



Can Theology be 'Practical'?

Part II: A Reflection on Renewal Methodology and the Practice of Research

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Introduction

In this second keynote address, I shall focus especially on the nature of Renewal as it informs practical-theological research. Practical theology can be used in an individual manner as a form of reflective practice or it can be used as an educational process in a congregational context. These uses of practical theology are important and have their place in the range of how practical theology is used. However, in this address I am assuming that we are talking about the role of research in practical theology in different contexts. In other words, like other academic disciplines, we can talk about practical-theological research as a process of investigation leading to insights that are effectively shared. But in this case we are also aiming to use these insights to renew theological praxis in the life of the church and its mission in the world.

So, let me begin by defining some key terms. What is methodology? What is Renewal? And when we put them together, what exactly are we talking about?

Let me begin with the term 'methodology'. Methodology can mean a number of different things. For the sake of this discussion, let me indicate three senses or uses of the term 'methodology'. In sense (1) it can mean an overall approach in terms of epistemology and ontology, or assumptions about the nature of

knowledge and how it related to reality.¹ For example, in the social sciences positivism understands that the world is captured by language in a fairly straightforward manner so that the word 'tree' corresponds simply with the object in the real world so designated by it. In other words, there is an *a priori* understanding of what constitutes knowledge in relationship to the reality beyond language or what we might call ontology. This particular approach contains assumptions about the nature of reality and the ability of language through concepts or images to represent it in academic or ordinary discourse. I call this a 'standpoint', even if the standpoint is denied because the tradition (e.g. positivism) emphasizes neutrality and objectivity. We all view reality from somewhere and the assumptions about knowledge and reality belong to that standpoint. It enables us to understand what we are doing and why we do what we do in the way that we do it. Many academics do not examine their standpoints and in fact many simply follow the procedures of the discipline as in for example scientific method. But as the philosophy of science has taught us, there are a number of assumptions at play that can be examined and scrutinized, which make a difference to our appreciation of why we think and act in the way that we do.

In sense (2) 'methodology' can mean an overall procedure or process of investigation.² For example in quantitative survey research in the social sciences, the process could be described as (a) the literature review, (b) the construction of the key research questions or hypotheses to be tested, (c) the operationalization of measures (i.e. design of questions), (d) the gathering of data, (e) the input of data into computer software, (f) the analyzing of data, (g) the presentation of results, (h) the discussion of the results in relation to the existing theory and (i) the statement of the implications for future research.³ In practical theology this process can be seen in some of the empirical studies, but different approaches can be detected in the use of the pastoral cycle or the four voices, which has its roots in action research.

In sense (3) 'methodology' can mean a discussion of specific tools,⁴ for example, the design of a questionnaire, or an interview protocol, or an ethnographic approach to field study and the observation of a community.⁵ These specific tools often relate to both the standpoint and the overall process of enquiry, but not necessarily so. For example, in the past questionnaires,

¹ See, for example, the discussion in standard textbooks like Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (2nd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); for a discussion in practical theology see John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), pp. 74-77.

² This is how I understand the pastoral cycle of the empirical-theological cycle, and it is how I also understand the four voices approach, which is part of a overall process of investigation which revolves around a conversational process, see Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 56-58.

³ See, for example, Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 9.

⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, p.74. However, I would distinguish between an overarching procedure and a specific tool of method, which is not a distinction that they make, so I think they conflate sense (2) with sense (3).

⁵ See the discussion of congregational studies by Helen Cameron, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies and Frances Ward (eds.), *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* (London: SCM Press, 2005).

perceived as 'objective' measures of beliefs and attitudes, would have been associated with positivism as a standpoint and scientific procedure as a process. Nowadays, with the greater sensitivity to the nature of hermeneutics, there is recognition that the questions that we ask are never neutral but are aligned with our assumptions and interests. So, while at one level the process of methodology might appear objectivist, there is recognition that the ways in which the tools are constructed are indeed influenced by the standpoint and necessarily so. Therefore, they should be open to evaluation like any other aspect of the academic process, including the influence of the standpoint on their construction. It also means that there is a greater fluidity in the use of the tools and previously tight approaches to the relationship between standpoint, procedures and tools has been relaxed leading to a more creative interplay between these elements, especially in the use of specific methods of data collection.

Now I move to the terminology of 'Renewal'. What exactly is Renewal? The language of Renewal has its roots in the Charismatic Renewal movement of the 1960s and 1970s.⁶ It captures the idea that Pentecostal spirituality, associated with Spirit Baptism and the gifts of the Spirit were once again part of the experience of the denominational churches, revitalizing its life, ministry and mission. For many denominational charismatics they were fundamentally Evangelicals, Anglicans or Roman Catholics with Spirit Baptism and tongues speech. Their individual and corporate experience of 'coming alive' in the Holy Spirit gave impetus to innovation in worship practices, the use of the gifts of the Spirit by every believer, especially through prophecy and healing practices, greater energy for evangelism and a holistic view of mission.⁷ In other words, there was considerable impact at the level of congregational life and ministry. But this was one of the main problems, there was very limited impact on the structure of their theology as a whole. The most interesting theologizing on the experience of the Holy Spirit came from Roman Catholic Charismatic theologians and some influence was seen in the statements of Pope Paul VI between 1972 and 1974,⁸ as well the journal *Theological Renewal* in the UK edited by the Presbyterian-cum-Anglican, Thomas A. Smail.⁹

This renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the mainline churches influenced independent churches and energized a movement called the House Church movement in the UK.¹⁰ It also renewed many classical Pentecostal churches that

⁶ See the description by Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: The Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1986, revised 1997).

⁷ Michael Welker, a theological commentator notes (1) the experience of the power and presence of God, (2) a new emphasis on community, its proclamation and worship, (3) use of gifts of the Spirit, (4) an openness to ecumenism, and (5) the experience of Baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues, see *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), pp. 11-13.

⁸ René Laurentin, *Catholic Pentecostalism* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1977), pp. 24-25.

⁹ See my 'Theological Renewal (1975-1983): Listening to an Editor's Agenda for Church and Academy', *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 30.1 (2008), pp. 83-107.

¹⁰ William K. Kay, *Apostolic Networks in Britain: New Ways of Being Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

had succumbed to the drudge of institutionalization. These House churches, because of a limited attachment to historical church tradition, were able to develop what would be termed a 'Restorationist' narrative based on the fivefold ministry paradigm (Eph. 4.11).¹¹ In their ecclesiology they were restoring the fivefold ministry pattern of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the church in preparation for the coming of Christ. This movement was to develop over the years and other tributaries, such as the Vineyard movement, were to flow into it and out of it, leading to a fluid landscape of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity.¹² In this latter movement from the 1980s onwards and into the 1990s, the earlier emphasis on Spirit Baptism as subsequent to conversion was diminished and a greater emphasis was placed on reception of the Spirit in conversion and gifts of the Spirit, especially words of knowledge.¹³ The dominant theological motif was the kingdom of God and the role that Jesus played in inaugurating the kingdom of God now. Thus the motif of renewal of existing forms of Christianity became redundant as the kingdom took over as the central motif.

Historically, one can trace a 'charismatic' dimension to the life of the church over the centuries, as it comes and goes. Sometimes it is well received and sometimes it is marginalized and condemned.¹⁴ The picture is mixed. I have argued that it plugs into and plays alongside other ecclesial traditions. With the growth of Pentecostalism in the latter half of the twentieth century, the separation between denominational Pentecostalism and independent charismatic churches has blurred quite considerably. This blurring has now been accentuated with the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in the non-western world, where its expression varies enormously. Now there is a hybrid effect so that there are many types of Pentecostalism, such that scholars of Pentecostalism, like myself, would now talk in terms of 'Pentecostals'. With this diversity, it does not make a lot of sense to talk about Pentecostalism as if it were a homogenous group, although people still do so.¹⁵ So, when the Pew Forum in their survey of Pentecostal beliefs and practices were looking for a label to describe the diversity of these movements, it landed on the label 'Renewal' as a useful way of describing a diversity of groups sociologically.¹⁶ In many ways, the Pew Forum uses this term as a 'flag of convenience'. It lumps a

¹¹ Max Turner, 'Ecclesiology in Major "Apostolic" Restorationist Churches in the United Kingdom', *Vox Evangelica* 19 (1989), pp. 83-108.

¹² See, for example, the range of expressions observed around the middle of the 1990s in Stephen Hunt, Malcolm Hamilton and Tony Walter (eds.), *Charismatic Christianity: Sociological Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997).

¹³ See the description of the move away from Spirit Baptism and initial evidence to the emphasis on multiple infillings in Wimber's theology by Vinson Synan, *In M. W. Wilson (Ed.), Spirit and Renewal: Essays in Honor of J. Rodman Williams* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 67-82.

¹⁴ See my discussion in *Encountering the Spirit: The Charismatic Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006).

¹⁵ See a discussion of the types of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity by Allan Anderson, 'Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definition', in Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers and Cornelius Van der Laan (eds.), *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories + Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 13-29.

¹⁶ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Report, *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals* (October, 2006), www.pewforum.org/files/2016/10/pentecostals-08.pdf (accessed April 8, 2015).

diverse set of groups together in a manageable manner for convenient categorization.

Academically and theologically, there is a different story to tell about how theologians in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have reflected on their approaches. The older generation of American Pentecostal scholars tended to be historians of the movement.¹⁷ These scholars were and are interested in understanding what happened and telling the story of the American movement centered on Azusa Street. In Europe a more global and critical approach was developed using intercultural theology and mission studies associated with the work of Walter J. Hollenweger.¹⁸ The second wave of scholars tended to be biblical studies scholars, like Chris Thomas and Rickie Moore. Together with Steven J. Land they set out to retrieve their own traditions and use early Pentecostal sources to develop 'critical-constructive Pentecostal scholarship'.¹⁹ Not far behind this group and to some extent overlapping in time is the third set of scholars, namely the systematic theologians. These theologians have taken into account what Chris Thomas and others have done, but go wider by engaging with more ecumenical sources. Examples of these folk are Frank Macchia, Amos Yong and Ken Archer.²⁰ It is this group that I think has been more open to the Charismatic Renewal tradition of the 1970s and 1980s as well as charismatic Roman Catholic systematians such as the late Ralph Del Colle.²¹ Finally, there are practical theologians, like myself, who are engaged in methodological discussions in their own disciplines and speak to both sides from the overlap between the two domains. To the practical theologians I speak as a Renewal theologian, drawing attention the weaknesses of the academy and provoking a dialogue about the nature of the discipline.²² To the world of Renewal scholarship, I speak as a practical theologian, reminding them of a wider world

¹⁷ For example, Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, 1997); and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission & Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

¹⁸ See his *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1972) and *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997). See my discussion of his work in relation to Pentecostal theological method in 'Pentecostal Theological Method and Intercultural Theology', in Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham (eds.), *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes* (London: SCM Press, 2011), pp. 62-74.

¹⁹ Rick D. Moore, John Christopher Thomas and Steven J. Land, 'Editorial', *JPT* 1 (1) (1992), pp. 3-5 (p.3).

²⁰ Representative texts include: Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); and Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004).

²¹ Sadly, for the Renewal academic community, Del Colle's death in 2012 robbed it of a brilliant academic and important dialogue partner from the Roman Catholic tradition. For examples of his work, see: 'Trinity and Temporality: A Pentecostal/Charismatic Perspective' *JPT* 8 (1996), pp. 99-113; 'Oneness and Trinity: A Preliminary Proposal for Dialogue with Oneness Pentecostals', *JPT* 10 (1997), pp. 85-110; and 'Postmodernism and the Pentecostal-Charismatic Experience', *JPT* 17 (2000), pp. 97-116.

²² See my *Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions in Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

and a broader conversation.²³Sometimes, I also stray into the world of systematic or constructive theology as well.²⁴ If I take the three points in turn, what might be said in terms of a Renewal approach to methodology?

Standpoint

In the arts and humanities, generally speaking, the academic study of any subject is now largely regarded as a hermeneutical process. As part of that hermeneutical process, it is understood that we all look at things through lenses. Or to put it in a different language, we have presuppositions or assumptions. We assume certain things about the nature of reality. There is a 'taken-for-grantedness' about how we read the world. The reality 'out there' can and does change our presuppositions, our assumptions, but on the whole they remain stable once they are formed. They are shaped just as much by cultural values as they are by theological values. This is inevitable and problematic; hence Paul's injunction not to be conformed to the world but to be renewed in one's thinking (Rom. 12.2). How one thinks inevitably influenced how one acts.

By and large Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians, Renewalists, are transcendent realists. They believe not only in the fact that language to some extent corresponds to the thing out there in the real world, but that the language of faith inherited through the Renewal tradition also speaks clearly and authentically about the transcendent reality. Of course, this belief cannot be proven strictly speaking. What kind of evidence would count? God cannot be tested empirically. It is a faith position that is supported by a tradition expressed in a community that coheres with the religious experience and mission of that community in the world. The experience of worship, life in the Holy Spirit, fellowship, mission and ministry all combine to provide a plausibility structure that supports the worldview of the members of the group. This means that they live and work based on the assumption that certain beliefs are true. It becomes their standpoint and their identity informed by a tradition. In the context of postmodern academic discourse, they have a place at the table, provided that they do not take over the conversation at the theological meal!

When the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (JPT) was launched back in 1992, it was edited by Classical Pentecostals, open to the input of broader charismatics on topics of interest. I had my first article published in JPT in 1993 on the subject of prophecy among charismatics in the Church of England.²⁵ From this journal and its associated monograph series, and now via a range of different book series from Bible commentaries to academic and confessional texts, a cluster of approaches have emerged that take a standpoint derived from aspects of the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions. So, what is this standpoint? I would say that the standpoint is attention to and the movement around the person and work of the Holy Spirit as distinctly expressed in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements of the twentieth century. It is not that other historical expressions of

²³ See my 'Pentecostalism' in Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 587-595.

²⁴ For example, 'Pentecostal Theology' in Cecil M. Robeck Jr. and Amos Yong (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 254-272.

²⁵ 'Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description', *JPT* 5 (1993), pp. 81-122.

the person and the work of the Holy Spirit are denied. Indeed, increasingly, Renewal scholarship is informed by broader historical and ecumenical sources, and I, for one, have been advocating for this development. But, the standpoint does not depart from the territory of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements and it is actively resourced by the scholarship that emerges from them. This scholarship provides the tradition from which the hermeneutical engagement emerges and with which it interacts. It may move around the terrain a fair bit, but it does not depart from it. Otherwise, it becomes a different kind of standpoint. In other words, this reading tradition constitutes a positive and participatory predisposition towards the movement as well as engaging with other academic sources. Someone can have sympathy towards the movement but sympathy alone will not constitute a participation in the Renewal standpoint. Sympathy is an external attitude from the outside, whereas a participatory predisposition works from the inside out. In my view, this is what constitutes a 'Renewal' standpoint.

The nature of such a participatory predisposition and how it functions epistemologically has been captured by Trevor Hart:

In a sense, then, we invest confidence in a particular framework or perspective because, as we occupy it, we find ourselves laid hold of it from without, seized by a reality which manifests itself to us, and charged as a matter of conscience with the task of declaring this reality to our fellows. It is in this relationship of intellectual commitment to a truth which seizes us from beyond ourselves, this declaration of universal intent (the claim that which we know in this way is not merely 'the truth for us', but has contact with an objective reality), that we transcend our subjectivity.²⁶

Renewal scholars would endorse Hart's description that universal truth is revealed and sustained in particularity, but would also understand this standpoint as a tradition of enquiry, which is resourced by the community of scholars and the churches they represent.²⁷

Process of Investigation

Does Renewal methodology contain a unique procedure or approach to the theological sub-disciplines? I would say that the answer to the question is 'no', but quickly add the caveat that it can and does influence or shape how existing procedures or methods are used. I would say that there are basically three ways in which people have attended to the process of research from within the Renewal tradition.

²⁶ Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (London: SPCK, 1995), p.67.

²⁷ Hart, *Faith Thinking*, p.69, also argues for a position between objectivism (the view from nowhere) and perspectivism (relativism), proposing critical enquiry that takes place from the standpoint of a tradition that nevertheless accesses reality outside of it. For a discussion of his hermeneutical position in more detail, see Trevor Hart, 'Tradition, Authority and a Christian Approach to the Bible as Scripture', in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies & Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 183-204.

First, there is what I have termed the retrieval stand.²⁸ This approach is derived from the assumption that the heart of the Pentecostal tradition is to be identified with the first ten years of the movement (1906-1916). Of course, there are all sorts of problems with this assumption in terms of historiography, but for the moment we shall ignore them. This assumption, nevertheless, has inspired a group of Pentecostal scholars to quarry the early Pentecostal sources, especially the early magazines and tracts in order to understand just how these people experienced the Holy Spirit, worshipped in community and were propelled out into missionary activity. Having understood the early tradition on a particular matter, the process turns to the biblical texts that were cited in these sources. These texts are then read afresh in the light of the retrieved reading tradition and new insights from the texts are appreciated and subsequently brought into dialogue with contemporary Pentecostal praxis. So, the procedure moves from tradition to text to today in a kind of dialectical and dialogical conversation. Allied to the approach is a more literary and narrative approach to the reading of the biblical texts. This approach resonates with the worldview of early Pentecostals shaped by the narratives of life in the Spirit.

Second, there are theologians who, though they are rooted in the identity of Pentecostalism, have nevertheless engaged in all seriousness with other theological sources. They may read early Pentecostal literature, but this does not form the focus of their approach. Rather, they have engaged particular theological traditions outside of the Pentecostal academic world and they have been so shaped by them so that they straddle different theological worlds.²⁹ This straddling posture is used to open up a conversation with broader theological sources, such that discussions of theological themes are always part of a conversation from outside of Pentecostalism. I have called this the ecumenical approach. Of course, how people use these sources varies enormously, but that sources outside of Pentecostalism are used is the main point. Indeed, these sources are not just from contemporary scholarship but also from historical periods as well. There are some scholars in this group who also engage beyond theological sources and use philosophy, social sciences and the natural sciences as dialogue partners. In this sense they have moved beyond a theological ecumenism towards a disciplinary ecumenism in the process of pushing the boundaries of academic discourse. In this approach there is both a reworking of broader theological tradition in conversation with Renewal and a move towards inter-disciplinary enquiry.

Third, there is a group of Renewal scholars who take seriously the contemporary church in its concrete expression. These scholars attend to the empirical investigation of congregations and contemporary movements because there is the belief that in order to understand the contemporary expression, it has to be investigated in its own right. This is something that I have brought to

²⁸ I developed this typology of retrieval, ecumenical and empirical in relation to ecclesiology, but I believe that it transcends ecclesiology as can function more widely, see my 'Renewal Ecclesiology in Empirical Perspective', *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 36 (1) (2014), pp. 5-24.

²⁹ For examples see: Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as a Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006); Andy Lord, *Transforming Renewal: Charismatic Renewal meets Thomas Merton* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

the methodological conversation, but I have not been on my own.³⁰ There has been an empirical turn in practical theology but also in ecclesiology because of the realization that whatever we say about the nature of the church, ideal categories do not capture the full reality of church life today.³¹ What is required is a study of concrete expression in order to better equip and transform the church for its mission in the world today. So, this development is driven partly by academic trends but also by a mission imperative.

In my own work, I have in the past developed a dialectical approach to the process of conducting empirical research.³² In this approach, I differentiated between theoretical “system” and concrete “lifeworld” and developed a model of oscillation between the two domains in a hermeneutical process of investigation and interpretation. I linked it to standpoint epistemology, in terms of a charismatic critical realism, that was framed by means of charismatic spirituality or what I would call a standpoint in this paper. This particular model was developed from earlier work based on the empirical-theological cycle of van der Ven, with some modification of his hermeneutical framework because of my standpoint.³³ But I have also used versions of the pastoral cycle to integrate multi-disciplinary discussions of speaking in tongues and demonology and deliverance.³⁴ My latest book did not use any of these processes. Instead, it was a theoretical piece that surveyed the literature on the subject of Scripture, pneumatology and religious experience among the practical-theological academy and offered a critique and proposal based on a theological reading of the Acts of the Apostles informed by Pentecostal theology of experience and the wider Protestant theology of mediation.³⁵ My current research project in megachurch studies is an inter-disciplinary team-based approach framed within the discourse of public theology that includes case studies of five megachurches in London.³⁶

So, what does all this mean? It means that there is some variety in terms of the processes of research. Some researchers stay with an approach or procedure because it is what they know and feel comfortable using. Others test methodological approaches as part of the nature of research and then reflect on the methodology afterwards. I would say that I am one of these second types of people. I respect my colleagues who are methodologically rooted, but I am

³⁰ Also see: William K. Kay, *Pentecostals in Britain* (Carlisle, Paternoster, 2000); Grace Milton, *Shalom, The Spirit and Pentecostal Conversion: A Practical-Theological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); and Stephen E. Parker, *Led by the Spirit: Toward a Practical Theology of Discernment* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

³¹ See Pete Ward (ed.), *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

³² See my *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), pp. 24-30.

³³ See my *Charismatic Glossolalia: An Empirical-Theological Study* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 13-32.

³⁴ See my 'The Practice of Tongues-Speech as a Case Study: A Practical-Theological Perspective' in Mark J. Cartledge (ed.), *Speaking in Tongues: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 206-234; and 'Demonology and Deliverance: A Practical-Theological Case Study' in William K. Kay and Robin Parry (eds.), *Exorcism & Deliverance: Multi-Disciplinary Studies* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), pp. 243-263.

³⁵ *Mediation of the Spirit*.

³⁶ The book from this study is tentatively entitled *Transforming the City: Megachurches and Social Engagement in London* (Leiden: Brill).

personally interested in exploring new processes and procedures, while resting on my knowledge of tried and tested ones. Why am I so flexible? I am not flexible in the sense that I believe a due process of investigation should be designed for the outset. But, in essence, it is because the process of the investigation simply has to make sense in its own terms and has currency within the academy. Fundamentally, it is heuristic not absolute, although it should fit with the Renewal standpoint and not be antithetical to it. The process should also take you where you need to go in terms of the nature of the investigation using the resources that are available.

Methods

So what about the specific methods or tools that we use? We all use certain tools, but perhaps we do not fully understand them as well as we should. They do have a relationship with the standpoint and they can be used inappropriately. But, depending on the discipline and the overall research design, there is a variety that can be used and combined together. This is because the hermeneutical nature of theology means that we can never discard the need to interpret the sources or data that we have before us, whether those sources are Scripture and historical material, dogmatic statements, contemporary narratives or corporate ecclesial practices observed and recorded.³⁷ There are choices to be made, once again depending on the aim and design of the research, but the tools should be appropriate to the task. In other words they should be 'fit for purpose'. You would not use a saw to hammer in a nail or a razor blade to tighten a screw!

The standpoint also influences the types of tools that would be deemed most appropriate to the detailed work of research. So, one of the big debates in the reading of New Testament texts by Pentecostal and Charismatic theologians has been whether historical-critical methods should be elevated to a higher position in the hierarchy of methods compared to a 'final form' reading of the text using narrative and literary methods. At one level, these methods are not mutually exclusive, but from a particular standpoint, one could be said to be enshrined within a modernist reading of the text and the other a more postmodern reading.³⁸ Certainly, the emphasis on narrative resonates more strongly with Pentecostal spirituality and intuitions, compared to an historical and analytic appropriation of sources. Nevertheless, it may not be an 'either/or' scenario but a 'both/and' one, where one is given priority over the other but neither is discounted completely because the New Testament theologian also needs to write in a way that the academic guild regards as responsible academic practice.³⁹ Therefore the important point here is to say that while methods can

³⁷ For a discussion of hermeneutical theory in practical theology, see Sally A. Brown, 'Hermeneutical Theory', in Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (eds.), 2012, pp. 112-122.

³⁸ See John Christopher Thomas, 'Max Turner's *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996): An Appreciation and Critique', *JPT* 12 (1998), pp. 3-22; and Max Turner, 'Readings and Paradigms: A Response to John Christopher Thomas', *JPT* 6 (12) (1998), pp. 23-38.

³⁹ John Christopher Thomas, 'Pentecostal Theology in the Twenty-First Century', *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 20.1 (1998), pp. 3-19 (pp. 14-16), where he places attention to the original context (historical critical enquiry) in third place of the procedure, behind the attention to the content, structure and theological emphases of the text and the canonical context, and in front of the context of the church (i.e. reception history) and the Pentecostal context.

be used heuristically they cannot be used inappropriately because there are academic practices that regulate their usage and one's work would not get published if the conventions were obviously flouted.

Practical Theology in Renewal Methodology

In practical theology as a discipline, there is a considerable diversity of approaches. It appears as though any approach is valid and can be celebrated as adding to the diversity of the discipline. This may not exactly be the case because there are strong voices to be heard from certain quarters. From my experience of the international societies, I would say that the strongest voices are feminist and empiricist ones and they can sometimes be in conflict, but not necessarily so. Amid these voices, I have attempted to place a Renewal perspective and to some extent I have had some success in adding a voice to the conversation.⁴⁰

Building on the work of Renewal theologians (mainly Pentecostal), I located the standpoint in the spirituality of the movement and I took seriously the integration of spirituality and practical theology.⁴¹ From a Renewal perspective, spirituality permeates the whole of life and means that each and every event in one's life can be an opportunity to encounter the person and work of the Spirit in a dramatic or ordinary manner. And this means that even in the academic research process there can be moments of insight that are prompted by the person of the Spirit as we carry out our regular tasks. Prayer is at the centre of the work of academic life because it is through prayer that we connect to the person of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit draws us to Christ, who in turn draws us to the Father, so the moment we give attention to the work of the Spirit, we are immediately placed within a broader Trinitarian framework of thought. This spirituality is framed by the doctrine of Trinity and this means that the theological grammar that we used is shaped by a Trinitarian structure. This Trinitarian way of thinking inevitably prompts us towards its locus in salvation, namely the person and work of Christ, who has called a body together to be his people in the world, namely the church, instituted by him and constituted by the Spirit. So, Renewal theology is church theology, not simply academic theology and it is directed towards the mission of the church in the world for the sake of the kingdom of God and the glory of the one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This standpoint or way of being and thinking is part of who we are as people and as Christians. It is holistic and cannot be separated from all spheres of life. It cannot be compartmentalized and put in a corner, bracketed out here and placed there. It is the ground on which we stand, the terrain around which we move, the air that we breathe, and it provides the lenses through which we view the task of practical theology. This does not mean that it cannot be challenged. It does not mean that it cannot be corrected, by Scripture, by the Spirit himself, and by the community of the church or indeed the community of the academy, especially others who share the standpoint critically. But what this standpoint provides is a set of motivations to research certain kinds of things for the mission of the church and the wellbeing of society. Why did I research prophecy and then

⁴⁰ See my 'Pentecostalism' in Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 587-595.

⁴¹ *Practical Theology*, pp. 17-20.

glossolalia among Pentecostals and Charismatics in my early years as a researcher? Because I was puzzled by their usage in the communities that I belonged to and I was introduced to academic thinking that raised a whole host of questions about these phenomena. Similarly, today, why I am interested in the subject of anti-human trafficking? Partly because I have been introduced to Christian organizations that approach the subject from a Renewal standpoint (e.g. Exodus Cry), and I am intrigued to understand how these organizations go about their work and how the person and work of the Holy Spirit influences how they do what they do. So, I am motivated in my research because of my standpoint.

The standpoint also influences the procedure and methods of research. In my doctoral research I used the empirical-theological cycle of Hans van der Ven as my procedure for research. It contains five phases and I used all of them in the process of investigation. However, he had placed this process within a particular hermeneutical framework shaped by Jürgen Habermas called communicative action theory. I did not find this materialist theory conducive to my own standpoint, and so I substituted it for a Renewalist hermeneutic based on the Paraclete sayings in John's Gospel.⁴² I did this deliberately because I wanted to shape my framework of thought in terms of Scripture and the work of the Spirit. So, one of the things that a Renewal standpoint will do is to take an existing procedure of investigation, that has been well established in the discipline of practical theology and it will give it a Renewalist overhaul or a particular twist. The process was very similar to van der Ven's, but the sensibilities were different because I was not forced to process my findings via a Habemasian framework of thought that I felt did not resonate with my standpoint intuitions.

Standpoint also influences how one uses tools or even develops tools. Early in my work I was forced to develop questionnaire measures that tested beliefs and attitudes concerning glossolalia because they did not previously exist.⁴³ I could not simply take a measure off the shelf, but had to work hard conceptually and operationally to develop these questions that would test my theologically-informed understanding. But it was an understanding that was informed by my experience of research and my own personal experience of practice. I was alert to and sensitive to certain features of glossolalia because of my experience. Of course, I followed due process in the development of the instruments and I had to explain and justify the inclusion of certain items to my supervisors,⁴⁴ but the standpoint enabled me to understand and indeed to 'see' certain things that the literature had, up to that point, missed or ignored.

Similarly, when I conducted a congregational study and I wished to investigate the ordinary theology of the congregational members, I had to decide on the most fitting way to approach the subject. After some careful thought as well as knowledge of the Renewal theological literature, I realized that Pentecostal Christians best articulate their theology via story or testimony. Whenever I visited this congregation I heard narratives of blessing or of healing or of struggle and winning through. So, I decided to listen to their stories by

⁴² *Charismatic Glossolalia*, pp. 7-24.

⁴³ *Charismatic Glossolalia*, 141-45; *Practical Theology*, pp. 239-44.

⁴⁴ See A.N. Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*, (London: Pinter Publishers, 2nd ed., 1992).

means of testimonies.⁴⁵ I also realized that these stories can be different and in a community there can be tensions between the different stories. Some narratives are dominant and others are marginal, but how might one detect that easily? So, I decided to use focus groups and began each one with a time of testimony followed by a discussion based on questions. The different testimonies allowed different beliefs to be expressed in narrative form and the conversation that followed invited the congregants to negotiate the meaning of these narratives. Thus the method of testimony, embedded in focus group research was informed by the standpoint of Renewal spirituality and fitted appropriately as well as being extremely useful. It was very 'practical'!

Given the standpoint commitment to the wider church and the kingdom of God, there will always be an interest in the outcome of research and how it can be used for the benefit of the mission of the church not just for academic interest.⁴⁶ This does not mean that the standpoint does not allow criticism, although it could be construed that way. If that is the case then it is not truly academic because findings should be open to evaluation, likewise the use of the findings. But how the church and the academy use the findings of research for the benefit of wider society is also an important aspect of research. For example, in a recent project that we (Andrew Davies and I) designed to look at megachurches in London and their social engagement, as part of the impact of the academic research, we have planned to write an accompanying handbook for church leaders to enable them to learn lessons from these churches and implement these lessons in their own context.⁴⁷ The benefit of the research not only provides resources for church leaders and church communities, but it also impacts the wider communities in which these churches and leaders are situated. In this way, the benefits of research can be seen in relation to all three publics of church, academy and society.

Finally, I would translate the question 'can theology be practical?' into the question: 'so, what?' What difference does this research make in the world today? What difference does this research make to the ministry? What difference does this research make to the mission of church? As noted previously in Part I, many of my Doctor of Ministry students wish to jump to a place of intervention before they have taken the time and energy to engage in the process of investigation. In this regard, there is impatience with the hard work of research and a presumption that because they are pastors working in a particular context that they know not only what the problem is but also the solution. Time and again I have to remind them that if they are engaged in practice-based research it is still the case that they need to define the boundaries of theory, conduct a process of investigation leading to insights that can be communicated before they can design and implement a strategy of intervention. Otherwise they are not really using research to inform their practice.

⁴⁵ See *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 21-26.

⁴⁶ See *Testimony in the Spirit*, pp. 179-83.

⁴⁷ This project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK, see: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/research/projects/megachurches/people.aspx> (accessed June 17, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me summarize my basic thesis. In this presentation, I have argued that Renewal as a concept when used in connection with the concept of methodology means a 'standpoint' in relation to a particular tradition. This standpoint is a participatory predisposition of alignment with the scholarship emerging from the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements of the twentieth century. This standpoint is neither uncritical nor lacking in self-reflection but constitutes a broad tradition of enquiry. It is situated epistemologically as part of a community of scholars committed to the theologizing of the experience of the Spirit in relation to the authority of Scripture and the life of the church today. Given this basic orientation and commitment, Renewal theologians will display a variety of procedures in their disciplinary methodologies, provided that none of them fundamentally conflict with the standpoint of Renewal. Finally, as part of this work, specific methods or tools will be adopted and used as appropriate to the subject of enquiry and the nature of the source material. Once again, I would expect a fair degree of diversity as appropriate to the contemporary state of scholarship in the different theological sub-disciplines, and this includes practical theology. In practical theology, research serves the ministry of the church in the world and intersects with all three publics of church, academy and society for the benefit of all three.

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