‘CAN YOU TALK THE WALK?’ A SUMMARY OF A CREATIVE APPROACH TO REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR FORMATION

Bruce Hulme[1]

Talking the walk is an innovative approach to Christian reflective practice (or theological reflection) that contemplates and cultivates holistic formation for God’s good life of *shalom*. It emerged over many years from several intersecting contexts in my life: doctoral action-research; teaching at Tabor Institute in theological reflection, supervised field education, formation, spirituality and spiritual direction; formation and practice as a spiritual director; and a long grappling with how to better connect experience and faith and live the implications in my own life and ministry. Three pillars ground talking the walk’s model: formation, *shalom,* and the Emmaus Labyrinth. And three movements guide its method: contemplative conversation, imaginative discernment, and courageous embodiment.

Talking the walk is for anyone curious about a reflective practice that emphasises presence and encounter, not just insight and activity; mystery more than mastery and confidence more than certainty; fruitfulness from relationship more than productivity for results; better questions that open up more than simplistic answers that nail shut; the journey with not just the destination towards; and circuitous depth more than linear progress. In many ways the neatness of the pillars and movements betray these very traits and the messiness of reflective practice. But as the industrial statistician George Box once quipped, “all models are wrong, but some are useful.” Their value lies in offering a way in, as Mueller says, like “a good multi-purpose screwdriver [that] improves upon what weak fingers and fragile fingernails cannot do.”[1]

This article offers a bird’s-eye view.[2] After outlining some key assertions and

[1] Bruce Hulme is Head of Spiritual Direction and Head of Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care at the Tabor Institute of Higher Education, Adelaide, South Australia. Email: bhulme@adelaide.tabor.edu.au; www.talkingthewalk.com.au.

Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry
ISSN 2325-2847 (print)* ISSN 2325-2855 (online)
© Copyright 2023 *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*
All Rights Reserved

emphases, I visit each of talking the walk's pillars and movements before briefly reflecting upon its use in theological education and beyond.

ASSERTIONS AND EMPHASES

Covenant Epistemology

First, the epistemological backbone. Talking the walk is permeated with Esther Meek's winsome covenant epistemology.[3] Meek critiques the common Western 'knowledge-as-information' approach. That which is to be known is merely passively 'out there', and we as the masters of knowing only truly know when we have exhausted and conquered all the data. Meek makes a compelling argument for why this default is so dehumanising. She offers covenant epistemology as a life-giving alternative, which includes some of the following features embedded within talking the walk.

Meek draws heavily from and extends Michael Polanyi's 'personal knowledge' epistemology through what he termed *subsidiary-focal integration*.[4] She paraphrases this as "the responsible human struggle to rely on clues to focus on a coherent pattern and submit to its reality."[5] The subsidiary clues are drawn from John Frame's triad of three interlocking domains for knowing: the existential, the situational, and the normative.[6] All knowing endeavours invite us to indwell any number of clues from these domains. Through conversational interplay between the clues, larger realities emerge as we "join the dots." These realities gift any number of new possibilities as we live their implications.

Knowing is not distant and impersonal but relational. It displays "tell-tale features that could only be present if *a person, or persons in relationship, is, or are, in the vicinity*."[7] One such sign is knowing's reciprocity; in the knowing act, we do not *achieve* insight through mastery as much as *receive* it through discovery. Reality is thus fundamentally gracious, and in coming to know, we find ourselves further questioned, challenged and expanded. Knowing is thus pledged and interpersoned—traits captured in the notion of 'covenant'.

Knowing is on the way. In subsidiary-focal integration, Polanyi reinstated the importance of anticipative, tacit and half-knowing, thus subverting the conventional focus upon 'having arrived' through conquering facts. In coming to know, we draw upon and move *from* an indeterminate number of tacit clues, groping anticipatively from one to another. But, led by a growing sense of being "on the cusp," we also move *towards* the known, drawn by an indeterminate number of tacit possibilities for further exploration. Knowing opens up rather than nails shut. Its timbre is formational, pilgrimed, longitudinal, and exploratory. Knowledge is discovery not just explanation, transformation not just information, deeply felt not just clearly articulable.

Finally, knowing is for *shalom* because "the goal of human exchange with the world is not exhaustive certainty but dynamic, mutually healing, communion."[8] Knowledge as information aims for results, performance, mastery, success, power and wealth. Knowing as interpersoned and loving transformation seeks wholeness, relationship, joy and peace. "Seeking the *shalom* of the world is what we have always been called to do . . . knowing should heal—both the knower and the known. It should bring *shalom*, rather than curse."[9] And in the reciprocity of knowing, the communion of *shalom* is experienced. As such, "[G]reat lovers make great knowers."[10]

Talking and Walking

Second, the guiding motifs. Talking and walking are powerful metaphors for reflection and formation along the Jesus Way. Conversation and pilgrimage. Pondering and plodding. Wondering and wandering. Their mutual enrichment embodies what Karl Barth called *theologia viatorum* or 'theology on the way.'[11] This is the theologising of travellers. Of wayfarers. Of sojourners. It inhabits theology as verb, not just inherits theology as noun. The walk of formation generates our talking, and in turn, the talk of reflection guides our walking.

Together, talking and walking form a simple premise: "As we learn to walk the talk, we must also learn to talk the walk." The idiom 'walking the talk' points to the magnetic attraction of wholehearted, authentic living. For Christians, integrity means living daily as God's beloved in thought, passion and action through the Spirit to participate in God's loving work. To practice what we preach is to walk in and towards the flourishing reflected in the biblical vision of *shalom*: God's fullness in Christ for the cosmos, communities and individuals, embodied in graces such as reconciliation, justice, beauty and wholeness.[12]

But, like following a labyrinth, walking the talk is decidedly nonlinear. It is not always clear what we ought to do, believe, or become. We wind our way through the marvel and mess of experiences—personal, communal, global—that raise new questions and redirect life and ministry. Like the two Emmaus Road disciples, we grope for meaning and wisdom when life's experiences arrest us. What has it all to do with God? And what is God doing with it all? Unfamiliar terrain makes it difficult to know which steps to take next, let alone have the courage to take them.

So, to walk the talk we must also develop a capacity for theological reflection that contemplates and cultivates the formation journey. To authentically participate in God's *shalom* at work within the twists and turns of life and ministry, we must develop a reflective practice that is attentive to a longitudinal, *shalom*-shaped pilgrimage of self, others, and world. This is what I mean by "talking the walk."

The Whole Person

Third, the anthropological lens. Reflective practice is a thoroughly holistic, human endeavour. *Persons* reflect theologically—persons are not robots. A whole-person emphasis affords some important implications.

The predominant conception of theological reflection remains the theory–practice dialogue where theology and ministry critique and shape one another.[13] This sells us short! Often it feels like an arm's-length, mechanistic algorithm that treats the reflector's unique, spiritual self in the process with automatic suspicion or, at best, prayerful support. But when we try to jettison self from the conversation, reflective practice lacks soul. Since *persons* are deeply involved, reflection is uniquely existential, spiritual and charactered. Spirituality and personhood must be more than separate addendums to the 'real business' of the theory–practice interface.[14] Our lives have something to say which, theologically, banks on the indwelling of the Spirit.[15] As such, to accredit and enhance personhood in the reflection process, theological reflection (and practical theology at large) needs to shift from a *dialogue*

between theory and practice towards a genuine *trialogue* between theory, practice and persons.[16]

Theological reflection with a whole-person emphasis also necessitates careful pedagogical design to cultivate deep, whole-person learning. Many models major on the intellect but minor on intentional engagement with the affects or the body. Reflective practice for holistic formation engages metaphor and muscle, not just cognition and concept. Visual, narrative, imaginative and embodied elements are just as crucial if learning is to stick.

Finally, persons are persons in relationship—with God, self, others and God's world. Healthy formation never occurs in isolation. So, reflective practice for holistic formation is both intrapersonal and interpersonal. It attends to communal and cosmic journeys of formation, not just the individual's journey.

Pillars and Movements

Fourth, the structure. Talking the walk employs James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead's helpful delineation between model and method.[17] Three interlocking pillars comprise the model to ground our reflective practice; they establish fundamentals that underpin the method:

		
Formation (dimensions)	***Shalom*** (direction)	**Emmaus Labyrinth** (design)

And three interlocking movements comprise the method to guide our reflective practice; they shape processes that work out the model:

		
Contemplative Conversation (listening for clues)	**Imaginative Discernment** (joining the dots)	**Courageous Embodiment** (living new realities)

THREE PILLARS TO GROUND OUR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Formation

The first pillar establishes talking the walk's three *dimensions* of holistic formation and their interrelationships.

Reflecting Frame's three domains, talking the walk centres *spirituality and personhood* (the existential), *ministry in context* (the situational) and *theology and wisdom* (the normative). Each provides possible entry and exit points for reflective practice. Each offers ways God speaks to us in a genuine trialogue. Each are flawed and 'on the way', being continually reshaped by the Potter.

These three are a useful rule of thumb rather than rigid and exhaustive. They find strong resonance with other threefold expressions from a wide variety of sources, such as: beauty–truth–goodness;[18] desires–beliefs–practices;[19] prayer–study–work;[20] *lex orandi–lex credendi–lex vivendi*;[21] *oratio–meditatio–tentati*;[22] orthopathy–orthodoxy–orthopraxy;[23] affective–cognitive–behavioural;[24] normative–cognitive–practical;[25] attitudes–understanding–practices;[26] character–creed–conduct;[27] being–knowing–doing;[28] personal–intellectual–pastoral;[29] will–mind–body;[30] heart–head–hands;[31] and psychology–theology–ministry.[32] Such resonating expressions—and many others besides[33]—illuminate, nuance and enrich talking the walk's key dimensions.

Spirituality and personhood centre on the lived, existential experience of God's immanence and transcendence that births the relationality of prayer—*lex orandi*, or *oratio*. As orthopathy, they connect with the heart and soul of our affects, deepest desires and animating life force. They are thoroughly bodied, storied and interwoven with our personality, character and identity. Spirituality and personhood concern our unique self in daily life—animated, formed and deepened by the Spirit.

Ministry in context is an unfolding orthopraxis amidst the realities of suffering and delight, complexity and change. Thoroughly situated, cultured and practical, ministry is hammered out on the concrete anvil of *tentatio*. It walks the questions as a pilgrim rather than observes them as a tourist. We must live our lives, so *lex vivendi* presses us: *how* shall we live, *here* and *now*? Ministry in context embodies *shalom* through our sojourn with others as participants in Jesus' ongoing work in the neighbourhood.

Theology and wisdom centre on the normative story of God as revealed in the Scriptures and understood in the experience and reflections of Christians, historical and contemporary. Their focus is understanding utilising careful, critical reasoning. As *lex credendi*, theology and wisdom make authoritative and orthodox claims, yet differing situations mean they are necessarily and continually contested, nuanced and deepened. They speak God's truth from beyond us into our situations to challenge, broaden and

thicken our existing (formed and malformed) theologies in the spirit of *theologia viatorum*.

Spirituality, ministry and theology are mutually interdependent *perspectives*, not separate *parts.* Thus, 'coinherence'—the "full and mutual sharing of one thing in the complete reality of the other"[34]—best describes the dynamics between them. Each dimension is only itself in dynamic, unfolding and conversational relationship with the other two. Technically, this renders the common term 'integration' somewhat weaker since this seeks to bring things together that can otherwise exist independently. As persons in formation, we do not come to theological reflection with a blank slate; spirituality, ministry and theology *already* exist in dynamic, reciprocal and forming (or malforming) relationships. If 'coinherence' lacks accessibility (most of my students glaze over if I use the term), then 'interdependence' is a reasonable alternative. Ultimately, the point is not the nomenclature of coinherence but teaching and learning reflective practice in ways that reflect its rich reality.

Shalom

The second pillar establishes talking the walk's *direction*.[35]

A formational emphasis implies a *telos*: 'Formation . . . towards what?' Naming this goal is critical because our visions of the good life—what Charles Taylor termed 'social imaginaries'[36]—shape what we love and believe and thus our interpretation of present experience. Hence, they require continual recalibration. As such, reflective practice brings eschatology to life (in every sense) because it becomes animated and anchored in the present as much as in the future.

'Christlikeness' is the conventional goal of Christian formation, but is it adequate for doing reflective practice? Imitation language can promote mimicking ('more like Jesus, less like me') rather than Christ's life manifesting through our unique selfhood and contexts as we become fully alive and deeply human.[37] Moreover, it can become generalised or myopic. It needs exegeting and concretising to realign our social imaginaries with God's salvific work in communities and the cosmos, not just our individual selves.

The biblical motif of *shalom* as God's good life does this. *Shalom* outworks formation towards self in Christ in its richest sense: a social imaginary of holistic flourishing where everything within and between us, God and all creation, is put to rights through Christ. It offers a rich, broad and malleable lens for reflective practice commensurate with creation's eschatological vocation. As Reuschling argues,

Shalom . . . as the wholeness that God intends for all that is created in the good image of the trinitarian God . . . reflects a consonance between who we are, what we are becoming, what we love, and how we live. *Shalom* enables us to interpret and reflect on the episodes of

our lives, and it informs and directs our actions to establish 'an approved pattern of our lives.'[38]

Four features are worth noting.

Shalom is multifaceted. It is evident wherever fractured relationships between individuals, communities, creation, and God are reconciled through divine forgiveness. This relational, covenantal emphasis energises *shalom* as a disruptive passion for justice and righteousness, especially for the poor, marginalised and voiceless. *Shalom* cultivates beauty and creativity as a foretaste of the new creation so that all can share in the neighbourhood.[39] And *shalom* manifests as paschal wholeness, the paradoxical daily participation in Christ's death and resurrection as intrinsic to a flourishing self, others, and world.

Shalom is "glocal"—both local and global; it interweaves at cosmic, communal and individual levels.[40] Our smallest daily, incremental acts of reconciliation, justice, beauty and wholeness share in God's pleasure "through [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."[41]

Shalom embodies the gospel of the kingdom—its scent, its culture, its lived expression. It is the good news of Christ's reign with skin on. *Shalom* performs what God's flourishing looks like: relationships reconciled through divine largesse; justice and restoration for the poor and marginalised; creativity that cultivates blessing for all; and transformation through sharing in the paschal mystery.

And *shalom* engenders hope in and towards God's good life of the ultimate fulfilment of cosmic, communal and individual journeys. God *is* at work, we *are* headed somewhere, and *shalom* is what it looks like. Reflective practice is hopeful because it helps us discern where *shalom* is coming to fruition or being resisted and participates in cosmic, communal and individual formation towards what has already begun in the resurrected Prince of *Shalom*. Such a *telos* for reflective practice is not simply a theology Christians salute on Sunday but a reason to get out of bed on Monday—a new 'cultural' vision of the good life and better future that reflects God's loving purposes for a people and a world.[42]

Emmaus Labyrinth

The third pillar establishes talking the walk's *design*.

Thoughtful design is critical if an approach to theological reflection is to faithfully employ its underlying epistemology and enhance agency in the knowing process. It needs to engage the whole person pedagogically and form them holistically for God's good life.

And it requires utility that allows for both simplicity and depth, rigor and creativity, technique and virtue, individual and communal reflection. These considerations shape talking the walk's architecture, which emerges from a creative juxtaposition of two resources replete with the guiding motifs of walking and talking.

The first is the Road via Emmaus story with its three movements. In Luke 24:13–27, two grief-stricken disciples contemplatively walk and talk with a cloaked companion who gently listens them into speech and reframes their experience within a larger story. In the imaginative act of breaking bread at Emmaus in 24:28–32, Jesus makes himself known, which sparks discernment through recognising the affective, tacit sensation of burning hearts. Returning to Jerusalem in 24:33–49, the disciples' excitement turns to fear when they see Jesus in plain view, but he gives them the courage to embody their new reality, as is then worked out in Acts. I prefer 'Road via Emmaus' over the conventional 'Road to Emmaus' and extend the passage to verse 49 to highlight Luke's emphasis upon Jerusalem and the struggle to live newly discerned realities in the nonlinear return journey.[43] This lessens the emphasis upon discernment as the end goal and sets it within the larger formational concerns of how such discernment becomes embodied so that the gospel of the kingdom can flourish.[44]

The second is the labyrinth, a ritual for embodied reflection and an ancient archetype for life's winding journey. It also has three movements along its singular path. The inward trek helps us release what we carry ('purgation'). The centre gifts rest and positions us for the discernment of new truths ('illumination'). The outward trek returns us to embody these gifts in daily life ('union').[45] The labyrinth's nonlinear and circuitous route shapes a reflective practice that is attuned to mystery, patience and surprise amidst the twists and turns of coming to know. I am perplexed as to why such a rich resource is so underutilised in theological reflection models.

Combining these two rich resources generates the Emmaus Labyrinth. Its three movements mirror the knowing process in covenant epistemology to "rely on clues [contemplative conversation] to focus on a coherent pattern [imaginative discernment] and submit to its reality [courageous embodiment]."[46] The design is both ascetic and aesthetic, with pedagogical potential to engage the whole person—imagination, affects and the body, as well as the mind. It facilitates reflection and formation that is both communal and individual, named and beyond words, lived out and hidden within. There is depth enough for students and experienced ministry practitioners, yet they can remember and practice 'conversation, discernment, embodiment' easily enough. The Emmaus Labyrinth neither mandates sequential steps nor guarantees results. Rather, it invites awareness and curiosity along the path of encounter and coming to know to share in God's good life of *shalom*.

THREE MOVEMENTS TO GUIDE OUR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Contemplative Conversation

So, how do we talk the walk?

In the first movement, contemplative conversation, we *rely on (or indwell) clues*. Contemplative conversation is both interpersonal and intrapersonal. Its contemplative stance stems from the God who first draws near and listens us into speech. In turn, we bank on the possibility of noticing God's person and presence in all things if only we have ears to hear. Our talk is a labyrinthine release that twists and turns, like good conversations often do.

'These things' sparked the Emmaus Road disciples' conversation.[47] We start by noticing an experience in our walk that invites reflection. Typically, it apprehends, arrests or disturbs; niggles, resides or remains; swells, surges within or pressures. 'These things' for us might be an issue, event or circumstance; personal, communal or global; spiritual, ministerial or theological; or in none of these neat categories! The important thing is to start from where we are and blow on the coals of our care,[48] narrating the experience clearly and concisely with a focus on facts and the feelings evoked, not interpretation. Then we rely on or indwell emerging clues through a contemplative trialogue that listens in three directions.

We listen in to spirituality and personhood. In the chosen experience, through what clues from our life might God be speaking? We might notice any felt responses or shifts in our body. We might listen to our spiritual vitality, movements in prayer and lived journey of abiding as God's beloved. We might pay attention to our affections, what moves us and the emotions we feel. And we might befriend our unique personality revealed in our story, character, thinking and biases. In any clues that emerge, we ponder how *shalom* is evident and/or inhibited within us in the experience.

We listen out to ministry in context. In the chosen experience, through what clues in others and the surrounding context might God be speaking? We might notice clues in the physical environment, both constructed and natural. We might employ cultural intelligence and social analysis to consider the possible influence of societal dynamics. We might stand empathetically in the shoes of any persons involved, experiencing their journey and their possible perspectives. And we might honestly evaluate any ministry interactions and our participation in God's work. In any clues that emerge, we ponder how *shalom* is evident and/or inhibited around us in this experience.

We listen up to theology and wisdom. In the chosen experience, through what clues in

words of guidance and wisdom might God be authoritatively speaking? We might attend to relevant verses, passages, books, stories, characters or themes from the Scriptures. We might contemplate communal wisdom from the Christian tradition past and present, other traditions, or broader society. We might engage in robust thinking that is open to both critical examination and the mystery and adventure of ideas. And we might contemplate common sense from accumulated, gathered experience. In any clues that emerge, we ponder how *shalom* is evident and/or inhibited in these wisdom sources from beyond us in this experience.

The order of domains here is not important, only that all voices are heard in genuine trialogue since God speaks through any and all. Do any clues catch our attention from listening in, out and up? Do any prompt a tacit 'burning heart' or aliveness that beckons further attention? We stay with them and let them speak as they twist and turn together. What do they say? Does a bigger picture begin to emerge?

Imaginative Discernment

In the second movement, imaginative discernment, we *join the dots*.

At the Emmaus meal table, the simple, imaginative act of Jesus breaking bread joins the dots for the disciples. It triggers the recognition of a larger reality, makes sense of their burning hearts on the road ('I knew it!'), and prompts a bold naming of discerned truths. Imaginative discernment is gifted rather than forced, a sort of unexpected reception that comes when popping out at the centre of a labyrinth. It is less about *rules* that guarantee results to read God's mind and more about an *etiquette*, with a posture of receptivity that places ourselves on discernment's path, that invites the Spirit to disclose reality.

While discernment can encapsulate the entire reflective process, it also specifies the actual experience of coming to know. Like suddenly seeing the bigger picture of a puzzle, our attention shifts from the specific clues to the larger and weightier focal pattern their integration provides. This might elicit an epiphanic 'Aha!', 'I see it!', or equally, 'Oh no!' It might be a more evolutionary dawning or the gentle and slow arrival of "a small, shy truth."[49] Frequently it is accompanied by a bodily felt, integrative shift. Whatever the experience and however we describe it, this experience of joining the dots to perceive something larger, deeper and richer is central to knowing. We need to befriend it.

The imagination can catalyse the experience of discernment. In contemplative conversation, did an image arise which reflects and probes the deeper truths of our experience? Can we say, "It is like . . ."? Examples might include a picture, figure, icon, metaphor, analogy, saying, sign, symbol, gesture, artefact, illustration, parallel or story.

Where is *shalom* present or absent in our imagery? What does our exploration of imagery suggest? Or, can we imagine what God's good life might look like in relation to our experience? Can we say, "It could be like . . ."? How might *shalom* be cultivated, and its absence resisted, in the experience we are exploring? What part might we and others have to play?

This leads us to name our discerned truths, as best we can. We do this with a fallible confidence, knowing we could be wrong but believing we are right. We consider the conversations so far as a whole, particularly in relation to any imagery and visions of the good life. What 'grabbed' us or had our heart burning? What are the kernels of reality and truth? Where is *shalom* present and absent? Where might God be present, desiring, speaking, acting? What are the new questions and places of mystery and ambiguity, disquiet or discomfort?

In naming our discerned truths, we are as concise and straightforward as possible. At the same time, things may feel locked inside or on the tip of our tongue since discernment is always "on the way." So, we let any frustration give way to wonder that something is brewing within as deep calls to deep. It is all part of coming to know. This mystery is to be marvelled at rather than mastered.

Courageous Embodiment

In the third movement, courageous embodiment, we *live new realities*.

Courageous embodiment recognises that "knowledge is only a rumour until it lives in the muscle."[50] Having talked the walk, how will we now submit to reality and walk the talk? We must cultivate what we contemplate, for our living reveals our knowing. Talking the walk emphasises the deep formational work of the Spirit with which we cooperate, such that Jesus' life seeps into our flesh and bones to manifest *shalom* in the world around us. Embodiment, then, is the most appropriate term for talking the walk's praxis. It probes how we might wholeheartedly incarnate any discerned spiritual, ministerial or theological truths through both outward doing and inward deepening.

The two disciples rush back to Jerusalem to share their revelation with the other disciples, who excitedly share a similar experience. But, with Jesus' sudden appearance and offer of *shalom*, they get the wobbles, vacillating between terror, doubt, joy and disbelief. Living discerned truths is decidedly labyrinthine, and they need the encouragement of his presence, plans and power to truly embody their new reality.

And so we ask: What are God's invitations to concrete embodiment back in our 'Jerusalem'? How will our discernment work its way into our beliefs, desires and actions? What practical steps might we take to cultivate any visions of *shalom* in ourselves, others

and the world? What planning, people and resources might this involve? What rhythms or practices for holistic formation might cultivate depth and strengthen our 'muscle memory' for *shalom*? We think small, incremental and achievable steps.

What obstacles to embodying any discerned truths can we already notice or anticipate? These might include fear and failure, doubt and scarcity, grief and isolation, inertia and stubbornness. What courage from God do we need to step forward? How and from whom might we receive that encouragement?

In the embodiment of discerned truths, new experiences will arise that beckon further reflection. These often return us again to contemplative conversation. This is not an endless cycle of introspection but a way of being in the world that lives the call to live more attentively, fully and fruitfully into our own lives. This is walking and talking along the Jesus Way, sharing in God's *shalom* in the world.

TALKING THE WALK IN PRACTICE

So, how has talking the walk found its legs so far?[51]

Its chief expression in Tabor's theological reflection unit is the critical experience report process. Twice over the semester, this process guides students through the interlocking movements as they reflect by themselves and in supervised peer groups upon their chosen experiences. I always lead the learning by writing my own report on a fresh experience and reflecting with other staff members in a live, supervised 'real-play' demonstration. My being vulnerable and modelling the process gives students freedom and confidence in their own reflective practice in supervised peer groups. I am encouraged by frequent reports of the transformative, sometimes life-changing encounters the critical experience report process often curates.

My mantra for preparation and teaching is simple: Does this make affective connections? cognitive sense? a practical difference? This leads me to creatively explore aesthetic and kinaesthetic pedagogies so that theological reflection is more than just an exercise in intellectual gymnastics. Two examples are worth noting.

In extending the bounds of the Emmaus Road story, I noticed a symmetry: vv. 13–27 and vv. 33–49 are essentially the same length. With some help from Tabor's marketing department, I produced a visual juxtaposition of Luke 24:13–49 and the labyrinth as a teaching tool (see figure 1).

Figure 1. The Road via Emmaus Labyrinth

Students receive their own copy on a 30x30cm card, providing a visual stimulus and invitation to a nonlinear engagement with the text. Likewise, talking the walk's speech bubble / labyrinth logo and the six icons for the pillars and movements help students make quick connections and reinforce their learning in a creative manner.

The Emmaus Labyrinth also offers a significant opportunity to engage in talking the walk with the whole self. Participation is always by invitation, and sensitivity to students' varying capacities for walking is critical. I roll out a five-circuit Chartres labyrinth in the central courtyard, with one-metre pathways, using masking tape on a roller:

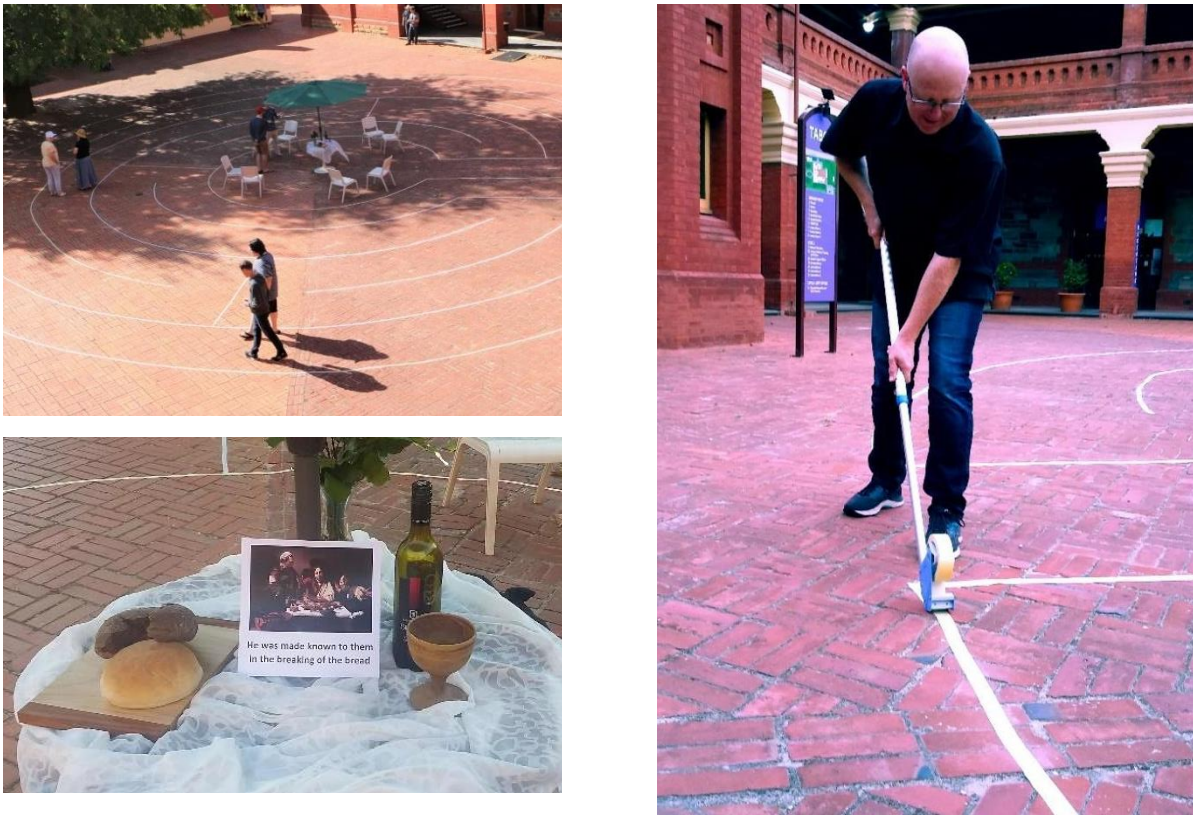

Figure 2. Constructing and using an Emmaus Labyrinth in Tabor Institute's central courtyard

Students walk and talk the labyrinth in pairs, and the exercise is always by invitation, never compulsion. Although anyone can walk a labyrinth, labyrinths are not necessarily for everyone. Though not all find it memorable, some talk of the profound interweaving of one another's stories as they walk and talk the twists and turns together. Most importantly, students get a bodied sense of talking the walk's movements. I am not aware of a labyrinth being used in such a communal way elsewhere.

Talking the walk is finding expression beyond the classroom. I have run two-day immersive experiences for ministry practitioners wanting to develop their reflective practice, including pastors, spiritual directors, mentors, supervisors, chaplains and spiritual carers, counsellors, schoolteachers, theological educators, youth workers, cross-cultural workers and missional entrepreneurs. Participants choose and narrate an experience prior to walking the labyrinth and work through the pillars and movements in a live-in contemplative environment through an interweaving of teaching, personal reflection and walking and talking with a partner. Initial feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Figure 3. A night-time labyrinth at an immersive Talking the Walk retreat

Talking the walk has also connected with faith communities. One of my students used it with around one hundred people in a new congregation re-formed out of two existing churches to facilitate discernment about future directions as a local Christian presence. I am heartened by this capacity for transferability.

CONCLUSION

Talking the walk is a work in progress, but the early fruits are encouraging. Its theological and pedagogical innovation might pique the interest of professors. It might be used in a wide variety of ministry settings to better equip practitioners. And ultimately, its simple rhythm of conversation, discernment and embodiment might enrich the talking and walking of ordinary pilgrims. Is that not all of us?

---

1 George E. P. Box and Norman R. Draper, Empirical Model–Building and Response Surfaces (New York; London: Wiley Blackwell, 1986), 424; Cited in Paver, John. Theological Reflection and Education for Ministry: The Search for Integration in Theology (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 46.

[2] See the Talking the Walk website at www.talkingthewalk.com.au. See also Bruce Hulme, "Talking the Walk: Six Contours of an Approach to Theological Reflection for Formation" (PhD diss., Flinders University, 2021), https://theses.flinders.edu.au/view/25e542b7-beff-4d44-8219-c96bebc022fc/1.

[3] In particular, see Esther Lightcap Meek, *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2003); Esther Lightcap Meek, *Loving to Know: Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011); Esther Lightcap Meek, *A Little Manual for Knowing* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014); Esther Lightcap Meek, *Contact with Reality: Michael Polanyi's Realism and Why It Matters* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017).

[4] See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, corrected ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962), vii.

[5] Meek, *Longing to Know*, 13.

[6] John M. Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions: A Guide to Triperspectivalism and Its Significance* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017).

[7] Meek, *Loving to Know*, 45.

[8] Meek, *Loving to Know*, 400.

[9] Meek, *Loving to Know*, 473.

[10] Meek, *Loving to Know*, 40.

[11] Barth saw it as a commitment to "an unceasing movement from what is known to what is not yet known, to an active pilgrimage," as cited in Matthew Benfield, "Theologia Viatorum—Imperfect Theology," *Theologia Viatorum—Learning the Way*, n.d., https://www.theologiaviatorum.com/.

[12] For example, see Ephesians 2:14–16; Isaiah 32:17; Philippians 4:8; John 12:24–25.

[13] Or thought and action, belief and behaviour, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, text and context. For example, theological reflection is the "dialogical relationship between the practice of ministry and the resources of theological understanding." (Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton, and Francis Ward. Theological Reflection: Methods. Second edition (Kindle version) (London: SCM, 2019), loc. 171 of 5409. "In practical theology, practice and theory are explored in their mutual relationship to one another"(Jeanne Hoeft, "Assessment of Formation and Assessment as Formative," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 23, no. 2 (2020): 75; "Theological reflection is important because everyone should and can think theologically about practice" (Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), chap. 6; see also Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. Stephen Pattison and James Woodward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 138, https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12544.

[14] As Wolfteich contends, "[A]ny theology is impoverished when separated from the lived experience of faith and from critical study of that experience. Practical theology, if it is to be theology, must attend to spirituality and must develop methods appropriate to that subject matter." Claire E. Wolfteich, "Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 122.

[15] Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16.

[16] By this I am not referring to an *order* for doing theology but rather am saying that the key interface in practical theology is *trialogical*, not *dialogical*. Any dimension of this trialogue is a valid starting point. I also use 'persons' rather than 'person' deliberately. Talking the walk is for individuals who must ultimately take responsibility for their own *habitus* of theological reflection. However, the plural (1) reflects the way in which individuals never, strictly, reflect in isolation since knowing is not only personed but rather interpersoned; (2) allows for faith communities to reflect collectively; (3) explicitly counters the accusation that theological reflection for formation, with an emphasis upon/inclusion of spirituality and personhood, collapses into individualistic and overly subjective introspection; and (4) aligns with an emphasis upon *listening with* in theological reflection.

[17] James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, rev. and updated (Oxford: Sheed & Ward, 1999), chap. 1.

[18] Howard Gardner, *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed: Educating for the Virtues in the Age of Truthiness and Twitter* (New York: Basic, 2012); James Bryan Smith, *The Magnificent Story: Uncovering a Gospel of Beauty, Goodness & Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017); Steve Turley, *Awakening Wonder: A Classical Guide to Truth, Goodness & Beauty* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic, 2015).

[19] As employed in Augustine's baptismal catechesis. L. Gregory Jones, "Beliefs, Desires, Practices, and the Ends of Theological Education," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 189.

[20] Common in the Benedictine Rule. Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict*, 2nd ed. (Norwich, UK: Canterbury, 1999), 70, 76.

[21] The rule of prayer, the rule of belief and the rule of life, common in Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and mainline Protestant liturgies. See E. Byron Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity: Practicing Ourselves* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 28.

[22] What Luther considered as the makings of a good theologian: prayer, meditation on the Word, and testing in the realities of life. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works Vol. 34, Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Lewis William Spitz, trans. Robert R. Heitner (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 283–88.

[23] Formation in Methodist, Pentecostal and missional church traditions. See Henry Knight, "Consider Wesley," Catalyst Online: Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives for United Methodist Seminarians, 2009, http://www.catalystresources.org/issues/294knight.html; Steven Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield, 1994), 41; Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 157.

[24] Common learning domains in education. See Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2014), 76.

[25] Three aspect of pastoral formation and knowledge in Charles R. Foster et al., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and the Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 8–10.

[26] Robert J. Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 226.

[27] L. J. Ball, *Transforming Theology: Student Experience and Transformative Learning in Undergraduate Theological Education* (Preston, Victoria, Australia: Mosaic, 2012), 126.

[28] Karen Shakespeare, "Knowing, Being and Doing: The Spiritual Life Development of Salvation Army Officers" (PhD diss., Anglia Ruskin University, 2011), http://core.kmi.open.ac.uk/download/pdf/363620.pdf.

[29] Andrew D Mayes, *Spirituality in Ministerial Formation: The Dynamic of Prayer in Learning* (Cardiff, UK: University of Wales, 2009), 175.

[30] Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 85–90.

[31] Dennis P. Hollinger, *Head, Heart, and Hands: Bringing Together Christian Thought, Passion, and Action* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005); Edward Foley, *Theological Reflection across Religious Traditions: The Turn to Reflective Believing* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), chap. 4; John Hugh McNally, "Journaling about Head, Heart, and Hands: A Vital Tool for Cultivating Formation," *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 42 (May 7, 2022): 128–39.

[32] Wil Hernandez, *Henri Nouwen: A Spirituality of Imperfection* (New York: Paulist, 2006), 2.

[33] For example, passion–thought–action or identity–understanding–skills. Missiologists like Stuart Murray and John Drane explore the dynamics between belonging, believing, and behaving. Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Wayneboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), 9–66; John Drane, *After McDonaldization: Mission, Ministry, and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), 82–92. There is resonance with Peterson's three angles of pastoral attentiveness to God in spiritual direction, Scripture, and prayer. Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). Hollinger notes further resonances within education (Pestalozzi, Gardner), social psychology (Myers, Allport) and philosophy (Thomas Aquinas, Polanyi). Hollinger, *Head, Heart, and Hands*, chap. 9. Also suggestive is Aristotle's three modes of rhetorical persuasion: pathos, ethos, and logos. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, Ingram Bywater, and Friedrich Solmsen (New York: Modern Library, 1954).

[34] Hernandez, *Henri Nouwen*, 2.

[35] See Bruce Hulme, "A Vision for the Good Life: *Shalom* as a *Telos* for Christian Formation in Teaching Theological Reflection," in *Wondering about God Together: Research-Led Learning & Teaching*, ed. L. Ball and P. G. Bolt (Sydney: SCD, 2018).

[36] This is explained in James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 65–71.

[37] David G. Benner, *Soulful Spirituality: Becoming Fully Alive and Deeply Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011).

[38] In Jeannine K. Brown, Carla M. Dahl, and Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, *Becoming Whole and Holy: An Integrative Conversation about Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 127–28.

[39] Walter Brueggemann, *Shalom, Order, Chaos and Sin, The Work of the People* (Cypress, TX), https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/shalom-order-chaos-and-sin.
[40] Walter Brueggemann, *Living toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Church, 1982), 16–21.
[41] Col. 1:19–20.
[42] Sine, Tom. The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 95.
[43] Jerusalem is the *centripetal centre* of Jesus' ministry throughout Luke's gospel and its *centrifugal centre* throughout Acts, but Luke 24 sees the two disciples headed in the wrong direction! The story's conventional title—the Road to Emmaus—unfortunately frames their return journey as a sort of addendum to the story; 'to' implies that Emmaus is where it is at. Ending the section at verse 35 makes the embodiment of this life-changing reality sound straightforward. But "while they were still talking about this" (24:36), they encounter Jesus again ("*Shalom* be with you!") and become terrified. Luke still has something significant to say about the struggle to embody discerned truths. His interest in formation, use of geography and emphasis upon Jerusalem together suggest that expanding the return journey section to 24:33–49, which includes the two within the larger group, is a viable alternative.
[44] Acts 1:8.
[45] One longstanding approach to framing the labyrinth's movements draws from the so-called threefold path in the Western mystical tradition of purgation, illumination and union (or incarnation). See Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice*, rev. and updated (New York: Riverhead, 2006), 28–31.
[46] Meek, *Longing to Know*, 13, bracketed insertions mine.
[47] Luke 24:14. τούτων/*toutón*—"these things"—is a pointing word, a focusing word. It concentrates on particulars. We are not trying to solve all the world's problems, tackle every issue or nail our 'theory of everything'. We grapple only with what captures our energy, vision and attention right now—not *those* things, but *these* things. This is where theological reflection begins.
[48] Meek encourages us to "practice blowing on the coals of our care"—to rehearse being attentive to the pledged and tacit nature of coming to know—because "caring invites the real." Meek, *Loving to Know*, 33.
[49] Michael Leunig, *When I Talk to You: A Cartoonist Talks to God* (Sydney South, New South Wales, Australia: HarperCollins, 2014), 66.
[50] Attributed to the Asaro Tribe, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, in Brené Brown, *Rising Strong* (London: Random House, 2015), 7.
[51] Readers are welcome to contact me if they would like the critical experience report outline or any of talking the walk's other resources.