

Annual Conference for Theological Educators 2020  
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## doing theological reflection during-after uprisings – the beyond habit

*theological educators as reflective practitioners – inhabiting and teaching a habit and method towards better reflective communities*



This is a personal reflection from one whose work-writings-teachings have been and continue to be in a variety of ecclesial communities and contexts. For me, theological reflection is both habit and method for both the individual and the faith community. My current approach/method of 'doing theology' and ministry practices, locates my style as maverick-wayward-

mischievous-intersectional geared at de-centering dominant or majoritarian ideas. With this disclaimer: I frame my input around the following urgent existential question: how do we do God-talk (and related reflections) in the context of: *people who know the feeling of a boot on their necks; the toppling of statues associated with evils of imperialism and racism; and the energising solidarity around #BlackLivesMatter?*

Experience (critical to reflective practice) is not only what happens to us: it is I would suggest what we do and how we respond with what happened/is happening to us. What shape(s) will the new of theological reflection take that must be 'beyond' normal and is rooted amongst those the shit-stem (Rastafarian parlance for system) determines as ab-normal. I am working with that understanding of theological reflection as method and habit, that dares to give agency to reflective practices as a 'conspiring' (breathing) ministry with God's Spirit: a life of surprises, a life of adventure, a life of reversals, a life of new things, a life of new ways of doing things, a life of new ways of knowing God, a life of new ways of seeing others, a life of new ways of being with others and ourselves.

So here are some rhizomatic thoughts on pushing the boundaries of the reflective habit, practice, and method 'beyond' normal, normative and normativity....

**Breathing together:** “Please, I can’t breathe” were George Floyd’s desperate cries for help as he gasped for breath and clung to life due to the senseless brutality of policing. *Where is the system’s boot or knee (think inherited deposits and traditions) on the neck, throat and heartbeat of theological reflection and where is protest and movement to dare to ask the critical systemic questions?* The George Floyd story of desperation-despair-crucifixion at the hands of racist state brutality saw a degree of resurrection in what it tipped – a movement of allies (solidarity). *Where and how must our theological reflection change – acknowledge its white privilege so that a fresh and new conspiring (breathing together) may take place? What needs to be interrogated? What should be toppled - thrown out? What new alliances are*



*needed? How will any reflective habit-method-practice facilitate and empowering ‘breathing spaces’ towards inclusive and transformative communities and lives?*

**disrupting to address deficits:** consider and interrogate the context of our modules-teaching methods-reading lists-governance-reference points or who we defer to – whom we quote in our writings – how we locate the output of those we cannot place in our neat categories: what is it saying about us as reflective practitioners and what (how) we are facilitating in our teaching and forming (catechesis of the mind)? How do

we enact anti-racist teaching/reflective practices, which is at the heart of the matter – and in taking on all forms of exceptionalism? This is not about having a few black colleagues to do input and assume that all will be well. Antiracism is an active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes so that power is redistributed and shared equitably. It is also about confronting white supremacy within ourselves, diving below the surface to gain a greater understanding of how we became complicit in racism in the first place. This must be the kind of scrutiny and interrogation for theological reflection and the current state of our reflective practices: it must be about disrupting any shape that ‘normal’ will take (old or new): and a key to this disrupting is for us to collectively reach

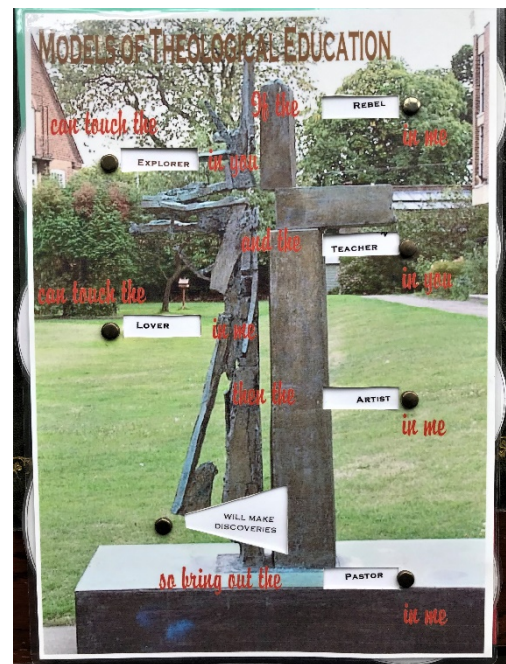


a common understanding of the deep ways supremacist notions and exceptionalism culture divide us and the ways constructs of whiteness set us up to dehumanize others. *So, what conversions are*

necessary for our reflective practices, habits, and methods and what new tools and methods can we deploy to interrupt cycles of violence and hate and harness the courage and imagination necessary to enact change? Incremental changes are not working...

**imagining alternatives:** theological reflection is not short of volumes of writings of all sorts. In my years of teaching in a theological college, I have seen and read numerous reflective pieces (theological reflections) many working un-deconstructed theological paradigms. I can list those on my fingers that deployed the gift of the imagination to push boundaries, interrogate so-called sacred deposits (inherited traditions); play with and explore new metaphors and paradigms as we struggle to improve the grammar of our faith and faithfulness. *Can it be that theological reflection is suffering from an illiteracy of the imagination, stifling our ability to discern alternatives?*

Consider the theological reflector **as bandit raiding stars at night/and hammering them into cracked vessels, to hold our creative and working alternatives;** **as magician rebel, making doors that are never there to open and windows where you can put to your eye for a glimpse of forever** – making the faith strange and mysterious again – rather than tame and domesticated – a baptized imagination...; **as seamstress - stitching the ordinary miracle of an agonized earth to make a garment for long and lonely journeys.** Stitching together the extraordinary of the familiar to clothe people - inventing metaphors and new language. “When old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart: and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.” (Rabindranath Tagore); **as an indecent protestor: knocking down walls/statues with a note of her flute and wrenching wide open/pod, seed, egg, stone, brick, heart, word to set truth free.** Releasing truth(s); offering an alternative way or imagining differently; sub-version(s) to the dominant version(s); offering of abundant life. How do we find new and meaningful language “for the re-education of desire” to engage society? to stir the senses, move the hearts, evoke the imagination and appeal to creativity. Need to **liberate the tongue** and the **imagination** (to break illiteracy of the imagination). Our minds/heads have been colonised.



**futuring – beyond past and present:** The Zapatista’s deployed the expression: “*preguntando caminamos*,”: translated as “walking, we ask questions” [we should not be so afraid to take action – complexity of issues is no excuse for not questioning and acting]. Foresight is difficult

for us. We are preoccupied with the here and now – locked into the ‘age of the tyranny of the now’ [Roman Krznaric, *The Good Ancestor*, 2020]. This is so pervasive, that we have effectively colonised the future as if no one is and will be there (*tempus nullius* – the future as nobody’s time). Is theological reflection – the habit, method, and tools we deploy guilty of such colonisation? How are we (theological educators) being good ancestors...? Nurturing resilience in reflective practice must mean remedying the systemic flaws that have rendered our future precariously colonised. This must begin and continue by reforming the systems by which we decide-interrogate-reflect on issues urgent to the flourishing of that beloved community we all dream of.

***unending – a beyond vision and challenge:*** consider working with a group (students or leadership in a faith community) reflecting on the current situation of uprising. Perhaps, the group agrees to use the following default questions (drawing on insights from some practical theologians): *what is going on? why is it going on? what ought to be going on? how will we respond?* Thinking of the ‘beyond’ challenge [drawing from post/decolonial insights] as signifying spatial distances - marking movement -promising a future – taking us into the unknowable – with no return to current status – an inbuilt habit to interrogate its own limitations – transforming possibilities for the present] how would we interrogate and reframe these questions (or any of our default questions we would deploy) given the urgency and solidarity of a growing movement and the challenges raised around historical narratives, received deposits from traditions and institutions, identities and belonging, racial injustice, white privilege, notions of supremacy and exceptionalism etc?

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**[Unedited and only for circulation at Educator’s network Online Conference]**

- 1<sup>st</sup> three images taken from facebook/twitter posts – so only for this private circulation
- The last image (models of theological Education) is a gift from one of my former students (Queens) with the wheels (look closer at side of image to see the wheels capturing a variety of ways I have contributed to her journey as a reflective practitioner