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An Investigation into Practical Theology as a
Dynamic Process in the Work of the External
Consultant, and in the Development of the
Missional Congregation.

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Research M.Th. Thesis submitted to the Department of
Theology and Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, the
University of Glasgow

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to establish a model for practical theology originating out of my role as mission adviser within the Church of Scotland. The initial intention was to examine the specific tools used in local church consultancy to see if they had any theological basis, or were only management tools applied to the life of the church. This developed into a specific model of practical theology, but its approach still satisfies the original idea, of forming a theological basis for consultancy.

The methodology is by literature review, qualitative research and personal experience, with the thesis divided into three sections. The first looks at the context of consultancy, beginning with an examination of a theological framework in which consultancy takes place, followed by its theological and cultural contexts. The 'internal' context is the place of the church as viewed by society and understood theologically, as exilic yet not marginalised. The second is 'external', and describes the culture of postmodernity. For the church to re-engage with its context, a model of liminality is explored.

The second section describes the model for consultancy. This is examined in three parts; the *dynamic* in the shape of a spiral, the *method* based on the interaction of personal, community and scripture narratives, and the *form* as story. The basis of intervention by the consultant is scripture, with story and not textual analysis as its raw materials.

The final section looks at the process of consultancy, by comparing various management approaches, along with a piece of qualitative research looking at the theology, context, determining factors and practice of consultancy.

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The consultant practitioners who responded to the research questionnaire

Definitions

"Consultant"

A person who is invited in to work with a consultor, who is not part of the original 'system'.

"Consultor"

Individuals, groups or organisations, who are working in relationship with the consultant, in the consultancy process.

"Church"

Based on the Greek word "ekklesia" meaning 'a calling out', it is a group of people, nationally or locally, called out in the activity of mission, rather than an organisation that is formed. (Barge 2004, p. 18)

"Community of faith"

This is to be understood as synonymous with a local congregation

"Mission/missional"

Mission comes from the Latin 'missio' and means to be sent, and is defined in two ways:

- The mission of God: this is the over riding principle of 'missio dei', mission is wholly God's, and the purpose of the church is to participate in it.
- The mission of the church: this is the overall activity of the church as it strives to carry out its purpose

Missional describes the culture of a church that is engaged in mission.

Scriptural references

All references are taken from the *New International Version* of the bible, 1978, except for two quotes taken from Eugene Peterson's translation of the bible entitled the *The Message*, 2002. These are found on pages 18 and 144, and are quoted because Peterson's use of language vividly conveys what this author is seeking to say.

Chapter one

General introduction

Since 1997 I have been employed as an Adviser in Mission and Evangelism for the Board of National Mission, Church of Scotland; a role that has taken me to all parts of the country, seeking to develop mission and evangelism in both local congregations and presbyteries.

When first in post, the materials available were set courses to be delivered to church leadership groups, and although in the first few years I used these materials, I began to realise that there needed to be more than a 'toolbox' approach to developing congregational vision. As a result, I began to consider the idea of 'consultancy', still working with church leaders, but starting with a blank piece of paper on my side of the relationship instead of the toolbox, and going to listen to where people were, instead of talking. It would only be after determining where a congregation wished to go in the consultancy relationship, that specific tools would be used to develop congregational life.

From this approach I set out to examine the specific tools used in consultancy to see if they had any theological basis, or were only management tools applied to the life of the church. However, as the research developed, it became clear to me that even more than this was needed as people's experience and narrative became important aspects of the reflective process. It was out of this development in my thinking, that the central element of this thesis began to emerge, that of a model of practical theology.

It was important to ground this in the life of Scotland; as a result, *Scottish Identity* by Will Storrar became an essential reference to set the whole of the thesis in context; and to begin to understand practical theology itself, Don Browning's *A fundamental Practical Theology*, started my thinking about the spiral shape that the model of practical theology would become. At the later stage, as narrative took on a more important role, two other books developed this approach; *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals, Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* by Anderson and Foley, and *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* by William Bausch.

Although many other authors could be mentioned, the introduction would not be complete without *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality* by Alan Roxburgh, which helped to link together my thinking on the theological and cultural contexts of the church, and *Managing Transitions* by William Bridges, which shifted my thinking away from change to the importance of transition within the model of practical theology.

There were also major limitations in the literature review, for apart from the work of George Lovell, there was a scarcity of material available on church consultancy. It is my hope that this research helps to fill this gap. However, two writers from the secular field greatly influenced my thinking; Peter Senge's work on the learning organisation, and Ed Schein's development of process consultation.

Apart from the literature review my methodology included a piece of qualitative research. Using my contacts, I sent out a questionnaire to practitioners in the field of church consultancy, mainly from Scotland and England, but also a small number from abroad, including the USA.

Many of them were recognised denominational consultants, with others working independently or for para church organisations, but due to time limitation, there has been no follow up or one to one contact. Although few of these consultants explicitly mention narrative as a consultancy tool, many of their responses do fit theologically and culturally with the basis of this thesis.

The thesis itself is divided into three sections. The first looks at the context of consultancy, beginning with an examination of a theological framework in which consultancy takes place, followed by its theological and cultural contexts. The 'internal' context is the place of the church as viewed by society and understood theologically, as exilic yet not marginalised. The second is 'external', and describes the culture of postmodernity. For the church to re-engage with its context, a model of liminality is explored.

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The final section looks at the process of consultancy, by comparing various management approaches, along with a piece of qualitative research looking at the theology, context, determining factors and practice of consultancy.

Chapter two

The context of consultancy (1). From relationships to strategy: a theology of journey

In the report of the Special Commission anent Review and Reform, the core calling of the church is described as hearing, following and being obedient to Jesus' words, 'Come follow me'. (Reports to the General Assembly 2001, p. 36/9)

From the first disciples of Christ who were called by the lakeside to leave their commitments and to follow Jesus Christ, to the pilgrim church of today, this calling is the starting point of a theology of journey, of travelling into the unknown. A journey filled with excitement, mystery, despair, suffering and ultimately discipleship.

Many had taken this journey before. Abram was called to leave his home at Haran, there were the wanderings of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; Moses was called to lead God's people through the desert to the Promised Land; and the people of God, who were exiled, journeyed to Babylon, eventually to return home to Jerusalem.

In all of these journeys, did people know where they were travelling to, and certain that God was at work? (Smith 1986, p. 5) The answer is both 'yes' and 'no'. If it were only 'yes', this would indicate certainty and remove the need for faith.

To answer only 'no', would seem to indicate that the purposes of God are unclear, with no one willing to risk their life on such a journey. It is only the middle path between 'yes' and 'no' that allows God's people to know the final destination, whether the promised land for the people of Israel or the Kingdom of God for the church today, but not the details of how they will get there.

It is both a Kingdom present in the world now, with all its suffering and sinful realities, living in tension with a Kingdom to come, bridged by the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Promised to come, yet also the one incarnate who travels with his people on their pilgrim journey. Within Kingdom theology, the journey is part of the process of the life of discipleship, and in itself, is an expression of faith, lived in the dual reality of already, but not yet.

Anticipating the context of postmodernity, the image of stepping stones in the mission journey of the church to contemporary culture fits this discussion. The pilgrim journey is not just an intentional one, but is more about a risky crossing and uncertainty than safe arrival, lived out one stone at a time, each step nearer to the goal of the journey, and travelled in hope. (Lings 2003 b, p. 2-3) In this journey, how will the church keep its balance? Will the bank on the other side ever come into view, and will the next stone appear out of the mist, just enough ahead of the feet that are journeying? (Lings 2003 b, p. 11, 21, 26)

For such a journey to be undertaken, trust in God is a prerequisite, to know that God in his faithfulness will honour steps of faith, no matter how stumbling they might be, and that hope for the future is only possible if people set out on the journey.

One such example is the people of God as they crossed the River Jordan to enter the Promised Land, before their attack on Jericho. In this dramatic event, the waters of the river only part as in faith, and in response to God, they put their feet into the Jordan, and not before, as an example of faith that walks, rather than one that talks. (Galloway 1999, p. 23)

The theological framework of journey, from relationship through to strategy, will be examined using the analogy of building blocks, where each one is a solid foundation for what is to come. Although in this model each block is described separately, in practice, they are all interdependent, and are developing over a similar timeframe, and supporting this structure, is the assumption that within the community of faith, Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which everything else is to be built. (1st Corinthians 3:11)

The building blocks are:

- I. **The base building block of relationships:** to build the biblical understanding of community out of congregation.
- II. **The core building block of purpose and vision:** a clarity of direction for the future.
- III. **The practical building block of strategy and restructuring:** the nuts and bolts of planning, prioritisation and the allocation of resources, that need to be not just strategic, but experimental and risk taking.

These are the component parts of a jigsaw, in attempting to build up a picture of congregational 'health'.

Throughout this discussion, the story of Moses will be used to give concrete illustrations. Moses was asked to take a personal risk to go to Pharaoh and say, 'let my people go', and felt that he was not able for the task. The people of Israel were asked to take a risk, to leave what they knew, no matter how bad it was in slavery, and to follow Moses on a journey of faith into the unknown.

I. The base building block of relationships

Who is on the journey of faith? In answering this question, the consultant's role is to help people examine their identity, to see that the purpose of developing relationships is to understand other people's motivation, (Lovell and Widdicombe 1978, p. 22) and to develop a sense of community as the basis upon which a common vision for the future can be built.

"The Church 'works' where people join together, building relationships with each other and the community to which they belong. It is through these relationships that the Gospel is spread."
(Church Without Walls report 2001, p. 38/8)

Deep in the early history of the Old Testament, what began to forge the identity and sense of community of a people who were slaves in Egypt, but who were later transformed into the people of God through their wilderness experience? In Exodus chapter 12: 1-30 there is the story of the first Passover.

This dramatic event demonstrating the power of God was not only the practical means for their escape, but also became a core communal link, both in terms of the history of Israel, but also part of their very being as God's people.

Forged in adversity, and out of the promises of God, this mighty act sealed their identity as the community of God's chosen people.

Communal identity comes from sharing such key memories and events, listening to one another's stories, and dreaming about the future. It sets an agenda of trust, where people will get to know where others are coming from, and seeks to answer the question, 'who are we?'

II. The core building block of vision

What is the destination of this journey of faith? Mark Green (2003, p. 8) in talking about a church that is envisioned equipped and supported, quotes Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*,

"'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'" said Alice. "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat".

To know the destination is to have vision. It is 'the big picture' that needs to be cast before the people. Something to be lived and grown into, something powerful that others will wish to be a part of. (Boots [no date], p. 12-13)

"It was not just information she offered me; in the sharing of her vision, she taught me to see, too, and once I could see it, we were standing together in a whole new way". (Haycs 2002, p. 4)

There is a paradoxical relationship between vision, that which is still to come, and tradition, that which gives roots and stability, but also leads to immobility.

In one sense it offers contrast, but in another way, it is tradition's means of continuation. The consultant needs to help people to separate the tradition from the vision that created it, put people back in touch with the original vision and biblical roots, so that they can own it today, without it being seen as a criticism of the past. If vision is knowing why you did something for the first time, then living traditions can degenerate into empty and meaningless habits and customs, so that people do not really know why they are doing them second time around.

When times got tough on the journey, the people often complained and said they would rather be back in Egypt, their old place of identity, security and origination, than suffer a lack of food and water.

(Galloway 1999, p. 33) In response, Moses constantly shared the promise of a vision of a land flowing with milk and honey, (Exodus 13: 3-5) the new place of identity, made stronger because of what they had lost, or never had, a place of belonging. (Galloway 1999, p. 33) Bausch (1984, p. 75) describes this as one of the paradoxes of story, security found in uncertainty.

This was not a place to flee to, but a place where God wished them to be. It is a strange expression, but was often repeated to stimulate the imagination of the people of Israel. *Yes the risks now are hard, but keep going; your God promises a special land for you.* There was a point to this journey with all its risks, and even though each step was into the unknown, the people could look forward to this destination promised by God.

However, if change is to take place, more than vision is required. There also needs to be dissatisfaction and resources. In the story of the Exodus, vision and dissatisfaction were there in creative tension.

The vision of the Promised Land and the original dissatisfaction with being slaves in Egypt got them on the move, and the vision of the land flowing with milk and honey, together with God constantly meeting the ongoing dissatisfaction with adequate 'resources', kept them going. God provided the 'resources' of water from the rock, Manna from heaven and the pillar of cloud and fire for guidance, as his partnership with them as they travelled together.

The difficulty for the consultant is increasing the levels of dissatisfaction. Parsons and Leas (1993, p. 70) describe it as, 'disturbing the equilibrium', taking initiatives or responding in ways that do not fit the expectations for normal patterns of behaviour in organisations. If people are happy with the status quo, then they will not want to take the risk of upsetting it, and in faith, strive out for a future in a pilgrimage that is still only a vision. To travel without knowing the answers in advance, requires people with ears and eyes open, to see and listen to a vision from God, see 'dissatisfaction' as part of the solution, and be challenged to invest their energy in the future.

III. The practical building block of strategy

How are people going to reach their destination? If vision enables a faith community to travel further in their 'imaginative' journey, strategy considers the practicalities that will enable the purpose and vision to be fulfilled. Not just understood in the practical sense of problem solving, but seen as expressions of faith, both theological and ethical.

As Israel travelled through the desert they were guided by God, using a 'strategy' of pillars of cloud and fire. (Exodus 13: 21-22) God's vision had a very practical dimension to it, but the people of God still had to follow, and put God's intentions into action. They could not be outside observers; they had to be participants on the journey. In faith they had to follow, each day, for now, and for the future.

This path, even when inspired by God, will not always be smooth. There will be times when people will lose sight of God, times when his pillar of cloud and fire will become obscured. The consultant must recognise this, for as the people of Israel travelled through the desert, literally one step at a time, for the church today, the struggle will be no less.

The key to the journey of faith is that the strategy, the means adopted, is consistent with the vision, the aims to be achieved. (Gibbs and Coffey 2001, p. 52) The purpose of the twin pillars was to get Moses and God's people across the wilderness, and to the Promised Land. Those people would be very different in their relationship to God, from the ones that left Egypt.

So when are these things going to happen? Throughout history, the people of God have had to wait for the promises of God to come true, and it was the same for the people of Israel. There must have been a rhythm between those times when they waited, and times when they were on the move through the desert, built in by God, to allow resting and listening.

The consultant needs to do the same, and help build these elements into the life of the faith community today.

This theological framework has the following outcomes:

Key questions:

- Who are we?
- Where are we going?
- How will we get there?
- When will things happen?

Key issues

- The need to journey from congregation to community
- The three building blocks come together to construct healthy community
- Out of community comes common vision
- The spiritual journey involves change

Key mistakes

- Starting with the strategy and restructuring, without asking what is our purpose and vision
- Writing a 'mission statement', without having first developed good relationships

In a world of rapid change, where people in church are often inclined to adopt a fortress mentality, the consultant helps the faith community to seek answers to these questions, develop the issues and avoid making such mistakes. Through their common journey of faith, on a pilgrim way that is still being discovered, relationships and clarity of purpose before action can forge the faith community into a team. (Lovell and Widdicombe 1978, p. 22)

RJ McAlpine, 2004

Chapter two. The context of consultancy (1). From relationships to strategy: a theology of journey

The next two sections seek to answer the question, in what context does this journey of faith take place?

Chapter three

The context of consultancy (2). The current theological context: a theology of exile

The life and witness of the church does not take place in a vacuum, but in the context of its encounter and engagement with society.

Theologically, the image is that of the church sitting in the uncomfortable position that straddles exile and marginalisation; culturally, it is postmodernity, two interweaving strands that require exegesis, so as to examine the context of the faith journey. (Gibbs and Coffey 2001, p. 37)

Although exile and postmodernity intertwine, a bridge between them is still required to enable the church to re-engage theologically in the culture of the present. This thesis will describe this bridge as liminality.

The theological strand: "Exilic, yet not marginalised"

"Exile is the cradle of theodicy and eschatology, death and resurrection, a trusting end and a new beginning. It is the vacuum that precedes a second era of creation, a deeper construction out of faith elements that existed previously. And so, amidst painful change, there is rejoicing for the opening to a future which God has created." (Raitt 1997, p. 230)

After the dramatic events of the 6th century BC when the Babylonians conquered the people of Judah, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and its Temple, many of its leading citizens were taken into exile.

For Israel, this was the crushing reality that brought to an end traditions of expectation that had been developing for over 600 years. (Raitt 1997, p. 3) These events fractured whatever sense of religious and social cohesion the Judahite community had maintained, for the community now became divided into remnant and exilic. (Seitz 1989, p. 295) Removed far from their spiritual home of Jerusalem, how would these exiled people maintain their identity as God's chosen race?

Walter Brueggemann (1986, p. 1), in his examination of the exilic prophets sees their role as having the difficult task of giving voice to the faith and experience of this community in exile. They helped people enter into, be in, and depart out of exile. Their appeal was based not on the power of the old traditions, but by enunciating new actions of God that are discontinuous with the power of the past, yet are still based on recognisable stories, knowledge and memories. (Brueggemann 1986, p. 2) They articulated through word and imagination the painful experiences of Judah, with the capacity to speak about what the people had to face up to, the reasons for the actions of God, and the ability to speak to a new world beyond the loss of 587 BC, so creating hope in a community so deep in crisis of exile, that it may have given up on faith altogether. (Brueggemann 1986, p. 3)

The events of exile therefore had two aims, to help the community relinquish the known world and to receive the new world given by God. This is an example of 'practical theology'¹, for out of that experience of crisis questions were raised that challenged their identity as the people of God. In exile, who were they? Would they ever return home to Jerusalem? How would they get there? When would it happen, and where was God in all this pain?

What is vital to recognise is that this displacement of the idolatrous public life of Israel, and the generation of new order, happened under the theological conviction of who God is, and what he wills. Brueggemann (1986, p. 4) sees no role for the political, economic or the cultural. God's sovereignty was against the political claims of the Davidic dynasty, the ritual pretensions of the priesthood and temple and the public power system practised by the royal temple system. Thus God makes available an alternative world and Brueggemann (1986, p. 5) understands the metaphor of 587 BC to resonate with what is happening at the end of the 20th century.

If Brueggemann is correct, then this is a theology of exile that echoes and resonates for faith communities today. In its own state of crisis, what questions are being asked, and what lessons are being learned about the churches theological and cultural identity in postmodern Scotland? Will an examination of a theology of exile help to illuminate its own situation of faith, and society, thereby bringing the two contextual strands of theology and culture together? Is there an opportunity in exile, just as Jeremiah bought his field, as Jerusalem was about to fall? (Jeremiah 32: 8-9)

The church in Scotland may not have been exiled geographically, but in terms of its relationship to wider society it lives very much in exile, for "One can be in exile without ever leaving the land." (Klein 1979, p. 149) Here are two parallel communities in common context; their light continues to shine, but not from the original 'old centres'.

¹ See chapter on The dynamic and method of practical theology

The 6th century people of God sought to maintain their identity in the midst of a foreign land, and the church in 21st century Scotland is attempting to do the same in the midst of a culture of postmodernity, where there is now no agreed universal 'centre'² to society. If this is culturally true, then the church can no longer claim to speak from the margins of national life, but only as an exilic community, cut off from society by an outdated identity of the past, and now surrounded by the values of a hostile world.

Out of this exilic experience, the church could be tempted into trying to move back into the centre of society, by seeking to reproduce another Christendom³. David Smith (2001, p. 25-6, 29) would clearly see this as a huge mistake. Christendom, which changed the church to be so far removed from the transforming church as seen in the book of Acts, which subverted the gospel, and abandoned the call to mission, is the very opposite of exile. While exile might be uncomfortable for the church; it at least has the potential to maintain the gospel's distinctive prophetic cry, and in its messiness have a theology that prevents Christendom's complacency, and help to establish an identity and practice of God's people that is authentic for today.

Out of this experience, is it possible for faith communities to forge a new identity as the people of God? To begin with the experience of where they are, and by listening to God through the stories of faith, culture and Spirit, be a new people of God.

² See chapter on The current cultural context: postmodernity

³ John Hull (1999, p. 7, 10) describes Christian identity under three types: *Christendom* which is primarily territorial and represented locally as a building and people who have known each other all their lives. *Christianity* is Christendom's individualisation and interiorisation which locally is seen in the belief structure of the Christian tradition. (Hull 1999, p. 8, 11) He comments that when this happens, the mission of Christianity is ignored, and goes unnoticed. (Hull 1999, p. 9) *Christianness* is where the focus of identity is in the mission of God as expressed in Jesus Christ. (Hull 1999, p. 12)

To confront the reality of a diminishing influence on the life of the nation with a voice that is heard by many as irrelevant, and to be a creative minority.

Not a comfortable settler institution in a stable society that accommodates, but nomadic pioneers in a changing order, that journeys the path of infiltration, transformation and restoration. (Barrow 2003, p. 13) Out of this dynamic flux between faith and culture, can the church offer something new?

In the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Thomas Raitt (1977, p. 230) sees exile as the forerunner to a new creation, built upon a deeper construction of the faith elements that already exist. If society today has no centre, then the church needs to offer a new centre, based not on the individuality of postmodernity but, ironically, the creation of Christian community which has, at its core, building relationships and offering a sense of belonging.

The development of this new identity, in community, lies at the very heart of the healthy church. It is fundamentally Christian, yet it is also a product of culture. For Hull (1999, p. 12, 13) this means that there is an interpretation of the self, or a narration of it, in the light of cultural stories, and a dynamic mutuality between Christian faith and identity, with culture and history⁴.

The exilic writers helped Israel to maintain the faith and their community even when everything else seemed lost. Even when God was hidden to his people in exile, they spoke of his revelation, that God's love is not absent, even in judgement.

⁴ This will be developed in the chapters on The dynamic and method of practical theology and Story: the form of practical theology:

It is irrational, unpredictable and powerful. (Raitt 1977, p. 229) This was a trust based on a hope in the presence of God and not on any theological triumphalism. (Klein 1979, p. 151) Bausch (1984, p. 72) describes this as one of the paradoxes of story, triumph grows out of suffering. The question for today is how Christians will express this hope in God in this postmodern exile? To say to the community of faith, and to the world, even if it seems to have given up on itself, God in his love has not. (Raitt 1977, p. 229)

None of this theology would have emerged had not God's people gone into exile, and Thomas Raitt (1977, p. 228) makes the claim that it was good for them, since it broke the idolatrous connections between God and Zion, temple and the Davidic Dynasty. In spite of the tragic circumstances and devastation it brought to God's people, it was a time of liberation of God, his power shattering religious conceptions and institutions. Can this claim be made for the church today? To say, it is good to be where we are? To be a servant community, operating out of weakness, often invisible, crying from exile and open in its response to people's needs.

If theology can redefine itself, and create structures of interpretation supportive for faith in the midst of trouble, in a movement from doom to salvation, is this not 'practical theology'? (Raitt 1977, p. 7) What is theologically true can change, either in a new word for a new situation or re-interpreted to produce norms gradually over time. (Raitt 1977, p. 225-226) Theology does start with experience, and that experience is reflected upon, to determine a new or redefined theology. Exile is part of the journey of faith, exiled from Egypt, from Jerusalem and now within postmodernity, but always with the continual redemption of the righteous remnant, in an ongoing sense of messianic hope. (Smith 1986, p. 5)

The second context for the journey of faith is the strand of postmodernity. If a new identity for the church is to be forged out of the experience of today's culture, it is important for it to be clearly defined and carefully understood.

Chapter four

The context of consultancy (3). The current cultural context: postmodernity

"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." (John 1: 14, the Message).

The church is in a crisis of identity, to such an extent, that Drane (2000a, p. 95) claims it is now incapable of imagining how to contextualise the gospel in the world of postmodernity. If he is right, how then will the church re-engage with the values, attitudes and styles of today's surrounding culture? George Lings. (2004, p. 19, 26) replies with a theological answer. The church needs to follow the pattern of incarnation. Its first journey is one of descent, to enter culture rather than locality, as Jesus Christ came for the people of Israel, rather than the location of Bethlehem, so making connections and establishing relationships. The second journey is then to begin a counter cultural challenge. However, what practical response lies beyond the theology of incarnation?

This section looks at the relationship between faith and contemporary culture, and examines the developments and changes in society that have deeply affected the life and witness of the faith community. Once used to planning in a more stable environment, it now finds itself in new, uncharted waters.

Before looking at postmodernity in detail, there is an attempt to answer three related questions.

The first is an attempt to define culture. For John Drane (2000 a, p. 2), it is "The way people live and relate to each other", whereas Neibuhr (1952, p. 32, 33) defines it more fully, for him it is "...the total process of human activity..." seen as achievement or social heritage, received and transmitted, and described as an artificial environment that humanity has imposed on the natural. A different definition comes from Pobee and Ositelu (1998, p. 28); culture is the 'solvent' of religion. It is therefore the environment, the atmosphere, in which works of faith take place. It is because the church does not function in a vacuum, that the context of postmodernity is so important.

The second question is whether cultural change is to blame for the decline in the institutional church, or has the church to take responsibility for its own decline. Barbara Wheeler (2004) cites the 'cool' reasons of Roof and McKinney, namely *personalism, localism, individualism and privatism*⁵, and her own 'warm' reasons of *theology, separatism, activism and revivalism*⁶ as possible competing influences on the decline of the church. In choosing between them, she finds that the evidence lies on the 'cool' side, since the 'warm' factors are based on an idealised picture of the past and that there is no proof, between them and decline, of cause and effect.

⁵ Personalism (as a result of choice, people switch denominations), localism (local is trusted over denominations), individualism (people search for God alone) and privatism (faith is no longer in the faith arena, it is an optional hobby)

⁶ Theology (there is no longer a distinctive Presbyterian theology and the boundaries of core beliefs have been eroded), separatism (this focuses on behaviour, can you tell church and society apart?), activism (the churches are failing to act out their faith convictions), Revivalism (the church is failing to connect with contemporary society. One strand cares about numbers, the 'Megachurch'. The others focus on warmth and depth as signs of life: i.e. spirituality.)

It is therefore not a case of failing churches, but a cultural revolution, leading to belief that is drifting further and further from the Christian norm. (Brown 2001, p. 2, 5)

In direct contrast, Coupe (2004, p. 1, 2) talks of the 'Fifties Freefall' of the loss of children to the church as being attributable, not to cultural change, but church policy. For Ward, the thesis of secularisation as the ultimate demise of religion can no longer be seen as a convenient scapegoat. (Ward 2002a, p. 22) It is not primarily the world's values that have prevented the church from reaching out effectively; it is the values of the church that has privatised faith, and has more to do with its own failure to receive and develop the visionary hope to be church, and to engage creatively, rather than a gospel unfriendly society (Barrow 2003, p. 13-4; Green 2003, p. 16, 20).

Added to this, is whether postmodernity is a challenge offering positive opportunities for spiritual search, or is too discontinuous with Christian orthodoxy to benefit the mission of the church? (Draper 2002), and Ziebertz (1989, p. 13) are positive; in postmodernity, rigidity gives way to the organic and radical, and even secularisation can be re-branded as "religious recasting" or a "religious change of form".

In his analysis, Simon Barrow (2003, p. 8- 9, 10) begins by citing authors who are also positive. David Hay sees postmodernity as giving churches the opportunity to engage, as people emerge out of the cultural repression of spiritual memory, eroded by secularisation. Dr Martyn Percy, in viewing today's culture as a spiritual marketplace, with its choice and competition, sees little cause for alarm as people move from religious 'assumers' to religious 'consumers'. However, Barrow himself disagrees.

For him there is a huge gulf between individualistic spiritual experience and traditional church, which means there is no escape route from the continuing church decline, and talk of 'believing without belonging', glosses over the fact that alternative spirituality is radically different, or dislocated from traditional beliefs about God. In other words, people are secular in their spirituality.

However, he is also surprised to concede some opportunities in postmodernity. Its deep awareness of the other, and its sensitivity in relationality, being used to resist the domination of modernity, without going back to idealisation of pre modernity. (Barrow 2003, p. 15)

John Drane (2000 b, p. 2) introduces a final word of caution. Has the strategy of the church been crafted to match real or perceived needs in today's changing society? As the church has tried to understand postmodernity, has it been too precise for the evidence available? In other words, is the church's approach to postmodernity a pragmatic one, or does it need to have all its theory worked out in advance?

The rest of this chapter will examine:

- I. What is modernity?
- II. The movement from modernity to postmodernity with its resultant theological issues
- III. What is postmodernity?
- IV. The theological issues of postmodernity
- V. The postmodern church: its essence, form and practice
- VI. The statistical evidence for decline
- VII. Liminality: the bridge between faith and culture

I. What is modernity?

Describing postmodernity is a frustrating exercise. Ursula King (1998, p. 94) makes the comment that postmodernity defies exhaustive description and unequivocal definition. Powell (1998, p. 7) says that those who think about postmodernism do not agree as to whether it is a break from modernism or a continuation of it, or both. They don't even agree what modernism is. However, some broad descriptions need to be attempted.

Modernity seems to have come out of the 18th century Age of Enlightenment with its core values of reason, logic, rationality and progress. It was an age that was optimistic, that by implementing these universal values, they could deconstruct feudal and medieval structures, along with the myths and holy ideas that prevented progress, freedom and happiness. (Powell 1998, p. 9, Ziebertz 1998, p. 9)

Drane (2000 b, p. 171) describes this thinking of modernity as being founded on three significant assumptions.

- That knowledge is certain; therefore had to be scrutinised by reason through the mind.
- That knowledge is objective; therefore emotions had to be set aside.
- That knowledge is inherently good; especially scientific knowledge.

Modernity is therefore based on knowledge, rather than the ongoing interpretation of it, as seen in postmodernity.

However, this started to fall apart in the 20th century through such lived experiences and nightmares as war and ecological disaster.

II. The movement from modernity to postmodernity with its resultant theological issues

Callum Brown (2001, p. 176) offers a competing voice by understanding the time of cultural change as being far more specific and violent. The Enlightenment project and modernity was halted in the 1960's, and this is where postmodernity started to mature, with the immediate victim being Christendom. Whichever thesis is correct, the gradual theory of secularisation or the specifics of Brown's argument, centred on the collapse of feminine piety (Brown 2001, p. 10), the situation today is highly complex, in that modernity has not ended with a full stop.⁷

So is postmodernity an intensification of the modern era, or does it seek to negate modernity?

Ward (2002b, p. 16) makes this very point, in postmodernity there are still the grand narratives of natural science and evolutionary science, as roads to knowledge. He goes on to argue, if science is modernity, then modernity is still very much in cultural control, although it has difficulty in accepting into the science narrative the late arrivals of freedom, truth and religious belief. (Kings 2002, p. 502)

⁷ I suspect that Brown is correct in identifying one dramatic aspect in the process of secularisation

The postmodern world is therefore not a homogenous society. It is a complex mix of cultures; the traditional, or pre modern, with large tracts of modernity and growing elements of an ascending postmodern culture, creating a society very different from the world of previous generations. It is not a completed article, nor a void, but is a transient or transitional cultural position until a new one emerges, and within its cultural flux of change, people are holding on to some of the trappings of modernity, while deciding what to keep and what to reject of that which is new.

For King (1998, p. 94), postmodernity is a celebration of this dynamic cultural flux of diversity, complexity and ambiguity. Fowler (1996, p. 160) sees it as a transition in culture bringing ferment, social tension, conflict and dislocation. Storrar (1990, p. 58), commenting on the work of David Bosch, says; the postmodern world is liberating, fragmenting, empowering and marginalising. There is the slow and uneven replacement of the modern paradigm with the postmodern paradigm with its new cultural awareness and theological motifs. For Drane (2000 b, p. 6), 'post-modernity' is provisional and evolving, the hyphen drawing attention to the changes taking place and affecting all our lives, bringing chaos and confusion as people travel to the new way of being. Using the image of liquidity, Pete Ward, quoting Leonard Sweet, captures this sense of movement from modernity to postmodernity.

"If the Modern era was rage for order, regulation, stability, singularity, and fixity, the Postmodern Era is a rage of chaos, uncertainty, otherness, openness, multiplicity, and change. Postmodern surfaces are not landscapes but wavescapes, with the waters always changing and the surfaces never the same. The sea knows no boundaries." (Sweet 1999, p. 24, cited in Ward 2002 b, p. 15)

What then are some of the theological issues in this move from modernity to postmodernity? David Bosch recognised that these cultural paradigms often co-exist, even in the same person's thinking and practice of mission, thus leading to a sense of uncertainty within the life of the church. (Storror 2001, p. 60) This is compounded by John Drane's (2000 b, p. 59) concern that when culture is more diverse and diffuse than it has ever been, most traditional churches are fairly homogenous in their make up, and only match a certain kind of person. (Kings 2002, p. 509-510) To make this situation even more complex, there is the increasing divergence between generations, in the move from modernity to postmodernity. (Barrow 2003, p. 12; Gibbs and Coffey 2001, p. 45)

If the church is to challenge these different kinds of people to a life of serious discipleship, then it needs to do so in such a way that it offers the realistic possibility of encountering a unified gospel in a similar diverse fashion. If not, there will be no relationship between the cultural and the missional, with people straddling two cultures, the modern culture of the church, where fewer and fewer people live, and the postmodern culture of society. (Drane 2000 b, p. 60; Drane 2000 a, p. 117)

How then will the church proclaim a gospel that will be "best fit" for people of different cultures, maintain unity, without losing the sharpness of the gospel? Donald Millar gives the church a stark warning; a diffuse message will not be heard. (Millar 1996, p. 28, cited in Gibbs and Coffey 2001, p. 45)

At the same time, postmodern thinking also threatens certain features of the Enlightenment, which are still important for theology:

- The commitment to rational objective knowledge
- The elevation of science and its rationality to status as the arbiter of truth
- The relegation of religion to the realm of the private, subjective and self-validation of the divine. (Fowler 1996, p. 179)

He further comments that at the heart of this challenge to theology is the practical task of helping postmodern people and cultures claim the possibility of shaping their lives and systems in response to, and in partnership with, the praxis of God. (Fowler 1996, p. 180)

These theological implications cannot just be an academic argument for the church, for given the mixed picture of the society with which it is attempting to communicate the gospel, it is vital that it has some understanding of people in today's changing postmodern culture. If a new culture is emerging, with an interest in spirituality and ethics, (Storrar 2001, p. 68) is there a new 'postmodern church' emerging alongside it?

Not according to John Drane (2000 b, p. 54).

"Quite simply, we seem to have ended up with a secular church in a spiritual society".

Drane (2000 b, p. 36-7, 40-41, 43-45, 49) uses the work of George Ritzer and applies his four key characteristics of the 'McDonaldization'⁸ process to the church. He concludes that the church likes rationalised systems, as compared to messy spirituality, is obsessed with numerical rather than spiritual growth, likes the predictability of safety and routine rather than the unpredictability of God, and the exercise of power and authority rather than a God who created people in all their diversity and vulnerability, which is central to discipleship.

He argues that the mission of the church must not become such a pre-packaged product to be marketed and locked within the world of modernity. (Drane 2000 b, p. 171) This world no longer exists. Instead, the church needs to respond creatively to this cultural challenge, giving many and varied opportunities for people to explore and practice their beliefs. (Storrar 1990, p. 68) If the link between identity, community and culture in the modern church was and is 'congregation', then in emerging postmodernity or "liquid church", that link will be a self narration, in relation to 'choice'. (Ward 2002 b, p. 23)

III. What is postmodernity?

If the new emerging culture has this label of postmodernity, how is it to be understood? It was Lyotard who coined the famous phrase "incredulity towards metanarratives" as a definition of postmodernity. (Powell 1998, p. 33)

⁸ These are the concepts of *efficiency, calculability, predictability and control*

These big stories of mythic proportions, that legitimised science, and claimed to be able to account for, explain, and subordinate all lesser local narratives, are no longer required, for as a society we have moved beyond any need for such grand descriptions of thought and culture. (Powell 1998, p. 29) So what are metanarratives, their properties, functions and failures?

These have been summarised by Dominic Smart (1997 a, p. 8- 11) as follows:

Properties

- They give foundational claims, so provide a foundation for sure knowledge
- They have all exerted a dominant influence from time to time
- They are criticised, modified and replaced by another metanarratives

Functions

- They provide a matrix into which all other thoughts can be ordered i.e. a unifying system of thought
- They help to assess the truthfulness of statements
- They give direction for history, i.e. help to define progress
- They are a means of social control

Failures

- They have failed people's experience, i.e. science and history have not lived up to people's expectations
- There is now a need for more than one story to be read, since different cultures are now part of the whole
- They have collapsed, since ultimately they are a matter of perspective, of how they are interpreted
- People now have the ability to construct their own reality. It is now what people make it and want it to be

What is ironic is that the church has its own metanarrative of the story of Christian salvation, and a truth that claims to be eternal. As it seeks to witness this gospel message to today's generations, in the light of this 'incredulity', how is this metanarrative to be communicated to a generation of people who see truth as what they wish it to be?

To replace these metanarratives we now have many micro narratives jammed together. (Powell 1998, p. 32) These small, local and personal stories, which do not seek legitimisation by any grand narrative, fill the void that is left, and it seems that postmodern audiences don't mind that all these heterogeneous stories do not add up to some grand, global, universal total sense. (Powell 1998, p. 152-153)

Another view on the break up of metanarrative is that they have been replaced not just by micro narratives but the 'cultural icons' of film, TV and sport. These are seen as extensions to people's identity, something they are not, and through them truth is imagined. (Simmons 2003)

It is as if the fragmentation of the grand narratives has come about under the pressure of the multiple and local stories, and no one cares that together they don't make any sense or give direction or purpose.

It is the importance of 'locality', either geographically or personally, and for the institution of the church, a need to respond appropriately. How does it tap into this affinity for the local, and counter the distrust of the denomination, and how does it relate the gospel so that God's story in Christ touches people's own story, in such a way that it is not overarching, but unique?

Anticipating the 'form'⁹ of practical theology, both Callum Brown (2001, p. 12-13) and Colin Greene (2003, p. 5) talk about 'discursive' Christianity, defined as a sociological indicator in which Christianity is measured in terms of the discursive power of the Christian narrative or story, so as to create in a community a common sense of identity and belonging, by penetrating the mores of popular culture. Even if Greene sees discursive Christianity as part of the 'reversal mentality'¹⁰ of modernity, this thesis still roots practical theology in the framework of Christian narrative. If in the shift from modernity, where Christianity has moved from the foreground of individual's identity, to postmodernity, where Christianity is no longer articulated in people's lives as moral stories, how will the church re-engage with people's micro narratives today? (Brown 2001, p. 194)

A second pillar of postmodernity follows on from the breakdown of the metanarrative.

⁹ See section, Story: the form of practical theology

¹⁰ The churches have to regain a certain critical mass in terms of numerical and statistical growth, either through much more effective evangelism, social welfare programs, political influence, intellectual punching power or through penetrating the media driven world of popular culture. (Greene 2003, p. 5)

Since the reality of postmodernity is based on the 'here and now' and not the past, in constructing the future, (Simmons 2003) with no big idea to bind people together or shared values to agree on, it leads to a lack of overall meaning and purpose in life, which can be described using the terms individualism¹¹, relativism¹² and pluralism¹³. This is described as 'incoherence', the natural outcome of the loss of big stories, since nothing in culture now hangs together. (Green 2003, p. 12, Smart 1997 b, p. 23) No one is in charge; there is no higher authority upon whom people can depend to order chaos. It is one of the great social and cultural shifts in history. (Hayes 2002, p. 3)

If the metanarrative has now 'dislocated' into localised and particular stories, (Fowler 1996, p. 160) then each person seeks to make sense of their own life by constructing their own individualistic and pluralistic morality, declaring that everything is valid, saying no truth claim can be exclusive, only a never-to-be-concluded dialogue rather than a finished product, (Ziebertz 1998, p. 2) and combating the loss of meaning by creating their own unified matrix into which they place their own beliefs and ideas. If this is the case, then 'truth' and the plausibility of faith, need to be seen as something done and experienced, and not just intellectually believed or argued. (Drane 2000 b, p. 172; Lings and Hopkins 2004, p. 9)

Out of this analysis of postmodernity come various questions. Is postmodernity itself not just another metanarrative that is replacing modernity, or at least containing multiple metanarratives, such as 'the market economy' and 'environmentalism'?

¹¹ This is personal spirituality as compared to organised religion. As a result, people believe that church-going is optional. (Ward 2002 a, p. 23)

¹² This is being able to live comfortably and at peace in the diverse setting of pluralism. Its attitude casts doubt on the whole concept of truth and falsehood. The main virtue is tolerance. (Ward 2002 a, p. 24)

¹³ This is different cultures and lifestyles brought into the same space due to globalisation. (Ward 2002 a, p. 24)

What does life actually mean to people today, and how has this new emerging culture impacted on what people believe?

IV. The theological issues of postmodernity

John Drane (2000 b, p. 171) sees postmodern people as 'post rational'. They have an emphasis on the concept of mystery, feelings and emotions as valid interpreters of reality, and as a result, objective knowledge is no longer plausible.

Truth is therefore no longer understood in relation to external authority, but individual experience and choice. In a consumer¹⁴ world, more choice means less absolutes, dissolving truth and identity to fluidity.

However, for Drane (2000 b, p. 172-3), behind the phrase 'what works for me', still lies a search for absolute truth, and goes on to say that people are also 'post individual', not autonomous, only seeing meaning when incorporated into a wider community. A reality that is vital for the mission of the church, as gospel is lived out in community. (McGaffigan 2002, p. 2)

In her classic book *Religion in Britain since 1945: believing without belonging*, Grace Davie (1994, p. 4-5) sees a mismatch between two possible variables in the measurement of religiosity that are directly related to community.

¹⁴ We have moved from the consumer revolution of 'standardisation' to one of 'customisation' where people expect things to fit them like a glove. (Bowden 2004 , p. 2)

'Believing', defined as religious belief, concerned with feelings, experience and the numinous, and 'belonging', understood as religious practice, concerned with religious orthodoxy, ritual practice and institutional attachment. She goes onto say that at the heart of the disjunction between belief and practice lies proactivity. Religion is now a reactive sociological variable, reflecting the context of society rather than creating it, with cultural consequences. (Davie 1994, p. 9, 43)

This sociological observation is supported by recent research. To investigate what people in 21st century Britain believe, a major research project was carried out by Nick Spencer of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity.

He identifies Britain as a religious country, where seven in ten call themselves Christian, but hardly seven in a hundred attend church. He describes this religiosity as believing without belonging. (Spencer 2003 b, p. 1; Ward 2002 a, p. 25)

As a consequence of this collapse in belonging, there has also been a gradual decline in belief, (Gill 1994, p. 32) People who once had a sense of belonging to the church, through family, school or Sunday School, but who stopped attending, lose that identity, and belief wanes. Without belief being nurtured and shaped by belonging to worshipping communities, the church will not be able to engage seriously in mission. Now that people are no longer 'evangelised' in this way by society, the church itself needs new models for faith sharing, in a social location that is secular and pluralistic.

The natural outcome of this lack of believing is that Britain, on a macro scale, is slipping from being a nominally Christian society to becoming sub Christian. In this cultural context, what is the relationship between how the nation behaves, how people think as individuals, and how these two elements combine to act as barriers or potential bridges to faith? (Spencer 2003 b, p. 1)

Spencer's research identified several barriers to belief; reasons, whether directly articulated or evident through analysis, why people find religious belief implausible, incredible or undesirable. These were classified as: *Cultural*, *Personal*, *Ecclesiastical* and *Intellectual*¹⁵. What is worth noting, is that these factors arise out of, and support, the analysis of postmodern culture as already identified, and in trying to identify possible bridges¹⁶ to overcome these barriers, Spencer concludes that the most effective response to a pragmatically inclined nation, is love in action, by translating faith into works. (Spencer 2003 a, p. 12; Spencer 2003 b, p. 1)

V. The postmodern church: its essence, form and practice

The metanarrative might have fractured, but the need for individual cohesion and transformation is greater than ever.

¹⁵ Cultural: often unconsciously absorbed beliefs and attitudes which shaped people's minds and made them resistant to Christianity.

Personal: ideas which shaped people's minds but which were more consciously held, the most important being tolerance and the privatisation of their moral code. (Spencer 2003, p. 1)

Ecclesiastical: The impact of and experience of church culture

Intellectual: the prevalence, importance and nature of traditional apologetics. (Spencer [no date], p. 12)

¹⁶ Social: their attitudes to a society without religion

Personal: their irreducible spirituality

Ecclesiastical: their sense of a new kind of church emerging

Intellectual: reflecting that those most antagonistic to traditional faith know least about it. (Spencer [no date], p. 12)

According to Ursula King (1998, p. 95), there is a desire for greater unity and wholeness and inter-dependence. Mark Green (2003, p. 15) put this challenge; today's culture cannot provide answers to the fundamental questions about meaning and purpose, and a culture that cannot answer its own questions, is open to another answer.

Ironically, it will be a story about community and of developing a sense of belonging in a world of individual stories. A time of theological rebirth, where the church reflects on the practice of mission, its 'practical theology', not by resisting society's fragmentation with a call for homogeneity, or by buying into the consumer culture wholesale, but by locating people's individual stories in an encounter with the story of God, in a unique way for them. (Draper 2002) This is a 'reformation' of the church's own metanarrative, not just seen in communicating a message, but in promoting a context for the gospel, that is an encounter based on relationships.

So what could this emerging postmodern church look like? It begins with its 'essence'.

Whatever pattern of life and witness is most appropriate, any faith community must express a core that is first of all Trinity centred, in other words, God relational. It also needs to be communal, practically displaying the Body of Christ, and finally missional, having an outward focus to its neighbourhood. Within these things, following attentively the pattern of the incarnation, and deeply engaged in the local context. (Lings and Hopkins 2004, p. 10)

The second aspect of the postmodern congregation is its 'form'.

One helpful approach is to return to the thinking of Pete Ward, and the idea of 'liquid church'. Based on the work of Zygmunt Bauman, he sees postmodernity as a liquid, where the solidity of modernity is being melted, and questioning is replacing previous certainties. (Bauman 2000, p. 3,4, cited in Ward 2002 b, p. 16-17)

The congregation, as the basic structure of church today, characterises this solidity, and has internalised many of the core values of modernity. (Ward 2002 b, p. 17) Historically, this relates well with a church that seemed to be a good fit with modern society, but is now in decline. However, the church has been influenced by the cultural changes taking place in society; the solid is being 'energised' by a liquefying of its edges. (Ward 2002 b, p. 22)

" ...starts from the positive elements in the new, fluid environment and tries to work with these and make them part of the way forward for the church....To be a liquid church means...to combine with water to become fluid, changeable, flexible...internalise the liquid nature of culture rather than to learn to sail through it. " (Ward 2002 b, p. 15-16)

This is a church that finds its way into all the cracks of society.

It recognises its changes, and looks to see if the structure of church can be made compatible. If not, the alternative is to expend energy on traditional ways of being church, even though the vast majority of people remain untouched. (McGaffigan 2002, p. 1)

One crucial aspect of liquid church is connective networks, which correspond to the decisive demand of reflexivity in modern society. (Ziebertz 1998, p. 16, 17)

If the congregation and parish are geographically based, then networks are decentred, by conferring identity, relationally, culturally and generationally. (Lings and Hopkins 2004, p. 19) Lings (2003a, p. 3) describes them as flows of information, connectors and hubs who are people, where accessibility takes over from address, location is less crucial than links, and the hub is the core, not home. Static location is therefore no guarantor of connection, and relationship, not real estate, is the key to the church's mission. In such a fluid world, expressions of church will be non-boundary and permeable, rather than cross-boundary. (Lings and Hopkins 2004, p. 6-7)

The old institutions, including the church, are crumbling because they are geared for a society that handles information, people and resources in a totally different way. It needs to learn that managing the dominant social reality of these interlocking web of networks requires a very different approach to organisation, control and leadership. (Gibbs 2003)

This suggests the 'form' of postmodern church, that is liquid and networked, arising out of, and running in parallel with, traditional forms of church, a balance between 'neighbourhood' and 'networks'¹⁷ as places of belonging.

At the Synod of July 2003, Archbishop Rowan spoke of whether the church was capable of moving towards this more 'mixed economy', which values both inherited and emerging forms of church, two realities, as complementary and different.

¹⁷ George Lings ([no date] c, p. 2) describes networks as a second source of liminality, where there is no centre or even an edge.

"a mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary in an active partnership across a wider area." (Cray *et al* 2004, xi, cited in Lings and Hopkins 2004, p. 26)

Lings and Hopkins (2004, p. 5) add a slight edge to this discussion; even if old and new expressions of church are required to reach the diversity of our mission context, they claim fresh expression have a better chance of connecting culturally with how most people live in society. As a result, there needs to be a shift in the investment balance between traditional and inherited forms of church, to fresh expressions. This very much leaves the question of traditional denominations hanging in the air.

If liquid and network are the 'forms' of postmodern church, what are some of the major influences arising out of a postmodern society, which will act as a springboard for reflection, on the 'practice' of new emerging faith communities?

Os Guinness uses four words to describe postmodern society, and in each case asks the question, 'What is the challenge for the church?' If people in society today are not so tied by family and church, but by the generation they are part of, what are the marks of this generation, and how should the church be responding?

The first marker is that we live in an 'age of 'Entertainment', (Guinness 1995, p. 79) a rival claim that directly impacts on the worship of the faith community. Green (2003, p. 12) describes it as the "opiate of the masses", distracting people from reflective thought and radical action, by the power, creativity and pervasiveness of the media.

In a society that shops around to be entertained, where what you experience is important, is very generation specific in its marketing, and forms 'virtual communities' across the Internet where people meet person to person but no longer face to face, how should the postmodern church be calling people to worship God? (Guinness 1995, p. 126)

The second marker is 'Advertising',

"...the art of getting people to buy what they don't need by describing it in ways they know are not true." (Guinness 1995, p. 83)

This has a direct effect on the mission of the church, as it challenges individual worth. People may be created in the image of God as unique individuals, yet in the world of advertising people move from producers to consumers. (Lings and Hopkins 2004, p. 7-8)

Advertising holds the belief that the key to identity and belonging is to be found in what you buy and display. There is such a thing as society, but to be part of it you need to wear the right brands or logos. (Green 2003, p. 12-13; Guinness 1995, p. 85) In this cultural climate, how does the church create community which stresses that, within the Body of Christ, each person, as an individual, is valued by God?

His third marker is that people are living in the age of 'Style' which directly impacts on personal belief, due to an ever increasing choice, which stimulates ever increasing desires. (Guinness 1995, p. 90) In our consumer culture, people are constantly changing their minds about what they do and buy, with the church competing in a marketplace of values and beliefs.

People might be willing to try new things, but that does not make discipleship any easier, for choice and relativism lead to DIY religions, bolt-on spirituality, where the Christian faith is only part of people's private values, a hobby, an optional extra, and certainly not part of their public life. If style is something ever changing, how does this impact the belief and practice of the church, and the traditional ethics of the gospel?

The final marker comes from a society obsessed with 'Image' that challenges the claim that the Word of God is Truth. (Guinness 1995, p. 96) Henri Nouwen said there are millions of words, yet they have all lost their power. (Guinness 1995, p. 95) In a visually dominated world, how does the church offer Jesus Christ, the word made flesh, in a way that cuts through the superficiality of image? How does the church share the greatest story in the world, and say to people 'this is truth for your life'?

If the church looks through its 'stained glass windows' and views the world of entertainment, advertising, style and image, but fails to understand what it sees, then it should be no surprise that society looks at the church and wonders, even if it bothers at all to ask, what is its relevance to us? The church needs to understand the society of which it is a part, respond to it creatively, but not simply reflect it. As befits the signs of our times, the missiology¹⁸ of any emerging postmodern church will need to be contextualised in its own local situation

Lings and Hopkins (2004, p. 7-8) add one extra caveat: the church goes through a similar process; it is shaped around the values of the gospel so as to become counter cultural.

¹⁸ I understand missiology to include 'essence', 'form' and 'practice'.

It is this dynamic interaction between faith and culture that Leslie Newbiggin often spoke about as a missionary encounter. The gospel critiques and challenges culture's fundamental assumptions (Goheen 2002, p. 360-1) and, at the same time, postmodernity challenges the structures of the church, with its own strengths, qualities and even gospel values, that it will have no option but to respond and change.

VI. The statistical evidence for decline

A statistical overview of the church in Scotland in the late 20th and early 21st centuries that will show in raw figures, how the changing cultural scene has inflicted numerical decline on the church.

In a population of approximately 5 million, 88% do not attend church, and those who do are not young. (Knoke 2003, p. 13) A more detailed analysis comes from the information collected by the *Scottish Church Census of 2002*.

Table one: decline of attendance compared to percentage of
population. 1984-2002

Year	Nos. of adults and children in church	%of population	% decline
1984	853,700	17	
1994	691,120	14	19
2002	570,130	11	18

(Brierley 2003, p. 16)

Although the decline between 1994 and 2002 is smaller than that between 1984 and 1994, the year on year rate of decline is still increasing, and has to be set against a population decline of only 2% over the same period. Projecting these figures to the year 2020 estimates only 7% of the population will be attending church. (Brierley 2003, p. 16, 31, 151)

An interesting comparison can be made with the work of David Hay. In the publication "The Spirituality of the Unchurched", his research shows the following pattern of spirituality in Britain.¹⁹

While church attendance has declined by 20%, spiritual experience has risen by 60%, with more than 76% of the population claiming to have had a spiritual experience, e.g. 38% of people aware of God's presence. (David Hay and Kate Hunt 2000) These statistics put into figures how Robert Wuthnow describes the changing face of spirituality, in a movement from the 'Spirituality of dwelling', where God is identified with a place, to a 'Spirituality of seeking', in which people strive to negotiate their own way through the complex maze of life. (Ward 2002 a, p. 25)

These statistics also highlight a postmodern culture gap that exists between expressed spirituality and church attendance. In spite of the conclusions of Hay's research, and the fact that more people in Scotland still attend church than football league matches, [4.5%] (Brierley 2003, 31) the overall decline of church attendance in Scotland is alarming.

In asking two questions, Callum Brown (2001, p. 7, 8) takes this debate a stage further.

When can you declare that Christianity is dead, and not just declining, and what makes a country a Christian one? This he defines as Christianity infusing public culture and being adopted by individuals, so forming their identity. The mere disappearance of Christian churches and people is not sufficient to make a country un-Christian.

However, these two issues run together, each influencing the other in a downwards spiral, with the consequent reduction in religiosity as a factor in how people construct their lives. A changing condition that has allowed previous social "sins" to be accepted and regarded as moral by most people in Britain in 2000. (Brown 2001, p. 8)

This is particularly true for the number of younger people who have dropped out of the life of the church in the last 20 years. The largest percentage of this decline is in the 15-44 age group, and if they also happen to be parents, then they will take their children with them. (Brierley 2003, p. 49, 50) As a result, the pool of children open to the church has declined.

This should not in any way be a surprise, for if any age group is to fall through the postmodern culture gap, it would be the 'baby busters' or 'GenXers' (born 1964-83), with serious consequences. Leaders in business and society will have no experience of, or contact with, the church, so locking it out of these influential generations. (Knoke 2003, p. 13)

¹⁹ Ward (2002 a, p. 22) cites similar evidence for Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Dougall (2003, p. 10) uses stronger language, 'GenXers' are vital for the church, not just because they are the future, but because they are the predominant culture in shaping (all of) society. They set the trends and everyone, except the church, follows.

In summary, Britain at the beginning of the third millennium is witnessing the death of a culture which formally conferred Christian identity on the country as a whole. At the same time, there is no longer any agreement on core realities and metanarratives and, if any do survive, they are no longer Christian. (Brown 2001, p. 193) This is the reality, and the context, in which the church finds itself.

In responding to this theological and cultural situation the church must not retreat into history and tradition, or accept the values of society that will undermine the values of the Kingdom. The only option is re-engagement, by dialogue and bold experimentation.

The church has to listen, and then take on board the needs of society in such a way that people will encounter a gospel message that meets them where they are, travels with them, encourages community and personal transformation, and lets people see that their story is important to the God of history and salvation.

VII. Liminality: the bridge between faith and culture

In the movement from modernity to postmodernity, dislocation or discontinuity between the values of faith and culture are taking place. (Galloway 1999, p. 35; Ziebertz 1998, p. 3)

In response, what can offer the possibility of re-engagement or, using one of Ziebertz's (1998, p. 3) options, attempt a new cultural penetration?

In *The Missionary Congregation, leadership and Liminality*, Alan Roxburgh (1997, p. 27) describes the concept of liminality as a means of re-engagement between faith and culture. In response to a radically changing environment, the church goes through three phases of transition: separation, the liminal (marginal) and reaggregation. In the liminal phase, two things are taking place. First there is the negation of everything considered normal, along with the potential for transformation and new configurations of identity. Because of the latter, the Latin term 'liminal' is used, to describe this as a *threshold* experience. It is the potential that lies beneath the churches current sense of marginalisation. (Roxburgh 1997, p. 29) One scriptural example is the exilic experience of the people of Israel and their return from exile to a new culture. (Roxburgh 1997, p. 57)

He describes two loops of liminality. (Roxburgh 1997, p. 36-42) The first is seen in the movement from pre modern Christendom, in which God was the centre of society, to 'modernity'. In this loop, the liminal aspect of the process was that of 'marginalisation', since in the modern world there was still a recognised 'centre' of society, which the church could be marginalised from. The re-engagement process, successfully achieved by the church at that time, was to accommodate modernity by recognising the centre as an increasingly secular public world and the place of the church in this, as a privatised faith. In terms of the mission of the church in the 21st century, are there still churches trapped in this first liminal loop, trying to recapture the centre ground?

The second loop of liminality takes place in the movement from modernity to postmodernity. This time liminality can't be marginalisation since the dynamic of culture has changed so much that there is now no centre. It is a culture with a plurality of competing values and beliefs, where there is no consensus on meaning, purpose, values or direction. (Roxburgh 1997, p. 12) In this place of liminality, the church is struggling to re-engage. There is no framework in which the change process can easily take place and the church has to cater to the choice of the 'market place'.

To re-engage, it has two choices. The first is the strong impulse to return to the original state of re-engagement of privatised faith in marginalisation. The problem with this, is that this culture no longer exists! Roxburgh (1997, p. 12) describes this as a 'centre periphery' paradigm. The church will either seek a recovery of the centre or try to create a new marginal existence. He says neither is helpful.

The other option is the potential given by a period of liminality to break from modernity and to transform society through its new centre, that of each individual. Since the church cannot reclaim the past, it now has no option but to create a new community around Jesus Christ. Since the church is no longer at the centre of society, God's mission must now be at the heart of all the church does, so changing the whole direction of the missionary and spiritual journey. This will create a new centre, for a new social location, related to individual and personal choice. (Lings and Hopkins 2004, p. 18; Roxburgh 1997, p. 15, 17) In postmodern Scotland, the church is in tension between these two choices.

In building vibrant, authentic communities of faith that seek to address the needs of postmodern people, the church needs carefully to understand both the context and dislocation of postmodernity and the possibilities of re-engagement in liminality, through a missiology of essence, form and practice. In this way, the church can act as a bridge into existing culture, reaching out for growth, and living as a hermeneutic of the gospel. (Hopkins 2004 a, Storrar 2001, p. 60)

If the reality of church decline is all too real, history tells of a gospel that likes to travel into new places, as an 'exciting' faith. As Scotland today has a new society, will the church seek liminality as its 'cutting edge' for the future, as its opportunity for cross-cultural mission? (Lings and Hopkins 2004, p. 4; McGaffigan 2002, p. 2) Not by seeking to reclaim a lost marginality, but a new centre in the person of Jesus Christ.

Having examined the spiritual journey in the context of theological exile and cultural postmodernity, the following sections will begin to relate these external forces of demographics and environment, to the internal experiences and developmental forces of congregational life. (Parsons and Leas 1993, p. 65)

Chapter five

The model of consultancy (1). Practical theology and its relationship to models of contextual theology

Having examined exilic theology and postmodernity as the back cloth to congregational life, a model for practical theology will now be examined in some detail. This will begin by setting it in the context of different models and understandings of theology, as a basis for describing its structure.

This chapter will first of all ask the question, 'what are models?', followed by a more detailed look at the issue of contextualisation, concluding with the matter of local theologies.

What are models?

Stephen Bevans (1992, p. 25) describes the usefulness of models as providing an angle of vision, even if they cannot bring the picture entirely into focus; they are partial, incomplete, but never false. Bevans cites two other writers; Avery Dulles (1983, p. 30, cited in Bevans 1992, p. 24) describes models as,

"a relatively simple, artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated".

For Sallie McFague (1982, p. 74-75, cited in Bevans 1992, p. 25) they affirm something real, but never capture its reality. In attempting to picture the complexity of congregational life, these descriptions aptly fit the model of practical theology.

Contextualisation

This will be examined under the headings of:

- I. Praxis
- II. Human experience
- III. Stories
- IV. The gospel

In understanding the relationship between models and theology, Bevans strongly makes the point that contextualisation is imperative, and is part of the very nature of theology itself. (Bevans 1992, p. 1) Trish McLean (2002) takes it one step further, arguing that faith needs to be continually contextualised and re-contextualised within culture as it changes. So what is contextualisation? Bosch describes it as the message of the Christian church, incarnated in the life and world of those who have embraced it. (Bosch 1991, p. 421) Gibbs describes it in very different language; contextualisation is the experience of God's revelation, through life's hard knocks. (Gibbs and Coffey 2001, p. 126) Therefore theology that is contextual, takes into account, and brings together, the message and spirit of the gospel, the social changes in culture, the need to understand cultural identity, and the tradition of the Christian people, with the aim of helping religion make sense to a particular culture. (Bevans 1992, p. 1, 7)

I. Praxis

If contextualisation is vital for theology, then it comes through praxis. It begins with action, crisis, issues or questioning, followed by reflection. Something has happened in the life experience of the faith community that causes it to respond in a continual dialogue of reflected-upon action and acted-upon reflection. (Bevans 1992, p. 65; Bosch, 425)

II. Human experience

However, to gain contextual genuineness, praxis needs to be rooted in human experience. (Bevans 1992, p. 48) This is the understanding of faith and knowledge, not developed out of rationality and intellect, through reflection on scripture and tradition alone, but listening to where people are, and understanding it as a form of inculturation, which recognises the essential role of experience in theology, spirituality and any kind of human living. Within the faith community, the consultant will examine the interaction of the experiences of the past in tradition and scripture, with those of the present cultural context; conditioned by circumstance, theological conviction is a missiological imperative. (Bevans 2003, p. 52) Galloway says something similar; people's environment interacts with their self-understanding and, because of this, meaning in life is related to place. (Galloway 1999, p. 28)

However, experience is always subjective, and can never be value or culture free. Culture is the context that constructs the reality in which people live, thereby influencing their understanding of God, and how faith is expressed. (Bevans 1992, p. 2, 49)

From a theological standpoint, praxis is therefore the opposite of understanding the gospel as purely an external message to society; instead it is the revelation of God who speaks through people's everyday events. (Bevans 1992, p. 48, 68) It is human experience that gives practical theology its anthropological dimension.

This is developed in what Bevans calls the transcendental model that starts with people's individual religious experience. There are things in life which people cannot understand without a complete change of mind, and radical shift in perspective. (Bevans 1992, p. 97)

Here is the person open to an encounter with God and the experiences of struggle in life, and through scripture, events and cultural values, faith is contextualised.

III. Stories

Out of people's experience come stories, therefore contextual theology is also grounded in narratives, the interrelationship of individual story, the communal faith story and the story of scripture. A dialogue helps to expose the 'truth' of scripture, its meaning, and not just its 'words'. Rather than applied theology, these narratives begin to 'translate' the meaning of the gospel story, so that it starts to make sense. (Bevans 1992, p. 30)

IV. The gospel

Experience, however, cannot be the only key to contextual theology.

The message of the gospel is also supra cultural, it has a kernel, surrounded by a disposable and non-essential cultural husk. (Bevans 1992, p. 33; Bosch 1991, p. 449) For Bevans, gospel is primary and is the judge of culture, yet it is its relationship to experience, which allows people to understand the world round about. (Bevans 1992, p. 34) As culture 'translates' the gospel, it maintains faithfulness to the original story that is unchanging, and restores its original flexibility. (Bevans 1992, p. 30) Contextual theology therefore says that culture is critical to experience, but at the same time, is not essential to the truth of the gospel story.

From these observations, the relationship between practical theology and models of contextual theology is a synthesis, for in the ongoing dialogue between faith and the different cultures in postmodern society, all aspects of contextualised theology are important. This not a compromise, but an understanding that reflects and recognises the composite nature of society, and how theology can be contextualised within it, and underpinned by an ambivalent view of culture, bad or good, depending on how it is viewed, developed or interacted with. (Bevans 1992, p. 83-84) The church requires to seek a similar balance, to transform, but at the same time, discover values that will transform its own worldview.

Local theologies²⁰

Who then should be the contextual theologians? As an expression of people's own present experience, in relation to their faith, the theologians have to be those within the local faith communities.

(Bevans 1992, p. 13) However, Schleiermacher (1998, p. 26-7) also saw the role of leadership, in "nurturing the Christian disposition", in the upbuilding and development of the community and the equipping the saints, as key to his thinking about practical theology. In the middle is the consultant, helping to give birth to local theologies, rooted in context and culture. (Bevans 1992, p. 13)

So what will such a model look like, and on what basis will it operate, thereby allowing the consultant to examine congregational life and develop a healthy community of faith? The next section begins to answer these questions.

"The best models of contextual theology succeed in holding together in creative tension *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis* - or, if one wishes faith, hope and love" (Bosch 1991, p. 431)

²⁰ In developing genuine 'local theologies', Robert Schreiter names five criteria. An inner consistency, i.e. moving in the same direction as the basic movement of Christianity. They must be able to be translated into worship, i.e. does it develop the communal prayer of the church? (Bevans 1992, p. 18) Orthopraxis, i.e. theological expression should not lead to action that is un-Christian. Should be open to criticism from other churches, i.e. learn from others and grow in dialogue with them. Have a strength of theology to challenge other theologies, i.e. contribute positively to dialogue. (Bevans 1992, p. 18-19)

Chapter six

The model of consultancy (2). The dynamic and method of practical theology

Based on the 'shape' of a dynamic spiral, and with narrative as its methodology and 'form', the next two sections describe a model for practical theology. Its outcome, to enable a faith community to understand its situation, be proactive in using the scriptures, and develop a community that is healthier.

In this chapter the model of practical theology will be examined under the headings of:

- I. What is practical theology?
- II. Practical theology: theory or praxis?
- III. The dynamic of practical theology
- IV. The method of practical theology
- V. Transition through the model of practical theology

I. What is practical theology?

The term practical theology can sound like a contradiction in terms, or is there something in this juxta-position of language that is important in making practical theology actually possible? (Campbell 1990, p. 10)

Purves (1998, p. 222) says something similar, in practical theology; the adjective seems to qualify the noun in a distinctly odd way.

To understand the 'practical', there needs to be a definition of the 'theology'. Tillich (1951, p. 20-21) argues that since theology is a combination of *logos* (word) & *Theos* (God) then Jesus in being the word made flesh, is both totally concrete and particular, so that you can be 'in Christ' and totally universal, and this is the basis of all theology. (Kirk 1997, p. 2) Purves (1998, p. 222-224) extends this thinking; he states that all theology and knowledge, because it is of the acting and self revealing God, is inherently a practical theology by virtue of what God does. Practical theology is therefore first a theology of God, the 'Missio Dei', as undertaken in Christ, before it is a theology of the church. (Lings and Hopkins 2004, p. 4) It has as its foundation the words of Jesus, "As the Father sent me, so I send you". (John 20: 21)

'To be sent' comes from the Latin 'missio', and is translated as 'mission'. This gives the second foundational element in understanding practical theology. If theology is the study of the ways of God, and God is by nature missionary, then all practical theology must also be missionary. Kirk (1997, p. 50- 51) describes mission as the foundation and mortar of the building, cementing everything else together.

The outcome of such thinking is 'mission shaped church'²¹. Hopkins and Lings (2004, p. 19-20) describe this as a creative fusion of best missiology and ecclesiology. It described the church of the 1st century AD and should be normative for the whole church today, for without being shaped by the mission of Jesus, the church would not have come into being.

²¹ This thinking found in *Mission Shaped Church, Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, Church House Publishing, 2004

'Mission shaped church' picks up on many of the themes from the context of consultancy; it is rooted in Trinitarian theology, relational, communal and missional, and because church and community cannot be separated, there is no disincarnate gospel, as it does not exist as a free-standing category in mission

As a result of theology being incarnate in the world, it is based on praxis. Here the words, deeds and experiences of the church become its first order of theological expression, which is then reflected upon to create theology. As its third foundational element, practical theology arises out of the life of the church and returns to that life.

(Schleirmacher 1998, p. 16-17) This ties in with Kirk's (1997, p. 3, 6) thinking on the relationship between theology and mission, for practical theology is both a theology of mission, and mission as theology, rooted in the context of people's lives. From this understanding, he attempts to define practical theology, as a critical reflection by the community of faith, on God and his word, out of the experience of and that seen by, the community of faith

Interestingly, Kirk (1997, p. 6, 8) sees practical theology as having two tasks that relate to others sections of this thesis. First of all, theology makes sense of the whole of life by reference to God, where the gospel story engages in people's story²². Secondly, it is an agent for the transformation²³ of the whole of life, so that it may reflect God's intentions.

²² See section Story: the form of practical theology

²³ See later in this section on 'transitions'

Forrester (1990, p. 5) agrees with the importance of praxis; practical theology is concerned with questions of truth in relation to action, reciprocity between theory and practice, where theological understanding not only leads to action, but also arises out of practice. This understanding of practical theology raises the theological issues of meaning and truth [theory], in relation to living out a life of faith that is value laden, [praxis] for a congregation acts as a result of both its implicit and explicit values and beliefs. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 5, 66)

The fourth foundational element is the cultural context, this has already been examined, but the words of Hopkins and Lings (2004, p. 19) are helpful at this point. It is only in active mission, to a particular context, that the church can discover what it needs to be. Not isolated or insular, but responsively created for its context.

II. Practical theology: theory or praxis?

In *Foundations for a Practical theology of Ministry*, Poling and Miller (1985, p. 31-35) develop this examination of practical theology by seeing it revolve around two axes. One of these is described as the 'critical method'. This is a continuum that runs from action with no self-critical reflection, to fundamentalism that is so committed to ideology that again there is no self-criticism. However, between these extremes, this axis of practical theology implies an awareness of presumption (theory), together with a willingness to revise them under certain conditions (praxis). There is the potential for critical reflection, on the meaning of faith and its resulting actions in the world, with the outcome of this dialogue being coherent theological statements.

Alastair Campbell (1990, p. 13-15) in contrasting the work of Thurneysen and Hiltner also views two opposite ends of the practical theology spectrum. In one, the view of Thurneysen, practical theology is seen as homiletic, with a framework centred on scripture and tradition. Campbell (1990, p. 16) views this as too subsumed under dogmatic theology. The other, the view of Hiltner, is earthed in human sciences, but viewed by Campbell (1990, p. 14-16) as being in the limbo of pragmatism. Campbell (1990, p. 20) sees practical theology as having to tread this difficult path between practical relevance and theological integrity,

"...or join its nineteenth century predecessor on the scrap heap of old confusions"

Added to this debate are the views of Tillich. He has a focus on the mutual interdependence between existential questions and theological answers. (Tillich 1951, p. 68) Questions are formulated out of experience by theology, which then answers these questions, from God, under the guidance of the original questions. In response to what is experienced, theological answers can be reformulated, so forming a circle of question and answer that has parallels with the model of practical theology. (Tillich 1951, p. 69)

"The Christian message provides the answers to the questions implied in human existence." (Tillich 1951, p. 72)

However, the substance of the answer never changes, that is the logos of being, Jesus Christ. (Tillich 1951, p. 71)

In all these definitions, practical theology is understood as a core part of the community of faith, living out its struggle, reflecting on its experiences and not just trying to believe the right things. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 4) They have in common the juxtaposition of theory and praxis. However, touching on the work of Tillich, where does theology actually begin, with the theory or with the praxis?

In *Practical theology in Action*, Ballard and Pritchard describe four models for the interaction of theory and praxis in practical theology.

- I. The first model is that of applied theology. You begin with the theory or theology and apply it to the situation under review. However, this dynamic can be interpreted as a very one-way process. Are not beliefs hammered out in the practical struggles of life while, at the same time, witness and service is informed by a living faith. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 60) *This model is therefore based on authoritative scripture and tradition.*
- II. The second model is that of critical correlation in which there is a dialogue between the tradition and the issue under consideration. In other words, there is a tension within theology arising out of, and serving, the church. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 11) It is the day to day life of the church challenged by the gospel, which is in dialogue with it, which shapes Christian practice. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 12) The practical theologian therefore acts a mediator between the insights of the Christian tradition and the reality of the present. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 62) *This model is therefore based on ongoing dialogue.*
- III. The third model is the one of praxis. It has as its starting point the present concrete situation (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 66) and therefore takes seriously the experience of the church.

In this model, lived faith is important and is the primary source of theological understanding. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 67, Groome 1987, p. 57) *This model is therefore based on current reality.*

- IV. The final model is that of Habitus, understood as a mindset that has become second nature, induced by long training and spiritual socialisation. In this model the task of practical theology is not to provide methodology or skills, but a training of mind and heart. In other words, to build up the body of Christ. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 68) *This model is therefore based on developing spirituality.*

Albert Ploeger (1999, p. 71) describes two of these models of practical theology, the proclamation model (applied theology) that begins with scripture and tradition, and the experiential model (praxis) that begins with the experiences of faith in daily life, and seeks to bring these two models of revelation and experience together. His correlation, and 'interwovenness', is the experience of life and belief.

Another paradigm of correlation is found in the work of Groome (1987, p. 63), who makes the point that the praxis of people in history is the point of departure or equal with theory, when they do theology. He then goes on to describe Matthew Lamb's schema of dialectal unity between praxis and theory in doing theology, in which he focuses on two of five types described. (Groome 1987, p. 64) They are first of all the critical theoretic correlations, in which both theory and practice are essential to, yet neither is synonymous with, God's self-disclosure in history. (Lamb 1982, p. 75, cited in Groome 1987, p. 65) The second is the critical praxis correlation, in which praxis is primary. (Lamb 1982, p. 86, cited in Groome 1987, p. 65)

In both of these, theology holds theory and praxis in critical correlation, critical because it is not simply an acceptance of faith handed down. (Groome 1987, p. 66)

At the very least, Groome holds praxis and theology in a relationship of equals and, if anything, the balance slides to the side of praxis. This seems to relate with much of the view already observed in the work of Ballard and Pritchard. The key context is current reality, the key action is a dialogue and the key frame of mind is that of 'criticality'.

The intention of this review is to show that the dynamic of practical theology is not just a theoretical model, but will focus on, and draw together, some of the different emphases described above, into a coherent and yet flexible whole. However, although each aspect of theology will in some way be part of the dynamic, in practice, it will major on the models of praxis and correlation, but if the final outcome is not also *habitus*, then this dynamic will have failed.

If, as has already been suggested, the central motif of mission is 'missio dei', and the core action of mission is that of 'sending', then any action that comes from the dynamic of practical theology must be God's mission in the community, by the sending of God's people. In the words of Ballard and Pritchard, practical theology informs spirituality, for it cannot be separated from the life of prayer, faith and worship. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 85)

Having examined the relationship between theology and praxis, the rest of this section will describe two specific aspects of practical theology, and ask; can it form a base for communal discernment²⁴, to help God's people as they journey into the future? The first part examines the *dynamic* of practical theology; then moves on to think about a *method*, to implement it in church consultancy.

III. The dynamic of practical theology

In his study of practical theology, Don Browning's (1991, p. 1) main question is in what way do religious communities make sense? This can be in relation either to outside events, or to challenges from within. His starting point is with congregational practice, described as 'norms' and 'ideals', which emerge out of the memories and traditions of sacred texts and events. (Browning 1991, p. 6) These are described by Browning (1991, p. 10-11) as the 'outer envelope', the fund of inherited narratives and practices from the past tradition, not just Christian, that have been delivered, and so always surround the congregation's thinking, along with the 'inner core', that of 'love your neighbour'. (Matthew 19:19 & Matthew 7:12)

Farley (1987, p. 9) comes to a similar conclusion, there is a past focus on the authoritative tradition and texts as a theory to practice paradigm. What he means is high awareness of text and meaning of content, but a low awareness of context and meaning of the situation. (Farley 1987, p. 10) In the first instance, the practices of congregational life are always determined by theory.

²⁴ Communal discernment is the process by which a community of faith seeks to see God's movement in the world and in that community's life. It is our attempt to see "rightly". To see our experience and our goals through the eyes of Christ. It is our striving to listen deeply and grow in our conformity with God's love for us. (Gallagher 2003, p. 1)

They are 'theory laden', but when a crisis event happens in the life of a congregation, questions arise that challenge these practices, and people start to see different meanings in the texts, so as to produce new norms.

In their book *Practical Theology in Action* the authors describe this as the first part the 'pastoral cycle'. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 74-75)

This is the experience of the congregation that provides the source and authority for all reflection, for as Ploeger (1999, p. 92) states; the power of faith present in the life of the congregation is not just in the biblical texts, but in their faith experiences. Practical theology has the function of tracing this power and stimulating what is constructive. (Poling and Miller 1985, p. 67) If current reality has been interrupted, it cannot go on as it is, and a response is required. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 77)

This leads on to the next stage of the cycle but, before that, other comments need to be made. The old model of applied theology that started with theory and led to the outworking of practice, has broken down. Practice is no longer the logical conclusion to an argument that begins with revelation and is then developed and/or extended by disciplined thinking (theology). The priority is quite the reverse. Practice leads to reflection and to theological truth, and praxis is reflective action in which the community of faith is taken seriously.

So how does this reflection begin to take place? As already noted, the next stage is initiated through some form of crisis. Here we can use the language of Whitehead who identifies three 'poles' or 'authorities' that engage each other within the individual or community, and contribute to the overall reflection and ultimate action.

To this, Ballard and Pritchard (1996, p. 77) would add an analysis of what is going on, as a result of the crisis or questioning. These poles are Christian tradition, cultural information and personal experience. It is in the gap between the theology and the practice caused by any crisis of such interplay, that questions regarding traditional positions of theology arise.

Whitehead (1987, p. 42) understands the testing of the leeway, this 'limited mobility', between our religious tradition (theory) and personal experience (practice) as 'Play'. Galloway's (1999, p. 67) describes these crisis points as trying to 'live between the cracks'. Due to rapid change, the things that shaped the values of previous generations are in transition, and the building blocks of culture are giving way. Thinking along similar lines, Ziebertz (1998, p. 8) sees practical theology as the means of mending the 'cracks' of discontinuity.

In Browning's (1991, p. 6) terms, 'deconstruction' takes place. This could be due to a personal experience, challenging Christian texts or the pressure of culture challenging the practices and traditions of the church.

The key point here is that questions are raised, and it is these questions that take us to the next point on the dynamic cycle of practical theology.

This is the area of practical theology where the work of God, in raising the questions, meets the Word of God in Christian texts and traditions. These questions cannot be seen as accidents.

If there is a belief that the Spirit guides the church, then it will be seen to envision direction and purpose where others will only see random activity. (Farley 1987, p. 36) There is here an engagement and dialogue between the norms and ideals of the life of the congregation, the texts, and the vital and critical questions raised by the crisis.

In outlining four theological strategies addressing postmodern experience, Fowler (1996, p. 185) describes what he calls the hermeneutical approach.

In this, practical theology is to bring an interpretation of the Christian tradition into a mutually critical correlation with an interpretation of the present situation that requires address and action. He sees this as bringing spiritual clarification and a sense of direction formed in synergy with God. It allows revelation, God's disclosure, to take place. (Fowler 1996, p. 186) It is in this critical corporate or individual reflection, this not taking the 'faith handed down' as a norm to be accepted, that the process of 'reconstruction' begins. (Browning 1991, p. 6)

Farley (1987, p. 9, 11) describes this theology as an activity of reflective wisdom in the believer and faith, needing to engage in the interpretation of situations in a reflective and disciplined way. Further, Ballard and Pritchard (1996, p. 77-8) see reflection as more than simply having information. It must involve discovery and change, for only then will it be possible to take up a different, more realistic and creative stance for the future. In summary, if practical theology does not begin with the theory, then the theology must at least critique and inform the practice so that the dynamic of practical theology continues and the church does not stagnate.

This tension between theology and practice will not be easy, or indeed ever resolved, but eventually it will begin to be 'consolidated'.

(Browning 1991, p. 6) It is at this point that the practice of the church is changing. The norms have been challenged and new practices start to take shape. The cycle is closing, ready to begin again when the next crisis happens and new questions are raised.

Here is a circular movement throughout our lives, as individuals, as a local congregation and, corporately, as the Body of Christ.

As practical theology, it began and continues in experience. (Poling and Miller 1985, p. 69) This is theological reflection that is both a process and which produces an end product, a reshaped worldview that will provide a new filter with which the congregation will enter the next turn of the cycle. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 150) This is the 'why' of theology, not just to interpret the world, but empower Christians to participate in changing it. (Groome 1987, p. 63)

In truth it is not so much a cycle as a spiral. It is not something simply to be repeated, going over the same ground, but a dynamic that moves on into new territory, taking the congregation another stage on its journey of pilgrimage. The spiral is therefore a repeating theology, within the movement, journey and pilgrimage of God's people.

Three dangers regarding this dynamic of practical theology need to be considered. The first is that this cycle needs to be completed and not, for any reason of pressure or expediency, cut short. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 137) If there is a lack of exploration or reflection, this will lead to a lack of understanding of the situation and the resulting action will be misinformed.

The second is dividing the cycle into two distinct and separate parts, namely, reflection and action. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 83) This could result in a congregation reflecting on a situation without changing or putting anything into practice. The third is to be too rigid in any application of the dynamic cycle. The church is a living organism, and therefore does not fit neatly into any methodological tool.

It can be seen that this dynamic is very different from a simple theory to practice paradigm, and can be summarised so far as a hermeneutic cycle that moves from congregational norms, to crisis, to questions and back to new norms.

In the language of Lovell and Widdicombe (1978, p. 14-15) this is described as 'Action research', a theology that is determined by reflecting on the practice. The work is done and then carefully recorded, with the results evaluated by those who carried out the work, and the people they worked with. Whatever is learned is then ploughed back into the project to inform any future decisions and actions. In other words, the process is continuous. (Lovell and Widdicombe 1978, p. 22) Browning (1991, p. 10) describes this using a very different kind of language. When things are breaking down, practical reason tries to reconstruct its picture of the world and its more concrete practices.

This dynamic of practical theology also chimes with the work of Farley (1987, p. 1), who describes the essential component of theology as the theological "interpretation of situations", and Tillich (1951, p. 4-6), as the "the creative interpretation of existence", theology moving between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation, which he describes as kerygmatic theology, and the situation into which the truth has to be received, the apologetic theology.

Practical theology seeks to balance them, by a theological method that will relate the two theologies so that neither is obliterated. Tillich (1951, p. 3, 8) describes this as the method of correlation, a way of uniting message and situation, where the questions implied in the situation are correlated with the answers implied in the message. For the consultant working with a local faith community, this is the ultimate 'situation' to be interpreted.

There is also the need to understand that any hermeneutic cycle or spiral will not turn in a 'uniform' fashion, stages of the cycle will not move neatly from one to another. The contribution of this thesis to the debate is therefore to offer a cycle of four overlapping stages.²⁵

It begins with the current reality or experience of the congregation, in which, or out of which, questions arise or a crisis intervenes. Once this happens, the critical reflection or deconstruction has begun. This stage of 'experience', including any analysis, (movement two of Groome (1987, p. 71-2)), a critical reflection on the present praxis, will then naturally move into the stage of dialogue, between the experience of the congregation, its norms and beliefs, and the wisdom of the texts. Throughout this period, critical reflection is taking place and the old practices are starting to deconstruct. At the same time, the dialogue encourages reconstruction to take place. As part of this ongoing interaction, and out of dialogue and reconstruction, there emerges a new understanding in embryo form. In a real sense dialogue never really stops, understanding grows, and the action of the new practices and norms of the congregation begin to change with consolidation starting to take hold. It is as if the original crisis or questioning has released theological energy, to drive the dynamic of practical theology.

This model of practical theology is therefore highly fluid, and allows for a living dynamic to occur. It is then highly likely that any new practices begun will raise new questions or difficulties, thereby restarting the whole process once again.

We conclude this look at the dynamic of practical theology by coming back to the issue of the purpose of the church. It is only a church in dynamic movement that will undergo transformative change, so as to impact its community, as the people of God. This will only be achieved by a theology done by the people, and not for the people, (Lovell 1972, p. 5) thinking theologically in their pastoral situation. In Groome's (1987, p. 60) words, the people are the 'who' of theology.

This is a context that is not just their own community, but sees all human history as the arena of God's actions, becoming the source of questions challenging faith across time and from all cultures. In other words, all creation is ultimately the 'where' of theology, the primary locus, the point of both departure and arrival for the rational disclosure about God. (Groome 1987, p. 61) This is Poling and Miller's (1985, p. 31-35) second axis of practical theology, the relationship between church and society, a continuum from the church struggling to be faithful in the modern world, to its responsibility to society in being part of public dialogue, and so risking its identity of faith. He raises the same question: where is the praxis located, mainly in the religious or in secular communities?

²⁵ See Appendix one

IV. The method of practical theology

Tillich gives a helpful descriptor of method. He says that method is a tool, literally a way around, which must be adequate to its subject matter. In this case, the method is based on narrative as it relates to the story of the subject matter, namely the community of faith. In this way, the method is an element of the reality itself, and tells us something about the object to which it is being applied. (Tillich 1951, p. 67)

As praxis correlates theology and action, so the method of practical theology requires to correlate method and subject.

Method also requires to be inherently theological in nature as it seeks to understand the concrete situation in which a congregation acts, by examining what it says about its faith in God, and what its actions say about that faith. (Ammerman et al 1998, p. 16)

At each of the four stages of the method of practical theology, questions will be raised that will enable the dynamic to spin positively. Whether by spontaneous crisis, or deliberately sparked from within the life of the congregation, these questions and crisis are never abstract, they always arise from the context and reality of people's lives and congregation's situations. The consultant encourages and helps people to raise the questions, see them in a positive way, so that critical reflection of the situation will take place.

The basic pattern to this method follows that laid out in the book *Studying Congregations*. (Ammerman et al 1998, 26-27)

- I. Naming
- II. Storytelling
- III. Conversation
- IV. New script

I. "Naming"

This phase 'names' the concrete situation of the practices of the congregation. (Farley 1983, p. 165, cited in Groome 1987, p. 67)

In his shared praxis approach, Groome (1987, p. 70-1) describes this as the first of his five 'movements' of practical theology, the expression of the present praxis. What is distinctive about this congregation? What are its constituent features? Since practical theology comes out of shared experiences, this is a starting point rooted in current reality, and questioned by event or crisis. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 79-81) In this phase, the consultant needs to help the congregation explore and reveal its present practice with all its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, so that they can be challenged and changed. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 81) It is an attempt to describe the lived experience of the community, including the hard data of discrete events and the crucial process of contextualisation. (Poling and Miller 1985, p. 77, 100) This description occurs on three levels: the personal, the institutional and religio-cultural engagement.

Browning (1991, p. 48) describes this opening phase as 'descriptive theology', for it is descriptive of the context of consultancy²⁶.

"Storytelling"

The next phase is that of telling the faith story, what Ballard and Pritchard (1996, p. 128) describe as a narrative approach to theological reflection. They see the story as the primary language of human experience, and cultures being formed and sustained by their narratives. Fowler (1996, p. 186) describes something similar in a narrative-linguistic approach.

He sees the Christian faith as a narrative for grounding the identity of the church, and shaping it for discipleship. He makes the point that the practices of the faith shape us more deeply than the doctrines of conscious belief. (Fowler 1996, p. 188) So how does this story illuminate or challenge the practice of the congregation? If done honestly, then this dialogue will raise questions regarding the implicit theology of the life of the congregation. What will take place is a critical reflection between the practice and the theology, almost in a sense of suspicion, so that the past traditions will be tested, to see if what has come through in practice to the present is true and honest to the biblical texts. This represents movement three of Farley (1983, p. 176, cited in Groome 1987, p. 67-68), a critical appropriation of the theory that comes from the faith handed down.

²⁶ A helpful model of descriptive theology is found in the book *Studying Congregations*, where the authors describe the story or picture of a congregation using the four different lenses of ecology, culture, resources and process. This offers the consultant a systematic approach to practical theology, identifying the essence of congregational life which is constantly changing and is a complex reality. (Ammerman et al 1998, p. 9-16)

Browning (1991, p. 49) describes this as 'historical theology', for it is the historical context of consultancy; the ongoing tension between theology and tradition, noting what has won through in practice.

III. "Conversation"

The third phase of this method of practical theology is where the two stories, that of the congregation (after the dialogue of 'storytelling', and with all their value systems and assumptions), and the story of faith are brought together in conversation, so that they can interpret one another. This coincides with Groome's (1987, p. 73-4) fourth movement of practical theology that places the two sources of knowing, praxis and theory, in a dialectical hermeneutic with each other. In reality this is practical theology as dialogue. It is also a dialogue that takes place between tradition that represents continuity, and the fact that faith learns from the living present of reality. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 84)

This is the core engagement of critical reflection that takes place in the method of practical theology. If the focus of "storytelling" has its emphasis on the past as it is practiced in the present, then "conversation" is about beginning to develop a new theology for the future.

If this is to be a true critical dialogue of correlation, then not only will the texts critique what the congregation says or is doing, both implicitly or explicitly, but the practices of the congregation will also critique what is found in the texts. In a sense, this phase brings a level of suspicion upon the texts. (Farley 1983, p. 167, cited in Groome 1987, p. 67-68)

For example, is it actually possible to carry out what is found in scripture, or in a changing culture is there now a new way of being church? This is a phase of testing claims and seeking support for praxis. Drawing on the work of Farley (1987, p. 9), we could also add that by not focusing on either single texts or situations, errors of the past might be eliminated.

Browning (1991, p. 51) describes this phase as 'systematic theology'. A new theology emerges in the present context of consultancy.

IV. "New script"

The final aspect of this method is that of listening to the above conversation taking place and then imagining and planning for the future. This is the point of re-engagement with reality, via the truth of the Christian tradition, so that a new vision for congregational life emerges. (Groome 1987, p. 68) This will involve a process of change; it is the task of discerning the demands of, and responses to, this new emerging situation.

Groome (1987, p. 74) describes this as movement five, that of coming to a decision or response of ongoing praxis. In other words, decisions need to be made and implemented about what is going to be done to advance God's Kingdom in the life and work of the congregation. Out of this process comes a new praxis that enables growth and creativity. (Ballard and Pritchard 1996, p. 81)

For Browning (1991, p. 55) this is 'systematic practical theology', seen by many today as encompassing what practical theology is actually all about.

If this model and method of Practical theology are to be valuable tools, then they must be able to be harmonised together. This is laid out in the following table, as a multiple overlapping, but interrelated, process.

Table two: the stages of the dynamic and method of practical theology

Stages from the dynamic of practical theology	Stages from the method of practical theology	Descriptor of stages from method of practical theology	Stages of Don Browning
Experience	Current reality	" <u>Naming</u> " Describing and exploring what is going on.	Descriptive
Dialogue	Dialogue 1	" <u>Storytelling</u> " Between the practice of the congregation and the theology it is based on.	Historical
Dialogue	Dialogue 2	" <u>Conversation</u> " between the story of the congregation and the story of faith. (texts)	Systematic
Understanding & Action	Listening to dialogue	" <u>New script</u> " The emergence of new practices.	Systematic Practical theology

Having examined this model of practical theology in some detail, there is still the outstanding question of how the community of faith will actually be challenged to examine its corporate life and so be opened up to the possibility of change. What seems abstract and theoretical must be earthed, not just in people's experience, but in a way that enables them to write a 'new script' for their faith community. This will begin with an examination of the effects of change and transition.

V. Transition through the model of practical theology

In *The Manual, Understanding your Congregation as a System*, Parsons and Leas (1993, p. 65-67) see the management of change as the means of reclaiming the excess tension out of the system. When a church is thrown out of homeostasis, by crisis or questioning, the natural response is to return to the old ways of doing things by regaining balance, and not changing current patterns, what they call adaptation or survival. However, when a system does shift, energy is released, people see themselves in new ways, and non conscious contracts or patterns become conscious. They conclude, in this flux or unfrozen state, change can be more easily effected, leading to new possibilities and transformation.

In both the theological framework from relationships through strategy, and in the pattern of practical theology, it would be a mistake to view each of their stages as linear movements, where one must be fully complete, before the next stage can begin. As seen in the section on postmodernity, traditions are not abruptly replaced, but old elements are constantly changed.

This happens by subjective experience, by a series of choices, and not by objective validity. (Ziebertz 1998, p. 19)

A more accurate image would be that of overlapping transitions, where people are in more than one phase at the same time, and the movement through transition is marked by a change in the dominance of one phase as it gives way to the next. (Bridges 1995, p. 70)

William Bridges makes a clear distinction between change and transition. He says change is external and situational, for example someone is given a new team role, whereas transition is psychological and internal; it is the process that people have to go through to come to terms with that new situation. (Bridges 1995, p. 3) The two are inextricably linked, so unless the internal transition occurs, any planned change will not have taken place once the dust has settled. (Bridges 1995, p. 4)

"...the first task of change management is to understand the destination and how to get there, the first task of transition management is to convince people to leave home." (Bridges 1995, p. 32)

This understanding of the role of transition turns around our traditional thinking on change. It sees change as the starting point and the term given to the overall process, with transition beginning once the external change has taken place. Paradoxically, transition starts with an ending, those issues that people will have to deal with, and work through, as an old situation is left behind. (Bridges 1995, p. 4) Transition therefore begins with letting go of the old reality. (Bridges 1995, p. 5)

The second main issue is what Bridges calls the 'neutral zone'. This is the no man's land or limbo period between the old reality and the new. The old is gone, the new has not yet fully arrived, and life feels uncomfortable. It is a place where neither the old ways nor the new work satisfactorily. (Bridges 1995, p. 5, 34)

Understanding these concepts of transition and the neutral zone is important for change as it takes place in the life of a faith community. As people are challenged by the interaction of personal narratives, faith stories and scripture, and enter their neutral zones, they will respond in different ways. Some will try to rush through, feeling that there is something wrong, because they neither expected it, understand it nor feel that they can cope with it. Others will be frightened by it, so try to escape from it altogether, thus abandoning the transition and jeopardising the change. For those people who escape prematurely, a great opportunity is lost for, painful though it is, the neutral zone is a time of creativity, renewal and development. (Bridges 1995, p. 5-6)

Parsons and Leas (1993, p. 69) describes the role of the consultant at this time as keeping contention alive, to avoid moving too rapidly to solve the problem before it is correctly defined. It is about keeping people in problem solving situations, -the neutral zone- long enough until the solution is found that meets the broad range of interests and needs.

The neutral zone is therefore both a dangerous and opportune place, and is the very core of the transition process. It is where the old habits that are no longer adaptive to a new situation are extinguished, and the new habits begin to take shape, new beginnings that can only be made where first there have been endings to old realities or stories.

Yet how often do people try to start with the new beginnings, the end point of change, rather finish with it? (Bridges 1995, p. 6)

In many congregations this might mean avoiding an engagement with scripture, or jumping straight to formulate strategy without building relationships or vision. Here is a crucial role of the consultant, to understand, recognise and be with people as they spend time in the neutral zone.

Without anticipating what is to come in the next section on narrative, how might an engagement with scripture throw light on this transitioning process? What stories can be called upon to enable 'new scripts' to be written, and can narrative develop a culture or willingness to change?

The following three cameos begin to explore this possibility.

- I. The transitional event of creation: the nature and character of God
- II. The life of Christ
- III. The story of the Exodus: a transitional event in the life of Christ

I. The transitional event of creation: the nature and character of God

The oldest recorded fact that is known about God is that he does new things! (Genesis 1:1) In the creation event two things happened, the change process was started, which then led to an ongoing period of transition, that creation is still experiencing.

The seasons come and go and time waits for no one. During all of this, even in times of great change and transition, God is a God of order, and not chaos. God is in control, even to the point of anticipating Christ's return, when the new creation will be ushered in, the original change of creation completed and this period of transitional human history brought to an end.

This is in direct contrast with scriptural references about the nature and character of God. In the realm of the eternal God, his Word (Isaiah 40:8), his love (Jeremiah 31:3), and his purpose (Job 42:2) never change. In bringing these two characteristics together, there is the new and the constant, in a tension/balance relationship that needs to be taken into congregational life. In transitional events, both stability and flux are required.

II. The life of Christ

This tension/balance relationship is echoed in the life of Christ. Jesus is described as the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13: 8), but also the same person who transformed the Passover meal into the Lord's Supper, (Mark 14: 12-26) and who extended the greatest command from love of neighbour to love your enemies. (Matthew 5: 43-44). Galloway (1999, p. 97-98, 116-117) gives an example of this, in his ministry; Jesus transformed the exchange/transaction of giving and receiving by drawing people into community, which is at the heart of restoring relationships. She challenges the church to do the same, to be communitarian and 'sym-bolic', healing, drawing together and unifying.

Throughout the model of practical theology, the faith community needs to engage change with the same transitional power as demonstrated in the story of the life of Christ.

Since the Kingdom of God is here but not yet, this power of God's Spirit continues, and is the means of transformation.

III. The story of the Exodus: a transitional event in the life of Israel

This final cameo, an example from the life of Israel, gives a specific example of transition and, in particular, the neutral zone.

One of the most difficult aspects of the neutral zone is that people do not understand it. They expect to be able to move straight from the old to the new. But since it is a journey from one identity to another, it will take time. This parallels the experience of Moses as he led God's people through the wilderness. It took forty years, not because they got lost, but because the generation that left Egypt had to die off before others could enter the Promised Land. Old outlooks, attitudes, values and ways of thinking that had been functioning in the old reality had to die, so that they could be ready for the new life in the present and for the future. (Bridges 1995, p. 37)

For Moses and Israel, the ending of the old realities and beginning of transition was caused by the change of leaving Egypt. After this they experienced a neutral zone that lasted for forty years, during which, and for this reason, Egypt was taken out of the people. (Bridges 1995, p. 37) By establishing the identity of God's people in the Passover, it was easier for Israel to cope with this change and transition.

The role of the consultant is to make the neutral zone a secure place to be; where visions can be dreamed and change explored, all firmly based on a clear identity of who they are, as part of God's people.

This 'hinge' section has looked at the theory of the *dynamic* and *method* as a model for practical theory; the final sections will examine the more practical issues. In the first, the role of narrative in the interaction between personal, communal and scriptural stories of faith will be developed as the basis of the *form* of practical theology. After this, there will be a description on the process of consultancy, in an examination of the equilibrium between the mechanical, communal and the relational aspects of the consultant's work, finishing with an analysis on what other practitioners have learnt about the theology, context, determining factors and practice of consultancy.

Chapter seven

The model of consultancy (3). Story: the 'form' of practical theology

"Theology is a secondhand reflection of such an event; story is the unspeakable event's first voice." (Bausch 1984, p. 28)

How true is the statement, 'human beings live by telling stories'? In the context of faith communities, is there a sense of common adventure as people participate in the story of the church, with the ability to live that story, and to tell it? (Barton 2000, p. 182, Haucrwas 2001 a, p. 172, 174)

The gospel story, where the world of today is drawn into the adventure of marginalised people, from Israel, who began as a nation on the edge of other powerful nations, through Jesus of Nazareth, whose ministry was often expressed among the poor, the homeless and the outcast, to the life of the early church, persecuted, scattered and marginalised within the 1st century AD Roman empire. (Yarnell 2003, p. 19) At the root of practical theology is an engagement of this biblical story of marginalisation, with the exilic faith communities of 21st century Scotland.

The structure for a model of practical theology is now completed by examining its 'form'.

This is a narrative theology of story, which will enable the *dynamic* to spin, and the *method* to be applied to congregational life, based on the interaction between the larger story of God in Christ, set within the community of faith, meeting the personal story of each individual. The consultant works in this arena, and needs to be aware of, and see, that the church community is a fundamental place of story, with the gospel story as the raw material that sets the people of faith apart. In this faith context, the space and place of storytelling exists as the starting point for developing a living theology. (Bausch 1984, p. 12, Mead 1994, p. 59, 61, West et al 1999, p. 7)

In considering the role of story in the experience of the faith community, the following issues will be examined:

- I. What is story?
- II. The need for imagination to engage with story.
- III. What happens when people do engage with the story of God in Christ.
- IV. The action of story as seen in ritual, the outcome of engagement.

I. What is Story?

Stanley Hauerwas (2001 b, p. 155) takes us back to the beginning by making the point that Jesus has to be, prior to story. Yet the biblical narrative of his life is based on the art form of story, which in turn is prior to the church. (Bausch 1984, p. 108, 197) Is story therefore significant in itself, or is there more to story than meets the eye of the reader? Is story something substantive enough to convey the 'truth' of scripture? (Hauerwas and Jones 1987, p. 1, 4)

Michael Wolter (2000, p. 130) defines story as a linguistic rendering of a sequence of events, and, more tersely, following E M Forster, "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence".

Donald Smith of the Netherbow arts centre says story is the power of narrative to express, and storytelling the sharing of narrative between people. (Smith, 2003 a) Why then is this sharing of narrative so important to the church? Pobee and Ositelui (1998, p. x) give this clue; communication is not statements but stories, not theological arguments but testimonies. So what do stories communicate?

If as human beings we like to establish order from chaos, then one way of doing this is to create stories, as systems of meaning and being. They tell us who we are, why we are here and where we are going. (Bausch 1984, p. 171, Draper, 2002)

Anderson and Foley (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 4, 12) agree; they see the purpose of story as being created to construct meaning in life, both 'internally', in making sense of the world, and 'externally', in communicating ourselves to others. (West et al 1999, p. 10) As a result, story functions to sustain and confirm identity, and to display the content of Christian convictions. (Hauerwas and Jones 1997, p. 3-5)

Two other writers develop this thinking of story and identity. Hull (1999, p. 13), proposes an ongoing mutual dynamic between identity, story and culture as a means of understanding what is truth and right, where each person's identity is a product, not only of the time and context of culture, but is made available to their consciousness through narrative. (West et al 1999, p. 11)

Story helps to interpret the self in dialogue with the projections, expectations and memories derived from available social, public and cultural narratives. (Hull 1999, p. 12, Brown 2001, p. 61) The second writer is Ford (1997, p. 193), who links system (theory), story (narrative) and performance (action) together, as a way of describing and rendering human identity.

For the consultant, stories and narratives are therefore vital tools which can be used to discover people's theology or identity, shaped and transmitted by personal memories and experiences. (Ammerman et al 1998, p. 33) For example, if people's identity is based on the past, when crisis comes, they will be tempted to return to the traditional stories of the congregation, so preserving, prolonging and protecting them, instead of a new vision for the future. (Baush 1984, p. 33, 196) It is this implicit theology, revealed and identified, that requires to be heard in the arena that is the community of faith so that a process of change might take place. It is as their significant stories are retold, interpreted and reinterpreted, that meaning and coherence is given to people's experience and encounter with God, in such a way that they can cope with the new experiences of life and faith. (Bausch 1984, p. 172, West et al 1999, p. 12)

These stories, old and new, are then woven together into personal life narratives that convey what people believe to be the essential truths about themselves and the world, which are interpretations of life experiences, and not an objective reporting of them. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 5) Stories therefore mean something; they are not just abstract constructions without purpose, they have been formed by what has actually happened to people in life, and not in a vacuum.

Different types of story have been identified. There are those which tell of identity forming events of the past, which are now 'remembered' in the present, in the form of collective or individual memory. One example of this is the story of the Exodus. There are also 'open' stories, those still experienced in the present, which therefore remain unfinished. An example of this type of story is that of the Exile of the people of Israel in Babylon. (Wolter 2000, p. 130) Hauerwas (2001 b, p. 160) would claim that the whole of God's story is unfinished, and wonders if the church is actually capable of continuing it, for the church is the context in which the story is tested and always open to revision. Wolter's (2000, p. 140) third type of story is that which is 'revealed' or acts as revelation. In the context of the faith community this is the disclosure of scripture through the revelation of God.

in studying congregations, the consultant must be able to make the space required, so that people can listen to the different types of individual stories within the faith community. In essence, within the model of practical theology, stories are the raw material for the work of consultancy.

The next issue is how the consultant encourages people to engage with their stories, of tradition, and of scripture, with the aim of bringing the world into their story?

II. The need for Imagination to engage with story

The Concise Oxford dictionary defines imagination as the mental faculty forming images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses. (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1982, p. 498)

John Barton (200, p. 55) makes the observation that we are drawn into stories by our imagination. In so doing, we measure ourselves against their characters, and so reveal more truth about what it is to be human. This is seen in the rise of cinema going, and the interest in soap operas, where people relate their stories to fictional and non fictional characters. Schroder (2000, p. 186) makes a similar point; people who are drawn into the biblical stories are drawn into the ongoing 'movement' of the texts. They get involved in them, and experience this as 'liberation', because everything compulsive has been removed from the way they can now receive them. Bausch (1984, p. 70) sees this as one of the paradoxes of narrative; freedom is discovered in obedience to listening to the story.

This is important for a postmodern world, where the question is more likely to be, 'what does this mean for me?', as opposed to, 'is it true'? Through imagination, there comes truth and authority in story, as against the reception of doctrine. (Bausch 1984, p. 60, Schroder 2000, p. 186) Gibbs agrees: in today's culture, there is a move away from propositional truth to story telling, so that the truth of scripture comes out of people's experience as they share their stories of their encounter with God and with others. (Gibbs 2003, Gibbs and Coffey 2001, p. 206)

As people get drawn into the text, does imagination help with the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of God? Traditionally this is seen as coming from theology, a study of God, yet where does theology begin? In Christ, who was there before the story, but unknown without them? Bausch sees an important link here between imagination and knowledge.

He quotes Thomas Driver,

"theology originates in stories (and should itself tell more of them)...the dramatic imagination is the means whereby we get started in any knowledge whatever". (Driver 1977, p. xxiii, cited in Bausch 1984, p. 17)

Schreiter (1998, p. 27, 28) would seem to agree when he sees the importance of image and story in practical theology in organising knowledge, especially for congregational identity, which becomes theological in its contact with the stories of scripture.

So the sequence of events is seen as beginning in the life of Israel and Christ (the history), out of which comes their story, (the narrative) and finally, by reflection and drawing conclusions, there is an emerging theology and practice of the church, (the doctrine by interpretation). (Bausch 1984, p. 197, 198) Part of this sequence is scripture, involving the process of narrative reflection as the community of faith interpreted what was happening to them, and tried to make sense of their experiences. (Sunderland 2002) However, the reference point is always story, the engagement of individual stories, with the faith story of God in Christ, in and through the use of imagination.

Imagination also balances, or counters and 'cures', the emphasis on the rational and logic in looking at scripture. (Bausch 1984, p. 51, Hauerwas and Jones 1997, p. 1) Instead of just a philosophical and intellectual sorting out of story, it generates an understanding of narrative that fits with a postmodern approach to life, by affirming a balance between the intellectual and the intuitive, the thought and the feeling, the creed and the story. (Bausch 1984, p. 11, 16)

This is not in any way an uncritical approach to story, as apologetic, (Hauerwas and Jones 1997, p. 4) but a means that helps people to get behind the theology and closer to the raw event. (Bausch 1984, p. 17)

Bausch (1984, p. 24) says it is 'imagination [that] carries truth', and is the one genuine means of holding often contradictory elements in tension at many levels, be it rational, emotional or spiritual. Truth in story is therefore not to be understood on a purely literal or historical basis as something to be proved, but as narrative that points to God, uncovered by our imagination and often hidden by a rational approach to scripture. This means that the structure, dynamic, gradient and direction of stories can be trusted for what they are. There is no need to look for a reality behind them or compare them with unexpressed facts. As we listen or read the story, questions about what really happened will fall silent. (Barton 2000, p. 183)

Ford (1997, p. 195-6) here uses the concept of 'middle distance perspective' and applies it to truth. If you get so close that you are dominated by one perspective, middle distance is supplanted. If you take too broad a view, then middle distance is subsumed into a generalisation of trend or theory. This understanding would see the truth of story neither in detailed information nor that contained in a wide systematic theology. Truth therefore can be wrong in some details but still give a realistic narrative, using middle distance to combine both realism and idealism, producing tension, contradiction, depth and illumination; a dynamic that rings true in ways not verifiable or falsifiable by criteria appropriate to other modes of perspectives. (Ford 1997, p. 196-7) So there is a critical relationship here in an ongoing dynamic between story, imagination and truth.

However, all of this will depend on a willingness to see the story that is being read, as open for the reader, (Barton 2000, p. 59) and to know that they can, if they wish, be part of it. Imagination enables this open engagement in an interaction between text and reader, that sees the words of a text, not as closed, but as disclosure, where the story leaps out of the frame and converges on the reader. (Barton 2000, p. 57) In this sense the meeting point of reader and story is not behind the text, but in front of it. When this happens, not only does engagement takes place, it happens in the present tense for the reader, not in its original historical time frame, by challenging and changing people in the context of personal and practical concern. (Barton 2000, p. 58, McDonald 1990, p. 25) There is an important point here. Story is not something people can remain in control of, it comes from beyond themselves, in the word of God coming to life. (McDonald 1990, p. 31)

Michael Wolter (2000, p. 140) describes this concept using different language. He says that human experience of reality is often perceived as an interaction between the 'remembered story' and the 'story being experienced in the present'. However, if the desired integration between these stories is not possible, then the assistance of another story type is required. This is the 'revealed story'. This disclosure then allows the readers of these stories to rediscover themselves by reading their own story into the text, and so have their story changed. (Wolter 2000, p. 141) He sees this function of revelation as helping people to gain insight into the continuation of their story, as experienced in the present, and continuing it into the future, so that once again it converges with the 'remembered story'. (Wolter 2000, p. 142) The integration of these stories happens through the engagement of imagination.

Schroder (2000, p. 177) expresses this as story being the 'communicative space' in which people listen to the text, with the many voiced witness of the tradition at the same time. The power of imagination therefore removes the historical time line and converges readers and stories from across the ages into a single point in time.

The consultant working with any faith community needs to recognise scripture as the 'revealed story' that unifies time and space, and its power is in its 'remembering' and 'retelling', within the community of the church. (Schroder 2000, p. 176)

Imagination allows the reader to go back to the original texts and see them not as doctrine to follow, but as story to engage in and be part of. The rediscovery of imagination allows people to revisit an old situation in a new way, not to change the unchangeable, but to reinterpret it creatively. (Bausch 1984, p. 19, 25) This engagement parallels the movement from experience to reflection on the texts as seen in the model of practical theology. To see in the scripture events, the means by which questions are raised or issues of life experience mirrored, so as to move the model of practical theology on in a positive direction, from present life to future journey, from dogma and tradition to story.

As people approach the text in this way, they not only seek the truth of the story event, they also enter the world of the writers of the narrative. What is read, listened to and imagined is that writer's experience, within the context of their faith communities. An engagement with the story of scripture takes place, and by entering other people's conversations and stories, people become one with them, leading to personal transformation, and community building. (Bausch 1984, p. 62)

V. What happens when people do engage with the story of God in Christ.

West, Noble and Todd (West et al 1999, p. 27) describe scripture as the product of the faith community's reflection on God's revelation to them in their cultural context. This led to an understanding of faith, and a tension between its demands and how they lived. In the interaction between personal story and scripture as described in this thesis, scripture is always seen as normative and original. Even if it is not to be understood as rigid, restricted or a finished document, detached from its history, there are still boundaries, beyond which the flexibility cannot go, and still be true to the founding story. (Bausch 1984p. , 196-197)

Within the faith community, people's stories are woven together into two strands. The first as they encounter the transforming story of God as disclosed in scripture, where the human and the divine stories come together to reveal people's own story with greater clarity, and in its retelling, are transformed. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 7) Bausch (1984, p. 174-5, 187-8, 204) uses the language of self discovery, to discern God's activity, movement and presence, and sees story as a foil to thinking or acting, that brings to the surface something in people's own lives, so creating their 'own gospel. For the faith community this happens in Jesus, where God meets people in the midst of humanity, and the fully human narrative of Christ is made flesh at the centre of the God head. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 40) It is not enough for the disciple only to know the facts of the story; they need to be made part of the story of God's new time, in and through the work of Jesus. (2001 b, p. 148) Barclay describes this as a dynamic of dialogue where the stories of the past are relevant to present experience.

He cites the example of the Gospel of Mark, where

"present experience shaped the way they talked about Jesus; the stories of Jesus shaped their present experience." (Barclay 2004)

It is this dialogue which echoes across the centuries to the faith communities of today. (Barclay 2004)

This dynamic between people's life experiences and their stories, with the story of God, creates personal narrative frameworks. They then shape each other into a master story, which influences any subsequent interpretations, enabling each person to carry their own personally constructed narrative into each situation of life. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 11) This disclosure of God does two things: it forges a link between reader and story by pointing them to something still meaningful through traces (of revelation) left in the text, and secondly, has the outcome of forming part of their world view on life. (Schroder 2000, p. 177) McDonald (1990, p. 29-30) points out that it is too easy for this to happen by taking refuge in the abstract. The bible is a witness to that which is true and authentic in the human situation, as it points to a transcendent dimension expressed in history, by many who have walked with God in Jesus Christ.

At this point the dynamic is incomplete, for story leaves a gap of interpretation between the disclosure itself and the particular choices that people can make. (Hauerwas and Jones 1997, p. 3) Since scripture is pluralistic in its interpretation, its stories illuminate possibilities and invite people to live them out beyond limits of experience, to surprise. (Bausch 1984, p. 110, 115, 195) This is what Ford (1997, p. 202) calls the cutting edge of 'performance', living in the historical present.

The living of life now in which the factors of system and story are taken up seriously and dramatically into new speech, action and events, concentrating on relationships, commitments, visions and experiences. (Ford 1997, p. 193-4) All of these come out of the truth and realism of story, which provides a pivot between life and literature, helping to translate one experience, that of the writer, into the experience of the reader. (Ford 1997, p. 198)

What is coming to the forefront of this discussion is the role of revelation; where God addresses people by breaking through expectations and suspending judgement about what is, or is not, a possible or true. God's revelation and human disclosure, through the stories and narrative of texts, are two sides of the same coin, challenging the community of faith with something beyond themselves, something not made or discovered without God. (Barton 2000, p. 60) Within this interaction, story forms a middle link or pivot. (Schroder 2000, p. 176)

The second strand, if people use their stories honestly to reveal an understanding of themselves and the world, and interact with others, has the potential to build authentic communities of shared meaning and values. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 7, 18, Barton 2000, p. 182) Bringing these two strands together is a recognition that story is an effective means of relationship building, since humanity is fundamentally interpersonal and relates to God as person. This link between other people and to God has been described as "knowledge-energy", (Bausch 1984, p. 15) and Bausch (1984, p. 19), quoting Navone and Cooper, sees storytelling and story listening as the most appropriate means of living in this relationship.

In the arena of consultancy, stories have the potential to create these dynamics of personal transformation and community building, through an engagement with scripture that links the wider story of God with the stories of the people of God.

What is critical here is the role of the faith community itself. Its function is to weave together these stories of humanity and God in the context of people's experience of life. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 41) In practice, personal transformation happens within the context of community, and not as isolated experiences. The consultant therefore works to help the faith community deal with its stories, and to use them to heal the deep hurts and memories of the past, the conflicts of the present and its hopes and vision for the future. (Barton 2000, p. 182, Bausch 1984, p. 55)

This is a story of the church as God's new language, to be told and enacted, with the church as the agent of narrative. God is the main character, but the church cannot tell of Him without becoming part of the story itself. (Hauerwas 2001 b, p. 149) So the teller and tale become one, narrating a story that is only intelligible if told within the context that is the life of the church. (Hauerwas 2001 b, p. 150, 152) This raises the question, can the church provide such stories and meaning for people today? To reinvent itself so that its story connects with the story of society, so enabling the biblical narrative to become a public story and not just a private conviction. (Barrow 2003, p. 15, Bausch 1984, p. 42, Robinson 2001, p. 2) Tom Wright (2001, p. 10) makes a similar point: he wishes to place the biblical narrative in the public arena as the source of truth and hope for the world.

The consultant has to recognise that each person is a product of the environment of their life experience, and that they come to each change in life, not in a vacuum, but carrying the baggage of their personal narrative framework. In the community of faith, this dynamic is complex, involving the interaction of relationships with others and the disclosure of God into people's lives. An interaction that is made more complex by the narrative of scripture. A narrative that has no anxiety about harmony, balance or symmetry, in a real sense tailor-made for people caught up in a pluralist and post modern world. (White 2001, p. 14)

As scripture interacts with the stories of the community of faith, the consultant has the role of helping them to see themselves in these stories, and to be able to cope where confrontation and difference arise, between their traditions and practices, and what scripture seems to be saying. The outcome of this 'imaginative' human and divine link, is to tell the story and to be the story. In practice, how can this be done?

V. The action of story as seen in ritual, the outcome of engagement.

Tied in with and accompanying story, is the role of ritual, one aspect of Christian 'performance', as a verdict on story. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 19, 23, Ford 1997, p. 199) Anderson and Foley (1998, p. 28) see ritual engagement as an important measure of the seriousness with which people regard the story.

"Rituals not only construct reality and make meaning; they help us fashion the world as a habitual and hospitable place." (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 20)

They see this relationship between story and ritual not just as complementary, but symbiotic, mutually beneficial despite their separate identities. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 25) Rituals give shape to the common stories and these stories urge people to rehearse them through shared action. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 27) However, they must be more than just ordered, patterned and shared behaviour, they need to be imaginative and interpretative acts through which people express and create meaning in their lives. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 26) If the link between ritual and story is broken, they will become rote actions that convey little or no meaning. When this happens, the need is go back and remember the original story. (Bausch 1984, p. 199)

This is a key link for consultancy work. Ritual gathers together the stories of people's lives and so enables a balance between individual and communal meaning. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 24)

Margaret Kelleher has identified a framework for looking at the meaning of ritual:

- Public meaning: interpretation shared by a significant number of the ritual participants and apparent to those closely observing the ritual.
- Official meaning: significance that the originators of the rite bestowed on it.
- Private meaning: individual significance that particular participants find in the ritual. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 29)

By examining the rituals of congregational life, the consultant can access, enter and interpret the human story of the community of faith. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 27)

Rituals can also span the spectrum between myth and parable. Mythic rituals create or perpetuate the story that everything is going to be well, and ignore any contradictions in the story. On the other hand, parabolic rituals embrace the discordant and admit the painful. Most rituals are a mixture of both. The parabolic that keeps the community moving towards the edge, with the mythical that establishes equilibrium, and generates hope so that they can move on and explore that edge. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 32)

In all of this, Anderson and Foley (1998, p. 34) seek ritual honesty. If there is a true convergence of the private, public and official meanings of ritual, then stories told will be vital ones, and the rituals that sustain them authentic. The real challenge is to allow the parabolic to surface, and then to embrace and integrate them into the myths. This is what leads to transformation, the community learning how to live with contradictions, in order to discover the deeper truths of life.

"The reciprocity of narrative and ritual enhances the possibility of weaving human and divine stories into a single fabric" (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 36)

It is important to realise that telling stories maybe one of the rituals. A powerful life-giving encounter, that enables a weaving together of the divine and human narratives, in the stories that are told, and the rituals enacted, that help people to understand their story as part of a larger transcendent narrative. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 37)

If the aim of practical theology is healthy community, then it is dependent on story, which along with ritual, is part of the action of human response to both life experience and divine initiative.

(Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 38)

Communities of faith need to be able to tell and manifest the stories that formed them and will guide them for the future. (Hauerwas 2001 a, p. 198)

Out of these stories will come local theologies, and the broad issue of how these theologies and practices will correspond to both tradition and scripture, and what is actually taught, proclaimed and practiced. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 44, Bausch 1984, p. 198) Are there different theologies within any one congregation, that somehow or other need to be pulled together in liturgy? Are there ritual gaps exacerbated by the crisis of a new situation that need to be filled? A new narrative to tell, but no ritual frame work for doing so. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 125) If so, then new rituals will need to be created to meet the fresh challenges of new stories, and then woven together with the stories of old; ritual newness born of the intersection of ever changing human narrative as it encounters the divine. (Anderson and Foley 1998, p. 129)

The question remains, for the faith communities of 21st century Scotland, how will they tell their story that invites the community at large to enter its world view, and meet the God who gave rise to the story in the first place? (Sunderland 2002)

Chapter eight

The process of consultancy (1). A comparison of the mechanical, communal and relational

"Of all the businesses, by far
Consultancy's the most bizarre.
For to the penetrating eye,
There's no apparent reason why,
With no more assets than a pen,
This group of personable men
Can sell to clients more than twice
The same ridiculous advice,
Or find, in such rich profusion,
Problems to fit their own solution." (Smith 2000, p. 8)

The above tongue in cheek poem describes a traditional approach to management or organisational consultancy. Someone has a problem to solve, and a consultant is brought in to help find a solution. In reality it is a far more complex process than that. However, it is an approach that does not sit entirely comfortably with the model of practical theology, based on the experience of where people find themselves, and the interrelationship of their stories, encountering the story of faith in scripture.

Traditional consultancy can tempt the consultant into examining only presenting problem(s), for example, a lack of finance, and focusing only on specific solutions, which will not allow the faith community to look at where they have come from, who they are, and where they hope to travel as a pilgrim people.

Using a broad brush, there are three aspects involved in the process of consultancy that require to be kept in equilibrium.

- I. The traditional approach to consultancy (*mechanical or managerial*)
- II. The congregation as 'Learning Organisation' (*inter relational or communal*)
- III. The consultant - client relationship (*relational or counselling*)

On one side of this equilibrium is the aspect of consultancy alluded to by the poem. In this model, the consultant as *expert* or *facilitator*, works with the organisation seeking to solve specific problems related to one or more parts of the system, which are hindering its efficiency and effectiveness.

On the other side is the concept of the 'learning organisation'. Here the consultant as *teacher* and *vision builder* encourages the congregation to understand two issues. The first is to see and keep the 'big picture' of a common vision, and not to break problems down into such complex issues that any resulting fragments are not able to be reassembled.

(Senge 1992, p. 3)

Secondly, the learning organisation is one that discovers how to tap into people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels. (Senge 1992, p. 4)

Holding the management model and the learning organisation together is the client-consultant relationship. Here the consultant is *companion*, sharing by relationship the common journey of faith with the pilgrim people of God. It is this relationship that holds the key to effective consultation. It acts as a spring, maintaining the correct tension between the mechanistic process and the image of the community of the Body of Christ and, at the same time, is a counter weight that maintains their balance. The client-consultant relationship is the nexus of the process of practical theology.

I. The traditional approach to consultancy: the tools of practical theology

Roger Smith describes a consulting cycle that starts from two ends, symptom recognition and solution generation, which ultimately come together in narrower desired outcomes and objectives. He defines symptom recognition as the gap between what is, and what is wanted, split between problem finding, the reasons for the gap, and an analysis of how people feel, or what they know about the gap, and how this information fits together or is synthesised. Out of this problem analysis and synthesis phase comes a problem definition, the generally agreed core problem that is giving rise to the many symptoms; what is actually causing the gap.

This in turn leads to the identification of desired outcomes and objectives, those things that need to be done in order to bridge the gaps, solve the problem and prevent its recurrence. (Smith 2000, p. 55-57) Robert Gallagher (2003, p. 2) describes this phase as one aspect of diagnosis.

The second aspect of diagnosis starts from the other end of the consulting cycle, that of solution generation. How many ways could the outcomes and objectives be achieved? Which solution is the best fit, how to sell this solution and action plan to others, and how will it be implemented, so that the cycle ends back at the core phase of desired outcomes and objectives. (Smith 2000, p. 56) In Gallagher's (2003, p. 2) more simple process of planned change, once the desired solution has been found, the consultant and their client enters the planning phase (strategic vision or action planning), followed by implementation. It is during this phase, when action is actually taking place, which the consultant will begin to understand something of the system that they are working with. The cycle is then completed by evaluation, which may or may not lead to further analysis and syntheses, depending on whether the result(s) fall short of people's expectations. (Smith 2000, p. 78)

This form of traditional consultancy diverges from the model of practical theology in two main ways. First of all, there is its shape. This can be described like a funnel, with the two wide elements of symptom recognition and solution generation focusing down into the narrow middle section of desired outcomes and objectives. In contrast, the shape of the proposed model of practical theology is a spiral. Gallagher's approach is closer, being simpler and circular. Diagnosis leads to planning, followed by implementation, evaluation and back, if required, to diagnosis. (Gallagher 2003, p. 2)

The second main difference is that of focus. Although Smith (2000, p. 68) describes his cycle as holistic, and recognises the importance of the consultant keeping their eye on the big picture, it has the danger of channelling its energy towards finding a solution in only one, or at best, some aspects of the system. Gallagher (2003, p. 2) again comes closer to the model of practical theology. He makes the point that the context for the whole process requires the consultant and client to be clear about the scale and type of the change being proposed, from the limited venture of training, to the long term attempt to transform organisational culture.

Yet the traditional approach to consultancy still has a role to play in the life of the faith community. There will be times when a congregation will need specific tools in order to examine particular aspects of their life. However, within practical theology, this will not be the consultant's first step. Although specific tools of consultancy will intersect with the model of practical theology at various points in its spiral, a more holistic approach is required, something that fits in better with a theology of story.

II. The congregation as learning organisation: the power of practical theology

Congregations can no longer seek stability in their life, but need to be open to learning and responding to internal and external change that is constant in postmodern society. Vitality and health can no longer be periodic or linear, they need to be part of an internal culture, a change of DNA, which will allow congregations to absorb this change and naturally position themselves on a cycle of development. (Campbell 2000, p. 1-2)

To create such a learning organisation requires the mastery of component technologies described by Senge (1992, p. 5, 6) as five basic 'disciplines'. The essential cornerstone and first discipline is described as *personal mastery*, for an organisation's commitment to learning can be no greater than that of its individual members. (Senge 1990, p. 7) Senge puts down the marker, that it is personal mastery which is the vital link connecting personal and organisational learning. (Senge 1990, p. 8) It is people with high levels of this discipline that will see vision as a calling rather than a good idea, current reality as an ally and not an enemy, and will work with the forces of change instead of resisting them. Personal mastery fosters life long learning, and leads to a broader vision beyond the individual, and a commitment to the whole. (Senge 1992, p. 142, 171)

The church operates with this same tension between individual and community learning, as it seeks to create a balance between each person as a disciple of Christ, using their gifts, with the image of the Body of Christ. (Campbell 2000, p. 5) In the context of the community of faith, personal mastery is one side of this individual - corporate dynamic. The disciples of Christ as active, intentional, life long learners and practitioners, within the learning community of faith. (Green 2003, p. 8, 31)

Within this relationship of community, each individual and congregation also brings their own ideas of what they understand 'church' and 'congregation' to be. The second discipline of Senge is *mental models*. These are deeply ingrained, conscious and unconscious assumptions, generalisations, pictures or images that influence how people understand the world, so limiting people to familiar ways of thinking and acting.

So when new insights arise, they conflict with the existing mental models which then need to be unearthed and scrutinised. (Senge 1992, p. 8, 9, 174) This discovery then helps people to clarify their assumptions, discover their internal contradictions and then think through new strategies based on new assumptions. (Senge 1992, p. 178) For these not to fail, productive learning needs to occur. Senge (1990, p. 174, 199) sees this as the balance between a person inquiring into the reasoning behind the views of others and, at the same time, stating their own views so as to reveal their own assumptions and reasoning, inviting others to make inquiries into them. The learning organisation of the future will make its key decisions based on the shared understanding of people's mental models. (Senge 1992, p. 204)

Within the context of the community of faith, and that of the broad influence of the cultures of society, these mental models come out of life experience and are often developed as people seek to manage or respond to particular problems, crisis or questioning. These models so developed, then affect people's thinking, and consequently their actions at the visible/invisible and conscious/subconscious levels. (Campbell 2000, p. 6) One crucial aspect of this is history. The consultant has to be aware of, and keep in sight, those sometimes almost forgotten incidents which are deeply embedded in the system and internal culture of a congregation, but which still affect its behavioural patterns. (Campbell 2000, p. 12) Out of mental models, traditions are built that can block individual and corporate vision, experiences where people knew why they did them first time round, but are now maintained simply because they have become traditional. Parsons and Leas (1993, p. 1) describe this as, "The seeds of decline are found in our successes."

Congregational decline is as a result of using patterns that once worked, and staying with them beyond their usefulness²⁷. (Parsons and Leas 1993, p. 2)

As change is introduced, these ingrained mental models are challenged, with the consultant there to help the individual and community to recognise, expose and scrutinise their assumptions, dialogue with others and scripture, reach consensus, and come to the point of common vision. (Campbell 2000, p. 6)

The third discipline of the learning organisation is that of *building shared vision*. Senge (1992, p. 147, 148) defines vision as the ability to focus on ultimate intrinsic desires, the ends, and not only secondary goals, the means, and sees it arising from two aspects of people's lives. First of all there is the creative tension between future vision and present reality. If there were no such gap in people's thinking and experience, then no action would be required and no one would be motivated to pursue the journey of discovery. (Senge 1992, p. 150, 209) It also emerges and grows from the interactions of personal visions, the means by which people derive their energy and commitment and create the synergy of common vision. (Senge 1992, p. 217, 211)

²⁷ Parsons and Leas (1993, p. 1) order this decline as:

Placed outside the comfort zone people learn and grow to be 'pioneers', this leads to success. These successes become precious traditions, so people become 'homesteaders'. Even if rewards are fewer, people refine these traditions in the face of conflict and shun experimentation. Congregations get stuck in their successes! They often identify a link between strengths and past success. They are left with an organisational pattern that does not serve the congregation well.

Campbell (2000, p. 6, 7) sees vision in the faith community being generated through vulnerability, struggle and risk, with the Holy Spirit, asking what God is calling the community to do in the future. Vision is therefore something that has to be owned both individually and corporately, so allowing people to travel a common journey together.

In practice, developing such authentic visions take time to emerge, to allow multiple visions to exist, and then listening for the right course of action that transcends and unifies the individual visions. (Senge 1992, p. 217) Only in this way will vision foster commitment rather than compliance or agreement, something that will not happen unless people are part of teams that contribute to the learning process, thinking together, but not in competition with one another. (Senge 1992, p. 9)

Senge's (1992, p. 10) fourth discipline is that of *Team learning*. Teams are the fundamental learning units in modern organisations, which will not learn, unless their teams do. Related to the concept of shared vision is the idea of 'alignment'. This is when a group of people function as a whole, creating synergy instead of wasted energy. (Senge 1992, p. 234) So team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of the team to create results that its members truly desire. (Schein 1969, p. 236)

This learning begins with dialogue, which is the capacity of the team members to suspend their own assumptions and enter into a genuine thinking together. It comes from the Greek 'dia-logos', meaning a free flow of meaning through a group, so allowing it to discover insights not attainable individually.

This needs to be compared with discussion, which literally means a heaving of ideas back and forward in a winner takes all competition. (Senge 1992, p. 10) These two should be complementary, however most teams can't distinguish them and so move unconsciously between them. (Senge 1992, p. 237)

The consultant, acting as facilitator, will help the team balance the movement of discussion and dialogue back and forth, so as to help reach consensus. (Senge 1992, p. 247) Discussion, where views are presented and defended, balanced by dialogue, where different views are presented as a means of discovering a new view. Discussion, where decisions are made, contrasted with dialogue, where issues are explored. (Senge 1992, p. 247) Senge comes to the conclusion: if dialogue is done correctly then everyone wins. (Senge 1992, p. 241)

Campbell (2000, p. 9) agrees, and describes it in terms of synergism, an aligned community working for a common purpose, going in the same direction, towards a shared vision. He says that understanding a congregation, and where they wish to go, has more to do with what is going on dynamically between the parts, than it does with the parts themselves. (Campbell 2000, p. 12) The consultant, if they wish to get a better feel for the culture of any organisation, will see this through working with team(s), and not just individuals. Campbell quotes Russell and Branch (1979, cited in Campbell 2000, p. 9)

"Individuals do not sacrifice their personal interest to the larger team vision; rather, the shared vision becomes an extension of their personal visions"

Senge (1992, p. 11) believes that all of these disciplines can be developed through practice.

They are personal disciples, as compared to traditional management ones. They are concerned with how people think, what they want, how they interact and learn with others. They are not models to be emulated or someone else's 'best practice' to be copied.

The '5th discipline' is *systems thinking*, which integrates all the other disciplines together. (Senge 1992, p. 12) For Senge, systems thinking sees the importance of the invisible strands of interrelated action of the whole, that are difficult to see, so tempting people to focus on the isolated parts of the system. (Senge 1992, p. 7) By enhancing the other disciplines, systems thinking reminds us that the total can indeed be greater than the sum of its parts. (Senge 1992, p. 12)

It is important to understand that at the heart of the learning organisation is a shift of mind, [*metanoia*] from people seeing themselves as separate within the organisation, to being connected to all others within it. From seeing problems as caused by someone 'out there', to seeing how one's own actions can create the problems experienced. To grasp this meaning is to grasp the deeper meaning of learning, which is far more than just taking in information. (Senge 1992, p. 12-13)

Before leaving this systems approach, Parsons and Leas (1993, p. vii, 7) offer two helpful thoughts. The first recognises the effective organisational system as the 'vessel' for congregational health, and secondly, the theory of homeostasis. People in relationships develop patterns and keep doing things the same way. It moulds behaviour in a system or organisation into predictable patterns, therefore making it possible to get along, do work, and find safety and to trust.

If not, this would lead to the need of reinventing relationships every time people met. However, serious problems can arise at the extremes of any system.

A tight, rigid homeostatic system will not be able to adapt to changes in the environment and so will not grow. Too loose, for example when too much change taking place at once, and this leads to chaos, loss of congregational identity and cohesiveness, with no structure or commitment. It is the tension between these two extremes or polarities of order and chaos that is important, and required to maintain the health of a congregation, allowing different voices to be heard and honoured. Healthy congregations actually create this tension to maintain internal variety, stay flexible and open to renewal, moving along the continuum, to be neither 'balanced' or stagnant. At the heart of systems thinking is this "loose-tight paradox"²⁸. (Parsons and Leas 1993, p. 7, 21- 23)

It is clear that the learning organisation is dependent and built on people, and not on a management structure; as a result, it is well suited to the theology of the church as the Body of Christ. For the faith community, systems thinking is the recognition of the church as a whole, where people use their gifts to strengthen the Body of Christ and not to see only their work, as important. The church that is involved in systems thinking does not focus on the specific, to the detriment of the whole, but has invisible strands that bind the whole together. (Campbell 2000, p. 16)

²⁸ This paradox birthed the great stories of the bible and framed the historical struggles of the church (Parsons and Leas 1993, p. 21) and is seen in the section on the form of practical theology in scriptural examples of transition

The learning organisation is also similar in shape to practical theology. It thinks in circles and not in lines, focusing not just on what happened, but why it happened; not on events, but on the patterns and trends, and the structures that lead to repeating patterns. (Campbell 2000, p. 16)

Overall, the learning organisation offers the consultant a pattern to follow in examining congregational life, and gives the congregation a mirror to see itself and to ask, are we such an organisation?

III. The consultant - client relationship: the heart of practical theology

Process Consultation differs from other models of consultancy in that it is based on particular assumptions. The first is the consultant - client relationship. This is defined by Schein (1969, p. 14) as a 'helping' relationship, and lies at the very core of what process consultation is all about. The best analogy is that it relates closely to the dynamic of counselling, in which the art of consultancy is to fuse the different perspectives brought into the relationship by the consultor, so enabling them to do their work more effectively and efficiently, by the release of energy through the consultancy process. (Lovell 2000, p. 21- 22)

The second assumption is that of self diagnosis. (Schein 1969, p. 5) Problems are better solved by the organisation; the client learns to see the problem, be actively involved in generating a remedy, and is then able to solve new problems as they arise in the future. The role of the consultant is therefore to teach diagnostic and problem solving skills, rather than focusing on context expertise. (Schein 1969, p. 5-7, Lovell 2000, p. 28)

These two core assumptions can be seen in the work of Lovell and Widdicombe. They identify the key phases in the engagement of consultancy as a collaborative approach, ownership by the consultor and it being non directive. (Lovell 2000, p. 21, Lovell and Widdicombe 1978, p. 51-2, 196-197) This is defined as working 'with' people and not 'for' them, (Lovell 1972, p. 5) and described as a model which emphasises the uses and development of the expertise of the consultor. (Lovell 2000, p. 30) Both the development of the client - consultant relationship, and the self diagnosis of the consultor, gives a form of consultancy that is 'community in practice'.

Lovell (2000, p. 33) summarises this by seeing the elements of the practice theory of consultancy being the interplay between personal attributes (being), body or bodies of knowledge (knowing) and the technical and practical human relations skills (doing).

If this dynamic is to take place, then the consultant must first define who the client is. Schien (1969, p. 90) gives this advice: the client, individual or team, should be as near the top of the organisation as possible, for here its values, goals and norms are more visible, so if change does takes place, then potentially, it will have more influence on the rest of the organisation. Each faith community functions differently, but the client will be identified as minister/pastor/leader, and/or the official leadership team.

The second issue is the means of the consultant's intervention: how should this take place? In broad terms, its setting should be where real work is going on. (Schein 1969, p. 90-1)

This can be in a one-to-one style 'counselling' relationship with the minister/pastor/leader, within a wider involvement that seeks to understand group relationships in congregational leadership teams, committees and/or workgroups, and to get a more complete picture, beyond the formal structures of the faith community. Since people's formal role in the structure only partly determines how they will behave and relate to others, the consultant needs to look at the processes that occur between people, so as to understand the informal relationships, traditions and culture that surrounds the formal structure. (Schein 1969, p. 11)

Whatever situation the consultant finds themselves in, consultancy involves all three groups of people. The whole group, organisation or congregation is the client, and not just the initial contact person. (Schein 1969, p. 86)

For Schein (1969, p. 5-6) there is one other main assumption in consultation: most organisations can be more effective than they are. This can be understood in two ways. In management terms, the consultant begins the process by diagnosing the strengths and weaknesses of the present structure, before deciding on any action program, theologically, 'betterment' can be defined as being more Christ-like. (Lovell and Widdicombe 1978, p. 50-51) Whatever approach is taken, it is important not to jump straight to the final building block of strategy, but take time to 'name' the present situation, its questions and crisis, as the starting point of practical theology.

Integral to these assumptions is how people communicate.

This is the complex transfer of information, which includes what is said through body language and tone, facts, feelings, speech and gesture, with the same message carrying both manifest and latent meanings.

The consultant recognises this and, understanding both the content of what is being said and at the same time interpreting the other clues of communication, gets at the real meaning of any message. (Schein 1969, p. 15, 21) This gives rise to the first rule of consultancy: good communication begins with listening to where people are, and change will not take place unless people feel that they are being listened to, and valued.

"You can't have a dialogue before you have listened" (Grimes 2001)

Part and parcel with communication is the offering of choice by the means of self diagnosis. In contrast to other models of consultancy that can be based on the consultant as having a monopoly on 'truth', process consultation leaves the client to make the ultimate decision. (Schein 1969, p. 28) This is second rule of consultancy that seeks to discern the right way ahead, by allowing people to listen to themselves through a multiplicity of visions that offer choice.

What can be said in summary about process consultation is that it is relational. It is only once relationships within the group have started to develop, that consultancy can move onto the active phase of problem solving. (Schein 1969, p. 47) This can be expanded; it is only by developing good relationships with others within the community of faith, and with God, in an engagement with scripture, that vision becomes possible.

Schein expands this thinking and identifies four areas that are crucial to the development of these relationships. The first he defines as self orientation.

This is recognising and dealing with the problems that people have as they enter a new group, and is something that needs to happen before problem solving can take place. People need time to feel comfortable before they can listen to others and get on with the task. (Schein 1969, p. 31) This is the development of the helping relationship from consultant - client, to within the group, and is Schein's way of describing the key element of belonging. Within a congregation, this is important, not just for new people, but is a stepping stone to belief and trust, the sharing of stories and the forging of a common way ahead.

The second area is the means of decision making. If people own the decisions that are made, then they will be motivated to direct their energies to fulfil the tasks that need to be carried out. Rodgers (1990, p. 15) points out that a successful client/consultant relationship, hinges on the extent to which responsibility for any proposed activity is jointly held, and not given over to the consultant and 'parked' with him. If ownership does not take place, then people will be held together by the formal structure alone, and so will operate neither efficiently nor effectively. (Schein 1969, p. 37) One of the most effective, but also the most time consuming, methods of decision making is that of consensus, as seen in Senge's 4th discipline of team learning.

The key again is listening, so that the people who do not agree, know that their views and feelings have been taken on board and, as a result, will work with the group in putting its decision into practice. (Schein 1969, p. 57)

The third issue is group norms. These are difficult to define, yet people in any group seem to be able to state them if asked.

Schein (1969, p. 59) defines them as a set of invisible assumptions or expectations held by members of the group that influence what kind of behaviour is right and wrong, appropriate or not, allowed or not.

The consultant needs to be aware of any contradiction between the explicit and implicit norms of the congregation. (Schein 1969, p. 61) It may well be that the explicit doctrines proclaimed do not match up with the implicit practices of what people actually believe, and will be one outcome of dialoguing the congregational story with the doctrines of the faith story. Congregational life also tends to be a 'broad church', with people holding differing views and beliefs. How will this spectrum match the accepted congregational norms: will they help or form a barrier to progress in developing the helping relationship, and a common faith vision? (Schein 1969, p. 60)

Over time, the expectation is that as these helping relationships develop; the maturity of the group will grow from simply getting acquainted, into one that is functioning smoothly and efficiently. (Schein 1969, p. 61) As this happens, the role of the consultant is to help identify the growth areas and feed them back to the group, making what is sometimes invisible, become visible. (Schein 1969, p. 63)

The final area is leadership. This is the bridge between the group process and the organisational process. (Schein 1969, p. 64)

As people are motivated by different needs, so the leader needs to be able to see what motivates people and, along with their abilities, have a flexible style to provide different leadership for different people.

(Schein 1969, p. 64-5) It raises the question of what assumptions a leader holds about people in their group, the process that is happening within it, along with the relationships being developed. (Schein 1969, p. 65)

For example, is there a common aim of community using the gifts of all God's people, something that the consultant can observe and reflect back to the leader? (Schein 1969, p. 65)

This analysis of the assumptions and relational base of process consulting leaves one question unanswered; is it possible to say anything about its effectiveness? Schein (1969, p. 124) himself states that the goals of process consulting cannot be stated in simple measurable terms. Effectiveness comes by looking for evidence of the changes in some of the values of the organisation and the interpersonal skills of its key people. The consultant will look to see a congregation's culture for change, and the willingness of its people to use their gifts, to seek a common vision.

For Lovell (2000, p. 23, 25-6), the effectiveness of consultancy depends on an interaction that is creative, relevant and respectful, 'earthed' in the reality of the consultor, with the learning of consultancy being transferred into the consultor's private and public domains. Smith (2003 c, p. 4) makes a similar point,

"I would measure success by the commitment of people to the activities we organised together. I suspect that hindered people from seeing a direct connection between church and daily life"

Lying at its core, process consultancy is not a diagnosis of issues, but a focus on relationship building that it shares with the initial building block of the theology of journey. A relationship that stays in the 'here and now', with people's current experiences, crisis and questions, as a starting point that it shares with the model of practical theology.

Out of this relational base come two things, the first being a sense of belonging to the group. Lovell and Widdicombe (1978, p. 1-2) agree; healthy community involves a sense of belonging, and people strive to build it from where they are, out of constant interaction with others.

The second is the possibility of a common vision for the future, based on this sense of belonging deeply rooted within the life of the congregation.

In a sense, all of this happens due to 'self diagnosis'. The helping relationship, allied to using scripture as a self reflective tool, will stimulate choice, emerging out of the engagement between personal, corporate and faith stories. Once this way ahead has been discerned, it will lead the model of practical theology onto the phase of action, the final building block of strategy.

How often has a faith community approached their journey with purely a mechanical frame of reference, focusing on specific problems and not the whole story, starting at the third building block of strategy, without considering their common vision? Others have attempted to be learning organisations, seeking that common vision, yet failing to build it on a solid foundation of good relationships. If all three building blocks are required for the journey of faith, then all three approaches are also required in the process of consultancy.

At its heart lies the relationship building of process consultation, without which neither consultant, nor people, would build up enough trust to make choices that involve risk.

Without learning together as the people of God, there would be no power in the dynamic of practical theology to develop a common vision, and there will be times when a traditional approach to consultancy is necessary, to answer specific and particular problems.

Yet, these ways of consultancy are only part of the story; they are not the story itself. It is no accident that faith down through the centuries has been transmitted through the specific story of faith and, as such, seems to be the 'best fit' in looking at a model for congregational development. The consultant's working tool is the gospel narrative, through which God speaks, challenges and comforts, built on the story of Jesus Christ, the cornerstone and firm foundation of faith, in the context of culture, history, experience, faith and story.

Chapter nine

The process of consultancy (2). Qualitative Research, an examination of the theology, context, determining factors and practice of consultancy

Introduction

The 'what' of the research

The rationale for undertaking this research is that there is little evidence of such work having been carried out in Scotland. This section, as an integral part of the process, seeks to build a wider conceptual framework for the research, by examining the role of practical theology in the work of other consultants. For, in being linked to a wider sample of consultants beyond the researcher's own experience, the study is illuminated, making it more significant and credible. (Marshall and Rossman 1995, p. 7)

The 'who' of the research

This researcher is a mission consultant working for a national denomination in Scotland, who approaches this research recognising that his own theology and understanding of the mission of the church is an issue of objectivity in any analysis and interpretation of collected data. However, by attempting to carry out this research in a means that is sound, it is hoped that any bias will be overcome, and so, if repeated, the findings would be similar.

The 'how' of the research

The method of data collection was by questionnaire²⁹, with the questions devised by this researcher based on his experience in the field of local congregational consultancy, along with the main issues arising out of the research process, these being *the theology, context, determining factors* and *practice of consultancy*. The boundaries of the questions were deliberately set as wide as possible.

The method of sample selection was not random, but by this researcher's own contacts in the field of church development and congregational consultancy, as well as others identified in church organisations and denominations through a search of both their own literature and on the internet.

²⁹ Copy of questionnaire is reproduced as appendix two

Table three: Number and percentage totals of the responses to the questionnaire

Number of questionnaires sent out by post or email	70
Number of questionnaires returned completed	30
Percentage of total completed questionnaires returned	42.9%
Number of responses where respondent indicated that they could not participate, since local church consultancy was not their field of expertise	3
Percentage of responses where respondent felt they could not participate	4.3 %
Total number of questionnaires returned	33
Percentage of total number of questionnaires returned	47.2%
Number of questionnaires not returned	37
Percentage of questionnaires not returned	52.8 %

The total of 33 responses gives enough variety of samples for a general study; however, there are not enough respondents for a detailed analysis in each of the separate categories, so making it difficult to draw detailed conclusions. In terms of whether people responded or not, it did not seem to make any difference as to whether the questionnaire was sent by post or email, or if the researcher knew the participants or not. In the main, the response to the questionnaire had a positive tone.

Whether received by email or post, and with a few exceptions, the participants filled out the questionnaire directly on the form as it was originally laid out. While most answered only the questions supplied, a few added details and issues of their own, sometimes on extra pages, some of which was pre-prepared material, possibly used in other contexts. Both will be commented on in the analysis section.

In the following collation and analysis of the responses, the participants are anonymized and are identified by their work context only and, unless otherwise stated, work primarily in the UK. Appendix 3 gives the fields of identification, for both the participants who completed the questionnaire and those unable to do so.

As the majority of consultants had a varied list of interrelated themes running through their responses, it was decided to analyse the data section by section, using an approach that laid out all the material in each section, compared the participants' responses, and then extrapolated both the common issues and the unique comments in note form. This sought to bring order, structure and meaning to a mass of collected data, before interpretation, analysis and writing. (Marshall and Rossman 1995, p. 111)

It is an approach that is based on the methodology of 'The constant comparative method' that involves the discovery of emerging phrases, themes and patterns, refinement of categories and finally, relationships and patterns across categories. (Maykut and Morehouse 1994, p. 133 - 134, 142 -143). Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 15) describe it as a systematic means of gathering information, reflecting on its meaning, arriving at and evaluating conclusions and eventually putting forward an interpretation that seeks to explain, describe and explore the phenomenon.

However, it is recognised that it is not a 'pure' approach to this methodology, since the main categories were already pre-determined rather than left to evolve.

The aim of the research

The aim of this research is to integrate the 'what' and 'how' of the research process, by combining an objective scientific approach, with an analysis that seeks to understand, and to 'get under' the words of what is actually being said, the deeper meaning, and not just what might be expected as a response to the questions. This is particularly true when taking theological issues into consideration. However, even seeking to understand the importance of the respondents' context, any analysis is dependent on the interpretation of the researcher. Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 4) describe it as an immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for study, which values and seeks to discover the participant's perspective, viewing inquiry as an interactive process between participant and researcher. It is both descriptive and analytical, relying on people's words and observable behaviour as its primary data. Having said that, this research will only be of value if it is seen as relevant, of interest and sound.

The 'faults' of the research

On reflection, various issues would have made the research more effective and interactive. These are:

1. The questionnaire should have been trialled so as to check the validity of the questions, to make sure the questions were understood, so not leading the participants in a particular way, and that the boundaries of the questions were not set too wide, so leading to misinterpretation. Two respondents commented that they did not understand the question about 'context'.
2. The questionnaire was devised after, and not integrated with, the research proposal, leading to a design fault in which the researcher had already decided on the critical categories and grouped theory of consultancy, so looking for supportive data, rather than letting the data collected evolve the research.
3. The research is non-emergent, the data was collected and then analysed, rather than evolving with further refined questionnaires and new participants.
4. The questionnaire was not sent out beyond the researcher's own contacts, thereby limiting both the size and the constituency of the sample.
5. The questionnaire should have been followed up by personal contact, so as to get more depth and understanding to the responses, i.e. feedback to respondents allowing the research to be more flexible and to evolve. This is borne out in the analysis, where interpretation is very often limited.

6. More information could have been sought about the respondents, since some of the questionnaires went to people not in the right field of work. Further, their identified role is based on the researcher's interpretation, some of whom were known, with others based on information given on the questionnaires, literature or web sites.
7. The questionnaire should not have indicated that three responses were sought in questions one and three. This might have led the respondents into feeling that they had to give three answers to these questions. Also, there was no indication as to whether the responses should have been in priority order.
8. Using a questionnaire only, gave a one dimensional approach to the research.

Having stated the limitations of the research process, it is still anticipated that it will help to build and support the argument for the role of practical theology in church consultancy, and will add to the limited amount of research undertaken in this field in the UK.

In terms of its significance, the research findings have been asked for by all those who participated in completing the questionnaire. However, in a changing church, there is also recognition that by the time this is done, some of the respondents might have changed their approach to consultancy. This time lag will challenge the dependability of these research findings.

The final aspect is that of writing up the research, focusing on those aspects contributing to the focus of inquiry and having prominence in the data, and then reporting back the findings, both to the participants involved, and to the Mission and Discipleship Council of the Church of Scotland.

The predetermined categories were:

- I. The theological principles of consultancy
- II. The context of consultancy
- III. The determining factors of consultancy
- IV. The practice of consultancy

There will also be a closing section drawing together some conclusions from the qualitative research, particularly related to the model of practical theology.

I. The theological principles of consultancy.

The theological principles identified were:

1. "Missio Dei"/Great Commission
2. The image of the church
3. The Kingdom of God
4. The incarnation of Christ
5. Journey/pilgrimage
6. The Spirit of God and the gifting of the people of God

1. "Missio Dei"/ Great Commission

The main theological principle identified was that of "Missio Dei"/Great Commission. The table below lists how this principle was described in the questionnaires.

Table four: Descriptions of "Missio Dei"/Great Commission

The phrase "Missio Dei" with no further explanation	1 academic/research 1 national organisation
The phrase "Missio Dei" defined as "It's his – He's there", which shapes the church by function and not form into a Jesus community of disciple making disciples	1 national denomination
Verses from Matthew 28 with no further explanation	2 national denomination (28:19, 16-20) 1 national organisation (28:19)
The phrase "Great commission" defined as "Go and make disciples"	1 national denomination
Great commission statement defined as each congregation called to serve a particular "nation"	1 international church fellowship
Mission is from God, further defined as a revelation of divine purpose which we are equipped to fulfil	1 national denomination
Mission defined in Kingdom of God terms	1 academic/research
The phrase "the call to make disciples of Jesus Christ"	1 national denomination
The command of Jesus for Christians to witness in Acts 1:8	1 national organisation
The New Testament thrust about the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ e.g. Matthew 9: 35-38	1 national organisation

For three respondents, two from national denominations and one from a national organisation, "Mission Dei"/Great Commission related to all of their theological principles. It was also interesting to note that only one respondent, a full time church and organisational consultant from the USA, defined mission, as the "nature and mission" of the church.

From an examination of these responses, it is clear that the shorthand phrases 'Missio Dei' and 'Great Commission' are assumed to be understood, certainly within church circles, as few respondents gave little or any definition of them. However, it could also have been that the question was not clear enough, to seek not just the main principles, but fuller definitions of them³⁰. It is therefore difficult to make any further interpretation as to what each respondent actually understood in using these terms, which is a pity, since they are obviously crucial to how people understand their role as consultants.

One respondent from a national denomination did open the door a fraction. They said, "... church is defined by function NOT form & it's a Jesus community of disciple-making disciples". This limited interpretation, along with the other responses, supports the understanding of mission as contained in this thesis, namely, based on Matthew 28: 16-20 and John 20:21, "Missio Dei" is God's mission, and the purpose of the church is to be sent into its 'neighbourhoods' (John 1:14) and to participate in that mission, through the prime task of making disciples.

One respondent took a different theological approach.

³⁰ This is true for all of the questions and is therefore not repeated all the way this section

For them, a national denominational consultant, the theology of consultancy is founded on the 'servant' role of Jesus as found in John 13 and Philippians 2, which, on reflection, lies at the heart, and root of, "Missio Dei" /Great Commission.

2. The image of the church

The second theological principle is that of 'image'. What is this church sent by God? This is described in table five.

Table five: Descriptions of the 'image' of the church

The phrase "The priesthood of all believers" defined in relation to people's spiritual gifts	1 international church fellowship
The phrase "Priesthood of all believers" defined as ministers, elders and non ordained	1 national denomination
The phrase "Priesthood of all believers" undefined	1 national denomination
The phrase "Body of Christ" undefined	1 national denomination
The phrase "Body of Christ" defined as God's 'hands and feet'	1 national denomination
The phrase "Body of Christ" defined as the church working together in one place	1 national denomination
The phrase "The bride of Christ" more fully reflecting God's intention for it	1 national denomination
The phrase "maturity in the image of Christ" undefined	1 USA, full time church and organisational consultant
The phrase "Every member ministry" undefined	1 academic/research
The phrase the "Whole people of God" undefined	1 national denomination

Again there is the problem of little or no definition, making interpretation difficult. However, all of these phrases, with the exception of "The bride of Christ" and "maturity in the image of Christ" which hold different theologies, the rest focus on community. For one denominational consultant, the image of the church and what it does, primarily based on listening, is core to the practice of consultancy. For another respondent, coming from an academic/research background, this theme of every member ministry links all of their responses.

This thesis has argued strongly that common vision and developing strategy for the future can only be built on the foundations of good relationships, which are the base for community formation. These limited findings support this, that consultancy recognises the importance of building up the Body of Christ. Indeed for one denominational and two respondents from academic/research backgrounds, even if religious experience, discipleship or forgiveness of sins is primarily individual, they always happen in the context of community.

What is also interesting to note is that three respondents, one from an international fellowship and two from national denominations, stated both the principles of the "Great Commission", and the "priesthood of all believers", as part of their theology for consultancy work.

These responses indicate that 'Missio Dei'/Great Commission is the starting point of the journey of mission. As one respondent from a national denomination said, God who sends his church, and goes before it, states by his sending action, that "mission is a revelation of divine purpose".

3. The Kingdom of God

This theological principle was stated by only four consultants, but is implicit in the later principles of journey/pilgrimage and incarnation, and is brought in at this point, because it seeks to answer the question, what is the destination of this "Missio Dei" and what is it, that the 'sent' church seeks? This is described as the Kingdom of God.

While two respondents, one from a national organisation, the other from an academic/research background, gave no definition, one respondent from a national denomination described it as, "the discovery of a 'becoming God'". Another researcher used these words; "... mission, church, purpose must be clearly defined in Kingdom of God terms." This thesis has already stated that the church lives in such paradoxical times; a Kingdom ushered in by Christ, yet is still to come, so as one of many contexts, the Kingdom of God is vital for understanding the life of the church, and so that of mission and consultancy.

4. The incarnation of Christ

As part of Kingdom theology there is also an understanding of the incarnation of Christ. These questionnaire results indicate that incarnation theology is clearly part and parcel of church consultancy. One respondent from a national denomination said, "The church is the continuation of the incarnation, His body on earth, doing the same things he would do if here and now in the 'flesh'" Another, also working for a national denomination, describes incarnation as "The discovery of God's profound 'yes' to humanity".

Two other respondents, both from academic/research backgrounds, also identified incarnation as a major theological principle; one gave no definition, but the other equated it with Jesus becoming one of us, listening, caring and giving solutions in understandable language.

Incarnation is therefore another context for consultancy, as a primary means of engagement by the church with those it meets. A theology of incarnation as the first movement of God's mission into 'neighbourhoods', ushering in the Kingdom of God and being part of the journey/pilgrimage of faith, that is central to discipleship.

5. Journey/pilgrimage

The second theological principle that follows from the Kingdom of God is that of journey/ pilgrimage. This seeks to answer the question, if the church is sent by God, with a destination that is the Kingdom of God, then how is it to do this?

Three respondents saw this as a major theological principle, with one national denominational consultant having all of their theological principles linked to the theme of journey. This can be summarised in the words of one full time church and organisational consultant.

"The pilgrimage model of the church is superseding the pyramid model and is more consistent with Jesus teaching and example. On pilgrimage people give mutual help, support, guidance, challenge and service. Control does not figure."

This is directly linked to that of incarnation. Here is a theology of journey, with the church sent into the world as the continuation of the incarnation of Christ.

As one national denominational worker said, it is this journey that the consultant takes part in, alongside the community of faith.

This theology of journey/pilgrimage was seen in three images mentioned by two denominational consultants. The story of the Emmaus road, a journey and reflection together where Christ is companion; the epic journey of the wilderness experience of the people of Israel, the life experience of Christ, his temptation in the wilderness, and the parable of the Good Shepherd as he leads his flock to new pastures. From the opening theology of journey, to the concluding frameworks for consultancy, and scattered in between, this thesis has been cemented and woven together by a theology of journey/pilgrimage. A theology seen as vital to the context of ongoing church consultancy.

As the church undertakes this journey of faith and witness, its needs to interact with those whom it meets. Four issues were identified by the respondents as central to this pilgrimage.

Partnership

For two respondents from national denominations, partnership was the main theme in their questionnaires. One described partnership in mission, as between the church, God, community and the world, in a willingness and openness to work together, of being inclusive with whom the church encounters, including voices from the community which may not be present in the church. For the other, partnership should be based on the model of Christ as companion, with the global church working together as the Body of Christ, in one place. Here is a relationship between partnership, with incarnation and the image of the church.

It is also worth noting that for both of these respondents, the ecumenical context is a major determining factor. Another respondent from the academic/research field added, consultation is one expression of catholicity so churches aren't trapped by their local situation.

There was only one slightly dissonant voice to this which came from a respondent working for a national organisation: here partnership is understood as inclusive, at least as far as orthodox theological churches are concerned, whether evangelical or not. This tension highlights the risk of partnership beyond the church.

It is acknowledged that the local community, and not wider (ecumenical) partnerships, have been the focus of this model of practical theology.

Relationship building

One denominational consultant described this as, "An acknowledgment of the interaction of relationships", which picks up the core building block of the missional church, in the theology of journey.

For one person from an academic/ research field, this was not just their main theological principle, but the focus of their work, centred on caring for both the human and spiritual needs of those the consultant is working with. Understanding where people are coming from, allowing people to think for themselves, and working alongside them, helping to set goals and deciding how to fulfil them. Another consultant, who works with organisations outside the church, described this in different terminology, as developing "peer – peer" collaborative relationships.

The implicit understanding is a focus on internal relations, which supports relationship building as core to a healthy community of faith. In practice, this is done by listening, understood by one denominational consultant as the key to understanding, which is more important than agreeing.

Society and community

One respondent from a national denomination described this as, "Community is the key human activity" and "Community is the context for the outworking of the realm of God and is the activity of the Holy Spirit." This thesis has already stressed the importance of the contextualisation of the gospel in any model of practical theology. For one respondent in the field of academia/research, contextualisation was their most important theological principle. They said, that since in a postmodern age society has moved on, "The kerugma (gospel) must be discontinued from its modernist baggage". Another, working in the same field, said that people's spirituality is expressed in the wider community and not just in the Church. This identifies yet another context for the outworking of the realm of God, namely, community both within, and outwith the church.

Vision

The final aspect is that of vision, the second building block in the life of the missional congregation, and another major thread running through this whole thesis.

One respondent from a national organisation described it as an inclusive "big picture" syndrome, similar to the vision given by Moses.

If God does indeed have a plan for each congregation, then according to one respondent working for a national denomination, the aim of the consultant is to help them discover it. Here two concepts were important. The first is spiritual reflection. A full time church and organisational consultant talked of getting people to reflect critically on their experiences of God, to see that they are more alive spiritually than they might think. Another from an international church fellowship commented that with God, all things are possible, and that faith and belief in his power can get congregations to do amazing things.

The second is ownership. Another consultant from a national denomination stated, if you want others to share 'your' vision, the congregation needs to help the consultant design it. The concern here is that vision must not be self designed, either by the consultant on behalf of others, or by the congregation itself, but in being open to God, it is truly God inspired.

As people undertake this journey of partnership, relationships, community and vision, rooted in "Missio Dei" and destined for the Kingdom of God, one consultant from an academic/research background sees people being called to maturity of faith in the image of Christ.

6. The Spirit of God and the gifting of the people of God

The final theological principle is the role of the Spirit of God, and the gifting of the people of God. This is seen in the table below.

Table six: The Spirit of God and the gifting of the people of God

The Holy Spirit is the true enabler	1 national denomination
The Holy spirit is the prompter	1 national denomination
The Holy Spirit is the source of creativity for human activity	1 national denomination
Indigenous leadership arises out of the Spirits activity in community	1 national organisation
God gives to his church all that it needs to be the church	1 national denomination
Human responsibility and the Holy Spirit	1 national denomination
The Spirits gift of administration equips the church to serve the world	1 full time church and organisational consultant
All people have God given vocations and are in the world for a purpose, which is their spiritual development and that of others	1 academic/research
An openness to God's Spirit and the awareness of individual gifting	1 national denomination

For these consultants it is important to be explicit and to say that nothing happens without the work of the Spirit. This can be encapsulated in the term 'discernment', and for one consultant from a national denomination, this is the main theme running through their response. Although this thesis has not majored on this aspect of the Trinity, it is clearly seen as indispensable for these church consultants, and inextricably linked to vision.

The final comment is to draw attention to the fact that in this section, only two respondents, one full time church and organisational consultant and one from a national denomination, specifically mentioned prayer support, along with the right application, understanding, listening to, and use of scripture to provide the basic principles of all activity. Maybe it should be assumed that these are also important for all other respondents!

Due to constraints in space, the other categories, not already identified, are listed in appendix four.

II. Qualitative research: the context of consultancy

"My job is to contextualise the big vision – the Holy Spirit only speaks local dialects!" (National denomination)

One respondent from an academic/research background seems to be the place to begin: they said that context is the starting point for teaching, and is fundamental to adequate understanding and practice of mission.

From a similar background, another respondent described context as affecting the way consultancy is done; it is the determining factor in understanding where people are coming from, what influences their thoughts and why they believe what they do. Finally, to reinforce the importance of context, a respondent from a national denomination wrote, "It is the defining shaping influence", another, that congregations need to discover, explore and articulate their contexts, and a third,

"The context of the opportunity is the piece of work, the church community, event, the organisation, the relationship, or wherever the consultation will eventually take place."

An analysis of the questionnaires divides context into the following broad sections, and seeks to answer, why is context so important?.

1. The global context
2. The national context
3. The local context
4. The context of the local congregation
5. The consultant as part of the context

1. The global context

Three respondents specifically highlighted the importance of the global context. One, from a national denomination, saw western post modern culture as the over arching factor; another respondent from an national organisation, saw a link between the local situation and the international perspective, since Christ's body is global and God's mission goes beyond human boundaries. The third, working outwith the church, recognised that global issues and pressures can sideline consultancy work at a moment's notice.

In looking at the cultural context, this thesis has focused not on the global context, but on the national context of exile and postmodernity.

2. The national context

The national context was described by one respondent, working in an academic/research background, as setting the broad trends, and for giving the possibility for networking up similar local contexts, whereas the local context determines what is relevant. One of these broad trends is that of the national decline of the mainstream churches, and one respondent, from an academic/research background, raised the issue of whether this would give motivational energy for the church to carry out its task?

Another broad trend highlighted was that of changing culture, described by four denominational consultants as postmodern and/or post Christian. One of them raised the important question of how does the church relate these cultural factors to local situation. Another respondent, a full time consultant in the USA, commented that the problem for the church, particularly in the national or denominational context, is how much control does it really have?

The global and national contexts raise for local congregations the question of how to take the initiative, and not just respond to what is happening in society. Other sections of this thesis have already looked at postmodernity, as the cultural context of consultancy in Scotland, ground that does not need to be repeated, only to say that this is supported by the responses of these consultants.

One respondent from an academic/research background, described the context for consultancy and church, as an exploration of the interaction between modernity and postmodernity, the implications of the demise of Christendom, the implications of secularism and pluralism and the difference between urban and suburban mission, which seems to be a good summary.

3. Local Context

“All local work takes into account the structures of the church ..., its authority and decision making procedures, and the key issues and problems which have a bearing on the work under consideration.” (Full time church and organisational consultant)

The local context is related directly to the themes of partnership and relationship building. For two denominational consultants in particular, ecumenism is crucial as a major determining factor in the direction work progresses, for it can both help and hinder collaboration. At the same time, as one respondent from an academic/research background put it, local churches are often parochial and need to take opportunities for partnership.

This is related to an awareness of the local history. How do neighbouring congregations get along? One denominational consultant described three possible relationships: competition, co-operation or indifference. It might be that working with a congregation of a different denomination is actually less of a threat than working with a congregation of the same denomination!

Two other specific issues were described. Two denominational consultants identified locality, the geography of where a congregation is located, especially rural areas, in which continuing contact and the introduction of new ideas can be more difficult. The second is understanding changing demographics. One respondent working for a national denomination asked, what are the local environmental conditions that will influence the context in which a congregation undertakes its mission? e.g. the age profile of the community.

Understanding the local context is all about helping congregations relate to their 'neighbourhoods'. Any movements of mission, either transformational or incarnational, will not happen without a contextualised gospel. This builds on the theology of journey/pilgrimage, which recognises that the world we live in needs to be understood, both theologically, as a church in exile and culturally as a post modern society.

Having examined the global, national and local contexts, there is not enough information to draw any specific conclusions as to the relationship between the respondent's role, and how they view the importance of context, either as global, national or local.

4. The Context of the Local Congregation

Apart from national and local contexts, the consultant also has to understand the context of the church that they are working with. This is listed in the table below.

Table seven: The context of the local congregation

Diminishing resources and the availability of funding and grants can be a major determining factor for some congregations.	3 national denomination
There is a lack of strategic thinking in the leadership of the church.	1 national organisation
The consultant needs to have an awareness of any conflict between congregational goals, overall mission strategy and policy, and the consultant's aim to encourage the 'making of disciples'.	1 national denomination
To be aware of the pace of change acceptable in the local situation	1 national denomination
The context starts with people's experience. The consultant needs to enable people to hear and understand that God is present and active in the world, and meets with them in their situation.	1 national denomination
A context of denominational restraint v Christ-centred agenda	1 full time church and organisational consultant
The theological context of being anxious about evangelism, therefore it is difficult to make the mind shift to being missional	1 national denomination

Given that each local situation is different, it is not surprising that these local contexts vary financially, in people resources, in relationships, sociologically, theologically and structurally. Although the evidence is limited, an awareness of such issues and how to handle them sensitively is of prime importance in consultancy work, and is more evidence that supports the vital role of relationship building and an appropriate method of consultancy.

5. The Consultant as Part of the Context

The final part of the jigsaw is the role of the consultant, important because this personal contact is part of the context of consultancy. No consultant can ever be neutral; as soon as they enter the system of congregational life, that system changes. How this happens will be dependent on the context of the congregational system, of how the church actually 'works', and the assumptions made about the service to be provided. One respondent outwith the church, described that this ranged from collaboration, to the instruction of the consultant with little clarification of situation, need or contact. Another, from a denominational background, recognised the confusion people have about the role of the consultant as expert, trainer or resourcer, from working as a team, to the person who will sort out the problem under consideration. There is also the issue of personal cultural background as raised by one respondent from an academic/research field, which might be very different between the consultant and those they are working with.

Although only explicitly mentioned by a few consultants, and in some cases in the section on the practice of consultancy, the mode of working seems to be understood as non-directive, rather than expert led.

This is described by one research worker, as enabling the consultor to explore their context while implanting skills, without building in a dependency on the consultant in the future.

A full time church and organisational consultant described it as

“... working *with* people. This gets individuals and groups thinking, discussing and deciding for themselves, makes for free and responsible decision, thus making that contribution to their own lives and situations necessary for their own salvation and growth.”

Finally, it is described by an academic/research worker, as resulting in a learning process where the consultor is able to acquire skills. This builds on, and supports, the means of working as described in ‘the learning organisation’ and ‘process consultation’ outlined in chapter eight.

III. Qualitative research: the determining factors of consultancy

An analysis of the questionnaires indicates that church consultants understand their main determining factors or congregational values as:

1. Leadership and vision
2. Change
3. Theological and biblical values
4. The community of faith and its relationship to wider society

1. Leadership and vision

The determining factors of leadership and vision were split into two main groups. The first group only described leadership, with one respondent from a national denomination designating all three determining factors as "missional leadership"! The second linked it specifically with vision. The following table gives the respondents' descriptions of leadership.

Table eight: Descriptions of leadership

The term 'leadership' with no explanation	1 national organisation
As 'minister'/'officer'/'elders'	1 national denomination
As the 'attitude' and 'commitment' of office bearers and minister	2 national denomination
As 'Careful but strong leadership'	1 national denomination
As 'mission minded' or 'missional' leadership	2 academic/ research 1 national denomination
As church leaders with an understanding of the theory and practice of congregational development	1 USA, full time church and organisational consultant

Apart from indicating that it is church leaders, and not just pastors or ministers that is the vital group for church consultants to work with, there is little more than hints that can be gleaned from this limited information. However, it is implied that good leadership is one that operates as a team, and takes mission, again not defined, seriously. What is more instructive and illuminating is when you add the positive link made by many of the consultants, of leadership with vision.

Of the six respondents who made this link, five of them, three from national denominations, one from a national organisation and one from an academic/ research background, had leadership and vision under the same determining factor on their questionnaire return, so indicating an inextricable link between them for their work.

Again, any detailed analysis must be limited, for the only other information given by the respondents, one from a national denomination, the other from a national organisation, is that out of this leadership with vision, come inspiration and unity of purpose. This should come as no surprise, since common vision attracts and pulls people in the same direction.

All of these points have already been discussed. A theology of mission that begins with God and not the church, the role of vision as the core building block of the missional congregation, and leadership, which recognises the importance of a systems approach to the Body of Christ, as a faith community.

It is worth noting that only one respondent, from an international church fellowship, described the link between leadership and vision, using the term 'pastor' as an individual, who carries the vision and inspires the people, rather than leadership as team ministry.

The second group of respondents focused on vision without linking it specifically to leadership.

One person from a national denomination described it as, the "Big vision ... (This is God's church in God's world)", that needs to be contextualised by the consultant. The following table completes the other responses:

Table nine: Descriptions of vision

Shared Vision	1 national denomination
Shared and realistic vision of outreach	1 national denomination
As discovering the purpose of the church	1 national denomination
As discovering the thinking of the Kingdom rather than the congregation	1 national denomination
As discerning what faith is in the 21 st century	1 national denomination
Is based on purpose, that comes from core meaningful beliefs	1 full time church and organisational consultant
As energised by faith and seeking to find out what God wants	1 national denomination

Without repeating what has already been said under leadership, vision, as a means of answering the question, 'where is a congregation travelling to in their faith journey?' is crucial to consultancy. It is something that requires to be shared, developing common vision, as seen in Senge's third discipline of the 'learning organisation', and is often moulded as congregations experience the transition of the 'neutral zone' and, in that environment, are prepared to take risks. It is clear that change and vision are inextricably linked. This journey in the neutral zone, in its widest sense, has as its context the Kingdom of God. For as the church travels in this paradoxical world, does it know where God is leading it, and is the consultant travelling with them, to help determine God's 'big picture' for them?

2. Change

"Enjoying an agenda that comes primarily from tomorrow rather than from yesterday" (National denomination)

Eight of the respondents indicated that change was one of their determining factors for consultancy. Again, this should come as no surprise, since change is integral to the journey of faith in the neutral zone, and central to vision. The responses can be divided into two main groups. The first group, two from national denominations and one from a national organisation, indicated, in general terms, a need to be open, and have a positive attitude to change. However, the second group is more interesting in that they gave some clues as to their understanding of change, and these are given in the following table.

Table ten: Descriptions of change

A willingness to go beyond talk to make change happen	2 national denomination
To be a community of hope that enables them to change without believing that they are losing everything	1 national denomination
Not staying in the comfort zones, and be willing to adapt creatively to a changing environment	1 full time church and organisational consultant
Building a community that does a few things well and faces the cost of change and growth	1 national denomination

These comments are self explanatory, but do indicate the cost of change, to travel a journey in faith and hope, knowing that the destination will be uncomfortable. What is interesting is a comment from one respondent from a national denomination, who offers a different approach: congregations require security in themselves in order to be able to reach out. As no further explanation was offered, any analysis is purely conjecture, but it may well be that aspects of stability are still required even in the midst of a willingness to change.

Other contributions develop and build on these descriptions of change. Three respondents, two from national denominations and one from an academic/research background, highlighted the importance of having enough risk takers: people or, by implication, leaders, willing to live beyond their means. Without this, change will not begin. Another related theme is that of consensus: are there actually enough people willing to go beyond the pain of change to make things happen. Just as vision requires to be shared, so do the implications of change. Four respondents, two from national denominations, one full time church and organisational consultant from USA and one academic researcher, commented on this need for a critical mass for change, built around perceived needs. One of them, from a national denomination, said it is a "Willingness to let go some of what we have so that something new may have space to grow". The implication is that faith is based on a new hope for the future, and it is the community of hope itself that can enable such change.

This thesis has stressed the importance, not just of change, but of transition, to allow vision to be put into practice. The church is part of a changing world and, as such, lives in the 'neural zone'. If any further comment is to be made, it is that the issue of transition is not found within the work of these consultants.

Due to a lack of further information, no other determination can be made that at this stage. Linking to the next section, one denominational consultant said this about change, which gave him hope in every situation:

“change, growth, reconciliation, healing are all possible in the realm of God, as demonstrated by Jesus, especially in the parables about the realm of God.” (See Matthew 5 & 13)

3. Theological and biblical values

This determining factor was expressed in different ways, but has unity in being a common factor that motivates. One consultant from a national organisation talked of people who are ‘energised’ by their faith. A similar comment comes from someone working as a full time church and organisational consultant, that there needs to be a real experience of Christ and the gospel.

A denominational consultant talked of understanding prayer as expectant, and for the need of preaching that informs and inspires. From a similar background, another consultant saw the importance of good biblical teaching; for another, in an academic/research setting, it was the need for contextual theological reflection. Finally, taking this research back to a key text of the thesis, a national denominational consultant uses Matthew 28:18-20 to highlight the importance of consistent teaching on the responsibilities of the church.

Two markers can be put down at this stage which are made with no value judgement, but purely as observation.

First of all, there is no indication, apart from two comments on theological reflection (made by two respondents both from academic/research backgrounds), of the pattern identified in practical theology, of reflection on people's and congregational stories, by the story of God and Christ in scripture. The second is a surprising lack of references, in this section, to prayer.

4. The community of faith and its relationship to wider society

In spite of being commented on by eighteen respondents, this determining factor has been left to last, as it seems to be the logical outcome arising from the other determining factors.

At the end of the day, they will determine how a congregation will seek to carry out its responsibilities as a missional community, as one that is not isolated from wider society, but engaging with it. Theologically, as one respondent from an academic/research background commented, this can be understood as an 'Incarnational Christology', that resonates with the first of two movements of mission as already identified in this thesis. For one denominational consultant, it is an incarnation within the community of faith and society that is its context and, for another, in thinking that is based not on the congregation, but on the Kingdom of God.

An understanding of what is 'church', must bring together these theological and biblical values, along with the dynamic that is taking place within congregational life, and its relationship with the community of which it is a part.

This understanding, in the words of one denominational consultant, will go a long way in helping the consultant to find a way of doing mission that is 'right' for a particular congregation, and from a respondent from a similar field, will help congregations to understand their mission as a journey of faith with others.

The final part of this section identifies other factors that need to be in place within the local faith community, prior to any effective engagement with its 'neighbourhood'. These are contained in the following table.

Table eleven: factors for effective engagement with communities

They should already be in some sense a missional congregation, as a base to build on	1 national denomination
They should have an encouraging environment in which people are valued and can participate, grow and mature in their faith.	1 national denomination 1 academic/research
It should be a congregation built around people and not programmes	1 academic/research
A church willing to work together	1 academic/research
A congregation that meets and listens to people's experiences from the community	1 national denomination
A congregation where people are understood, that takes faith development, and the discovery and use of people's gifts	1 national denomination
Structures that exist, and are required, must facilitate mission and not just maintenance thinking	1 national denomination
Congregations should also have a focused or 'tight' approach to strategy, by doing a few things well	3 national denomination
Outward looking	1 national denomination 1 full time church and organisational consultant
A willingness to integrate the sacred and the secular	1 full time church /organisational consultant
Skills in strategic planning, committed to keeping the process on track, with clear achievable goals	1 international church fellowship
Good communication	2 national denomination

The key issues identified are: an ethos or culture for mission ('outward looking'), an internal environment that is relational and communal, and an ear that listens to the neighbourhood and is willing to act.

As the congregation develops this outward looking focus, two things begin to happen. One denominational consultant describes it as making room for others; for another academic researcher, it is the encouragement of friendships beyond the congregation. Put another way, the organisational culture of church has a formative impact on its people which orients the church towards the mission of God. In this way, it becomes open to the needs of the people round about, for, in the words of one denominational consultant, that is the way God is.

This final determining factor is about meeting and journeying in the local congregation's 'neighbourhood', as the context for mission. It is out of that experience, or even crisis, that contextual theological reflection, the dynamic of practical theology will take place, in the presence of God, and through his story, in scripture.

IV. Qualitative research: the practice of consultancy

The intention of this section is not to examine either the specific tools or materials used by each individual consultant or denomination, or their style of delivery, but only the principles of consultancy practice.

These are identified as:

1. The means of entry
2. The 'consultant - consultor' relationship
3. The identification and discernment of the outcomes of consultancy
4. The timescale of the consultancy process

1. The means of entry

Twenty two respondents gave no indication as to how their first contact with their clients is established. However, five consultants, three from national denominations, one full time church and organisational consultant, and one consultant from an international church fellowship, indicated that their means of entry into the life of a congregation is by invitation, while for three denominational consultants, it was either their specific role within a presbytery, or as "directed by senior staff".

Although most consultants do not explicitly state their means of entry, the assumption must be, to establish from the outset the consultant – consultor relationship, together with an emphasis on partnership and non directional consultancy, as highlighted later in this section, that the consultant requires to be invited in as a request from the consultors. It is only a small number who work with congregations as a result of being sent in by others, outwith the client group. This will very much change the consultant client-relationship.

2. The 'consultant -consultor' relationship

On one side of the relationship is the person and role of the consultant who, once invited in, becomes part of a relational dynamic.³¹ One denominational consultant describes it as "... analysing the system – and joining it!" The role of the consultant needs, in some way, to be part of the congregational system, and not just someone who is external and seen as objective. However, the responses also indicate that the consultant cannot be totally part of the system, otherwise objectivity is lost.

The table below attempts to list the main terminology used to describe the consultant - consultor working relationship, something that is difficult to quantify and interpret.

³¹ The theologian cannot be detached from his object. Every theology presupposes that the theologian is in the theological circle. (Tillich 1951, p. 26) At the same time there is the tension of the theologian needing to be detached, even if that takes him or her beyond the boundary of the theological circle, as a result of serving both the concrete and universal 'logos'. (Tillich 1951, p. 29)

Table 12: The consultant – consultor working relationship

'Non directive' approach	1 national organisation 1 full time church and organisational consultant 1 academic/ research
Partnership	3 national denomination
Based on training ³² /resourcing/support	1 full time church and organisational consultant 2 national denomination 1 national organisation
Facilitation ³³	1 national denomination 1 national organisation
As enabler ³⁴	1 national denomination
"Servant" role ³⁵	1 national denomination
As journeying companion	1 national denomination

³² To train: come to a desired state or standard of efficiency by instruction and practice. (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1982, p. 1136) My understanding of a trainer is someone who has expertise in a specific area. The consultant can act in this role.

³³ Facilitate: to help forward. (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1982, p. 346) My understanding of facilitation is someone from within the group, and agreed by the group, to act in this role, developing shared leadership and structuring the process of group dynamics.

³⁴ Enable: to empower, to make possible. (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1982, p. 316) My understanding of enabling is the same as facilitation.

³⁵ "Because it is a practical approach with identifiable outcomes in process and in action and activity, I believe it stands as a testimony to the faith values of the practitioner, and by grace, to the presence of the realm of God in Christ." (consultant, National Denomination)

The main approaches are non directive and partnership, with the key being that of ownership of the process. One full time church and organisational consultant defines non directive as working *with* people, in other words in partnership with them.

“This gets individuals and groups thinking, discussing and deciding for themselves, makes for free and responsible decisions, thus making that contribution to their own lives and situations necessary for their own salvation and growth.” (Full time church and organisational consultant)

Two other respondents, both from academic/research backgrounds, contribute to this understanding of the non directive approach. For one, it is about the consultants controlling the agenda, for the other; it is the consultants discovering for themselves solutions to their problems through self reflection, balanced with the consultant understanding where the consultants are coming from and working alongside them to set goals. It is interesting to note that for this consultant, there are also times when they act as the expert.

Part of this non directive/partnership approach is the consultant also acting as facilitator. One consultant from a national denomination, in carrying out their role, sees facilitation as allowing the congregation to do the work. Another closely related term is that of enabling. From a national denomination, one consultant describes it as allowing people to hear and understand that God is present and active in the world and meets with them in their situation. Both terms are about the consultant taking a step back, and not being seen to be in control of the situation.

It can be seen from these responses that there are many ways of consultancy practice for developing the consultant – consultor relationship. In practice however, while the above general relationships hold true, a spectrum will operate depending at what stage the process is at. These will range from being a partner in learning to being the expert, from offering suggestions, to allowing people to test their dreams, from being the teacher and trainer, to not imposing solutions, from asking the right questions to being an observer of context.

However, even if the consultant is clear about their role, two respondents, one from a national denomination and a consultant working out side of the church, indicate that there can often be confusion about their role from the viewpoint of the consultors. This is clearly something that needs to be clarified from the outset of the process. What is actually expected, and is the consultant willing to play this role?

On the other side of the relationship is the empowerment of the consultors.

"Empowerment - Finding ways to more fully use people's gifts, develop individuals and teams, while meeting organizational needs and being successful." (Full time church and organisational consultant, USA)

Who are the consultors? The following table indicates how they were described.

Table 13: The descriptions of consultants³⁶

Individuals e.g. ministers/pastors	2 national denomination 1 academic/research 1 national organisation
Leaders, leadership teams, in local churches	1 international church fellowship 6 national denomination 1 academic/research 1 national organisation
The local congregation	1 international church fellowship 9 national denomination 2 national organisation 1 full time church and organisational consultant
Area groupings of local congregations	1 national denomination 1 national organisation
Regional leaders	1 academic/research
National leaders	1 academic/research
Denominations	1 full time church and organisational consultant 1 national organisation
Interdenominational groups	2 academic/research
Christian mission agencies	1 full time church and organisational consultant
Out with the church	1 consultant working outwith the church structures
Undefined	3 academic/research 1 full time church and organisational consultant 4 national denomination 1 USA, full time church and organisational consultant

³⁶ The number of consultants is more than the total number of responses due to the fact that some respondents gave more than one description of their consultants.

It is clear that the main consultors are local congregations and leadership teams. This is not surprising, considering the role of most of the consultants involved in this survey.

In the midst of this dynamic is the task of relationship building and the ongoing tension between being totally directive with lack of ownership, and being totally non directive with no direction given at all. This dynamic is represented in the image seen in appendix five, of a triangle that highlights the three interrelated and interdependent issues. This again raises the important issue of the 'non directive' approach to consultancy raised by three of the respondents. One denominational consultant describes this in terms of partnership, rather than imposition, as a means of building relationships of equality, while another, working in an academic/research field, talks of listening, questioning and allowing time for people to think for themselves as primary, yet not denying that consultants can also play the role of expert.

"Visit, listen, observe, question
Explore, test, dream
Stay away long enough for something to happen ..."
(Academic/research consultant)

This collaborative approach enables a common agenda to be developed, where there is an agreed core starting point and destination. There might be disagreement as to how to get there, but key is the interaction of relationships, built on common belief and understanding, centred on the work of those who are willing to be involved, who over time explore and journey together.

The outcome, in the words of one full time church and organisational consultant from America, is ownership of planned change, where people are engaged in a process of understanding, setting direction and action.

3. Identification and discernment of the outcomes of consultancy

Emerging from the above dynamic is the identification and discernment of the following issues, seen as important as the outcomes of the consultancy process.

Table 14: Issues of identification and discernment

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Related questions</i>	
Problems, barriers, fears and concerns	What is keeping us where we are?	1 international church fellowship 1 national organisation 3 national denomination 1 academic/research 2 full time church and organisational consultant
Historical context	Who are we?	2 national denomination
Priorities, purposes, strategic issues and core values	What are the starting points for our journey?	1 international church fellowship 1 national denomination 1 full time church and organisational consultant
Empowerment through gifting	What have we to offer?	1 USA, full time church and organisational consultant
Strengths, possibilities, and growth points to be built on	What are our spiritual foundations?	1 national denomination 1 USA, full time church and organisational consultant
Hopes, dreams and vision	What is our destination?	1 international church fellowship 6 national denomination 2 academic/research
Listening and questioning	What is God saying to us?	2 academic/ research 5 national denomination
Clear, achievable strategies, goals and objectives	How we are going to get to our destination?	1 international church fellowship 7 national denomination 1 national organisation 1 academic/research
Key strategic issues that will make a difference in the life of the church and move it towards its vision:	Where is the "energy" in the life of our congregation?	1 international church fellowship 1 national denomination
Issues of Change and growth	What transformation and transitions do we need to go through?	1 full time church and organisational consultant 2 national denomination 1 USA, full time church and organisational consultant

This table follows the pattern seen in the theology of journey, and asks similar key questions. It also challenges consultants to be aware of the local context, the people who are on the faith journey seeking to be creative in discerning God's vision, and how the consultant helps to generate an active response so as to fulfil goals and objectives. These are questions that tie in directly with previously discussed issues of ownership, relationship building and partnership.

Are they communities that listen to God, to their neighbourhoods and to others, so as to discern the way ahead? Are they congregations who recognise the importance of transition and have an existing culture for change? Are there spiritual foundations to build on? In the words of one American full time church and organisational consultant, is there an "Appreciative Process – Working in a manner that identifies the organization's strengths, core values and patterns of success ..."

4. The timescale of the consultancy process

The final principle is that of timescale. One consultant from a national organisation emphasised the importance of the missional timescale being long term; another said there should be "significant involvement". Another consultant from a national denomination said consultancy should ideally be placed in the context of an ongoing partnership of learning together, and not a 'one off'. Two others, again from national denominations, agreed without stating what that timescale might be. However, some consultants did give an indication of the length for the process of consultancy. This is given in the table below.

Table15: Length of consultancy

To be measured in years	1 national denomination
A minimum of two years	1 national denomination
Eighteen months	1 international church fellowship
Two to three months followed by a review after one year	1 national denomination

This elongated time scale will allow the consultant to balance several issues. The first is described by a research consultant, who saw the importance of staying away long enough for something to happen. This will give, in the words of another research consultant, time for congregations to think for themselves. Balanced with a comment from a denominational consultant, of regular ongoing meetings, that will allow the monitoring and evaluation of the short, medium and long term goals.

The long term view allows reflection to take place. This is the final element in the consultancy chain: that of feedback, evaluation, review, monitoring and exit, mentioned by eight consultants. Five of them do not define it, other than stating it should be done; however, three others do give minimal definitions. One consultant working for a national denomination carries it out to see if the goals have been achieved, or not. For another two national denominational consultants, it is to ensure forward movement, support and resourcing, to meet objectives.

The respondents clearly see the practice of consultancy as a process with a pattern that can be followed, but is not necessarily a linear one. There are many aspects that are important to help a church community to be healthy. Indeed one denominational consultant uses the image of wellbeing, and describes the process of consultancy like a 'spiritual health check'.

The final issue is that of effectiveness. Can the consultancy process be measured? Two consultants gave their definitions of the outcome of the consultancy process.

"The most important outcome is that there should be increased understanding. Also an acceptance of any decisions made, positions reached. Any goals set should be self determined, Action will also include a review. The best measure of the effectiveness of the process is if there is renewed hope and energy." (National denomination)

"Increased Capacity – Develop the capacity of the system for continuous improvement of its organizational life, increase competence and commitment." (Full time church and organisational consultant (USA))

There are echoes here of Ed Schein (1969, p. 5-6), that any organisation can indeed be better than it is.

Conclusions

"To make explicit, what is implicit"

Although the model of practical theology is not explicitly stated in the work of other consultants, there is general agreement on many aspects of its theology, context and practice.

There is theological agreement that 'Missio Dei' is the starting point for both mission and consultancy, that the Kingdom of God describes the context of the journey of faith, and that the incarnation of Christ helps to define the purpose of the church. During this 'in between time' of here but not yet, as people seek to understand the world round about them and the place of faith within it, the church does not take God into the world, but participates in the mission where he already is, and in the pilgrimage of faith, as people journey with Christ, they continue his movement of incarnation into the world.

This theology then becomes the basis of practice, and can be described under two broad headings. The first is a management approach, and from the information contained in the questionnaires, this model comes through in many consultants mode of working. However, the danger with this approach is the tendency to focus only on problems, rather than the 'holistic' life of the congregation. In developing a model for practical theology, the intention is to help congregations see and understand who they are, where are they going and how will they get there, so encouraging them to develop a 'big picture' mentality.

The second approach is that of narrative, and strangely for a community of faith this is given less emphasis. Where it is mentioned, it is described as 'bible studies' and 'contextual theology'. However, to define these terms more accurately, further research would need to be done to determine whether the model of practical theology being used is one of applied theology, praxis or critical correlation.

In looking at narrative more specifically, and in particular its relation to practical theology, two issues can be commented on. The first is the use of scripture as a self reflective tool.

"By calling folk back to God's word, examining key scriptural texts and testing these against their recent experience." (National denomination)

"Listening to God: I offer an exercise in which members of the congregation, using their existing knowledge of the bible, will arrive at the main purposes of the church." (National denomination)

"Listening to God in prayer, worship, through Scripture." (National denomination)

The second is using experience as the starting point for practical theology.

"The opportunity for this change may arise from any number of circumstances - a crisis, change of circumstances, or an idea. When this moment is seized it is full of potential and can be a God-given moment." (National denomination)

One of the denominational consultants makes the point that consultancy needs to start with people's experiences and with an enabling process that helps people to hear and understand that God is active in the world, and meets with them in their situation.

There is also general agreement on the context of consultancy; the church is seeking to communicate with a changing cultural world, the backcloth of which is postmodernity. This raises two theological issues, both related to the journey of faith.

The first is an awareness of people's spiritual needs, the importance of relationship building and the development of partnerships, both within and outwith the church. This is something that should not come as any surprise, but as a direct result of taking seriously the theological position of exile. The motif might not be stated explicitly, but it is there by implication, recognising both the need for support in a world that is at best apathetic, and at worst hostile to the message of the gospel, and which acknowledges that the church does not have the luxury of travelling the pilgrim journey alone.

The second issue is how the faith community comes to terms with, and responds to, change.

One major difference in emphasis between the questionnaire responses and the model of practical theology is the contrast between change and transition. In the practice of other consultants, the principles of transition are not explicitly mentioned, and although this does not indicate a one dimensional approach to change, it does not fully take into account the effect change has on people as they enter their neutral zones experience. This thesis seeks to expand the theology of change to one of transition.

Related to both the theology of journey and that of change, is vision. This is clearly seen as important, but again is not spelt out. How can the spiritual journey be undertaken without first knowing, not just the starting point and context, but also the ultimate destination of faith? There is little point in being able to move from one stepping stone to the other, developing strategy, if you are trying to cross the wrong river! It would have been very interesting to be able to make direct links between the respondents' theology, and their vision for congregational development, but due to a lack of specific information this has not been possible. This thesis clearly understands the development of vision as the base upon which strategy is built. Throughout this spiritual journey the role of the consultant is understood as companion, one who journeys with the faith community in a 'non-directive' way.

This is a role filled with tension, the consultant seeks to balance an objective external view with the recognition that in entering the system of the congregation, that system is changed.

In doing this, the good practice of the process of consultancy is recognised and developed, as the consultant seeks to build good relationships and view the whole picture of congregational life, as a necessity.

Overall, what emerges from this analysis is a general agreement on the important aspects of consultancy; however, many issues seen as central to the model of practical theology are not explicitly stated. The purpose of this thesis is to make the implicit, explicit.

Chapter ten

The overall conclusions on consultancy

The consultant faces a paradoxical relationship between uniqueness and unity, for the Body of Christ is a complex organism made up of individual life stories that come together in locality, to form communities of faith that are not always held together by shared theology, practice or tradition. To match this complexity, consultancy cannot be defined by the use of specific tools, but by a cluster of frameworks that come together, giving it a shape that is not managerial or technocratic, but theological and spiritual.

The four frameworks that give consultancy its shape are:

I. Relationships, vision and strategy as the building blocks of practical theology

The first framework is theological and has as its starting point the journey of faith. Its purpose is to fulfil the 'Missio Dei', to seek a destination that is the Kingdom of God, and to have a companion that is the incarnated Christ. In many congregations this is not a simple linear event, for people are often travelling from different theological starting points.

In this spiritual journey, the role of the consultant is to use this theological framework so as to give the community of faith a sense of where God is leading them. To answer the question, *where are we going?*

II. In practical theology, exile is the place of the church, the Trinity is its essence, and being 'liquid' and networked are its forms

The second framework is cultural, and is the context within which the faith journey takes place. This framework takes seriously the influence of two overlapping cultures upon people's experience, the culture of the church and its traditions, and that of wider postmodern society.

Here the role of the consultant is to help the faith community understand where they are, a church coming to terms with a rapidly changing society, seeking to avoid the temptation of trying to straddle the church/society gap but, through liminality, to bridge it, so as to re-engage with 21st century Scotland. This framework answers the question, *where are we?*

III. Story is the form of practical theology

The third framework is narrative. Central to the journey of faith are people's individual experiences of life, from which they gain their identity in the world and their understanding of God.

This is where theology begins and ends.

In the dynamic of practical theology it arises out of the experience of crisis and questioning, and in its method is the outcome of the dialogue between personal, communal and scripture narratives. Story lies at its core; the complexity of God's story as seen in the scriptures and in Christ, matching both uniquely and communally with personal narratives, in such a way that the gospel becomes a relevant event for each person.

The role of the consultant is to encourage the questioning, to see crisis as an opportunity and transition as positive, to bring people to the scriptures, so that in their journey of faith and that of the community, they can meet, listen and share. Story seeks to answer the question, *who are we?*

IV. Cell, congregation and celebration as the structure of practical theology

The final framework is structural. This is the 'external glue' that holds the building blocks together as a single unit; whether it be cell or small group of belonging, the worshipping congregation or times of larger celebration. These are the contexts for the journey of faith, and the arenas, where the stories are told and retold.

Part of the process of liminality is to relate the model of practical theology and this shape of consultancy to the growing awareness of the importance of story in culture today. If people are trying to make sense of life through story, then the church, as a provider of narrative, needs to preach a truth that is alive in real places for real people, their story in interaction with God's story, and not just an abstract universal system of doctrine. (Smith 2003 b, p. 65)

The positive aspect is that God has already given his church the raw materials to work with; the stories of the gospel have the power to sow the seeds of a new church, where new narratives are formed in the crucible of faith experience. (Smith 2003 b, p. 71) In a time of numerical decline, God takes us back to the old story, to tell it in a new way, as a new church, to a new culture. All it needs now, are the storytellers!

From beginning with the idea of examining the theological basis of the tools used in consultancy, this exploration of practical theology has developed into a contribution to the ongoing discussion of practical theology as having its roots in narrative. If the basis of this research is not new, then hopefully new insights will have been gained in bringing together much of current thinking on the subject, into a unified model and shape, and examined in relation to a particular Scottish context.

It would be wrong to say that the story ends here; in a sense it has just begun. The original idea has been turned on its head; the next task is to develop the tools of consultancy that will aid this model in a very practical way, within the life of the church, here in Scotland.

Appendix one: the four stage overlapping dynamic of practical theology

Stages					
Experience	Crisis and/or questions exploration and analysis	Critical reflection	D ³⁷		
Dialogue	exploration and analysis norms and traditions of the congregation scriptural texts	Critical reflection	D	R ³⁸	
Understanding		Critical reflection		R	C ³⁹
Action	Practice and norms are changing				C

³⁷ Deconstruction

³⁸ Reconstruction

³⁹ Consolidation

Appendix two: consultancy questionnaire

What are the main **theological** principles that determine your consultancy/enabling work?

- a.
- b.
- c.

In broad terms, how in **practice** do you carry out your consultancy/enabling work? (*In one paragraph*)

Through your consultancy/enabling work, what have you discovered to be the main **determining factors** that develop a missional congregation?

- a.
- b.
- c.

How does the **context**, both nationally and locally influence your consultancy/enabling work? (*In one paragraph*)

Appendix three: code for questionnaire respondents

Those who replied to the questionnaire		
Number of respondents	Nationality	Description of work context
17	UK	National denomination
5	UK	Academic/research
3	UK	National organisation
2	UK	Full time church and organisational consultant
1	UK	International church fellowship
1	USA	Full time church and organisational consultant
1	UK	Consultant working out with the church structures

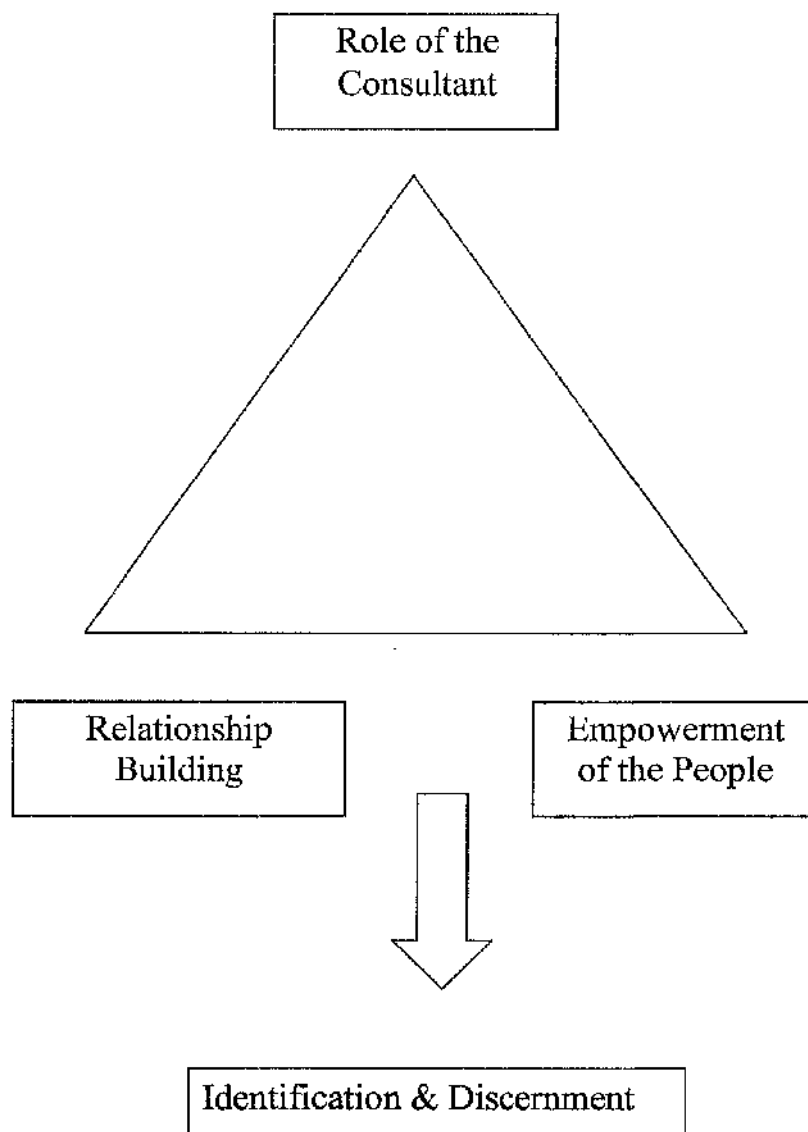
Those who replied to the questionnaire but indicated that they could not participate		
Number of respondents	Nationality	Description of work context
2	USA	Academic/research
1	USA	National religious research organisation

Appendix four: other theological principles

The 'vocation' of the consultant	National denomination
The role of the consultant as described in Ephesians 4:12, equipping the saints and building up the Body of Christ	National denomination
God's desire that all would come to know him	National denomination
The role of the consultant, doing God's work as his servant	Full time church and organisational consultant
The evangelical desire of the consultant, described as salvation through Christ is available to all	National denomination
Celebrating the wisdom and good	National denomination
Making whole: Judgement, justice, shalom	
Priority for the 'last, least and lost'	2 National denomination
The church exists by the grace of God, for the purposes of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ	National denomination
"The five marks of mission" ⁴⁰	2 National denomination

⁴⁰ Two respondents used this phrase. This researcher is not aware of it, and assumes it is a denominational term for mission theology/programme

Appendix five: the relationship, role, empowerment triangle



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