eTheology: Explorations in Computer Mediated Theological Reflection
To Ellie and Tony

with love
eTheology: Explorations in Computer Mediated Theological Reflection

Duncan Ballard
St. Michael’s Theological College, Landaff, Cardiff
2007
First published in 2007 by

Worcester, UK

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Introduction

This thesis considers (and critically assesses) how far the ‘new technologies’ associated with the internet – hypertext and hypermedia, blogging, wikis and chatterbots amongst others – might be used in the practice of Theological Reflection (TR). It presents a critical account of how some initiatives in using the internet might create insights and possibilities for TR, as well as highlighting some of the problems and pitfalls that might arise. This is in pursuit of two main research questions:

1. Is TR possible on the internet?
2. If TR is possible on the internet, what then does it add to the sum total of theological reflection and how might it relate to other methods?

The thesis arises out of my experience of training for the Anglican priesthood at St. Michael's College, Llandaff from 2000-2002. In particular, it stems from a dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of the models of TR that were presented to theological students.

In the first chapter, I examine the literature relating to reflective practice and TR, and draw some tentative but normative conclusions regarding the purpose of TR, the processes it undertakes, and the sorts of results it might be expected to produce. I then move on in chapter two to theories of hypertextual writing, and speculate how these may aid the process of TR. In chapter three, there follows a description of the various iterative interventions into Practical Theology on the internet that were conducted in order to explore the two main research questions of this thesis. The primary question asks is TR possible on the internet? Does the model overcome some or all of the limitations identified as being a part of current models? Does it introduce new limitations? The second question that follows is that if TR is possible, then do the ‘thinking spaces’ and tools created as part of the eTheology website add any value to the experience and the fruits of theologically reflecting, and are the results it produces compatible with ‘conventional’ reflective methods? In chapter four I then analyse the results of these interventions, drawing upon direct observable statistics and results, face to face interviews and on-line questionnaires, and present some conclusions as to the place of these new technologies in TR.

1 See definitions of these terms, and others used in this thesis, please see the glossary of terms, page 188.
I will show that eTheology does provide a significant new way of doing TR. It is not without its own problems, however; and, I will suggest, it cannot be used to the exclusion of other, more traditional, methods. I conclude with the concept of TR as *bricolage*, a French term that describes a toolbox of techniques and methods which can be used as the occasion demands. In the concluding chapter, I summarise my results, draw out their implications, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the e theology interventions and of the thesis in general, and point out some directions for further research.

**Practical Theology and TR**

TR is a discipline situated within the field of Practical Theology. There are at least two ways of conceiving of Practical Theology. Following Tracy (2004), one way is to conceive of it as a particular field of theology. In this way, Practical Theology is a theology which deals with practical questions – it is the application of principles from other fields of theological enquiry (for example, systematic theology) to such practical areas of life and ministry as liturgy, church governance, pastoral care and education. However, Practical Theology can also be understood in a different way, as an attempt to emphasize the thinking of the Christian tradition in a way corresponding to modern thinking: a ‘thinking of praxis’. From this perspective, it represents a new kind of *fundamental* theology in that it attempts to provide an account of what Christianity is about, which it does, not so much with the categories of classical metaphysics as with the categories of contemporary human sciences and anthropology. A formal definition of Practical Theology may help:

> Pastoral/Practical Theology is a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meet contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical, and practically transforming. (Pattison and Woodward 1994: 9)

TR is seen as an essential element of Practical Theology (for example, Woodward and Pattison, 2000: 136, Ballard and Pritchard 1996: 27), and thus is foundational to any training for clergy that seeks to creatively bring together theology, experience, practice and theory. However, not only are there no agreed definitions of the nature and methods of TR available to students, the very way in which TR is taught leads many students to question its relevance to their lives and practice (Pattison, Thompson and Green, 2003: 122; Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005: 31-32). Many writers comment upon the under-resourcing of TR (for example, Pattison and Woodward, 2000: 136, Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005: 29-36), leading Pattison to compare the requirement for students to reflect theologically to their being asked to manufacture “bricks without straw” (c.f. Exodus 5:16) – an ultimately futile occupation as without sufficient resources or guidelines being made available, the product will inevitably crumble. For example, on one hand, students are taught that TR requires creativity, honesty, and a deep sharing of self in the exploration of the situation and issues. On the other, it is required to be presented in an essay - in a linear manner

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2 At a symposium on “What is Theological Reflection” sponsored by the British and Irish Association for Practical theology (BIAPT), hosted by St. Michael’s Theological College and attended by over twenty practical theologians, it proved impossible to define, even imprecisely, what TR is.
with an introduction, discussion and conclusion - and is inevitably graded by an examiner. This is clearly at odds with the ways in which many students reflect upon life - in prayer, through music, perhaps alone on top of a mountain - and has led to TR being seen as, at best an irrelevance, at worst a dishonest practice, and by some as being a terrifying ordeal to be avoided at all costs once one had left the college environment.

A recent enquiry into the nature of TR (Pattison, Thompson and Green, 2003) has usefully summarised some students’ reactions to TR. Although the literature relating to TR (and Theological College prospecti) would seem to suggest that the subject is well understood and firmly embedded in theological education, Pattison et. al. found that students described TR as being “… essentially mystifying, alienating and non specific” (Pattison et al, 2003: 123), overly academic and lacking in practical application. Because there is little offered in terms of methods or expectations of the process, students felt anxious and inadequate when reflecting, emotions that are particularly disempowering in an activity that requires participants to disclose so much of themselves and risk ridicule. Finally, TR was seen by students as inflexible and divorced from real life.

Yet despite the shortcomings of TR as it was taught in St. Michael’s (and there is evidence to suggest that St. Michael’s is far from alone in its approach (Pattison et al, 2003: 122), it is, in the words of Joseph Driscoll (2004: online)

… perhaps our single most important task after direct [pastoral] care. Adapting the philosopher's wisdom saying, the unreflected ministerial life is not worth the ministering. This is truer than not, when we realize that in the times we get caught in a continuous ‘doing’ of ministry, we slowly lose focus, getting tired, irritable and resentful of ‘always doing’. Theological reflection is taking off the shoes of work and walking more gently and quietly in prayer toward the ever-burning love of God.

TR simply is not optional.

Despite the misgivings of theology students, TR is not an intellectual exercise for the sheer delight of playing with interesting ideas. Its aim is not only religious insight but insightful religious action. The minister or priest is not a philosopher or theologian who may put off decisions until all the data is in: he or she has to make pastoral decisions in the here and now, often with incomplete information. Their responsibility is to avoid uninformed decisions, to arrive at less inadequate conclusions. The action called for does not always mean taking some public stand (or perhaps simply providing new liturgies). It may be that the action will be to pray, to turn the problem over to someone else, or to continue in an already established way. Whatever the decision, a reflective ministry will be richer than an unreflective response to people’s needs.

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3 This thesis makes use of quotes from scholarly articles available only on the internet. In such cases I quote the author and the year the web page was published; however, it is not possible to cite page numbers in these instances. I indicate such quotes in the following format: author (year: online).
It was my dissatisfaction with the process of TR, which promises so much and yet seems to deliver so little, that began this investigation into its nature. As I began to think more deeply about the nature of reflection, and specifically TR, I began to see more and more connections with the world of the new digital technologies of the internet, hypertext and hypermedia, the world I inhabited before training for ordination. Yet there seemed to be very little work done on explicitly making these connections. In particular, I hoped that this collection of technologies (which I call ‘eTheology’ or Computer Mediated Theological Reflection – ‘CMTR’) would remove from TR the straitjacket of linear narrative, a reliance on words alone, and add a freedom and spontaneity that seemed to be lacking.

Computers and TR

My first introduction to computer technology was through the medium of games, particularly adventure games. The player takes on the role of a hero and has to solve puzzles, battle monsters, collect treasure, and wend one's way through a complicated maze in order to reach an ultimate goal. However, I was never particularly interested in attaining the goal (usually the acquisition of a fantastic object or the defeat of a particularly powerful creature); rather, I preferred to explore the maze. I found that it was always wanting to know what mysteries were just around the next corner that drove me forward. The game did not have to have a particular beginning or ending - just a series of branching, twisting passages that led to new locations, or returned to old locations by a new route.

I have come to regard this type of game as a metaphor for TR: I know that I have a particular destination in mind, but it is the journey toward that destination, and the discoveries that lie in its path, that give me pleasure and encourage me onward. The twists and turns of a maze are certainly not linear, even though they do lead from one specific point to another, and often circle around a particular location, coming near to the entrance to the next level, say, and then veering off at the last moment only to return unexpectedly at a later point; however, the player cannot see that this has happened until all of the maze on that level has been revealed.

My writing habits follow this pattern also: I find myself ready to end an essay or a passage on a particular topic only to discover that my attention has been drawn to a relevant point which draws me away from my conclusion, takes me to new ideas which demand consideration, and ultimately (sometimes) returns me to my final point. If I do not try to force my ideas to follow a pre-designed pattern, I find that I can more successfully convey complex ideas.

I suspect that the difficulty of rendering thought into a logical, sequential (linear) text is a common experience for most students (and theological reflectors!). Wittgenstein, in the preface to his *Philosophical Investigations*, struggled with the notion of writing a linear text from complex, nonlinear thought processes; he acknowledged that his thinking process was nonlinear, but he had been taught to write in a linear tradition, and thus he found that his thoughts
were "soon crippled" if he tried to "force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination" (1953: preface). He described his thought process in terms of travelling "over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction," and as "long and involved journeyings" (1953: v). When I first read these descriptions I was immediately reminded of the computer-game metaphor I had been contemplating as a description of my own reflection process, but Wittgenstein also made me aware that conceiving of a thinking (or writing, or reflecting) process is not as simple as the exploration of a maze: there is no single, self-contained passage which can be occupied at any given point; there is, instead, a continually shifting locus of a series of points, always interconnecting, never singular.

Now, in a new medium made available by the advent of desktop computers and advances in software programming techniques, there is a ‘writing space’ which would have perfectly accommodated Wittgenstein's interconnected texts. The rapid adoption of the internet as a medium for world-wide communication has resulted in new ways of presenting information that were simply not possible a decade or so ago. Ever since Gutenberg invented movable type we have lived in a culture dominated by print. Now we are in the midst of a communications revolution as “… profound as that which saw the printed book replace oral and manuscript texts” (Synder, 1996: 11). One of the driving technologies behind this revolution is ‘hypertext’, a term coined by computer visionary Theodor Holm Nelson in 1964. In 1960, Nelson had been working on his own philosophical investigations, a text to be called *Truth, Man, and Choice*, and as he wrote he discovered that, like Wittgenstein, he too had difficulty in organizing his ideas in a strictly linear form. In his memoirs, he articulates the frustrating process of writing a sequential text:

> . . . you take a structured complex of thought (I like to call it a structangle) that you are trying to communicate, and you break it into individual sequential parts that can be put end to end, and this is a wholly artificial process, a breakdown not intrinsic to the structure of thought you are trying to convey, but based upon the fact that it has to be published eventually in a sequence. (Nelson, 1992: 45)

Out of Nelson’s struggles was born the concept of hypertext – a technology that transparently links textual and other documents on the internet, and now forms the basis of the web.

I had been concerned at college that forcing TR into a straightjacket of a linear narrative which I found crippled whatever life-enhancing, transformative promises it may have offered. Hypertext seemed to offer a possible answer – a technology created in an attempt to overcome the very problem I had been experiencing in recording TRs. Yet hypertext was not merely a new way of writing texts: it appeared to alter the very way in which the texts interact with each other and with the reader. How would this new medium effect the process of TR?
The eTheology Project

Apart from a small number of books and journal articles, there has been little attention given by theologians and scholars of religions on the impact of the new digital technologies. What has appeared has tended to be of the ‘how to find religion on the net’ variety, research on the emerging digital church and congregations, evangelism on the web, articles concerning the use of computer technology within particular disciplines, or sociologically oriented studies of the medium. To date there has been no exploration of the process of doing theological reflection with, through and in this new electronic media. Similarly, no practical framework or software yet exists to assist this process, or to enable people to share, discuss and collaborate together as they think theologically. I should therefore state at the outset that this project is exploring new territory: it is a series of iterative interventions into on-line Practical Theology rather than a controlled experiment into cause and effect. There is no well-beaten path to follow, and, as a result, I took many wrong turns and have without doubt missed several interesting side roads on the way to my conclusions. I see this research as merely the start of a series of explorations.

In order to explore the proposition that the new technologies of hypertext and hypermedia could not only allow new ways of doing and recording TR, but also perhaps somehow alter the very nature of TR and how we understand it, I began by examining the literature relating to reflection. This was drawn from a number of disciplines: theology, medicine, education and the arts: the arts have been included specifically because, as Graham, Walton and Ward (2005: 31) point out, TR may be “… enacted in story, sacrament or symbol”, not simply in word. From this review I was able to draw certain tentative conclusions as to the nature of reflective practice, the ‘shape’ it might take and the results it might reasonably be expected to produce. I then turned to the literature relating to the new digital technologies, particularly post modern literary criticism, and began to explore how these might be used in reflection and possibly answer some of the perceived shortcomings identified earlier.

Following the reviews, I began to design the interventions, or ‘experiments’, a series of small scale investigations into how the possibilities afforded by various computer-based tools might impact upon the process of TR. In order to investigate in which ways, if any, these new technologies impact upon TR, and taking the insights from my original review of the literature pertaining to Reflective Practice (and TR in particular) and to hypertext and hypermedia, I designed various software tools and created a number of websites, all of which are documented in this thesis. I call this collection of technologies, models and methods eTheology, or Computer Mediated Theological reflection (CMTR). These tools were then tested ‘in real life’. The explorations or ‘experiments’ followed a broadly

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4 This is no longer strictly true, although it was when this introduction was written. Towards the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005 a few internet sites have appeared exploring some of the thoughts and concepts that fuel this thesis. These have been, in the main, theoretical explorations, but their very appearance may indicate a thirst for models of CMTR.

5 There are, however, many institutions promoting teaching theology using internet technologies. Some of these may be found in appendix B.

6 When I refer to ‘experiment’ in this thesis, I am using the term in the sense of iterative explorations, rather than following a formal scientific model.
iterative approach, in that changes in the software tools were made incrementally in attempt to grow closer to the promise that the fusion of TR and internet technologies offered. At each stage, feedback was obtained by direct observation of the measurable results, anonymous on-line questionnaires, and face-to-face responses received from people participating in the project. These ‘experiments’, the results and the changes subsequently made along the way are described in the fourth chapter.

An analysis of the results of the project is presented in the fifth chapter, which is followed by a section of conclusions, in which I gauge how far I did or did not answer the research questions set by the thesis (with the possible reasons why), together with what has been learnt from the experience, what this research seems to suggest for future work in this area, and particular results of the ‘experiment’ that would repay further investigation.

Some of the results of CMTR are given in the appendices to this thesis, and I believe that the technologies did indeed ‘add value’ to the experience and enabled reflections that other, more traditional models of TR were less likely to produce. For example, the on-line reflection upon Eucharist proved to be incredibly rich and far ranging, and liberating in a way that I had not experienced using traditional models of TR. However, I also found that, due to various factors which are documented later, eTheology was not the great panacea for TR I had originally envisaged, being too cumbersome for some and simply unfathomable to others. Yet CMTR may nevertheless form an important ‘tool’ in the Practical Theologian’s toolbox, and provide for ways of doing TR in environments that are not conducive to traditional models and methods.
What is Theological Reflection?

In a study of how the technologies associated with the Internet may aid TR, it is important to understand the range of concepts that the term TR encompasses. In this chapter I begin by examining the basis of virtually all models of reflection, commonly called in theological circles the ‘pastoral cycle’, the ‘circle of praxis’, or the ‘experiential learning cycle’ in educational literature. I then review reflective practice as understood in a number of disciplines: education, medicine, counselling, the arts and finally in theology. Following this I then explore the nature of the process of reflection: as observation, as refraction, as coherence and then as catalyst. From this review I draw some conclusions as to the hallmarks of reflection, and suggest some of the problems that are associated with reflection, specifically with reflection in theology.

These features, or hallmarks of reflection, then became the principles behind the design of the proposed hypertextual tools for TR explored in the later chapters of this thesis.

Looking for a Definition

One day, when Pooh Bear had nothing else to do, he thought he would do something, so he went round to Piglet's house to see what Piglet was doing. It was still snowing as he stumped over the white forest track, and he expected to find Piglet warming his toes in front of the fire, but to his surprise he found that the door was open, and the more he looked inside, the more Piglet wasn’t there. (Milne, 1928: 1)

Defining what is meant by ‘Theological Reflection’ (TR) can be like looking for Piglet: the more you look for it, the more it is not there; and afterwards it can be difficult to describe why it was so absorbing and life-changing. And TR
can be transformative, allowing people to learn from each other’s successes and failures, each other’s ideas, experiences and wisdom (see, for example, Stone and Duke, 1996, Kinast, 2000, Groom, 1980).

However, as Pattison, Thompson and Green have suggested, TR as it is commonly taught in Universities and theological institutions not only “fail(s) to survive and meet the needs of those who work in practical situations” (2003: 120) but also has the potential to be profoundly disabling and divorced from the experiences of students.

**What is Reflection?**

Reflection is seen as a basic building block of any educational or learning process (see, amongst many others, Dewey 1933: 9; Boud, Keough and Walker 1985: 19; Meizirow 1981: 3-24). The process of reflection can be broadly described thus: something happens in which we are involved, we observe or in which we are interested and wish to draw conclusions. We then describe or examine our experience of that event. We ponder and think about it as well as use the resources we possess to illuminate our understanding. We finally draw conclusions and we establish any basis for future action(s). Should we refuse to reflect, we deny ourselves the opportunity to learn, to adapt, and to grow. A failure to reflect leads to the eternal repetition of the same mistakes again and again. It enacts the myth of Sisyphus, who repeatedly rolls a stone up a hill only to have it roll back down. His destiny prevents him from reflecting upon his actions, and so he never learns how to block the stone and keep it from falling back to its original position.

The need to reflect, if we are not to be caught in a vicious cycle, is not a new insight. The ancient Greeks knew well that "the unexamined life is not worth living." According to Plato (420-347 BCE), who quoted Socrates (469-399 BCE), "Know yourself!" was said to be the motto of the oracle at Delphi.

The process of reflection described above can be reduced to four simple steps:

1. action [do];
2. identify the key elements [look];
3. analyze the information [think]; and
4. generalize for the future [plan].

---

7 Plato, *the Apology*. Plato wrote a dialogue that recorded a conversation between Socrates and his students. These were Socrates final words, uttered as he prepared to drink a cup of hemlock and die. He advocated the value of reflection or philosophical thinking. Today, asking open-ended questions is sometimes known as the ‘Socratic method’. Another term for it is the ‘maieutic’ method, which refers to the process of giving birth.
A four step solution may appear inviting, yet this is a complex endeavour, and often a formal four-step process cannot answer such thorny questions. It is especially complicated when applied to the domain of theology, which strives to bring meaning to life.

As the early church developed during the first five centuries of the Christian era, theology became the property of the religious communities or the Church, building upon (but remaining distinct from) the pagan philosophers. In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (1225 or 1227 to 1274) set forth the notion that theology dealt with knowledge of reality - the totality of all that is – and was a science that was truly the "queen of all sciences." While Aquinas related theology to nature, he nevertheless placed the former in an exalted position. For Aquinas, Theology and Philosophy were contiguous. Thus he combined philosophy and the biblical heritage into a reflective edifice sometimes known as the "Medieval Synthesis." Although it would be tempting to describe current-day TR as being within this venerable tradition, it would not be accurate. Modern TR owes far more to recent educational practitioners than to medieval theologians. The legacy of educational practitioners is examined in the following section.

**Why Reflect?**

If, to (mis)quote the Greek, an unreflected life is not worth living, why should this be the case? According to Mezirow, “reflection is the central dynamic in intentional learning, problem solving and validity testing through rational discourse” (1994: 4): but there is much more to reflection than just the rational. Kemmis (1985) for example states that the process of reflection is more than a process that focuses 'on the head'. It is, he argues, a positive active process that reviews, analyses and evaluates experiences, draws on theoretical concepts or previous learning and so provides an action plan for future experiences. Perhaps the term TR is not a terribly useful one. The metaphor it utilises is limited: a mirror reflection is merely the image of an object directly in front of it – faithfully reproduced, albeit back-to-front. Perhaps what is required is, in the language of Lewis Carroll, a creative adventure right through the mirror into ‘Looking-Glass Land’ itself, a creative exploration of the possibilities that lie beyond.

Reflection at its best helps people to learn how to empathise with another through experiences that they will never know. For example, a man will never know childbirth: how then will he learn the compassion and understanding needed to support a mother in labour? However, reflection will rarely provide neat answers to the conundrums of practice. It will not directly answer the question: ‘what does childbirth feel like’ or ‘what should I have done in the situation?’ yet it will raise other questions. This iterative process of answering and then raising new questions is an integral part of development in many professions, leading to, it is claimed, (amongst other factors) improved competency, deeper consideration of ethical issues, learning from past practice and a critical evaluation of the reflector’s role in the world.
Reflective Practice

To describe the tasks involved in reflective practice is relatively straightforward. It is also fairly simple to write a list or checklist for how to lead a reflective group; however, a reflective activity is a means just as much as it is an end in itself. It has a purpose, and that purpose is set within a context that makes the entire endeavour complex as well as interesting and engaging. Reflection is a continuous process, according to some cyclical in nature, but also extended into time. It is less like a wheel spinning than like a wheel rolling down a road, thereby acquiring and discarding as it travels.

The last three decades have seen substantial growth in the use of reflection, not only in ministerial training, but also in schools, colleges and universities, and in the training of nurses, doctors, and business administration students at the graduate level (see, for example, Kember, van der Veen, Herrick, Yagelski, Bleakley). This appears to come from two main directions: firstly from consideration of the role that reflection can play in developing professional practice (Schön 1987), as in professions such as nursing, teaching and social work. This has resulted in the development of reflective approaches which use terms such as the “reflective practitioner” and the “thinking performer”. Secondly, from exploring the place of reflection in the learning process as a step in Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle (1984: 4) and as a mechanism which specifically underpins the progression from surface to deep to transformative learning (Barnett 1997).

Dewey (1933) is generally pointed to as the scholar who first stressed the importance of reflection for learning, but modern theorists such as Donald Schön (1987) and Kathleen Blake Yancey (1998) and her work with portfolios and reflection have given reflection credibility as a useful pedagogical tool and has led many to see reflection as a form of meta-cognition or "thinking about thinking" (Swartzendruber-Putman, 2000: 88). Although many scholars have made statements about the value of reflection (for example, Camp, Herrick, Swartzendruber-Putman, English), Sherry Swain sums up the generally accepted benefits of reflection: “reflection enables us to evaluate experience, learn from mistakes, repeat successes, revise, and plan”(2002: 28).

With particular reference to this project of TR on the web, Yancey’s concluding questions about reflexivity voices some uncertainty about the social context for reflection. She asks, “what is the effect of public audience on reflection?” (1998: 204) We might restate the question as, “how does reflection make the participant feel and react to
the fact that they are posting their reflections publicly for everyone to read?” Should individual reflections be made public? Of special concern for Yancey here would be the effect of audience on self-revelation. Would the sharing of reflections inhibit self-revelation and stifle the reflective act? As a spectator, would the inhibited reflector still be able to “refract” - affirm, question, rethink - his or her own experience by reading the posts of his or her peers.

The Learning Cycle

Kolb (1984) provides one of the most useful descriptive models of the adult learning process available.

Figure 1: the Pastoral cycle, after Kolb (1984)
The pastoral cycle suggests that there are four stages which follow from each other: **Concrete Experience** is followed by **Reflection** on that experience on a personal basis. This may then be followed by the derivation of general rules describing the experience, or the application of known theories to it **Abstract Conceptualisation**, and hence to the construction of ways of modifying the next occurrence of the experience **Active Experimentation**, leading in turn to the next **Concrete Experience**. All this may happen in a moment of inspiration, or over days, weeks or months, depending on the topic, and there may be a ‘wheels within wheels’ process at the same time wherein various issues and thoughts that have arisen from the process are in themselves subject to the cycle.

For the theologian, the learning cycle (sometimes known as the pastoral cycle) as a model for TR has particular strengths. When using the cycle, the theologian would usually begin at the stage labelled “experience”. This entails naming the **experience** and listening to and retelling the story; an **analysis** of the experience follows, which may involve a consideration of my own and other’s points of view and agendas, loci of power and powerlessness etc; then **reflecting** on the experience (which can include tradition, culture, context, scripture, knowledge from other disciplines and Christian doctrine); leading onto praxis or **action**, which contains the possibility to transform either the situation or the observer. In the pastoral cycle, it is important not only to engage with each stage of the cycle, but also to be mindful of how one moves from stage to stage.

Later in this chapter I shall consider in greater detail the pastoral cycle and its relation to TR: for now it is sufficient simply to keep a picture of the model readily to hand as I consider the development of Reflective Practice as a discipline in professional development.

**The Origins of Reflective Practice**

A reflective process is itself a learning process. Writing about TR as a process of discovering and learning about our faith and the world is, in fact, to consider the merits of an educational process. Thus, an examination of the role of TR must first consider educational methods and models.
Reflective practice in education is an evolving concept. In the 1930s, John Dewey defined reflection as a proactive, ongoing examination of beliefs and practices, their origins, and their impacts. Since then, reflective practice has been influenced by various philosophical and pedagogical theories.

Dewey defined reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (1993: 118). He set out five phases or aspects as follows:

1. Initially, the mind leaps forward to a possible solution.
2. Then follows an intellectualisation of the difficulty or perplexity that has been felt (directly experienced) into a problem to be solved.
3. The use of one suggestion after another as a leading idea, or hypothesis, to initiate and guide observation and other operations in collection of factual material.
4. The mental elaboration of the idea, or supposition as an idea or supposition (reasoning, in the sense in which reasoning is a part, not the whole, of inference).
5. Testing the hypothesis by overt, or imaginative action.

(from Dewey 1933: 199-209)

In this five-fold process we get a feel of Dewey’s model for reflection: practitioners focus on problems and then experiment with situations:

In every case of reflective activity, a person finds himself confronted with a given, present situation from which he has to arrive at, or conclude to, something that is not present. This process of arriving at an idea of what is absent on the basis of what is at hand is inference. What is present carries or bears the mind over to the idea and ultimately the acceptance of something else. (Dewey 1933: 202)

This insight has formed the basis for developments in reflective practice ever since. Yet there are problems.

First, these five phases can be approached in a rather linear and mechanistic way - it can be used as a plan for action or a checklist of items to be done. In practice, two of the phases may telescope, or some may be passed over as Dewey himself recognized: indeed, no set rules may be laid down (Dewey 1993: 207). This was a crucial insight. Yet
Dewey still used terms like ‘stage’ and ‘phase’, leaving behind him a sense of sequence and linearity. And indeed, this is one of the major criticisms levelled at TR as it is taught in theological institutions (See, for example, Pattison et al. 2003: 2-3).

Second, there is not a real grasp of reflection as an interactive or dialogical process. Dewey’s work was grounded in the idea that “the individual student teacher learns to reflect on a particular experience individually” (Cinmnamond and Zimpher, 1990: 112). To some extent this is mitigated by his stress on active experimentation: there is room for feedback. Also, there is in his work a lack of attention to the ways in which people’s sense of self, their frames of reference are formed in dialogue with others.

Finally, while Dewey does attend to the place of emotions, for example with regard to the doubts that trigger reflection – but it is limited. This is slightly odd given what he had to say elsewhere about the importance of the intellect and emotions (Dewey 1916: 335-6).

Reflection as Coherence: a Holistic Activity

Research in the meaning and purpose of reflection (particularly in education) has accelerated over recent years, generally attempting to make the process more holistic and part of everyday life. The great strength of the work of Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) is that they address emotion in reflection. For them reflection is an activity in which people “recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it” (1985: 19). They rework Dewey's five aspects into three.

- Returning to experience - that is to say, recalling or detailing salient events.
- Attending to (or connecting with) feelings - this has two aspects: using helpful feelings and removing or containing obstructive ones.
- Evaluating experience - this involves re-examining experience in the light of one's intent and existing knowledge etc. It also involves integrating this new knowledge into one's conceptual framework. (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985: 26-31)
Despite this reworking, their focus on 'deliberate' learning does tend to act against an appreciation of reflection as a way of life and as a social activity. As Cinnamond and Zimpher (1990: 67) put it, they “… constrain reflection by turning it into a mental activity that excludes both the behavioural element and dialogue with others involved in the situation”, a criticism that has also been frequently levelled at TR. Researchers such as Schön have pointed reflective practice back to the practical situations from which it arose.

Schön: Reflection in - and on - Action

In *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Donald A. Schön argues that education has traditionally relied on "rigorous professional knowledge, based on technical rationality" rather than the "awareness of indeterminate, swampy zones of practice that lie beyond its canons" (1987: 3); instead of asking students to think about and write about specific situations, dealing with real situations and reflecting on how they solved them, education has traditionally simply asked students to memorize cores of knowledge and theory. Schön argues that rigorous professional practitioners solve well-formed instrumental problems by applying theory and technique derived from systematic, preferably scientific knowledge. . . . But, as we have come to see with increasing clarity over the last twenty or so years, the problems of real-world practice do not present themselves to practitioners as well-formed structures. Indeed, they tend not to present themselves as problems at all but as messy, indeterminate situations. (1987: 3-4)

Schön argues that real-life situations are never as neat as textbook examples but are richly problematic with "indeterminate zones of practice - uncertainty, uniqueness, and value conflict" (1987: 6). Therefore, students are better served with practice, and reflection upon that practice, than they are with learning information and even systematic rules.

Schön breaks reflection into two brands of action: reflection-*in*-action and reflection-*on*-action. Reflection-*in*-action refers to the immediately recursive thought a person puts toward the action at hand, "during which we can still make
a difference to the situation at hand - our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it" (1987: 26). For example, while a student writes, her thinking about what she is writing, her concurrent revision, her stopping to think and re-read illustrates reflection-in-action. Schön names reflection-on-action "thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome" (1987: 26), or, post-activity reflection on the activity. When a student thinks or writes about the process of writing a project after she has finished, for example, she is taking part in reflection-on-action.

From this perspective, situations do not present themselves as givens, but are constructed from events that are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. It is this recognition of emotional discomfort in response to professional experiences that for Schön defines the essence of reflectivity. Schön challenges practitioners to "...move into the centre of the learning situation, into the centre of their own doubts" (1987: 83). Thus, professional reflectivity allows surprise and even distress to inform a redirection to new landmarks without being overwhelmed, or blinded by the familiar.

It is through reflection that the practitioner will utilize a repertoire of understandings, images, and actions to reframe a troubling situation so that problem solving actions are generated. Mezirow echoes this by writing, "learning is defined as the social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action" (Mezirow 1994: 223). By embedding reflectivity into the educative process, Mezirow contends that meaningful learning occurs through self-examination of assumptions, patterns of interactions, and the operating premises of action. This emphasis on critical reflection can lead to transformation. This is elegantly summarized by Tremmel as "...working together in a dance-like pattern, simultaneously involved in design and in playing various roles in virtual and real worlds, while at the same time remaining detached enough to observe and feel the action that is occurring, and to respond" (Tremmel 1993: 436).
Thus in reflective practice, practitioners engage in a “continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand their own actions and the reactions they prompt in themselves” and in the situation. (Brookfield 1995: 113) The goal is not necessarily to address a specific problem or question defined at the outset, but to observe and refine practice in general on an ongoing basis.

According to Kolb (figure 1), the following steps are integral to the reflective process:

1. **Collect descriptive data** Reflective practitioners need detail and breadth of perspective as they gather information on what is happening. They can achieve this through the datacollection tools they select. Brookfield (1995: 29) suggests using four possible "lenses" to create a balanced picture of practice: (i) practitioners' own writings about their experiences as students and teachers (autobiographies); (ii) student's eyes; (iii) colleagues' eyes and experiences; and (iv) existing theoretical literature.

2. **Analyze data** After data has been collected, it can be analyzed in terms of the attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, goals, power relations, and consequences that they reveal. What happened that was expected or surprising? What theories about teaching or personal experiences with learning are revealed in the data? How do these theories relate to the
practitioner's stated beliefs and attitudes? What is revealed about the relationships among the participants? What are the consequences of the practitioner's actions?

3. Consider how the situation or activity could have been different Whether looking at the data in the moment or in retrospect, practitioners need to examine alternatives to the choices they have made as well as the beliefs behind them. (Stanley 1998: 584-591) Considering how other practitioners address similar situations, generating alternatives and asking "what if" questions push practitioners to broaden their reflection beyond the data they have collected (Genhard 1996).

4. Create a plan that incorporates new insights Because reflection is conducted not for its own sake but to improve practice, practitioners must link information and insights gained from the reflective process to changes they are making in the ‘real life’. (Farrell 1998: 10-17) The changes need not be huge - small changes can have an impact on practice and learning. The important thing is that practitioners incorporate their new insights in their ongoing planning and decision making, observe the impact, and continue the reflective cycle.

Brookfield’s Counter-Cultural Reflections

Not all writers agree with Kolb’s theory. Rogers, for example points out that "learning includes goals, purposes, intentions, choice and decision-making, and it is not at all clear where these elements fit into the learning cycle" (1996: 108). Another researcher, Brookfield (1995), has systematised a series of ‘stances’ for reflection which I have found to be very helpful in TR. Building upon Schön’s work, Brookfield's account of “critical reflective practice” (1995: 204) depends upon three interrelated processes:

(1) the experience of questioning and then replacing or reframing an assumption, or assumptive cluster, which is unquestioningly accepted as representing dominant common sense by a majority;

(2) the experience of taking a perspective on social and political structures, or on personal and collective actions, which is strongly alternative to that held by a majority;

(3) the experience of studying the ways in which ideas, and their representations in actions and structures, are accepted as self-evident renderings of the 'natural' state of affairs – challenging the statement “that’s just the way it is”.


Reflection in the Professions

As well as having been applied particularly to the field of educational reflective practice, the insights of Dewey, Kolb, Schön and Brookfield have been applied to reflection in many other professions – for example, medicine, counselling and the arts, as well as Practical Theology.

For example, one strand of reflective practice in medicine and counselling involves identifying and then analysing critical incidents. The idea of reflecting upon critical incidents is not a new one. It has been refined from a technique first developed by John Flanagan who was working with pilots in training in the American Air Force:

> An incident is an observable type of human activity which is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical it must be performed in a situation where the person or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer, and its consequences are sufficiently definite so there is little doubt concerning its effect.

(Flanagan, 1954: 335)

Thus, there are significant differences between what a medical practitioner and a theologian mean by reflection, not least being that medical reflective practice requires that a situation be isolated for analysis. Clamp (1980) noted that nurses' attitudes largely govern how care is administered to their client and he contended that the commonest causes of poor care are ignorance and inappropriate attitudes. The process of reflection, if then related into nursing practice, can assist the individual in gaining the required knowledge, leading to a potential improvement in the quality of the care received from that individual. Thus this understanding of reflection is isolated and very closely bound to the notion of professional competency. However, in TR the situation is never isolated, but forms part of the ‘larger story’. Atkins and Murphy (1995: 31-35) acknowledge a difference between analysis and reflection whereby analysis may be more objective but, “reflection ... must involve the self and must lead to a changed perspective.”

In contrast, reflection in the field of Counselling, according to Rogers (1969), is about the willingness to: have faith in your own knowledge, skills and experience; trust the process you are engaged in; relate to the student, client or patient with respect and unconditional positive regard. It is also about a willingness to subject every action and thought both to reflection in action and self respectful effective reflection upon action. Reflection according to this understanding is the hawk in your mind (Bolton 1999), constantly circling over your head watching and advising on your actions – while you are practising.
Reflection in the Arts

As Graham, Walton and Ward (2005: 31) have pointed out, TR may be “… enacted in story, sacrament or symbol”, and not simply in word: it may, therefore, be instructive to examine the notion of ‘reflection’ in the arts. It is often said that artists are usually twenty or thirty years ahead of theologians in being able to articulate the theology of a culture (for example, see Parker, 1992, Harries, 1993 and Dillenberger, 1987 amongst others). They seem especially gifted in opening our eyes to the presence of transcendence. To take just three examples, Picasso’s *Guernica*, Lorraine Hansberry’s *Raisin in the Sun*, and Carlos Fuentes’ *The Good Conscience* preceded Church statements on war, racism and the tension between personal sin and systemic evil by more than a generation.

Some authors produce works that make faith connections from the first chapter to the last. Their language is not always theological, but the message is clearly religious. Writers know that dialogues can teach better than pronouncements; narratives touch more deeply than dogmas.

In “The Trial of God,” a play set in an inn of the seventeenth century, God is accused in a court of justice. The charge is that God was unfaithful to the covenant by allowing almost a whole town to be destroyed in a pogrom. Nobel prize winner Elie Weisel, with insights born of the Holocaust, introduces characters (young and old, male and female, Jew and Gentile) who engage in profound theological reflection.

It is Purim, a joyous feast with games and masks, and visitors have come to the inn. The innkeeper, Berish, one of only two survivors of the massacre, acts as prosecutor but no one can be found to serve as defense council for God. Finally a stranger who identifies himself only as Sam agrees to take on the job.

Sam defends God with, “. . . why evil—why ugliness? If God chooses not to answer, He must have His reasons. God is God . . . . Endure, accept. And say Amen.”

But Berish replies, “Never! If He wants my life, let Him take it . . . . How can you speak of grace and charity after a pogrom?”

Sam: “Is there no more propitious time to speak about them? You are alive— isn’t that proof of His Kindness?”

Berish: “What if I told you that He spared me not out of kindness but out of cruelty?”

(Weisel, 1979: 132-133)
Another attack is imminent and Berish is offered a way out, but when a priest urges him to feign acceptance of the cross, he refuses. Sam, thinking he has won, cries that Berish opted for God and against the enemies of God. But Berish insists, “I have not opted for God. I’m against His enemies, that’s all.” Sam piously responds, “I’m His servant. He created the world and me without asking for my opinion; He may do with both whatever He wishes. Our task is to glorify Him, to praise Him, to love Him—in spite of ourselves” (Weisel, 1979: 157). The guests wonder if Sam is a saintly rabbi, a miracle-maker, a mystical dreamer on his way to meet—and help them meet—the Redeemer.

It is only when Sam puts on a fiendish Purim mask that he is recognized as Satan.

My point in including “The Trial of God,” is not to suggest that even the devil does TR, but only to propose that the process is not echoing pious platitudes, repeating devout phrases. The purpose of TR is not to defend God in the face of overwhelming evil and suffering but to come to grips with demanding questions as honestly as we can. And that sometimes includes anger—even against God. Weisel contends that inspiration for the story came from three rabbis who “in the kingdom of night” that was the concentration camp, decided to indict God for the Holocaust. They found God guilty and then, the trial over, one of them reminded the others that the hour of prayer had arrived. And they bowed their heads and prayed.

Timidity in TR sometimes prevents the breakthrough to a more profound relationship with God. Like Jacob (Gen 32) we are sometimes called to wrestle with God. And like Jacob we may come out limping but with a new identity. For it was in the wrestling that Jacob became Israel—“the one who contends with God.”

Reflection in Theology

Reflection in Theology owes a great deal to the understanding of reflective practice gained in other academic fields. However, it can be argued that TR is a term used to describe a process that may have been in use for as long as there have been theologians; yet it has only become recognised as a distinct subject in the last 25 years or so (Kinast, 2000: 1). The methods, aims and objectives for TR vary greatly between theologians (see, for example, a recent symposium on TR at St. Mike’s College Llandaff, an account of which can be found in Pattison and Thompson, 2005). There remain, however, certain hallmarks of this type of theological activity (as distinct from systematic
theology or moral theology) that are characterised as being rooted in specific contexts rather than dealing with generic truths. For example, Pattison understands TR to be “the habitual, conscious, methodical and purposeful correlation of some of the insights and resources of theological tradition with contemporary situations and practice” (Pattison, 2004: 1). He proceeds to argue that TR must be in principle, public and articulable in terms of its methods, processes and outcomes.

Characteristically, as taught in Theological Colleges, TR treats lived experience with an equal weighting to classic texts and church tradition. It aims at practical action rather than theoretical ideas, and its character is influenced greatly by the various sources that have contributed to its development – for example, liberation theology, feminist theology, black theology, clinical pastoral theology, and ecumenical dialogue.

There are many methods and descriptions of TR, but all hold in common the image of a dialogue between the situation in question, Christian scriptures and tradition (perhaps drawing upon the writings of the Church fathers), and insights from other disciplines (such as sociology or psychology or perhaps art), and thus is able to draw out implications for Christian living. Importantly, TR takes seriously people’s experience – it does not treat experience as unimportant and void of theological insight, nor does it treat experience as case studies to merely illustrate and apply theological principles.

In the literature relating to TR there are many examples of models for conducting TR. There are linear methods that can be described relatively simply by drawing a diagram on a piece of paper – the experience enters the method at one stage, scripture, tradition, insights from contemporary culture are applied at the next stage, and a pastoral response is formulated. Such models include the pastoral cycle described by Ballard and Pritchard (1996), the Whitehead’s ‘ministerial’ style (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1995) and a model that could be described as ‘ecclesial’ which incorporates in a more stated way the influence of church structure, liturgies and ministry in the resulting praxis. (Fox, 1997)

There are also many correlational methods which largely take their basis from Tillich’s work (for example, Tillich, 1951: 3-68). For a practical theology to be genuinely practical, it must have some description of the present situation, some critical theory about the ideal situation, and some understanding of the processes, spiritual forces, and technologies required to get from where we are to the future ideal, no matter how fragmentarily and incompletely that ideal can be realized. Methods drawing upon this school of TR (although these models, it must be said, are far
more critical of contemporary insights and practices than Tillich’s relatively uncritical correlation) include Schreiter’s work on inculturation (1985), Farley’s ‘situation hermeneutics’ (1983) and the ‘practical’ styles of Don Browning (1996) and Stephen Pattison (2000).

Other methods of TR are more heavily influenced by praxis, for example those modelled on liberation theology (for example, Pattison, 2000 and Metz, 1980) and feminist theology (for example, Carr, 1988). There are also narrative approaches to TR that are more akin to Dewey’s reflective practice of simply telling the story (see pages 20-22).

There are styles of TR that could be described as a confessional or evangelical, proclaiming theological truths for others to accept; devotional styles, emphasising the affective dimension of theology and methods that seek to ask simply, “what would Jesus have said or done?”; and finally there is a school of TR that could be described as “whole being” reflection. This group of methods attempts to integrate fully people’s experiences into their understanding of God’s work in the world. Examples are the “spiritual wisdom” of Killen and de Beer (1994) and Groome (1980).

However, the most common model of TR taught in theological institutions is based upon the pastoral cycle, or a variation upon it, and most representative of these models is that outlined by the Whiteheads (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1995).

Evelyn and Jim Whitehead’s tripolar model for TR is based upon the pastoral cycle, within which (a model within a model) they employ three sources of information relevant to the reflective dialogue: culture is invited into the conversation between experience and tradition. In explaining their model, the Whiteheads begin the conversation from the perspective of tradition rather than experience or culture, as “TR must always be set within the context of faith” (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1995: 23) and experience (the usual starting point in the pastoral or learning cycle) is “not the primary, and certainly not the only, norm of religious truth” (Kinast, 2000: 7). In the Whitehead model, ‘tradition’ consists of all sources of the Christian heritage including scripture – described as “the sense of the faithful” (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1995: 31) – where tradition and experience have met in the past and where they overlap today. The Whiteheads are careful to emphasise the importance of both communal and individual experience (removing the tendency towards individualism and, in TR in theological institutions, the clericalism inherent in some models of reflection). Finally, the inclusion of the resources of culture, sometimes challenging the faith tradition, sometimes contributing to it and sometimes contradicting it, becomes one of the “conditions for carrying out honest, realistic theological reflection” (Kinast, 2000: 8). We sometimes lose sight of God when we only look in (so-called) sacred places. Philosophy, psychology, sociology, political interpretations and the wisdom of other religious traditions are some of “the diverse ways that God speaks to us from the broader culture which lies beyond
our own limited experience and the historically specific tradition of Christianity” (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1995: 20).

The Whitehead’s model requires reflectors to first attend (listen) to the information given by the three sources described above. Next, there is a lively conversation among these sources with the reflectors asserting their personal opinions whilst being open to other viewpoints. A shared understanding or consensus should emerge from this conversation (which the Whiteheads liken to a crucible where diverse materials are transformed into a single substance). This then leads to the third stage, which is an appropriate response.

The strength of the Whitehead model is that it takes into account, and positively encourages the exploration of, personal feelings and desires, preferences and preconceptions. But it also requires persistent openness to listen actively for the truth, in whatever guise it may appear. The Whiteheads also strongly make the point that the reflection process is not complete until the reflectors have decided upon a response or reaction to the reflection, and have planned its implementation. Thus, the ideal of practical action based upon theological understanding is reached, firmly related to the real life situation. The pastoral response emerges from a particular context as it is theologically interpreted.

This is what TR seeks to do – to allow the reality of theology to come through its distinct form, namely, experience correlated with tradition for the sake of praxis. The reality of theology, which TR seeks to disclose, is the presence of God in other people’s experience, a presence that invites them to encounter God where they are and to participate in the divine life which is offered them there. For this reason the form TR takes is coextensive with people’s experience. It does not treat their experience as theological or spiritually void, nor does it use experience merely to illustrate and apply theological principles. With TR, “theology is in service to experience, not the other way round” (Kinast, 200: 3).

What is Theological about Reflection?

If TR is based upon the thinking of modern secular researchers, and is formed in a similar way to reflective practice in, for example, teaching or counselling, then it would be fair to ask the question, “what is theological about TR?” although perhaps it would be easier to ask “what is not theological in TR?” After all, *Vox populi vox dei* - "the voice of the people is the voice of God" - for God speaks through creation, and the human experience, and reflection upon that experience, is our most direct contact with that divine voice. Learning to think theologically offers something different from slavish or literal affirmations of faith. It does not permit a separation of faith and the remainder of
our lives, nor does it allow for a denial of all religious experience. TR means looking at the richness of human experience to discover its meaning by recognizing the transcendent factors that connect us one to another and to the divine. God also speaks through the body of Christ, the Church and its traditions, our culture and society as well as through Holy Scripture. We do not limit God's existence to the Church, but we know that, at the very least, God may be found there.

To be sure, the church has long supported a cadre of specialists who attend to the theological needs of the community. The academics and clerics have their special and necessary roles to keep the Church intellectually honest and press for adaptation and discovery. Church leaders, bishops, presidents, moderators and clerics have their special responsibilities as formal guardians and teachers of the faith of the Church. However, since ministry is a shared function, theology belongs to God's people: it is the voice of the people. The specialists and clerics have their role, but the people of God, the communion of saints past and present, are the final arbiters of the Church's theology when it is expressed in human terms. Ultimately the theology of the church belongs to all its members, and therefore effective ministers must be also effective theologians, and therefore require the insights that TR brings.

Perceived Problems with Current Models of TR

As stated previously in this work, there are problems with TR as taught in theological colleges, identified formally by Pattison, Thompson and Green (2003) and anecdotally by various theology students, and which prompted this thesis.

TR in colleges is required to be linear, represented as an essay, with a beginning, middle and end with a coherent argument running all the way through. Students argue that reflection is simply not like that, and in particular, reflections rarely, if ever, come to an end or conclusion. In addition, there is a difficulty in identifying sufficient inputs to inform a truly reflective process (for example, there may be a strand of Buddhist thought that illuminates a particular reflection – but if the reflectors have never heard of it, it will never be brought into the conversation). As TRs are generally marked as essays, it becomes difficult for the process to become truly collaborative, and if they do, how can this be recorded on paper? The process is seen as being overly academic, lacking in practical application and shrouded in mystical and technical language. Because there is little offered in terms of methods or expectations of the process, students feel anxious and inadequate when reflecting, emotions that are particularly disempowering in an activity that requires participants to disclose so much of themselves and risk ridicule. Finally, TR is seen as inflexible and divorced from real life, and very, very serious – certainly very little playfulness can be discerned!
In this exploration of the nature, characteristics, prerequisites for, and desirable outcomes of TR, certain questions regarding the nature of reflection and the Internet have surfaced that need to be examined by this thesis. As each characteristic or ‘hallmark’ of TR is explored in the next section, the corresponding research question is also described.

**Recording Reflections: public and accountable**

At the basis of many complaints about TR as taught in Theological Colleges is the claim that to present a TR in the form of an essay, with a beginning, middle and end, written down on paper and marked according to content, is far from the best way of capturing a vital, exciting and life changing process.

Reflections can be expressed in many different ways. However, although reflection is certainly an art (see, for example, Bleakley 1999: 215- 330, and Winter, 1989: ch. 10), it is also a discipline, and as a discipline it needs to be, to some extent, public, measurable and accountable. Because of this, most models of reflection revolve around a written form. Creative (expressive and explorative) writing is an appropriate form for reflective practice as it relies on our habitual medium for communication: words. Writing gives validity, form and coherence over time and space, as well as aesthetic illumination (Bolton 1999: 243-5). We inhabit the gaps between practice and theory, between professional and personal, with words.

Writing develops and clarifies our understanding of our data or experience; the discussion then draws out issues and locates gaps and queries, extending the learning process for the writer and the group. In this way, the writer becomes reader and co-critic, and the discussion group or audience takes on the role of co-author. Previously, the barriers to this taking place were largely technological and geographical – the group needed to meet together and to somehow combine their thoughts and musings over a significant period of time for the reflection to be truly useful. Internet technology, I believe, allows us to break down these barriers of time and place.

But are words sufficient? “What is the use of a book”, thought Alice, “without pictures or conversation?” (Carroll, 1865: 1). Alice had the wisdom to know that a text had to capture her heart, imagination and spirit as well as her mind in order for it to speak to her fully. So it is for reflection: words on a page (or computer screen) may form the backbone of the reflection, but in order for it to come alive, for it to be able to change situations or lives, it must also communicate in other ways: by using music, pictures, video and also perhaps by using the new technologies, specifically hypertext technology.
important knowledge about reality always comes out of literature … through a … transformation of reality by imagination and the use of words … When you succeed in creating something different out of … experience, you also achieve the possibility of communicating something that was not evident before the novel or poem or play existed. But you cannot plan this transmission of knowledge. The novel is a reality in itself. (Llosa, 1991: 79)


Therefore, one research question for this project is, can the new technologies of the internet such as hypertext and hypermedia enable us to capture and record TR in such a way that it remains alive and vital?

**Hallmarks of TR**

From this review of the development of reflective practice in the fields of Practical Theology, education, medicine and counselling, the following ‘hallmarks’ of reflection can be distilled, and, although not exhaustive, these at least appear to be common across the various models and methods of reflection. These hallmarks are then elaborated upon in the following pages.

Reflection appears to be (a) many things. It is (b) essentially collaborative, (c) multi-vocal and (d) at its best can cause refraction (that is, a new way of seeing situations and events). Reflection (e) is public and should be accountable (and thus must be able to be recorded in some fashion); it (f) tells stories, and therefore is rarely linear, belongs as much to audience as to the story-teller, and (g) requires participants to listen. Reflection is (h) located in a specific context and (i) pays attention to emotions, thereby (j) engaging the whole person and situation. It can (k) transform the situation and is therefore, in some sense, (l) political.

This is not to say that every instance of TR must exhibit all of these hallmarks in order to be worthy of the name. However, I believe that every model of TR must carry within it at least the possibility of all these elements.

I will now examine each of these aspects of reflection in more detail.
Reflection as Collaborative and Multi-vocal

Commonly (and this was seen with great clarity in Pattison, Thompson and Green’s preliminary work on “TR for the real world”), reflection is seen by theological students as an individual act; this is its very essence, and any attempt to share or examine the fruits of TR are antithetical to the process. Kenneth Bruffee (1990) in his article Collaborative Learning and the ’Conversation of Mankind’ states a similar view: ”Oakenshott (1990) argues that the human conversation takes place within us as well as among us, and that conversation as it takes place within us is what we call reflective thought. ...Oakenshott assumes what the work of Lev Vgotsky and others has shown, that reflective thought is public or social conversation internalized” (97).

However, although an internal conversation may form part of the process, reflection is greater than this – it requires collaboration. Donna Qualley and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater (2002: online) confirm this: “If collaboration is to provide a way for people to negotiate multiple (and often contradictory positions), it must involve two recursive moves: a dialectical encounter with an “other” (a person or idea) and a reflexive engagement with the self”.

Reflection involves, and requires … an inner-outer tension in the development of meaning, a process that occurs in communication with others, through ‘the layering of meaning upon meaning, voice upon voice, strengthening through merging (but not identification), the combination of many voices (a corridor of voices) that augments understanding. (Fey, 2002: online)

In short, it is this ‘combination of many voices’ that generates the conversation within us that is "reflexive" – without other voices (wherever they may come from: other people, textbooks, dim memories or snatches of hymns) reflection cannot occur. Collaboration allows for a "fusion of horizons” (Qualley and Chiseri-Strater, 1994: 1) that results in an enlargement of one's perspective, what could be called a more "complicated understanding”.

One of the themes Lester Faigley develops in his book Fragments of Rationality (1993) is that reflective discourse tends to be more multivocal, more fragmented, and contains more information, commonly with elements of serious mixed with trivial content. Often reflective discourse amounts to an overwhelming quantity of information of which to make sense. A common experience I have after engaging in a TR is one of asking, “what on earth happened?” I know there were moments of interesting insights and views expressed, but any meaning I can pull out of the discussion is fragmented like a jigsaw puzzle that has been tossed on the floor in pieces. However, this multivocal nature of reflection should be seen as far from a hindrance – there is an “essential intertextuality of life” (Faigley, 1993: 45), whereby texts interpenetrate ad infinitum in the never ending play of meaning. In order to approach the
fullest possible understanding of a situation to enable us to reflect upon it, as many voices as possible should be ‘heard’, including (or perhaps especially) those voices that are usually silent and on the margins of society. The great difficulty, of course, is allowing these voices to speak in a TR, or even to be aware of them.

However, composition theorists Joseph Harris, John Trimbur, and Susan Jarratt, as well as scholars in other disciplines, have discussed a number of potential problems with this uncritical notion of community which too often emphasizes consensus and connection at the expense of conflict or difference. Philosopher Iris Young (1986: 2) argues that the ideal of community "presumes subjects who are present to themselves and presumes subjects can understand one another as they understand themselves". ‘Community’ also implies that there is a ready supply of people willing and waiting to reflect – while this may be the case in some professions, such as counselling where reflective practice is seen as foundational, this is rarely the case with ministers. Thus, TR requires a community of reflectors. The question for this project is whether the internet, representing the on-line thoughts of millions of people, provide this community for collaboration and reflection.

Reflection as Refraction

Quite simply, sharing reflective pieces puts the knowledge gained from reflection in a broader context. If, as Pat Belanoff contends, reflection “can enable the reconstituting - if only momentarily - of a unified self, which … enables one to act more effectively” (2001:421), then surely sharing and reflecting upon these reflections may similarly fragment that “unified self” and stir the student to reconstitute a more complex and synthetic understanding. Carol Pope uses the term “refraction” to describe this movement beyond reflection where the same activity is seen but from a different angle: “I have to do more than hold a mirror to myself and the group; I have to turn the mirror and see the group from different angles. …I call this process Refraction. Refraction, an extension of reflection, suggests an added way of seeing” (1999:180). Reflecting upon reflections, then, is a kind of “refraction” that heightens and deepens the learning gained from reflection.

How, though, can this be achieved by one person reflecting alone? From where will come the challenge and impetus to refract? Can the internet, by juxtaposing divergent and clashing concepts and thoughts, ‘stir up’ the reflector such that refraction can occur?

Reflection as Story Telling

We do not ‘store’ experience as data, like a computer,
we ‘story’ it. (Winter 1988: 235)

Stories are the way we use to make sense of ourselves and our place in the world. We tell and retell our stories both minor and major to our friends, loved ones, our colleagues, even our therapists and priests. Of course, this can be merely a process of tucking ourselves into a ‘quilt patch’ worked out of safe and self-affirming accounts – our stories can too often be essentially uncritical and unchallenging. This (often unknowing) self-protectiveness can ensure that our stories are not exploring sensitive issues, ‘the gaps’, but can rather simply be comforting fairy tales that express how we would like life to be.

If TR was simply the telling of one’s story, it would run the risk of becoming merely confession: after all, confession can have a seductive quality; the desire to hold an audience captive with our autobiography is strong. TR is, however, more than an examination of personal experience: it is located in the social and political structures in which we live. In order to retain political and social awareness and sensitivity, TR needs to be rooted in the public and the political as well as the personal and the private.

To this end, TR needs to be taken alongside discussions with peers on the issues raised, an examination of the texts from the larger fields of work and politics, and discussions with colleagues from outside our own spheres of expertise and work. TR thus becomes socially and politically, as well as psychologically, useful, rather than a mere navel-gazing exercise. Goodson (1998) creates a distinction between life stories and life histories. Life history is life story plus appropriate and challenging data from a wide range of sources, and evidence of vital discussion with colleagues. The life history pushes the question of whether private issues are also public matters. The life story individualises and personalises, the life history contextualises and politicises (Goodson 1998: 11). As he points out,

Stories do social and political work. A story is never just a story – it is a statement of belief, of morality, it speaks about value. (1998: 12)

The ‘grand stories’ or meta narratives of patriarchy/patriotism, religion, family and local ties no longer hold our society together (amongst others, Lyotard, 1984). Faith in the great god science has also been shaken: “science, in my view, is now at the end of certainty” (Prigogine, 1999: 101). The post-Newtonian belief in our ability to order (master even) our world is rapidly vanishing. The assumptions that an objective view of the world (Kantian) is ‘grown up’, that we should shed our subjective view along with sand and water play, are also being questioned (see also Sacks 1985: 1-21).
A story is an attempt to create order out of a chaotic world. But for our experiences to change us – spiritually, socially, psychologically – our world must be made to appear strange. We need to examine the stories we tell critically: to create and recreate fresh accounts of our lives from different perspectives or points of view, to invite and listen to the responses of others. Listening critically to the stories of others also enables learning from their experiences. The process of postulating what the other actors in a situation must have thought and felt, empathising with them and the situation, as well as imaginatively reconstructing the situation in new and fresh ways, offers understandings and insights as no other process can. For example, the story can be retold from the point of view of someone else in the story, reconstruct it with the genders reversed (or subtly subverted), or a satisfactory ending in the place of a horrible one.

Can the internet become such a laboratory, where we can play with myth, identity, self image and perhaps even meaning, to provoke new understanding?

Reflection as Listening

The role of listener to the narrative is just as important as that of the teller to re-teller:

… so there is an art to listening … Every narrator is aware from experience that to every narration the listener makes a decisive contribution: a distracted or hostile audience can unnerve any teacher or lecturer; a friendly public sustains. But the individual listener also shares responsibility for that art of art that every narration is: you realise this when you tell something other the telephone, and you freeze, because you miss the visible reactions of the listener … This is also the chief reason why writers, those who must narrate to a disembodied public, are few. (Levi 1988: 35)

Theological Reflectors are not writers in this sense. They are writing for an embodied set of people: they write only for their group. The discussion with colleagues, the process of retelling or re-storying, is just as much an essential part of the process as the writing and storying. Sharing reflective writings and discussing them in depth enables the development of practice because the outcomes of reflection are taken back into practice – iteratively improving and developing praxis (see figure 1).

However, once the TR has been committed to paper, there can be no ‘listening’ in the sense that Levi promotes – there can only be assent or dissent. Is there some way that the internet can be used to enable people to listen to, and respond to, and perhaps even change, a reflection?
Reflection and Emotion

We live in deeds not years, in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most – feels the noblest – acts the best. (Aristotle)

Sophocles has been translated as saying ‘between feelings and action there is thought’ (Antigone). In other words, our actions are effective only if they arise from both emotion and thought. All writers point to the importance of paying attention to the emotions, bringing them honestly and openly into the ‘reflective space’. A degree of empathy is a necessary skill for reflection - one can re-experience an event, or experience another’s vicariously. “The past is [not] a foreign country. They do [not] do things differently there” (Hartley, 1953: 1).

The anthropologist James Clifford (1986: 71-81) points out how the ethnographer can no longer stand on a mountaintop from which authoritatively to map the human condition. Similarly, Theological Reflectors cannot confidently diagnose and dictate from an objective professional or scientific standpoint. The enmeshment of culture and environment is total: no one is objective. Theologians must ‘inhabit’ the reflection.

Reflection as Transformation

Many scholars have noted that reflection acts as the vehicle for transforming a learner’s understanding. Gillie Bolton (1999) uses an interesting metaphor to describe this power of reflection. One metaphor for reflection is the mirror which projects back the object being looked at - as it is. She, instead, prefers the notion of the “Looking Glass” out of Alice in Wonderland.

Alice ... has just crawled through the mirror. She looks around her and, in this looking-glass-land, even "the pictures on the wall next the fire seemed to be all alive." In my experience, the things seen from the Reflexive Writing side of the looking glass are or are about to become, all alive. (1999: 193)

Donna Qualley and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater describe this effect of reflection as a knowing ‘deeper than reason’: “if we are to engage in authentic dialogue with each other, it must be a reflexive dialogue, one that leads all of us to a more complicated understanding and to a way of knowing 'deeper than reason’” (1994: online). Notice that here,
reflection is represented as a catalyst that has the effect of a change—a change of knowledge, a change of awareness, even a change of consciousness. David Kember describes Mezirow's extensive work on reflective thinking as “an essential component of this model of transformative learning for adults” (2000:383). To do TR is to be willing to state, 'this is how and where I am now, and this is the particular map I'm using on which to identify my position'; to site oneself in a place where, implicitly or explicitly, others (including those who are met only through the medium of their reflections) may be able to point to hitherto unexplored pathways that will lead to a different position; perhaps even to recommend the use of a different kind of map.

However, although TR has the potential to transform the reflector, it can also transform the situation. A reflective process that observed a situation and thereby identified a possibility liberating action but did not provoke or enact that action is ultimately pointless, and possibly even un-ethical. Can on-line reflection assist in this transformation?

Reflection as a Political Process

The psychologist Oliver Sacks studied people who were missing, or effectively missing, part of their brains, and the bizarre things this led them to do. In his essay *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, (1985) he studies Dr. P, who could see, but had lost ‘visual perception, visual imagination and memory, the fundamental powers of visual representation’. Sacks concludes:

Our mental processes, which constitute our being and our life, are not just abstract and mechanical, but personal as well – and as such involve not just classifying and categorising but continual judging and feeling also. If this is missing, we become computer-like, like Dr. P was. And by the same token, if we delete feeling and judging, the personal, from the cognitive sciences, we reduce them to something as defective as Dr. P – and we reduce our apprehension of the concrete and real … Our cognitive sciences are themselves suffering from an agnosia essentially similar to Dr. P’s. Dr. P may therefore serve as a warning and as a parable – of what happens to a science which eschews the judgemental, the particular, the personal, and becomes entirely abstract and computational. (1985: 19)

TR may also learn from Sachs’ warning and parable, and be open to ourselves as much as is possible. A TR suffering from agnosia will not get us terribly far. Seen as a set of interlocking stories, the problems, anguishes and joys of practice become comprehensible – material to be dealt with creatively and imaginatively. Attempting to reflect only upon ‘what actually happened’, and then to subject such an account to rational questions such as ‘how might I have done it better’ unnecessarily restricts what might be explored.
Effective reflective practice encourages the seeking of understanding and interpretation of principles, justifications and meanings (Morrison 1996). This can lead reflectors to perceive a need for change in their world, their relation and attitude to it, and to seek to change the attitude of others. Can the internet become a medium to achieve such an aim?
Reflection: Conclusion

What is TR? Mind the Gap

No single definition of TR exists: indeed, it is difficult in the extreme to find agreement between two theologians as to what the term may even encompass. In such a situation, it may not be helpful to look for a simple definition as it will merely inflame passions. On the other hand, a definition with many sub clauses and conditions serves only to confuse and obfuscate. Therefore, as an aid to shape this discussion of TR I will settle on the most basic of definitions, based upon Farley’s work (2003: 37-38) on situational hermeneutics: 

Theological Reflection is the art of interpreting situations as a discipline of faith.

All humans exist in, act in, and interpret situations. This human condition does not evaporate when that person is part of a community of faith. On the contrary, faith and membership of a community of faith inevitably colour and shape the interpretative task. This, Farley claims (2003: 38), creates a specific, differentiable, special hermeneutic task, a task which demands a deliberate and self-conscious educational undertaking, “part of the church’s lay and clergy education.”

One of the distinctive cries of London is ‘mind the gap’, a reminder on underground trains to be careful as you alight from a train, lest you fall between carriage and platform. The notion of gap can be used as an image for other boundaries in our lives, such as that between me as a priest and me as a parent. We spend our lives minding these gaps in order to protect ourselves from being hit by trains, being “eaten by bears” (Milne, 1928: 27-29) or falling into uncomfortable situations where we do not know the answers. But it is these gaps that can be most constructive – where we are able to learn and explore. In these gaps a person is open, or potentially open, to questioning situations, knowledge, feelings and understandings. TR inhabits these gaps between practical experience and theoretical theology, and acts as a bridge.

Effective TR can enable a certain discipline, a mindfulness of the gaps – an awareness and a willingness to tackle border issues – excitingly and creatively, albeit carefully. Winter et al. (1999) maintain that reflective practice is one way of redressing the ‘devaluation, deskilling and alienation’ now suffered by the caring and teaching professionals, including ministers.
To the definition of TR I am also tempted to add a single sub-clause: that of *theological jazz*.

*The art of interpreting situations as a discipline of faith:*

*the art of theological jazz*

But why should the proposed definition of TR include the clause *theological jazz*? Simply because the best Practical Theology is similar to neither baroque nor grunge music; instead, it is like good jazz, combining technical mastery with the artistry of focused artistic improvisation. Theological jazz combines the structure supplied by the tradition of the church with the theologian’s practical experience to manage situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and conflicting values. There is no one way of doing it, and one size does not fit all situations. TR is best modelled, not taught in the traditional sense. Model it, play with it, and you will create the conditions for it to grow.

However, according to the research by Pattison et al (2003), many practitioners claim that it is not only impossible to study TR in an academic sense, but that the very process of observing reflection ‘castrates’ the process. Nevertheless, without understanding the underlying theoretical principles of practice, we are merely skilled mechanics trying out one tool after another without understanding which tool would be appropriate to the task.

Therefore, perhaps the most important aspect of this research is to develop new tools and models for TR, not as ends in themselves, but as an exploration of the process of reflection in theology. In the next chapter I will explore some of these tools, the ‘new technologies’ that have become associated with the Internet: hypertext, hypermedia, bots, blogs and wikis. In it I will analyse the potential benefits of such technologies for TR, and also examine some of the possible drawbacks in relation to reflection. I shall then move on to describe the central purpose of this project: the practical exploration of TR on the Internet.
Text on the Web: Hypertext

In the previous chapter I surveyed the various models and methods of reflective practice and came to some tentative conclusions regarding what provokes or inhibits TR. I was also able to explore some of the limitations of current processes and formulate some research questions. In this chapter I will now consider some of the new technologies that have been developed alongside the Internet and examine their strengths and weaknesses in particular regard to TR. I begin with a survey of some precursors to hypertext, then progress to an examination to some of the technology behind hypertext and hypermedia. I then explore the nature of hypertext - how it alters our understanding of text, author and reader – and consider some of the benefits and drawbacks that this technology may have for TR.

The New Media

The Internet has been described variously as "the grandest revolution in the capture and dissemination of emerging academic and professional knowledge and information since Caxton developed his printing press" (Wills, 1995: 14), "the most significant advance since the penny stamp" (Keller, 1995), and (paraphrased) "the end of the need to print to paper....the harbinger of an economic, social, and cultural revolution as significant as industrialization and urbanization in the 18th and 19th Centuries....people will not just work differently; they will think differently” (Davidow and Malone, 1993: 162-167). In short, the claim is that the introduction of the Web is little less than a revolution in communication.

8 The terms ‘Internet’ and ‘Web’ are conflated throughout this thesis. The distinction is very real from technical and historical perspectives, but isn’t being observed in the public consciousness: email and home pages seem to be part of the same phenomenon, despite the former being the Internet and the latter the web.
One of the problems with being at the start of a revolution is that one can hardly reflect on it adequately. It is a little like the schoolboy joke in the letter saying "Dear Mum, All is well over here in the Holy Roman Empire, except that the Hundred Years War started today". The joke is, of course, that you can look back on the Hundred Years War and see what its shapes and patterns were, how long it lasted, and who won; indeed, you can give it a name. But looking forward, it is difficult to make a lot of sense of it. The same is true of the combination of the Internet and Theology: with its virtual environments and simulated worlds, we have entered a metaphysical laboratory, a new tool for examining our notions of ‘God’ and for investigating our very sense of reality.

The ‘Web is changing our concepts of space, time, perfection, social grouping, knowledge, matter and our sense of morality. Our real world view of space says that it consists of homogenous measurable distances laid out across an arbitrary geography indifferent to human needs; the Web’s geography, on the other hand, consists of links between pages each representing a spring of human interest. Real world time consists of ticking clocks and the relentless schedules they enable; on the Web, time runs as intertwining threads and stories, starting and stopping as required. In the real world, perfection is held as an ideal we humans always disappoint; on the web, perfection just gets in the way. In the real world, social groups become more impersonal as they get larger; on the Web, individuals retain their uniqueness, no matter what the size of the group. In the real world, we have thinned our knowledge down to a flavourless stream of verifiable facts; on the Web, knowledge is ‘fat’ with stories and voice. Our ‘realistic’ view of matter says it is the stuff that exists independently of us, and as such it is essentially apart from whatever meanings we cast upon it like shadows; the matter of the web, on the other hand, consists of pages we have built, full of intention and meaning. In the real world, to be moral means we follow a set of principals; while on the Web, resorting to principals looks like prissiness, and authenticity, empathy and enthusiasm instead guide our interactions.

However, it is the thesis of this research that it is in the reading and writing of documents that theology and the ‘Web collide most creatively. Therefore, it is to hypertext that this chapter now turns.
The Development of Electronic Media

The Printed Word

The word was born as pure sound. First the word is spoken; then it appears as a symbol, a pictograph that recalls the sound. Next, in the phonetic alphabet, the word takes a form can be readily translatable - from sound to sight and back to sound. In print, sound becomes redundant: the printed page makes silent reading possible. The word is now fully objectified. It exists on the printed page, quite independently of any speaker or any hearer. The sound of the word no longer matters. The word is an object, indifferently available to any subject.

Through this process, print has created a need for interpretation: hermeneutics has become a necessity. Interpretation is required by print precisely because print decontextualizes the word. When the word is extracted from its birthplace in the human voice and placed on a page in black and white, then the word no longer has a context. The meaning of the printed word becomes a problem, even for its author. Once a word is printed and circulated, it is available to be recontextualized by readers in different times and place. And as it is recontextualized, even the author may lose the certainty of what contexts are appropriate and what are not. A replaceable context is something that can be celebrated, as in printed poetry, or deplored, as in fundamentalist exegesis.

Print is one-dimensional. Print is. It exists in splendid objectivity on the printed page. The simplicity, the stark objectivity, the fixity of the printed word transfers itself to meaning. As we encounter the word objectively, we look for a meaning that corresponds to it. We imagine that the objectivity of the word must be accompanied by an objectivity of meaning. We look for the meaning of a text that matches the unity and objectivity of the printed word.

The hermeneutical crisis of print begins in this search for the single meaning of the single text. Gutenberg transferred the sacred text from the illuminated manuscript to the objective, and duplicable, printed page. Where the manuscript had produced an intimacy between the copier/reader and the word, the printed text was quite objective. The Reformation and Counter Reformation can be understood, from this perspective, as a struggle to determine who would control the definition of the objective meaning of the text, a meaning which corresponded to the objectivity of its printed form (see, for example, Hughes, 2004). Would the single meaning be defined by the magisterium? Would it be revealed by the Holy Spirit through the devotional life of the pious reader? Or would it be defined by the new class that would be created by the print culture: the objective scholar? Protestantism, in affirming the new power that the printed word would put in the hands of ordinary people, opposed the claims of the
traditional ecclesiastical elite to control the meaning of the sacred word in its new printed form. But by insisting on a single literal sense of Scripture, Protestantism ended by supporting the claims of a new elite--the objective, critical scholar—to define the single meaning of the single text.

![Figure 3: Plate XXVIII of the Mazarin Bible, issued by Gutenberg in 1456](image)

Critical scholarship attempted to resolve the hermeneutical crisis by positing an original context, which, if properly reconstructed by historical science, would determine the single ‘literal meaning’ which the theology of the Reformation had posited. In banishing allegory from interpretation, only historical science could provide the objective context that would endow the objective word with objective meaning. It was left to visionaries like Pascal and Kierkegaard to see the flaw in this approach: Johannes Climacus (a pseudonym of Kierkegaard) identified the ultimate failure of an objective, critical hermeneutical enterprise. Faith, according to Climacus, is an "infinite passionate interest in one's eternal happiness” (Swensen and Lowrie, 1941: 33). But, Climacus objects, in the scientific spirit that dominated objective critical scholarship we became so objective that we no longer had an eternal happiness! The search for a single “literal meaning” was seen as self-defeating.

If it is true that there is no one meaning for a text how then can it be represented and communicated in a way that allows the reader/writer to interpret it according to their context? One technology that has become available in recent years is electronic media, communicated via the Web.
The Digital Word

To the objective scholar whose concern was the interpretation of text, electronic media represent the unscholarly, the unscientific and the untruthful. Print was designed to convey solid stable fact: it could hold a proposition, freeze it so that it could be studied, dissected and verified. The electronic media were designed to convey news, information that moved so quickly that, by the time it could be confirmed or denied, it was no longer news. The content of the electronic media, as they developed from the code of the telegraph into the sound of radio to the images of the cinema and TV, now constitute performance more than it does description.

Electronic media, it is possible, have the power to render text archaic. With the availability of information in many non-textual forms, the need for universal literacy does not seem as compelling as it once did. One does not need to read in order to be informed about the world beyond one's immediate experience. One does not need to read a newspaper in order to be informed about the events of the day. Radio, television and their respective storage devices - the audio tape and the VCR - greatly reduce the importance of text in the culture at large. In the electronic media, then, print loses its place as the primary information medium. In the process, performance replaces rational argument as the primary mode in which information is presented.

David Lochhead contends that as we relate to text through computer technology we will be less inclined to look for the meaning of a text. As the text appears to us less and less as a given, objective ‘thing’, the “idea of an objective meaning of a text will become less compelling”. (Lochhead,1997: 66)

In spite of these appearances, text has not disappeared. In a sense, text has been given a new lease on life by the computer. The computer deals with text easily and naturally. Instead of reducing the text we must use, computers actually multiply text. When we begin to use computers in any regular and systematic way, we soon find that we are overwhelmed with text - far more than we can absorb.

The computer, then, tends to restore a central place in our culture to text. With the democratization of the computer in the form of the personal computer, we find the culture shift away from print reversed. In its re-emphasis of text, computerization raises questions of whether the new technology will fundamentally change our relation to text. On the Web, this text takes the form of hypertextual (or hypermedia) documents.
What is Hypertext?

The World Wide Web (WWW)

The World Wide Web is a user-friendly interface onto the Internet. It was developed by Tim Berners-Lee in 1990-91 ([www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee](www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee)), and caught on in 1993, when a freely-available 'Web browser called Mosaic started the 'Web revolution'. Berners-Lee is sometimes mistakenly credited with inventing the internet, but his actual achievement was perhaps more socially significant: he recognised that the internet was 'too much of a hassle for a non-computer expert' (Berners-Lee 1999: 20), and created an elegant solution. More surprisingly, Berners-Lee hoped that the World Wide Web would be built through collaboration - he wanted 'Webusers to be involved in a two-way process, not only reading 'Web pages, but also adding to and amending them, creating links, and, of course, creating new pages. The Web's creator did not expect 'Webbrowsing to be a one-way experience, but the browser software which became popular, from Mosaic onwards, would only read and present 'Web pages, not alter them.

The dream behind the 'Webs is of a common information space in which we communicate by sharing information. Its universality is essential: the fact that a hypertext link can point to anything, be it personal, local or global, be it draft or highly polished. There was a second part of the dream, too, dependent on the 'Webbeing so generally used that it became a realistic mirror (or in fact the primary embodiment) of the ways in which we work and play and socialize. That was that once the state of our interactions was on line, we could then use computers to help us analyse it, make sense of what we are doing, where we individually fit in, and how we can better work together. (From 'The World Wide Web: A very short personal history' at [www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee](www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee)).

It is worth emphasising that the 'Webs is something that runs on the internet. It is not, however, the same as the internet. The internet is the network of networked computers. Since it is basically all cables, wires and microprocessors, the internet can carry any kind of data, such as e-mail, computer programs, or illegally copied music files. The Web, however, is made up of a particular type of (easy to use, universally readable) data. At its heart are hypertextual links.
Hypertext and Hypermedia

Imagine you're writing a short paper, and you're using expository footnotes. You find, however, that you want to be able to address more fully the issues which are raised in those footnotes, so you develop a few of them into essays. Because each essay now deals with a different aspect of what on a larger scale is the same issue, you find yourself now using parts (or all) of some essays as "footnotes" for parts (or all) of others. Functionally, this means you offer the reader opportunities to branch off from any one essay at points within the text where another essay elaborates upon, or brings new light to, the current thread of the author's thoughts (and the readers' thoughts, as anticipated by the author; readers are more empowered to determine structure in hypertext than in most traditional linear forms, and "authorship" becomes a more slippery term in hypertext writing). For instance, if you are reading an article about marine mammal bioacoustics, you may be interested in seeing a picture of a dolphin.

Or you may want to hear the sound it makes.

Or you may even be interested in seeing what a marine mammal sound "looks like" in a spectrogram. You might even want to find out more about sounds made by other animals in the sea, thus leading you on a completely different, detailed path. As you approach the point where it becomes harder and harder to tell which was the "original" source essay and which was the footnote, you are moving towards full hypertextuality.

Figure 4: hypertext links between documents
There is no reason to limit digital text to the storage capacity of one's own desktop computer. By nature, electronic media are networked media; the computers of the world are increasingly connected through local and widearea networks and by the Internet (Fowler, 1993). Through the World Wide Web (WWW), using a frontend graphical user interface such as Microsoft’s Internet Explorer (IE), one can explore the riches of the Internet by following hypertextual connections between the multitudinous resources on the Net. If the user has the appropriate hardware and software and plenty of bandwidth, then IE allows one to access digital resources residing on Internet computers all over the world—to read a text, to view digitized photos or graphics, to play a video clip, or to listen to a digitized sound. We are rapidly approaching the realization of a global hypertext that was only dreamed of a few years by fanatics such as Ted Nelson, in his fabled "Xanadu Project" (Nelson, 1987).

The word hypertext was coined back in the sixties by Ted Nelson in his 1965 paper *A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing and the Indeterminate*. His unfinished project was named Xanadu, alluding to both the poetic fragment of Samuel Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* (1798) and the palace Xanadu in Welles’ *Citizen Kane*. Xanadu was a palace which was never completed, just like the project of Ted Nelson, which attempts to "design and develop" a system for the containment of our total “docuverse” (1992: 2). Nelson defines hypertext as "non-sequential writing - text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. This is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" (1992: 4). Thus, hypertext consists (the language varies) of nodes or writing spaces, connected by links created either by the author/creator or by the reader/user. By activating an existing link or by creating a new one, the reader can jump from node to node and thus blaze a trail through the network or 'Web that is the 'docuverse' of the hypertext (Landow, 1997). Hypertext is simply a non-linear way of presenting information. Rather than reading or learning about things in the order that an author, or editor, or publisher sets out for us, readers of hypertext may follow their own path, create their own order— their own meaning out the material.

These links are at the heart of the 'Web and the Web's spatiality. Because the links arrive from many other documents, the 'Web turns into a larger place than the real world. It is a public place, a place we can enter, wander, and get lost in, but cannot own. Since place and space have been inseparable in our experience of the real world until now, when we experience the Web-ness of hyperlinks, we assume that it must also have the usual attributes of spatiality, including the accidental nature of geography. This makes it easy to forget that what holds the 'Web together is not a base of rock, but the world's collective passion.

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9 Term coined by Ted Nelson, the founder of the Xanadu project, who defines it thus: "We need a way for people to store information not as individual "files" but as a connected literature. It must be possible to create, access and manipulate this literature of richly formatted and connected information cheaply, reliably and securely from anywhere in the world. Documents must remain accessible indefinitely, safe from any kind of loss, damage, modification, censorship or removal except by the owner. It must be impossible to falsify ownership or track individual readers of any document."
The result is a loose federation of documents – many small pieces, loosely joined. But even the notion of a
document has been subverted by this model: not only are the documents joined together, but their interior structure
has changed also. The ‘Web has literally blown documents apart. It treats tightly bound volumes like a collection of
ideas – none longer than can fit on a single screen - that the reader can consult in the order she or he wants,
regardless of the author's intentions. It makes links beyond the documents an integral part of every document on the
web. Bolter points at the key aspect of this property:

A hypertext has no canonical order. Every path defines an equally convincing and appropriate
reading, and in that simple fact the reader's relationship to the text changes radically. A text as a
network has no univocal sense; it is a multiplicity without the imposition of a principle of
domination. (Bolter, 1992: 25)

The process of linking was originally conceptualized by Bush (1945) in his proposed memex as a means of
registering the connections made by an individual thinker as he or she explored and related concepts during the
research process. Bush's underlying premise was that the mind worked associatively. Whether or not this is true, the
dominant model of hypertext now rests on claims that it represents the associative nature of all thinking, thus
bringing it closer to the working of the mind for the user. As Dryden puts it: "In its structure of branching links and
nodes, hypertext simulates the mind's associative processes, thereby providing an electronic platform for
constructing and recording the reader's literate thinking". (Dryden, 1994: 284)

Some Precursors to Hypertext

In sketching the history of the 'technologies of the word', Walter Ong (1982) hints at remarkable parallels between
primary and secondary oral cultures. Ong argues that all forms of communication- including basic language -
constitute technologies of communication that in turn profoundly shape (indeed, in the view of some, determine)
culture. Human cultural history is then subdivided along the lines of orality, literacy (marked by the invention of the
alphabet and the rise of text), print (defined by the invention of the printing press), and what Ong calls the
"secondary orality" of electronic culture (1982: 44). Oral cultures- those which rely on the "technologies" of
storytelling, including repetitive phrases and generic frameworks to aid the memory- are characterized as
comparatively egalitarian (Chesebro and Bertelsen, 1996) because more or less everyone can speak, and thus
participate in this communication technology. In literate cultures, by contrast, the technologies of reading and
writing - at least until the 19th century - are the preserve of an elite.

By contrast, Ong argues that a "secondary orality" in the electronic culture created by the mass media and new
communications technologies conjoins the more egalitarian and participative community of orality with the global
reaches of the new technologies: "secondary orality generates a sense for groups immeasurably larger than those of the primary oral culture - McLuhan's 'global village'" (Ong 1988: 136). In part, this will come as we shift from the authority of fixed, mass-produced texts to what Mullins calls "the fluid word" - precisely the electronic word, malleable and open to change by anyone across a network, and open, further, to a nearly infinite 'Web' of hypertextual links that can be added more or less by anyone: each new link, of course, then opens the original text up to still another interpretation in an unending hermeneutical dance of reading and creating new meaning.

Scholars familiar with the Talmud have recognized that such hypertextual linking and the resulting trees of diverse interpretations are in fact neither entirely new, nor possible only in electronic form. On the contrary, the Talmud itself records multiple interpretations and applications of a single text from the Torah of Moses (the Pentateuch or the first five books of the TANAKH, the Hebrew Scriptures), as these interpretations, applications, critiques, etc., arose across the Oral Torah.
When Daniel Bomberg, a Viennese non-Jewish printer, gave the Babylonian Talmud its present form in the sixteenth century, he conceived of the brilliant idea of liberating the typography of the page from its linear, mechanical form. He achieved a work of art in which the medium is the message. Just a few seconds' study of the page of the Talmud reveals that this is not the book as a decree or an orderly procession of words and ideas, lined up and marching in lockstep, and forcing the reader, in turn, to proceed enfilade -- like soldiers in a line. This is not about authorship, though it is about authority, so much so that the Talmud becomes a sacred text of the Jews. Even as a printed page, with the (written) Torah text at the centre, surrounded by rings of interpretation and application, the Talmud retains a hypertextual openness: the page is printed with blank space at its edges, suggesting that the dance of interpretation will continue (Neusner, 1991: 157-174). And though the Talmud itself is considered a sacred text, publishers and editors of newer editions do not hesitate to include their own commentary, if only in the form of photographs, pictures, and clarifying comments (maps, datelines, etc.) or simple footnote marks -- like hot buttons were the page on the Web. As such, the narrative preserved in the text is not merely a dead record of past events: rather, it is shaped so as to recreate through contemporary re-readings something like the participatory oral community originally gathered to hear what is described as a speech of Moses.

But beyond their physical similarities, both hypertext and the Talmud imply a way of knowing that is very different from the linear book. It attempts to capture the noise of a symposium, a hot and multi-voiced discussion of an important and ambiguous question, the basis for talmudical discourse. Many questions are left unresolved; while the voices which speak, speak with the utmost authority; many times these speakers are anonymous, just like participants in chat rooms or bulletin boards or e-mail lists. The debate, furthermore, extends over time and space. While the central text is supposed to recreate the discussions of the Sanhedrin, the successive layers include commentary by and among rabbis spread out from Babylon to France to Jerusalem to Cairo, and span twenty centuries.

A second look at the ancient Jewish sages reveals that they, too, understood the power of the web metaphor in grasping the interrelatedness of all creation. The Babylonian Talmud is divided into sixty-three volumes, known as tractates, which were compiled and edited over the course of hundreds of years, until the collected work reached its final form around the year 500. In Hebrew, the word for tractate is Masechet. It so happens that the word also means "web." The labyrinth of collected academic discussions that make up Talmudic literature can best be described in

10 Writer Jonathan Rosen in his book, The Talmud and the Internet, makes a great deal of this analogy. He writes, "The Talmud offered a virtual home for an uprooted culture, and grew out of the Jewish need to pack civilization into words and wander out into the world...[Jews] became the people of the Book because they had no place else to live...That loss...lies at the heart of the Talmud, for all its plenitude. The Internet, which we are continually told binds us all together, nevertheless engenders...a similar sense of Diaspora, a feeling of being everywhere and nowhere. Where else but in the middle of Diaspora do you need a home page?"

11 The fact that the word masechet is derived from "web" does not point to a cultural phenomenon that is uniquely Jewish. There is almost certainly a connection between masechet and the Latin word textus, which comes from texere, meaning "to weave, to fabricate." All texts consist of woven strands of ideas coming together to form a whole. Fittingly, they are printed
that manner. One does not pick up a tractate of Talmud to gain quick answers to complex questions in fact, the opposite is true. The Talmud gives us complex responses to what we might have thought were easy questions. Each Talmudic discussion brings us in to the inner world of its participants, often including rabbis of several different generations. Each argument is based on a logic process consistent with the thought processes and assumptions of that particular rabbi. This finished ‘Web leads us to the conclusion that life is infinitely complex, that certainty is elusive, and that the process of searching for answers is more significant than actually finding them.

As an alternative to the book, the Talmud by its openness of form invites anyone with curiosity to enter into the symposium, the ongoing dialogue across space and time - just like the Internet. 'Vadok,' or "Look into it!," is how the Maharsha (R. Samuel Eliezer Edels -14th century) ended many of his amendments or comments. This phrase is a perfect example of the spirit of the Talmud's openness, its invitation.

The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas described the Talmud as

mischievous, laconic...but in love with the possible, [it] register[s] an oral tradition that came to be written down accidentally...in which multiple, but not arbitrary, meanings arise and buzz in each saying. These Talmudic pages seek contradiction and expect of a reader freedom, invention and boldness. (Levinas, 1990: 5)

Adin Steinsaltz calls it a

collection of paradoxes: its framework is orderly and logical, every word and term subjected to meticulous editing, completed centuries after the actual work of composition came to an end; yet it is still based on free association, on a harnessing together of diverse ideas reminiscent of the modern stream-of-consciousness novel ... as a reflection of life itself, cannot be artificially compartmentalized, but must develop naturally from subject to subject. (Steinsaltz, 1976: 62)

Precursors to hypertext may also be found among some of the intriguing works of modern fiction, which strain against the physical limitations of the printed page, crying out for the freedom and fluidity of hypertext. Works such as Sterne's Tristram Shandy, Joyce's Ulysses and Finnegans Wake and Borges's Library of Babel and Garden of Forking Paths might be more at home in hypertext than in print. (Bolter, 1991: 132-39)

on material that is itself woven, or they appear on electronic screens that consist of interconnected lines or dots.
The Anatomy of Hypertext

The way that the computer de-objectifies print could be illustrated in a number of ways. It is perhaps simplest to consider the operation of a word processor. A word processor can be used both for reading and for writing. A typewriter is, quite unambiguously, a tool for writing, whereas a microfiche projector is, just as unambiguously, a tool for reading. A word processor can be either. Like a typewriter, I can use a computer to create text. But like a microfiche reader, I can use a computer to translate the text from its unreadable stored form (magnetic signals on a disk) to a form in which it can be read.

In the print medium, there is a clear contrast between an author of a text and the reader of the text. The role of the author is clear. The author creates and revises text. The author shapes the text into its final form as it appears on the printed page. The "author", here, may in fact be a group of people, including editors, typesetters, printers. The act of creating text need not be the act of a single individual. The act of authoring is, however, clearly distinguishable from the act of reading.

One of the first things one experiences in using a word processor is the way in which the technology changes the relation of the author to the text. Before the computer, the act of creating text was primarily a linear one. One started a text at the beginning and proceeded through to the end. Revision of text tended to be messy. That is, to revise text one had to interfere with the linear flow. One would cross out, write in the margins or between the lines, cut and paste with real scissors and real paste. With a computer and word processing software, however, one can start a text anywhere and let the text grow. One can revise text by entering into it. Moving text, inserting or deleting text is neither messy nor difficult. The result of editing is seamless. The flow of the text is uninterrupted by the editing process.

What may not be obvious to the novice user of word processing software is that the medium blurs the difference between an author and a reader. If I wish to read a text that is stored magnetically on a computer disk, I load it into my text editor or word processor in a manner that is identical to the way I would load a text that I am in the process of creating. Once loaded, I can treat the text in exactly the same way as a text I am authoring. I can insert, delete, cut, paste. I can split the screen of my computer console so that I can compare two parts of the text at a single glance. As a reader, the medium allows me to relate to a text in a way that is identical to that of an author. The medium simply does not recognize the distinction.
The relation of subject (reader/writer) and object (text) is much more intimate with the computer than with the print medium. I relate to a text on a computer with my fingers as well as my eyes. Text becomes, in McLuhan's terms, "tactile". (McLuhan, 1965: 314, and McLuhan, 1963: 57) The text becomes an extension of me, and I can manipulate text as if it were a part of my body.

McLuhan uses the word "tactile" to describe media that contrast with print. Print is not tactile. Electronic and hyper media, however, are tactile. By "tactile," McLuhan refers to the integration of the senses. When McLuhan calls television a tactile medium, he means that television does not involve a single sense. Rather, television draws the whole person, with all of his or her senses, into an involvement with the content of the medium. Print isolates the sense of sight. A tactile medium, like television, works by integrating the senses rather than isolating them. If we are to use McLuhan's terminology, then, we can describe what the computer does to text as making text tactile. Through the computer, we become involved with text in a way that is not possible with print. With the computer, I do not observe a text. I enter into a text.

**Metaphor and Navigation**

The significance of links within a hypertextual environment is often underestimated; the textual points or nodes are taken as givens and the links are regarded simply as matters of preference or convenience. Their ease of use makes them appear to be merely shortcuts. They are seen as subservient to the important things: the information sources that they make available. Their speed in taking a user from one point to another makes the moment of transition too fleeting to be an object of reflection itself; the link-event becomes invisible.

However, the act of a link is not simply to associate two givens (Lanham, 1993). Beyond this, links change the way in which material will be read and understood: partly by virtue of the mere juxtaposition of the two related texts (how is a jump from a page on teenage drug use statistics to a page on rock music going to affect how the rock music page is read?); and partly by the implied connection that a link expresses - though it is far from inevitable that the connection a designer/author intends is the one that readers will necessarily draw. Moreover, it is worth noting that links are (generally) only one-way: of course one can return from a page visited to the page from which the link originated, but the significance implied by the link from A to B does not necessarily accompany the return from B to A; nor is such a relation, to the extent that it does exist, necessarily reciprocal.
One of the great delights of the ‘Web is its inherent intertextuality, so it may seem discomfiting to see that questions about text boundaries assert themselves so strongly on the ‘Web as well as in print. Text boundaries in a physical book are provided simply by its materiality: we know where the book begins and ends by the simple fact that it is contained by physical covers, and we have some sense of whether we’re looking at the beginning, middle, or end of the text simply by paying attention to how far into the text the book is opened. We have some sense of how long the text is simply by looking at it and then picking it up.

The web, obviously, offers no such physical cues about texts. And yet readers on the ‘Web still need answers to the questions answered by the materiality of physical texts, namely: Where does this text start and where does it end? How long is it? How do I know if I’m reading the beginning, middle, or end? Writers for the ‘Web need to answer those questions for the readers of ‘Webtexts just as editors, publishers, and our material existence answer them for readers of physical texts.

Questions of context on the web, as in print, are fundamentally questions of authorship and authority. In order to decide on the credibility of the text's argument or information, it is necessary to establish some sense of the text's origins. Readers want to know the answers to questions such as: Who wrote this text? Who published it? With which other texts and authors does it ally itself? What sort of reputation do those other texts, this text's publisher, and this text's author have?

Again, the presence of a physical text answers many of these questions simply by its physical existence. By the time you go to read a book, you've already picked up many cues and made many decisions about the worth of the text you hold in your hands. For example, you got the book from somewhere; whether you obtained it from an academic library or a supermarket checkout line makes a difference with respect to your expectations about the text and the kind of response you're prepared to have to it (what Louise Rosenblatt (1978) calls "stance") before you begin reading. Furthermore, if you have selected an academic publication, the name of the publisher, the date of publication, and the name of the author will all make a difference to how you approach the book.

On the web, however, the absence of a material text means that it is now up to the reader to determine the answers to those questions in ways that were previously answered by others (editors, publishers, and librarians or booksellers, most notably). Readers need to be able to answer questions about a text's origin and about its wider rhetorical and institutional context.

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12 Louise Rosenblatt (1978) was among the first researchers to describe how the reader's stance, either efferent or aesthetic, influenced how a text was read. When a reader is processing text efferently, he/she is reading to learn facts and remember details. On the other hand, one reads aesthetically for the joy of the experience. An aesthetic reading experience draws the reader into the world of the text, and the story is relived through the eyes of the reader. Rosenblatt calls this an "evocation" to which the reader responds. Langer (1995) describes this as an "envisionment," living through the experience of the text.
The Text's Origin

In order to make judgements about the worth or suitability of a particular text for particular purposes, readers need to know where the text came from. The structure of the ‘Web itself gives readers cues about the placement of the text within a wider institutional and discursive context. Again, reading URLs (see glossary for definition) can help readers determine how close they are to the top of a server's hierarchy, and what kind of institution provides server space for the site. In this way readers can develop some hypotheses about the purpose and function of the text, and the rhetorical context in which it was written. There are no hard and fast rules for determining such hypotheses, though; as always, readers pay attention to a certain number of variables, variables which assume different kinds of importance in different contexts.

The Text's Purpose

Certain aspects of a paper text's purpose are conveyed by its materiality. For example, an article in a newspaper serves a rhetorical function that is embedded in, and supports, the wider rhetorical function of the newspaper itself. The fact that the article is physically located on the pages of that particular newspaper attests to that commonality of rhetorical function.

On the web, such determinations are made differently. Again the physical location of the site on a particular server offers clues, but not decisive ones. The lines are more clearly drawn in commercial applications of the ‘Web (you do not, for example, expect to see personal homepages at www.pepsi.com), but once you venture out of the realms of business sites, it becomes harder to tell simply by the directory structure of the URL what kind of information you might find on a particular site. (As more and more people gain the ability to register a ‘Web server address, URLs may become more reliable indicators of a site's origins.)

In addition to the cues provided by the ‘Web itself, writers may need to give readers very explicit information about why the site was written and what purpose it serves. This is particularly important in a situation where a site may contain many different kinds of documents. An academic's ‘Website, for example, may consist of an eclectic mix of professional documents: a curriculum vita, links to electronically published work, links to works-in-progress, links to ‘Web sites, to conference presentations and perhaps to the ‘Websites for the conferences themselves, and so forth. It is extremely important that the purpose for each of those sites-within-a-site be clear, or the information will be dismissed and of little use.
The Text's Relationship to Other Texts

As the last example implies, it is also important for site authors to provide pertinent information about the wider institutional and rhetorical contexts for their ‘Webtexts. There are a number of ways to do so, and their usefulness will vary depending on the circumstances, but generally, ‘Web writers need to provide links to other sites which will help contextualize their site.

Providing links to other sites is also an important way to place a specific site within the larger community. For academics, such links function in the same way that a bibliography functions in a book. Readers use such links to establish the site's context, which they then use in deciding about the ethos of the site and text's author(s), which they then use to help them determine whether and how to value a specific web text’s information or arguments.
Some Consequences of Hypertext

Hypertext challenges presuppositions of print culture such as: (1) authors can be distinguished from readers; (2) a text is the property of its author; (3) a text is (or should be) fixed, unchanging, unified and coherent; (4) a text should speak with a single, clear voice; (5) a text has a beginning and an ending, margins, an inside and an outside; (6) the centre of a text, of a group of texts, or of anything else, is fixed, stable, and single; (7) a text is (or should be) clearly organized in a linear, hierarchical structure; (8) generally speaking, an author writes by himself, and a reader reads by himself; (9) the act of writing or reading is (or should be) ethically and politically neutral, but the results may not be. (Fowler, 1994)

Before I continue to elaborate on these characteristics, I would like to briefly restate the nature of TR as discussed in chapter two.

Reflection is many things. Reflection is likely to be essentially collaborative and interactive; it belongs as much to audience as to the story-teller. Reflection tells stories, and therefore is multi-vocal but rarely linear; it is fluid and dynamic. Reflection can transform the situation: in other words causing refraction (that is, a new way of seeing situations and events), and it is also therefore, in some sense, political, and it potentially turns about assumptions of possession and copyright. Finally, reflection is e

How, then, can the technology of hypertext provides answers for these requirements for reflection?

Helpful Characteristics of Hypertext

**Hypertext is collaborative and demands interaction** It is impossible to be a passive reader of hypertext. Even in the most restrictive of hypertexts, what Michael Joyce calls an "exploratory hypertext" (Joyce, 1998: 41), the reader must pick and choose her way from node to node, thus determining the "text" to be read. In a less restrictive hypertext (what Joyce calls a "constructive hypertext"), the reader is granted freedom to annotate existing texts, to add new texts to the network, and to create new links between texts, often with remarkable power to change the appearance of everything, by manipulating windows and changing fonts. The reader of a hypertext is always at least the co-author of the "text" that is read; sometimes the reader is the primary author. As Lanham observes:
The interactive reader of the electronic word incarnates the responsive reader of whom we make so much. Electronic readers can do all the things that are claimed for them—or choose not to do them. They can genuflect before the text or spit on its altar, add to a text or subtract from it, rearrange it, revise it, suffuse it with commentary. The boundary between creator and critic (another current vexation) simply vanishes. (Lanham, 1993: 6)

In addition, hypertext is inherently collaborative (Landow 1997: 88-100, 124-25, 141, 144, 179; Lanham, 1993: 13, 71; Bolter, 1991: 202). Landow describes a collaborative, democratic learning environment at Brown University, facilitated by a sophisticated hypertext system:

Within a hypertext environment all writing becomes collaborative writing, doubly so. The first element of collaboration appears when one compares the roles of writer and reader, since the active reader necessarily collaborates with the author in producing a text by the choices he or she makes. The second aspect of collaboration appears when one compares the writer with other writers—that is, the author who is writing now with the virtual presence of all writers "on the system" who wrote then but whose writings are still present. (Landow 1997: 88-100)

Landow's considerable experience in collaborations with colleagues and students leads him to claim that hypertext nurtures a genuinely collegial community of inquiry. Hypertext can put teacher and student closer to the same level, promote interdisciplinary collaboration between scholars, and encourage the integration of a scholar's teaching with her or his research. (Landow, 1997: 12425, 179)

In the nineteenth century, American poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) lamented the limits of the writing dialogue in these words:

This is my letter to the World
that never wrote to me.

Her letter, she says, goes out to "Hands I cannot see." In our time, thanks to the Internet, a letter to the World is more than ever falling into "Hands we cannot see." And the odds are great that someone - perhaps many - in the world-wide audience will write a response. In this way, hypertext can offer a solution that enables reflections to be collaborative, rather than simply the work of one person.

Finally, hypertext invites a reader/writer into a playful relationship with the text. That is, on the computer, the text becomes a playmate to the reader or writer. The text takes on a plasticity like that of clay to the potter: it can be
moulded and remoulded, twisted, re-ordered, and restored. The meaning of a text, consequently, is as “malleable as the text itself” (Lochhead, 1997: 68). The task of interpretation becomes that of imagining new meanings, of stretching interpretations to see how far they can stretch, to make new hermeneutical shapes out of old materials.

**Hypertext belongs as much to the reader as to the author** – it is "multicentred" and "infinitely recentrable" (Landow 1997: 11-13, 66, 70, 77). Hypertext mirrors the decentralised, disseminated self of much poststructuralist critical theory (Landow 1997: 76-77). Landow suggests that such thinking is prompted by contemporary shifts in communication technologies: while print encourages the ideal of the single, integral self, electronic text encourages multiple, even conflicting voices. Hypertext offers the possibility of a shifting centre, a "multicentred" or "infinitely recentrable" textual universe, with the centre to be determined by the active reader. Centres come and go; the act of establishing a momentary centre, however, is an ongoing necessity, to be repeated again and again:

. . . hypertext does not only redefine the central by refusing to grant centrality to anything, to any lexia, for more than the time a gaze rests upon it. In hypertext, centrality, like beauty and relevance, resides in the mind of the beholder. Like Andy Warhol's modern person's fifteen minutes of fame, centrality in hypertext exists only as a matter of evanescence. . . . This hypertext dissolution of centrality, which makes the medium such a potentially democratic one, also makes it a model of a society of conversations in which no one conversation, no one discipline or ideology, dominates or founds the others. (Landow 1997: 70)

This property of hypertext, of being infinitely recentrable, may possibly present a way forward for TR which is often seen as the property of theologians and academics, a rarefied activity with no consequence or resonance for the church.

**Hypertext is non linear and multivocal; it is fluid and dynamic** For many people who use hypertext, hypertext offers a promise of freedom from sequentiality. Hypertext is a non-linear way of presenting information. Rather than reading or learning about things in the order that an author, or editor, or publisher sets out for us, “readers of hypertext may follow their own path, create their own order -- their own meaning out of the material” (Lanham, 1993: 33). Instead of a linear, page-by-page, line-by-line, book-by-book approach, the user connects information in an intuitive, associative manner. Hypertext fosters a “literacy that is prompted by jumps of intuition and association" (Heim, 1993: 30). By jumping to different passages in a single text or to passages in different texts, multilinear hypertext presents multiple points of view.
The linear language of the printed page encourages a single, clear point of view; the multilinear hypertext lends itself to multiple, perhaps even conflicting voices (Heim, 1993: 7). No piece of hypertext ever sings solo; it always collaborates in a (cacophonous?) choir with all of the other nodes of the network in which it is implicated.

Hypertext is also fluid, multiple, changing; not fixed or single (Landow 1997: 52, 207; Lanham, 1993: 16; Bolter, 1991: 31, 43, 155). The printed page sits fixed and still; electronic text is always in flux, flickering on and off of our computer screen (Bolter, 1993: 31, 54, 71). Anyone who has done any word-processing knows that electronic text is "fundamentally unstable," "restless," prone to "change" and likely to "disappear" (Bolter, 1993: 155). Reading a particularly challenging piece of hypertext fiction, one that leaves narrative sequence entirely up to the reader, Bolter observes: "There is no single story of which each reading is a version, because each reading determines the story as it goes. We could say that there is no story at all; there are only readings" (Bolter, 1993: 157)

Additionally, hypertext has no beginning or ending, no centre or margin, no inside or outside (Landow 1997: 57-58, 60-62, 109-10, 112; Lanham, 1993: 7, 125, 129; Bolter, 1991: 8687, 143, 162-63) With the codex book it is easy to distinguish the words in the centre of a page from the blank margins that surround them, or the first page of the book from the last, or one book on the shelf from another, but none of these physical realities holds anymore with electronic text. In a hypertextual network there is no beginning or ending, no up or down, no in or out, no centre or margin. When one electronic text is linked to another (and another, and another …), or when one text is copied and pasted into another, the notion of a separation of or a distinction between texts simply evaporates.

It is clear that Hypertext is networked text (Landow 1997: 23-27, 57-58, 66-67; Bolter, 1991: ix, 201, 231-32). Unlike the linear or hierarchical structure of print, hypertext is a multilinear network, with no obvious beginning or ending, no top or bottom (Bolter, 1991: 11214). It is the nature of a network to undermine efforts to establish a hierarchy or central authority (Landow: 1997: 66-67). Moreover, the shift to the network paradigm encompasses far more than hypertext; it is redefining our entire culture:

. . . just as our culture is moving from the printed book to the computer, it is also in the final stages of the transition from a hierarchical social order to what we might call a "network culture." For decades all forms of hierarchy have been disintegrating, as greater and greater freedom of action is granted to the individual. . . . Hierarchies in government, church, and family may retain status in law, but they have almost no moral authority. . . . The network has replaced the hierarchy (Bolter, 1991: 232)
As a networked text, Hypertext operates very similarly to the way our brains do - in a series of networks, or associations - as opposed to a linear path. Hypertext software provides for the human element in the management of information. Since hypertext analogizes the way our minds normally work (that is, not in a straight line but in several dimensions at once), hypertext can be considered a thought machine.

The ability for people to learn more, or at least learn more pleasurably through hypertext, has been demonstrated again and again through testing. Researchers at the University of Texas Medical School at Houston, for example, created self instructional electronic texts on aplastic anemia, and compared students who used the electronic texts to those who used traditional learning methods. While test scores showed no significant difference in retention, time spent in study of the multimedia program was on average 15 minutes longer than for the syllabus. "Evaluation responses by the students were extremely positive and indicated a desire to have electronic texts available for required courses" (Reeves, 1997)

And in two separate studies, learning disabled, remedial and regular education students were separated into three groups: lecture, lecture/computer study guide, and computer study guide. Results indicated that while the two latter methods were as effective as lecture, post-test and retention test scores were higher for computer study guide group (Higgins, 1997: 529 – 540). And because the author is no longer in control over what path a reader will take, hypertext creates an environment for independent critical thinking. In a sense, the readers are also the "writers" of the material, by making connections themselves. And making those connections on their own, pulling together different bits of information and creating a whole new meaning, entails critical thinking.

Thus it would seem that, in theory, hypertext provides an answer for critics of TR that complain that, by forcing upon the narrative a beginning, middle and end, the dialogue essential to the reflective process is stifled.

**Hypertext is potentially political** - it is "antihierarchical and democratic" (Landow 1997: 23, 31-33, 70, 172, 174, 176-78; Lanham, 1993: 102-103, 108, 200; Bolter, 1991: 117, 143, 232-33). Putting remarkable power into the hands of ordinary people, the electronic media are proving to be a surprising force for democracy, rather than the ultimate nightmare of totalitarian control. Theorists such as Bolter and Landow draw bold conclusions about the liberatory implications of the history of information technologies for human culture. Landow contends that:
the history of information technology from writing to hypertext reveals an increasing
democratization or dissemination of power. Writing begins this process, for by exteriorizing
memory it converts knowledge from the possession of one to the possession of more than one.
Ryan also argues, "writing can belong to anyone; it puts an end to the ownership or selfidentical
property that speech signalled" (Marxism and Deconstruction, 29). The democratic thrust of
information technologies derives from their diffusing information and the power that such
diffusion can produce (Landow 1997: 174).

Hypertext brings to the fore and accentuates the responsibility of the reader for ethical and political decisionmaking
in the midst of the hypertextual docurse. As a diverse, multilinear network, hypertext can readily incorporate
conflicting arguments and interpretations; it can "encompass conflicting possibilities" (Bolter, 1991: 143). Thus,
hypertext can provide the arena in which ethical and political arguments can take place (Landow, 1997: 169-178). For
example, Gerald Graff suggests that the wisest response to the canon wars raging in literary studies today is to
"teach the conflicts" (Graff, 1990: 51-67). That is, instead of trying to decide the shape of the canon once and for all, why not shift the spotlight to the process of arguing over the canon? Make the argument the focus, not the
decision at the end of the argument, Graff says, for canons come and go, but the need to argue over authority,
values, norms, beliefs, and behaviours will remain with us forever. Coincidentally (perhaps), hypertext enacts Graff's
advice to "teach the conflicts."

Hypertext erodes the author's moral claim to intellectual property rights and legal claim to copyright. The common
assumptions about an author's moral and legal rights to control the dissemination of her intellectual property
evaporate in the Electronic Age. As John Perry Barlow (1996: online) puts it, "almost everything we think we know
about intellectual property is wrong". To consider only one angle on this issue, if the distinction between author and
reader vanishes in electronic media, then how can the "author's" moral and legal rights be maintained over against
those of the "reader"? When we scratch the surface of this moral and legal conundrum, we find the real issue just
below: money. That is, in cyberspace, how will authors (or theologians) get paid for their work? This property of
hypertext came into play very early on in the lifetime of this project—see page 107 for a fuller discussion.

**Some Drawbacks of Hypertext in TR**

The conventions of reading, like the conventions of writing, have grown out of the structure of sentences flowing
into paragraphs, paragraphs flowing into pages, pages followed by other pages. These conventions began with
scrolled parchment, and were later adapted to the codex volume (Bolter, 1991): they assume a fundamentally linear
and hierarchical organization of information, with passage following passage in a sequence governed by (a) relative
importance, formalized in the discipline of the Outline, and (b) the narrative structure of argument, formalized in
the discipline of the Syllogism. These two disciplines have constituted the primary form and rhetoric of academic
writing, in particular, for centuries in the West. There are texts, and styles of writing, that resist these disciplines, and contemporary post structural theories in particular have directly criticized them. Nevertheless, the force of these habits is so strong that most readers tend to impose such a pattern on textual material in the process of reading, even when the content is resistant to it.

It is not clear how these habits will now begin to change with the spread of hypertextual materials; but there is nothing about the form of such materials that insures more novel readings or new ways of organizing information. Yet we see a great, sudden enthusiasm that new technologies, including the capabilities of hypertext, will usher in a wave of educational innovation and reform (Means, 1994). In part, this enthusiasm is understandable, for web-like textual systems are much more flexible than traditional resources, such as books: they can accommodate all the textual forms that paper and print can, and more. Where text is linear, hypertext can be lateral as well. Where traditional conventions of writing and reading depend on (or create artificially) hierarchies of importance, hypertext can also represent more complex, "rhizomatic" relationships between ideas (Burbules and Callister, 1996: 23-50). Where traditional text depends upon the disciplines of the outline and the syllogism, hypertext opens up the additional textual possibilities of bricolage and juxtaposition: assembling texts from pieces that can be represented in multiple relations to one another.

In general, then, hypertext seems to add dimensions of writing, and to that extent may encourage new practices of reading as well: ones that might prove more hospitable to alternative, non-traditional points of view and more inclusive of cultural difference. Yet all of this remains to be seen; the development of new practices of reading depends upon much more than just changing characteristics of text - indeed, traditional text can be read hypertextually and hypertexts can be read quite traditionally. However, the practice of hyper reading (the technique of reading hypertexts) can illustrate some of the less desirable characteristics of hypertexts.

The first element is surfing. This is seen not only in relation to on-line texts, but to other multi-channel resources as well (remote-controlled cable television, pop radio stations with push-button station-shifting, CD sampling, leafing through ad-laden glossy magazines, etc.). With a surfeit of stimuli competing for people's attention, they are, on the one hand, becoming more adept at screening information very quickly, making rapid judgments about whether it is desirable, and "parallel processing" different materials simultaneously. On the other hand, their capacities for sustained attention to any single textual source are affected as a consequence. Moreover, in a competitive market for time and attention, we can expect a premium to be placed on the catchy, instantly appealing "hook," rather than
such interest or subtlety as can only emerge over time. The content of textual materials and media is being changed with the assumptions that interest must be seized and held quickly or an audience will scroll past without stopping, and that few readers are going to be willing or able to follow the text closely all the way through from start to finish. This leads to an increasing fragmentation of content. Again, these trends have been at work for a long time, in popular culture, in the political sphere, and elsewhere - my analysis here is hardly unique or original. But the structure of hypertextual (and multimedia) resources on the World Wide Web will take shape, is already taking shape, in line with such readerly dispositions.

Second, and related to this first point, is a growing consumer orientation toward information. The habits of mind encouraged by mainstream media (most newspapers, magazines, and television news and documentaries) have promoted a certain levelling, in most people's minds, of all sources of information. A generalized suspicion of traditional authorities and the emergence of fictionalized, hybrid news/entertainment features has tended to blur distinctions of relative credibility and has made all sorts of information merely grist for the mill of gossip, sensationalism, or opinion formation. As a result, the processes of selection, evaluation, and interpretation that develop information into knowledge and understanding are atrophying for many readers (or are not being developed in the first place). This trend is epitomized in the Web, and discussions around the Web, which, as Marshall and Shipman (1997: 124-133) point out, tend to conflate "information" with "knowledge." The bulk of the Web is organized around information sources: facts, statistics, lists, charts, visual data, and so forth. Once accessed, it is for the reader, in most cases, to judge what it means, or if indeed it means much of anything at all. Unfortunately, this second-order reflection is discouraged by the levelling effect that puts all information points at the same level of accessibility and all designer/authors at the same prima facie level of credibility. Links, once again, are part of what can turn information into knowledge, suggesting causal associations, category relations, instantiations, and so forth; but when a link is not evaluated as such, an opportunity to translate information into knowledge of some sort is lost. Hence we need an alternative analysis that highlights the cognitive importance and potential of links (Jones and Spiro, 1995: 146-157).

Third, an intimate connection needs to be drawn between general usage of computers, including Web browsers as well as other applications, and the use of computers specifically for playing games. For many users, especially among the generation of younger users who are growing up with these technologies, many of one's first experiences with computers are typically taken up with playing electronic games. This experience develops certain orientations to the machine. Some of these can be considered beneficial from the standpoint of developing into an autonomous, proficient user of the technology generally: technical skill with keyboard and cursors; learning to deal with complex
Explorations in CMTR.

Environments; developing navigational skills and the ability to explore unfamiliar pathways; becoming comfortable with unforeseen obstacles; and adopting an experimental, trial-and-error orientation to the unexpected and difficult. Other consequences of adopting a "game-like" orientation to new technologies may be less beneficial from the standpoint of developing into a critical, discerning user: having a certain trivializing attitude toward what is encountered within virtual space (including particularly, but not only, violent events); a paradoxical ability to focus for extended periods of time on game-like activities, but a diminishing capacity to concentrate on less stimulating projects; and coming to accept a certain taken-for-grantedness in the terrain and structures of tasks, viewed as simply the parameters of another computer challenge. To the extent that other computer software, and particularly the operations of the Web, have come to adopt some similar game-like programming elements, their use can be intrinsically "fun" and interesting but they may also lend to other activities of writing, drawing, and reading the attitudes and habits of thought developed within game environments, many of which reinforce a "surfing," casual, uncritical approach to computers and what one creates (hence the use of the Internet, in certain cases, for pornography and for writing or acting out violent fantasies within a "safe" virtual space, as if these were without serious consequence). Part of this uncritical approach involves using links without reflecting upon them.

While hypertext learning environments provide students with an new type of interactive learning and reading experience, the introduction of hypertext can also become a barrier to those who are not familiar with the technology: hypertexts requires that students be familiar with computers and know how to access the hypertext information. Reading from computer screens is about 25% slower than reading from paper. Even users who do not know of this human factors research usually say that they feel unpleasant when reading online text. As a result, people do not like to read a lot of text from computer screens: this has resulted in hypertext authors tending to write 50% less text. We also know that users do not like to scroll, which is cited as one more reason to keep pages short.

Finally, another limitation of hypertext is with the use of links. In ordinary encounters with links, they are already made. Readers can certainly design/author their own hypertexts, writing their own texts as well as incorporating or modifying material from other textual sources as well; and, increasingly, Web browsers will allow readers to add their own customized links to the hypertexts they encounter that have been designed/authored by others. Nevertheless, the initial contact users have with hypertext - and for most, even now, the only contact - is with materials created by unknown persons whose reasons, biases, motivations, and credibility are almost entirely beyond their awareness. The usage and placement of links is one of the central ways in which the tacit assumptions and values of the designer/author are manifested in a hypertext - yet they are rarely considered as such.

The assumptions and values implied by links, where they allow one to travel and where they do not, and the boundaries tacitly limiting this particular space will appear for most readers invisible; or, to the extent that readers do recognize that such choices have been made, they will be regarded as authoritative, since in most cases the ability to create such pages - the knowledge of the code - will attach a certain status to the invisible author, as well as the presumption that one who knew enough and cared enough about the topic to create the hyper-document must have greater than average expertise on the subject. Now, of course, these assumptions are not inevitable, and many readers will have a more sceptical nature; a few will know as much or even more about the subject than the hypertext designer/author does; and still others will encounter particular links that they find problematic, and so become more generally discerning in not taking other links for granted. On the other hand, as more and more persons do develop the skills to create such documents - or as new generations of HTML editing/word processing software make their creation a seamless part of the text creation process itself - the aura of credibility of any particular hypertext on the Web will be diminished, since there will almost certainly be more ‘garbage’ than work of quality in this Brave New Self-Publishing World (Burbules and Callister, 1996: 23-50; Burbules and Bruce, 1995: 12-18).

Finally, there are clear theological consequences of working in cyberspace. Both Catholicism and some Protestant traditions emphasize precisely the goodness of the body and Creation as they develop a Christology which argues that when God takes on human form, the human body is thus reaffirmed as sacred. These traditions also fully endorse a notion of the soul as distinct from the body, and the correlative belief in an afterlife and salvation as entailing (but not exclusively so) the everlasting life of the soul as opposed to the mortal body. But by emphasizing such doctrines of incarnation, they reassert something of an originally Jewish affirmation of the goodness of body, sexuality, and life "in this world." Moreover, as Catholicism and some strands of Protestantism stress incarnation, they further stress that God is known in important ways through the material world, not against it. That is, just as the disciples knew Jesus "in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24: 30-35), so Catholics experience the real presence of the Divine in the bread and wine really consumed by embodied creatures in communion. While Protestants, of course, insist that the bread and wine are symbols, not really the body and blood of Christ, communion remains a central sacrament, one that brings the community of believers together through a ritualized common meal. Even for Protestants, communion is a sacrament of real bread and real wine (or grape juice) that represents an embodied Lord who brings the believers together as embodied creatures in a face-to-face community.

A particular aspect of these sorts of experiences is that in them we know an Other - both the Others of our human community and the Divine Other as manifested (really or symbolically) in the matter of bread and wine.
But our online experience is as *disembodied* beings - and, in the developed world at least, almost always as human beings *by ourselves*, i.e., alone, in front of a screen and terminal. And the Other before us - whether in the form of text scrolling across the screen in a chat room, or from our email reader, or even in the form of video images accompanied by sound - remains under our control as an electronic avatar or simulaclum. Unlike the embodied believers who surround us in communion, and unlike (for the believer) the Divine who encounters us in the breaking of the bread, the electronic Other can be manipulated, ignored, and simply switched off as we will.

In light of the centrality of *embodiment* in Christian theology and the sacrament of communion as the medium in which both human and Divine are fully known, the question thus forcefully confronts us: in our well-meaning efforts to exploit the new media to (re)call attention to our existence and our message of Good News in a culture increasingly located in cyberspace, are we engaging in a migration to an online environment that fundamentally threatens our lives as embodied creatures, where such embodiment sustains and gives meaning to traditional forms of community, worship, prayer, and communion?
Hypertext: Conclusion

As Stuart Moulthrop (1991: 19) observes: "Hypertext is all about connection, linkage, and affiliation." Like many, I believe that the combination of Web technology and multi-media approaches have an awesome potential in reframing contemporary challenges as well as personal and group integration in response to them. But despite what has been achieved, the significant breakthroughs are still to come--but they need to come soon.

The key for me lies in the potential of available computer technology to configure seemingly unrelated, or opposing, perspectives and understandings. This is vital in an increasingly fragmented and alienated society. Hyper-linking together documents on disparate topics is a necessary start, but it is not sufficient. There is a major distinction between wandering the highways and byways of the Web and acquiring a sense of pattern--a platform for new types of initiative, and a receptor for new kinds of insight.

How do new levels of significance emerge through the Web for users bent on learning, but with quite different learning styles? The design of Web menus, as crude lists of hyperlinks, illustrates the problem. Into what sort of insight-enhancing patterns can hyperlinks be more fruitfully woven?

In this chapter I have examined the characteristics of hypertext and documents on the Web, and I have shown some of the characteristics of these radically new ways of approaching texts. I have shown that, in principle, such new technologies might have much to offer the world of Practical Theology and TR. However, this thesis is not a theoretical consideration of the possible benefits of the Internet to TR. It is a practical exploration into using new technologies to see if they work in the real world, with real people and real situations.

Armed with the understanding of the nature of TR gained in the second chapter, and the qualities that Internet-based technologies might bring to it, I began to combine the theoretical benefits of hypertext with the characteristics of reflection into a usable tool for reflective practitioners -- or, at least, the beginnings of a series of tools. However, as this is a relatively new field for practical theologians, and there is little experience in the field of working with such technologies, I met with varying degrees of success. These are outlined in the next chapter.
Practical Explorations in CMTR

This thesis, in proposing that hypertext technologies may lead to possible new ways of enabling theological reflection (Computer Mediated TR, or CMTR), asks two principle research questions. The first question is - is TR possible on the internet? Does the model overcome some or all of the limitations identified as being a part of current models? Does it introduce new limitations? The second question is - if TR is possible, then do the web space and tools add any value to the experience and the fruits of theologically reflecting, and are the results it produces compatible with ‘conventional’ reflective methods? These practical questions can only be explored by actually doing TR on the Internet. Therefore in this chapter I describe the route taken to develop the web site and the various tools to aid CMTR, building upon the theoretical understanding of the characteristics of TR and Internet technologies gained in the previous phases of this project (as explored in chapters two and three). However, as this is a project that spends most of it’s time in cyberspace, I first discuss the nature of researching with, and on, the web.

Research Methodology on the ‘Web

There is no standard technique for studying the Web (see, for example, Gauntlett and Horsley, 2004: 34). Depending on the focus of the study, researchers may draw on a wide range of methodologies, which may originate in a variety of disciplines including communication studies, sociology, anthropology, visual studies, cultural geography and literary studies. Rather, it is case of plundering existing research techniques for emerging methodological ideas developed in the course of very diverse research projects, and weighing up whether they can be used or adapted for the purposes of this thesis.
The short history of research in the area of cyberspace has tended to prioritize the process of interactive communication over the study of the web itself. Much of the early communication research about the social aspects of the Internet focused on ‘computer mediated communication’ (see, for example, Baym, 2000). Several authors have examined the types of social world that exist online by studying the textual interactions that constituted so-called ‘virtual communities’ or ‘cybersocieties’ (for example, Jones, 1995). Researchers tended to analyse such media as newsgroups, bulletin board services or e-mail discussion lists, treating the web as merely the medium for communication. However, developments in communication technologies are constantly changing the way in which the web is produced, represented and consumed. Chat or e-mail exchanges remain a key topic of research in communication studies, but as the web develops, e-mail accounts and chat spaces are being increasingly integrated into websites, as indeed is the case in this thesis. As this happens, the boundaries between the ‘Web and other Internet spaces become blurred.

The web is a technology and media form that can be understood at many levels, and this can lead to confusion when defining the parameters of a research project. Web pages are simultaneously computer code, cultural representations, and the outcome of skilled labour, such as writing HTML. ‘Web pages are complex artefacts that can be written, read, used or consumed, and therefore, despite their apparently virtual nature, they are sometimes compared with other designed products that have a more traditional material form, such as a book or DVD. Although it is possible to do a ‘fine-grained’ analysis of an individual webpage as a cultural text - as if it were a written paper document - it is equally feasible to take a broad view of the way in which the Web is becoming part of global culture and commerce. In addition, there are many new methodological problems which are encountered when researching on the ‘Web. For example, pages appear to allow the possibility of conducting fast and cheap global surveys by administering an electronic rather than paper questionnaire. Yet we cannot rely on the same respondent behaviour online as we would on ‘pencil and paper’ questionnaires (Gerhard, Moore and Hobbs, 2001: 137-153). The quantity of information that may be generated and the speed at which answers can be collected can result in satisfying piles of data, but we should be wary of being persuaded by sheer quantity of responses; data is only useful if it is representative of the larger population (Gerhard, Moore and Hobbs, 2001: 202). In addition, ethical guidelines are emerging for Internet Studies such as those produced by the Association of Internet Researchers and individual disciplines often have professional codes of conduct (addressing issues such as anonymity) which were considered very early on in the project, and resulted in some interesting on-line conversations (see pages 109-112).

Studying the Web is a matter of moving back and forth between long standing debates in methodology and the distinctive challenges posed by new electronically mediated research. In thinking about which methodological frameworks are available to study the web, it is advisable to bear in mind that what is considered to be legitimate methodology is itself always in flux. Alongside the rise in new information and communication technologies over
the past ten years, a substantial body of work has emerged which questions orthodox methodological practices (for example, Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In qualitative sociology, in particular, there have been extensive debates about the possibility and desirability of feminist methodology (Oelson, 1994: 158-74) and alternative measures of validity than statistical or ethnographic analyses (Lather, 1993: 38). Another recent development has been the rise of writing as a method of enquiry (Richardson, 1994: 216-229), which often draws on the notion of reflexivity (Woolgar 1988) which could prove to be a fruitful method for a thesis such as this. Several branches of social science are advancing the use of visual material, which holds much promise for the investigation of the graphics-laden new media. Their branches range from a long-standing tradition of using photography and film in anthropology (Banks and Morphy, 1997) to developments in visual sociology (Harper, 1994: 403-12), multimedia anthropology (Pink 2001: 586-99) and computer-assisted analysis of qualitative material (Fielding and Lee, 1998). All of these developments can be used as a resource for studies of new media such as the Web. For example, Annette Markham (1999) has written a highly personal account of her online experiences, showing the impact of recent debates on autoethnography and reflexivity. Even though methods of data collection and analysis may change, questions of research design, selection of participants, choice of field site, ethical practice and the influence of theoretical frameworks continue to be crucial, and cannot be sidestepped, however virtual the data collection. Early on in the design of the ‘experiment’, therefore, how the project would be evaluated were of vital importance.

Evaluating CMTR

Writers on evaluation, particularly of educational technological programs (for example, House, 1993 and Shadish, Cook and Leviton, 1991) all indicate that program evaluation has undergone a major transformation in the last three decades. It has changed from "monolithic to pluralist conceptions, to multiple methods, multiple measures, multiple criteria, multiple perspectives, multiple audiences, and even multiple interests. Methodologically, evaluation moved from a primary emphasis on quantitative methods, in which the standardized achievement test employed in a randomized experimental control group design was mostly highly regarded, to a more permissive atmosphere in which qualitative research methods were acceptable” (House, 1993: 3). The most fundamental shift has been away from a blind faith in the science of evaluation and experimental research methods based on standardized test scores to a ‘softer’ evaluation based on qualitative reflections on the model and the participants.

As I have shown in chapters two and three, there is little research available on computer-mediated TR. Much work in computer-supported collaborative learning focuses on learning at the individual and group level (for example, Koschmann, 1996). Collaborations in this line of research are analysed for how learning emerges from the group’s interactions, where it is the content of interactions (textual, or in some cases, physical and graphical) that is the critical piece of analysis, in order to determine misconceptions and growing conceptualizations. A somewhat
different perspective on studying computer-supported collaborative learning is analysis at a higher level of aggregation, for example, studying multiple group or whole group discussion forums (Scardamalia et al. 1989: 51-68). The questions at this level are about the behaviour of all the participants in the forum. When do participants read other people’s comments? When do they write comments? What is the level of participation in the group? Does the kind of computer technology and how it is used impact reading and writing behaviours of students? For example, if a small percentage of the group is writing all the notes in the forum, we may suspect that not everyone is using the opportunity to articulate their positions and have them reviewed by others. By looking at how a whole group reads and writes notes, we can learn about the kind of aggregate behaviours that might be helpful for CMTR or suggest that there are problems with the particular collaborative setting.

Stuart Card and his colleagues at Xerox PARC refer to aggregate behaviour within an information space such as the World Wide Web as an "information ecology" (Card, Robertson and York, 1996: 111-117). Participants in an information ecology (referred to as "informavores" in Card's paper) are producers, gatherers, and consumers of information. By studying the rules of behaviour and the relationships between variables in the information ecology, we can learn better how to maximise the ecology (i.e., achieve more information or participation at lower cost). Research in information ecology are developing models of the WWW, for example, that describe when pages are created or deleted, and when they are accessed (Pitkow and Pirolli, 1997: 383-390).

Taking the ecology metaphor further, a more precise measure of ‘success’ can be made. Success occurs along two dimensions: the amount of information and the amount of time. Short-lived success occurs when information is widely disseminated but quickly disappears. For example, the disc jockey who persuades a stadium full of people to dance may have a large, yet short-lived impact. A small, long-lived success occurs when information is seldom noticed but survives a long time. An example of this might be the theologian whose published work is referenced by one other person after many years but not noticed by anyone else.

From my previous investigation into what are the conditions for, and results of, reflection, I suggested that there are a variety of desirable outcomes for TR, some of which are can be measured quantitatively, and some of which are rather more elusive and require a more qualitative approach. These outcome goals include a wide variety of possibilities beyond the traditional ‘scoring’ of the written reflection out of 100, including short term changes in project participants such as

14 The European Commission has established the 5th framework Programme for research and development concerning Information Society Technologies (http://www.cordis.lu/ist/), the objective of which is “to explore means of creating a ‘single information ecosystem’ in which every single knowledge entity (whether a person, organization, or entity working on their behalf) can be globally, yet selectively, aware of opportunities afforded by all others at any point in time.”
• the willingness or otherwise of the participant to reflective singly and in a group,

• evidence that the student has been able to draw upon a wider range of sources and stimuli than they would have used in traditional TR techniques,

• some indication that the (process or result of the) reflection has made an impact upon and difference to the life of the participant

or longer term indicators such as

• changes in the academic standard of the reflections or student performance,

• increased participation in TR, regardless of whether the reflection is required of the participant or not,

• other outcomes, defined as higher order thinking skills, more sophisticated communication skills, research skills, and social skills.

Other outcome measures might be found in participants' perceptions about the implementation, quality and benefits of the model. These might reflect student engagement levels as well as satisfaction levels. Other interim performance indicators might include the effect of the program on community and family participation or involvement, and participant retention. Ideally, evaluation designs should rely equally on participants' self reported attitudes as well as observations of participants' actions within learning contexts. In the evaluation of this project, equal attention was paid to participant feedback as to the observable outcomes of TR.

Behaviour of Informavores

The analysis of the ‘experiment’ focused on writing (using the metaphor of Card et al., ‘information-producing’) behaviour and reading (‘information-consuming’) activities. Writing behaviour analysis looked at the entire dataset resulting from all the TRs that were created on-line. Reading behaviour, however, due to the sheer amount of data produced by people simply browsing across pages, only looked at the funeral and Eucharist TR datasets (28 notes with 8 authors).
Three questions about writing (producing) behaviour were addressed:

- **How much do individuals write over time?** Each TR was scanned, and individual authors' contributions were tabulated.

- **How broad is participation (operationally defined as writing, not simply reading) in the TRs?** This is calculated by simply dividing the number of authors by the number of members of the group.

- **How many of the notes are in response to others' notes (i.e. threaded)?** A sustained discussion is probably necessary for a successful computer-supported collaborative learning forum. A simple question-and-answer pair of postings (thread length of 2) is probably not a broad group discussion, a gathering of different kinds of evidence, a comparison of alternatives, or an exploration of issues. Threading, that is, the number of notes in response to a given note, is a measure of sustained discussion. I computed the length of a thread from each top-level note (that has no parent note). So if notes A and B were both in response to note C which was a response to note D, note D would have a thread length of four in my calculation, and only one thread (top-level) would be counted.

Three questions about reading (or consuming) behaviour were addressed:

- **How much reading do group members do?** How does reading and writing behaviour relate? The number of notes that each member read was counted, and computed a ratio of read-notes to written-notes.

- **How much reading does each note receive?** As reported by others, individuals' reading behaviour can vary dramatically within a collaborative space (Davis and Huttenlocher, 1995: 84-85). The number of times each note is read over the course of the ten week 'experiment' was computed.

- **When does a note get read?** Research on the WWW as an information ecology has suggested that ‘recency’ is perhaps the most critical factor driving the desirability of a piece of information (Pitkow, 1997). To explore when notes are accessed, the lifetime of a note was computed, where birth is defined as the first day that the note is ever accessed and death is defined as the last day that the note is ever accessed.

In analyzing the results of the CMTR project, I used a variety of measures and methodologies: I counted the number of unique visitors to the site, the number of active participants, the average time spent at the site, the frequency of repeat visits etc. Webpage use was estimated through the analysis of ‘access statistics’ derived from
information about the user when they connected to a site\textsuperscript{15}. Unfortunately, such statistics cannot tell the entire story – for example, it is not possible to ascertain the sex, age, or location of anonymous visitors. The boundaries of the population working with the project can, to a certain extent, be set by restricting knowledge of the project to a small subset of people: in this case, to clergy working in the Diocese of Worcester. However, web pages are public pages, and no accurate statements can be made as to the ethnography of the participants. Therefore, the server data will be augmented with more traditional research tools such as on-line questionnaires, email interviews, face-to-face meetings and observation of the growth of the web space. The results of this analysis, and the conclusions drawn from them, can be found in the following chapter.

Future Evaluation

This discussion has focused largely on questions of method rather than purpose. However, the issues raised here suggest that research on hypertext, TR and the Internet is in some ways a circular problem. For example, the extent to which people provide truthful responses to Internet questionnaires is an issue for researchers who want to obtain a true picture of what is happening. But this also raises important questions about how people interact with each other and institutions on the Internet. The nature of community and individual behaviour on the Internet become prior questions.

Following this line of argument, the issues presented by the research methodologies used in the thesis present in themselves important questions about the nature of the Internet and the nature of the forms of human organization that use the Internet. The difficulty in clarifying groups in researching hypertext and TR raises questions about how individuals understand themselves to be part of groups in an Internet environment. When people join and leave discussion groups with a click, what is the nature of commitment to TR or the requirement for social conformity to group norms? George Marcus has pointed out that the very subject of research is determined by the connections that are made between objects, people and stories during fieldwork (Markus, 1995). Taking this view, we constantly construct the web as we conduct our research, rather than researching something that is already ‘out there’. Limiting the investigation of eTheology (or any on-line activity) at the outset to the simple collection and analysis of online data is unnecessarily restrictive, and in so doing we may miss the central features of the behaviour or group we are studying. Even though the Web appears to be about electronic communication, every component is also set within

\textsuperscript{15} Counting access ‘hits’ to one URL is a relatively simple way to analyse the Web, and one still frequently reported in the media and on the ‘counters’ of web pages. Yet these hits do not actually measure the number of individual users. A single user may access the same webpage more than once during one session, access the site on several occasions and log on from different machines. Any of these occurrences will artificially inflate the number of apparent users. Furthermore, the typical method of counting hits merely describes the number of files — including graphics, logos and bits of frames — served by the host, so the actual number of visitors may only be 10 per cent of the number of hits. When this project measures ‘hits’, it will reflect the actual number of unique viewers – this information can be collected by interrogating server logs rather than relying on simple hit counters. Therefore, in this project I have combined log file data taken from the server with an analysis of the interactive ‘chat’ features of the site.
the social, moral and economic context within which this communication/information network has emerged. This naturally leads to important questions about human relationships and identity, and spiritual formation.

Once a reasonably clear strategy for evaluation had been formulated, the design of the ‘experiment’ could begin.

**Creating the Experiments**

It is often said that we are in the midst of an historic change, perhaps a renaissance in which new forms of knowledge and new representations of ideas have been made possible by technology. Yet the ideas and thoughts have always been communicated by technology - it is simply the technology that has evolved. History suggests that in the first stages of innovation, the new technology typically is adapted to reproduce the old (for example, Eisenstein, 1980), but gradually experimentation produces parallel but separate knowledge cultures. As we have seen in chapter two, it is very likely that print and digital media will continue to coexist, in the way that oral and print cultures have coexisted. History also suggests that it is not the technology itself that causes innovation; rather, it is cultural and social needs which are latent but unmet by the traditional technologies. Therefore, bearing in mind the drawbacks and potential of TR, and also weaknesses and strengths of the new technologies, I began to design the ‘experiments’.

The investigation into CMTR and the development of the eventual eTheology web site and tools was a result of many smaller investigations and developments along the way. These were not experiments in any strict sense, but were rather designed insertions or explorations into Practical Theology, the nature and direction of which were determined by an iterative process of feedback and reflection.

To explain the process, it may help to display graphically the thinking process that led to the final appearance of the project thus:
Figure 6: designing the experiment

Note: definitions for the terms blogging and wiki can be found in the glossary.
Project Participants

In order to explore TR on the web, it was decided, over the course of several supervision sessions (April and June 2003), to work with a defined group of volunteers. I began with a group of eight curates (ministers in their first four years of ministry in the Church of England) who met every month from April ’04 to September ’04. This was a self-selected group of people who were excited about the possibilities and implications of TR in parish ministry but were dissatisfied with traditional processes. The group ranged in age from 28 to 48, was equally divided between male and female, and covered the range of traditions found in the Church of England today (from Conservative to Liberal, Evangelical to Catholic). No one in the group had any remarkable degree of computer expertise, but all were broadly familiar with computer technology. This group discussed the principals of the ‘experiment’: the ethical considerations, design principals, and the issues for the TRs; decisions were made democratically (that is, via a simple majority) and it is this group that directed the course of the project, for example, moving the focus at one stage from commercially available hypertext software to using more custom-designed software.

At an early stage the project was also made available to the general Internet community in order to increase the diversity of discussions. This group was anonymous, and recruited by word of mouth, articles and notices in electronic newsletters and newsgroups, and advertisements in theological web sites. I saw my role in the project as a ‘process consultant’, engaging in dialogue to encourage participants’ cooperation, active participation and self-reflection.

Ethical Issues

Between January and April 2004, significant time was spent considering the ethical implications of reflecting in public. A qualitative analysis of a publicly available group discussion is generally subject to fewer ethical concerns than other analyses (see for example, Klinger 2000: online and Brem, Russell and Weems 2001: online). Nevertheless, certain ethical issues were raised: is there an ethical obligation to inform project participants or the web hosting company prior to sampling? Is public discourse via computer-mediated TR public property? Does the principal of “expectation of privacy” apply? Questions were also raised about intellectual ownership and copyright: who owns the messages and thoughts that appear on the web site and who owns the copyright?

16 For a more detailed analysis on ethical issues in internet-based research, included expectations of privacy and fair use of information, see, amongst many others, http://www.nyu.edu/projects/nissenbaum/ethics_ess.html
Ethical guidelines for the project were proposed in an early email to participants, which was then posted to the site:

I do NOT view the quantitative or qualitative studies of publicly posted or archived messages as a violation of anyone’s privacy. I will respect any request by list owners or participants to be excluded from the study. However, I will not seek permission. I view public discourse on the CMTR website as just that - public. Analysis of such content, where individuals’, institutions’ and lists’ identities are shielded, is not subject to “Human Subject” restraints. Such study is more akin to the study of gravestone epitaphs, graffiti or letters to the editor. Personal? – yes. Private? – No” (Ballard, 2003)

The implications of the proposed guidelines were debated in a prolonged email-based discussion. The discussion revolved around two major issues:

Is discourse on the CMTR site public? Some firmly believed that public posts should be treated like private letters. Regardless of wide-spread distribution and public access of the posts, there was an expectation of privacy. A post is made on the site in the expectation that the audience is limited, definable and identifiable, and the contents is not redistributed, analysed or quantified. Alternatively, some regarded public discourse as public domain, and supported the proposed guidelines. In the end, all participants (bar one, who removed himself from the project) agreed that, for the sake of the project, the guidelines should be adopted, provided that we returned to the subject should the web site ever become more than a pilot.

Do authors of contributions to a reflection have any legal, ethical or moral rights? Again, opinions were divergent. Some considered author permissions and citations should not even be optional – authors and sources had to be acknowledged and permission obtained if quotations were used. Some questioned the right to intrude into the lives and activities of others, regarding such intrusion as exploitation, particularly if participants are not consulted prior to browsing. Some expected that if copyright of public posts was surrendered on joining the project, then this

17 This research has always aimed to avoid causing harm and distress to it’s subjects – the so-called “golden rule” (Thomas 1996): (1) never deceive subjects; (2) never knowingly put subjects at risk; (3) maximise public and private good while minimising harm. Despite the importance of these rules, there has been intense discussion and disagreement as to whether they should be applied in different disciplinary approaches to Internet research (Walther, 2002). A report, entitled "Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the aoir ethics working committee", was approved by the Association of Internet Researchers on 27 November 2002. A PDF version of the report is openly accessible, via: http://www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf

An excerpt from page 7 of this report: "Are participants in this environment best understood as 'subjects' (in the senses common in human subjects research in medicine and the social sciences) - or as authors whose texts/artifacts are intended as public?”.

Although guidelines and proposals for Internet research ethics are usually based on those designed for "human subjects research", researchers and scholars in the humanities may have quite different perspectives, and may be aware of instances in which human subjects guidelines do not apply to complex Internet material.
should be made clear upon joining. Others considered the use of posts should be governed by professional and academic guidelines, i.e. short excerpts can be quoted can be quoted without author permission.

After several months of discussions, a policy was agreed by a simple vote (12 in favour, 1 against, 6 no replies):

Members of the eTheology project acknowledge and affirm the individual rights of informed consent, privacy and intellectual property. Members are committed to reducing censorship, and believe the issue of informed consent of authors, moderators and/or archiving institutions does not apply to an analysis in which only public text in analysed. Public posts are public and their use is governed by professional and academic guidelines. All necessary measures are taken to separate names of authors and groups from the database. Individual authors and groups are identified by an on-line name, and anyone using the content generated by the project for academic research must outline their procedure for maintaining confidentiality of authors and groups. (Ballard, 2004)

Once we had reached an agreement on intellectual property rights, discussion naturally turned to other ethical dimensions of life on-line; for example, inequalities of access to technology (perhaps due to, amongst other factors, income, education, mobility, telecom infrastructure, political climate etc.) In addition, several members of the group were concerned that the site be accessible to people with disabilities.

**Access for People with Disabilities**

Communication technologies need to address issues of accessibility for disabled persons, particularly visually impaired users. The World Wide Web Consortium (2001) estimates that more than 90 percent of all websites are inaccessible to persons with physical disabilities. Throughout the project I was able to draw upon previous experience as a provider of technology for people with visual impairments, ensuring that, in theory, each page could be read using either screen readers (using computer-generated voices to audio describe the web page) or Braille readers (using dynamic Braille cells to represent the data on screen, line by line). Attention was also paid to people with poor sight, using scalable computer fonts and high contrast foreground/background combinations, and to people with difficulties with colour perception.

Therefore, in theory, people with disabilities potentially have a far greater access to TRs using the eTheology web site than they do to conventional libraries, which can only offer a limited number of static, paper-based resources. In addition, people with disabilities can participate with other colleagues separated by great distances on an equal basis, removing such factors as transport, also providing a certain visual anonymity, meaning that participants can optimize their own self-presentation, and thus everyone can interact within the group without feeling embarrassed or patronised.
Unfortunately, participation remains theoretical. No person with a visual impairment or any other disability participated in the ‘experiment’ (or at least, no one indicated that they had such a disability) and so the suggested gains in improved access remain theoretical.

Building upon the understandings of TR and hypertext technologies, and shaped by the discussions regarding evaluation methodology and ethical considerations, I began to work on producing some practical, technological aids for conducting CMTR.
Exploring CMTR:
Some Experiments Along the Way

Creating a Hypertext Document Using a Word Processor

By April 2004 the group felt that they were in a position to begin the reflections. Once the proposition of this thesis had been articulated – that is, that the process of TR might possibly be enhanced by the use of hypertext technology - the first step to test the concept was to create a basic hypertext document. This was created, very simply and quickly, using Microsoft Word, a modern word processor which claims some 80% of the office software market. The content of the document was based upon a reflection which had been produced as the result of a face-to-face reflective session on the subject of “what are we doing in funerals” (www.etheology.org.uk/funerals.htm and reproduced in appendix D). Word allows hypertext linking within and between documents, and the insertion of pictures, sounds and video, and these elements were used (liberally!) within the TR.

The time taken to create the document was a few hours, with most of that time spent sourcing suitable music and pictures to amplify the text. Feedback upon the document by email and voice conversations confirmed that the links and multimedia did add to the TR, in that it made the document more enjoyable and attractive – however, there were many drawbacks observed from this way of producing a TR.

Several people stated that the technology frequently ‘got in the way’ of the content, leaving them wondering which button to press rather than engaging in the reflection. There was also a fear expressed that they would have to master the labyrinthine intricacies of the word processor in order to create a similar TR themselves. Also, several of the supposed inadequacies of ‘traditional’ TR were still present in the resultant TR document: it remained linear, the hypertext links were ‘internal’ rather than external to the web, the document was ‘proprietary’ (that is, the document could only be read by the ‘Word’ word processing software – although once published to the web this particular limitation was overcome), and there was little opportunity for either interaction or modification of the reflection (it was still the product of one person’s reflection, however well this was disguised with multimedia ‘eye candy’).

18 Eye candy is a term used in information technology for visual elements displayed on computer monitors that are aesthetically appealing or attention-compelling but not essential.
Although this basic TR document proved that the thesis was worth exploring, there were far too many drawbacks to this method. Therefore, attention moved away from using a word processor to an exploration of the class of software designed specifically to create multimedia documents.

Using Multimedia Software

During April-May '04 a number of multimedia authoring packages were investigated, ranging from software to create e-Books19 through to full web-authoring packages. All were, in some way, more intuitive than using a word processor, although the results achieved did not differ significantly. The greatest advantage these packages brought was that they allowed ‘visual’ authoring: elements could be dragged onto the page giving an immediate indication of how the resulting document would appear.

At the end of May a TR was published (using a software package called StorySpace20) on the e-theology web site that had been created from face-to-face discussions with the group of curates on the subject of alienation and ministry. Although hypertext and media added much value to the process of recording reflections (as reported by the members of the project), it was not quite the revolution that might have been expected from the literature review. It was clear from the feedback from the curates that there is a difference between the way print technology and computer representations of knowledge shape communication, and therefore mediate human relationships.

Subsequent discussions with the project participants suggested that the printed and computer-based texts were not in fact opposites - all texts are, after all, technological artefacts - yet they are not the same. Again, according to email responses and face-to-face interviews with participants, hypertext did seem to allow for a greater empathy and involvement with the reflection. This observation is illustrated by a study that compared reader comprehension of a statistics textbook which was presented in different formats - print, online and as hypertext (Egan et al, 1989: 30-57). Readers understood printed texts better than the same text as it "scrolled" by on a computer; and when placed within the hypertext program, comprehension was higher than the print version. Of course, different types of knowledge have different rhetorical structures; an encyclopaedia is a kind of reference material that lends itself to

19 See glossary for a definition of eBook

20 Storyspace is a hypertext authoring environment developed by Jay Bolter, Michael Joyce, and John Smith. Though the dominant paradigm for hypertext has shifted from chunk-hyperlink to the page-hyperlink structure of the World Wide Web, Storyspace was found to be an excellent mechanism for creating and visualizing complex interlinked structures. Storyspace is primarily a tool for the creation of hyperlinked text. Other media elements could be integrated only as a captioned illustration would be in a printed document. Non-textual media elements lie outside of the hyperlinking framework of Storyspace and are independent entities that provide no opportunity for interaction. This drawback mostly precluded Storyspace from becoming a tool for complex hypermedia as is called for in the thesis. However, the principles of visual authoring, simplicity of use and linking of chunks of text that were evident in multimedia authoring systems such as StorySpace remained core to the vision of the thesis.
hypertext in a way that a narrative text such as a novel might not. However, at this stage in the project it did seem that reflections, with their open-ended structure and non-linear pathways, were suited to the medium of hypertext.

Again, however, the previous problems of the technology masking the reflection, and the linear nature of the reflection were cited as difficulties by people viewing the TRs. Perhaps these drawbacks were due to the method of producing the TR, rather than the means: up until this stage, the reflections were written by one person on their own, working from recordings of reflections and adding various multimedia elements and links as they saw fit. How could the insights and creativity of other people be introduced into the pre-recording stage of TR, without convening a meeting of fellow reflectors, with all the logistical and practical problems that entailed? Therefore the focus of the project switched to Creativity Software as a possible method of working together on TRs.

Creativity Software

Many people have found that using software specifically created to enhance the creative process is very useful for generating or recording thoughts, and for manipulating and implementing ideas. Such software ranges from outlining and mind mapping programs to software that questions and provokes, stimulating further ideas\textsuperscript{21}. To see if this software could assist in TR, a number of these programs were used to create a reflection. The techniques used by the programs ranged from flashing unrelated words onto the computer screen in the expectation of provoking an association or random thought, to using photos and other visual images to expand on concepts, and rearranging the words of a sentence in order to try and throw new light on an idea. The results were then emailed around the group.

E-mail exchange provides direct exchanges between the members of the collaborative group. This is a “simple” solution, and requires only that members have e-mail capability. To keep ‘up to speed’, either all members receive copies of all relevant messages, or the messages are broadcast as a mailing or distribution list—again, everyone receives a copy. Characteristic of the e-mail exchange model is that each user must sort and keep personal copies of all the messages posted to the discussion that might be relevant to access later. The postings cannot be edited or easily cross-linked in any way useful to the group unless they are somehow collected with annotation features into a central archive. As we attempted to produce a TR via email with three or four other group members, this proved to be the greatest drawback – the reflection was constantly interrupted by other emails, and there was significant confusion regarding who wrote what, when, and about which aspect of the TR. One of e-mail’s greatest strengths – allowing many people to converse at once and in their own time – was also its greatest drawback.

\textsuperscript{21} For a full listing of the software investigated, please see the appendix
The approach of the creativity programs did, subjectively, enhance the process of TR. Whether this was through some novelty value or some genuine tapping of creative potential was unclear. However, the software did illustrate certain principles and approaches that could be useful for the project. In particular, the group enjoyed the way that creativity software could spark off an idea and cause a reflection to move in a totally unexpected direction. However, the software did require a fairly high level of computer knowledge and commitment to the project, and also required that the other participants were on-line and available at the time – perhaps there could be some way of using the insights from the creativity software in a more user-friendly manner, possibly proactively suggesting ideas rather than waiting for the user to investigate thoughts? Perhaps this software could even act as a fellow reflector?

Creating TheoBot

By mid-May ’04 I began to wonder whether it would be possible to create a program that, if a case study were presented to it, would provoke and stimulate theological questions, acting like a virtual group of fellow reflectors that could be summoned at will. Following a suggestion from the group of curates, and working with aspects of ‘chatterbot’ technology, Microsoft ‘Agents’, and some Artificial Intelligence (AI) coding, I began to create ‘TheoBot’.

A chatterbot\(^{22}\) is a computer program for simulating conversation between a human and a machine. A question or statement is presented to the software, and the chatterbot replies, just as a person would (although using its own version of logic). Classically, chatterbots try to create the illusion that an authentic exchange is taking place between two thinking, living entities. The origins of chatterbots can be traced back to 1950, when the British mathematician Alan Turing famously asked the question: "can machines think?" It was a good question, and many people have since spent considerable amounts of time and effort in trying to prove that the answer is 'yes'. Researchers in artificial intelligence have devoted much time and effort to trying to understand human cognitive capacities and adapt them to machines, and chatterbots represent just one aspect of this research. The first chatterbot, named Eliza\(^{23}\), appeared back in 1966. Eliza was created by Dr. Joseph Weizenbaum of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and was intended to resemble a Rogerian psychologist. When a human spoke to Eliza, she returned the sentence in the form of a question, thus inviting the user to give further explanation, ad infinitum. Not exactly a high level of conversation, but nonetheless ingenious and sufficiently 'intelligent' to cause confusion at a time when people were not used to interacting with computers.

\(^{22}\) For an more in-depth technical discussion, please see \url{http://debra.dgbt.doc.ca/chat/info.page.html}. See the glossary for a definition of Bot.

\(^{23}\) For transcripts of example conversations with Eliza to see a Chatterbot in action, please see \url{http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/4-2/text/dialogues.html}
I began to create basic AI software along lines similar to Eliza, but soon found that the ‘responses’ formed by the software quickly became repetitive, and it was all too apparent that one was conversing with a computer – again, the technology had got in the way of the process. However, I had been aware of Microsoft Agent technology for some years, and began work on using this as a front end for the AI software in an aim to make the responses seem more ‘human’.

Microsoft Agents are animated characters used by the Windows operating system to provide friendly and non-threatening help to the computer user. They are commonly used for basic tasks such as checking that the user really does want to delete that file, or as a front end to a help system, allowing the user to enter a query and receive an answer.

By combining the Agent and Chatterbot technologies together with some rudimentary AI, I was able to create an ‘animated theologian’ who was able to give spoken responses to typed queries, and who, if there was no response in the databanks that matched words in the query, was able to launch an internet search to seek the web for an ‘answer’. I created two Theobots: one was programmed with the entire text of the Authorised version of the Bible (because it was freely available), the second with the text of Brueggemann’s commentary on 1 and 2 Kings (again, because the text happened to be at hand – although not free of copyright).

Theobot works by the user typing in a question or a statement. This is scanned for key words and these are then run through a simple thesaurus to pick up related words – for example, ‘love’, ‘loves’, ‘loved’ and ‘loving’ are all considered as one key word (this was a significant drawback in itself, but time and knowledge prevented a fuller development of vocabulary). These key words are then matched with the database, and any ‘answers’ are presented on screen or spoken out loud in order of relevance (that is, based upon how frequently the key words matched the phrase or paragraph in the database).
The results of using TheoBot were, so say the least, disappointing. Although the novelty of an animated, speaking (and bearded) theologian on the desktop was initially captivating, the experience soon palled, especially as the shortcomings in the vocabulary parser and in the relatively small and restrictive nature of the data contained within the bots resulted in few intelligible answers. On at least eight out of ten questions TheoBot would resort to an internet search, which was to be expected given the limitation of the database and vocabulary, but it was far faster simply to launch an internet search and forget about using the ‘bot. On the occasions that TheoBot did return an answer to a query, the result was given without any real context, and the shortcomings of the parser soon became apparent.

However, once TheoBot was asked ‘hard’ questions (questions of fact, or perhaps doctrine, rather than ‘soft’ questions like “what should I have done?”) the replies were far more useful and to the point. This is almost certainly due to the nature of the data programmed into TheoBot – if it were possible to input the proceedings of, say, ten or even one hundred TRs – then the results may be more useful. Unfortunately, such a database of TRs does not (yet) exist.

It was also clear that all the technologies examined so far were rather solitary in nature. The review of models of TR (chapter two) implied that, for reflection to take place, it might be necessary to involve more than one person. Were there technologies that would allow some way of working with a number of people simultaneously, recording faithfully each person’s thoughts and arguments? The project therefore began to consider the class of software known as Groupware.
Reflections Using Groupware

Groupware is technology designed to facilitate the work of groups. This technology may be used to communicate, cooperate, coordinate, solve problems, compete, or negotiate. While traditional technologies like the telephone qualify as groupware, the term is ordinarily used to refer to a specific class of technologies relying on modern computer networks, such as email, newsgroups, videophones, or chat.

By July ’04 little had been achieved in terms of innovative ways of provoking TR, and feeling a little disheartened by this stage, I decided to turn to a commercially available collaboration tool, Groove, to see if others had already solved the problems I was hitting. On its most basic level, Groove is an application to facilitate collaboration and communication among small groups. The key concept in Groove is the shared space. A Groove user creates a shared space and then invites other people into it. Each person who responds to an invitation becomes a member of that space and is sent a copy that is installed on his or her hard drive. From that moment on, Groove keeps all documents synchronised via the internet or network. When one member makes a change to the space, that change is sent to all copies for an update.

![Figure 8: Groove collaborative software](24 www.groove.net)
Groove already allows shared document editing (with a built in word processor), shared calendars, a discussion board, and the facility to send files to each other. With a little programming, it was possible to integrate a web browser into Groove that allowed collaborative browsing – that is, one person could begin a web search, then someone else could take over and move the search in another direction, and a third person could take control and type in a new search criteria, all the time remaining in contact with each other via voice or text notes. The collaboration could occur in real time, or could be suspended until the other members of the group became available.

Groove succeeded in meeting some of the requirements of the project far better than the other solutions that had been considered to date. It was even possible to quickly write a simple word processing application that incorporated some of the other aspects of the project, such as hypertext linking and incorporation of multi-media elements. However, although Groove was a very close match, it still required software to be installed on each group member’s computer (which might entail upgrading the hardware); it only worked under Microsoft Windows, and it did require a fairly tight collaboration – it would not be possible for someone to casually look at a TR and contribute a thought, for example, as all members of a group had to be predefined and known to the system.

It seemed clear from the investigation into groupware systems that what was required was not so much formal collaboration protocols, but rather a more informal means of co-operation. Therefore, by the end of July ’04 I had begun to create some hybrid application that combined the robustness of groupware with the responsiveness and simplicity of hypermedia authoring software, ideally with some of the best aspects of the AI creativity software thrown in for good measure.

**Web Logs and Blogging**

It was at this stage in the development that the phenomenon of Web logging or *blogging* began to make headlines in the technology press. A Web Log, or "blog", is a journal that is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption. Blogs generally represent the personality of the author or the Web site and its purpose. Topics sometimes include philosophical musings, commentary on the Internet or other social issues, and links to other sites the author favours. The essential characteristics of the blog are its journal form, typically a new entry at least each day, and its informal style. The technology encourages a high frequency of update (often many times a day), dynamic content (the blog is a reflection of how the ‘poster’ feels at that moment) and an intimacy of thought (which has led to the immense popularity of blogging both among posters and readers, bringing with it their trust and loyalty).
Most common uses for blogging are personal and, considering its origins as a personal web publishing forum, this makes sense. However, blogs do two things that other Web sites and technologies simply cannot. Firstly, blogs are personal. Almost all of them are imbued with the temper of their writer. This personal touch is much more in tune with our current sensibility than were the opinionated magazines and newspapers of old (and blogging should be regarded as analogous to the publishing of periodicals rather than of books). Readers increasingly doubt the authority of The Times or Telegraph, despite their grand-sounding titles and large staff. They know that behind the curtain are fallible writers and editors who are no more inherently trustworthy than a lone blogger who has earned a reader's respect.

The second thing blogs do is - to invoke Marx – seize the means of production. It is hard to underestimate what a huge implication this has. For as long as writing has existed, writers of whatever kind have had one route to readers: they needed an editor and a publisher. Even in the most benign scenario, this process subtly distorts the information imparted. Writers find themselves almost unconsciously writing to please a handful of people - the editors looking for a certain kind of story, the publishers seeking to push a particular venture, or the advertisers who influence the editors and owners. Blogging simply bypasses this ancient ritual.

Yet, although blogging contains many of the elements that are core to the desire for TR on the web, such as its dynamism, its decentralization of information, its encouragement of the fringe and its immediacy, there was no way to allow others to participate in the conversation and to contribute their own thoughts. Thus, after six months of research and development, I was left with an appreciation of what was required for the thesis to become a reality, and an understanding of what technologies might be necessary. What was lacking was a simple way of tying all these disparate elements – word processing software, multimedia authoring, creativity and AI software, groupware and blogs – into some simple, robust and inexpensive solution. Development, for a time, halted.

The attraction of collaboration sites on the Web has also spurred further development of Internet infrastructure; in particular, extensions to the underlying protocol that allows users to interact with Web sites and other Internet resources. Of particular interest is WebDAV, or the WebDistributed Authoring and Versioning project, which is an attempt to extend the current Web HTTP 1.1 transfer protocol to include methods for creative collaboration in arbitrary media formats, not just text. The name clearly spells out the intent. When fully supported by both server and client, this would make collaboration over the Internet as natural as browsing. WebDAV appears based on some of the original Web-editing ideas once taken up by Tim Berners-Lee, considered by most to be the conceptual “inventor” of the World Wide Web.
Software Tools for TR

While the development of the web site stopped, I began to investigate small tools, possible components of a web site, which might have some use in encouraging or provoking TR. As was seen in the chapter concerning Theological Reflection, there are a myriad of techniques and theories about how reflection should be supported. In the chapter I suggested that a number of general themes emerge which, to some extent, imply a definition of reflection. The first of these emphasises the restructuring and integration of knowledge. The second is the idea of the need to raise awareness; of incomplete knowledge, of inconsistencies in knowledge, of assumptions and of what is known. Raising awareness in this way makes it possible to restructure disjointed knowledge to form a whole, but restructuring or reframing knowledge can also be a way to raise awareness. The third is the importance of seeing from multiple perspectives which again can raise awareness in the ways discussed above. It is this last theme that seemed to be most fruitful for a collaboration with internet technologies.

Gaver et al (2003: 223-240) present a framework for using ambiguity in interaction design. They suggest that ambiguous situations require people to take part in making meaning, that this is inherently pleasurable and leads to a deep appropriation of the reflection. Three types of ambiguity are suggested along with techniques for creating and using them in design; ambiguity of information, ambiguity of context and ambiguity of relationship. There has also been exploration into how technology can be used to support reflection in other ways for other purposes, for example some pieces of interactive art claim to provoke reflection in a contemplative way, where the viewer is not asked to learn anything, just consider and enjoy this process. Höök, Sengers et al (2003: 241-248) created an interactive art work called Influencing Machine and experimented with providing different amounts of feedback to the users to try and find the balance between an intriguing ambiguity and a frustrating experience. Building on these insights, I began to work on software tools that would cause confusion or surprise. Some tools flashed up random images onto the screen, or played random sounds or colours. Other tools took a snapshot of whatever was being searched on using Google (a commonly used internet search engine) and returned a collage of pictures: a representation perhaps of what the ‘web’ was thinking about at that moment?
Figure 9: Web Mosaic: a snapshot of the web

Still other tools were created that took a question written by the user and then, using an engine that was capable of generating rudimentary English sentences, slowly built up an answer to the question by piecing together random 'chunks' from the internet.

Figure 10: Cyber Chat: talk to the Internet
An example of one of the ‘dialogues’ ran thus:

| Question: | What is reflection? |
| Answer:   | Reflection is the angle of the Sun and the Moon’s orbit is tilted with respect to the Laws Of the Game of Life is a Dream deeply rooted in the Land of the Free. |

Perhaps not too enlightening on this occasion, but it did capable of shedding unexpected light on other subjects!

Other tools took some text submitted by the user (perhaps a paragraph or two outlining a situation) and then, at random, replaced words with visual images. Others, in the likeness of Burroughs, sliced up texts and reassembled sentences in an attempt to stimulate new thinking. Another tool called Newsfeed took an arbitrary news headline from the web, and then choice a random word from it. Based upon that word, it would then return an image, again, hopefully, stimulating the theological imagination of the user. Finally, other tools were created that allowed the user to search databases of specific areas of interest: for example, the Bible (various translations), the writings of the Church fathers, encyclopaedias of science, humanities reference works, writings from other religions, etc.

One of the themes running through the feedback regarding the use of the tools provided by the site was that they were popular, and spurred reflection in a less explicit or verbal way than many of the other techniques explored previously. In fact, the ‘toys’ proved to be the most popular aspect of the site (based upon the number of times they were run).

**Interactive Websites: Wikis**

Following a chance remark on a blogging site, I followed up some research on collaborative web spaces, called Wikis (from Hawaiian, meaning, literally, “quick”). A Wiki is a collaborative open-source tool that works within the context of existing servers, clients, protocols, and standards, and provides both read and write access to internet content. It is also an evolving technology that is able to keep apace of infrastructure developments (such as changes in the way the internet organises itself) as these are deployed. The main difference in comparison with most other collaborative tools is that a collaborative wiki is very informal and easy to use. Some sites may, for special reasons, require logins and passwords, but on the whole, the basic Wiki interactivity consists of people “dropping by”, browsing and reading, and, when so inclined, freely adding comments or new content. A Wiki is a free-form solution, not setting any artificial limits on content as such. Significantly, wiki is a simple, open, and non-proprietary storage solution.

26 William S. Burroughs, author and experimenter in creative techniques for stimulating thought and writing, including ‘text splicing’ where pages of text are literally sliced up using a sharp knife and rearranged randomly, in the hope that new insights can be gleaned.
Most computer users today, whatever their work or interests, whatever make and model of platform and operating system, have some kind of Web-browsing capability. Even older or budget systems with little extra resources can acquire a Web browser for free that needs only modest hard disk space. This approach is in contrast to other solutions, such as the groupware solutions investigated, that can require significant investments in software and time and sometimes new hardware as well. To access a Wiki, all that is necessary is some form of web browser.

As a Wiki is open source (that is, the basic underlying programming code is freely available for anyone to use and modify), I began work on moulding the idea of a wiki site more closely to the needs of the project. As a result, the e-theology Wiki site has, at present, a WYSIWYG (“what you see is what you get” – that is, a visual authoring system) interface that will allow anyone to casually drop by and make a comment on an existing TR or begin a completely new reflection. This comment could be to agree or disagree with existing thoughts, or to move the reflection on in a completely new direction. There is no editorial control or censoring - in extreme cases, a thought or comment can be completely erased by someone, although there are backups kept which means that they can be restored.

Thoughts can be text-based, or pictures, sounds, animations, video etc. – fully multi-media. All the comments that refer to a particular thought in a TR can be seen at once, and links to new thoughts or comments are equally visible and can be explored in real time or at leisure. Although a TR on the site can be said to have a beginning (in that it has a starting point, or ‘seed’), it is very unlikely that it will ever approach an end point or conclusion, or be said to be ‘finished’. The full resources of the web are available at all times, and the user is free to leave and return to the reflection at any time – perhaps after a number of days or weeks have passed. However, this time lag is not seen by other users, who will only perceive the real-time, multi-vocal nature of the TR.
By combining the various elements of blogs, wikis, the theological tools (or toys) and a simplified hypertextual authoring facility, the eTheology site was created (which can be found at http://www.etheology.org.uk). Once the site had been set up and proven to work in principle, it was published onto the Internet, and its existence publicised as widely as possible. Following a supervision session where the preliminary website statistics (which were disappointing) were discussed together with some anecdotal evidence, it was decided that the existing site should be re-designed to take into account some criticisms concerning its usability, and to develop the site to make more explicit some of the characteristics of the ideal of a "Community of Practice" (CoP) described by Wenger (1998: 15) as a “joint enterprise with relationships of mutual engagement, relying on a shared repertoire of communal resources.”

Wenger and Snyder (2002) suggest six principles for the cultivation of CoPs which were incorporated into the new web site design:

1) Plan for evolution
2) Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives
3) Invite different levels of participation
4) Develop both public and private community spaces
5) Combine familiarity and excitement
6) Create a rhythm for the community

Projects which attempt to facilitate CoPs have had mixed results. In amongst great reported successes are studies that suggest that students for the most part engage sporadically and ineffectively in online conversation with their peers despite the potential learning benefits. Maria Loopuyt (in Carr, Loopuyt and Cox, 2002: online) suggests that postgraduate Humanities (and perhaps we can therefore infer theology) students have a very individualistic culture and that their sometimes idiosyncratic research interests mean that their peers are simply unable to offer a learning community.
Initially there were hopes that simply by providing a space on the web to reflect on theological subjects, then TR would result. However, Laurillard (1993: online) suggests that hypertext collaborative media do not in themselves promote learning or reflection. In fact, the burgeoning literature of online learning and professional collaboration suggest that a number of conditions are necessary in building an on-line reflective community. DiMauro and Gal (1994: online) distinguish between the technological and the social design factors required for a CoP which fosters reflective dialogues. Their work suggests that helpful technological design features may include: a protected workspace for reflection (that is, the possibility of restricting participants to a pre-approved list of people); the potential for asynchronous communication (allowing people to ‘think’ off-line, but giving the illusion of continuous conversation); the maintenance of a chronological record of dialogue; a searchable text-base to preserve the memory of the community, and ease of access and response to messages. All these features were incorporated into the eTheology project.

However, a collaborative reflective space contains not only technological features but also demands social considerations. DiMauro and Gal's social design factors include: a structured dialogue (participants should know who is speaking and in response to whom); the ability to link action with reflection; a participatory motivation where members take responsibility for their own successes and failures, and extending the time frame for dialogue to permit reflection. The project therefore integrated these social design features into the web site more explicitly.

However, this series of incremental developments added greatly to the complexity of the project. In September 2004 the site was reassessed and radically simplified.

**Growth in Use**

In order to try and increase the number of people using the site, the project was publicised by a number of means:

- **July 11th – July 15th**: 212 emails sent out to people who might possibly be interested in theological reflection on the internet. These email addresses were gathered from email enquiries from people interested in the web site, researchers in similar fields, and theological institution web sites.
- **July 20th – August 2nd**: follow up emails and bulletins sent to surfers who had left details on the site
- **August 7th**: talk given to Worcester clergy chapter (consisting of 15 Anglican clergy based in the Worcester East deanery)
August 7th – August 12th notices placed in a number of ejournals and websites (see appendix B)

August 18th article on eTheology sent to all Worcester clergy via Diocesan mailing, calling for interested people to participate in the project, resulting in six emails and four telephone enquiries.

September 7th seminar with Worcester Diocese curates on eTheology and using technology for reflection

Communication about the project was purposely restricted to Anglican clergy in the Diocese of Worcester mainly so that some conclusions could be drawn regarding the project participants. Due to the site allowing (or even encouraging) anonymous reflection, it was not possible to determine the exact constitution of the group; however, from the method I used to publicise the project, and the results from the questionnaire (see below) it seems that, apart from a certain ‘background count’ of surfers who accidentally came across the site, the great majority of participants and all those who chose to return a questionnaire were Anglican clergy in the Diocese of Worcester.

Presumably as a result of the increased publicity, the number of ‘hits’ that the web site received increased dramatically, as did the time spent at the site (a measure of how much information was perused by surfers) and the number of people returning to the site. These results are tabulated below and plotted graphically in the appendix C. However, there is some evidence to show that the number of visits to the site would have increased slightly (perhaps a matter of a few percent) simply by remaining in the same place for more than a few months, as a results of 'accidental' browsing and linking between sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Number of visits to web site</th>
<th>Average time spent on site per browser (mins)</th>
<th>Percentage of browsers returning within 10 days</th>
<th>No. of times the software tools were run</th>
<th>No. of new TRs created</th>
<th>No of additions to existing TRs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July wk 2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July wk 3</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July wk 4</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug wk 1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug wk 2</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug wk 3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug wk 4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept wk 1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept wk 2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Not recorded*</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Growth in the Size of the eTheology Website

Over time, the eTheology website grew through contributions from reflectors. It is notoriously difficult to represent the growth in size of a dynamic web site simply using statistics. What measure should be used – number of pages, number of external links, quantity of text? As no measure is particularly precise, I took ‘snapshots’ of the website using the search engine Grokker which gives a broad graphical idea of the progress of the site, including size of content (size of ‘spheres’), number of pages and external links (number of ‘spheres’):

Figure 11: eTheology.org, 06/05/04

Figure 12: eTheology.org, 06/07/04

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27 www.groxis.com
From the statistics on web use, email responses from participants and face-to-face comments made about the site, certain tentative conclusions can be drawn:

1. A certain amount of ‘background noise’ can be expected. There are a number of surfers who will randomly come across the website and experiment with some of the tools contained in it. This number seems to be around 5-6 each week. About half of these seem to add the site to their list of favourites and return within ten days.

2. The industry average user session length (that is, the average time of browser spends looking at one web site) is around 10.5 minutes (July 2004, [http://www.ican2000.com/webstats/index.html](http://www.ican2000.com/webstats/index.html)). The average user session length for eTheology is around 11.5 minutes – not a significant increase, but perhaps an indication that the content of the web site is holding peoples’ interest at least as well as other sites. (The attention span of web surfers is notorious: the average time spent looking at a web page is currently 47 seconds - [http://www.clickz.com/stats/big_picture/traffic_patterns/article.php/3414611](http://www.clickz.com/stats/big_picture/traffic_patterns/article.php/3414611) - unfortunately time spent per page of the eTheology web site was not measured in this project.)

3. Following publicity, the number of visits increased tremendously (by factors of 10 in some cases), perhaps indicating an interest in the possibility of eTheology even if the particular way the site was designed did not
lead anyone to create a new reflection. This suggests that improved and frequent publicity could increase the interest in the site and thus create more opportunities to create reflections in a more carefully attuned web space.

4. However, these targeted 'theologically-literate' visitors seem to return to the site with less frequency than the casual surfer, but do spend more time reading the content of the project. Perhaps, without a large number of 'ready made' reflections, the site remains of academic interest only. By amassing together a large number of reflections, the site might become a practical resource as well as an intellectual curiosity. Utz (2000: online) points out that having a high expectation of, and motivation towards, on line interaction improves the relational dimension of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), suggesting that more time spent managing users’ expectations may result in a more consistent user base.

5. Only after two months or so of returning to the site and reading the content was one new TR created. Perhaps there are issues here of permanence and trust, in that a site needs to have been 'present' for some time become it can be trusted to host thoughts and ideas, let alone TRs. According to Walther and Burgoon (1992), CMC becomes more personal the longer people spend interacting with each other. With the amount of data collected in this particular set of 'experiments' it is not possible to confirm this; however, anecdotal evidence certainly suggests this might be the case in using the internet for TR.

Interestingly, at the very end of the project there appeared to be a sudden uptake in the use of the website among local clergy (the results are not covered by the data collection period, but outlined in the appendix). This may indicate that a history of relationship increases people's feelings of personal connection in eTheology, and also that knowing there is a chance of further interaction (either face-to-face or virtually) in the future increases people commitment to the tools and techniques. Patricia Wallace (1999) humorously calls this process the "socio-emotional thaw" - in other words, in spite of the apparent coldness of eTheology (lacking as it does verbal and social cues), users eventually begin to 'warm up' by substituting other cues and reading existing cues more carefully.

Unfortunately, an analysis of if, or how, this is happening with the on-line reflections is beyond this thesis.

In this chapter I have outlined the path I took towards the eTheology website, together with the various meanderings and dead ends along the way. These were, I suggest, inevitable and unavoidable, given the novel nature of these investigations. I also suggest that these discursions, far from being mere distractions, were essential to the development of the site and the tools.
Analysis and Conclusions

In the previous chapter I outlined the explorations in Computer Mediated Theological Reflection (CMTR) and some of the practical outworkings of the project, together with the results and feedback obtained along the way that influenced the development of the website and the various ‘theological toys’. In this chapter I shall analyse in more detail the findings of the ‘experiments’, draw some conclusions and suggest future avenues of exploration.

This project was born out of a dissatisfaction with TR as taught to ordinands at Theological Colleges. To recap, these were that TR tended to be taught as being linear, perhaps reproduced as an essay with a beginning, middle and end with a coherent argument running all the way through. In addition, there was a difficulty in identifying sufficient inputs (or ‘differing voices’) to inform a truly reflective process. Also, TRs were generally seen as not truly collaborative, being the work of single students. The process was also seen as being overly academic, lacking in practical application and shrouded in mystical and technical language. Finally, TR was seen as inflexible and divorced from real life, and very serious – certainly very little playfulness could be discerned.

Theoretically, I believe that hypertext overcomes most if not all of the perceived problems with TR. Its properties - being non-linear, multi-vocal, decentred and interlinked, with the capability of incorporating multimedia – should mean that hypertext is an ideal environment for TR. In this light, the statistical results and responses from project participants may be disappointing from the perspective of providing new working models for TR. However, they do provoke the question: why does a technology that, in theory, answers many of the criticisms made of TR in the literature and by students, not provide a suitable environment for reflection in practice?
Several answers are possible. Perhaps the website, despite been redesigned several times, is still not sufficiently accessible and inviting. Perhaps the group chosen to work with have ways of thinking and working with ideas that do not translate well into hypertext technologies. Or perhaps TR simply cannot exist in cyberspace, no matter how many collaborative tools and creative toys to spur the imagination are created for the purpose.

These statistics support comments made in response to a simple email survey that was sent out to people who left their email addresses on the site, and observations made by groups of clergy following workshops that was given on the subject of TR in cyberspace. These are recorded in appendix D, but the main essence of the comments is that the project is an interesting one, and the software tools are sometimes useful (and often surprising), but that using the internet for the process of doing TR, whether on their own or in a group, felt cold and unnatural, and that they were wary of committing their thoughts to such a public forum (this was certainly a common theme amongst the clergy).

During the course of the analysis of the project there were identified a number of advantages and disadvantages to the technology that were not foreseen by the literature review. As these shed an interesting light upon the whole enterprise, these are examined now.
Unforeseen Advantages of CMTR

Although the statistical results of the ‘experiments’ may not have justified the initial enthusiasm for the technology, some major advantages, other than those that were envisaged during the literature review stage of the project, were identified by the participants. These included, in addition to the expected benefits of hypertext, a de-centring of power; an improved participation at a low cost over great distances; a degree of permanence in the reflection and time to reflect - the illusion of a continuous dialogue which actually took place over several weeks.

De-centring of Power

Virtually all the email respondents cited a freedom to imagine and respond that was not possible in face to face groups where there were expectations of the roles people play – this was especially noticed where groups included curates and incumbents with the attendant ‘power differentials’. In connection with this, it is interesting to note that Heller and Kearsley (1996) report that students using a computer conferencing system experienced a reduction in discrimination due to physical or cultural differences.

In her book *Life on the Screen*, Sherry Turkle (1996) describes the concept of depaysement. Appropriated from anthropology, depaysement, meaning literally to "decountrify" oneself, is defined as the experience of (re)seeing. "One leaves one's own culture to face something unfamiliar, and upon returning home it has become strange - and can be seen with fresh eyes" (Turkle, 1996: 218). Cyberspace is rich with opportunities for depaysement: we can experiment with how it feels to be the opposite sex or genderless, we can change our ethnicity or the color of our skin, we can develop relationships with people we would never meet face-to-face, all of which enable us to experience a different perspective from which to (re)view the self and real life constructs. This potential of cyberspace is at the heart of the potential of eTheology.
Future research might take up the nature of the experience of reflecting and contributing to reflections anonymously, examining, for example, the paradoxical relationship between pseudonymity\textsuperscript{28} and the hyperpersonal\textsuperscript{29}. The effect of gender and cultural neutrality on TR could also be profitably explored.

As predicted, the online environment allowed participants to find a strong and confident voice. Some group members commented in their email responses that they were more confident and contributed more online. Two-thirds of the members rated their participation in the reflection as greater than in face-to-face groups.

Balanced against this advantage was the stress for some project participants in communicating using only the written word. Although the asynchronous nature of all the assessable work certainly permitted "planned discourse", one member noted the difficulty of communicating in a completely text-based medium: "It is ... hard for someone to exchange their opinion or information through the written word and only the written word". There were opportunities to enrich the reflections using pictures, sounds, video etc. but these were generally found to be “far too much trouble, more trouble than it was worth” Any technology that seeks to enrich a human process like reflection must become so simple to use as to become almost second nature.

The benefit of getting to know each other online without meeting face-to-face was commented upon favourably by many participants. One member summarized many peoples' reactions in the following comment in her email:\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{quote}
I feel grateful for having the opportunity to meet each other (online) and talk for a few months before meeting each other ... When you meet someone in real life too many things get in the way for you to be able to talk to someone properly.
\end{quote}

One questionnaire entry asked members to reflect on the impressions they had formed of others in the group, to articulate these, and explain on what sort of information they were based. Members’ comments suggested that, in general, positive impressions were formed, or at least these were the ones they chose to share. Most also relied on

\textsuperscript{28} Pseudonymity is the ability to prove a consistent identity without revealing oneself, instead using a pseudonym. Pseudonymity is a state which combines many of the advantages of having a known identity with the advantages of anonymity. The main difference between anonymity and pseudonymity is that while in anonymity the identity is not known, in pseudonymity, there exists a separate persistent "virtual" identity but it cannot be linked to a physical person, persons or organization. Many people don't want the things they say online to be connected with their offline identities. They may be concerned about political or economic retribution, harassment, or even threats to their lives. Whistleblowers report news that companies and governments would prefer to suppress; human rights workers struggle against repressive governments; parents try to create a safe way for children to explore; victims of domestic violence attempt to rebuild their lives where abusers cannot follow. Instead of using their true names to communicate, these people choose to speak using pseudonyms (assumed names) or anonymously (no name at all).

\textsuperscript{29} According to some researchers (for example, Walther, 1996), computer-mediated communication, such as eTheology, can surpass the level of affection and emotion of parallel face-to-face interaction. Intimacy becomes heightened, and people can reveal far more about themselves that they would ever dream of doing in real life. The After a while an online group starts to share increasingly intimate information about their personal lives and feelings. Part of this "hyperpersonal" effect, Walther hypothesizes, comes from people's tendency to present themselves in their best light when using only written words to convey their personalities, and part of it, he believes, is due to a mutual idealization of one another in the absence of visual and auditory cues.

\textsuperscript{30} See appendix B for further examples of email responses.
the kinds of cues that seemed to be critical to face-to-face interaction such as sex, age, and race. An analysis of these impressions indicates that those with more experience online were less likely to include physical characteristics and more likely to reflect on personality qualities, suggesting that, perhaps, the longer we spend online the less important face-to-face markers become. This observation raises interesting questions for CMTR: as time online increases, do we begin to pay less attention to physical markers in real life, thus significantly altering the process of TR? Is this a positive influence on TR, or does it later the nature of a process that is intended to remain rooted in praxis?

Previous experience with educational newsgroups as well as existing research led me to expect a certain informality in online communication. However, I was not prepared for the playfulness which emerged (eventually) in the comments on the reflections. For example, frequent use was made of short, non grammatical comments or several times use was made of irony. Day and Batson (2000: on-line) caution against categorizing online play as frivolity and they challenge practitioners in the field to develop appropriate practices for the "different psychological environment" that is created by CMC.

Many members reported a strong sense of community in the subject, but those students who contributed most to the reflections were those who were most likely to describe themselves as committed to the group as a community, supporting the time-related nature of interpersonal relationships posited above.

The feedback also suggested that the technology enabled some people to be more expressive, subtle, organized, or creative in how they communicated. Where in face to face situations they found themselves embarrassed or tongue-tied, or simply too distracted to keep up with the pace of conversation, by using written words they found a conciseness or a poetry that was not otherwise obtainable. However, for others the process felt “cold and unnatural” (for further comments on the web site, see Appendix C).

**Permanence of Reflection**

There are many benefits in creating a permanent record of the interactions during a reflection, not least when an observer comes to document a particular interaction. A permanent record may permit an enhanced level of learning by the group, but may also present ethical dilemmas where chat and e-mail exchanges are essentially understood as transitory by participants, but now are preserved, 'frozen in time', to be quoted and referenced in the future in ways that were never meant at the time.
The medium itself permitted the formation of new networks and new collaborative partnerships, and also encouraged participants to make connections and inferences that would not be possible in ‘real life’. For example, it was reported that the software tools provoked images and concepts that, although related to the subject of the reflection, came from sources that were well outside people’s experiences and which they would have had no reason to explore if they had not been using the web space for TR. People were able to return again and again to these concepts and use them as “starting points for pathways to reflection” (member of the group, 2004). Reflection was possible between people who were separated by great distances – the most distant participant who responded to the questionnaire lived in Boston, USA – and at a very low cost. Paradoxically, Jessica Lipnak (2000), an expert on virtual teams, estimates that 75% of e-mail communication (excluding ‘spam’ or unrequested marketing emails) is between people who are located within 50 feet of each other.

Time to Ponder

The asynchronous form of communication provided by the site allowed participants sufficient time to reflect and formulate responses (providing ‘thinking time’). In conversations following the project, many participants identified this aspect as being particularly helpful, especially as the thinking time was not apparent to other participants and did not restrict the flow of the reflection. One person in particular was most impressed at how a conversation could continue in cyberspace, apparently uninterrupted and coherent, yet actually taking place over several weeks. The same person made several interesting links with his similar relationship with certain early Christian writers – he felt that the conversation between him and the theologian was continuing into the present day. Participants also reported that they generally felt more satisfied in their on-line responses than they often felt following face-to-face meetings.

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31 Total costs for the project, to date, stand at less than £800.
Disadvantages of CMTR

Participants identified many disadvantages of the technology, some foreseen by the literature review, others unanticipated. These included some difficulties in navigation, greater opportunities to misunderstand each other; a reaction described as emotional remoteness and various technical problems. Participants also reported misgivings over the lack of consequences associated with CMTR and the need to contribute if you are to be seen to participate. In addition, there were concerns about the use of language, and a definite distrust of information delivered through the internet.

Navigation Issues

Of all the comments made by participants (for examples of some feedback, see Appendix C), the most common, yet the hardest to resolve, was that of navigation. People simply got lost in a labyrinth of reflections, reflections upon reflections, and comments on reflections. Studies of how people read web-based material found they do not read the web as if it were a print media (see, for example, Birnbaum, 2000). This is because, researchers contend, the web is intentionally visual, with more visible impact than in print-based text. Furthermore, technologies such as eTheology allow non-print-based materials to be included, most notably interactive materials. This means that much more is happening in a web space, and people scan the text looking for highlighted keywords, subheadings, and short ‘bytes’ of information (Morkes and Nielsen, 1997).

The multimodal nature of graphical interface in eTheology allows users to potentially access far more information than print media – and to provide a far richer experience. The user can look at a site, receive ‘bits’ of information and choose what they want to investigate. This type of reading requires a different type of attention. It requires new reading and comprehension skills, such as a new type of visual perception, the capacity to read within the visual forms available online, and the ability to negotiate the barrage of information juxtaposed with sounds and images. Images, photos and emoticons are common enhancements to the CMTRs created in the project.

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32 quoted in the Monitor on Psychology journal, [http://www.apa.org/monitor/apr00/research.html](http://www.apa.org/monitor/apr00/research.html)
33 [http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/writing.html](http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/writing.html). This web page summarizes two recent studies which measured the effects of better writing on the performance of users. Better writing improved the usefulness of a non-technical web site by 124%, and a technical site by 159%. The users of better-written web sites were 800% more accurate than the control users. These studies clearly demonstrate the power of good writing.
34 See glossary for a definition of emoticon.
One of the significant issues facing the eTheology web site was that of GUI usability, and in particular the effects of colour, sound, images, and the positioning of information on web pages, together with the more basic problem of having to navigate around a site that was constantly being modified. The problem is not solved simply by placing pointers to information on the site. Usability researchers (Rajani and Rosenberg, 1999) found users often fail to recognize investigative aids built into GUIs, especially regarding navigational tools. This ‘banner blindness’ is encountered when users searching for in-depth information fail to find the tools intended to help them access the information. At present there is very little software available to help with the navigation around a wiki, where the links need to be dynamic, graphical and intuitive. It is this area of the eTheology site that will need the most work in the future.

**Misunderstandings: Flaming and Spamming**

Although many participants found a freedom in CMC, one or two did report an uneasiness in using the medium, feeling that their comments had been misread by others (interestingly, no one reported that they had been distressed by other people’s postings, nor did anyone feel the need to censor or delete another’s writings as is possible on the site). The decentring of identity has its dangers, particularly in environments where participants are not required to disclose their real names as was the case on the eTheology web site. Destructive emotional expression in the form of flaming may undermine the safety required for reflective dialogue, and although this was not experienced during the project, several respondents quoted this as a fear that could inhibit reflection. The very features permitting greater equality allow the expression of negative emotion as Howard Rheingold (1994) explains:

> The same lack of social feedback that lowers inhibitions enough to promote self-disclosure among groups of people can also lower inhibitions enough for individuals to disrupt those groups and sometimes tear the delicate fabric of trust that has been carefully woven over months of conversation among disembodied strangers. (Rheingold 1994: 185)

On the eTheology site, participants were known to each other primarily through their texts, and these texts were usually read as they scrolled past on the video monitor. However, in McLuhan's terms, a video monitor is a much "cooler" medium than print. It is not possible to be as objective about a text on a computer monitor as we are on a printed page. We tend to immerse ourselves in the text instead of holding it at a distance, and to react to random details in the text finding it more difficult to view a text as a whole.

In computer communication, where we are interacting with each other through texts which are displayed on a monitor, we often respond to small things, often understood out of their context in the text as a whole. A phrase, for example, can be read as an insult when, in the context of the whole text, it is a quite innocent remark. Others

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35 GUI: Graphical User Interface –see glossary of terms
can overreact to spelling mistakes or mistakes of grammar. In the give and take of this kind of communication, with partly interpreted texts taken without any of the kind of physical cues that accompany the spoken word, misunderstandings can escalate to the level of tirades generated by what seemed to be an innocent phrase. This phenomenon of emotional over-reaction is very common online. When it happens, it can seriously disrupt, and even destroy, the group process of a site concerned with reflection.

**Emotional Remoteness**

Paradoxically, for a technology that was originally intended to remove the tyranny of the written word in TR, the web site became more and more reliant on texts. This reliance on text for communication may have resulted in the impression, stated by several ‘observers’ of the project (that is, people who just watched and did not contribute, yet still made comments on the process), of an emotional remoteness to the reflections. There are no voices, facial expressions, or body language to convey meaning and emotion. This created extra challenges for me, and I spent much time via emails and telephone calls trying to maintain a sense of group and identity amongst the participants. The relational element of web sites, such as eTheology, that encourage interactivity is a product, Walther (1992) has argued, of our strong desire for affiliation. As essentially social beings we are driven by a need for association and connection. When relationships are developed, and there is an expectation of future interaction (as was the case when local clergy used the site), antisocial behavior is less likely and participation improved. It is not surprising therefore to find that “… flaming is more prevalent on large lists where it is easier to remain anonymous rather than in private email” (Walther and Burgoon, 1992: 52-53).

**Technical Problems and Technical Language**

The population of cyberspace has grown exponentially in recent years. With Internet Service providers and web servers often operating to the limits of their technical and human capacity and continuously upgrading to new technologies (which have not always been fully tested) it is not surprising that services are not fully reliable. This resulted on only two or three occasions in interruptions to the reflective dialogue, and may have discouraged new participants from regular involvement. To this must be added, as pointed out by many participants, the relative technological inexperience of many, and the lack of up-to-date equipment to access the project (which depended upon the computer equipment owned by the participants). Among the questionnaire respondents there was no discernable pattern regarding age, so a more recent education does not seem to affect this finding. However, anecdotally, it appears that it was people who were already making significant use of the web who found most promise in the technology found on the eTheology site. More research would be needed to verify this.
In addition, one of the barriers to participation mentioned by members of the group more than once was the technical nature of the environment. This was largely unavoidable, given the nature of the project, although certainly greater efforts could have been made to ensure the project was more 'user friendly' in the terms it used.

The technical language that was used extensively in the project in itself changed the nature and 'feel' of the reflections for some participants (the three people who mentioned this factor all happened to be women, but as not all the women of the group commented, I don’t feel that this was a factor). For example, the word "computer" is anachronistic, since today the equipment is used for information management more than computation. The names and uses of the keyboard - keys named "control," "break," "escape," and "command," - derive from a cybernetic "command and control" philosophy, reflecting the military development of technology to sustain hierarchy. Technology design reflects this structure: the technical infrastructure underlying computer networks is based upon an analogy of centralized "mainframes" controlling "dumb terminals", essentially the technological equivalent of a master/slave relationship. Today, social network relations, especially seen in groups drawn together for reflection and consultation, tend to be egalitarian or communal. Although the terminology and design of the technology reflects social organization rather than causes it, the language used in the project did not represent accurately the nature of the relationships formed. If we do not yet have an appropriate language to describe the social relationships that are occurring in cyberspace in projects such as eTheology, perhaps this is a sign that we may be living in an age of genuine social innovation.

A Lack of Consequences

Some questionnaire answers mentioned that they felt others made comments on-line that they would not make in face-to-face meetings (interesting to note that this apparent recklessness was attributed to other people, never to themselves). In particular, irony was notoriously difficult to portray on line, whereas in face to face conversations a simple wry smile would be all that was necessary to indicate the intention of wit. Consequently I spent a significant amount of time 'keeping the peace'. Of course, once the group met again face to face, misunderstandings were easily cleared up, but this was often too late. One project participant left the project through such a misunderstanding. The work of DiMauro and Gal (1994) suggests that a successful on-line reflective community should be able to experience consequences to their thinking – action as a result of reflection. In short, many of the participants felt that the website led them nowhere other than reflection for reflection’s sake. If the eTheology website was part of a programme of on-line and face-to-face encounters, this may go some way to improve the quality of the community cohesion.
The Need to Contribute

There are things we take for granted when reflection takes place in a physical location where everyone can see each other. Online, you have to "speak" to be "seen." This means that right at the beginning of a project such as eTheology, one needs to work at community building, at building a sense of who is "there" in the project. At the very least, every member of the group needs the opportunity to introduce herself and to have her presence acknowledged by other group members. In other words, the group needs an opportunity to make itself visible. This opportunity was missed by the project, allowing, as it did, everyone and anyone to simply ‘drop in’ and make comments. In a face-to-face meeting or reflection, participants are able to see each other. It is not necessary that a person be vocal to make his presence known. Even the silent members of a group are seen. Their physical responses to others and to what is said make their own contribution to the ongoing life of the reflection. Online, if one does not contribute verbally, one's presence cannot be noticed. The consequence is that the rest of the group cannot tell if one is silent or whether one is missing. Online, you cannot see who is not there.

On several occasions emails were sent between participants of the project, especially in the early stages, checking that they were still willing to be members as they had not posted any comments for a few weeks. Although most of this can probably be explained as my own anxieties regarding the ‘success’ of the project, there was a sense from other members that if they were contributing then surely all should. Consequently it is important that some expectation of regular contribution be stated and, if it is not forthcoming, a moderator needs to follow up with ‘silent’ members. This contribution need not be substantive nor need it be a means of 'evaluating' the member: the purpose is to encourage each member to remain visible to the rest of the group. Any kind of closure is difficult online: the experience of online communication is often experienced as a "rolling present." The reflective process is represented in the form of a succession of notes, and as notes scroll off your screen they tend to be forgotten. The reality of the moment is whatever was said in the last note. Each note adds new threads to a topic which others, if they wish, can follow - it follows that it is often difficult for a group to stay "on topic."

Distrust of Technology

One of the outcomes of the project has been to observe that, almost without exception, the (Anglican) clergy who were approached to contribute to the reflections on-line were suspicious of the technology (evidenced both by the slow up take of the web site, and face to face comments) and, at first, were unwilling to commit at all to theological discussions in cyberspace. This could be due to any number of reasons, and some were mentioned by the clergy themselves: a distrust of the medium itself, which has become, in the eyes of some, a “place for fraudsters and perverts”; an unwillingness to allow the possibility of sharing theological reflections with the general public (perhaps
a fear that controversial thoughts might be taken out of context?); and an unfamiliarity and reluctance to get to know how to use the software, coupled with hectic lifestyles and great demands upon time.

It may be that clergy who are technologically literate and so are possible participants in the eTheology project, are at the same time predisposed not to reflect in groups, virtual or otherwise. On the other hand, clergy who find a collaborative approach to TR helpful may believe that using a computer to mediate their thoughts is unthinkable. Although there is some anecdotal evidence regarding personality types of clergy using the internet, more research would be required before any conclusions could be drawn.

A telling illustration comes from Alluquere Rosanne Stone (1995). Stone describes an encounter between former quiz kid Charles Van Doren and computer interface creator, Brenda Laurel. The encounter took place at Atari Labs in the late 1980s where Dr. Laurel was engaged in research on interactivity. Van Doren was working for the Encyclopaedia Britannica company which had begun work on a new interactive version on CD ROM. Stone describes the story:

He came by Laurel's new office in the lab one day and proceeded to chat her up about interactivity. Laurel's ears perked up. "That's great," she said, "I'm working on interactivity too."
"You are?" Van Doren said.
"Sure," Laurel said enthusiastically. "I've got this idea for an interactive educational thing about whales told from multiple perspectives - whales from an Inuit perspective and then whales from a whaling corporation perspective, and a Greenpeace perspective, say. Multiple narrative thread, user selectable. It'd fit right into your interactive encyclopaedia."

Van Doren turned red and began to make a peculiar noise. After a few seconds Laurel realized he was sputtering. Finally he burst into speech. "Encyclopaedias don't present viewpoints," he said, biting off the words. "Encyclopaedias present truth."

This encounter illustrates the vivid contrast between modern and postmodern thinking. The modernist presents the truth, just as it was nailed on the door at the church of Wittenburg in 1557. 'Truth' is a slippery concept, made more so by placing it in the context of the web.

Participants also described their distrust of the sources ands canonicity of the facts, concepts and opinions that were fed into the reflections through use of the theological toys. However, the lack of academic rigour in some of the information found in cyberspace suggests, at least in the realm of CMTR, that they should be taken on their own terms and with a different perspective upon truth - maybe even a sense of playfulness that allows for new ways of looking at things without expecting every item of data to be ‘correct’ and ‘verifiable’.
Some Conclusions

In this thesis I have asked two principle research questions. The first question is - is TR possible on the internet? Does the model overcome some or all of the limitations identified as being a part of current models? Does it introduce new limitations? The second question is - if TR is possible, then do the web space and tools add any value to the experience and the fruits of theologically reflecting, and are the results it produces compatible with 'conventional' reflective methods?

I believe that this project has shown that TR is possible over, and through, the Internet. It does overcome many of the original dissatisfactions with current models of TR, such as: the linearity of the essay form, the reliance on words alone, the difficulty of recording a conversation, and the difficulty in bringing as many different 'voices' or points of view to the table as possible. However, many new problems arise with the technology, including navigation issues, misunderstandings, emotional remoteness and a lack of consequences. The results of the eTheology website do seem to be compatible with the current models and methods of TR: the reflections recognisably belong to the body of TR, and it appears to have brought to the reflections, according to participants, insights and concepts that might not otherwise have emerged. As to whether the 'experience' of reflecting is enhanced, the answer has to be that for some it is, and for some it is not.

The results of the ‘experiments’ indicate, at least to the participants, that there may be a place for CMTR in the lives of some clergy and students, although almost certainly only as one aspect of a range of facilities and opportunities. It is apparent that there is nothing inherent in the Internet that guarantees reflection – the technology is no panacea. But in a specific context involving learning activities, such as research, collaboration, self expression, and reflection, the Internet offers multiple affordances, so numerous that it may be a mistake to treat it simply as a (neutral) medium. It is really an infrastructure, which brings together media, tools, people, places and information, and so expands the range of human capabilities. However, the results of the project indicate that CMTR cannot stand on its own as a tool: the responses from project participants suggest that the quality of the reflections would be greatly improved if CMTR formed just one element of reflective practice. Participants found eTheology most helpful when combined with other models and methods for TR.

The chief benefits of the project can therefore be summarised thus - eTheology provides a:

- **Store of information** Serving as a long-term, reusable project memory
- **Forum to express ideas** Supporting the emergence and debate of new ideas
- **Method of mediating** Structuring and focussing interaction
Is CMTR Better than Face-to-Face Reflection?

So, which is better: face-to-face ‘real life’ TR, or reflection on the web? This is a loaded question, since ‘better’ is an ambiguous term. Better for what? There are distinct advantages to the time-stretching, distance-shortening, and potentially fantasy-driven dimensions of CMTR. Several educators with experience in teaching TR were shown the on-line reflections, and feedback was unanimous in that these reflections were of “a different quality” to paper-based exercises. Words such as “deeper”, “wider”, “exciting”, “confusing” and “perplexing” were used to describe the experience: interestingly, all the educators stated that although they could see potential for the model “in real life” they were unsure of its value in an academic setting, because it was impossible to see when the reflection had come to a conclusion and so could be graded. Also, as many of the project participants pointed out, real life reflections have the advantage of touch, smell, taste, the complex integration of all the five senses, and a more robust potential to ‘do things with’ other people.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the results is that CMTR offers the possibility of reflection distributed between the medium, the learner and the context (see, for example, Jonassen et al., 1995: 7-26) rather than being a private enterprise conducted between student and tutor as is often experienced in educational settings such as the Theological College. In this way, using CMTR as a component of reflective practice may come closer to the ideal of Communities of Practice (CoP) and the work of Jürgen Habermas.

The ‘discourse theory’ propounded by the German Philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1990) suggests an ideal reflective situation is a scenario in which truth would be infallibly be attained by all participants having perfect freedom to place propositions on the table, completely uninfluenced by prejudices, external constraints, vested interests, distortions of communication and so on. The eTheology site, with its ability to draw upon the vast amount of information, opinion and conjecture that forms the web, comes close to this scenario. However, although TR in cyberspace can approach this ideal, the results of the project suggest that there remains a dimension to discourse on the web that appears to be essential to reflection in physical groups yet is unavailable to virtual participants. At some stage, at least, the group needs to see, hear and (possibly) touch other members of the group.

Turkle provocatively suggests that computer-mediated forms of communication, such as the eTheology website, have become new "objects-to-think-with" or "test-objects" (1995: 185) for experimenting with "the constructions and reconstructions of self" (1995: 180). Taking her cue from the French postmodernists (for example, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari), she proposes that our increasing comfort with technologically mediated forms of social interaction, with the generation of multiple selves online, is slowly conditioning us to a more performative and decentred sense of self. As we cycle in and out of so-called "real" and "virtual" worlds, the set and

36 As this occurred only at the very end of the project, only verbal feedback was obtained.
unitary self of modernist thought, the true self within, is giving way to a more composite and constructed sense of personal identity. The distinction between real and virtual life begins to blur as we become "increasingly comfortable with substituting representations of reality for the real" and are "explicitly turning to computers for experiences that [we] hope will change [our] ways of thinking or will affect [our] social and emotional lives" (1995: 26).

The internet's scope for anonymous interaction, and therefore identity play, is significant for the way in which it fits in, for example, with contemporary queer theory. Queer theory suggests that people do not have a fixed 'essence', and that identity is a performance (Butler 1990; Gauntlett, 2002). It suggests that we may be so used to inhabiting one 'identity' that it seems to be natural to us, but it is a kind of performance nonetheless. Because the internet breaks the connection between outward expressions of identity and the physical body which (in the real world) makes those expressions, it can be seen as a space where queer theory's approach to identity can really come to life.

In her calculated and careful ethnography of life online, Annette Markham argues that people experience computer-mediated communication "along a continuum" (1999: 20). For some, the Internet is simply a useful communication medium, a tool; for others, cyberspace is a place to go to be with others. For still others, online communication is integral to being and is inseparable from the performance of self, both online and offline. For most users the Internet is the first, a mere tool, and the third option holds as yet for only an exceptional few. I myself have progressed along this continuum during the course of this project, moving from being most comfortable in a ‘real-life’ environment for TR through to now finding a well of creativity and complexity within TR in cyberspace. Indeed, where once I was able to reflect with others by drawing upon ideas and work of other theologians and thinkers, I now find that I expect and almost need to have the resources of the internet at my fingertips in order to understand and express what I am thinking. I have moved from a position of knowing things to a position of knowing where to find things. While this has the effect of massively increasing the information I have at my disposal, swelling the number of voices contributing to my reflecting, enriching immeasurably my TR, at the same time I feel deeply the loss of not being able to reflect with people the way I used to. Previously, however incomplete and partial my reflection, it was mine and was born from my experience, reading and thinking; reflections now feel as they do not belong to me. Perhaps this is how TR should be, but the process in getting to this point has been, for me, enabling and disabling at the same time.

37 For greater detail, see, amongst others, http://www.theory.org.uk/queer
A Model for CMTR

In researching the question of whether CMTR is possible and/or desirable, I have held to a very loose definition of what TR might be, and how it might be done. This has enabled me to explore every possibility that arose through using the technology, rather than closing down certain avenues simply because they did not fit my preconceived model.

My understanding of what TR is, or how one may go about it, has changed through this project. I believe now that TR may be less like Theological Jazz (as outlined in chapter two - which is a rather precious image, and implies that everyone can play an instrument!) but rather more like Bricolage. Bricolage is the art of getting a job done by using the tools to hand – there is no one method, there is no ‘right’ conclusion to a job, tools that work in one situation are useless in another. The Theologian is therefore a bricoleur – someone skilled in recognising the tools that are to hand and in how to use them. eTheology is simply one tool, with its own strengths and weaknesses, that is now available.

There is little doubt in my mind that CMTR is different to real life TR, but the results are compatible and the possibilities for the technology enormous. However, looking back at the various models of TR described by others and illustrated in the second chapter of this thesis, no existing model adequately expresses the process I observed during this project, particularly in the way that new data was introduced into the process. I would therefore like to propose a new model for CMTR: Collect, Relate, Create and Donate.

**Collect**
Learn from previous works stored on the web. Do not restrict your search in any way. Follow links between documents and see where you end up. Collect ‘chunks’ of data – words, pictures or sounds. Dismiss nothing – trust nothing.

**Relate**
Consult with peers and mentors at early, middle and late stages. Relationships are important.

**Create**
Explore, compose, and evaluate possible responses. Use whatever tools are at hand. Although you must not restrict yourself only to words, the results must be recorded somehow.

**Donate**
Disseminate the results and contribute to your peers, the web and other places. Place no restrictions on its use.

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38 “In its old sense the verb ‘bricoler’ applied to ball games and billiards, to hunting, shooting and riding. It was however always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle. And in our own time the ‘bricoleur’ is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman.” (Levi-Straus, 1966: 19)
This model emphasises the strengths of using CMTR: rapid and inexpensive communication between people separated by distance (and time); straightforward access to libraries and information and thought that would have otherwise been impossible to consult, the fluidity between author and reader, demanding interaction and participation. It also suggests a responsibility for participants to share the reflections with all. TR is seen to be, at its heart, as essentially collaborative.
The Future for CMTR

I regard the existing eTheology website as a ‘proof of concept’, a work in progress that can be used to experiment with new forms of TR. It is true that my initial enthusiasm for applying new technology to TR was perhaps unfounded. Francis Wheen’s (2004) critique of modern fashions suggests that the very mention of information technology or the Internet is sufficient to cause otherwise sober and intelligent people to believe that all sense of normality can be suspended. He examines the so-called ‘dot-com-bubble’ of the late 1990s and argues that huge numbers of people were encouraged to part with money to finance ventures which to any objective observer would have seemed ludicrous. Yet people believed in this ‘weightless economy’ and that, “Internet technology had repealed the traditional laws of financial gravity: it was a ‘new paradigm’” (Wheen 2004: 270). In the early days of the project I may have been equally mesmerised by the lure of virtual realities. It is clear that CMTR is no panacea within Practical Theology; but what is equally clear is that, for some, it genuinely provides a new selection of useful tools.

However, the eTheology website is merely the first exploration for TR in cyberspace. Much has been learned, and much remains to be done. The direction the website could take depends largely on the time and resources made available to it: the user interface could certainly be improved, and a tighter integration between its various parts achieved; the theological toys used to stimulate the imagination could be refined and the number increased; the intelligence of TheoBot could be developed and fine tuned, as could the data upon which it bases its responses. Once a significant number of reflections have been collected together, TheoBot could act as a ‘front end’ for this collective wisdom, taking part in the reflective dialogue as if it were another person in the group.

Without a doubt, the interface to the technology could and should be simplified: as many participants stated, it is difficult to interact with a reflective process through a computer keyboard, and the ‘medium’ for some distracted from the content. For example, voice recognition technology has improved considerably in recent years, and would vastly improve both recording reflections, and in interrogating databases of reflections. In addition, the latest technology now commercially available\(39\) can now ‘measure’ and react to the emotional content in people’s voices, adding a further dimension to CMTR that participants felt was missing.

For such technology to be truly useful, it must be ubiquitous: information should be at the fingertips. With very little additional work, the technology for CMTR could be transferred from the desktop computer to handheld personal digital assistants (PDAs). Already, wireless technology allows such PDAs to connect to the internet without being attached to a telephone line, but it would require little extra development time to create theoBots to act as ‘front-ends’ to databases of reflections. In this way, it would be possible for a minister to carry St. Augustine and Martin Luther King Jr. around in their pocket. By becoming in this way ubiquitous, the CMTR technologies could either be

a substitute for other reflectors when none are physically present, or, more interestingly, they could become a participant in a reflective group even when others are present. An interesting experiment would be to allow two theoBots to ‘reflect’ with each other without human interaction.

CMTR and Theological Education

There are implications in this technology for theological education. It is now possible for groups and individuals to take ‘virtual tours’ of places and concepts both in and out of the college: for example, historically accurate explorations that allow viewers to see, hear (and eventually smell and touch) biblical communities, experience (and perhaps lead or enable) various styles of worship and reflect upon them as a group, and perhaps even, following on from my work with TheoBot, the chance to ‘talk’ with figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. and St. Augustine. The agents created by this project are just one example of information management and dissemination: although much research is being conducted on using intelligent bots in teaching the sciences, there is little or no research in the theological education field. More development is necessary to enable increasingly sophisticated meta-data systems, offering multi-faceted views of data, and data about data. If the website is used in the future and the number of online reflections increase, the database will also increase in size and become increasingly more useful.

The implications for formal theological education are similar in nature to the lessons that the music industry has drawn from the file-sharing program Napster. Rather than holders of intellectual property, or loci of religious power, my experience of CMTR leads me to imagine a different world of information sharing. We can usefully take Napster as a model for that new world of information sharing--a plausible move, granted that it is arguably the most successful internet application ever released. The project suggests, rather than a Seminary, the possibility of a Disseminary--a common effort to put as much theological sustenance at the disposal of as many people as possible. It suggests that a Disseminary can serve the mission of theological education by raising the tide of theological literacy among its students and among interested believers (and non-believers). A Disseminary sets out as rich a banquet of theological wisdom as it can manage to offer, without trying to set standards for who consumes it, how well, when, or how often. The effort must be to spread as much theological nourishment as possible, without (I believe) devoting energy to policing the results of that distribution.

40 For example, http://www.media.mit.edu/
41 In the time between drawing up the preliminary conclusions of this project within which I explore the possibility of the Disseminary, and the final draft of the thesis (a period of some 18 months) a new website has been published in the USA: http://www.disseminary.org. This website largely echoes my thoughts, and indicates just how fast Theology and the Internet is developing.
The Future

In contemplating what the future might hold for TR it may be useful to gaze into the past. I have attempted to show how formal knowledge has broken free from cloistered protection to broad dissemination in the age of Guttenberg. Knowledge in the modern period followed logocentric patterns with one-to-many relationships: the post modern period promises yet greater dissemination marked by many-to-many relationships. The developments brought about by technology allow for many new possibilities, not least for Practical Theology and TR.

![Diagram: One-to-One relationship versus One-to-Many]

All knowledge is open-ended on the internet; in principle, there need be no microcosm of knowledge like the encyclopaedia or textbook; links can be provided to the data, to other texts, and to the tools to stimulate reflection and analysis which might ultimately lead the reader to rewrite the text. A text might include performances in a real-time live video window, or link changing real-time information with recorded knowledge in text, graphics and sound. The notion of knowledge as "literature," a systematic body of texts within which judgements about the validity of information and analyses of information are made by reference to the system itself, has led to the understanding that knowledge is theoretical. This in turn subjects the process of TR to the authority of the professional, the teacher or the cleric, which is in turn derived from literature. In the environment of the internet, however, reflection upon knowledge requires a skilled performance: learning, research and reflection are an action, not a literature. Technical culture, in this sense, is a tacit agent of change, embedded in technological objects, introducing the pedagogy of reflection by doing, by iteration, by exploring the vast number of viewpoints represented on the web. It also
introduces the value of the collaborative, rather than competitive, social relations in learning and reflection. Reflection becomes, rather than ‘proof-texting’ to reinforce one’s preconceptions and prejudices, a strategy for learning, which requires navigating the internet to find access to the right information, making judgements about its quality, and knowing how to integrate it into one’s own life and work.

This is where the modern and postmodern minds collide. To the modern mind, there is too much information. The world is exploding with ideas and perspectives that cannot possibly be consumed. We must control what people read so that truth might prevail over misinformation, so that quality might prevail over mediocrity, so that correct ideas might prevail over anarchy. But to the postmodern mind, attempts to control information are futile and naive. What control exists in the postmodern world will emerge not from the centre, but from the periphery.

The genie is out of the bottle. There is no chance of forcing (him) back.

The Universal Information Ecosystem

If, as it is claimed, the internet evolves into a ‘universal information ecosystem’, more thinking and practical exploration is necessary on the implications for TR and theology in general. There are immense implications promised by this evolution: some are optimistic, such as Chardin’s vision of the noosphere. "The idea," writes Chardin, "is that of the Earth not only covered by myriads of grains of thought, but enclosed in a single thinking envelope so as to form a single vast grain of thought on the sidereal scale, the plurality of individual reflections grouping themselves together and reinforcing one another in the act of a single unanimous reflection" (Chardin, 1955: 87). And further: "[The] Noosphere [is] the living membrane which is stretched like a film over the lustrous surface of the star which holds us. An ultimate envelope taking on its own individuality and gradually detaching itself like a luminous aura. This envelope was not only conscious, but thinking...the very Soul of the Earth" (Chardin, 1955: 93). Not only are our bodies the stuff of the Earth's body, but our minds are the consciousness of this being, the Earth. We have supposed that we are individuals, yet we "are dust, and to dust ye shall return." If C.G. Jung has given us the notion of the "collective unconscious," Chardin, then, speaks of the "collective conscious." How might this change our understanding of the Church, theology, of God even?

42 The European Commission has established the 5th framework Programme for research and development concerning Information Society Technologies (http://www.cordis.lu/ist/), the objective of which is “to explore means of creating a ‘single information ecosystem’ in which every single knowledge entity (whether a person, organization, or entity working on their behalf) can be globally, yet selectively, aware of opportunities afforded by all others at any point in time.”
However, there is no shortage of those who are rather less optimistic. Pask (1982) considers the possibility that our current generation of computing devices might one day metamorphose into a system “like a brain and carry out operations that are mindful.” Pask asks, “How do we view ourselves and our society, confronted with the prospect of being transformed beyond our imaginations? Have we the wit to fear the future? Have we wit enough to overcome that fear? (Pask, 1982: 177). If such an evolution is inevitable, not only should the church develop tools and technologies to work in this new medium, but it should critique and be involved in fashioning this new consciousness.

One of the inferences from this project is that many clergy are unwilling, and unable, to use computer technology. The inability of the clergy to grasp the potential of the new technologies might be understandable, but is at the same time regrettable. The very way in which we do theology is being changed by the internet. The "major new challenge to theology," according to Hopper (1991: 6), is the potential "ability of technology to offer and inculcate another definition of the human." Berger (1992) goes a step beyond Hopper to perceive in the potential for technology a threat "to replace our faith in and need for God with a never-ending stream of goods, cures, conveniences, and entertaining diversions" (1992: 323). These are surely issues with which the clergy should be concerned. Berger echoes Marshall McLuhan's concerns over "the discarnate life" of the human being who, via electronic technology, is "freed from flesh" and "capable of instant transportation anywhere." Berger sees a need for individuals to gather "in time and space in order to pray, sing, confess, pass the peace, break bread, preach, baptize, and read Scripture" (1992: 344). This incarnational engagement, Berger asserts, is "the witness we [Christians] bring to a world captivated as it is with the discarnate life" (1992: 345).

The implications for the body, mind and spirit carried within the 'discarnate life', eroding the boundaries between the real and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate, the unitary and the multiple self, must be addressed by theologians with some urgency.

The eTheology project has merely been the beginning of one such exploration.
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# Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AI</strong></td>
<td>A form of artificially generated computer intelligence which has proved remarkably successful at tasks such as playing chess as well as a grandmaster, using integral calculus to solve problems, and examining blood test results to diagnose blood disorders more accurately than most doctors, and which has utterly failed at tasks such as answering rudimentary questions about the story told in an newspaper article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applet</strong></td>
<td>A Java program that can be embedded in a Web page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bandwidth</strong></td>
<td>The amount of data that can be sent from one computer to another through a particular connection in a certain amount of time. The more bandwidth available, the faster you are able to access information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bitmap</strong></td>
<td>The images you see on your computer are composed of bitmaps. A bitmap is a map of dots, or bits (hence the name), that looks like a picture as long you are sitting a reasonable distance away from the screen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blogging</strong></td>
<td>A blog is basically a journal that is available on the web. The activity of updating a blog is &quot;blogging&quot; and someone who keeps a blog is a &quot;blogger.&quot; Blogs are typically updated daily using software that allows people with little or no technical background to update and maintain the blog. Postings on a blog are almost always arranged in chronological order with the most recent additions featured most prominently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bookmark</strong></td>
<td>Similar to a real-life bookmark, an Internet bookmark acts as a marker for a Web site. (In Internet Explorer, they're known as &quot;Favourites&quot;.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Browser
A Web browser, often just called a "browser," is the program used to access the World Wide Web. It interprets HTML code including text, images, hypertext links, Javascript, and Java applets. After rendering the HTML code, the browser displays a formatted page. Some common browsers are Microsoft Internet Explorer, Netscape Communicator, and Apple Safari.

### BOT
This is an automated software program that can execute certain commands when it receives a specific input (like a ro-"bot"). Bots are most often seen at work in the Internet-related areas of online chat and Web searching. The online chat bots are able to greet people when they enter a chat room, advertise Web sites, and eject people from chat rooms when they violate the chat room rules. Web searching bots, also known as spiders and crawlers, search the Web and retrieve millions of HTML documents, then record the information and links found on the pages. From there, they generate electronic catalogues of the sites that have been "spidered." These catalogues make up the index of sites that are used for search engine results.

### CD ROM
Stands for "Compact Disc Read-Only Memory." A CD-ROM is a CD that can be read by a computer with an optical drive. The "ROM" part of the term means the data on the disc is "read-only," or cannot altered or erased.

### Client
In the real world, businesses have clients. In the computer world, servers have clients. The "client-server" architecture is common in both local and wide area networks. For example, if an office has a server that stores the company's database on it, the other computers in the office that can access the database are "clients" of the server. On a larger scale, when you access your e-mail from a mail server on the Internet, your computer acts as the client that connects to the mail server. The term "client software" is used to refer to the software that acts as the interface between the client computer and the server. For example, if you use Microsoft Outlook to check your e-mail, Outlook is your "e-mail client software" that allows you to send and receive messages from the server.

### CMC
Computer-Mediated Communication (including e-mail, interactive chat sessions, and message forums)

### Computer
Technically, a computer is a programmable machine. This means it can execute a programmed list of instructions and respond to new instructions that it is given. Today, however, the term is most often used to refer to the desktop and laptop computers that most people use.

### CoP
"Communities of Practice" At the simplest level, CoPs are a small group of people who have worked together over a period of time. Not a team, not a task force, probably not even an authorized or identified group. People in CoPs can perform the same job (tech reps) or collaborate on a shared task (software developers) or work together on a product (engineers, marketers, and manufacturing specialists). They are peers in the execution of "real work." What holds them together is a common sense of purpose and a real need to know what each other knows. There are many communities of practice within a single company, and most people belong to more than one of them.
Explorations in CMTR

Cross platform
Software that can run on multiple types of computer systems is said to be cross platform. For example, the graphics program Adobe Photoshop runs both on Windows and Macintosh computers. Therefore, Photoshop is considered a cross platform application.

Cyberspace
Unlike most computer terms, "cyberspace" does not have a standard, objective definition. Instead, it is generally used to describe the virtual world of computers. For example, an object in cyberspace is a block of data floating around on some computer system or network. With the advent of the Internet, cyberspace is now also used to refer to the global network of computers.

Database
This is a data structure used to store organized information. A database is typically made up of many linked tables of rows and columns. For example, a company might use a database to store information about their products, their employees, and financial information. Databases are now also used in nearly all e-commerce sites to store product inventory and customer information.

Domain
This is the name that identifies a Web site. For example, "microsoft.com" is the domain name of Microsoft’s Web site. A single Web server can serve Web sites for multiple domain names, but a single domain name can point to only one machine. For example, Apple Computer has Web sites at www.apple.com, www.info.apple.com, and store.apple.com. Each of these sites could be served on different machines.

Download
This is the process in which data is sent to your computer. Whenever you receive information from the Internet, you are downloading it to your computer. The opposite of this process, sending information to another computer, is called uploading.

eBook
A book in digital format that you can download to your computer and read using a software program. Depending on the specific format, the eBook can be read on a computer, PDA, or dedicated reader device with the proper software.

E-mail
E-mail is part of the standard TCP/IP set of protocols. Sending messages is typically done by SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol) and receiving messages is handled by POP3 (Post Office Protocol 3), or IMAP (Internet Message Access Protocol).

Though e-mail was originally developed for sending simple text messages, it has become more robust in the last few years. Now, HTML-based e-mail can use the same code as Web pages to incorporate formatted text, colours, and images into the message. Also, documents can be attached to e-mail messages, allowing files to be transferred via the e-mail protocol. However, since e-mail was not originally designed to handle large file transfers, transferring large documents (over 3 MB, for example) is not allowed by most mail servers.

Emoticon
A combination of keyboard characters meant to represent a facial expression. Frequently used in electronic communications to convey a particular meaning, much like tone of voice is used in spoken communications. Examples: the characters :-) for a smiley face or ;-) for a wink.
**File**
A file is a collection of data stored in one unit, under a filename. This can be a document, a picture, an audio or video file, a library, an application, or other collection of data.

Documents include text files, such as a Word documents, RTF (Rich Text Format) documents, PDFs, Web pages, and others. Pictures include JPEGs, GIFs, BMPs, and layered image files, such as Photoshop documents (PSDs). Audio files include MP3s, AACs, WAVs, AIFs, and several others. Video files can be MPEG, MOV, WMV, or DV files, just to name a few.

**Front End**
the look and feel of a website or any online program.

**GUI**
Stands for "Graphical User Interface," and is pronounced "gooey." It refers to the graphical interface of a computer that allows users to click and drag objects with a mouse instead of entering text at a command line. Two of the most popular operating systems, Windows and the Mac OS, are GUI-based. The graphical user interface was first introduced to the public by Apple with the Macintosh in 1984. However, the idea was actually taken from an earlier user interface developed by Xerox.

**Hit**
Technically, a hit is a request made to a Web server. It is a popular misconception that the term refers to the number of visits a Web page gets, but that is not the case. If a Web page has five images on it, when the page is loaded, six "hits" will be recorded. This is because the browser has to make six requests to the Web server - one for the HTML of the Web page and five for the images.

**Homepage**
This is the starting point or front page of a Web site. This page usually has some sort of table of contents on it and often describes the purpose of the site. For example, http://www.etheology.org.uk/index.html is the home page of eTheology.org. When you type in a basic URL, such as "http://www.etheology.org.uk," you are typically directed to the home page of the Web site. Many people have a "personal home page," which is another way the term "home page" can be used.

**Host**
This is a computer that acts as a server for other computers on a network. It can be a Web server, an e-mail server, an FTP server, etc. For example, a Web host is what provides the content of Web pages to the computers that access it.

**HTML**
Stands for "Hyper-Text Markup Language." This is the language that Web pages are written in. Also known as hypertext documents, Web pages must conform to the rules of HTML in order to be displayed correctly in a Web browser. The HTML syntax is based on a list of tags that describe the page's format and what is displayed on the Web page.

**HTTP**
Stands for "HyperText Transfer Protocol." This is the protocol used to transfer data over the World Wide Web. That's why all Web site addresses begin with "http://". Whenever you type a URL into your browser and hit Enter, your computer sends an HTTP request to the appropriate Web server. The Web server, which is designed to handle HTTP requests, then sends to you the requested HTML page.
### Hyperlink
An image or portion of text on a Web page that is linked to another Web page, either on the same site or in another Web site. Clicking on the link will take the user to another Web page, or to another place on the same page. Words or phrases which serve as links are underlined, or appear in a different colour, or both. Images that serve as links have a border around them, or they change the cursor to a little hand as it passes over them.

### Hypermedia
The linking of multimedia to Web documents; the integration of text, images, sound, graphics, animation, and video through hyperlinks.

### Hypertext
Text that has hyperlinks. When hypertext is viewed with an interactive browser, certain words appear as highlighted by underlining or colour; clicking on a highlighted link leads to another location with more information about the subject.

### IE
Internet Explorer. A graphical World-Wide Web browser from Microsoft.

### Intranet
"Intra" means "internal" or "within," so an Intranet is an internal or private Internet used strictly within the confines of a company, university, or organization. "Inter" means "between or among," hence the difference between the Internet and an Intranet.

### Media
In general, "media" refers to various means of communication. For example, television, radio, and the newspaper are different types of media. The term can also be used as a collective noun for the press or news reporting agencies. In the computer world, "media" is also used as a collective noun, but refers to different types of data storage options. Computer media can be hard drives, removable drives (such as Zip disks), CD-ROM or CD-R discs, DVDs, flash memory, USB drives and floppy disks.

### MOO
Object Oriented Multi User Dungeon. MOOs use object-oriented programming to add dimension, whereas MUDs are text-based games.

### MUD
Multi-User Dungeon, Multi-User Dimension, or Multi-User Domain. A type of text-based multi-player interactive game, played using Internet relay chat, with adventure, combat, magic, puzzles, and different locations to explore. MUDs can be played on the Internet or over a modem.

### Multimedia
As the name implies, multimedia is the integration of multiple forms of media. This includes text, graphics, audio, video, etc. For example, a presentation involving audio and video clips would be considered a "multimedia presentation." Educational software that involves animations, sound, and text is called "multimedia software." CDs and DVDs are often considered to be "multimedia formats" since they can store a lot of data and most forms of multimedia require a lot of disk space.

### Network
When you have two or more computers connected to each other, you have a network. The purpose of a network is to enable the sharing of files and information between multiple systems. The Internet could be described as a global network of networks. Computer
networks can be connected through cables, such as Ethernet cables or phone lines, or wirelessly, using wireless networking cards that send and receive data through the air.

**Newsgroup**

This is a discussion group that is based on postings about a particular topic. These topics range from sports, cars, investing, teen problems, and some stuff you probably do not want to know about. Users post messages to a news server which then sends them to other participating servers. Then other users can access the newsgroup and read the postings. The groups can be either "moderated," where a person or group decides which postings will become part of the discussion, or "unmoderated," where everything posted is included in the discussion.

**Offline**

When a computer or other device is not turned on or connected to other devices, it is said to be "offline." This is the opposite of being "online," when a device can readily communicate with other devices.

Offline can also mean not being connected to the Internet. When you disconnect from your ISP or pull out the Ethernet cable from your computer, your computer is offline.

**OS (Operating System)**

Also known as an "Operating System," this is the software that communicates with computer hardware on the most basic level. Without an operating system, no software programs can run. The OS is what allocates memory, processes tasks, accesses disks and peripherals, and serves as the user interface. With an operating system, like Windows, the Mac OS, or Linux, developers can write code using a standard programming interface (known as an API).

**Parser**

This is a program that receives input in the form of sequential data, and breaks them up into parts (for example, the nouns (objects), verbs (methods), and their attributes or options) that can then be managed by other programming.

**Paste**

Just like you can paste a note on a sheet of paper, you can paste data into a document on a computer. The paste function can be used to paste copied data into text documents, images, Web browser address fields, and just about any place where you can enter data. However, to paste data, you first need to copy it to the "Clipboard," which is a temporary storage area in your system's memory, or RAM.

**Search engine**

Google, Excite, Lycos, AltaVista, Infoseek, and Yahoo are all search engines. They index millions of sites on the Web, so that Web surfers can easily find Web sites with the information they require. By creating indexes, or large databases of Web sites (based on titles, keywords, and the text in the pages), search engines can locate relevant Web sites when users enter search terms or phrases.

**Server**

As the name implies, a server serves information to computers that connect to it. When users connect to a server, they can access programs, files, and other information from the server. Common servers are Web servers, mail servers, and network servers. A single computer can have several different server programs running on it.
**URL**

Stands for "Uniform Resource Locator." It is the address of a specific Web site or file on the Internet. A URL cannot have spaces or certain other characters and uses forward slashes to denote different directories. Some examples of URLs are http://www.sharpened.net/glossary/index.html, http://www.wheaton.edu/, and ftp://info.apple.com/. Not all URLs begin with "http". The first part of a URL indicates what kind of resource it is addressing. Here is a list of the different resource prefixes:

- http - a hypertext directory or document (such as a web page)
- ftp - a directory of files or an actual file available to download
- gopher - a gopher document or menu
- telnet - a Unix-based computer system that you can log into
- news - a newsgroup
- WAIS - a database or document on a Wide Area Information Search database
- file - a file located on your hard drive or some other local drive

The second part of a URL (after the "://") contains the address of the computer being located as well as the path to the file. For example, in "http://www.cnet.com/Content/Reports/index.html," "www.cnet.com" is the address or domain name of the host computer and "/Content/Reports/index.html" is the path to the file. When a address ends with a slash and not something like ".html," the server usually defaults to a file in the current directory named "index.html".

**Webmaster**

The webmaster is the person in charge of maintaining a Web site. The jobs of a webmaster include writing HTML for Web pages, organizing the Web site's structure, responding to e-mails about the Web site, and keeping the site up-to-date.

**Webpage**

Web pages are what make up the World Wide Web. These documents are written in HTML (hypertext markup language) and are translated by your Web browser. Web pages can either be static or dynamic. Static pages show the same content each time they are viewed. Dynamic pages have content that can change each time they are accessed. These pages are typically written in scripting languages such as PHP, Perl, ASP, or JSP. The scripts in the pages run functions on the server that return things like the date and time, and database information. All the information is returned as HTML code, so when the page gets to your browser, all the browser has to do is translate the HTML.

**Wiki**

A wiki is a Web site that allows users to add and update content on the site using their own Web browser. This is made possible by Wiki software that runs on the Web server. Wikis end up being created mainly by a collaborative effort of the site visitors. A good example of a large wiki is the Wikipedia, a free encyclopedia in many languages that anyone can edit. The term "wiki" comes from the Hawaiian phrase, "wiki wiki," which means "super fast."

**Windows**

This is the most popular operating system for personal computers. It is developed and distributed by Microsoft. There are several versions of the Windows operating system, including Windows XP (for home users) and Windows 2000 (for professional users). Earlier versions of Windows include Windows 3.1, 95, 98, ME, and NT. All Windows
platforms use a graphical user interface (GUI), like the Mac OS, and also offer a command-line interface for typing text commands.

WWW

Otherwise known as the ‘Web’ or ‘world wide web’. A hypermedia-based system for browsing Internet sites. It is named the Web because it is made of many sites linked together; users can travel from one site to another by clicking on hyperlinks. Text, graphics, sound, and video can all be accessed with browsers like Mosaic, Netscape, or Internet Explorer.
Appendix A

Follow-up Questionnaire

In February 2005, after four reflections had been created using the technologies available on the website, the electronic questionnaire was distributed to those members of the project who had indicated they were willing to be contacted (31 in total), and the results collated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Communication with others over a computer network made a difference in my understanding and/or appreciation of the theological issues being discussed.</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Web pages on the web site provided me with more insight and background on the context and content of the reflection than I would have otherwise had.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I felt comfortable making comments and responding to others' comments on the site.</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I enjoyed the opportunity to share my thoughts and ideas about theology with other participants anonymously.</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Once I understood how to operate it, I felt the site was easy to use.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The topics of discussion were clear and easy to follow.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I believe that the time required ‘off-line’ to access the computer in order to participate in this project was worthwhile.</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I can see how communicating with others over the internet can help me to be a more effective theological reflector.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I can see how using the Internet to access additional information or teaching resources, such as the Theological Toys, can help me to be a more effective theologian.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I would choose to participate in a project like this again if I had the opportunity.</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Useful Resources

Below are listed various on-line conference, resources and mailing lists that have been invaluable during this project.

**Resources**
The ACM Hypertext 2004 Conference: http://www.ht04.org/
Hypertext '03 conference: http://www.ht03.org/
alt.hypertext FAQ list http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~7ejamie/hypertext-faq.html
Electronic Literature Organization: http://www.eliterature.org/
Hypertext Kitchen: http://www.hypertextkitchen.com/
Hypertext Now: http://www.eastgate.com/HypertextNow/

**Journals**
Tecca, the magazine for beautiful software: http://www.eastgate.com/catalog/Tekka.html
Hyper-X: http://www.altx.com/hyperx.html
Grammatron: http://www.grammatron.com/

**Mailing lists**
ht_lit mailing list: http://iberia.vassar.edu/~kmm/ht_lit.html
Wr-eye-tings Scratchpad http://www.burningpress.org/wreyeting/info.html
alt.hypertext: news://alt.hypertext
Appendix C

Some Responses by Email

In addition to electronic questionnaires and face-to-face feedback that determined the course of the investigation, various comments were received via email. A selection of these are reproduced below:

Dear Duncan:

BLIMEY! (you've caught me on one of my more polite days - rare occurrence that they are!!)
First impressions are - "this is amazing".
I'll get back to you with more detail.

Yours ….

Dear Duncan,

Thank you for all the work and ingenuity. 
I can see where you're coming from re. wanting to do something beyond the linear.
For me it partly works and partly doesn't.
The hyperlink method come over as both benefit and a distraction:
benefit because it brings up related associations;
distraction because of the need to navigate and sometimes get lost in either cul-de-sacs or loops.
In some way, the medium gets in the way of the message.
And in order to read I need to be on-line, which introduces a time/cash pressure.
But I like the opportunity and possibility of thinking other than linear.
I wonder if there are other ways which enable what you're looking for but have fewer in-built distractions?
Please excuse such a 'curate's egg' response.
I'd be glad to hear others.


Dear Duncan

Well done. This site is very good and easy to use.

As for 'our bit' I felt rather proprietary about it and wasn't sure how much of 'us' was there. (How much of 'us' is meant to be there!?) I felt rather as I did when I was making a clay pot at college. (It's still the basis for a sermon!) It was not a good pot - 'a poor thing but mine own'. I'd decided not to glaze it as I liked it that way. When I arrived at the pottery one morning I discovered the lecturer had put a glaze on it. I was quite upset. It was no longer 'mine own'. The problem was I had to admit it was a much better pot. The glaze was beautiful and hid all the odd bumps and lumps - ever my problem. I shall think on this a little more. Do we always need a critic, mirror, mentor in order to produce something really worthwhile and that will speak to a much wider world? Or is there some small seed contained in the vision we are given that might have something important to say to others just for the moment?

Just some musings!

As I mix with you young people my world widens- I didn't know you could use the adjective poncy with the noun woman.

Much love ….

Dear Duncan - although I've dropped off the end of IMD I'm so delighted that you've sent me details of the above. To say that the site is impressive is a massive understatement! It's brilliant - and so helpful. Am I able to download it or not? (my printer isn't working at the moment so I can't even try).

Yours …

Dear Duncan

Thanks for this. I thought the hypertext bit where I could add my own comments very useful – and when someone made a comment on my comment! I found myself glued to the inbox to see if anyone else was contributing. Alas, not so far!

Thanks again

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Dear Duncan,

I found the web site fairly easy to get around, but I frequently lost myself, especially when reading comments on comments. There doesn’t seem to be any sort of ‘mater page’ which I can return to? I liked having music and pictures in the reflections, but I struggled to see the point of some of them. Guess that’s just me!

Can I correct something I’ve already written? I (think) I have second thoughts about some of my comments which are now in public! Nothing serious, I’d just like to clarify.

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Dear Duncan,

I couldn’t make it to the last session, so thank you for putting the discussion on the web. Did you really cover all of that? I’ve made some additions which I hope people won’t find too ‘off the track’ – I felt a bit nervous when making comments, as if I was trespassing almost. How do the others feel? Sometimes I want to write something tongue-in-cheek but stop myself in case it’s misunderstood.

Anyway, good idea, and let’s see if it leads anywhere.
Appendix D

Example CMTR: Funerals

The first example of using hypertext technology for theology is one of the first reflections to be placed on the web. This reflection: “what are we doing – and what is God doing – at a funeral?” was created by taking the notes from a group reflective session, creating the web site using a standard web design software package (Microsoft Frontpage), incorporating the images, sounds and links that were mentioned in the discussion, and then inviting participants to browse the site and provide feedback, which was then incorporated into the site.

This site, as can be seen from the site map (below, ref 16) was relatively orderly and logically and consistently laid out, due, no doubt, to the method by which it was created – that is, it was sketched out on paper by the group before it was published on the Internet. Since it was created, the structure of the reflection has seen little change, but many visitors (between 40-50 each month)
Figure 17: CMTR on funerals

Each page of the reflection is reproduced as a box of text: hypertext links are indicated by underlined text. An attempt has been made to number the boxes to indicate the flow of the conversation, but this can offer only an indication.
"What are you doing - and what is God doing - at a funeral?"

A group of curates in Worcester Diocese met in February 2003 to discuss what they thought God - and they - were doing when they conducted a funeral. This is a record of that reflection.

The group began by looking at the occasion of the funeral itself, and some of the aspects of the service that had made the most impact on the participants. Immediately, two strands became apparent: the role of the **funeral service** itself, and the **role of the priest** before, during and after death.

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The **Funeral Service**

Although death is clearly the focus for the funeral service, the group was clear that they believed the funeral was for the comfort of the living. It celebrates a life, and so involves reflection of the meaning of life - both the specific life of the deceased, and of life in general. The **priest** proclaims, in some way, a **word of hope and comfort** at a time of despair for the mourners, and thereby also invites reflections on the nature of **time**, **reality**, God's **purpose** and our part in it. In the **funeral** the deceased passes out of our daily lives and into both history and God's loving arms: the funeral service must explore this new status and the person **remembered and commended**. Finally, the funeral service **changes us** - we should "**number our days and apply our hearts to wisdom**" (Psalm 90:12)
The priest and the Funeral Service

The group saw the role of the priest in the funeral service as having many facets. These included the priest as accompanying people through the process of saying goodbye; of publicly representing the church and society at a difficult time; of saying the words and conducting the rituals of the funeral. There were also less defined aspects of the role of priests: of interpreting the person’s life in the light of the Gospel; of creating an atmosphere where loving remembrance and reconciliation could occur.

The words We Use

The funeral service, and the pastoral visiting that accompanies it, are one of the few occasions when ‘God talk’ is acceptable, and indeed welcomed. However, the group wondered how intelligible all the words were to the mourners – was there a need for just ‘comfortable words’, words which echo with people’s childhoods (or even words they’ve heard on the television?) There are, without doubt, words that are helpful and words that are unhelpful, depending upon the context and the person who hears them.

One of the crucial roles for the priest, the group felt, was to interpret these centuries-old words for the 21st century. In doing this, some very serious theological questions needed to be faced: questions of God’s purpose for that person’s life, is there a heaven or a hell, is there a judgement? It was quite likely that the people attending the funeral would not be church goers, and unaccustomed to the words we use (in a technical sense they are ‘strangers’): we therefore had a responsibility to think through the words and images we used with people who could be in a very vulnerable state. In this way, conducting a funeral ‘sharpens up’ theological thinking in a way unlike any other pastoral encounter.

However, it was pointed out that just as the mourners may not understand the words and images we might use, we ourselves may be unaware of the power and profundity of the liturgy. In some sense, we were singing a strange song in a strange land. We may not fully understand the words, nor may the mourners, yet something is still communicated and lives are changed.
Page 2.3

Time

Looked at from the perspective of this world, the dead are dead, absent; they ‘exist’ only in the mind of God who holds the ‘blueprint’, the template, of each individual until that moment when he shall resurrect them, make them present again. From the perspective of heaven, which is beyond this realm of space and time, we have all run our course and are raised together, judged and brought into God’s nearer presence. In the hereafter it is already the end of the age.

Can God tell the time?

Page 2.4

God’s Purpose

What is the ultimate destination and location (in theological and popular understandings) of the dead? There is a difficulty in describing heaven to a mourner, and an even greater difficulty in reassuring them that their loved one is ‘in heaven’ – yet surely this is what they want to hear. In today’s society, the fear of ‘nothingness’ after death is, in itself, what draws so many to at least a wish fulfilment that whatever follows life is the very best something possible, regardless of how hidden or uncertain that is. Heaven is a far more acceptable concept than hell. Good news. Biblical evidence – great feast. Misconceptions – floating around in white robes. We shall be ourselves, but we shall be changed (changed from glory to glory?)

One of the problems with the images we use is that they can be used too literally. For example, do we really think that the deceased person is truly ‘looking down’ on us. Is it rather presumptuous of us to imply that the person is ‘wrapped up in God’s everlasting love’ -but what can we say?
Worship

"A Christian funeral is nothing less than a bold and dramatic worship of the living God done attentive to and in the face of an apparent victory at the hands of the last enemy. Though the liturgy may be gently worded, there is no hiding the fact that, in a funeral, Christians raise a fist at death; recount the story of the Christ who suffered death, battled death, and triumphed over it; offer laments and thanksgivings to the God who raised Jesus from the grave; sing hymns of defiance; and honour the body and life of the saint who has died. Thus, one measure of the veracity of a funeral is its capacity to face, without euphemistic smoke and mirrors, the reality of death."


Honouring the Dead

One function of the funeral must be to honour the dead (a good death does honour to a whole life – Italian proverb); however, this should be done with honesty and integrity. Uncritical praise is rarely satisfactory, and can leave mourners confused as to who we were actually burying. However, the pure, unvarnished truth is not always helpful - several of the group spoke of “talking around” an aspect of the dead person’s life, seeking the good yet being compassionate with the not-so-good aspects.

The priest can inhabit the role of the troubadour: someone who can dare to tell the truth. This can be helped, curiously, by the very strangeness of the words the priest sometimes uses.
Change

When it come, bereavement means change. What these changes are and what they will mean are at first, in the early hours and days, barely grasped (if at all), but something fundamental has happened and things cannot be the same again. The bereaved person is entering into a time of transition and significantly, the person is experiencing this time without the person with whom they may have shared previous life changes. Like other major transitions in life (such as birth, growing up, marriage etc.), a rite of passage is needed, to mark it and help us through it.

Talking about God

"Now is the time to make a crucial point: all God talk is metaphorical, poetic, analogous – theology included. The theologian is using poetic language just as much as anyone else who talks about God. His poetry tries to be cool, restrained, analytic, systematic – as language should be when it becomes the tool for rational reflection. But no one should think that the restraint of the most philosophical theology means that it says "God is ... " and does not mean "God is like ..."

Andrew M. Greeley

More on the words we use.
**Accompanying compassion**: [Latin compassus (to sympathize); fr. co- (with) + pati (to suffer)]

It's a powerful, deep awareness of someone else's suffering, in such a way that you want them not to suffer. The root word is the same as that of passion, something you want so much that you suffer from not doing or having or accomplishing it. The root meaning 'to suffer' is also used of Christ en route to His crucifixion. For a Christian, any compassion we have is shaped by and rooted in Jesus' Passion, where His awareness of our suffering drove Him to do something about it. A sense of solidarity develops; your suffering becomes my suffering.

Conducted sensitively, the funeral can aid grieving and the movement towards wholeness; conducted badly it can hinder it. **Arnold Van Gennep** identified three stages of the funeral liturgy which he described as shaping what he called "rites of passage". He talked of a doorway (*limen*) through which those enacting the rite passes. They approached the doorway in a preliminal phase, they passed through the door in a liminal stage and emerged into the post-liminal situation. These phases were marked in turn by separation from one state, **transition** through an intermediate phase and incorporation into a new status. The role of the **priest** through this rite of passage is, simply, to hold people's hands through the stages of **transition**.

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**Arnold van Gennep**

Ethnographer and folklorist, born in Württemberg, Germany, but raised in France. He worked for the French government in various cultural organizations (1903--10, 1919--21), and held brief academic appointments at Neuchâtel, Oxford, and Cambridge. He became an energetic collector and publisher of folklore materials, including the Manuel de folklore français contemporaine (1937--58). However he is principally known for his earlier work, Les Rites de passage (1909), a comparative study of rituals marking transitions of social status.
A Public Representative

We believe that death is both a private and a public matter. While the death of a family member is a very personal loss, that death also effects distant family, friends, and the community at large. The Priest is a public representative, not only of the church but also of society.

One of the tasks of the priest is the decent disposal of the body, on behalf of the person, the family, society and the church.

A funeral ought to have a mission to get the dead where they need to be and the living where they need to be. A good funeral will get the dead guy disposed of in a way that says we are different from cocker spaniels and rhododendrons, that we pause more. This is a signature of our humanity. Unlike other living things, we wonder about what happens with the dead. Before we had an alphabet or could farm, we knew how to bury our dead with ceremony.

Thomas Lynch (Bodies in rest and motion)

Atmosphere

There is a critical importance in creating a suitable atmosphere – for remembrance, for worship, to allow Jesus to reach out to people in their pain. How can this atmosphere be achieved without artificially manufacturing it? One measure was eye contact. Another was simply the quality of the silences ... another whether the funeral director said anything afterwards!

There is a very necessary difference in atmosphere depending upon the context – compare the bitter-sweet funeral of someone who died of old age with the tragedy of a young death.
Ritual

Death is awesome, and grief powerful. They are major events in human experience, so major that ritual is needed better to express what is felt and known and believed, but what perhaps cannot be said. A ritual is a necessary thing when what experience is too deep, too profound, too significant for ordinary expression and routine words. The importance of rituals – such as viewing the body, prayers in the house before the funeral, placing objects with the body - should never be underestimated.

Everybody wants to over-explain the metaphors. Why have them if you're going to explain them? The beauty of a metaphor is you don't have to say anything! We don't have to know exactly why it is we're putting this pall on the casket; just do the thing. We are constantly trying to say, "Now this incense means this." Just sprinkle some around, and let people use their imaginations. The meaning overwhelms the sense. You don't have to get it; it will get you.

Remembrance

Memories make the grieving process possible. Thus, some of the group saw the sharing of memories about the deceased a vital aspect of the liturgy. In the same way, photographs, monuments, architectural space, even a particular time of year or day, or taste, or smell can bring back memories of the loved one. Through these moments we tell the tale, as it were, of this particular life and death and its resonance for those who were involved and those who attend the funeral.
Interpretation

Sydney Carter, in his book "Green print for Song" writes ...

'By whatever name you know'. As I write these words I am reminded of something that happened to me twenty years ago. I was very near despair. My future seemed to narrow to along, dark tunnel with no light whatever at the end of it. I had discarded the Christian label at that time; it seemed more honest to call myself an unbeliever.

In this state of mind I went, one freezing night, to a display of Rumanian Folk Art. In glass cases at the Royal Hotel, Woburn Place, could be seen embroidered shirts, corn dollies and the like. Looking at them, I remembered something from a book by Violet Alford: in Rumania, she said, the word 'music' could be applied to the decoration on a shirt, a belt, a buckle. This thought cheered me faintly, like a ray of winter sunshine.

What I had come for was a lecture on Rumanian Folk Music. A. L. Lloyd was giving it, with illustrations on the gramophone. At one point he was telling how, in Rumania, a peasant mother would sometimes teach a song to her daughter as if it were a weapon, magic or a kind of medicine. "Learn this song," she would say. "You may not understand it now, but you will need it later." I could do (I was thinking) with a song like that right now; and even as I thought it, or before, something started happening. I was being lifted on a wave: not by any one song in particular, but by all the folk songs, ballads, blues that I had ever listened to. All the people who sang them or were sung about—happy lovers, murderers, decrepit miners, mothers rocking cradles, cheerful drunks and lechers, flogged deserters—were lifted by the wave as well. We were in it, we were on it; it was part of what we were or could be. It was as if a veil had been drawn back to let me see, for a moment, what was happening.

This wave had a more than human personality. Male or female? Both, neither, all together; it did not speak to me but let me see that I was not alone. Nobody was alone: we were alone together, traveling. We were safe, beyond our danger; whole, beyond our being broken. (p62, Galliard)
Reconciliation

Forgiveness is a two way process, which is best described as reconciliation. It is traditionally described as having four stages: contrition (being truly sorry); confession (admitting faults); absolution (being forgiven); and satisfaction or penance (putting things right). These four stages can be found in many circumstances in life. They are also found in the parable of the Prodigal Son and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They should also feature (the group felt) - or at least begin the process - in every funeral liturgy.

Forgiveness is not about letting someone off the hook, or getting away with it. It is a healing of a hurt between two people, or between the person and God.

Transition

Passage from one stage, place, stage, or subject to another—so states the dictionary definition—words that describe movement, but that say nothing of substance and the depth of human feeling. Nothing of nights spent tossing and turning, when craving sleep we lie awake, fighting our personal demons and feelings of failure. Or, terror resulting in knotted stomachs, shallow breathing, and the desire to remain in our comfort zone or to run far away. Neither does it tell of moments of quiet contemplation, contentment, and joy, feelings of accomplishment, even ecstasy and the delight change can offer. Transitions, be they small or large are rarely finite. With revisionist minds, we place timeframes around the experience. Sometimes we use a ritual such as a birth, wedding, illness, death, birthday, graduation, or a new newspaper editor to define these significant phases.
The words We Use

The funeral service, and the pastoral visiting that accompanies it, are one of the few occasions when ‘God talk’ is acceptable, and indeed welcomed. However, the group wondered how intelligible all the words were to the mourners – was there a need for just ‘comfortable words’, words which echo with people’s childhoods (or even words they’ve heard on the television?) There are, without doubt, words that are helpful and words that are unhelpful, depending upon the context and the person who hears them.

One of the crucial roles for the priest, the group felt, was to interpret these centuries-old words for the 21st century. In doing this, some very serious theological questions needed to be faced: questions of God’s purpose for that person’s life, is there a heaven or a hell, is there a judgement? It was quite likely that the people attending the funeral would not be church goers, and unaccustomed to the words we use (in a technical sense they are ‘strangers’): we therefore had a responsibility to think through the words and images we used with people who could be in a very vulnerable state. In this way, conducting a funeral ‘sharpens up’ theological thinking in a way unlike any other pastoral encounter.

However, it was pointed out that just as the mourners may not understand the words and images we might use, we ourselves may be unaware of the power and profundity of the liturgy. In some sense, we were singing a strange song in a strange land. We may not fully understand the words, nor may the mourners, yet something is still communicated and lives are changed.

Fears

... although someone mentioned one mourner who feared to remarry as they felt their deceased spouse was 'looking down from heaven on them'. This is the stage of faith that a lot of people are at - 'Jesus is always sitting on the end of my bed, watching' (and presumably, judging).
Useful Words

Pictures of heaven:

In one of his books, A. M. Hunter, the New Testament scholar, relates the story of a dying man who asked his Christian doctor to tell him something about the place to which he was going. As the doctor fumbled for a reply, he heard a scratching at the door, and he had his answer.

“Do you hear that?” he asked his patient. “It’s my dog. I left him downstairs, but he has grown impatient, and has come up and hears my voice. He has no notion what is inside this door, but he knows that I am here. Isn’t it the same with you? You don’t know what lies beyond the Door, but you know that your Master is there.”

_Christian Theology in Plain Language_, p. 208

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**And Death Shall Have No Dominion**

by: Dylan Thomas

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
Under the windings of the sea
They lying long shall not die windily;
Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,
And the unicorn evils run them through;
Split all ends up they shan't crack;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
No more may gulls cry at their ears
Or waves break loud on the seashores;
Where blew a flower may a flower no more
Lift its head to the blows of the rain;
Though they be mad and dead as nails,
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,
And death shall have no dominion.
Some Bible passages on death and being close to death:

- Ecclesiastes 9:10
- Genesis 3:19
- John 11:11-14
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-56
- Ezekiel 33:11
- Hebrews 9:27
- Isaiah 57:1,2
- Revelations 9:6
- Psalm 73
- Psalm 88
- 1 Corinthians 11:26
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14
- Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Unhelpful Words

The group felt that some words at a funeral are distinctly unhelpful. The appropriateness of the words are dependant upon the context: certain ‘traditional’ biblical passages could leave people feeling confused, as could some prayers in the liturgy and certain readings that are often requested at funerals. The following was given as an example:

DEATH IS NOTHING AT ALL

Death is nothing at all.
I have only slipped away into the next room.
I am I, and you are you.
Whatever we were to each other, that we still are.
Call me by my old familiar name, speak to me in the easy way you always used.
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.
Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together.
Play, smile, think of me.
Let my name be ever the household word that it always was.
Life means all that it ever meant.
There is absolutely unbroken continuity....
Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight.
I am waiting for you.....
for an interval....
somewhere near,
just around the corner.
All is well.

Henry Scott Holland
Heaven

eschatology: the study of matters relating to the end times. This would include talk and ideas about resurrection, heaven and hell, what the Kingdom of God is like in its fullness, and what is meant by eternal life or death. The Christian knows next to nothing about it. Even Jesus Himself claimed no special knowledge of when or how, even though He described some things about it. With so little data from God, the only kind of language that can even begin to take on the task is that of imagination, the making of vigorous images to catch the feel and pulse and fuzzy shape of it. That's what led to apocalyptic writings like Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation. People speak of it with terms such as the Rapture, the Millennium, the Reapers, Armageddon, the Bowls of Wrath, the Bottomless Pit, the Horsemen, the Final Trumpets, the Remnant, the Great Getting-Up Morning, the Judgement Day, the Lake of Fire, the Death of Time, and the New Jerusalem.

As long as we know that we don't know, it's fine, even exciting; the moment we claim to know, we lie, and that's not fine with God.

Pictures of heaven
Not-heaven!

Whatever more we say about the life of the world to me has to be recognized as inevitably symbolic language. We seek to convey truths by means of analogies and pictures. So the resurrection of the dead means that all that I mean by ‘me’ is constituted by God after death; and because I cannot conceive a disembodied me, this must mean that I have in some sense a body, as St Paul recognized. Similarly, notions such as purgatory, judgment, heaven and hell are pictures which seek to convey truths. Judgment suggests that the way we live on earth matters, not least because what we have made of ourselves by our earthly choices will have to be dealt with if we are to live happily in heaven. Purgatory hints at the possibility of development and growth in the hereafter. Heaven points to the possibility of bringing our potential to full fruition. Hell should be reinterpreted to mean not everlasting punishment — a view which most Christians had abandoned by the beginning of the last century — but the fact that choices made in the here and now leave their mark on our character and will have to be accounted for. Moreover, the suggestion is that all who are brought to judgment will experience their moment of hell — facing the full truth — before they can know heaven.

*Alan Billings (Dying and Grieving: a guide to Pastoral Ministry, SPCK)*

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On Death and Dying

"On Death and Dying" is the world-famous best-seller by the woman who popularized the field of thanatology as a subject for general social commentary – Dr. Elisabeth Kübler Ross, M.D.. It is still considered a classic, and is required reading in many academic settings, including medical and nursing schools, theological colleges, and popular psychology courses.

The book introduced the author's seminal "stages of dying" or "stages of grief" model which is still widely quoted. According the Kübler-Ross model, there are five stages that a dying person goes through when they are told that they have a terminal illness. The five stages go in progression through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This model has been widely adopted by other authors and applied to many other situations where someone suffers a loss or change in social identity. The model is often used in bereavement work. Not all workers in the field agree with the Kübler-Ross model, and some critics feel the stages are too rigid. Other authors, such as John Bowlby, developed models with different numbers of stages. Regardless of whether you feel the stages are absolute, the book is a "must read" for anyone seriously interested in death and dying issues.
Death and dying

It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens.

Woody Allen, *Death*

deadth [Old English < Indo-European base dheu-, to become unable to sense]

biological death: the end result of the act of dying; the permanent ending of all life in any one biological entity, such as a person, animal or plant; the final separation of spirit and/or soul from body.

spiritual death: the destruction of a soul; total loss of identity, passion, energy and purpose. There is absolutely nothing that animates, moves, or relates (inertia, spiritlessness).

Death is everywhere. True, the magazines and the Internet gab on endlessly about a future where life can go on for a very long time. But just as life finds a way, so does death. Just when we think we've got the best of it, the next AIDS comes along, or wars or natural or human catastrophes happen. And there will always be a large group of people who will not be allowed access to the life-lengthening benefits, for reasons of power. Death will still find a way to level the playing field and show how relative all human accomplishments are. Death reminds us that we're not in control. Christ reminds us that death is not in control.

When Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago was suffering from the cancer he already knew would kill him, he drew on part of the Christian tradition which calls death a "friend". This puzzled a lot of people, including nearly all the reporters and even many Catholics, some of whom thought he was talking about how death would end his pain. But Bernardin had something else in mind.

In Christianity, talk of death as a "friend" is true to a point. But it is always conditional. Death is not what we were created for. It's a direct result of how our universe is out of order with God. It's caused by the same thing that sundered our relationships with God and with each other. Death is "natural", but it is also quite "natural" to fear it, and to hurt from the losses it causes. A few people seem fearless of death or at least fully accepting of it, but that only happens to those who are committed to something greater, to the point of overpowering even this most native of fears. Jesus didn't want to die; in Gethsemane He prayed passionately that it would not happen. But His death was the purpose of His being there; God's will be done. For a Christian, death can only be a "friend" through trusting that whatever death is, Jesus was there, has felt its icy clutches, has transcended it, and is there to take us through it. Death only becomes a "friend" to those who trust that their best Friend is with them in it all the way through.
Troubadour

One member of the group sang this as a glimpse as to how he felt when conducting a funeral ...

Douce dame jolie,
Pour Dieu ne pensés mie
Que nulle ait signourie
Seur moy, fors vous seulement

"Fair sweet lady" begins the 14th century virelai, Douce Dame Jolie, "For God's sake do not think / that any woman has mastery / over me, save you alone." Written in Old French, the virelai - a kind of medieval dance song - is part of a larger work of secular love poems and songs entitled Remede de Fortune by the prominent French composer, Guillaume de Machaut. The Remede is generally regarded as the best and most important collection of French love poems and music of the 14th century.

The subject of the Remede is a young man's first love, and how he learns to become worthy of his Lady, narrated by the young lover himself. He tells us how the goddess of Love enflamed his heart, and seeing his inexperience, set out to instruct him to serve his chosen lady. The lover composes love songs to express his feelings, and one day the Lady discovers one of the young man's compositions. She asks him if he knows who composed it, and in embarrassment and fear of rejection, the young man flees his lady without answering, singing a long complaint against the goddesses of Love and Fortune. After being consoled by goddess of Fortune, the young man returns to his Lady where he takes up her courtship.
Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night

By Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Appendix E

Example CMTR: the Eucharist

This wiki was created between November and December 2004 on the subject of the Church Of England Communion service with the aim of facilitating an on-line discussion for a deanery chapter (ten or so Anglican clergy). It was the sixth wiki to be created, and is notable for the lack of pictures, music, animation etc. – in fact, it avoids all of the multimedia benefits that were originally thought to be essential! The other notable feature of this CMTR, when compared with the funeral CMTR described in Appendix E, is the complete lack of structure. Whereas the earlier reflection had some 70-80 pages and links, and has remained fairly static since it was created, this reflection, at the date of writing (June 2005) had over 1,000 pages and links, and was growing daily. This is illustrated in the site map below.
Figure 18: CMTR on the Eucharist - June 2005

Each original page, containing the subject matter for each thread, is represented in a box. Comments, and subsequent comments upon comments, are represented by indented paragraphs. As the CMTR is dynamic and the content can alter radically from month to month, a ‘snapshot’ of the reflection taken in June 2005 is reproduced here. Underlined phrases are links to other parts of the wiki, or elsewhere on the web.
The Eucharist

This section of the website is dedicated to a discussion of the Eucharist, Holy Communion, Mass, Divine Liturgy, Lord's Supper, breaking of bread ... the meal at the centre of our faith, at the same time a symbol of our unity, and a cause of wars.

I've placed a few links here that I'd like to discuss, but you can add your own, expand on my thoughts or even delete them totally. If you get confused with how to do this, email me (duncan@theparishchurch.co.uk) and I'll send you simple instructions.

The Eucharist: Holy Communion

The shape of the Liturgy: Shape Eucharist

Presidency: Liturgical Matters

Where's the Deacon? Diocesan Ministry

Who is the Eucharist for? Open Eucharist

Holy Communion

Getting blown away by God.

Anne Dillard writes powerfully on liturgical space as a danger zone:

"On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? "

The churches are children, playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. "It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life jackets and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. "For the sleeping God may wake some day and take offense, or the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return." (Anne Dillard, Teaching a Stone to Talk)

Along these lines is the thought that I picked up somewhere that the act of consecrating the elements in the eucharistic prayer is doing precisely that: consecrating the elements, ie the building blocks of creation (as in the Periodic Table). In other words, while we concentrate on the effect that the eucharist has on US in our straw hats and velvet dresses, we are missing the cosmic dimension of the act, missing the awesome reversal of entropy, the sowing of new seeds of Life into the material heart of Creation. To the hard hat and lifejackets should perhaps be added tinted goggles to protect our eyes from the glare of 'God at Work' as he relieves a few of the pangs of the 'groaning creation' that St Paul was so aware of.

Along similar lines is the provocative thought thatthe earthquake which rolled the Stone away caused the ground to split open and swallow Christ's body, thus establishing the process of consecration of Creation that was heralded by the Incarnation and has continued ever since with every blessing of the bread and wine. Again one can see why we should be figuratively strapped into our pews as we feel the aftershocks, the ripples of that earthquake which allowed the Earth to partake of the very first Eucharist.

Comments: From Anonymous [195.94.128.117] - 2004-12-01 7:35 PM
'Do this in remembrance of me.' This does not only mean: 'Go on participating in the Eucharist'; but even more: 'Go on offering up yourselves for each other and for the world as you say in deed and in attitude: "This is my body which is for you."' This central act of the Church's life has a direct missionary intention. In the consecration of creation in the bread and the wine we are consecrating ourselves to share the fruits of creation with others.

In the light of this kind of thinking, isn't it a sign of our narrowly human-centred (anthropocentric??) view of the eucharist that it is believed in some traditions that the consecrated elements should enter only the human body? Shouldn't we give the crumbs to the birds and the dregs to the soil in a joyful acknowledgement that God is saving all Creation through Christ, not just people?

Sometimes this happens accidently of course, as when, assisting at a Confirmation, I turned round in the congested sanctuary and knocked a chaliceful of wine flying. The bugs in the carpet shared in the Thanksgiving that day, as did the invisible creatures inhabiting the thickly embroidered cope worn by the bishop - who insisted on stooping low to mop up as much as he could.

Comments: From Anonymous [195.94.128.117] - 2004-12-01 7:51 PM
I know of one church, not so far from here (let the reader understand!) that keep a ‘Holy Hoover’ – a vacuum cleaner used only for cleaning the sanctuary of crumb – which are then reverently and gently buried.

The shape of the Eucharist

I've recently been reading 'Creating Uncommon Worship' by Richard Giles (who also wrote 'Re-pitching the tent') who has influences quite a bit of what follows.

Common Worship gives Holy Communion Order One the following shape:

The people and the priest:
- greet each other in the Lord’s name: **Gather Together**
- confess their sins and are assured of God’s forgiveness: **Confess Sin**
- keep silence and pray a Collect: **Pray Collect**
- proclaim and respond to the word of God: **Sacrament Word**
- pray for the Church and the world: [**Pray Together**]
- exchange the Peace: [**Exchange Peace**]
- prepare the table: **Set Table**
- pray the Eucharistic Prayer: **Eucharistic Prayer**
- break the bread: [**Break Bread**]
- receive communion: [**Receive Communion**]
- depart with God’s blessing: [**Service Ends**]

Gather Together

I've been very struck by the Eucharist of the church of the parish of St. Gregory of Nyssa in San Francisco (discovered on the web, although I'd dearly like to go - sabbatical anyone?) As part of their beautiful liturgy, which is documented on [http://www.saintgregorys.org](http://www.saintgregorys.org) the gathering is seen as a vital part of the experience (something that had never previously struck me). All gather in a separate space and then move into a seating area for the sacrament of the word. The whole assembly then moves to another part of the building for the Eucharist.

I guess there are several objections to this, amongst them many acres of victorian pine pews, the elderly and infirm, and the horrifying realisation that the Communion may involve, or demand, some sort of interaction with your neighbour.

One thing I know I'm guilty of is to cheery morning welcome. Whilst thinking about the Eucharist and the way I conduct myself during it, I saw that this sort of ad libbing simply serves to make me the centre of attention. How can the congregation move into confessing their sins after an opening like that? Of course, that begs the question whether the confession **Confess Sin** is in the right place!

[a drawback of this system of sharing thoughts is that you can't have the item that you're commenting on in front of you - I've already forgotten most of what you said!!]

Don't feel guilty about your cheerful greeting! Okay, as the Presider you 'merely' represent all the people and it isn't your 'show', but you are also you, the individual whom God called to BE the Presider. He has doubtless called a few morose clergy to balance the clowns and they all represent humanity (with perhaps the rare exception we can all think of? Oops, sorry!). This was brought home to me as I became more physically disabled than any of the congregation - I still represented all of them when I presided.

As for spoiling the build-up to Confession, a good opening hymn sung with impassioned blandness usually does the trick! Seriously, who said confession is a mournful act anyway? We can remove the veil hiding our sin with a flourish of relief and joy in the knowledge that we worship a God who has already forgiven us even as we run across the field towards him. If sin can be seen as a build-up of spiritual muck and grime, confession is surely the welcome shower - and who on earth gets serious in the shower?!

As to moving about, we are handicapped, most of us, by having only one large space, which is still usually furnished with fixed pews, so it's true that any thoughts of gathering in one place before moving to another is fanciful, besides the logistical challenges of the elderly, etc. So we are forced to good old Anglican compromise, which can end up pleasing half the people, or none, all of the time. I have generally found that half want to swap news before the service begins, thus enriching the shared worship; while half want to pray quietly and get into their sacramental shell - oops, just revealed my bias ...

Comments: From Kath [195.93.111.137] - 2004-12-03 5:11 PM

The Peace often comes into the equation of compromise, giving those chattering Christians who were forced into silence at the Gathering, an opportunity, more or less legitimately, to have a laugh and a hug and even a hasty gossip! I enjoy it, but I can see why others are a bit frosty.

Confess Sin

Virtually the very first corporate act of the assembly is to confess our sins and receive absolution. Certain liturgies (used to) have the confession between the prayers of the people and the peace. I guess there is a natural tendency to 'want to get the apology over with' before we can enjoy a relaxed and easy conversation. This goes as much for our conversation with God as it does with a friend after a misunderstanding. There is, however, a slight feeling that the confession is merely a perfunctory preface to the liturgy proper.
There is also, for me, a slight embarrassment on behalf of people who may not be regular worshippers that the first thing the church asks them to do is acknowledge their worthlessness (in their eyes at least). However, the main argument for placing the confession at the start of the service is that all liturgy is a journey that involves the whole assembly, and a journey must begin somewhere. We are woken up to discover who we really are.

I think, on the whole, I'd prefer the later position in the liturgy, although I could be convinced otherwise. Only after hearing the Scriptures read and expounded are we awakened to penitence and renewal.

Incidentally, does anyone use a asperge or sprinkling from the font as part of the absolution? It seems to me that this would work well if the confession and absolution were placed just before the peace.


I hate the confession being the first thing that people say together – it simply confirms all the stereotypes.

Comments: From Duncan [195.91.98.111] - 2004-1-028 9:04 PM

Yes, I’ve toyed with giving the absolution before people make their confession, just to underline the point that we are already forgiven. Just confuses people though!

Comments: From Anonymous [195.94.128.117] - 2004-12-01 9:14 PM

Don’t give up. Although I guess there’s a difference between personal confession (yes, we are forgiven) and corporate confession (are we all forgiven?) Not sure.
The Opening Prayer

Known as the collect, I assume, because it collects together the thread of the liturgy that day (or at least it should - there are often some many sub clauses that I need to get a pencil out to work out what the collects are actually saying!) Collect seems a needless word - why not simply 'opening prayer'?

Are we bound to use the set collects? I've seen some very nice ones from the International Commission on English texts that are at least thematically linked to the three year lectionary, but I'm not sure I can use them.


Go on Duncan, be a devil, use those unauthorised collects. Janet Morley (sp?)wrote a good selection as well. This is where CW gets its liturgical knickers in a twist because the 3-yr lectionary is supposedly not a 'themed' one like the ASB's was (it's the Suffering Community again.oh joy!) and yet we expect the Collects to be so. (Do the BCP Collects spring from any of the readings or aren't they simply the Collect for that Sunday?). Plus the fact that in Yoda-speak written they are. I used to either refashion them into comprehensible English or rewrite them completely according to the theme I had developed for the service. Since I used to prepare and print the whole service every week, thematising all the parts that CW permits - which is most of the service, that really wasn't so shocking.

I sometimes used liturgical material from what was then called The Whole People of God (now called Seasons of the Spirit) because they had writers who took risks with language - amazingly one was allowed to alter the material to suit your own needs, so I sometimes toned it down and nearly always shortened it. But some of the Post Communions were incredible, and Blessings. I take the point about worship being a counter-cultural rock of sameness in a world that bombards us with variety, but there is enough sameness (I believe) in the whole act of worship (and I mostly used the same Eucharistic Prayer) to allow a certain measure of variety. Not for its own sake but to enrich the worship by reflecting on the reading(s).

Duncan, would it be possible to have a Link site where I could post some of these alternatives for use on the coming Sunday, if people were so inclined?

Comments: From Duncan [195.91.98.111] - 2004-11-11 7:51 PM

Just fyi – and to show off – I found out why it’s called a collect I quote: “What is a Collect? The prayer traditionally called the "Collect" is now called the Opening Prayer. Historically it is a short prayer said before the Epistle in the Mass (in its older, traditional, form) and it was used also in Lauds, Terce, Sext, None, and Vespers. The word collecta is equivalent to the Greek synaxis. The Collect was used for the service held at a certain church or basilica in Rome on the days (for example during Lent) when there was a "station Mass" at a different basilica nearby. The people would gather together at the "collection" point, this first "collect" church. After saying certain prayers they went in procession singing litanies to the station church where Mass would be
celebrated. Just before they began the celebrant would sing a prayer, *theoratio ad collectam (ad collectionem populi)* "The prayer at the gathering point of the people". This prayer, the collect, would be repeated at the beginning of the Mass at the station church itself. Long after Pope Innocent III, with a slightly different emphasis, said that this prayer was used by the priest to collect together the prayers of all the people. The Secret prayer of the older form of Mass (now called the "*super oblata*" or "Prayer over the gifts") and Post-Communion are also collects after the example of the Collect before the first reading. Now the name is only used for the first of the three.”

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**The Sacrament of the Word**

It occurs to me that in many churches (the churches I'm working with excepting) one need to be specially vetted to 'do' the intercession, and a bishop's license to administer the chalice, but reading 'the lessons' is up to virtually anyone who volunteers. Ensuring that the Scriptures are heard and understood by the assembly is a ministry of living-giving importance and a task of the highest honour.

I used to think that only translations of beauty and dignity should be used (by this I mean, generally, NRSV or the Jerusalem). I now think that what is important is that the congregation should be gripped by the power of the Scriptures. If I had the nerve I'd use the Street Bible or The Message (Eugene Peterson).

"It is better that we should be blamed by literary critics than we should not be understood by the people" (Agustine of Hippo)

How many churches regularly use a Psalm in the main Sunday morning Eucharist? How do you avoid drowning in words? Do you use a responsorial Psalm and sing the refrain?

One recommendation that I have heard regarding the Gospel is that, once it has been read and is being processed back to the altar, the assembly should be allowed to touch (or even kiss!) the book. Sound a little American to me, but has anyone had experience of this?

Do people think of themselves as giving a sermon, or a homily. I think the difference is more than one of just words: homily means to me a brief breaking open of the theology of the Scriptures; sermon implies a doctorial thesis!

Should there be a homily 'wherever two or three are gathered', even mid week where there are literally 2 or 3? How much preparation should/do you allow?

How does the role of homilist (my word!) relate to that of the presiding minister?

How much silence (quality or quantity) do you observe after the sermon slot? "We are silent together, actively quiet, purposely still." (Phillipart, Saving Signs, Wondrous Words)
The Affirmation of Faith - may be said, should be said or must be said? To recite, parrot fashion, the Nicene Creed is no way for grown-ups to affirm their faith. Many people in our congregations simply mouth certain parts of the creed or just remain silent in the face of a smokescreen of fourth century philosophical jargon. If the Christian assembly is to be a community of authenticity and honesty, what is to be done?

How would you feel about a congregation writing its own affirmation of faith?


How would you feel about a congregation writing its own affirmation of faith?

Taking this last point first, never in a million years would a congregation be able to agree on the content of such an affirmation. The range of beliefs in the average congregation is awesome, although I suppose I'm basing that on my experience of liberal churches. Come to think of it, the Baptist Church in Bewdley did devise their own Affirmation, not for liturgical use but more as a manifesto for membership.

I have heard that the bishops at Nicea were extremely reluctant to compose such an affirmation and only did so under the pressing need to crush heresy. And I suppose that is still the subtext in its present liturgical use; a kind of leaden weight of verbiage intended to stifle dissent and doubt. This is a shame because I see doubt as the seed-bed for deeper faith. Look at Thomas. A faith protected by credal conformity is going to be vulnerable, like a hothouse plant, to the slightest crack appearing and letting in a questioning draught.

I suppose the vital section of the Nicene Creed is the account of Jesus's saving acts in their historical context, since our faith hinges on our belief that God intervened in history. But God's intervention, played out decisively in Jesus in the events of Holy Week and Easter is well rehearsed in the eucharistic prayer. And it makes absolute sense here since it places the eternity of communion in its historical setting.

Released from the Nicene need to crush heresy, the 'credal slot' could enrich the liturgy by reflecting on various attributes which we discern in God, allowing for some poetry to creep into the service maybe, perhaps reflecting divine light back to the Gospel, even adding to the 'mystery' instead of trying to dispel the mystery with undeniable 'facts' determined at Nicea by an episcopal committee.

Comments: From Kath [195.93.111.137] - 2004-12-03 5:11 PM

The only time I have been uplifted by the Creed was at a service where an Orthodox Russian choir sang it, to a most outrageously raucous and soaring tune. I didn't understand any of it but I 'got it', especially the resurrection, when you suddenly had to hold your hands over your ears because of their volume and sheer exuberance. It was unbelievable, if I can say that about a Creed!
After the peace there follows the offertory, and the table is set.

Collecting the subs - the financial giving of the people - rightly belongs to the bringing of the gifts to God. As the money represents the work and toil of God's holy people, why do we then remove the collection plate from the altar, as if the filthy lucre will contaminate the holy gifts of bread and wine?

I'm sure that passing round a plate or basket (or even bucket) will raise maximum funds, but is it the right and proper thing to do in a Eucharist? Most people (I'm now speaking of St. Barnabas) direct debit and budget for their church giving - this is how a household works. But we don't pass a hat around at Sunday lunch! Surely for those who don't direct debit, a plate could be left at the back of church? I have always found the collection a harassment - I generally give a £1 or so out of embarrassment, even though I already give direct from my bank. It is extremely inhospitable - we don't ask guests to contribute. This is where our theology bites - do we mean what we say, or are we after maximum return. Perhaps a simple bucket placed centrally, where people can place their gifts as they move up to the altar in thanksgiving, would suffice?


I couldn't agree more. What exactly is being proven by the passing of the plate? That the people of God are making a sacrifice? The collection certainly doesn't prove that since it's usually in most churches a small pile of envelopes and some loose change, since the majority give by bankers order. And conversely, IF the plate did indeed overflow with notes of large denominations, are we supposed to flaunt our sacrifice for the world to see? Of course not. Even the sacrifice of our presence and our praise is somewhat dubious, according to Jesus, if it is interpreted as praying at street corners so the world knows we are religious. So yes, the less sacrifice-flaunting the better.


And certainly it is not what you should do to ANY guest or stranger, shove a brass plate up their nose. One should GIVE to visitors, not take from them. We should shower them with gifts - why not a New Testament for every fresh face sitting in those pews? Don't let them leave without a gift of some kind. Home made jam with St Whoever on the label. Free tickets to the next church social, though that may seem a bit like fishing. The coffee bar in my last church was open all week and the coffee or tea on offer to visitors was free - donated by local shops, though volunteers financed the biscuits. Of course people made donations, probably more than we might have charged, but it's the principle.

And is it giving the right impression of our priorities if one of the first things a visitor sees is a notice saying that it costs a million pounds a second to maintain this church? Piling guilt upon guilt.

Christians are generally in a bad relationship with money. We aren't sure how we are supposed to relate to money, except we know we mustn't LOVE it. We slave away all week at jobs we maybe
loathe in order to MAKE the money and then we have to hold it at arm's length like the corpse of a mouse that our cat has just brought in. We regard it as filthy lucre. And yet we need barrel-loads of the stuff to run the Church with, the Church whose bible says we mustn't love money. No wonder stewardship is a confusing and confused idea. It's exactly the same as telling youngsters that sex is one of the most wonderful things in the world but they shouldn't do it Only it's the opposite. Money is one of the most awful things in the world but you must earn it I reckon stewardship advisers should be paid more Or have to be mendicant friars wandering around the diocese living off the loose change thrown in the collection plates.

I knew a church in Boulder CO who used the collection from their midweek service to give to the beggars and panhandlers who came a-knocking at the parish office door.

The Eucharistic Prayer

'Then bread and a cup of water and of mixed wine are brought to him who presides over the brethren, and he takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of all in the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and gives thanks at some length that we have been deemed worthy of these things from him. When he has finished the prayers and the thanksgiving, all the people present give their assent by saying “Amen”. (Justin Martyr 150 AD)

This earliest description of a EP we have shows it still to be an extempore affair, and even in the following century, when Hippolytus gives an example of an EP (below), he makes it clear that the norm was still extempore. Should we seek on some occasions to get back to that tradition?

Comments: From Duncan [195.91.98.111] - 2004-11-11 7:51 PM

One thing I have tried recently with Christ Church is to get them to make the Eucharistic Prayer their own. I invite them to gather more closely (you can do that at Christ Church!) and enter into the liturgical action ('with hands lifted in prayer') no less than if they were alongside the altar. Reactions are mixed!

Another thing I have done is to preface the sursum corda with a passage of Scripture (a practice I found on the St. Gregory's website), as it seemed to me that to launch directly into the 'lift up your hearts' a little hurried and awkward. I have used a passage from Baruch, emphasizing the liberation and glorious inheritance of God's children.

Baruch 5:5-6 Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east as the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne.
What are people's experiences of writing their own Eucharistic prayers? Here an example of a pick 'n mix prayer I found somewhere: Pick Mix. I do like This though from the Laughing Bird site for All Saints.

"We become Christ’s body, bread broken for a world that is obese with a materialism and still dying of malnutrition. We become a leaven in the world's bread, an agent of change that helps the reign of God to rise, fragrantly, like a loaf browning in the oven. We become Christ’s blood, wine poured out in sacrifice and celebration, poured out for the sake of a world drowning in division and still dying of thirst, a~ thirst for union and communion. We become the brewer’s yeast, the zest that unlocks the extraordinary in the ordinary, the tingle that makes sober people giddy with joy, the sweet smell and taste of the vintage.

(Philippart)

Presidency

So what title should we used to describe the role of the ordained person in the Eucharist? "Celebrant" doesn't work for me - surely we're all celebrating. "Presbyter" has, for me, too many echoes of abortive attempts at union with other churches. "Priest" misses the mark, because I believe the priesthood resides in the community rather than in a person. The assembly is the minister of the Eucharist, in which all participate. My role .... I think is one of convenor and conductor of the orchestra, although neither term inspires! Even though "President" also sounds far too hierarchical and bound up with rank and honour, I think for me the term "presiding minister" could work.


I coined the word 'Presider' in my earlier offering, though strangely I have never used it before. I must be on your wavelength? (Is that wise?)

There is a priest (sorry don't know details) who presides as a clown, which is not a bad model. The one who is willing to be a fool for Christ, especially when preaching. It would make a radical statement in our gloriously printed service books, if, whenever the words are for the presider it said, in capital letters in the margin,

FOOL:

By the way, write to Simon Rattle and suggest that the word 'conductor' doesn't inspire, and see what he says.
Where's the Deacon?

I believe that deacon's job is essentially assisting and organizing others. The deacon marshals all the other ministries, reminding and enabling people to do them on cue. What matters is that the liturgy goes well, for all those participating. There is nothing the deacon can do that someone else cannot do - certainly not reading The Gospel! That was the preacher's job until Gregory the Great's time; and if we have layfolk read the other readings I can see no reason they should not read this one - under the Deacon's helpful guidance, of course(!)

Furthermore, I believe the best way to build respect for the deacon's role is to encourage the presbyters to revel in the job when they are doing it: vest for it, relish it as a leadership role, and experience the special joy - even the special power!!! - of assisting people to do what they really can do but often don't know they can. (Ask any schoolteacher whether they feel powerful when that happens.) Truthfully, it's my own favorite job in the liturgy. Thank God I was ordained to it for life. The presbyterate is an organizational necessity: the diaconate is maybe even unnecessary, but a complete joy to me.
"Open Communion" has become a hot topic as the third Christian millennium begins - a topic perplexing some who have campaigned boldly for other inclusive reforms, such as communion of all the baptized, or opening all ministries to Christians of every ethnic or sexual identity. Should churches today call the world to baptism first, and only afterward to share the eucharist - a policy predominant since at least the second century? Or should churches today welcome newcomers at once to Christ's eucharistic table, and lead them to commitment in baptism afterward? I argue for the second approach.

Recent New Testament scholarship and Jewish scholarship together prove Jesus was a distinctive and innovative teacher. His religious contemporaries craned their necks in futuristic expectation. Many gathered in cultic dinner fellowships (chaburoth) where members faithful to the Mosaic law talked scripture and prayed for a messiah to come. Others, like John Baptist or the Essenes, called their errant countrymen to wash themselves ritually and prepare for God's coming reign with a strict rule of life. Most such groups enforced their membership's purity far beyond orthodox Jewish custom today, hoping to hasten God's saving intervention for their nation. For example, merchants who kept the law, yet had business contact with those less pure, dined in quarantined fellowships of their own. But Jesus' parables taught instead: God is already here working with all of you; you have no time to prepare for, learn about, win, or manage God's coming; now you must respond; and your response today makes all the difference.

This teaching he symbolized in a gesture that shocked many. If Jesus had ever been John's disciple - a relation contradicted within the gospel texts, and increasingly doubted - he abandoned baptizing (John 4:2) and instead sought out, welcomed, and dined with unprepared, unreformed, unwashed sinners. His action was a prophetic sign suited his own more radical message: here comes God now, ready or not! And seen against Jesus' contemporary religious background, the presence of obviously unqualified diners was essential to his sign. Perhaps Isaiah's vision of a banquet for all nations inspired his choice: there the prophet says, the pure and impure will share one feast.

So it can hardly surprise us that most New Testament resurrection stories are mealtime scenes. When Jesus' disciples met again to eat together after his crucifixion, their experience convinced them that he was not dead-that instead God had poured out his life like gasoline, setting the world ablaze. Paul wrote that God brought the whole world salvation by Jesus' death to reward his faith (Galatians 3:13, Romans 3:25) and virtually all churches made Jesus' table fellowship, the prophetic sign of his faith, the center of their common life too. Their gospel midrash stories echo Jesus' teaching, and consistently portray his relation with sinners the same way. For example, the despised tax collector Zacchaeus finds himself summoned to dine with Jesus, and responds then-not beforehand-by a dramatic change of life (Luke 19). Today New Testament research confirms the early church's understanding, and obliges us to look at its implications afresh. Church growth studies also confirm that human nature has changed little, and still responds best when welcomed unconditionally first of all, and then challenged to take up Christian living and church membership.

Opponents to open communion may warn of its organizational and educational risks, not to mention the strain of overturning many centuries' hallowed practice. But how can we tell people today what we believe about Christ, and yet keep his table fellowship in the way he distinctly refused to keep it?

I agree!