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**People's Ways of Believing:
Learning processes and faith outcomes**

by

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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April 2004

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People's Ways of Believing: learning processes and faith outcomes

Abstract

This study is unique in providing an in-depth analysis of the process of learning when linked to an epistemological authority. Applying this to the Christian tradition, and in particular its faith authorities as identified in its textual sources and ecclesiastical representatives, the thesis demonstrates how these affect a) the processes of learning as identified by Jarvis in his developing model (1987, 1995, 2001); b) the process of internalisation as understood through the construction of personal biographies and selves, and through the act of reflection; and c) the form/content relationship as approached through the concept of learning styles and with reference to Belenky *et al's Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986). The potential for the ideological and authoritative dimensions of Christian faith to affect learning adversely is something already identified by Hull (1991 [1985]). The study therefore builds on this to demonstrate not only how Christians *don't* learn, but how they *do*.

In response to a research question which hypothesised that the faith of adult Christians influenced the way they learnt, the inductive analysis of twenty-one semi-structured interviews resulted in the compilation of four distinct 'ways of believing', each of which reveals learning characteristics which the thesis argues are specific to their faith context, confirming hence the hypothesis. An original contribution to knowledge is therefore made in two areas: the field of adult learning in furthering understandings of experiential learning and associated processes, and that of Adult Christian Education in providing a unique analysis of Christian learning. In the context of the latter, its results challenge other studies into the 'form' of faith, notably Fowler's *Stages of Faith* (1981), as well as theories of theological reflection. In that of the former, student-centred theories of learning able to do justice to the process of internalisation are called for. Subsequent areas of research are therefore identified.

People's Ways of Believing: learning processes and faith outcomes

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People's ways of believing: learning processes and faith outcomes

Prologue

Introduction

This is a study of Christian learning. It did not set out with that goal. Rather, it had anticipated conducting a study of adult learning patterns amongst Christians, separating people and their personal faith commitment from the 'content' of Christian faith in order to investigate the impact the latter might have on their learning. The inextricable role of people's Christian commitment quickly became apparent, however, and the existence of a necessary relationship between individuals and the content of their learning was reinforced by the theories of learning upon which the investigation was based. So a two-stranded study emerged, considering Christian learning from and within a context of adult education. The question of Christian authority lies at its heart and its prime focus is how this authority impacts the learning process. It assumes a threefold relationship between Christians and their faith authorities: a) a necessary relationship, since one way of conceiving Christian identity is through people's engagement with and commitment to an overall Christian belief system and its faith-content; b) an authoritative relationship, since the Christian faith itself is based on a range of sources which carry both intrinsic and attributed authority; and c) an influential relationship, since these authorities have the potential to affect the learning patterns of those who adhere to them.

The original contribution to knowledge made by the project lies precisely in its demonstration of an interaction between Christian faith authorities and adult learning processes. This is recognisable in a variety of ways, and the empirical data analysed and outlined in the second section of the thesis specifies the threefold relationship (above) through the identification: a) of four 'ways of believing' presented as a typology of learning; b) of four different configurations of the fundamental

experiential components of Christian learning; c) of a range of different learning procedures which the thesis views as specific to the context of Christian education; and d) of different forms of reflection which affect the growth and development of the self. These are its ultimate conclusions in response to a research question which asked whether people's faith influenced the way that they learnt, and the reverse.

The project took the form of a journey, however, already implied by the slight change of course acknowledged above. The significant aspects of that journey are now outlined, constituting firstly the background to the research and the formulation of the research question; secondly the overall approach taken; thirdly, some of the considerations and caveats that arose *en cours de route* and which should be borne in mind as the thesis progresses; fourthly, the scope and context of the study; and lastly, the concepts and areas of scholarship in adult learning which underpin its theory.

I. Background and research question

William Perry, in 1970, brought out a book entitled *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years*. His basic quest had been simple. Observation of his Harvard students suggested that they responded to what Perry understood as 'the relativism which permeates the intellectual and social atmosphere of a pluralistic university' in different ways. He comments:

A few seemed to find the notion of multiple frames of reference wholly unintelligible. Others responded with violent shock to their confrontation in dormitory bull sessions, or in their academic work, or both. Others experienced a joyful sense of liberation. There were also students, apparently increasing in number in the years following World War II, who seemed to come to college already habituated to a notion of man's knowledge as relative and who seemed to be in full exploration of the modes of thinking and of valuing consequent on this outlook. (Perry, 1970:4)

Intrigued by this variety, Perry prepared a research project that aimed to 'illustrate the variety in students' response to the impact of intellectual and moral relativism' (1970:7). Only as time went on did he begin to associate his findings with a developmental path; his original assumption had linked these responses with

personality factors, and as a result he had turned to Adorno *et al.*'s (1950) *The Authoritarian Personality* to help explain why some students displayed a 'strong preference for dualistic, right-wrong thinking' and others 'an affinity for more qualified, relativistic, and contingent thinking'. One of the principal features of his enquiry was a conceptual link that connected dualistic thinking with authority. Those in authority in an educational setting, be that informally in the home or formally at High School, were perceived to know right from wrong and to be responsible for communicating that. Right and wrong were inextricably linked with good and bad (hence his emphasis on ethical development) and it was only when major authorities were seen to be challenged or even be in error that a shift from this dualistic way of thinking to a relativistic epistemology occurred. Perry's project shifted gear with his realisation that the transition was probably indicative of a stage of cognitive development, and after a lengthy investigation he detailed nine stages, or 'positions' in his book. These are summarised in a general Chart of Development on the inside back cover, which shows a transition from 'simple dualism' to 'complex dualism', through to 'relativism' and finally to 'commitment in relativism'. Each is characterised by people's relationship to authority, which in the early stages he writes with a capital 'A', indicating thus a tendency towards absoluteness. Mid-way through the stages he identifies a transition from relating to Authority to perceiving a variety of co-existing authorities. Part of his focus was also how individuals related to other people and whether they perceived the world in 'us and them' terms, or in a more general and inclusive way.

I was introduced to Perry's work through another seminal study which had based itself on Perry. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule had, in their volume *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), taken these fundamental premises and explored them and related issues in a unique study amongst women, offsetting Perry's male bias and extending the parameters well beyond formal schooling and a High School environment. This work had been influential in my Master's degree research, which had investigated the relationship between learning styles and gender amongst theological students. I had taken their penultimate stage of Procedural knowers, consisting of Connected and Separate knowers, as paralleling many characteristics of other, more deliberate and overt studies into learning styles. The connection between

learning styles and authority was thus made, and it was only a small step from there to form the hypothesis and research question upon which this thesis is based.

A number of implications and repercussions were identifiable within Perry's research. One of the most notable was a chicken-and-egg situation that appeared to represent the relationship between learners and external authorities. According to Perry, the greater the degree of authority perceived (or exerted?), the lower the developmental stage. Conversely, the more authority was perceived in relativistic terms, the higher the developmental stage. This begged an immediate question of which came first: Was authority perceived, or exerted? If the former, what accounted for this and could it truly be considered representative of an aspect of human development? If the latter, then it was conceivable that authorities, or Authority, were/was responsible for hindering people's growth and development. In Belenky *et al.*'s work, this was far more apparent and touched one of the most profound aspects of people's beings: the self. As part of the exploratory work for the research I published an article which engaged with this dimension of learning, applying it particularly to theological distance education. The paper (Le Cornu, 2001) argued that both theology as a discipline and distance education as a medium of instruction carried an unusual authority which could, if care was not taken, be self-defeating. The play on words was deliberate: rather than encourage personal growth through learning, either of these two authorities—and worse, the two combined—had the potential to hinder it.

So the transfer was made from Perry's live, personal authorities in the form of parents, teachers, professionals... all of whom conveyed notions of right and wrong, good and bad, truth and falsity to those in their care, to other, inanimate authorities, and more specifically and relevantly, to Christianity, its leaders and its faith-content. Quite clearly, here was an identifiable group made up of both types of authority, animate (clergy, Pope, other church leaders) and inanimate (bible, Christian doctrine), which claimed for itself the ability and right to decide in these same matters. Given my own professional work context of theological education, the implications were huge and the questions tantalising. Could it be that our educational endeavours were in some way blighted before they even got going? *Did* the nature of Christian faith-

content have this, or some other effect on those studying it? If so, how did it manifest itself? If not, what was the faith-content/learning relationship?

Research hypothesis and question were thus formed. As hypothesis, the project conjectured that the authoritative nature of Christian faith-content *did* have an effect on those studying it. The research question was therefore posed as:

Does the faith of adult Christians influence the way they learn? If so, how?

Largely in recognition of the chicken-and-egg dimension of Perry's work, a subsidiary question was also allowed, although this was to prove less fruitful and less easy to explore.

Does the way adult Christians learn influence their faith? If so, how?

At the time, the pertinent dimensions of the question were perceived to be the question of authority and the role it played in the learning/educational process, and the way in which people processed information as exemplified particularly in Belenky *et al.*'s 'perspectives'. I reasoned that people's learning styles might well be affected or influenced simply by dint of the authoritative nature of the faith-content they were engaging with and/or by the people communicating it. Despite embarking on a lengthy subsequent journey of exploration, that hypothesis remained at the core of the research, and the results presented at the end of the thesis in part address it.

II. Approach to the research

One of the key concepts within the question, and a feature which had also functioned as the springboard for enquiry was the dichotomy between the inner and the outer. Perry's authorities had all been external, and it was the transfer from an external Authority to an internal authority which attracted my attention. Belenky *et al.* had also emphasised this dialectic in people's epistemological make-up, expressing it through the question of:

What factors control goal-setting, pacing, decision making, and evaluation?

Who and what is experienced as validating/nonvalidating? (1996 [1986]:238)

The relationship between the inner and the outer became the main focus of the research. This in turn provided a second *fil conducteur*: the process of internalisation as understood as a means of human growth and development. The stage was thus set for a rough outline of exploration. Within the context of a study of adult learning, a theoretical framework of the processes of learning needed to be established. The salient characteristics of Christian authorities and faith-content needed to be ascertained in order not only to establish the validity of the hypothesis but also, more precisely, the nature of the authority and its potential for impact in interaction with learning theories. The process of internalisation needed to be contextualised within a similar educational framework and concepts embedded within in that were susceptible to influence identified. This provided the structure for the first five chapters of the thesis, which look in turn at:

1. The study of learning
2. The authoritative influence of faith on learning
3. Internalisation, and the construction of the person
4. Reflection, and theological reflection
5. People's ways of believing: learning styles, form and content

The content of these chapters and the rationale lying behind them is outlined in section IV of this Prologue. The ensuing empirical data collection was based primarily on Belenky *et al.*'s inner/outer dichotomy and its analysis refers to the aspects of learning previously identified as pertinent. Chapters Eight and Nine identify and comment on specific ways in which Christian faith-content influenced the learning of the interviewees; Chapter Ten looks back over the project as a whole, evaluating its quality and assessing its significance within three specific scholarly contexts. Recommendations for further research are made at the same time.

As the project progressed, however, a number of questions and difficulties arose that demanded attention. These are specified in the next section.

III. Considerations and caveats

III.1 Authority and learning

Although the link between authority and learning was a relatively new concept to me at the time of conducting my Master's degree research, and was the catalyst for the research question as a whole, it quickly became clear that it was a well-known phenomenon in educational scholarship. The turning point in people's epistemological growth identified by Perry and interpreted by him as a shift from viewing knowledge in absolute to relative terms was mirrored in James Fowler's (1981) *Stages of Faith*, for example. Here, the transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 was in many ways the most significant of the various developmental progressions, and was one marked particularly by the same shift in perception. In more specifically pedagogical terms, the dichotomies between didactic and heuristic and between deductive and inductive teaching and learning expressed similar tensions and wrestled with the authoritative dimension of education. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996 [1970]) was an excellent portrayal of some of the issues involved. In each case, however, these continued to revolve around people's overall individual growth and development and often focused on the teaching dimension without specifying precisely the implications for the learning process.

As the discussion on the notion of 'influence' in section III.3 indicates, the link between authority and influence was also more complex than had first been appreciated, and different ways of approaching the study of how Christian faith 'influenced' learning were eventually identified. Nonetheless, the authoritative dimension of Christian faith remained central to the enquiry, provoking questions about the definition of 'faith'.

III.2 Faith and faith-content

The background to the research question had led to its articulation in terms of people's Christian faith *per se*. Somewhat unnecessarily, as it turned out, a considerable amount of time and energy was spent immersed in literature concerned with the conceptual definition of faith, both generically and specifically Christian.

This encompassed a range of approaches, including the highly abstract and philosophical and the more earthy understanding characteristic of those involved in Christian Education. Fowler became prominent once again, as did Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1979) whose study had also been significant in Fowler's work. While the research eventually made a distinction between faith *per se* and faith-content and authorities, these two works in particular nevertheless proved their worth in their largely epistemological emphasis (despite the fact that both sought to reduce this dimension and to develop a broader, more all-encompassing understanding).

Epistemology was at the heart of the research question, however. Belenky *et al.* described their overall study in general epistemological terms. More specifically, their inner/outer dichotomy asked highly epistemological questions, concerned with how people validate their knowledge and know what they know. It was these connections which led to the final title of the thesis, 'People's ways of believing', paralleling Belenky *et al.*'s *Women's Ways of Knowing*.

While an epistemological context eventually proved to be an appropriate framework within which to locate and interpret the significance of the final research results, it was also expedient to differentiate between faith as a general concept and what the research came to term Christian faith-content, although there is necessarily a high degree of overlap. Faith-content, however, can be located external to people, and while its internal dimension must also be recognised, for the purposes of an enquiry which looked extensively at the internalisation of an external authority, then it was the body of authoritative Christian teachings, as mediated also by the Christian Church and its representatives—in short, the Christian belief system—that provided the external dimension.

III.3 The notion of 'influence'

One of the fundamental convictions lying behind the research question was that of the distinctiveness of the Christian belief system and faith-content, and its corresponding separation from other 'content', however that might be described. (This forms part of the discussion of Chapter Two.) Such a conviction, however, immediately affected the way in which the term 'influence' functioned in the research question, since it became

quickly apparent that if this distinctiveness was a reality, then this in itself would intrinsically imply an automatic influence. In other words, linking a body of content with specific and particular characteristics that are peculiar to itself with people in the learning process was necessarily going to result in an 'influence' simply because the way learning would take place would be intricately linked to that content and to no other. This had a number of repercussions for the research. Firstly, it suggested that there was no need for a control group when conducting the empirical interviews. Interest was not in comparing one way of learning with another, but rather in the interaction between a definable body of content and learners. The very fact that Christian faith-content had an authoritative dimension set it apart, and that separation implied an influence on its own grounds. Fundamentally, therefore, the research question was expressed in cyclical terms since it already had the answer 'yes' embedded within it. As a result of this, secondly, the focus of the study broadened to become one of the way Christians learnt *tout court*. Because the influence was implicitly present, then all that was required of the investigation was that it would identify the learning characteristics of Christians as they engaged with Christian faith-content. At this point the research question was subtly modified and to a large degree simply asked 'How do adult Christians learn?'.

The concept of 'influence' was slippery throughout the course of the research. Not only did this impact on methodological issues such as those identified, but it also begged questions such as those often associated with motivation. Is a perceivable influence intrinsic or extrinsic, or simply attributed? Does it matter? Ostensibly it would appear to be important, since in a context which asks what impact an outside agent has on people's behaviour, then the expectation is that the influence should be extrinsic. However, this is to overlook the cyclical nature of people's involvement with their environment and the fact that they are constantly 'in communication' or 'relationship' with it. A wholly extrinsic influence is conceptually impossible and people have to play a role when relating to external content. The waters become muddy at this point, although fundamentally the argument returns to the point made previously: in general terms, the investigation became an exploration of the interaction between a body of content with specific characteristics, whether inherent, imputed, or both.

These considerations impacted both the scope of the study and the approach taken. The latter was outlined previously. The section to follow engages with the former.

III.4 Scope and context of study

III.4.1 Christian Education?

The alternative articulation of the research question immediately suggested that its natural scholarly context would be that of the study of Christian Education. This is a well-developed area of study in the United States. Its concerns and approaches are beginning to filter into the United Kingdom, but the discipline is yet to be established on a firm footing. In both contexts, also, it has its roots in children's education, although, largely because churches of all denominations in Great Britain have taken seriously the educational needs of their adult congregations—something often reflected in the appointment of adult education officers—the study of specifically adult Christian education is now recognised in its own right, albeit largely outside a formal scholarly and academic context. One of the principal characteristics of both forms of Christian Education, however, is the focus on faith development. Adult education programmes are designed with that end in mind, and although within the discipline a distinction is made between formative and critical Christian Education (see Astley, 1994, 2000), the fundamental intention is that the educational pursuit should develop 'Christian' individuals. From this concern, a scholarly debate has arisen about the relationship between faith and learning, and a sophisticated body of literature developed, together with specifically designated 'Centres for Christian faith and learning', that focus on the integration of the two.

It would have been possible, and a case could have been made for this particular project to place itself in this context. However, this would have been to deviate from the actual interest embedded within the question, which asked not how faith and learning might integrate towards a specified goal, but how they interacted and one affected the other. A more appropriate context was that of adult education in general, 'secular' terms, with faith-content introduced as a somewhat alien component. This

approach would permit the identification of ways of learning that were *actually* characteristic of learners rather than *intended* or *desirable* characteristics. To my knowledge, this approach has never been taken before, and it is at this point that the research can claim originality. At the same time, it straddles the two specific disciplines of adult education and adult Christian education, and its results inform both constituencies.

III.4.2 Form vs content

It is possible nevertheless to identify an area within the study of faith development which is of relevance to the project. Fowler's *Stages of Faith* has already been introduced as sharing a common epistemological dimension with Perry's *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years*. Perry opens his work stating that:

We describe in this monograph an evolution in students' interpretation of their lives evident in their accounts of their experience during four years in a liberal arts college. The evolution consists of a progression in certain forms in which the students construe their experience as they recount it in voluntary interviews at the end of each year. These "forms" characterize the structures which the students explicitly or implicitly impute to the world, especially those structures in which they construe the nature and origins of knowledge, of value, and of responsibility. (1970:1)

The whole of his study focuses on these structures and forms, which he finally draws together in nine 'positions'. He acknowledges the difficulty of the concept of 'form' together with that of 'structure', but defends his approach on the grounds that this is the most appropriate way of analysing and understanding the progressive series of ways in which people interact with their environment. Perry spoke in terms of people 'construing their experience' which the hypothesis and research transferred conceptually to people 'engaging with social knowledge'.

Fowler, of course, adopted the same approach in his study of faith. His 'stages' directly parallel Perry's 'forms'. In a faith context, however, the approach has drawn criticism, largely on account of the separation of form from content. Astley states:

Fowler's theory is contentious in concentrating on *the form, rather than the content of faith*. This seems perverse to many. Most religious, and indeed, most non-religious, people are interested in *what* people believe and *what* they believe in. They are concerned, then, with the content of faith. Fowler, on the other hand, has as his focus of research the ways in which we have faith, the *how* of faith. He argues that this form of faith can be viewed under a number of interrelated dimensions. These ... include such elements as the way we reason, the way we make moral judgements, the way we rely on authorities for our faith, our view of symbols, and the way we hold our experience and beliefs together. (Astley, 2000:125; italics in original)

Fowler himself provides a discussion of the form/content relationship towards the end of his volume in which he defends his approach, claiming:

As a theologian I never lost sight of the crucial importance of the "contents" of faith—the realities, values, powers and communities on and in which persons "rest their hearts." (1981:273)

'Content' for him, however, was a vehicle which determined form. Content is not faith; rather, faith is a conglomeration of human characteristics shaped *around* content. Content is therefore important since it helps account for the shape—form—of faith. It was this latter which Fowler focused on, compiling his six 'stages'.

Fowler provides an (undefended) understanding of 'content', stating:

To try to account for the interplay of structure and content in faith means to look more radically and inclusively at faith as a *particular* person's way of constituting self, others and world in relation to the particular values, powers and stories of reality he or she takes as ultimate. (1981:271; italics in original)

Values, powers, stories of reality... a case can (and implicitly is, in Chapter One) be made to view these as dimensions of social knowledge constructed by people as a result of learning. These constitute aspects of the broader concept of a general world-view or belief system than the specific Christian faith-content that the thesis primarily focuses on. Nevertheless, the external/internal interaction is evident, and in many ways Fowler's thesis parallels the position of the thesis, since he emphasises the role that content has to play in shaping form. He gives an example of 'conversion', which he understands as a significant change in the contents of faith.

Conversion is a significant recentering of one's previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one's life in a new community of interpretation and action. (1981:281-82; italics in original)

Content therefore potentially 'influences' form.

The form/content relationship therefore became an additional dimension relating to the research question, and was particularly relevant to the thesis on account of Fowler's study. Chapter Five situates the relationship within the context of a study of learning styles and uses this to demonstrate the interaction between the two and the potential influence one has on the other.

III.4.3 Human growth and development

Despite rejecting Christian Education as a specific context for the study, the focus on learning and the developing interest in internalisation indicated that the more general concept of human growth and development *was* an appropriate contextual framework. This had a number of repercussions. Firstly, it suggested that theories of experiential learning, which claim to be amongst the few truly able to understand learning in holistic personal terms (Jarvis, Holford and Griffin, 1998), were adequate for the task of analysing a range of aspects relating to the process of learning. Secondly, the two-dimensional research question was affirmed. People's development is seen in terms of growth as they continually experience their environment. This is a two-way process not only of internalisation but also of externalisation (Jarvis, 1992; see Chapter One). So people do not simply absorb and process, but they also relate to their external environment. There are simultaneous processes going on involving forms of internalisation and forms of interaction with the external.

These considerations affected the structure and approach of the thesis, which, having explored the validity of the hypothesis that Christian faith-content has a particular authority, then looks at the way in which it has the potential to affect learning from three different perspectives: that of the theoretical understanding of the processes of experiential learning; that of the process of internalisation; and that which the thesis

terms 'people's relationship with knowledge', which considers how people relate to their external world using the concept of learning styles and the form/content interaction.

III.4.4 Social constructivism

The study was placed from the outset within a social constructivist framework. This had underpinned Belenky *et al.*'s work. It was also the referent used by many theorists of experiential learning. Broadly summarised, social constructivism (and its relation, social constructionism: see Burr, 1995 and Dougiamas, 1998) furthers the thinking of Kant (1788) in acknowledging the role that people themselves play in constructing knowledge. Berger and Luckmann developed a sophisticated understanding of the social construction of knowledge, emphasising the role of language and the 'objectification' of personal knowledge through linguistic externalisation. Language itself functions to provide societies with a common bank of social knowledge. Dougiamas, with reference to Von Glaserfeld (1990), Vygotsky (1978) and others, identifies six 'facets' of Constructivism which he lists in order of developing complexity, especially as it relates to learners. The thesis does not engage with these, or indeed with Social Constructivism as a 'philosophy' (Dougiamas, 1998). Nor does it enter the associated debates of relativism versus absolutism, despite the fact that this was an integral dimension of Perry's study. Nonetheless, its basic tenets of people constructing their knowledge, and in particular constructing a bank of social knowledge which is linguistically articulated, provide an overall framework, and Chapter Two takes this as an underlying premise from which to analyse the salient characteristics of Christian faith-content.

III.4.5 Learning and non-learning

Although the research questions were expressed in positive terms, and their modification focused very much on how Christians *do* learn and not on how they *don't*, both the relationship with authority and one of the primary studies to which the project turned as an early indication of support for its hypothesis—John Hull's *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (1991 [1985])—inclined the overall

approach initially towards a consideration of 'non-learning' as opposed to learning. The inverted commas are deliberate, since the thesis contests even the notion of true 'non-learning', at least within a framework of experiential learning. When considering the impact of authority on learning, however, the implication is that this is likely to be negative or adverse, something very much at the heart of Hull's own study. Yet influence doesn't necessarily need to be restrictive, nor authority an impediment. So a progression is evident through the first five chapters of the thesis, the opening chapters having a more overt focus on the negative side, moving to what the thesis suggests is an intermediate position in a study of reflection and theological reflection, to a positive influence in the identification of people's ways of believing in Chapter Five. This again ensures that the question of how Christian adults *do* learn is the final point of interest, while at the same time acknowledging the wide range of influences on learning that are present within a Christian Education context.

IV. Scholarly concepts and structure of the thesis

The first task of the research was therefore to establish a theoretical framework for the study of learning. Theories of experiential learning provided a suitable base, for the reasons articulated previously. Jarvis's 2001 model of the processes of learning is introduced as a developing attempt to systematise an understanding of the complexities involved. The model is considered in-depth, identifying various strengths, weaknesses and fundamental assumptions, and in so doing preparing the ground for the interpretation of the theoretical discussions and empirical data presented in later chapters. From there, the thesis turns to determining the distinctive and authoritative nature of Christian faith-content more securely, turning to a broader range of scholarship than simply Perry. Chapter Two argues for the distinctiveness of Christian 'social knowledge' in the form of an articulated belief system, discerning its peculiarly authoritative dimensions in its discreteness from other social knowledge, in both its propositional and its ideological nature, and in its authoritative claims for itself, primarily through the doctrine of revelation. These combine to reinforce the underlying assumption behind the hypothesis: that the authoritative nature of Christian faith has the potential to influence learning. The chapter includes a survey of Hull's *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (1991 [1985]). Hull focuses

predominantly on the ideological features of the Christian faith, and in certain ways the present study provides a positive corollary to Hull's negative: the reverse side of the same coin.

Jarvis's model and typology do not attempt to address the process of internalisation, however, and Chapter Two identifies this as another area of learning susceptible to influence on account of the primarily external nature of Christian faith authorities. Learning and internalisation share common ground in a constructivist understanding of how people grow and develop, and Chapter Three explores the relationship of the two within this context. Two fundamental dimensions are considered: that of individual biographies (a concept developed by Jarvis, 1995, 2001, *inter alia*), and that of the self and its growth, in each case demonstrating ways in which Christian authorities may impact the process. Chapter Four continues the theme of internalisation by focusing on the processes of reflection and theological reflection. Using the latter as a springboard to identify perceived 'problems' that Christians encounter when engaging with their faith-content, it then turns to non-theological reflection and proposes two faith-related factors which pertain strictly to this dimension of learning.

The theoretical discussion which makes up the first half of the thesis finally turns to a concept which evolved through a study of people's learning styles: that of people having a relationship with knowledge, and hence of a direct link between form and content. This harks back to Social Constructivism in recognising the fact that individuals are necessarily involved with and include something of themselves to any and all types of knowledge. It is not possible to think in terms of a total separation between the two, therefore, as might be the case between people and absolute knowledge. Instead, they are in a relationship, and Chapter Five argues that one way of understanding this is through epistemology and the study of learning styles. The chapter proposes a modified understanding of the concept, nevertheless, and in so doing identifies a final way in which an external authority such as faith-content might affect learning.

With the foundations laid, the remainder of the thesis outlines the empirical investigation, looking at its design and methodology and the means by which the data were analysed, before identifying three main ways in which faith-content can be seen to have influenced the learning of the participants. The penultimate chapter draws the various threads together, highlights and discusses issues relating to the data interpretation, and considers the question of non-learning in the context of the research once again. Finally, the thesis concludes by standing back and evaluating the project as a whole, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, its significance and original contribution to knowledge, and identifying areas for subsequent research.

V. Summary

As is the nature of many research projects, this one took time to find its true path. Nevertheless, the research question was retained in its original thrust throughout, while a number of ways of interpreting and exploring it were identified. These included an analysis of theories of experiential learning, an examination of how external social content was internalised, and a reconceptualisation of learning styles. The underlying hypothesis was that in a Christian context, external faith-content and faith authorities would influence any or all of these aspects of learning. The opening chapters demonstrate this potential from a theoretical perspective; the second half of the thesis investigates this empirically.

Certain caveats need to be borne in mind. 'Faith' as originally articulated in the research question should be understood as 'Christian faith authorities' and/or 'Christian faith-content', emphasising the external and authoritative dimension of this form of social knowledge. The concept of influence was difficult as it proved to be multi-stranded, incorporating a correlative dimension as well as having both an intrinsic and an extrinsic side. As a result, the research could be situated in both an adult education and a Christian education context. While the conclusions inform both constituencies, they are perhaps most apposite for the latter since the approach eventually taken was one of a study of Christian learning from an adult education perspective. This is one way in which the research breaks new ground. Its conclusions are presented in two stages. Firstly, the correlative influence resulted in the formation

of a typology depicting four 'ways of believing' (following Belenky *et al.*'s 'ways of knowing'); and secondly, these types brought to light other learning characteristics which the thesis argues are specific to an intrinsic or extrinsic influence. Hence the overall title of the thesis: *People's ways of believing: learning processes and faith outcomes*.

Chapter One

The study of learning

Introduction

The thesis opens by providing a study of theories of experiential learning. The Prologue established that this was an appropriate context for the focus of the research as a whole on account of its holistic nature and its ability to encompass most, if not all dimensions pertaining to individual human growth and development, and by extension to Christian growth and development. One of the implicit requirements of the research question was the securing of a framework by which the processes of learning could be ascertained and explored, and this is the principal purpose of this chapter. It focuses around the work of Peter Jarvis (1995, 2001, *inter alia*) whose model and accompanying typology of learning are considered in depth. In response to Jarvis's implicit invitation to further his 'work in progress' a critique of his work is provided which pinpoints areas in need of further consideration as well as those which have stood the test of time. The chapter opens with an introduction and overview, presenting the most recent published and therefore publicly available version of his model. (As the write up of the thesis was in its final weeks, Jarvis significantly modified this. However, as his revised version is not yet accessible through conventional published channels, the chapter focuses principally on the 2001 model.) A variety of dimensions of experiential learning are then focused on, preparing the ground for the approach taken in subsequent chapters.

I. Theories of experiential learning

I.1 The concept of experience

Any theory of experiential learning needs to establish a secure understanding of the concept of 'experience'. This, however, is one of the great challenges! Jarvis cites Oakeshott's (1933) comment that experience, 'of all the words in the philosophic vocabulary, is the most difficult to manage' (1995:65). This does not deter him from

exploring it, however! The essential ingredients are time, and people's individual consciousness or awareness. So right from the start of life, people can be seen to experience, albeit at a fairly basic level. Air on skin, temperature, impressions of movement and space... These are semi-continuous experiences with which all humans are familiar, and which are inescapable. As people grow older, they are also experiences that they pay little attention to unless they register some form of abnormality such as extreme heat or cold. So experience and consciousness are inextricably linked, yet take different forms. With reference to Bergson's notion of *durée* (Lacey, 1989), Jarvis (1995) suggests that people operate with different levels of consciousness. Much of the time, continuous, familiar or 'expected' experiences such as those cited above do not attract or demand focused attention, and consciousness is at a low level. When something happens that takes people by surprise and requires attention, then 'time appears to stop, indeed time appears to be frozen. Herein lies experience with a heightened consciousness' (Jarvis, 1995:65).

That situation is never neutral or vacuous. People themselves contribute to it by bringing a variety of aspects of themselves to help interpret and manage the experience. Similarly, each situation has a context in which it occurs and which guides people's response to it. Jarvis therefore offers the following definition of experience:

Experience is a subjective awareness of a present situation, the meaning of which is partially determined by past individual learning. (1995:67)

Nevertheless, people differentiate between two principal forms of experience, the one being essentially sensory, the other mediated through communication, be that written, spoken or gestured. The former, 'primary' experience is generally direct, the latter, 'secondary' experience, indirect. However, secondary experience is always accompanied by primary. So children watching a video and 'experiencing' the world it portrays may also be aware of their sibling crying in another room, feel a draught through the open window and enjoy the prickly sensation of the fizzy drink they are sipping. The two forms of experience lend weight to the idea of different levels of consciousness also. The video is absorbing the majority of their attention and their consciousness is heightened as a result. Nevertheless, at a low level, they are also aware of the background situation around them.

The study of experience requires a consideration of a whole raft of dimensions that includes the way in which people perceive, apprehend, interpret, sense, conclude and act. Philosophers talk of the 'puzzle of experience' (Valberg, 1992) and discuss, among other things, the object of experience, its content and reality. Much of the topic is still open for discussion. However, for the purposes of the thesis, Jarvis's definition provides a working understanding of the concept and this underpins the various dimensions of theories of experiential learning to which the following sections now turn.

1.2 Experiential learning

Jarvis, Holford and Griffin (1998:46), quoting Miller and Boud (1996:8-10), suggest that there are five underlying tenets of experiential learning.

- Experience is the foundation of, and stimulus for, learning.
- Learners actively construct their own experience.
- Learning is holistic.
- Learning is socially and culturally constructed.
- Learning is influenced by the socio-economic context within which it occurs.

It is the first of these which is the foundation stone; all the others flow as logical corollaries as scholars attempt to understand both the nature of experience and how it interacts with people as learners. So Jarvis speaks of disjuncture as the sensation of disorientation that people experience when 'individuals' biographies and their current experience are not in harmony.' This produces a situation 'whereby they recommence their quest for meaning and understanding' (Jarvis, 1995:13): they learn. He is consequently able to formulate a definition of experiential learning:

Learning is the process whereby human beings create and transform experiences into knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values, senses and emotions. (2001:10)

Experiential disjuncture is therefore intricately linked with meaning and understanding, which Jarvis suggests is intrinsically built into people's biographies. The holistic dimension of experiential learning is significant. The definition of

experiential learning (above) aims to encompass *all* existential dimensions of human existence. While it may be conceptually difficult to grasp *how* experience might be transformed into such outcomes as emotions, it is nonetheless important that this occurs if one of the basic premises of experiential learning theories is to hold fast: that experience, learning, and all dimensions of human growth and development are inextricably and necessarily linked. The links between theories of experiential learning and social constructivism are also significant. People construct their own experience and therefore are originators and sources of knowledge. Objective knowledge which frequently appears 'absolute' is nonetheless a phenomenon which is similarly socially constructed (see later).

Given the holistic nature of experiential learning, scholars focus on a range of dimensions that contribute to the overall concept. For Jarvis, two are of particular significance: the cyclical nature of the process which he has developed (1987, 1995, 2001) into a model which attempts to depict the different components which are included, and the different types of learning that can occur, which he links to the process of reflection. The next two sections look at these in turn.

1.3 A cyclical process?

Having formulated a basis on which the concept of learning can be grounded, scholars have then gone on to explore the process of learning, which is generally understood as a cyclical progression. Kolb (1984) cites three models of the experiential learning process, with reference to Lewin, Dewey and Piaget. Somewhat curiously, that which he indicates (1984:21) originates with Lewin seems generally to have been taken by subsequent scholars as Kolb's own. Kolb depicts it as a simple cycle, notably *without* specific starting point, incorporating four fundamental elements: concrete experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and testing implications of concepts in new situations. All three models bear similarities, not only in their cyclical nature, but also in what is understood to comprise the process of learning. Kolb indicates that 'for Piaget, the dimensions of experience and concept, reflection, and action form the basic continua for the development of adult thought' (1984:23) and acknowledges that Dewey's model is 'remarkably similar to

the Lewinian model, although he makes more explicit the developmental nature of learning implied in Lewin's conception of it as a feedback process by describing how learning transforms the impulses, feelings, and desires of concrete experience into higher-order purposeful action' (1984:22). The Kolb/Lewinian model has formed the basis for new developments in studies of learning, focusing both on the process itself and on learning styles. So Honey and Mumford developed four learning styles which they acknowledged originated from Kolb's work, while claiming that a fundamental difference is that, unlike Kolb, they refrained from asking 'direct questions about how people learn', basing their proposals instead on 'what managers and professional people do' (1992:4). Each of their four categories of Activists, Reflectors, Theorists and Pragmatists, 'connects' with a stage on the continuous learning cycle. Similarly, Jarvis used the model as a discussion starter with over 400 people, as a result of which he developed a much more complex model of the overall process of learning from an experiential perspective. This has gone through a number of revisions, one of the most recent of which is presented in Figure 1.1.

To an extent the model attempts the impossible, since the various components are necessarily generalised, and one could argue for just that reason that they become almost bland and meaningless. The memorisation of factual information differs enormously from the memorisation of a physical skill, for example, and the nature of the practice and evaluation involved in piano playing is quite different from each employed in, say, the controlling of one's emotions. The 'how' is therefore a problematic concept for the model; the question already arises therefore whether some (or even all) of the terms require elucidation and explanation, and whether in the process, the model might be reconstructed. Jarvis shies away from such a task, almost certainly rightly, since his objective is precisely to provide a model which encompasses *all* learning. Instead, he fills out the model by identifying three 'categories of response to experience' which result in nine 'types of learning/non-learning' that he presents as a typology (2001), details of which are provided in the following section. This usefully acknowledges some of the difficulties involved when attempting to provide a model of learning which encompasses the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

Figure 1.1: Jarvis's model of the processes of learning (2001:13)

1.4 Reflection and learning

As mentioned above, the components of Jarvis's model are extremely broad and the model itself demands filling out. An important contribution Jarvis goes on to make to the study of learning is the provision of a typology of learning which accompanies the model. Key to the entire process is the act of reflection, the degree to which this occurs (or doesn't), and the manner in which it takes place. He proposes three categories of response to experience, all of which result in particular types of learning/non-learning, as depicted in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: A typology of learning and non-learning (Jarvis, 2001:15)

<i>Category of Response to Experience</i>	<i>Type of Learning / Non-learning</i>
Non-learning	Presumption Non-consideration Rejection
Non-reflective learning	Preconscious learning Skills learning Memorization
Reflective learning	Contemplation Reflective skills learning Experimental learning
Each of the reflective forms of learning can have two possible outcomes, conformity or change	

Each of the types is then elucidated. Briefly summarised, these constitute:

Non-learning

Presumption

A typical response to everyday experience when people enter familiar situations and encounter familiar experiences. 'There is a sense of harmony between the biography and the individual's experience, so that there is no need to change anything—we know precisely what to do' (2001:15).

Non-consideration

This takes place in two forms. Either individuals choose not to engage with a challenging situation at all, or they engage with it and choose to avoid or defer its consequences. The former involves some form of mental deflection and/or perhaps physical removal; the latter is akin to putting something on the shelf.

Rejection

Rejection takes non-consideration a step further. People are unable to avoid an experience which would potentially result in learning, but they choose not to pursue

that path. While non-consideration may often be an instinctive reaction, rejection is more deliberate and conscious. Jarvis suggests that 'one of the most common reasons for this approach is because individuals hold fixed beliefs about 'the truth', they are sure they are right and so nobody can teach them anything more. Rejection may actually serve to confirm them in positions they already hold' (2001:16).

Non-reflective learning

Preconscious learning

This is the type of learning that occurs without people being consciously aware of it or directing conscious attention to allowing it to happen. Often this learning remains in the subconscious, only emerging if something specific brings it to the fore. It may also represent the type of learning that takes place when conscious attention is placed elsewhere. Jarvis is keen to distinguish, nevertheless, between preconscious and incidental learning on the grounds that 'incidental learning might well be conscious but its occurrence is still incidental ... while preconscious learning occurs at the edge of consciousness or at the periphery of vision' (2001:17).

Skills learning

Jarvis suggests that skills learning 'has to be restricted to the learning of simple, short procedures, such as those that somebody on an assembly line might be taught' (2001:18) due to the fact that much other psychomotor learning demands reflection. The thesis is unable to enter a lengthy debate, and to a point accepts the contention that some skills learning might be non-reflective. At the same time, the example given (an assembly line) indicates the complexity of the subject: the actual skills being taught and learnt may be mechanical and involve little or no thought but to accustom oneself to the overall environment and its demands might require considerable reflection. It can also be queried whether *anything* performed for the first time can be truly non-reflective.

Memorization

This is a broad term that includes rote learning of information, the 'learning' of a smell or taste, as well as the retention of 'past successful acts, memories of which are stored away and form the basis of planning for future action' (2001:18-19).

Reflective learning

Contemplation

Contemplation involves pure thought. Jarvis distinguishes contemplative learning from the process of thinking itself by suggesting that it is 'focused' thinking. He cites examples of the intellectual activity of a pure mathematician or the reasoning processes of the philosopher. 'It is the process of thinking about an experience and reaching a conclusion about it without necessarily referring to the wider social reality' (2001:19).

Reflective skills learning

This is the reflective version of non-reflective skills learning. 'It involves not only learning a skill but also learning the concepts that undergird the practice. This makes it possible to know why the skill should be performed in a certain way' (2001:20).

Experimental learning

Theory is tried out in practice, resulting in 'a new form of knowledge that captures social reality' (2001:20). Experimental learning represents most clearly the interactive cycle of internalisation and externalisation that takes place between individuals and their social reality, and accounts for the fact that social knowledge is never static and unchanging.

Jarvis (1995) turns to Mezirow (1977, 1981) in order to fill out his understanding of the process of reflection, citing the latter's seven proposed levels of reflection, but criticising him also on the grounds that Mezirow's approach to learning and reflection restricts learning to the cognitive domain. From the comments made previously in this section, it is clear that this is a disputed area of scholarship. On the one hand, it is difficult to envisage any learning taking place without some form of reflection (Jarvis's distinction between different levels of consciousness and attention is useful at this point), but on the other, the suggestion clearly implies that if the possibility of reflection is removed, then so is the potential for learning. This raises significant questions with regard to the mentally handicapped, or those in a vegetative state, as it does about whether and how animals learn. These considerations are outside the remit of present discussion. Similarly, lengthy arguments defending the position the thesis

has adopted—that in fact all learning is accompanied by some degree/form of reflection—are inappropriate. Suffice it to indicate simply that the thesis links reflection with consciousness, and suggests that just as the concept of the subconscious is familiar and accepted, so there are potentially ways in which people 'sub-reflect'. The ice is thin at this point of the argument; more in-depth investigation is called for. The thesis nevertheless rejects the option of occasions when there is a complete separation between learning and reflection, hence associating learning to the cognitive domain working in partnership with both affective and psychomotor domains when called for.

II. Analysis and discussion

II.1 A horizontal model

One of the significant features of Jarvis's model which the thesis grapples with from time to time throughout is its significant dependence on time. Jarvis states:

Life might be described as a passage through time, so time must be the starting point of any discussion of experience. Human existence is situated within time and emerges through it, and it has been argued elsewhere that learning is the process through which the human, as opposed to the biological, being grows and develops. (1995:65)

His model reflects a time-dependent approach, presenting learning in a 'horizontal' manner with the various components interacting sequentially. This is specifically evident in the left to right movement of the model, which, while incorporating a 'downward' dimension in its lower half (boxes 5 through 9), nevertheless sees individuals 'entering' a learning situation (left), progressing through a number of stages, and 'exiting' (right) either having learnt or not learnt. Jarvis himself recognises that the model is an 'over-simplification of the complex processes through which we go every time that we learn' (2001:13). One of the over-simplifications is emphasised through this horizontal depiction. Is learning truly as sequential as the model suggests? Might not any number of the components he identifies be operational at any one time? Is it actually feasible to isolate one, single, learning event? Are there genuinely only two possible outcomes, either of learning or of non-learning? One of

the difficulties encountered when engaging with the model is a slight inconsistency in terminology from one version to another. So, for example, in the 2001 version the person emerges either 'unchanged' or 'changed and more experienced', whereas in 1997 the former was described as emerging 'reinforced but relatively unchanged'. The difference might be slight, yet is almost certainly significant, especially in a discussion which relates experience to time. Self-evidently, no two experiences can be genuinely identical: the march of time indicates that people and their biographies will have changed, and however great the similarities, the social situation in which they occur will also be different. To emerge literally 'unchanged' would seem impossible, whereas 'reinforced but relatively unchanged' is a more representative portrayal of the result of some interaction with experience. There is, correctly, no implication in the model that people *have* to emerge. It is quite possible for them to circulate around boxes 5 through 9 indefinitely. This, however, provokes the question of whether no learning is taking place at this time. Is it not possible to conceive of each of these components as a learning outcome in its own right, rather than as a means to an end? Once again, the need for greater clarification of the terms, with reference to the 'how' as well as the 'what' would be beneficial.

A second anomaly introduced by the horizontal, time-centred depiction of learning lies in Jarvis's understanding that people's biographies develop essentially through a process of internalisation and externalisation. He observes that 'human beings are not passive recipients of their cultural heritage, they do not have it imprinted upon a *tabula rasa* type of mind, but they receive, process and externalize it' (1995:7). Hence a cycle of internalisation and externalisation takes place which he depicts diagrammatically, reproduced in Figure 1.3. It is important to note the fact that over time, both people and the objectified culture they construct through externalisation change. Neither is static, but rather dynamic, growing, developing and renewing itself moment by moment. This too is part of the process of learning.

Figure 1.3: The processes of internalization and externalization (Jarvis, 1992:25)

The notions of internalisation and externalisation suggest that there is also a 'vertical' dimension to learning, one that focuses on the change that takes place in people from a slightly different perspective. Jarvis relates the former in particular to the process of reflection: internalisation occurs through the making of meaning. Later chapters argue that this is a transformation of a different order: rather than the transformation of experience into personal knowledge, it is the transformation of personal knowledge into knowing. This is a difficult aspect to capture in a model such as Jarvis has developed, but it does suggest a) that were it possible, the model should be at least two-dimensional; and b) box 8, reflection/thought, might benefit from being expanded and or re-positioned.

The time-bound nature of Jarvis's model and its consequent horizontal approach is a feature which the thesis returns to, proposing that, ultimately (and ironically), it contrasts against learner-centred models, despite the fact that no developed version of the latter appears yet to exist. It has an immediate impact on the study of the processes of internalisation, and ultimately the thesis has to set a thorough discussion to one side, recommending this as an area meriting further development and research.

II.2 The components of learning

Box 8, reflection/thought, is a second box in which Jarvis uses different terminology from one version to another, however. This had previously been labelled 'reasoning and reflecting' (1997, box 7). These various anomalies reveal something of the difficulty Jarvis faced when trying to identify the different components within the learning process. Other scholars have similarly engaged with the question, most notably Marton and Säljö. As indicated previously, Jarvis compiled his list of components heuristically and to an extent, phenomenologically, as a result of people reflecting on their own practices: people were asked to engage with Kolb's model and then identify the components which they considered were representative of their own learning. Marton and Säljö cite a similar study which Säljö initially conducted alone before being joined by Marton, in which a group of adults were asked what learning 'meant to them'. Säljö drew up five 'qualitatively different conceptions' to which a sixth was subsequently added, comprising:

- A quantitative increase in knowledge
- Memorising
- The acquisition, for subsequent utilisation, of facts, methods, etc.
- The abstraction of meaning
- The interpretative process aimed at understanding reality
- Developing as a person.

(Marton and Säljö, 1997:35-38)

The scholars' intent was not to draw up a comprehensive picture of the learning process, showing the intricate relationship between the various components as Jarvis has done, and their analysis is clearly lacking in comparison. The complexity of the task of identifying and defining aspects of the learning process also becomes clear in their work: we are obliged to query, for example, whether the first three 'conceptions' are not at least in part identical! The difficulty and complexity of the task Jarvis has embarked on is further highlighted, although the compliment paid him by Merriam and Caffarella should also be noted:

Jarvis's model does deal with learning per se. The thoroughness of his discussion, which concentrates on explaining the responses one can have to an experience, is the strength of the model. These responses encompass multiple

types of learning and their different outcomes—a refreshingly comprehensive view of learning. Furthermore, his model situates learning within the social context; learning is an interactive phenomenon, not an isolated internal process. (1991:257-58; cited in Jarvis, 2001:11)

For the purposes of the research, it is the interaction of people with their social situation which most relates to the question of how Christian faith-content might influence the learning process. This is picked up once more in the next chapter. However, from the perspective of Jarvis's model, attention must be focused on the first three boxes, since these pertain directly to the discussion. Certain modifications can be proposed; this is the consideration of the next section.

II.3 Learning and its social referent

Merriam and Caffarella's compliment (above) stresses the importance of situating learning within a social context, emphasising the interactivity that has to take place between people and their environment. Jarvis has, in fact, portrayed the relationship between social situation and experience in various ways. In his 1987 and 1995 volumes, the two were portrayed as 'joined at the hip', depicted within the same overall box, separated almost tenuously by a dotted line. In his 2001 work, however, the two have become distinct, separate in their own right. Some of the reasoning behind this change is articulated in a statement within his 1998 publication (with Holford and Griffin):

Individuals enter situations and construct experiences. But the experience they construct is one that either they themselves or others (perhaps a teacher or facilitator) create on their behalf. The situation itself, therefore, is only the context within which the experience occurs, not the experience itself. (Jarvis, Holford and Griffin, 1998:50)

II.3.1 The social situation, and the experience of disjuncture

The relationship between people's social situation and the experience that occurs within/as a result of it is complex. Indeed, Jarvis himself identifies it as problematic. It

is reasonably easy to concur with the distinction made in the quote above between the two. Nevertheless, we might argue that the use of the term 'experience' is imprecise, particularly in view of the proposed differentiation between primary and secondary experience. As indicated above, secondary experiences are *necessarily* accompanied by primary experiences. Every experience occurs within a social context, but secondary experiences—as the definitions of the two types point out—are distinct from that context, whereas primary experiences pertain to it. An immediate modification of Jarvis's model might therefore be to place a new box *within* the social situation, itself within a social context, as in Figure 1.4:

Figure 1.4: Experience, its social situation and context

This would respect the huge range of primary continuous experiences everyone undergoes at every moment of every day. As these would generally not cause disjuncture and/or result in new learning, a progression to the box 'person reinforced but relatively unchanged' would be expected. It would also respect the fact that even secondary experiences are not removed from a social context—something that the model as stands seems to suggest. The points of emerging importance, then, become a) whether or not an experience causes disjuncture; and b) how people respond to *both the experience of disjuncture and the experience per se*. It is essential to make such a differentiation, since the former relates to many of the aspects of learning identified in the discussion previously (if disjuncture is experienced as traumatic and negative, for example, then the learning opportunity may be rejected), while the latter pertains more accurately to how the experience, once 'accepted', is interpreted and knowledge

is constructed. The box entitled 'experience' might therefore be usefully subdivided into two, in order to reflect these distinctions.

(Somewhat tangentially, it might be considered appropriate, for similar reasons, to place the person/biography box within the social situation, given the fact that people never live or operate outside this context. Their separation is justified in a model of the learning processes, however, once again if the situation provokes learning. If not, then a case can be made for joining the person and biography to the social context in which they are operating.)

Much depends, therefore, on the nature of an experience, the affective and/or cognitive responses it provokes, and—assuming it is responded to—the way in which it is constructed and consequently transformed. The thesis proposes that the real relevance behind the term 'situation' is, in fact, whatever it is that causes or provokes a sense of disjuncture in people, and that this results in two specific forms of (response to an) experience: affective and cognitive. The former influences whether the experience is engaged with or not, the latter relates to the act of reflection and the degree to which this occurs. This understanding suggests that the social situation affects the interpretation of experience highly specifically and in a singularly narrow manner. One situation, indeed, one element of a 'situation' (and the inverted commas might suggest the need for a more precise term), provokes one experience (but possibly more). The next section suggests that while this is probably accurate in terms of how the relationship between social situation and experience is understood, it is a restricted view regarding the overall learning process, and that situations occur within wider contexts.

II.3.2 The social context, and the interpretation of experience

The discussion thus far has not considered the significance of a situation being social. There are different ways of approaching the issue. Jarvis, with reference to his model, builds an impersonal, semi objective understanding. Marton and Booth (1997), on the other hand, deliberately separate situation and 'phenomenon', acknowledging in a

similar way to the discussion above that there are various elements embedded in the relationship between an experience and the 'situation' which provokes it.

This section takes both approaches in turn.

(i) The impersonal perspective

An immediate query arising from a conventional understanding of a 'situation' is whether any situation it necessarily has to be 'social'. It is certainly true, for example, that people go through many life experiences, both large and small, alone, in what might be considered a non-social situation. While other people are frequently the initiators of new experiences, they are only one of a number of other forces that intrude into individuals' lives. The physical environment, nature, wind, sensations, new sights, tastes, sounds... all contribute to present people with a need to identify the challenge, analyse it, and respond accordingly. Whatever the case, many of these experiences take place in social isolation, away from other people, and we might consider these to be 'non-social situations'.

Such an assertion is on uncertain ground, however. People themselves are always present in a learning situation, and this itself must constitute a social dimension. The contention is strengthened by the notion that people are socially-constructed beings. As soon as they begin to interpret an experience, they necessarily impose a meaning on it that has its origins in their social biographies. Thus two people will not interpret, understand or respond to an experience in the same way, nor will one person look at an ostensibly identical experience the same way a second time. In each case, their biographies, which have been socially conditioned and are continually changing, will determine the outcome. It would appear, therefore, that *all* learning takes place in a social situation, the major differences being whether the social referent for an experience is individuals themselves, or a combination of this and a wider, more general social context.

These two understandings of 'social'—personal and contextual, or perhaps individual and corporate—plus the fact that an experience may or may not cause disjuncture,

allow us to draw up a matrix of four potential learning situations, as depicted in Figure 1.5.

Figure 1.5: Possible learning situations

	Experience causes disjuncture	Experience does not cause disjuncture
Personal biography in a non-social context	Box A	Box C
Personal biography in a social context	Box B	Box D

Boxes C and D refer to situations which do not result in new learning. In Box C, people are physically alone, but that isolation is a familiar experience and they are not presented with anything that forces them to stop and think about their situation. Sights, sounds, tastes, smells emotions and thoughts all cohere with individuals' past experiences and the sense they had previously made of them. Box D, similarly, relates to those social occasions when the interaction with other people does not challenge existing assumptions and ways of doing things, ranging from situations which demand a highly impersonal professional protocol, to those intimate moments between husband and wife, parent and child. In each case (and for the spread of other possibilities between the two ends of the personal/impersonal continuum) mechanisms and knowledge built up over time allow for a smooth, disjuncture-free interaction.

Boxes A and B, however, indicate occasions which potentially result in learning. While the possibility of non-learning continues to be part of the equation, this is necessarily laid to one side given the present interest in learning. In both boxes, personal biography is an agent interacting with external stimuli. In Box A, however, given the lack of other human beings whose opinions, views and assumptions have to be taken into account, people are in a position to learn comparatively freely, or at least individually. There are fewer constraints put upon the learning outcome simply

because individuals themselves are the principal referent. In Box B, the situation becomes much more complex, since people must use not only themselves as a referent, but also relate this to others *and* to the surrounding environment. A wide range of diverse factors must be taken into account, and those factors may be continually shifting and changing.

This analysis begins to provide a framework for understanding the relationship between people's social situation and their experiences. Individuals entering a learning situation with personal biographies become a 'constant' in that this factor is found in each scenario. It is important, therefore, to examine the nature and functioning of these biographies. This takes place in Chapter Three. Secondly, people interact with external stimuli which are categorised as either social or non-social. While it is clearly reasonable to differentiate between the two, there may also be considerable degrees of overlap.

Three areas of investigation are therefore present: characteristics pertaining exclusively to the social context, those exclusively of the non-social context, and those belonging to both.

When turning to examine the *relevance* of a social context to the process of learning, new dimensions emerge. An analytic framework such as that provided is useful in bringing thoughts to order and clarifying issues. Nevertheless, a further step needs to be taken to relate these conclusions to the theories of learning the thesis has been considering. We are already moving to a point where it would seem appropriate to place 'experience' inside a box labelled 'situation' which itself is situated inside a box entitled 'social context'. It is the interaction between the situation and context that must now be explored.

Returning to Jarvis's definition of experience, his inclusion of the *meaning* of an experience is striking. His definition is careful to avoid the easy conclusion that a meaningless experience cannot be viewed as an experience at all, although one might suggest that the implication is there. Yet again we are struck with the complexity of the concept. Within the context of theories of learning, however, the notion of

meaning is vital, since it is as people find and construct meaning that learning occurs. The discussion to date would suggest also that this is the way in which people internalise the external. Meaning-making is therefore a form of transition or transaction between people and their external environment: their social context.

(ii) The personal perspective

Such an understanding of the relationship between social situation and social context is primarily impersonal and objective, however, approaching the discussion from the perspective of a model of the overall process rather than through an examination of the person/learner. This latter is the approach favoured by Marton and Booth (1997) who are at pains to emphasise their general discomfort with the traditional separation between learner and reality, internal and external, knower and known. Rather than talk of learners 'constructing' knowledge, they suggest that individuals 'constitute' knowledge, indicating thus the merging of these various dichotomies within the person. A preliminary discussion of their position has already been provided, and the value of their conclusions for the purposes at hand is slightly questionable, other than to signal that the approach taken by the research is not universally agreed upon. Nevertheless, it is worth drawing attention to certain aspects. Instead of differentiating between a social situation and social context, for example, Marton and Booth differentiate between a 'situation' and a 'phenomenon', suggesting that:

A situation is always experienced with a sociospatiotemporal location—a context, a time, and a place—whereas a *phenomenon* is experienced as abstracted from or transcending such anchorage. ... We refer to the wholeness of what we experience to be simultaneously present as a *situation*, whereas we call entities that transcend the situation, which link it with other situations and lend meaning to it, *phenomena*. (1997:82-83).

They go on to reflect on the fact that situation and phenomena are 'inextricably intertwined in experience', while acknowledging that 'as researchers we may opt to focus on one or on the other' (1997:83). At this point, however, their work takes on a different twist, since rather than go on to explore the difference between them, they suggest that a researcher may opt to look at how learners a) experience the situation, or b) experience the phenomenon. They also draw attention to the fact that the

learner's focus may differ, sometimes concentrating on the situation, at other times on the phenomenon—a conclusion they had come to through their research and which is more fully explored in previous chapters. Marton and Booth's fundamental opposition to a division between inner and outer is clear in the questions they ask (expressed in this paragraph as 'a' and 'b'). Situation and phenomenon can be distinguished, but their interpretation in a study of learning uses people themselves as the referent, and hence a triangular structure is formed (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6: The relationship between learner, situation and phenomenon

The distinction made by the scholars between situation and phenomenon is thus useful, but not totally applicable to the research at hand in view of the arguments made previously that supported not only the 'constituting' position but favoured a 'constructed' alternative or partner. Given Marton and Booth's basic premise, a direct parallel between 'social context'—the interest of this section—and 'phenomena' cannot be drawn, although there are certainly similarities. One major contribution made by the term 'phenomenon' is the implication that no social context ever displays the whole range of its components. A 'phenomenon' therefore, is the particular combination of elements that surround a situation, but which will be peculiar to that situation. Even then, it is likely to constitute unseen and unidentified aspects, and people may only perceive part of the whole picture and have to engage with an experience using a limited field of reference.

III. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has laid the foundations for a study of the processes of learning by focusing on theories of experiential learning, in the main as developed by Jarvis (1987, 1995, 2001). The different versions of his model clearly indicate the fact that this is 'work in progress'; indeed, the latest version, not yet available through published channels, makes further modifications which the thesis was unable to take into account. The holistic nature of experiential learning was noted, one of its strengths lying in the ability of these theories to incorporate and account for a wide range of areas of human growth and development. Nonetheless, the association of experience with time resulted in an emphasis on a horizontal, sequential approach to the study which the chapter suggested may not be typical of every type of learning. Another 'transformation' that took place was the vertical internalisation of knowledge, and the chapter observed that the model would benefit from becoming two-dimensional in order to incorporate more effectively the process of internalisation through reflection. Reflection was seen to account for different forms of learning and, ostensibly, non-learning, although this latter was challenged on the grounds that people and situations are never the same from one situation to another, and hence no two experiences can be identical. Some of the difficulties associated with Jarvis's changes in terminology were noted, focusing principally on the shift from 'person reinforced' to 'person unchanged' (relevant to the discussion on non-learning) and the different terms employed to describe the box conveying reflection, thought and reasoning. Certain modifications to Jarvis's model were also recommended, most notably that of the relationship between experience, social situation and social context.

The analysis of how Christian faith might affect the processes of learning takes place within this framework. Chapter Two moves to consider the nature of Christian faith and identify potential ways in which this might occur.

Chapter Two

The authoritative influence of faith on learning

Introduction

Having established certain foundations for the study of learning, this chapter now asks what in particular about the Christian faith might affect the way in which this takes place. Returning to the notion of authority, it focuses on a variety of areas which it proposes are characteristic of Christianity and its faith-content and identifies corresponding ways in which these are likely to interact with the process of learning and potentially influence it. John Hull's volume *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (1991 [1985]) is significant since thus far it stands alone in the field of Christian Education in demonstrating an impact on the partnership and interaction between ideological authority and learning. However, Hull's work is limited since it does not engage with learning theories. With reference to Jarvis's model discussed in Chapter One, consideration is given to how Hull's thesis may be interpreted, and new ways in which an influence may be exerted identified.

I. The authority of social knowledge

One way of understanding the collection of authoritative documents that together provide the foundations of the Christian belief-system is to view it as a form of social knowledge. Despite not cohering entirely with some of the system's own basic premises, this 'from below' approach, following Berger and Luckmann (1966) sees reality itself as a social construction, brought about as people engage with their external world and environment and articulate their conclusions. The linguistic expression is important, since this externalises knowledge that would otherwise have remained personal and subjective, and it fulfils a number of functions, allowing people in general to compare their conclusions and hence together as a social group to construct an interpretation of reality that is common to them all. In so doing, it also creates the impression of objectivity and thus of reliability, offsetting the insecurity of

individual subjective judgments by providing a commonly-accepted corpus of 'knowledge' that people take as 'true': social knowledge. The system functions cyclically, social knowledge providing the referent for individual understandings of experience as it occurs, internalising it and transforming it into personal knowledge, and these understandings then being bought back into the public arena through human communication. Social knowledge is therefore a continuously yet imperceptibly shifting phenomenon (Jarvis, 1992; see Figure 1.3) as individuals necessarily put their own stamp on the personal knowledge they externalise. Kolb (1984) asserts the primacy of social knowledge over personal, and one of the weaknesses of the theory is exposed: if social knowledge has to exist *in order that* people might make sense of their experience and only then make their own contribution to it through externalisation, the question is begged as to how the system started. It is a question of the same order as that of the beginning of the world, and (regretfully!) the discussions can go no further at this point. Despite the weakness, this constructivist outlook ably accounts for the interaction between people and their environment in an established order such as we know it.

The collection of authoritative writings which lie at the heart of the Christian religion can be seen in this light. The bible and the set of doctrinal statements which together articulate Christianity's fundamental premises are/were also the articulation of a particular people's understanding of their experience at a particular point in time. Hence they reflect the world-view of that people and era, but must take their place alongside the significantly different conclusions of other people groups and other eras both globally and throughout time.

This being the case, the question is raised as to what makes Christian faith-content distinct enough for the thesis to investigate its impact on the learning process. If this body of social knowledge is simply one corpus amongst many of the same ilk, then what properties might it have to suggest it has the potential to influence? The following subsections propose two specific characteristics.

1.1 A discrete body of knowledge

Theories of the construction of knowledge hold that social knowledge is not, in fact, the monochrome entity portrayed thus far, but that it is composed of a wide variety of layers and subsections. Two understandings are noteworthy. Berger and Luckmann (1966) identify two 'layers', the first constituting the ordinary, everyday knowledge that extends throughout a society and which is common to all its members (see also Heller, 1984). This is the knowledge that in many ways is 'nearest' and most accessible to people, as well as the most familiar. It underpins all other forms and provides them with a hermeneutical base. Alongside this everyday knowledge, however, are numerous 'sub-universes': smaller, often virtually self-contained bodies of more specialised knowledge that relate primarily to the different roles exercised by people within a society. Roles require linguistic articulation commensurate with the specific characteristics of each, something most obviously seen in jargon. Berger and Luckmann suggest that:

Sub-universes of meaning may be socially structured by various criteria—sex, age, occupation, religious inclination, aesthetic taste, and so on.

and that:

These result from accentuations of role specialization to the point where role-specific knowledge becomes altogether esoteric as against the common stock of knowledge. (1966:102)

They may become increasingly autonomous and independent from the surrounding body of social knowledge, and this is often associated with a tendency to identify the people who are 'in' the group and those who are 'outside' it. So techniques develop that help maintain the status quo, providing the means for the separation to be ever more distinct. Jargon, once again, fulfils this role by automatically rejecting those to whom it makes no sense.

Christianity can be considered a sub-universe within this scheme. This is the case at a number of levels. Clearly the body, or bodies of people who associate themselves with the religion are defined as 'Christians' as distinct from those who don't. At the same time, the boundaries are fuzzy, since Christian identity is an obscure concept that can refer simply to those born in a country where Christianity is the official state religion

as much as it can to those profoundly committed to its precepts. Commitment can also vary, ranging from those who attend church on a Sunday but have little else to do with the faith during the rest of the week, to those who aim to live a 'Christian' life on a day-to-day, hour-by-hour basis. For the former, their membership of the Christian sub-universe is likely to be somewhat peripheral and they take far more central positions in other sub-universes in other spheres of their lives, even those with somewhat contradictory norms to those of Christianity. More committed Christians may find that the majority of their lives is spent within the context of the Christian sub-universe, as they not only aim to live a particular type of life on an individual basis but they also take employment in an overtly and deliberately Christian environment where work colleagues all share the same outlook. At this point, the sub-universe almost takes the form of everyday social knowledge for the people who live within it, although sociologically they remain very much a minority group.

On a different level, the written and articulated Christian belief system also functions as a sub-universe. Here there is a defined body of literature, the combined total of which is understood as the foundations upon which Christianity is built. This corpus has as its core the bible and the set of doctrinal and creedal statements that express the basic tenets of the religion's beliefs. Once again, the boundaries blur as throughout history schisms occurred resulting from disagreements regarding the precise nature of that core as well as how it should be interpreted. At this point new sub-sub-universes are constructed, smaller groups again, all ostensibly under the Christian banner but defined according to theology, churchmanship, and other related dimensions.

The thesis proposes, nevertheless, that for its own purposes a basic core of Christian teaching exists which is expressed in certain key texts and expounded in a whole range of others, and that, despite significant variations in the way in which those texts are appropriated, those committed to the Christian faith are necessarily committed to that core in some way or another. Many would be familiar with the texts themselves, particularly the bible and central creedal confessional statements. Appointed authorities, in the form of clergy, Pope, trained leaders, church 'professionals' and theologians may also communicate and expound these central texts so that Christian adherents come to know their content even if unfamiliar with the primary source.

Once again, in a divided Church, fragmentation occurs at this level as individuals and groups pursue different foci and interpret the core according to their own purposes. Yet an engagement with the core is fundamental and is common to all.

The Christian sub-universe is a highly discrete sub-universe at this level. The core texts are defined. The Christian Patriarchs toiled long and hard to establish the biblical canon, determining which texts were 'in' and which 'out'; the views of individuals and groups were tested for heresy with the same aim in mind. Once established, the core has stood the test of time, remaining largely unchanged for almost two millennia. This is significant for the research, since the very fact that this Christian faith-content is set apart from surrounding bodies of knowledge means that it has characteristics peculiar to itself and that people's relationship with it is likely to have a particular form. The interest of the thesis is to identify that relationship. The hypothesis is based in part on the notion that faith-content has a status which subsequent sections link to authority, but in the present discussion on sub-universes and social knowledge relates to its discrete nature. Not only is it distinguishable on account of its content—significant in its own right for the arguments just presented—but it remains time-bound, set apart from the contemporary body of social knowledge. Here we may introduce the second understanding of the social construction of knowledge: Max Scheler's (1984 [1924]) view that some forms of knowledge alter faster than others, the fastest being technological knowledge. Jarvis, summarising Scheler's thesis, states:

[Scheler] called [technological knowledge] 'artificial' because it is a form of knowledge that does not persist over time, and he classified knowledge into seven types, based upon their degree of artificiality: myth and legend; knowledge implicit in the natural folk language; religious knowledge; basic types of mystical knowledge; philosophical-metaphysical knowledge; positive knowledge of mathematics, natural and cultural sciences; technological knowledge. (Jarvis, 1995:4)

It is not clear from Scheler's argument whether religious knowledge, 'moving' comparatively slowly in contrast to other forms, also struggles to be contemporary and up-to-date, but the implication is there. Particularly given the fixed dimensions of Christian faith-content, one is left with the impression of Christians having to reach

out and back in order to engage with the body of literature and teaching which they have appointed as authoritative. Hull (1991 [1985]) speaks of an 'ideological time-lag', to which the chapter returns at a later point. Here, the 'lag' appears to be more than purely ideological, incorporating issues pertaining to the very nature of knowledge.

The chapter suggests that the discrete nature of Christian faith-content as a sub-universe of social knowledge means that it has a particular form of authority that may well impinge upon the way in which Christians engage with it. That authority and hence potential is heightened, nevertheless, by further characteristics.

1.2 A propositional body of knowledge

A second way in which Christian faith-content can be seen to be authoritative is its highly propositional nature. Cantwell Smith observes:

In the Christian case, the role of belief has been quite major, at times decisive. Doctrine has been a central expression of faith, has seemed often a criterion of it; the community has divided over differences in belief, and has set forth belief as a formal qualification of membership. No other religious community on earth has done these things to the same degree; and some have not done them at all. ... The historical fact is that faith is expressed in a great variety of ways, and that in the Christian case one of the primary and basic expressions has been conceptually, in propositional doctrine; but in other traditions it has been expressed primarily and basically in other forms. (1979:13-14)

While Christians have begun to wrestle with the fact that it may be inappropriate to interpret apparently propositional statements *as* propositions (see Lindbeck, 1984 and Hull, 1991 [1985], for example), Hull's volume demonstrates how the Christian propositional belief system frequently functions as a deterrent to learning. He makes an important link with ideology, to which the discussion returns. In the first instance, however, it is clear that in their purest form, propositions are perceived by nature to carry a high degree of authority. Indeed, we might argue that as soon as they are seen as *symbolic* representations of a bigger, or as yet unidentifiable truth (interpretations suggested by Lindbeck and Hull), strictly speaking, they are no longer propositions.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (9th edition) offers the following amongst its list of definitions for the term:

Logic: a statement consisting of subject and predicate that is subject to proof or disproof.

Propositions by their very nature, therefore, carry notions of truth and falsehood. Not only so, but these qualities must be evidenced in some way.

It is the link with truth which makes propositions authoritative. As has been seen previously, 'truth' conveys value, and the thesis concurs with Perry's (1970) linkage of content with moral and ethical values. There is a direct line that connects notions of right and wrong with those of good and bad. Nevertheless, 'truth' as a concept is also associated with other authoritative factors. An important player is the role of objectivity. Humans have always distrusted what they perceived to be the totally subjective. With its link to the personal, subjectivity is too vulnerable to the vagaries of the less controllable aspects of human-ness, namely emotion and temperament. By implication, the subjective is also too 'near' individuals. This nearness renders the tasks of accurate analysis and genuine identification almost impossible to achieve with any degree of certainty. Although at times it is necessary to bring something close in order to examine a particular detail, in general terms it has to be held at a sufficient distance for it to be seen in its entirety. Only then can it be manoeuvred and turned so that each salient dimension can be scrutinised and identified, and its relationship to the whole understood. The distance at which something has to be held depends on the size and dimensions of the object in question; clearly also at some point if the object is at too great a distance it goes out of focus once again. However, the necessity for objectivity to require a distancing from individuals is clear.

A further dimension of the same question introduces the relationship between the subjective and individual versus the objective and publicly-recognised/recognisable. Objects gain credence and are considered 'real' and tangible if other people appear to perceive a phenomenon in the same way as oneself. This is the fine line between subjectivity and objectivity. Individuals are all ultimately bound within their own subjectivity, and can never be totally sure that their experience, especially their sensory experience, is the same as that of others. Nevertheless, one way of addressing

the issue is by developing ways of objectifying experience. A prime way in which this occurs is through language, and the ability to 'put something into words' (the 'into' taking a greater significance than is often recognised) enables all members of a society, culture, or linguistic network, to construct a common, objective reality. This was the thrust of Berger and Luckmann's afore-mentioned (1966) thesis.

Propositional statements such as are characteristic of the Christian belief system therefore carry a high degree of authority both on account of their perceived objectivity and of their link with 'truth'. These characteristics are intrinsically part of the Christian doctrinal belief system. Many also carry an additional dimension, however: one claimed by the propositions themselves.

1.3 A 'revealed' body of knowledge

The Christian doctrine of Revelation is undoubtedly the major extrinsic, or attributed form of authority linked to Christian faith-content. It is unnecessary to explore the intricacies of the doctrine itself. Briefly summarised, various sources of Christian faith are considered not only to reveal aspects of God himself but also to be divinely revealed. God himself is the author. Hence it is possible for humans to know the transcendent, and to some extent apprehend him (noting at this point Christianity's traditional male-centredness) through these media. The person of Jesus is of central importance, with the bible lying closely alongside, especially since this is an almost unique source of information about Jesus. Other sources of revelation are found in the created order itself, although this must be understood through the lens of Christian teachings, and in many of the Church's doctrines and creeds, especially when considered to have been composed under divine guidance. Revelation cannot be dissociated from other doctrines such as inspiration and infallibility, therefore. While the Church recognises four principal authorities on which its fundamental tenets stand—bible, reason, tradition, and experience (and hence appearing to incorporate all the major ways in which humans in general construct knowledge and form world-views)—the idea that these tenets are in some way divinely initiated and upheld endows them with a significance and importance that is also highly authoritative.

Since Christianity is such a highly propositional faith, the doctrine of Revelation necessarily links with questions of truth and falsehood, and we return to the discussion of section I.2. God himself is an/the Absolute of all Absolutes. He is the truth, and therefore his self-revelation also makes the truth known. A certain amount of work has nevertheless gone into exploring how people relate to this authoritative yet propositional source. George Lindbeck's (1984) consideration of the nature of doctrine in a postliberal age contributed much to the discussion. Lindbeck identified three ways in which Christian propositions functioned.

The currently most familiar theological theories of religion and doctrine can, for our purposes, be divided into three types. One of these emphasises the cognitive aspects of religion and stresses the way in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities. Religions are thus thought of as similar to philosophy or science as these were classically conceived. This was the approach of traditional orthodoxies (as well as of many heterodoxies), but it also has certain affinities to the outlook on religion adopted by much modern Anglo-American analytic philosophy with its preoccupation with the cognitive or informational meaningfulness of religious utterances. A second approach focuses on what I shall call in this book the 'experiential-expressive' dimension of religion, and it interprets doctrines as noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations. This approach highlights the resemblances of religions to aesthetic enterprises and is particularly congenial to the liberal theologies influenced by the Continental developments that began with Schleiermacher. A third approach, favoured especially by ecumenically inclined Roman Catholics, attempts to combine these two emphases. Both the cognitively propositional and the expressively symbolic dimensions and functions of religion and doctrine are viewed, at least in the case of Christianity, as religiously significant and valid. Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan have developed what are probably the currently most influential versions of this two-dimensional outlook. ... For a propositionalist, if a doctrine is once true, it is always true, and if it is once false, it is always false. .. For experiential-expressive symbolists, in contrast, religiously significant

meanings can vary while doctrines remain the same, and conversely, doctrines can alter without change of meaning. (1984:16)

Lindbeck's work is considered seminal, particularly on account of his understanding of religions as 'languages' for which doctrines provide the 'grammar'. Since each grammar belongs to its own language, the implication is that a particular set of doctrines is valid only for its own religious community. The doctrine of one group is not meant to provide meaning to other religious communities and cannot be expected to make statements at all about God in any absolute sense. Nonetheless, the Christian doctrinal 'grammar' continues to make truth and revelatory claims of and for itself. This, once again, sets it apart, especially for those who adhere to it, and gives it a particular authority which the chapter will go on to demonstrate can affect the learning process.

1.4 An ideological body of knowledge

If the classification of Christian faith-content as a sub-universe within the overall range of a culture's social knowledge can be accepted, then one of its defining characteristics that sets it apart from other sub-universes is that of an ideology. Paulo Freire's work was introduced in the Prologue as contributing to discussions pertaining to education and authority. One of his objections to what he called a 'banking' system of education was on account of its promulgation of a set of social norms and values that served the interests of one sector of society and oppressed another. This objection could well be expressed in terms of ideological oppression. Kress and Hodge (1979) point out how language is necessarily and implicitly ideological. Defining 'ideology' as 'a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view' and commenting that 'ideology is thus a subsuming category which includes sciences and metaphysics, as well as political ideologies of various kinds, without implying anything about their status and reliability as guides to reality', they go on to state:

Language is an instrument of control as well as of communication. Linguistic forms allow significance to be conveyed and to be distorted. In this way hearers can be both manipulated and informed, preferably manipulated while they suppose they are being informed. Language is ideological in another, more political, sense of that word: it involves systematic distortion in the

service of class interest. Yet the two kinds of ideology are not entirely distinct, in theory or in practice. Science is a systematisation from a point of view: so is a political ideology. Political ideology is liable to project fantasy versions of reality, but science deals in hypothetical constructs whose status is not always so very different. (1979:6)

Freire saw a vital dimension of the emancipation of the oppressed as their claiming reality through articulating it on their own terms and according to their own interpretations and perceptions. The challenges he threw were not lost on the Christian Church, which understood its own educational mission in precisely the terms he rejected: the continuation of a systematised and authenticated way of looking at the world that all too often served the interests of its powerful members.

The Christian belief system largely falls into the sociological category of an ideology. Eagleton, in his classic and thorough study of ideologies, identifies six ways in which the notion may be defined, suggesting that these represent a 'progressive sharpening of focus'. These are:

- a) 'The general material process of production of ideas, beliefs and values in social life.' Any pejorative or value-laden implications are removed, and although Eagleton is at pains to differentiate between ideology and culture, the two are closely linked in referring to the way people 'live' their social practices. 'This most general of all meanings of ideology stresses the social determination of thought, thus providing a valuable antidote to idealism.'
- b) A concept very similar to 'world-view'. The ideas and beliefs representing the 'conditions and life experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class.' World-view and ideology might be distinguished, nevertheless, by the fact that the former generally refers to 'fundamental matters such as the meaning of death or humanity's place in the universe, whereas ideology might extend to such issues as which colour to paint the mail-boxes.'
- c) The way in which the interests of various social groups are promoted and legitimated, especially in the face of opposition. In this sense, tension is an inherent ingredient as 'self-promoting social powers conflict and collide over questions central to the reproduction of social power as a whole.'

- d) 'Ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate the interests of a ruling group or class specifically by distortion and dissimulation.'
 - e) False and deceptive beliefs are not associated to a dominant class, but are seen to be integral to 'the material structure of society as a whole. The term ideology remains pejorative, but a class-genetic account of it is avoided.'
- (Eagleton, 1991:28-31)

Clearly, the 'sharpening of focus' is at least in part accompanied by increasing degrees of power, authority, control and a sense of pejorative-ness. Certain common factors also run throughout. Ideologies are concerned with ideas and beliefs, their truthfulness and falsity, and the way in which these are communicated. They are also linked to groups, whether majority or minority. John Hull (1991 [1985]) picks up a number of these features, drawing a link between ideology and authority, and suggesting that the Christian ideology provides an authoritative interpretation for experience, connecting this interpretation, over time, with truth. He quickly refers to Christianity as being a 'belief system' and points out that this has been important, particularly to Protestants whose (alleged) 'fear of uniformity' and need to be right (common to all people) has created an 'ideological enclosure'. This is characterised by a clear disbelief system that accompanies its affirmative corollary.

Ideological authority therefore incorporates some of the dimensions identified in the previous section. While an ideological concern for truth is more pragmatic and socially functional in nature than it is philosophical, the need to be 'right' continues to feature, this time in a social rather than individual context. This opens the door for a range of repercussions. Pressure to conform, not simply in behaviour but also in beliefs and attitudes, is commonplace, recalling Fowler's description of those at his Stage 3.

Stage 3... structures the ultimate environment in interpersonal terms. ... It is a "conformist" stage in the sense that it is acutely tuned to the expectations and judgments of significant others and as yet does not have a sure enough grasp on its own identity and autonomous judgment to construct and maintain an independent perspective. ... At Stage 3 a person has an "ideology," a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs, but he or she has not

objectified it for examination and in a sense is unaware of having it.

(1981:172-73)

The previous section commented on how authority can be attributed and perceived as well as intrinsically present. This is relevant to the present discussion, as it is to any which looks at the relationship between people and their external environment and social context. Ideological authority pertains as much to the hermeneutical side of constructing knowledge as it does the epistemological. So individuals belonging to an ideological community turn to the hermeneutical framework of that community in order to interpret their experience and give it meaning. The nature of its authority and influence therefore has a different flavour: options are restricted, and those available are endorsed as the only truly bona fide possibilities. Correspondingly, the emotional pressure that characterises much non-ideological epistemological reasoning is lessened. People make autonomous choices, freed from the affective considerations implied in Perry's study, simply because all the options come with a stamp of approval.

Hull (1991 [1985]) provides a thorough exploration of the implications of the Christian ideological framework for the consequent learning of its adherents. This, together with other ways in which the various authorities outlined in this section play their part in Christian learning, is taken up later in this chapter. However, the discussion of this section has demonstrated not only how ideologies *per se* exert an authority, but how ideological characteristics, when attached to propositions, heighten the authoritativeness of those propositions. Their 'truth' becomes even weightier, bolstered by the values and associations of the ideological framework and community. This applies on a macro level to the overall propositional belief system, and on a micro level to individual and personal propositions and belief statements. One of the results of this is that both the system and its propositions become even more self-contained and discrete, separate from the body of knowledge which surrounds them. This discreteness then becomes one last way in which authority is exerted and which is of relevance to the thesis, since it means that people are able to identify what is 'Christian' and what isn't and make corresponding commitments and decisions. A framework of inclusivity and exclusivity is constructed, the one trustworthy and worthy of people's devotion; the other to be rejected as a negative corollary.

II. The impact of authoritative social knowledge on learning

One of the significant aspects of social knowledge for the purposes of the thesis is that it is external to people. By juxtaposing it against personal knowledge as Kolb (1984, above) does, an inner/outer relationship is put in place. This relationship is held in a balanced tension, rather like a seesaw, and the balance in any learning situation can be weighted towards either end, or more evenly distributed between the two poles. More generally, returning to Fowler and Perry and the discussion of the Prologue, the balance represents where the greatest authority is placed and exercised, and the major transition point identified by both men conveys the sense of the seesaw tipping slightly from being weighted toward the external to being weighted toward the internal. The next chapter argues that this balance is best investigated through the concept of internalisation, and the impact that a heavy external authority might have on the process. Since Jarvis's model presented in Chapter One took a horizontal approach, its time-centred emphasis was itself 'weighted' toward a focus on quantitatively defined learning outcomes and the different components which contributed to their construction. The discussion suggested that his model was less able to incorporate the vertical process of internalisation and hence it is difficult at this point to suggest specific theoretical ways in which that process may be affected by an external authority. This is the purpose of Chapters Three, Four and Five.

One aspect of the learning process as outlined by Jarvis can be shown to be susceptible to influence, however.

II.1 A fourfold configuration

While Jarvis suggests that people and their biographies, the social situation, and experience itself are the key players in initiating learning, the two former elements may appropriately be reconceptualised to take into account the 'how' rather than the 'what' of learning. People bring their biographies and their selves, that individuation of consciousness, and when making sense of an unfamiliar situation it is essentially the latter which initiates learning as people begin to reflect on what is going on. The social situation is essentially that body of external social knowledge which represents

constructed reality. A common configuration of learning is therefore triadic, with a cyclical interaction between these three components, as depicted in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Interacting components of experiential learning

The discussion of Chapter One suggested that since people also bring their conscious selves to every learning situation, this necessarily involves some form of reflection and hence indicates a need to re-think the placing and role of Jarvis's box 8, 'reflection/thought': something apparent in his own most recent revision (2004). It is also possible that the ensuing patterns of reasoning are affected according to the configuration of the components, something looked at in the next section.

When considering the effect of Christian faith-content, however, as a distinct, discrete and alternative form of social knowledge, it would appear that the umbrella 'social knowledge' subdivides into two. Two alternative referents for the interpretations of an experience are available, especially if and when this occurs outside a specifically Christian social context. By subdividing social knowledge in this way, a fourfold rather than threefold configuration is constructed, with a corresponding greater range of possible forms of interaction. The precise details are difficult to anticipate. (This was an area which the empirical data was able to clarify.) Yet the potential is there.

II.2 Patterns of reasoning

A second way in which faith content may influence the specific interaction between people and social knowledge is identifiable in people's patterns of reasoning, especially if it is possible to speak of 'everyday' forms of reasoning in the same way as Heller (1984) speaks of everyday knowledge. There seems to be some indication that this might be the case in certain instances. Donald Schön, for example, explores the concept and function of the model of Technical Rationality. Citing Glazer, he comments that:

The major professions are "disciplined by an unambiguous end—health, success in litigation, profit—which settles men's minds," and they operate in stable institutional contexts. Hence they are grounded in systematic, fundamental knowledge, of which scientific knowledge is the prototype, or else they have a "high component of strictly technological knowledge based on science in the education which they provide." In contrast, the minor professions suffer from shifting, ambiguous ends and from unstable institutional contexts of practice, and are *therefore* unable to develop a base of systematic, scientific professional knowledge. ... The systematic knowledge base of a profession is thought to have four essential properties. It is specialized, firmly bounded, scientific, and standardized. (Schön, 1991 [1983]:23; italics in original)

Schön's particular interest is in practical and professional knowledge which he then takes forward into a thorough examination of reflection-in-action. This is picked up again in Chapter Four. For the discussion at hand, the points of interest in his comments above lie in his emphasis on the systematic and standardised dimension of knowledge. Schön goes on to observe:

The concept of "application" leads to a view of professional knowledge as a hierarchy in which "general principles" occupy the highest level and "concrete problem solving" the lowest. (1991:24)

From all of the above, it is possible to deduce that there are normal and accepted ways in which people engage with an established body of (social) knowledge, and these ways are characterised by general principles, codes of practice, and forms of logic. In the professional context that Schön is engaging with, with his particular interest in the

reflective *practitioner*, he focuses on 'professional' types of knowledge: what Berger and Luckmann (1966) might have designated 'sub-universes', particularly in view of their association of sub-universes with role. In a wider, more general context, it is probable that different philosophical eras tend to govern the forms of logic and reason that characterise people's engagement with the social world. So modernism, post-modernism, and other social philosophies, each provide a basis for understanding the world, and this basis has its own structural foundations and premises. Technical Rationality therefore fits as an epistemological sub-universe within the wider 'everyday knowledge' universe which provides it with some, but not all, of its epistemological tenets.

It is suggested that Christian faith-content has the potential to function as an epistemological sub-universe, but with a less stable basis than Glazer's Technical Rationality. While it is possible (although questionable) that an established way of engaging with it might exist, and that this might be characterised by a set of general principles that govern its logic and interpretation, evidence would suggest this is more akin to the 'shifting, ambiguous, unstable' patterns of reasoning typical of Glazer's 'minor professions'. Individuals, denominations, churches, each have a form of reasoning which fits with their own emphases and preferences, be these theologically rooted or other. Unlike Berger and Luckmann's sub-universe, however, which is very much connected to role and therefore often operates 'singularly', people performing one principal role at a time, in the case of people engaging with Christian faith content, they have not only the choice about whether to interpret their experience using this faith-content or not, about the form of reasoning to use if they do, and about how this might interact—or not—with the reasoning of the surrounding social epistemology. This is the basic outworking of the fourfold configuration outlined in section II.1 and hence a second theoretical way in which people's faith-content might influence their learning is identified.

Thus far, the discussion has centred primarily on social knowledge and its specific attributes, identifying authoritative characteristics pertaining to Christian faith-content. John Hull's study of what prevents Christian adults from learning turns to the Christian ideology in more general terms, considering it largely from the perspective

of Eagleton's categories (a) and (b) (above, section I.4). He suggests a number of reasons why and ways in which the process of Christian learning is often inhibited and adversely affected on account of Christianity's ideological characteristics. His thesis is of immediate relevance to the interests of this research, and the next section explores his position in depth.

III. What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?

John Hull's volume *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (1991 [1985]) has become an important text in the body of literature within the discipline of Christian Education. At first sight, his concerns appear somewhat tangential to the interest of the thesis, with its concern not on how people *don't* learn, but on how they *do*. Nevertheless, the one is the negative corollary of the other, both functioning as two sides of the same coin, and Hull's study offers insights which are important and relevant. Theorists of learning also highlight the fact that non-learning must be included alongside the process of learning (see Jarvis, 1995, 2001). This section firstly outlines the essential features of Hull's thesis, and then moves to analyse these from the perspective of the processes of learning *per se*.

Hull identifies three main (overlapping) ways in which the Christian ideology affects the behaviour and attitudes of its adherents. Fundamental to his thesis is the notion of 'ideological closure' and a consequent 'ideological time-lag'. He suggests that the former is a characteristic of many ideological systems such as Christianity on account of the presence of a hermeneutical circle, which means that 'ideologies (systems of interpretation and of meaning) always interpret themselves by reference to themselves' (1991 [1985]:80). Thus they often fail to allow either a critical self-awareness and a realistic engagement with other surrounding ideologies, belief systems and world-views. Other characteristics were identified in section I.4 (above). Ideologies therefore necessarily narrow the hermeneutical field available to people, as well as constructing a boundary around it.

Ideological closure may result in an ideological time-lag:

We must never forget that for many Christians their experience of growing up in faith is profoundly influenced by what we have called the ideological time-lag. This means that the Christian faith into which they were nurtured was always lagging behind realistic adjustment to the world as it has come to be today. Many Christian children are brought up within a sort of ideological enclave. The absence of an element of criticism from most programmes of Christian education in the early years means that the child or young person comes face to face with reality with a sudden jolt at a later point. (1991 [1985]:113)

Linked to this is what Hull calls 'sedimentation'. Layer upon layer of similar interpretation forms within the consciousness of a group, creating a form of 'inertia' as well as a resistance towards the new, unfamiliar and novel. The sedimented layers also provide an authoritative way of interpreting new experiences. Discussing the relationship between experience and authority, Hull comments:

Although the life of ideological groups is experiential in the general sense that it is built up by an interpretation of experience and is sedimented by experience upon experience continuously interpreted and re-interpreted in this manner, nevertheless the life of these groups is authoritative rather than experiential. The authority will justify the ideology, and the ideology must now also include elements which will justify the place given within it to the authority. Without such authority social groups would disintegrate, they would no longer be historically significant. (1991 [1985]:69)

Secondly, Hull identifies a concentration upon the past. While he recognises that ideologies may have a future orientation also (a Marxist utopia, for example, or Christian eschatology), he considers that a key characteristic is the tendency for social groups to understand themselves in relation to the event (and figure) which founded them. 'The role of the ideology is to diffuse the convictions of the founding fathers and to perpetuate the influence of their actions' (1991 [1985]:64). He then speaks of a 'domestication by memory'. 'An ideology is a way of selecting from the past certain elements which are to be valued because of the impetus and coherence they give to current action.' So 'the free-ranging and uninformed catalogue of past events is shaped in the memory by the ideology into a coherent pattern of interpreted meaning'.

A third potential characteristic of the Christian ideology is its tendency to exert a totalitarian grip over its adherents, which is threatened by other (generally religious) ideologies, each making similar totalitarian claims. Hull contends that the result will be a 'controversy about 'relativity'', linking this to assumptions of absoluteness. He rejects the latter on the grounds that 'to be absolute is to be unrelated. The things in this world must be related, and that goes for the religions of humanity just as for the planets in the solar system'. (1991 [1985]:26) Nevertheless, Christians often retreat behind walls of supposed absoluteness. Hull links the 'outer' plurality with an 'inner' pluralisation of consciousness: 'We are not so much unified persons facing many realities as disunified persons containing many realities' (1991 [1985]:27).

From these premises and others drawn from the psychology of belief, Hull is able to draw conclusions (followed by remedial suggestions) about how and why adult Christians are prevented from learning. Central to his thesis is the notion of cognitive dissonance and the discomfort Christians experience resulting from the combination of the ideological framework and their psychological belief system. Difficulties from the former arise in three main ways: within the belief system itself when it becomes apparent that it is not self-consistent; between one belief system and another when suddenly they both seem equally plausible or people meet equally convinced adherents of another religion; and if (when) people's own deeply-held beliefs are regarded as being childish or unimportant by those around or by society in general. Difficulties from the latter result from people's psychological 'need to be right' and of the 'pain of learning' which Hull suggests is characteristic not only of Christians but of human beings in general. The experience of disjuncture may be painful—indeed, Hull's position would suggest disjuncture automatically involves 'pain', something this thesis would contest—and hence learning *per se* may also be painful. The pain, according to Hull, is far more extensive, however, than simply that of disjuncture, and he relates it to more far-reaching aspects of the learning process than the initial experience. *Reflection* is an 'experience' which may be painful, for example, and Christians may well resort to thought-stopping techniques.

Certain Christians abandon or suppress all reflection (whether critical or otherwise) about their beliefs, surrendering themselves to a sense of relief by

not engaging these particular intellectual gears. (Astley, 1994:101, summarising Hull)

It is impossible to determine whether such techniques are solely characteristic of Christians, of religious people, or of everyone in general, and thus no significant light is shed upon the research question with which the thesis is concerned. (At a later point, Hull makes it clear that for him, ideologies are a universal human construction and no one operates outside their influence. We can surmise, therefore, that thought-stopping is likely to be characteristic of all people. It may nevertheless be *more* characteristic of Christians and/or religious adherents than of others.)

Together with thought-stopping techniques, Hull names two further major ways in which Christian 'discomfort' may be alleviated. The first is separation from the external causes. This may be either physical, social, or inward. So people may remove themselves geographically from a source of dissonance, or alternatively build protective walls round their 'city'; they may restrict their social relationships to those of their group; or they may 'simply not notice the opinions and beliefs of others; [they] will simply not hear the discordant voices' (1991 [1985]:117). Secondly, Hull speaks of 'ideological hardening'. 'The believer is drilled or schooled in the tenets of his faith' (1991 [1985]:125). This, at worst, gradually eliminates individuals' ability to think for themselves. At best, questions will be 'revisionary or applicatory, but not exploratory, comparative or critical'. 'The adult believer remains passive, finding out, but not contributing creatively to what there is to find out' (1985:126). So an 'us and them' division is created, which Hull describes as an 'ideological compensation'. The group becomes the authoritative source of truth, saved and defending itself (successfully) from the wiles of the enemy.

Hull considers that these three techniques are extreme, and not representative of the majority of church affiliation in contemporary Britain. (Astley's view that 'it is not the task of *every Christian* to reinterpret the faith for each generation, or even for themselves. To begin with, many people are simply incapable of that...' [1994:103; italics in original] should nevertheless be borne in mind.) He then composes a list of less draconian measures that he suggests *are* characteristic of British Christians.

These range from vagueness (avoidance of specific belief, tendency towards lack of clarity), to piety ('God knows, we don't need to'), authoritarianism ('the minister/bible knows, and we shouldn't/mustn't question'), objectification (refusing to engage with the bible or theology at a personal or internalised level, keeping them at arm's length), to an overall spiritual passivity that means Christians renege on their personal responsibilities, allowing themselves to be 'led in prayer', 'blessed' and generally have their spiritual batteries recharged simply by attending a worship service.

Both Hull himself, and Astley who engages in depth with Hull's work in a number of studies (1994, 2000, *inter alia*) emphasise the importance of critical reflection in the process of Christian learning. At this point, the line between studying formative Christian education as distinct from the way that Christians learn becomes blurred. Astley distinguishes between formative (Christian) education and critical (Christian) education by suggesting that the former 'concentrates on [the] role of passing on the church's values, beliefs and ways—in a word, its 'culture'.

This process is often described as some form of cultural formation:

'enculturation' (learning a culture by being brought up in it), 'acculturation' (the additional learning of a new, 'second' culture), 'assimilation' (the learning of a new culture with a loss of one's original culture) or 'biculturalisation' (the blending of two cultures).

The latter 'encourages a reflective analysis and evaluation of the church's claims, in the light of the learner's own experience and understanding'.

Critical Christian education is primarily evaluative of the church's self-understanding, and therefore in principle less conservatively 'traditional' than formation, when formation is seen simply as passing on a received tradition.

This 'Christian criticism' embraces what has been described as the 'deconstruction' of the tradition. (Astley, 2000:38)

The majority of Hull's categories outlined above represent thought-stopping techniques, which themselves are indicative of no, or minimal, reflection. In many senses, this is a third (and least desirable) alternative to the formative/critical education partnership, since in each of these at least some reflection takes place. Hull connects people's resort to thought-stopping techniques with a variety of fears,

appropriating them hence to an affective response or reaction. This rings true, and the demonstration throughout his volume of how cognitive and affective walk hand in hand is important to the overall discussion of the thesis. Apparently ignorant of Perry's (1970) study, Hull nevertheless takes the latter's identification of escape and retreat from learning one step further. For Perry, these were apparently direct responses to a challenge of relativism. They were nonetheless equally affective, often themselves based on fear, anxiety and insecurity. There were few implications in Perry's scheme that escape and retreat also involved a ceasing of reflection. Indeed, Perry suggested a number of ways in which people in these 'bubbles' actively continued to reflect as they had previously done, using this as a defensive mechanism against the perceived outside pressures to change. Hull, however, suggests a capacity that people have to put reflection and thought on hold. The source of fear is different from that of Perry's interviewees. Hull's reasoning suggests that an ideological influence causes people to retreat to the safety of their ideological enclosure on account of differences of content: matters of right and wrong.

Hull makes no attempt to relate his theories, and in particular his conclusions, to educational scholarship. However, certain dimensions can usefully be compared, contrasted and critiqued with Jarvis's model and typology in order to consider their 'place'. Two immediate observations come to the fore. Firstly, a general unease with the notion of non-learning *per se* has been expressed. Both in the Prologue and in Chapter One, indications were given that this should be viewed as a misnomer or even a misconception. While Jarvis, like Hull, associates non-learning with lack of reflection, the two challenges to this position emerge from the unrepeatability of an experience, since biography and situation will necessarily be different, and the notion that people can genuinely cease to reflect to the point that no learning occurs. For Marton and Booth (1997), for example, human consciousness implies thought and reflection, and while the previous chapter argued for understandings of each term to be more clearly defined, it is possible that they largely signify an increasing degree of focus and structure. Unconscious learning would appear not to be an option. So for both Jarvis and Hull, the question becomes a) the length of time that something is focused on, and the corresponding level of consciousness (Jarvis), and b) the focus and structure of thought (Hull). Rather than thought-stopping, therefore, Hull's

understanding of non-learning is more appropriately viewed as a diminution of perceptive, focused and structured thought. A descent into muddled disorganisation, probably involving a positioning of the issue at a lower level of consciousness, with little or no attempt to impose structure.

This proposal, however, ignores one of the strengths of Hull's thesis: the role of emotion in learning. Is it not possible that people impose an emotional barrier that prevents them from engaging with an experience, and hence to say that they don't learn? This would cohere with Jarvis's older—or not so old—learner who rejects the opportunity to adjust to the modern world. The question presupposes, however, that emotion can prevent thought! Certainly it can prevent *focused* thought. Jarvis's emphasis on different levels of consciousness suggests that thought—maybe uncontrolled and subconscious—can continue even if it has been emotionally blocked at the more focused level. The experience of many is that after a period of time, the original issues resurface, often taking new perspectives and suggesting in so doing that all thought has not stopped.

Chapter Nine introduces the idea of primary and secondary learning which begins to grapple with some of these issues. What is significant from the discussion of this section, however, is Hull's demonstration that the authoritative dimensions embedded within the Christian ideology often affect, influence, divert, or even impede individual learning processes. This is both at an intellectual and at an emotional level, and may pertain as much to the quality of learning as it does the quantity. 'Prevention' of learning, however, is almost certainly not the case.

V. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated a variety of ways in which it considers people's learning might be influenced as a result of the authoritative dimensions of the Christian ideology and its faith-content. Focusing on both aspects, the authority of the latter was shown primarily to relate to the process of internalisation, and hence deferred for discussion. Nonetheless, the discrete characteristic of the Christian sub-universe and its associated bank of social knowledge suggested that the common

triadic configuration of players within the learning process—individuals, the social situation with its referent of social knowledge, and experience—could potentially function as a foursome, two alternative areas of social knowledge becoming available by which to interpret the experience. Equally, the patterns of reasoning employed may be affected by this configuration, since people have the option of deviating from that commonly associated with the construction of everyday knowledge. The authority of the former, Christian ideology, was considered with reference to Hull's *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (1991 [1985]). Here, the links between thought, reflection, emotion and learning suggested that, while 'prevention' was an inappropriate way of interpreting the impact of the ideological authority on learning, it had an effect on the quality of thought and reflection, as well as heightening people's emotional responses.

The discussion has served two purposes, therefore. Firstly, it has established both the fact that people's external faith-content has a variety of authoritative dimensions; and secondly, it has demonstrated ways in which this and the accompanying ideological framework might influence the processes of learning, hence confirming via theoretical means the research hypothesis. Since the analysis of learning was based primarily on Jarvis's model and typology, little attention was paid to the process of internalisation, although the chapter indicated that certainly the authoritative characteristics of external faith-content suggested that this was another area of learning susceptible to influence.

This is the focus of the next two chapters.

Chapter Three

Internalisation, and the construction of the person

Introduction

Having ascertained in Chapter Two the appropriateness of viewing Christian faith-content as a) a form of external social knowledge, which b) carries particularly authoritative characteristics, this chapter turns to the concept of internalisation, reasoning that both features are likely to affect the way in which this occurs and hence exert an influence. This is particularly the case if social knowledge is located externally to people, since the inner/outer balance identified by Belenky *et al.* (1996 [1986]; see Prologue, section II) will be weighted toward the external. Within the overall context of the social construction of individuals, this chapter focuses on the processes of internalisation and externalisation in learning, exploring firstly the very concept of an inner and an outer in this context. Two specific results of internalisation are then considered, people's biographies, and their selves, and a variety of ways in which Christian faith-content may affect the process that contributes to their construction is demonstrated. Lastly, the chapter turns to the development of the self, turning to the metaphor of voice to demonstrate both how the self grows and develops and how this too is vulnerable to the influence of external authority. Through each of these studies, the validity of the research hypothesis is confirmed in theory, and areas to be explored in the empirical investigation identified.

I. The social construction of individuals and the processes of internalisation and externalisation

Fundamental to the discussion of the chapter is the assumption that people construct themselves as a result of transforming experience into a variety of learning outcomes. This relates not only to Jarvis's definition of learning introduced in Chapter One, but also to the notions of social and personal knowledge. Fundamental to those are the understanding that the latter is external to the 'inner' person. Such an understanding is

not universally accepted, however, and the purpose of this first section is to consider the different perspectives, in order to arrive at a conclusion on which the subsequent discussions can be based.

Despite the fact that Chapter One mildly criticised Jarvis's model for not doing sufficient justice to the process of internalisation, the cycle of internalisation and externalisation nonetheless plays an important role in his thinking and theorising about learning in general. There is a clear divide between people and their external world, and it is the transaction between the two that firstly causes experience, secondly permits its interpretation by providing it with a social referent, and thirdly occasions learning and growth in people as they transform and appropriate it within their lives. The cycle of internalisation and externalisation was introduced previously, with Jarvis's diagram of the process depicted in Figure 1.3. People's external 'objectified culture' is largely represented by the language that they use to construct it, since a significant degree of externalisation takes place linguistically, be that expressed orally or via gesture. Chapter Five returns to this model when discussing the relationship it argues people have with knowledge. For the purposes at hand, however, a clear distinction between the external and internal is understood. People are distinct from their environment. Learning takes place as they experience, transform and appropriate it within themselves. They articulate the result of their learning in their consequent interaction with the external environment, something which takes place primarily, although not exclusively, linguistically.

This understanding of people in relation with their environment provides the basis for Jarvis's constructivist model of the processes of learning outlined previously. While the discussion of the chapter finally accepts this overall configuration, it is nevertheless important to note that it is not a universally-accepted understanding of the world and people's relationship with it. A particularly relevant challenge since it emanates from the study of learning is Marton and Booth's volume *Learning and Awareness* (1997) in which the scholars challenge the view that people 'construct' their knowledge, preferring instead the term 'constitute'. They make their unease about the principles of social constructivism clear from the outset of their work, stating in the first chapter:

Individual constructivism is a form of cognitivism in the sense that it regards the outer (acts, behaviour) as being in need of exploration and the inner (mental acts) as explanatory, whereas, as we have pointed out, the reverse is true for *social constructivism*. The two schools are thus mirror images of each other, their focuses being on different sides of the borderline between “the inner” and “the outer.” They share the shortcoming of lacking explanatory power with respect to what they claim to account for because they share the separation between “the inner” and “the outer.” In order to combine the insights originating from these two camps that relate to our question “How do we gain knowledge about the world?” one has to transcend the person-world dualism imposed by their respective focus on what is within the person and what surrounds her. One should not, and we do not, consider person and world as being separate. One should not resort to hypothetical mental structures divorced from the world, and we have no intention of doing so. Nor should one resort to the social, cultural world as seen by the researcher only. People live in a world which they—and not only the researchers—experience. They are affected by what affects *them*, and not by what affects the researchers. What this boils down to—as far as learning of the kind to be dealt with in this book is concerned—is taking the experiences of people seriously and exploring the physical, the social, and the cultural world they experience. The world we deal with is the world as experienced by people, by learners—neither individual constructions nor independent realities; the people, the learners, we deal with are people experiencing aspects of that world—neither bearers of mental structures nor behaviourist actors. Thus in this book the dividing line between “the outer” and “the inner” disappears. There are not two things, and one is not held to explain the other. There is not a real world “out there” and a subjective world “in here.” The world is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is *constituted* as an internal relation between them. There is only one world, but it is a world that we experience, a world in which we live, a world that is ours. (Marton and Booth, 1997:12-13; italics in original)

Marton and Booth attempt to reconceptualise the relationship traditionally expressed as existing between learner and environment by focusing on the content of people's experience, as distinct from the event, as emphasised by Jarvis. It should be noted that their argument is rooted in a general discussion of how people know and what the nature of knowledge is. It is their understanding of this which leads them to challenge the inner/outer dichotomy. In many ways, therefore, their position contrasts against the approach of others in that it is fundamentally learner-centric. Rather than look at the world and understand people as participants in a world that is 'bigger' than them, they place the emphasis on learners and draw conclusions about how they and the world relate, contending that in so doing they solve Meno's paradox: the conundrum of how people gain knowledge when (a) either it cannot be found because they are unequipped to find it (otherwise it would already have been found), or (b) the seeker already has it, in which case it does not need to be sought (Marton and Booth, 1997:137). For the authors, the solution to this paradox 'lies in not making the distinction between inner and outer ..., not seeing the knower and the known, the subject and the object, as separate' (1997:138). If this approach is taken, then 'knowledge is [seen to be] born by a change in something in the world as experienced by a person. The new way of experiencing something is constituted in the person-world relationships and involves both.'

In this way Meno's paradox disappears. We simply do not ask the question: "How do we gain knowledge *from* the world?" Nor do we ask the question: "How do we gain knowledge from the depth of our immortal soul?" Person and world, inner and outer are not separated. We do not have to account for how knowledge travels from one to the other. Instead of trying to account for the person-world relationship is established, we posit this relationship and study how it changes as time passes' (1997:139)

The authors' position is interesting, but, the thesis suggests (and will go on to demonstrate), less revolutionary than they imply. Certainly regarding scholarship of learning, if one digs deep, little appears to have changed in reality. Marton and Booth continue to talk in terms which accept a distinction between 'individuals' and 'world'. If the two were genuinely merged, then this distinction would be impossible to maintain. Similarly, their reference to people 'gaining knowledge' 'about something specific' suggests at least a distinction between people and knowledge, and since

learning involves 'gaining', then it is a quantifiable increase that occurs as a result of engagement with the external. It would seem that at heart, these scholars may have revealed more about the inappropriateness of the philosophy behind Meno's paradox than they have about the true nature of the person-world relationship. The thesis returns to this at a later point.

Despite these objections, one valuable contribution Marton and Booth do make to the study of learning regards the role of awareness. This, for them, is the locus where individual and world connect; this is where learning takes place. The thesis recognises the influence of their thinking in its own formulation of how learning and experience relate, and while an entirely learner-centric understanding appears at this stage of the discussion difficult to substantiate, the problems associated with Jarvis's time-centric approach should not be forgotten. Neither one nor the other is yet able to present an entirely coherent portrayal of the process. Nevertheless, any study of learning must ultimately concentrate on the individual, and in this context it is apposite to refer to Belenky *et al.*'s (1996 [1986]) category of Constructed knowers who displayed many of the attributes that Marton and Booth promote.

Constructivists seek to stretch the outer boundaries of their consciousness—by making the unconscious conscious, by consulting and listening to the self, by voicing the unsaid, by listening to others and staying alert to all the currents and undercurrents of life about them, by imagining themselves inside the new poem or person or idea that they want to come to know and understand.

Constructivists become passionate knowers, knowers who enter into a union with that which is to be known. ... What we are calling passionate knowing is the elaborated form connected knowing takes after women learn to use the self as an instrument of understanding. (1996 [1986]:141)

Here we have an example of a type of 'merger' between individual and world, a union in which the two not only interact, but begin to fuse in the area of conscious awareness. Yet for Belenky *et al.*, this also involves the affective domain, not simply the cognitive. Important dimensions relating to the overall interests of the thesis are being raised at this point, and the discussion returns to them throughout. A significant pointer for the issue at hand, however, is the authors' use of the word 'enter' when describing the suggested union between people and knowledge. This suggests an

initial separation which people themselves take the initiative to dissolve. Prior to this, however, two distinct entities exist.

Clearly this is an area in need of continued discussion and investigation. The major players appear to be organised in different layers, perhaps most effectively depicted diagrammatically as in Figure 3.2. 'Human consciousness and awareness'—which should not exclude emotion—is placed at the centre of a structure which might almost take the form of an egg-timer, emphasising the fact that this is the pivotal point between the elements on either side.

Figure 3.2: People, experience and reality

The model does not, in fact, negate the idea of a process of internalisation and externalisation taking place through learning, nor does it reject the concept of the existence of an external and internal. Much depends on where one sees the pivot between the two. For Marton and Booth this is in the cognitive domain of conscious awareness. Nothing in Jarvis’s work disallows or rejects this; his emphasis, however, is on the sociological construction of people’s biographies, focusing hence on the constructed outcome rather than on cognitive activity. The two are complementary, and both must contribute to an overall understanding of the growth and development of individuals.

This section therefore considers that the idea of a dual process of internalisation and externalisation linking aspects of people's beings to an external environment can be upheld. While both 'inner' and 'outer' are somewhat nebulous concepts, from the perspective of experiential learning, experience itself marks the separation between the two. Human conscious awareness is almost certainly a pivotal area of overlap representing the zone where the two begin to merge. In one way this contrasts against biography which may be viewed as an outcome of internalisation rather than a stage of its process. In another, however, as will be seen, human conscious awareness also has a constructed dimension and as such fits within the overall concept of biography. Nonetheless, if a specific relationship between inner and outer can be maintained as the discussion suggests, then the potential for a weighty external authority to exert a particular influence on both the process of internalisation and on its outcomes is clear. For the purposes of the research, this took the form of Christian faith. The next section focuses on people's biographies and demonstrates ways in which this influence might be exerted.

II. The construction of a biography

The concept of 'biography' is one introduced by Jarvis (1995) as he seeks to understand the result of the experience of disjuncture in terms of learning and its relationship to people themselves. Thus if learning is a question of transforming experience into knowledge and other 'outcomes', people are seen as gradually building a cumulative and increasingly complex store of these outcomes, which together form their biography. Jarvis associates biography with mind, stating that:

People's minds—their biographies—are the sum total of their learning within social situations. (1992:41)

Mind is therefore the constructed result of learning, the 'place' where its cognitive outcomes, at least, are stored, and which governs subsequent transformation of experience. Jarvis emphasises the fact that people bring their biographies to each and every new learning experience, and they resort to these when faced with the unpleasantness of disjuncture, interpreting and making sense of the unfamiliar with reference to what has gone before. Hence two referent banks are brought to each experience: people's individual biographies, and the social situation in which the

experience occurred. Given the cumulative nature of a biography, people therefore become increasingly 'individual' throughout their lives, as each experience brings a unique combination of referents which results in a conclusion and outcome unique to the person concerned. One of the important functions of social knowledge, however, is to provide a public and commonly-accepted bank of interpreted information. This ensures that a reasonable cohesiveness is maintained at a social level even when individuals themselves might differ significantly.

For the purposes of the research, however, it is not the concept itself which is the focus of attention, but the processes which contribute to its construction. If, as section I argued, it is legitimate to view this construction as a result of internalisation, then it is necessary to consider how this occurs and what the outcomes might be. Two aspects are explored: the existential, followed by the psychological dimensions of personhood.

II.1 People, knowledge and knowing

One of the problems of viewing people's biographies as the sum of their knowledge, as Jarvis's quote cited above suggests, is the impression conveyed of finite, quantitatively-defined beings. This relates to his emphasis of understanding experience through the lens of time, and although his definition of learning quoted in Chapter One suggests that 'knowledge' should be seen as an umbrella term incorporating all the various outcomes of the transformation of experience, 'information' replacing its conventional use, this section argues that people's biographies consist of more than quantifiable knowledge. There is, nonetheless, a sense in which biographies do require the internalisation of knowledge, not simply in terms of information (which relates primarily to the act of memorisation in Jarvis's model) but through the act of constructing personal knowledge. As people internalise, so they evaluate and begin to own new knowledge, making commitments to it that then enable them to move on. While the discussion above suggested that the process of internalisation began in people's conscious awareness, and hence is primarily intellectual and potentially relates to information, its transformation moves beyond a

purely cognitive and intellectual commitment to an emotional one. Hull makes the same, important point.

We are emotionally committed to our everyday sense of reality, and to the thousands of cognitions which we take to be true and genuine knowledge without which we could not operate in this everyday world ... We all have the experience of being wrong sometimes, and usually we can find a reason for it. ... But to have the experience of unalleviated and inexcusable error, and to have it again and again and again would lead to cognitive and emotional breakdown. (Hull, 1991 [1985]:94)

It is as people come to the point of making this emotional commitment that the transformation of experience into personal knowledge can be said to have been completed and they themselves have engaged in further self-construction. The role of commitment, however, confirms the fact that one dimension of people's biographies consists of quantifiable knowledge. Returning to Jarvis's model, it also means that this knowledge, as a specific 'outcome', is identifiable and often articulated. There is an obvious link with external content and social knowledge here. As this is internalised, people evaluate it, considering ways in which it might fit with their existing knowledge bank and biography. As these are found, so new commitments are made. These may, or need not, replace previous commitments, depending on the circumstances and context.

This, then, is the process that occurs as Christians engage with external faith-content. Initially, this is perceived as a bank of external information. As people experience its content, so they begin the process of internalisation and evaluation, working toward making some form of intellectual and emotional commitment to it. One of the ways in which the chapter proposes faith-content influences the learning process, however, occurs at precisely this point. Given its perceived authoritative nature, it is conceivable firstly that the process of evaluation is fast-tracked and secondly that more rapid and potentially more highly emotional commitments are made to it. As with many of the discussions of these theoretical chapters, this must lie at the level of the hypothetical, to be explored in greater depth through the empirical data. At the same time, it should be recalled that commitment is in fact a normal part of learning. Not only is it the means by which people establish and 'fix' their personal

knowledge—the final step of transforming experience—but it is also part of their epistemological growth. Perry's forms were characterised by a gradual progression toward making a 'commitment in relativism', for example. As people began to sense that a black and white world of absolutes no longer fitted their experience or the evidence around them, so they firstly entered a state of confusion in which they were bombarded with alternatives. As they wrestled with this, Perry suggested that Position 6 ('commitment foreseen') was the stage when individuals may perceive commitment as a logical necessity for action in a relative world, or 'feel' it as something needed. From there, they go on to make a 'first commitment or affirmation' which also involves the acceptance of the origins of these commitments within their own experiences and choices, and some intimations of the implications. Positions 8 and 9 develop this still further, to the point that Perry suggests the latter is characterised by commitments being 'expended or remade in new terms as growth' (1970: chart of development, inside back cover). With reference to, Position 7, 'initial commitment', he comments:

Note on religion: In Commitment involving a religious faith in an absolute, the same distinctions re Commitment apply (cf theological distinction between belief and faith). The structural solutions for relating an absolute and relativism are varied and not outlined here. In all of them the crucial criterion for the integrity of the Relative orientation is the attitude toward people with other absolutes.

(1970: chart of development, inside back cover)

Perry does, in fact, identify different forms of commitment which he links to religion and hence adds weight to the developing argument of the chapter. Linking these forms to the difference between faith and belief, and identifying Position 5 as particularly relevant to the discussion, he comments:

The role of religious Absolutes in the subsequent Positions of Commitment is a special subject. There are data in our records illustrating several dispositions (e.g., "leap of faith," "liberal religion," etc.). In this report, however, it is enough to make two observations:

1. Theologically speaking, Position 5 represents the point of critical division between "belief" and the possibility of "faith." Belief requires

no investment by the person. To become faith it must first be doubted. Only in the face of doubt is the person called upon for that act of Commitment that is his contribution, his faith. In Position 5 one can no longer "believe" in the simple unquestioned sense.

2. If one later commits oneself to a faith in an Absolute, *there is a criterion which reveals that this Commitment has been made in the context of a relativistic world.* This criterion is one's attitude toward other people with a belief or faith in a different Absolute. They cannot appear as alien, as other than human; one must, however paradoxically, respect them. In one sense they "must" be wrong, but in another sense, no more so than oneself. The moral obligation to convert them or to annihilate them has vanished. (1970:146)

The discussion of the thesis, both previous and in subsequent chapters, would refute Perry's assertion that 'belief requires no investment by the person'. Rather, it requires investment of a different order and nature. Fowler's work would also suggest that Perry somewhat overstates his case, since his own fundamental purpose was to identify the specific forms of people's faith right from their earliest years. Perhaps the biggest difficulty with Perry's scheme when considering Christian learning, however, is the assumption that all dimensions of people's epistemological growth occur simultaneously and that it is impossible for people to be at a mixture of stages at the same time. So those who continue to profess belief in and commitment to an absolute would automatically be classified in one of the lower positions even if in other areas of their life they display a mature awareness of (and commitment to) living in a highly relative world. This would suggest that Christians might engage differently with their faith authorities than with other forms of social knowledge, and hence another type of separation and discreteness from those explored in Chapter One is identifiable, adding weight at the same time to the methodological principles lying behind the project.

The role of commitment in constructing personal biographies is clearly of significance and the discussion thus far suggests that Christian faith-content may well influence people in the manner in which these commitments are made and in their nature. A second way in which that content can affect people's biographies, however, relates to

the content of external social knowledge. In a Christian context, as people internalise faith-content, so they construct themselves and their personal knowledge in such a way that their biographies are increasingly 'Christianised'. This fact is tacitly recognised by different branches of the Church which encourage the practice of daily 'Quiet Times' of bible reading and prayer, or the recital of the daily Office. In these instances, simple exposure to Christian faith-content has an effect akin to quantitatively increasing the Christian dimension of people's biographies in the same way as the experiencing of any other form of social knowledge would do. Some Christian educators argue that the content of the content is also significant. Springsted states his case clearly.

What does it mean to say that theology is or ought to be spiritual? Such a claim is not analogous to saying that physics is scientific. For whereas physics is scientific because it is in accord with scientific method, that is, it reflects critically on empirical data, theology is not spiritual because of a spiritual method. Although there are spiritual methods, they do not involve the same sort of theoretical bases that scientific ones do. Rather, theology is spiritual because it involves an improvement, or is tied to an improvement, of the spirit. That theology has something to do with spirituality, therefore, means that we not only think of God, but by thinking of God truly at all we are at the same time involved with him in such a way that our spirits are improved by that involvement, by that thinking. This is what it means to say theology is spiritual, for there is an important connection between the thought and the improvement of the thinker. This makes theology, thinking on God, unique not only because God is unique, but also because the thought is related to a change within the thinker that comes from an active relationship with God. I do not believe that sciences make anything like this claim that one becomes like what one studies. (1998:49-50)

Springsted's position would suggest that not only are people's *biographies* shaped by the content of their learning, but in the context of Christian faith, there is an ethical and spiritual influence also. People are 'improved', or in traditional theological language, 'sanctified'. This is not the time or place to engage in the discussion any further, other than to observe that his position is not without its difficulties and clearly comes with a faith bias!

Thus far the discussion has suggested that the construction of individual biographies and the process of internalisation can be affected by the nature of Christian faith-content both through the role of commitment and the experience of engaging with its content. One further way is discernable, however: in the transformation of knowledge into knowing.

The section opened by suggesting that to view people's biographies simply as the sum of their knowledge was somewhat limited, and overemphasised the quantitative dimension. Elsewhere in the same volume Jarvis (1992) does more justice to the dynamic and qualitative, focusing on the existential side of biographies and linking this to the making of meaning and the role of understanding. So he states:

Being is about understanding, which in turn is about knowing rather than having knowledge. (1992:169)

The difference but partnership between knowledge and knowing is a familiar one. Ryle (1949) refers to the commonly-accepted distinction between knowledge of acquaintance, and knowledge about, the one being a fluid, indefinable and dynamic form of knowledge, the other conveying a sense that it can be 'grasped' (Kolb, 1984). 'Knowing', by nature, is qualitative, evading definition and quantitative articulations. Yet as the next chapter demonstrates, the final transformation of experience into personal knowledge involves knowledge becoming so integrated into people's biographies that it is no longer separate and identifiable. For Jarvis, this comes about through understanding and making meaning.

In a Christian context, then, the final step of constructing an existential biography through the process of internalisation is that of transforming knowledge into knowing. It is precisely at that point which the section suggests new difficulties arise. The Christian church has long recognised the fact that much of its faith-content no longer has any meaning in contemporary society. So a Church of England publication (*Tomorrow is another country: education in a post-modern world*, 1996), for example, offers an exercise to be conducted in church groups in which over thirty terms integral and specific to the Christian tradition are listed. These include 'trinity', 'grace', 'kingdom', 'god', 'sin', 'salvation', 'justification', 'blessed' and 'loved'. Participants are invited to draw a symbol alongside each term indicating by a sun their

general comfort with it and its meaning, by a flower an awareness that it is a fairly fragile concept and word which they use with caution, and by a skull and crossbones that it is 'dead and has little meaning' (1996:24). Irrespective of how individuals respond, the very presence of this exercise is an acknowledgement of the church's awareness that its content is potentially meaningless even to its own adherents, much less to those with no church contact.

In a consideration of how faith-content might affect people's biographies, the potential for it never to be transformed into knowing is clear. At first sight, this would appear not to relate to the authoritative dimension of faith-content. However, it is quite conceivable that given its authoritative nature, Christians internalise faith-content as knowledge but are unable to take the next step of transforming it into knowing so that it becomes part of their beings. This, of course, would be an act of self-transformation, having the effect of changing people's existential make-up.

Three specific ways in which Christian faith-content might influence the process of internalisation as it relates to the construction of individual existential biographies have therefore been identified. The nature of people's commitment to personal knowledge as they construct it may take different forms. The content of faith-content necessarily plays a role by dint of people experiencing it. The transformation of this content into knowing, however, might either never take place, or be impeded.

As indicated previously, while the concept of biography necessarily incorporates the whole of individuals' existential growth and development, it is helpful to focus specifically on the cognitive and psychological if only because of the argument of the previous section which suggested that the central zone for the initiation of learning within people was human awareness and consciousness. This is the interest of the next section.

II.2 Biographies and personal constructs

II.2.1 The concept of personal constructs

One of Hull's (1991 [1985]) emphases in his consideration of why aspects of the faith of Christian adults might prevent them from learning is the experience of cognitive dissonance. He links this with what he considers people's need to be right and the pain of being wrong, using these to form the theories first introduced in Chapter Two. In support of his argument, he turns to the work of George Kelly (1955) and Kelly's theories of personal constructs which provide him with a useful understanding of people's psychological structures, particularly with respect to the role of perception. This necessarily relates to the process of learning, and Kelly's work becomes of relevance at this point both on account of the outward focus of the act of perception—it is concerned with how people 'perceive' their external environment—and of his conclusions about the structures of human conscious activity. An inner/outer interaction is thus clearly present and the purpose of this section is to consider what impact Christian faith-content might have on that interaction, its process and results.

Kelly articulated in his two volumes entitled *Psychology of Personal Constructs* (1955) an understanding of people developing a range of psychological constructs throughout their lives. Like Jarvis, he emphasises the role of time. An important characteristic of 'biography' is that it consists not only of a past and present, but also of a potential future. This was an equally important dimension of Kelly's constructs. He began his important work with two fundamental premises:

We started out with two notions: (1) that, viewed in the perspective of the centuries, man might be seen as an incipient scientist, and (2) that each individual man formulates in his own way constructs through which he views the world of events. As a scientist, man seeks to predict, and thus control, the course of events. It follows, then, that the constructs which he formulates are intended to aid him in his predictive efforts. (Kelly, 1955:12)

Prediction—a looking beyond and reaching outwards—not only coheres with the definition of people and learning proposed above, but, according to Kelly, accounts for another characteristic of people's biographies: the ordering and organisation of their (particularly cognitive) knowledge in recognisable ways. He terms these

'constructs', and suggests that a personal construct is 'an anticipation, based upon our experience and continually modified in the light of more experience, which is intended to offer predictions about the way things will be' (Hull, 1991 [1985]:102). It follows that constructs are highly individual, representing people's individual perspectives and outlook on life, according to their previous experiences and conclusions (learned outcomes, knowledge). Constructs are continually being modified and adapted, then, as people also look back and evaluate.

Just as constructs are used to forecast events, so they must also be used to assess the accuracy of the forecast, after the events have occurred. (Kelly, 1955:13)

If the forecast was inaccurate, then the tools which were used to formulate the prediction—the constructs—are considered to have been deficient in some way, and people must then alter and amend them accordingly.

Personal constructs, then, are ways 'in which some things are construed as being alike and yet different from others' (Kelly, 1955:105). Kelly's theory is largely based on the notion of bipolarity. People initially test out the world and their understanding of it by asking whether something is like or unlike another thing, whether one meaning can also be applied to a different situation. While at first this might appear a blunt instrument, in fact it permits him to understand constructs as a vast range of overlapping systems of meaning, none of which are fixed and immutable. This dichotomous view provides people with 'channels in which one's mental processes run. [Constructs] are two-way streets along which one may travel to reach conclusions' (Kelly, 1955:126). Constructs therefore have limits, borders, frontiers, built individually by each person, and they both intersect and are superimposed one over another. They consist principally of meaning systems and of fields of knowledge, within which other forms of knowledge are contained (values, emotions, etc.). Kelly goes on to distinguish between a percept and a concept, suggesting that in the process of forming constructs, people perceive and conceive, image and construe.

A percept is a cognition based upon immediate sense experience, and it is maintained only under the influence of the object of experience. An image is the memory of a perception, cast usually in visual form, and only available in the absence of the object. A concept is an intellectual, mental or logical

structure given to a percept and its image, and is durable in the sense that it persists in the mind whether the reality with which it deals is actually present or not. Because they are durable intellectual structures of a logical kind expressed in language, concepts have an objective quality. Concepts are open to public discussion and to philosophical analysis. It is possible to clarify a concept, to define a concept and to reach agreement about a concept. Concepts do have a subjective side, in that it is perfectly correct to speak not only of the concept of God but also of my concept of God, but in rejecting the use of concepts, personal construct theory wishes to correct the emphasis upon the public, objective or uniform aspects of conceptual thinking. (Hull, 1991 [1985]:103-104).

Personal constructs thus become articulated and concretised in images and concepts.

For the purposes of the discussion, a picture is therefore being built of people's biographies consisting of *organised* cognitive knowledge, but that organisation is individual and continually shifting. The organisation, and the principles behind it, however, are the means by which people anticipate the nature of their experiences. In a non-social context, particularly with regard to the environment on a day to day basis, people's constructs are reasonably quickly built and remain fairly stable. Even when taken to a different place with unfamiliar sights and sounds, there is enough common ground with other environmental experiences for them not to be overly shaken. In a social context, given the fact that individuals' personal constructs may differ radically one from another, people are far more challenged in the effort to find common meaning: to reach a point where each individual construct and the features pertaining to a particular situation have sufficient matching points for meaningful communication to take place. Kelly talks about personal constructs being both permeable and impermeable. 'Impermeable constructs will resist new experience, or the new experience will be forced into the mould of the old constructs, however poor the fit may be' (Hull, 1991 [1985]:107). The link with certain of Jarvis's forms of 'non-learning' is clear, and questions raised previously about the role of emotion, personality and time re-emerge. Functioning in a hierarchical system, Kelly suggests that the higher a construct stands, the less permeable and the more resistant to change it is. Superordinate structures are those which are attributed greater importance,

greater stability or validity, and hence greater universality. They are the 'ruling constructs' in the system, the controlling point in the system as a whole. Hull points out that:

Since religious constructs are normally superordinate, that is, they are ruling constructs of great generality and power around which commitment is focussed, they will be highly resistant to change. It has been observed that religious people are difficult to indoctrinate, and personal construct theory would suggest that for this very reason they are also difficult to educate...

(Hull, 1991 [1985]:109-110).

The discussion returns to this at a later point.

As was indicated previously, Kelly formulated his theory of personal constructs on the premise that people try to order their experience of the world by interpreting it, and construing it in a certain way *because of an innate curiosity which means they look at life with an inquiring mind*. Kelly's prototypical human is a scientist, and his constructs are built on people's attempts to anticipate and predict. Happily, through his notions of a hierarchical structure of diminishing layers of permeability, he was able to accommodate forms of non-learning, albeit inadvertently. While his basic tenets cohere with the understanding of people and learning proposed earlier, other questions are nevertheless raised, particularly with regard to the degree to which people behave proactively or reactively. In a learning context, as shown above, we might consider that such a curiosity and forward looking is only characteristic of people (a) of a certain temperament; and (b) who are emotionally 'fit'. Certainly the separation of emotion from (at least the operation and functioning of) construct should be viewed as a weakness.

Kelly's work has largely stood the test of time, although others have proposed alternative understandings of the structure of human psychological behaviour. Mezirow, desirous of avoiding the 'suggestion of separation of the cognitive from the conative and affective dimensions of apperception and the psychological from the cultural in the learning process' (1991:42)—in other words, looking to provide a holistic theory of human learning and behaviour that incorporates all the various dimensions of being—devised a scheme of 'meaning perspectives'. He proposed three

types: epistemic meaning perspectives, which relate to the way people know and in which they use knowledge; sociolinguistic perspectives, concerned with society, culture, language and philosophy; and psychological perspectives, which focus on the self, control, various psychological features such as inhibitions and defence mechanisms, and personality attributes. These perspectives group into meaning schemes, which he defines as 'the particular knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that become articulated in an interpretation'. They are the 'concrete manifestations of our habitual orientation and expectations (meaning perspectives) and translate these general expectations into specific ones that guide our actions' (1991:44). Commenting on Kelly's work, Mezirow notes Kelly's bipolar approach and hence suggests that 'constructs do not "represent" or symbolize events but rather represent distinctions between events' (1991:52). Mezirow tries to focus on what *is* rather than what *isn't*, and his thesis is based (unsurprisingly!) on how people make meaning in their lives. 'Meaning is an interpretation, and to make meaning is to construe or interpret experience—in other words, to give it coherence' (1991:4). So both Kelly and Mezirow (and Mezirow cites a number of other researchers, all of whom he contends are articulating similar notions albeit in different forms) are concerned with how people organise their conception of the world and their own realities, and how this relates to their experience. To a point, the two scholars must be viewed separately. Kelly, with his emphasis on anticipation, should be viewed as offering a way of understanding people's perception and initial grasping of an experience. In a learning situation, therefore, Kelly's personal constructs imply a cyclic pattern, originating from people themselves, enveloping an experience, and incorporating it back into their existing structures. Mezirow, on the other hand, also originates from the person but in imposing meaning on a phenomenon, in some way leaves it there. The difference may be slight. However, it permits a distinction between perception and apprehension in the learning process. Mezirow's position is dependent on people grasping an experience, identifying with it, constructing it. It is ultimately the experience which takes centre stage. Kelly, on the other hand, puts the emphasis on individuals, imposing a gap between them and experience. The difference is subtle and potentially significant for theories of experiential learning, especially relating to the discussions on time- or learner-centred approaches. In terms of people's biographies, however, both scholars propose similar analyses: that

individuals interact with experience in such a way that an inner framework is constructed. For Kelly, unsurprisingly in view of his psychological background and position, personal constructs are essentially cognitive, whereas Mezirow specifies that meaning schemes are 'made up of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience [and] become more differentiated and integrated or transformed by reflection on the content or process of problem solving in progressively wider contexts' (Mezirow, 1991:5-6). Reflection is imperative for Mezirow; without this, meaning schemes could not exist.

The theme of reflection is returned to in the next chapter as another strand of the inter/outer interaction. Of the two scholars discussed above, Kelly's personal construct theory most obviously positions itself as relevant to the same consideration since there is an obvious interaction between the outer, in people's environment, and the inner, in their conscious awareness, with perception functioning as the pivot between the two. Nonetheless, there is clear potential for the outer to influence the inner, since the latter is understood in terms of defined structures. The next section considers what that influence might be, especially if (when) it has particularly authoritative dimensions such as Christian faith-content.

11.2.2 The influence of Christian faith

It is Kelly's emphasis on a dichotomous approach to perceiving the world which provides an immediate way forward in the discussion. Hull (1991 [1985]) suggests that this links with attitude, so that people's approval or disapproval, their emotional predisposition toward or against something, starts to consolidate a particular psychological construct. That may well be the case, but it would seem more likely that this builds upon existing constructs rather than accounts for their formation: Kelly was at pains to emphasise that his dichotomy was primarily one of perceiving likeness and opposite-ness, similarity and difference, which, at least in early stages, suggests an absence of affectivity. Perhaps a more appropriate link of the dichotomous approach to life is found in Perry (1970), whose early forms of epistemological behaviour, it will be recalled, were highly dichotomous, people viewing life very much in either/or, black and white, right and wrong terms.

As the thesis progresses, areas of overlap between different branches of scholarly investigation become increasingly apparent, and at this point, questions must be asked about how epistemology relates to perception. Chapter Five poses a similar question with regard to learning styles. Perry did not classify his study as one into people's psychological constructs, yet there are immediate similarities between his findings and Kelly's theories, and Perry's work might even be viewed as an empirical study into forms of perception and into the development of personal constructs. As people grew, so their constructs became far more complex and intricate, eventually preventing them from perceiving the world in absolute terms. The contribution of Perry's work to the present discussion, therefore, is in his demonstration of a link between the external and internal which revolves around authority. The cyclical nature of the interaction between inner and outer means that perception is a two-way process, and while in the early stages people probably initiate the bipolar approach, this is seen to be confirmed by the object of attention itself. There is no sense of disjuncture between the manner of perceiving and the content of learning. By logical extension, however, if the content of learning is inextricably associated with the (dichotomous) notions of truth and falsehood, for example, or carries a particular authority that confirms people's perception of it, then a cycle of dichotomous perception is both put into place and constantly reinforced. In Perry's terms, people do not progress beyond 'simple dualism'. So an external authority such as those which contribute toward the Christian faith may well serve to keep people in lower epistemological positions. The hypothesis is supported by personal observation and conversations with clergy which suggests that many probably lie in Fowler's Stage 3. The Prologue already drew attention to the parallel between Perry's shift from absolutism to relativism and Fowler's shift from Stage 3 to Stage 4.

Hull too identifies the possibility of people's personal constructs being 'rigidified' as a result of the Christian ideology.

Since religious constructs are normally superordinate, that is, they are ruling constructs of great generality and power around which commitment is focussed, they will be highly resistant to change. It has been observed that religious people are difficult to indoctrinate, and personal construct theory would suggest that for this very reason they are difficult to educate.

He continues:

This is perfectly understandable and highly justified up to a point, since we naturally have greater confidence in the constructs which life has tested, but if it reaches the point where new experience is being distorted or disregarded for the sake of loyalty to the old constructs, a dangerously false position has been reached. (1991 [1985]:109-10)

The discussion of this section and previous chapters would suggest that the cause of the rigidity and ensuing lack of openness towards learning lies as much in the nature of the ideology as it does in people's 'loyalty'.

III. The growth of the self

The last area the chapter considers as a dimension of personhood which is constructed and learnt through the process of internalisation is the self. As will be seen, it is a difficult concept to pin down, which has corresponding difficulties when trying to ascertain how its growth through internalisation might be affected. The section therefore turns to Belenky *et al.*'s work and the metaphor of voice which they employ as indicative of many dimensions of the self. Before so doing, however, a brief overview of the concept in general is necessary.

III.1 The concept of self

One of the immediate observations to make in any discussion about the self is that it incorporates a wide variety of components. It is also a notion which has been variously interpreted in different disciplines and in different cultural contexts. So whereas in the west, for example, selfhood implies individualism and unique identity, this is not necessarily a perception shared in other parts of the world (Allen, 1997). Theology has had an ambiguous relationship with the self, both treating it with a degree of suspicion and often preferring to shift the emphasis to the concept of soul (see, for example, Crabbe, 1999). Jarvis (1992), following Mead, links the self with mind. Self is also related to other existential dimensions such as identity, (self-) worth and esteem, (self-) image, (self-) perception, (self-) assertion and more. Given this panorama of spectra, any discussion must necessarily be restricted.

An immediate parallel between the notions of biography and self is that scholars consider them both to be learned entities.

Jarvis (1987, 1992), following George Herbert Mead, has argued that the mind and the self are learned phenomena, since the brain stores memories of experiences, probably from the time that the baby is still in the womb and certainly from the time of birth. Hence, the brain is the storehouse of memories from which emerge the mind and the self. (Jarvis, 1995:44)

Jarvis continues:

The person has two major components: the self and the physical body in which the former is contained. (1995:44)

He considers self to be 'an individuation of consciousness'. Strawson, on the other hand, lists seven components that he considers have traditionally contributed to an understanding of self:

Self is:

- a) *A thing*
- b) *Mental*
- c) *Single*, both at a specific time and through time
- d) *Ontologically distinct* from its thoughts, experiences etc.
- e) *An agent*
- f) Something that has *character or personality* (Strawson, 1999:132; italics in original)

The purpose of his essay is to explore certain of these perceptions, and in particular the mental dimension with regard to people's sense of self. Much of his discussion revolves around the role of consciousness and its relationship with time, in the same way that Jarvis considers this partnership in the process of learning. Of particular interest, however, is the implication that self and sense of self are inextricably bound. Strawson seems to suggest that without a sense of self, then the very existence of self must be questioned, although he does wish to divorce this from personality and long-term continuity.

Certain essentials therefore seem to be established. Self is a learnt aspect of being, hence showing its capacity for its growth to be influenced. It differentiates from biography yet relates to personal constructs in that it pertains specifically to

individuals' consciousness. It is rooted in the brain and linked to the mind, whereas biography applies to people's entire existential existence. Unlike biography, however, or perhaps enhancing the notion of biography, it has the capacity to reach beyond itself. It would appear to exist independently of people's character or personality, yet function in partnership with this. Despite Strawson's view that 'one may have ... a sense of the mental self without experiencing [it] as something that has long term continuity' (1999:149) it remains something that has to be *sensed*. In other words, although it is possible to analyse the concept and simply acknowledge the role of the conscious, in reality it would seem that the two cannot be divorced. The self *is* conscious, and this is experienced and lived through a *sense* of (it)self.

The questions are raised, of course, about how that individuation of self-conscious sensing not only learns, but how consequent growth can be focused on. For that, the discussion turns to the metaphor of voice.

III.2 An influencable self?

If the self is a learned dimension of people's beings, then logically it would seem susceptible to influence from authority in the same way that the thesis has argued is the case for other aspects. In the context of learning and internalisation such as that of this chapter, then it is necessary to determine a relationship that the self has between its inner and outer worlds.

Perhaps the most significant of Strawson's six components of the self for the purposes of the discussion is the idea of the self as an agent. By definition, agents are proactive and assertive. Three of the seven definitions of 'agent' listed by Dictionary.com (<http://dictionary.reference.com/>; 2004) reflect this capacity.

1. One that acts or has the power or authority to act.
2. A means by which something is done or caused; instrument.
3. A force or substance that causes a change: *a chemical agent; an infectious agent.*

So an agent itself has the power to influence (change) something it acts on. This then is something integral to the concept of self. Nonetheless, an agent has to be

sufficiently formed and 'powerful' to effect these changes. Without this, it cannot do its work and therefore its very identity is challenged. When considering the self in a context of learning, that formation and power are seen to occur through the process of reflection. Jarvis (1992), again reflecting his existentialist approach, connects growth of the self with authenticity, which itself is a matter of allowing people to come to be themselves through individual reflection. He comments:

Where the person is the center of attention, the aim of education is focused on the development of the learners as persons, and being and authenticity coincide. But where the "product" is more important, the direction of the growth is tightly controlled and the personhood of the learners is neglected. This leads to inauthenticity. (1992:112)

Returning to his typology of learning and non-learning, it is clear that the most effective and profound learning comes about through different forms of reflection, and these enable people to develop to the point of being able to make autonomous choices and decisions, as well as assume personal responsibility. At this point, they also become effective agents. This enables them to gain a sense of their identity, comparing and contrasting themselves against others, and in the process, gaining an idea of their 'worth' and/or constructing a 'self-esteem'.

The theme of reflection is returned to in the next chapter. One of the significant ways in which the self acts as an agent, however, is through speech. People articulate their ideas and views, communicate them to others, and indeed, in so doing 'act' on their social environment so that it becomes the continually shifting phenomenon outlined in Figure 1.3. The metaphor of 'voice' became important to Belenky *et al.* in their own study of the development of self. They write:

What we had not anticipated was that "voice" was more than an academic shorthand for a person's point of view. Well after we were into our interviews with women, we became aware that it is a metaphor that can apply to many aspects of women's experience and development. In describing their lives, women commonly talked about voice and silence: "speaking up," "speaking out," "being silenced," "not being heard," "really listening," "really talking," "words as weapons," "feeling deaf and dumb," "having no words," "saying what you mean," "listening to be heard," and so on in an endless variety of

connotations all having to do with sense of mind, self-worth, and feelings of isolation from or connection to others. We found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined. (Belenky *et al.*, 1996 [1986]:18)

The authors contrasted the metaphor of voice against visual metaphors that equated knowledge with illumination, knowing with seeing, and truth with light, suggesting that these historic, traditional metaphors reflected a predominantly male approach to epistemological questions.

Voice proved to be a useful metaphor that the research picked up and referred to in the data analysis. At this point of the research, however, it provides an essential conceptual link with the present consideration of how internalisation contributes to human growth and development. The role of language as a means of externalisation has already been introduced as the major way in which people construct social knowledge. Here, however, it takes on a personal significance since it is the means by which people assert themselves and hence develop a self. Belenky *et al.*'s women who experienced words as weapons, who were silenced and unable to speak out, also internalised far more than they externalised. In the process, their very selves were quashed, they were unable to form a true sense of identity and suffered from a low sense of worth. Those able to externalise orally and verbally also engaged in a form of self-assertion through which these existential dimensions grew and developed. A significant implication resulting from Belenky *et al.*'s work is that the quality of internalisation actually depends on the degree to which people are able to externalise and to which this externalisation is effective: the degree to which they are listened to. Not only so, but this is related to their ability to articulate in a reasoned and logical way. Their 'silent' women were not always silent! On occasion they would rant and rave, shout and gesticulate, but not in a way which commanded the respect of their listeners. So the growth of the self through the self-assertion in speech is more complex than simply 'speaking'. This dimension of the inter-relationship between internalisation and externalisation merits further exploration, since there is also evidence that profound internalisation can take place even if externalisation is restricted, and that the self can continue to grow. Extreme examples such as Helen

Keller, the American woman whose illness in infancy left her blind and deaf, yet who eventually came to have a highly public profile, come to mind.

The metaphor of voice nonetheless provides a useful way of understanding how the growth of self can potentially be affected by an external authority such as the Christian faith. More than any of the other concepts thus far considered, the dual processes of internalisation and externalisation are evidenced, suggesting a delicate balance between the external and the internal. The latter is easily cowed by the former! Just as Perry demonstrated, an overly-heavy external authority may well serve to keep people in a 'place'.

One of the significant factors relating Christian faith to the growth of the self through the development of voice is Christianity's own doctrinal framework of propositional beliefs, which, self-evidently, is linguistically articulated. So those engaging with it are necessarily, in the first place, engaging with an authoritative external 'voice'. What might the effects of that 'voice' be? Most obviously, and in need of little further exploration on account of its already established position in the work of Perry, Fowler, and indeed in general scholarship, is the weakening of people's willingness or ability to accept personal responsibility and the cultivation of a spirit of dependency. In Fowler's terms, this means that they may often not develop beyond Stage 3. This links with the discussion of the formation of personal constructs above, and although a case might be made for the two dimensions to walk hand in hand, they are nonetheless independent of each other, albeit with a similar outcome. In a Christian Education context, Astley (2000) sees one of the primary ways of counteracting this as the development of people's ability to think critically about faith-content, something supported by Brookfield (2001) writing from a secular, adult education perspective.

More subtly, however, is the question of the voice which people adopt as they assert themselves. Whose voice are they speaking in? Is it an authentic one? How is authenticity defined? The discussion above would suggest that this again links with reflection and people's ownership of the content they are articulating. Belenky *et al.*'s work suggests a more complex picture. They describe their Procedural knowers as

'chameleons', able to change colour according to the context in which they find themselves, but also struggling with a sensation of selfishness as they begin to develop their own position:

"Selfishness" is required because the sense of identity is weak. Procedural knowers, many of them quite successful, feel much like other women we have met in this book who have also subordinated themselves to the demands of authorities. Procedural knowers feel like chameleons; they cannot help but take on the color of any structure they inhabit. In order to assume their own true colors, they must detach themselves from the relationships and institutions to which they have been subordinated. (Belenky *et al.*, 1996 [1986]:129)

So speaking in another voice, functioning as a 'chameleon', clearly relates to a weak sense of identity. It is probably incorrect to assume that the two are inextricably linked. Many people can assume other voices, often temporarily and associated with a particular role (one might think of politicians) and retain a high sense of identity and/or a strong sense of self. The issue therefore is, once again, the degree to which that voice is owned and how it is used. However, it is also clear that within a developmental scheme, the two can be very closely connected. In a Christian context, observation suggests that the Christian 'voice' can sometimes be appropriated without a genuine backing of conviction formed from personal experience, and one might surmise that a weak self is 'hiding' behind this far more authentic voice.

The growth and development of the self therefore relates to learning through the processes of internalisation and externalisation, which this section has analysed through the metaphor of voice. An external authority such as the 'voice' of the Christian faith, has been shown to have the potential to affect the way in which the growth of the self occurs both by cultivating a spirit of dependency rather than foster one of autonomy and self-responsibility, and by 'supplanting' people's own voices. In both instances, the self is at least maintained in a lower developmental position, if not specifically weakened.

IV. Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, three dimensions of learning as it relates to the processes of internalisation and externalisation have been explored, and in each instance, different ways in which Christian faith might play an influential role detected. The approach of studying learning via the concepts of internalisation and externalisation was challenged, yet considered justifiable, the discussion contributing to the identification of two specific dimensions in which learning could be seen directly to result in the construction of the person: their biographies, and, as a dimension of these, their conscious awareness. Influence was perceivable not only in contributing to individuals' store of personal knowledge, hence in some way 'Christianising' those who are exposed to it almost as a quantitative outcome, but also in the way in which people made commitments and therefore constructed their personal knowledge. Personal knowledge is necessarily accompanied by knowing, however, which is linked with the making of meaning. The challenges experienced by Christians to make meaning from and with Christian faith-content were highlighted, with the recognition that this impacted on the growth of their existential selves. The possibility that the very content of Christian faith-content might also affect this dimension of being was introduced, but considered to be on a very fragile foundation.

In the domain of human conscious awareness, the chapter focused on Kelly's personal constructs and suggested that if these are best understood as essentially dichotomous in nature, then the absolute tendencies of Christian faith-content that lend themselves to a similar approach, may well mean that Christians consolidate a bipolar view of the world and maintain it, potentially therefore not developing the complex structures of Perry's relativity or of Kelly's own system. Similarly, following Hull, the constructs they do develop are used and reinforced to the point of inflexibility, hence restricting learning.

The last section considered the growth and development of the self by turning to the metaphor of voice, which itself represented the processes of internalisation and externalisation. Here, the issues became those of self-assertion and autonomy versus acquiescence and dependence. The section argued that the capacity of the

characteristics of Christian faith-authorities to foster dependence could also inhibit the development of the self, and that that potential inauthentic use of the Christian 'voice' might contribute to certain individuals using it as a refuge.

The discussion of the chapter has highlighted the fact that, although the thesis overall rejects the notion of non-learning, learning can certainly be impeded or adversely affected. This is certainly due to the focus on authority, which necessarily carries negative and often oppressive overtones. One of the recommendations made in the final chapter is that more attention is paid to more positive ways of responding to the same authorities. The empirical data demonstrated certain ways in which this happened. However, at this stage of the research, reflecting also the interests of the original hypothesis, the adverse influence is more prominent.

One of the themes to emerge as significant throughout the chapter has been that of reflection. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Reflection and Theological Reflection

Introduction

Reflection is a theme which emerged as significant in a number of ways in the previous chapter. In educational scholarship, it is understood to be a significant means by which people internalise the external, thus providing a further string to be investigated on the internalisation bow. It is accompanied in a Christian Education context by the study of 'theological reflection', which is a developing attempt to address some of the 'problems' that Christian learners are perceived to face when engaging with faith-content. Its very existence suggests that different forms of interaction between the two are likely to take place, some more effective than others. This may also affect the process and quality of internalisation. This chapter therefore opens by examining theories of theological reflection with a view to identifying and analysing the difficulties in learning it is concerned to address. It will then evaluate these in comparison with a study of the process of reflection taken from a non-theological perspective, and suggest further areas in which Christian faith-content would appear to affect learning.

1. Theological reflection

1.1 Introduction

The pursuit of 'theological reflection' is generally assumed under the rubric of 'practical theology'. This places an emphasis on the lived, applied and contextual dimensions of Christian faith rather than on the philosophical, doctrinal and content-focused. The two necessarily walk together, although different ways in which this happens can be perceived. Lartey, for example, identifies what he terms three different 'streams', or ways in which practical theology 'has been characterized, engaged in, or understood' and hence reflection undertaken. The *branch* approach emphasises the content of a discipline and focuses on how this is to be applied. He

turns to Schleiermacher's metaphor of a tree whose roots are philosophical theology, with a trunk of historical theological and branches of practical theology, and states:

Practical theology has to do with 'church government', or else the 'church's action' and is derived by applying doctrinal (philosophical and/or biblical) and historical formulations to the task of church management. (2000:130)

The *process* approach prizes method, and looks at how practical theologians are to 'deliver their goods'. 'Method' is concerned with how 'existential questions' are 'correlated with Christian symbols which provide the answers to the existential questions' (2000:130). He cites the work of Thomas Groome and his 'shared Christian praxis' (1987) and Laurie Green's 'pastoral cycle' (1990) as examples of ways in which practical theologians understand that questions and symbols can be brought together. Lastly, he describes the '*way of being and doing*' approach as a 'form of theological engagement'.

Here practical theology is understood not primarily as a branch of theological knowledge, nor simply as a method of generating theologically informed action, but rather as offering us *a way of 'doing theology' and being theologians*. This approach attempts to examine the content of faith and practice. It asks questions about what the contents of our faith are, realizing that tradition, context and experience (the 'three elements in the practical theology equation') shape us in such a way that there are very many different forms of equally valid Christian faith. (2000:129-131; italics in original).

Lartey critiques each, considering that: a) the branch approach risks turning practical theology into a 'second class citizen' by always making it a 'derived discipline dependent on knowledge and theory from the other 'more solid' fields of study; b) the process cycle runs the risk of superficiality, over-valuing method at the expense of content; and c) the way of being and doing approach has the potential of becoming anti-intellectual and of over-estimating the importance of context. He offers his own alternative which purports to address these weaknesses and incorporates his own buzz word of 'analysis'. Rather than 'reflect', which he understands as the principal focus particularly of process theology, his own 'pastoral cycle' includes three forms of analysis: situational analysis, theological analysis, and situational analysis of theology (2000:132). He is at pains, nevertheless, to emphasise that 'the whole process may be seen as theological and not simply the points within it labelled as such' (2000:132).

Lartey's analysis is useful since it quickly highlights areas of disjuncture between the essential elements of Christian living, which he identifies as tradition, context and experience (above). In the branch approach, context and experience flow from tradition, and hence a pivotal point of disjuncture is formed. In the process and way of being and doing approaches, the content of experience and context are offset against that of tradition in different ways and for different reasons. Since tradition (faith-content), context and experience also lie at the heart of experiential learning, these areas of disjuncture also relate to individual learning patterns and the interests of the research. The 'problems' appear to take two forms: firstly some sort of a gap between Christian tradition and human experiential and contextual life, and secondly, the way(s) in which that gap is bridged. Theological reflection is but one way in which this happens, and it pertains most precisely to Lartey's process theology, questioning how 'existential questions' can be correlated with Christian symbols. His understanding that these symbols are often viewed as providing 'answers' to those existential questions (above) is revealing, and is something the discussion returns to in the next chapter.

Despite Pattison's acknowledgement that:

Students undertaking placements on pastoral studies courses are bidden with monotonous regularity to indulge in theological reflection. This activity has a mystic flavour to it, for the teachers who demand theological reflection for the most part find it very difficult to say what it is they are looking for. (2000:136)

there is an increasing body of literature which is devoted to the art of theological reflection, and the next section turns to two specific models.

1.2 The art of theological reflection

The title of this section has been taken from one of the books and theories that will be considered, and itself confirms the developing understanding of theological reflection addressing a 'problem'. An 'art' implies a skill: the acquiring of an ability to do something that people were previously unable or unequipped to do. The bridging of a gap...

1.2.1 Let's Do Theology (Green, 1990)

For Green (1990), that gap lies principally between two distinct elements of theological work: active, and reflective. In pursuit of two major concerns, the transformation of theology itself, and the practice of being 'theologians' which he sees as the responsibility of every Christian, he understands both to come about through the interaction between action and reflection. Just as Jarvis sees social knowledge going through a continual process of change as people externalise, so Green sees theology as being transformed as people internalise it and then 'act' it. He formulates what he entitles a 'doing theology spiral', which, reminiscent of Kolb, has four elements: experience, exploration, reflection, and response, leading to a new situation/experience. Emphasising the importance of 'praxis'—a dynamic process of interaction between experience and reflection—he suggests that in many cases people split the cycle in two, unable to bridge the gap between the 'active elements of theological work', experience and response, and the 'predominantly reflective' elements of exploration and reflection. He provides a diagram in support of his argument, reproduced in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: A model of the interaction between action and reflection (Green, 1990:39)

Joining the two halves becomes his major preoccupation. He includes a chapter specifically on 'reflection' in which he states:

In order to do theological reflection then, we have to develop methods of bringing into juxtaposition our present life experience and the treasures of our Christian heritage, to check one against the other, to let each talk to the other, to learn from the mix and to gain even more insight to add to the store of Christian heritage. (1990:79)

Within this chapter he proposes a 'secondary cycle of theological reflection' which he bases on intuition, an 'imaginative leap which sets up an interplay between the explored issue and the Christian faith tradition so that each is affected by the other' (1990:93). So a more sophisticated model of theological reflection is proposed, reproduced in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: The process of doing theology (Green, 1990:95)

The inclusion of imagination re-introduces Kelly's personal constructs in his view that anticipating the object of learning through imaging, or imagining it, was an essential step in the process. Fowler (1981) too emphasises its role in the development of faith, although Green's use of it differs from Fowler's in that the latter's appears to be freely exercised and not directed toward any particular target, whereas the former's clearly

focuses on Christian faith-content of some sort. Green appears to understand the process theologically.

The Holy Spirit is operative in the process of reflection upon the issue that we have explored, and intuitively suggests that a particular element in the tradition—an element from the bible, sacraments, church history and so on—is somehow resonating with the experience in question and has something to teach us for today. So there emerges an *intuition* of what the tradition may hold. (1990:92-93; italics in original)

The second cycle therefore originates in the 'reflection' box of the first cycle, which moves to an intuition, exploration and new witness. At the same time, he perceives the key to theological reflection being that of hermeneutics. Finding satisfactory techniques for bridging the 'hermeneutical gap' is the principal task of the theological reflector.

Our reflective task is to find some way of bridging this cultural gap and seeing connections between the Christian heritage on one side and our present experience on the other—to hear resonances, to ring bells, to sense similarities, to sense opposition, to build up a whole range of sensitivities to the tradition so that we can draw upon it to check our present actions and understandings and see if our own story is part of the Jesus story, or not. (1990:80)

He proposes a range of techniques by which this can be done. One of the most important is the use of six theological 'tent pegs' which function as pivots between the Christian faith tradition and contemporary life. Identifying what he considers six fundamentally important theological themes (God's reign or kingdom, the incarnation, church, holy Trinity, crucifixion, and Eucharistic presence) he then draws an 'insight' from each: salvation includes liberation, all theology has context, theology includes action, concern about power, God's concern for the oppressed, and witnessing spirituality. In constructing a 'new model for doing theology, these markers remind us ... to give special regard to issues of liberation, context, action, power, oppression and spirituality' (Green, 1990:14-15). At a later point he demonstrates how his cyclical model might function in a specific situation. When considering the topic of adult education, for example, the theme of incarnation is interpreted as 'living alongside' or being 'hands on'. An example other than Jesus might be St Francis, or just people in

their own contexts. The educational implications of the incarnation are that education is 'not just theory', and that it involves participation; and the practical responses are that education starts from experience and requires commitment (Green, 1990:88).

Green's 'problem' to be solved is therefore seen to lie in the fact that the hermeneutical gap between people and their cultural biographies, and the Christian tradition. This gap was identified as contributing to the authoritative character of Christian faith-content in Chapters Two and Three, and it is possibly for this very reason that it is so significant and ostensibly so difficult to bridge. Green's method of bridging it is essentially hermeneutical, finding meaning in theological propositions (which often involves viewing them as symbols) and using this as a pivot to link with contemporary situations. Killen and de Beer offer an alternative model, however, which is the focus of the next section.

1.2.2 The Art of Theological Reflection (Killen and de Beer, 2001)

Killen and de Beer's framework for theological reflection is less well-developed than Green's, and consists of four components: 1. Focusing on some aspect of experience; 2. Describing that experience to identify the heart of the matter; 3. Exploring the Heart of the Matter in conversation with the wisdom of the Christian heritage; and 4. Identifying from this conversation new truths and meanings for living. (2001:68-69). More relevant for the present discussion is their exploration of a number of 'standpoints' that they indicate 'markedly influence the quality and trustworthiness of the insights that result when we bring our lives to our Christian heritage' (2001:46-47). Those standpoints are: a) certitude; b) self-assurance; and c) exploration. The authors demonstrate how these different standpoints influence the *way* in which reflection is conducted. So:

In the standpoint of certitude we think that we already know, or easily can come to know, what our lived experience means, because we think we understand our Christian religious heritage. In this standpoint, reflection involves catching what happens to us—events, thoughts, feelings, questions—

and placing them quickly into the boxes of our pre-established religious interpretive framework.

In the standpoint of self-assurance we think that we already know, or easily can come to know, what our Christian religious heritage means because we think we understand our lived experience. In this standpoint, reflection involves catching pieces of our Christian religious heritage—Scripture passages, theological themes, received traditions—and placing them quickly into the boxes of our pre-established interpretive framework.

If we want to encounter the wisdom of our Christian heritage in a way that empowers and offers transformative insights, we must bring that heritage into our reflection from the standpoint of exploration. In this standpoint we know that coming to understand both our religious heritage and our own experience is a lifelong process of the journey of faith. In this standpoint we willingly re-experience all the dimensions of the situations on which we reflect. We enter reflection open to the possibility that our interpretive frameworks are in need of revision and will be changed by our reflection and experiences.

(Killen and de Beer, 2001:47, 48, 50)

The authors indicate how people's reasoning alters according to the standpoint they adopt. That of certitude leads to a type of victimisation mentality: their religious framework is certain and unchallengeable, so life's difficult situations must be borne stalwartly. That of self-assurance results in a general discomfort with the religious framework that in time people potentially discard: an undesirable outcome for those actively pursuing faith development. That of exploration is the only one in which the two components come together in a vibrant, creative synergy, and is therefore the standpoint the authors favour. The examples given in support of their first two standpoints are curiously negative, nor are any of their conclusions based on empirical research. They offer no analysis as to *why* people might adopt a particular standpoint, and the general impression given relates to personality, background, religious context... . It is appropriate, therefore, to view them as hypothetical and potentially unrepresentative. However, the thesis affirms the underlying suggestion that people's

standpoints may then influence their pattern of reasoning. From these standpoints the authors then go on to emphasise what they term a 'movement towards insight', the culmination of which is the desired transformation, or the coming together of the two originally separate elements of faith-content and personal experience. They then offer a chart which outlines the 'complementarity between the movement toward insight and the framework for theological reflection', reproduced in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: The movement toward insight and framework for theological reflection (Killen and de Beer, 2001:74; emphasis in original)

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Framework</i>
1. When we enter our experience , we encounter our feelings .	1. Focusing on some aspect of experience .
2. When we pay attention to those feelings, images arise.	2. Describing that experience to identify the heart of the matter .
3. Considering and questioning those images may spark insight .	3. Exploring the heart of the matter in conversation with the wisdom of the wisdom of the Christian heritage .
4. Insight leads, if we are willing and ready, to action .	4. Identifying from this conversation new truths and meanings for living.

As will be seen, there are significant similarities between the interaction of these two columns and the process of reflection outlined by Boud *et al.* (1985).

This brief survey of two models of theological reflection are significant for the purposes of the research essentially because despite their differences, they demonstrate that the separation between people and Christian faith authorities on which the hypothesis was based is acknowledged and grappled with by the discipline of Christian education. Green identifies a 'gap' between experience and 'the treasures of our Christian heritage' (above), Killen and de Beer state their pursuit in terms of a

search for 'authentic lives' which they see as most profoundly achievable through the Christian faith.

Authentic lives reflecting integral patterns grounded in religious wisdom and values result from seeking God's presence, not apart from the world, but in the midst of it. Seeking God's presence involves theological reflection, the artful discipline of putting our experience into conversation with the heritage of the Christian tradition. In this conversation we can be surprised and transformed by new angles of vision on our experience and acquire a deepened understanding and appreciation of our tradition. In this conversation we can find ourselves called to act in new, courageous, and compassionate ways. We are called to transformation. (2001:2-3)

The pursuit differentiates seeking God's presence apart from the world, from seeking it in the midst of the world, mirroring therefore Green's gap and the research's own fundamental premise articulated in Chapter Two. Both term this as a 'problem' which needs to be overcome, although the nature of the problem differs. For Green it is an inability on the part of learners to bring experience and reflection together in a Christian faith context and his emphasis tends toward the hermeneutical; for Killen and de Beer, a dimension of people themselves and the way they learn present an obstacle. Each covets a 'dialogue' between two identified players, and the proposed way in which this happens—*theological reflection*—can be analysed according to theories of adult learning. This analysis suggests that both succeed in identifying certain potential stumbling blocks that impede dialogue, and that the processes of theological reflection proposed to overcome the obstacles might well be effective. Killen and de Beer, especially, with their emphasis on authenticity and transformation imply that theological reflection is also a matter of internalisation and the development of a particular, albeit undefined, form of the self (see later).

These, then, are the 'problems' which are perceived to be tackled and indeed overcome through the process of reflection. On the one hand, the difficulty lies in the nature of Christian faith-content, very much as was argued in Chapter Two, but placing the emphasis on the cultural differences embedded in the Christian tradition, and without the emphasis on authority. On the other, the difficulty lies in people themselves and dimensions of their own learning. Neither focus overtly supports the

research hypothesis, therefore, although the implications are perhaps present, especially when compared with the work of Hull, presented in Chapter Two, and the exercise in determining whether a particular theological term had meaning or not in today's society used as part of the argument of Chapter Three.

The chapter argues, however, that there are two specific ways in which the reflective processes themselves can be affected by Christian faith-content. The next section, which opens with a general overview of the concept and its outworking before focusing on these aspects in particular.

II. The processes of reflection

II.1 Introduction

Despite the apparent importance of reflection as part of the process of learning, there are nevertheless disappointingly few studies into the process *per se*. Moon (2000) identifies four which she considers 'important' although only one she labels (reasonably) 'comprehensive': that of Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985). She recognises that all four emanate from different contexts and backgrounds, resulting hence in a variety of emphases. So Boud *et al.* 'stress the importance of affective influence from humanistic psychology, while Boyd and Fales stress the importance of clarifying the problem—a need that derives particularly from the counselling context of their other work' (Moon, 2000:26). She observes that at the time most of the papers were written, Donald Schön's work on reflection in professional practice had not been fully absorbed or its impact truly felt, and certainly this volume has gained a prime place in studies into the overall process. Moon's observations seem to be somewhat selective: she overlooks the studies on 'thinking' made by Dewey early in the 20th century, and by Heidegger following him. Nor does she engage with the work of Jack Mezirow, although Mezirow is important in Jarvis's work, particularly in his emphasis that 'learning occurs as a result of reflecting upon experience, so that much of his work is relevant to understanding the learning process in socialization and in non-formal learning situations' (Jarvis, 1995:96).

No doubt one of the reasons for the significant disparity of approaches to the study originates in the wide range of dimensions that seem to be integral to the concept. The thesis has emphasised its relationship with the process of internalisation and with the making of meaning. However, as previous discussion demonstrated, it can equally well be linked with the way in which people reason and think, and with the growth of the self. At times, the term is used synonymously with evaluation, and it was this general fuzziness which provoked earlier questions about the box entitled 'reflection' in Jarvis's model.

The link between reflection and internalisation is a significant one, however, incorporating also the notion of *levels* of internalisation. The work of various scholars combines to present a picture of a gradual process in which an initial engagement with external social knowledge is gradually transformed to become part of people's beings. Marton and Säljö, whose work has already proved important elsewhere in the thesis in other ways (together, on occasion, with contributions from Booth), investigated the way in which learners processed information, identifying two principal categories which they labelled Deep and Surface (1976). Deep learners focused primarily on what was being communicated—the 'signified'—as distinct from Surface learners who concentrated on absorbing factual information: the 'sign'. The former were more interested in reflecting, evaluating and somehow 'experiencing' the subject matter, as contrasted against the latter whose intent was to memorise and reproduce. While the scholars' choice of terms might be considered in many ways unfortunate since the contrast suggests that 'deep' learning is in some way superior to 'surface', the relevance to the argument at hand is that content can be absorbed at different levels, ranging from the apparently surface and superficial, to a more profound degree of internalisation. This relates to the processes that people employ, and in particular to the extent to which they seek meaning. Boud *et al.* (1985), whose work is engaged with in depth later in the chapter, talk of learners needing to 'appropriate' knowledge. Appropriation represents the final 'owning' of new knowledge, its absorption into the warp and woof of being to the point that it then forms part of people's overall biographies and/or selves. Interestingly, the authors indicate that it may be both a component of reflection and an outcome (presumably of learning).

... for some learning tasks it may be quite sufficient for us to have integrated the new knowledge which has arisen from the experience into our own conceptual framework, but in many ways a further step is required. The new information which has been integrated needs to be appropriated in a very personal way if it is to become our own. Some learning can become so related to the self that it enters our sense of identity and can have a considerable importance and become a significant force in our lives. Significant feelings can come to be attached to this type of learning and any learning experience which touches this area can give rise to strong emotions that may need to be taken into account in future reflection. (Boud *et al.*, 1985:33)

Lastly, the work of Michael Polanyi is relevant with his understanding of tacit knowledge, or more precisely, tacit knowing. This is a form of knowing that cannot be articulated, and that people experience as 'just knowing'. It is not necessary to go into the intricate details of Polanyi's discussion, since he was concerned not only to establish the existence and importance of tacit knowing, but also to demonstrate its structure and *modus operandi*. A link with internalisation nevertheless appears clear.

We identified the two terms of tacit knowing, the proximal and the distal, and recognised the way we attend *from* the first *to* the second, thus achieving an integration of particulars to a coherent entity to which we are attending. Since we were not attending to the particulars in themselves, we could not identify them: but *if we now regard the integration of particulars as an interiorisation*, it takes on a more positive character. It now becomes a means of making certain things function as the proximal terms of tacit knowing, so that instead of observing them in themselves, we may be aware of them in their bearing on the comprehensive entity which they constitute. *It brings home to us that it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning.* (1983:18; italics added.)

Frequently tacit knowing is associated with 'knowing how' rather than 'knowing that' (Jarvis, 1995). However, the thesis suggests that tacit knowing is more than simply a form of practical knowledge: it is the fruit of such thorough internalisation that it cannot be separated from its surrounds. Nyiri (1988) acknowledges the possibility of different layers of knowledge within people, and of the need to extract certain forms 'jewel by jewel'.

Human experts thereby gradually absorb 'a repertory of working rules of thumb, or "heuristics", that, combined with book knowledge, make them expert practitioners'. This practical, heuristic knowledge, as attempts to simulate it on the machine have shown, is 'hardest to get at because experts—or anyone else—rarely have the self-awareness to recognize what it is. So it must be mined out of their heads painstakingly, one jewel at a time'. (1988:20)

The instances of people (frequently women?) having great difficulty in remembering the exact details of a conversation or event, and providing what (to men?) appears to be an inaccurate and often semi-articulate version is almost certainly not due to faulty or poor memory. Instead, these individuals may have so internalised the information, and so focused on understanding it, that what was originally discrete knowledge quickly became part of their bank of tacit knowing. From that point, it is exceedingly difficult to excavate it.

So reflection has an distinctly existential element, contributing to the construction of individuals through enabling them to transform knowledge into knowing, and the discussion returns to some of the themes explored in Chapter Three. In the context of a study which sets out to explore the effect that external social knowledge might have on the process of reflection, however, it is helpful to work from a structured understanding of the concept. As Moon identifies, the most developed model available is that provided by Boud *et al.* (1985). The first of the following sections therefore look at this in depth. Section II.2 picks up one component of this model (validation) and explores it from a range of alternative perspectives, proposing that this is one important dimension of the process which relates to the influence of faith on learning.

II.2 Towards a model

Boud *et al.* identify three components of reflection: experience, reflective processes, and outcomes. They depict these in a diagram reproduced in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Model of the process of reflection (Boud et al., 1985:36)

The third element of their reflective processes—‘re-evaluating experience’—they break down into four important aspects. Association is ‘the connecting of the ideas and feelings which are part of the original experience and those which have occurred during reflection with existing knowledge and attitudes’ ... ‘New associations are facilitated by positive attitudes and a responsive state’ (1985:31). Integration develops association by ordering and ‘discriminating’ between the conglomeration of ideas and feelings. It has two aspects: firstly ‘seeking the nature of relationships that have been observed through association’ and secondly ‘drawing conclusions and arriving at insights into the material we are processing. Synthesis is the characteristic of this integration phase in which we seek insight, which is the basis for further reflective activity’ (1985:32). Validation involves ‘testing for consistency between our new appreciations and our existing knowledge and beliefs, for consistency between these and parallel data from others and trying out our new perceptions in new situations’ (1985:32-33). An important player in the process is that of rehearsal. This is a technique people may employ prior to making a concrete commitment. Finally, appropriation is the means by which the new knowledge which has arisen from the experience is integrated into people’s very beings. The authors comment that:

... for some learning tasks it may be quite sufficient for us to have integrated the new knowledge which has arisen from the experience into our own conceptual framework, but in many ways a further step is required. The new

information which has been integrated needs to be appropriated in a very personal way if it is to become our own. Some learning can become so related to the self that it enters our sense of identity and can have a considerable importance and become a significant force in our lives. Significant feelings can come to be attached to this type of learning and any learning experience which touches this area can give rise to strong emotions that may need to be taken into account in future reflection. (Boud *et al.*, 1985:33)

It is already possible to sense a gradual process of internalisation. Appropriation represents the final 'owning' of new knowledge, its absorption into the very essence of being to the point that it then forms part of people's overall biographies and/or selves. Interestingly, the authors indicate that it may be both a component of reflection and an outcome (presumably of learning).

II.3 Validation

One of the significant dimensions of reflection appears to be the act of validation. For Boud *et al.*, validation, as part of the process of reflection, means 'subjecting what we have started to integrate to what we might call 'reality tests''.

We are testing for internal consistency between our new appreciations and our existing knowledge and beliefs, for consistency between these and parallel data from others and trying out our new perceptions in new situations. If any contradictions present themselves we have to reappraise the situation and decide on what basis we should proceed. (Boud *et al.*, 1985:33)

The authors stop short of exploring how these reality tests are conducted, however, other than suggesting that people might employ techniques of 'rehearsal', either internally or through literal enactment. Mezirow too states that 'the central function of reflection [is] that of validating what is known' (1990:18). Following Habermas, he suggests:

Validating a belief in the realm of communicative learning involves making a judgment regarding the situation and its circumstances in which what is asserted is justified. To understand the meaning of a sentence or any expressed idea, one must understand under what conditions it is true (in accord with what

is) or valid (justifiable) (Habermas, 1984, p. 276). We can turn to an authority, tradition, or force to establish the validity of an assertion, or we can turn to a decision by rational discourse, that is, a consensus regarding its justification. In communicative learning there are no empirical tests of truth; we rely on consensual validation of what is asserted. (1990:9-10)

Mezirow, in a similar way to Jarvis, emphasises the link between reflection and the making of meaning. While Boud *et al.* take a slightly different approach, the possibilities complement each other well. Testing for consistency involves looking to see whether something is 'true' under a variety of conditions, some of which forced its re-evaluation. It also involves the seeking of a consensus that coheres with the conclusions of other people.

Given the epistemological focus of the thesis and its interest in whether people validate their knowledge through use of an inner or outer authority, the way in which people validate an assertion was of particular relevance to the research. Mezirow speaks of turning to an authority, tradition or force. From a more philosophical perspective, particularly focusing on the cognitive, these are epistemological discussions which ask how people know what they know, and how they are sure that what they know is 'true'. Philosophy works with a concept under the rubric of an 'epistemic primitive'. Erickson describes these through the notion of 'presuppositions', indicating that these are 'assumptions that are brought to the process of thought or reasoning' (Erickson, 1986; cited by Zeolla, 1999.) Zeolla, engaging with Erickson's thinking, comments that:

Different people ascribe to different epistemologies. Although many people may accept more than one epistemology as being reliable, one view is generally considered more fundamental than the other(s).

(1999:www.dtl.org/apologetics/article/dead-men.htm)

He goes on to identify seven 'primitives' to which people might adhere. Writing from an overtly Christian stance, indeed, taking the position of a Christian apologist, certain of these epistemologies might be considered 'unconventional'. The thesis included them, however, in part because of their general contribution to the argument, in part on account of the fact that the research was specifically interested in Christian epistemological behaviour.

Zeolla's seven epistemologies, or primitives, are as follows.

1. Empiricism. "A philosophical theory which holds that all knowledge comes through sensory perception." By seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, or tasting truth is determined. Empiricism is the basis for scientific inquiries.
 2. Rationalism. "The theory that knowledge is gained through reasoning rather than through sense experience." Reasoning means to, "think logically." So adherents of this epistemology believe truth can be attained through following the rules of logic.
 3. Skepticism. "The doctrine that absolute knowledge is impossible and that inquiry must be a process of doubting in order to acquire approximate or relative certainty." An agnostic would ascribe to this position.
 4. Emotionalism. An emotionalist is, "One whose conduct, thought, or rhetoric is governed by emotion rather than reason, often as a matter of policy." An emotionalist will appeal to a subjective, inner feeling for proof of his beliefs.
 5. Post-modernism. This is "a view of the world characterized by a deep distrust of reason, not to mention a disdain for the knowledge Christians believe the bible provides." Further, "The postmodern view of truth is that religious truth is never learned from an authoritative or objective source outside of ourselves. It is created by the worshipper once he or she takes leave of all rational categories and enters the mystical experience
 6. Organizational authority. Here the person believes what his authoritative organization tells him to believe.
 7. Revelation. "The belief that God has communicated factual information about himself." The Christian and the adherent of any religion which claims it has an "inspired" book or prophet would ascribe to this epistemology.
- (Zeolla, 1999: www.dtl.org/apologetics/article/dead-men.htm, quoting Erickson, 1986)

His position is not well argued, and raises a number of questions, especially at the points where he makes unqualified assertions. Nonetheless, the significance of their role seems valid. Laura and Leahy (1994) comment:

The most deeply entrenched beliefs in any conceptual system (apart from our logical primitives which themselves provide the conceptual categories which determine the scope and limits of the patterns of coherent reasoning) are what we call 'epistemic primitives'. Epistemic primitives form a distinct class of beliefs which, together, constitute our epistemic framework for interpreting our entire experience of the world. On this view our chains of reasoning about that experience begin not with some immaculately perceived 'brute facts', but with these epistemically primitive beliefs which express our fundamental suppositions about the nature of our world. These beliefs are primitive in the sense that they have a threefold function in the belief systems which they underpin: a) a presuppositional or foundational function; b) a constitutive function; c) an organisational function. (1994:411)

There is a certain amount of overlap between Zeolla's categories; his acknowledgement that none is discrete and that people may employ some or all, either individually or combined, is therefore important. He gives no indication as to whether these primitives function at a subconscious, perhaps emotional level, or as conscious and deliberate intellectual acts of commitment. Other scholarship suggests either might be the case. The significant dimension of Perry's (1970) move towards commitment in relativism, at which point students would appear to make an intellectual choice that is largely reasoned and informed, will be recalled. Belenky *et al.* (1996 [1986]), on the other hand, contrast this against the gut, instinctive and often affective way in which a number of their interviewees (Subjective knowers) made epistemological decisions.

Despite the somewhat lightweight nature of Zeolla's contentions, his analysis is nonetheless useful in providing greater insight into the types of 'authorities, traditions and forces' identified by Mezirow that people might resort to in the process of reflection. There are also points of contact with other considerations of the thesis, particularly the external/internal dichotomy. Some of Zeolla's primitives are clearly internal, for example, others external. This is an important point in the thesis as a whole. Not only is the hypothesis on which the research question was grounded proved to bear weight, but the notion of inner and outer authority became a legitimate means of conducting the empirical research. It is logical also to hypothesise, or even

assume, that wherever people place their authority will affect, guide and influence the consequent patterns of reasoning. The discussion returns to considerations explored in previous chapters.

For the purposes of the discussion, Zeolla usefully introduces certain specifically Christian considerations which pertain to the process of reflection. The thesis has consistently argued for the distinctiveness of Christian faith-content, and at this point in its developing argument the question of epistemic primitives becomes of particular relevance. As previously, much must be left at the hypothetical level potentially for the empirical data to illuminate. Yet the fact that Zeolla was able to identify at least two primitives which can be applied to a specifically Christian context (numbers 6 and 7) suggests that a commitment to these is likely to affect all consequent learning. Given the context of validation within reflection, then this assertion may be rephrased: people's commitment to a 'Christian' primitive may well influence the process of reflection as detailed in Boud *et al.*'s model. Precisely how this might happen is open to conjecture, but the point of significance at this juncture of the thesis is to establish its potential.

II.4 Affirmative, receptive, or critical reflection

A second dimension of the reflective process that suggests it might be susceptible to influence by Christian faith-content lies in the actual nature of the reflection that takes place, which itself links to the growth of the self. As has been seen, Jarvis, turning to existentialism, sees reflection as integral not only to the growth and development of the person, but to people becoming authentic (1992). Emphasising the interactivity of the reflective process, which he sees as only truly developing authenticity when 'individuals freely act in such a way that they try to foster the growth and development of each other's being' (1992:113), he also identifies a negative corollary:

Inauthenticity occurs when individuals are unable to interact in order to help other people achieve their own personhood or when people's actions are controlled by others and their performance is repetitive and ritualistic. In this case, people reproduce the social situation and act within the organization's boundaries in a conformist manner. It occurs in education and industry, as well

as in any other bureaucracy. A typical example is where the teacher, however well intentioned, tells the learners that they must learn their mathematical tables, that a procedure or skill must be performed in a certain manner, and so on, and where the learners are expected to learn in an unreflective manner and reproduce what they have memorized and practiced. They may reproduce the social situation and reproduce themselves, but their human essence is stymied.

They are, but the process of becoming is inhibited. (1992:116-17)

Within that human essence, however, is the self, the growth and development of which the previous chapter linked with self-assertion, autonomy and responsibility. While that chapter considered this through the metaphor of voice, another way in which the self develop these capacities is through the act of critical reflection. To critique means to stand in opposition, to hold a view and to accept responsibility for it. This may involve a high degree of autonomy, especially if the voice is lone.

The role of and need for critical reflection in Christian Education has long been recognised, although as with theological reflection, its link with the development of the self may be less well understood. Astley's (2000) juxtaposition of Christian critical education against Christian formative education, seeing one as receptive, the other evaluative, has already been highlighted but bears being reintroduced.

Formative Christian education is *primarily receptive* of the received self-understanding of the church. Phrases such as 'spiritual formation', 'moral or character formation', 'theological formation' and 'ministerial formation' also utilise this metaphor of moulding or fashioning something into a certain shape or after a certain pattern. ... As long as such formation does not disable a person's development towards personal autonomy and critical reflection, it seems to me a proper—indeed essential—dimension of *any* education that wishes to call itself Christian.

Critical Christian education is *primarily evaluative* of the church's self-understanding, and therefore in principle less conservatively 'traditional' than formation, when formation is seen simply as passing on a received tradition.

This 'Christian criticism' embraces what has been described as the 'deconstruction of the tradition'.

(Astley, 2000:38; italics in original)

He understands these issues to 'cut across [the] variety of ways of defining the content of Christianity' (2000:37), and suggests that different programmes place greater emphasis on one or the other, although the two should not be considered incompatible. For the purposes of the chapter and thesis, it would seem that the former tends to put greater weight on the external and view this as something authoritative which has to be internalised, whereas the latter sees individuals as having an inner authority which is fundamentally 'superior' to the external content that is being engaged with. Astley's comment above also recognises that a receptive form of reflection may well risk fostering dependence and possibly a weak sense of self, as highlighted in the previous chapter.

Receptive and critical forms of reflection are not the only possibilities within a Christian context, however. From the Roman Catholic stable, and in particular the monastic tradition, one further form is discernible, which the thesis terms 'affirmative', although both process and term have been drawn inductively from source material rather than hold a recognised educational position. Jean Leclercq, however, in what has become a classic study of monastic learning, outlines what he entitles 'a theology of "admiration"':

Baldwin of Ford often describes his attitude in the presence of the Eucharist by these two words: *stupor et admiratio*. He is surprised, rapt, as in an ecstasy, in a state which partakes both of the immobility caused by astonishment and the spontaneous élan provoked by enthusiasm; he never grows accustomed to the sublime realities on which his glance lingers; his wonder never diminishes; he marvels at the mystery Revelation proposes for contemplation, and he also marvels at the faith. His admiration rewards and, at the same time, stimulates his faith, and these two dispositions of the soul augment each other mutually. They awaken the intelligence and all the other faculties of man: reflection and understanding are benefited by admiration and, in turn, foster charity and all

the other virtues, and mystical experience and asceticism flow from them.

(Leclercq, 1982:226; italics in original)

Elsewhere (Le Cornu, 2001) this is shown to relate to Kolb's analysis of the processes of experiential learning which include 'appreciation'. The argument includes the following quote.

Much can be said about the process and method of criticism, indeed, most scholarly method is based on it. The process of appreciation is less recognized and understood. Thus it is worth describing in some detail the character of appreciation... Appreciation is largely the process of attending to and being interested in aspects of one's experience. We notice only those aspects of reality that interest us and thereby 'capture our attention.' Interest is the basic fact of mental life and the most elementary act of valuing¹.

Is it possible to claim an 'influence' of Christian faith-content that is evidenced in these different forms of reflection? It would seem highly probable. The least questionable is the receptive form, since, as Astley points out, it is difficult to conceive of Christian identity unless some form of receptive reflection is present. The argument of previous chapters also suggests that Christian authorities may well augment and justify this approach to learning. However, a more subtle influence is equally present in the affirmative stance. Here, faith authorities require people to rejoice and celebrate in their truths. In so doing, their truths are experienced. Thus a cycle is put into place, yet one could not exist without the other. Truths are celebrated not only because it is right and proper that they should be celebrated, but because they themselves suggest this should be done. To do so is to experience them, and as a result of experiencing them, more rejoicing can take place. In many ways this is the most significant of all the influences! Is it possible to claim, however, that critical reflection is devoid of any influence? Probably not, since essential to theories of theological reflection is the notion of critical *dialogue*. Pattison, Green and Killen and de Beer all emphasise this dimension. So that critical theological reflection is not simply a matter of scrutinising for the purposes of finding flaws which in turn discourages any commitments from being made. It is not one-way traffic. Rather,

¹ Kolb, D.A., *Experiential Learning - experience as the source of learning and development*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1984, 103/4.

A good starting point for [theological reflection] is the model of a *critical conversation* which takes place between the Christian tradition, the student's own faith presuppositions and a particular contemporary situation. (Pattison, 2000:136)

III. Summary and conclusion

This study of both theological reflection and reflection *per se* has suggested that while the former clearly grapples with certain features of Christian faith-content, as well as acknowledging other influential aspects that are likely to impact the reflective process, there are a number of factors embedded within the act of reflection itself which, as yet, it appears not to recognise. Since the purpose of the chapter was not to critique the process of theological reflection with a view to identifying strengths and weaknesses, these observations can only be offered as a comment on the theory together with recommendations for further work to be done in the field. Rather, the discussion served to confirm a variety of aspects of the research hypothesis and support arguments and points made in previous chapters. Particularly pertinent, however, was the role of validation and the type of reflection engaged in, both of which were demonstrably affected by people's faith-content and authorities.

To a degree, the discipline of theological reflection views the relationship between Christians and their faith-content as 'unnecessary', despite the fact that the thesis argued previously for an indisputable *necessary* relationship on the grounds of Christian identity. Theological reflection largely focuses on gaps that need to be bridged, however, and proposes methods by which this can be done. Starting from premises similar to those of Hull—and to an extent those of the research—it offers as many insights into how and why Christian learning may be impeded as it does into how it might be encouraged and developed. That encouragement and development does not necessarily focus on the process of internalisation, although the implications and outworkings are generally covertly present.

Both this and the previous chapter focused almost exclusively on the one-directional process of internalisation, however, sometimes accompanied by externalisation, but

with little regard to the actual relationship and interaction between inner and outer. The next chapter turns to consider this under the concept of the relationship between form and content.

Chapter Five

People's ways of believing: learning styles, form and content

Introduction

The form/content relationship has already been introduced as significant to the interest of the research on account of Fowler's understanding that the two could be separated in order to analyse the forms of a human universal: faith. Conceptually, it is a relationship which can be placed within a discussion of the relationship between inner and outer, 'form' representing inner, personal structures, 'content' the object of their learning, often represented by external social knowledge.

This chapter examines the relationship between the two by turning to the concept of learning styles, which, it argues, ably incorporates both dimensions since it is concerned with the characteristic, inherent ways in which individuals relate to external knowledge. Bearing some similarities to Kelly's personal constructs, theories of learning styles may perhaps be interpreted as the way the former operate in real life: fleshed-out examples of the acts of perception and knowing. The chapter opens by examining theories of learning styles *per se*, initially considering how they have traditionally been understood before focusing on two dimensions it considers significant both to an understanding of the concept in its own right, and to the interests of the research: their procedural and relational nature. It then draws significant parallels between these and the form/content partnership, applying the considerations specifically to Christian faith-content and demonstrating the inter-relationship between the two. Rather than look at the impact of this authoritative knowledge on learning styles themselves, however, as was the focus of Chapter Three with personal constructs, the interest of this chapter is in the nature of the interaction between inner and outer. This in turn provides an appropriate framework for analysing what the thesis has called the 'necessary' relationship between Christians and their faith-content, providing examples of how they *do* learn, as opposed to don't.

I. Theories of learning styles

'Learning styles' is the title given by educational scholarship to the study of the way in which people individually go about processing information. Roughly summarised, learning style theories focus on the 'way' people learn as opposed to exploring the process of learning that was described in Chapter One: the 'how' rather than the 'what' of learning. It is a complex concept not least because a number of aspects remain only partially understood. Various questions quickly arise. Can any identifiable traits be considered innate? What is their relationship to personality? To which domain do they pertain? Is the concept itself secure enough as a result of these questions to command academic respect? Some of these questions were explored in the research preceding and leading to this project (1998). The conclusions are incorporated into the discussion of this chapter.

Theories of learning styles generally pertain to and are 'claimed' by the discipline of educational psychology. This has had a number of consequences, although given the thesis's understanding of people's conscious awareness functioning as the location where an engagement with the environment fundamentally takes place, a psychological focus is appropriate. Nonetheless, learning style theories have tended to be restricted essentially to the cognitive domain, focusing on patterns of thought, mental activity and intellectual approaches and abilities. Secondly, perhaps reflecting the era in which they had their heyday (1970s), studies into these various phenomena have been guided, if not determined, by established (scientific) methodology relating to psychology. So Entwistle, for example—an established educational psychologist in Edinburgh—criticises Perry's work into the epistemological development of High School students on account of his emphasis on interviews.

Perry's scheme relies heavily on intuitive impressions from interview transcripts. It is difficult to demonstrate the validity of the findings, except by appeal to the reader's own experiences of higher education. (Entwistle, 1981:75)

The thesis engages with the methodological issues Entwistle raises at a later point. Nevertheless, the majority of now generally-accepted conclusions about learning styles are based on investigations whose emphasis was, as far as possible, not only to

examine how people performed, but to do so in such a way that the results were both measurable and scientifically verifiable. One of the difficulties that this approach had to grapple with, and which continues to dog conclusions, is the extent to which identifiable learning styles were linked to people's underlying personality. This provokes a fundamental question of whether 'learning style' is a representative title that accurately describes the phenomenon under investigation. The conundrum is heightened by the similarities that are evident between certain traits categorised under 'learning style' with, for example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator which purports to classify people into personality groups. Sternberg (1997), in a defiant attempt to move discussions on, includes an entire chapter in his book that simply explores the concept of 'styles', which he breaks down to include cognition-centred styles, personality-centred styles, activity-centred styles, and teaching styles. His category specifically of 'learning styles' is found under 'activity-centred styles' on the grounds that:

Activity-centred theories of styles are more action-oriented than are cognitive- or personality-centred theories. They tend more to be centred around kinds of activities people engage in at various points in their lives, such as schooling and work. (1997:145)

Quoting *Webster's New World Dictionary*, he states that a 'style' is "a distinctive or characteristic manner ... or method of acting or performing", specifying from there that the term 'cognitive style' 'refers to an individual's way of processing information' (1997:134). Sternberg claims that his own work, entitled *Thinking Styles* (1997), is more representative of people's behaviour than any of the alternatives he cites principally because he takes exception to their (perceived) tendency to pigeon hole individuals into one particular style ('we do not have a style, but rather a *profile* of styles' [1997:19]). Thinking styles are forms of 'mental self-government' and he deliberately chooses the analogy of the organisation of society in the description of his proposed styles. Governments are 'external reflections of what goes on in people's minds. They represent alternative ways of organizing our thinking. Thus, the forms of government we see are mirrors of our minds' (1997:19). Sternberg's thesis and conclusions are interesting yet unconvincing. Entwistle's methodological query must apply equally to him; he supports his theories with reference to a series of inventories he designed, but which appear to test the characteristics of each individual style,

having already established in advance what he considered these to be. His three categories bear strong resemblances to the variety of other studies he draws from, and the impression given is tantamount to that of old material repackaged. Nevertheless, his discussion is useful in bringing order to the overall subject, and he makes important points in emphasising the fact that people have a profile of styles rather than one specific approach, and in attempting to bring the various different domains (cognition, personality etc.) under one all-encompassing umbrella.

A further complication is evident in that from even a cursory investigation into 'traditional' studies into learning styles one of the striking factors to emerge is the fact that the term 'style' must take its place alongside a number of other alternatives. Scholars speak equally freely principally of learning strategies and approaches to learning, but also of processes, skills, tactics, orientation, and more (see, for example, Laurillard, 1979), with no clear common consensus about what distinguishes each, or one from another. Some of the difficulty appears to have resulted simply from a huge number of separate investigations that took place world-wide within a very short space of time, not allowing hence a pooling of expertise in order for an accepted terminology to be established. Another feature seems to have been the vast range of approaches that in origin appeared to have little in common, yet with time many could be seen to contribute to a central thesis. Schmeck, for example, comments that:

I feel that all cognitive styles can be encompassed by one broad inclusive dimension of individual difference, labeled "global versus analytic" by Kirby, "holist versus serialist" by Pask, and "right-brained versus left-brained" by Torrance and Rockenstein. "Field-dependent versus field-independent" is a related dimension studied at length by Witkin and his colleagues. ... The term "global versus articulated (or differentiated)" has also been applied to this dimension of perceptual or attentional style. "Impulsive versus reflective" (Kogan, 1976), and "category breadth" (Wallach & Kogan, 1965) are likewise relevant. I am arguing that all of these, at some level of abstraction, are reflections of a single dimension that I label "global versus analytic," similar to Kirby's terminology. (1988:327)

These studies took place in very different disciplines under very different conditions and in many ways with quite different goals. Only with hindsight did scholars begin to

realise the similarities between them. Lastly, it would appear that scholars did indeed consider they were investigating subtly different phenomena. The key issues are expounded in depth elsewhere (Le Cornu, 1998). However, one basic consideration is the distinction between the way students structure unstructured subject matter in terms of procedures or descriptions (style) and what students do in order to learn something (strategy) (Laurillard, 1979). Schmeck (1988) makes a different distinction, focusing on the deliberate, conscious 'strategy' that students adopt in the learning process, as opposed to the unconscious (innate?) 'styles' that typify their approach, and, to some extent, guide and determine it. Lastly, Entwistle and Ramsden:

... reserve the word *style* to refer to the stable, trait-like consistency in one's approach to attending, perceiving, and thinking traditionally labelled *cognitive style*. They prefer the word *orientation* when referring to consistency in one's approach to learning in school and university setting, because they feel that the student's orientation to studying in schools and universities results from a combination of motives and styles during his or her perception of the classroom situation'. (Le Cornu, 1998:16, quoting Schmeck, 1988:7-8)

The 1998 study proposed three salient features which emerged from the overall discussion. Cognitive learning styles were understood to:

- Be mental processes
- Be reasonably stable traits that are repeated in various situations
- Pertain to the way a student structures unstructured subject matter in terms of procedures or descriptions. (Le Cornu, 1998:16)

It also accepted a definition of 'learning style':

People's characteristic ways of information processing, feeling and behaving in and toward learning situations ... those preferences, dispositions and tendencies that influence one's learning. (Smith, 1983:60; in Le Cornu, 1998:16)

As the discussion progresses, this definition is taken up and examined, as are the three proposed characteristic features of a learning style. Nevertheless, this summary adequately expresses the way in which the concept has traditionally been understood and used, despite variations in terminology and approach to the subject. It also

provides an immediate link with the question of how people reason and reflect—the form of thought—through the emphasis on mental processes.

From the variety of ways in which the concept has been approached, analysed and understood, two in particular proved of significance to the interest of the thesis and research: a bipolar relationship, and a procedural nature. The next sections look at each in turn.

II. A bipolar relationship

Both words of the title of this section are important. In the first place, a case is made for learning styles to be understood as lying along a bipolar continuum. It is almost certainly rare for people to operate exclusively at one or other of the extremes, and the reality of a continuum allows for the possibility of a combination of characteristic traits to function alongside each other, perhaps in this way also respecting Sternberg's insistence on people having a profile of styles rather than one sole style. The continuum argued for, however, functions primarily within people, representing the inner epistemological make-up of individuals. Alongside this, and partnering it, is a relationship that people construct with the content of their learning which the section suggests is best understood in personal vs impersonal terms. A matrix is thus formed, one axis representing the continuum, the other representing people's relationship with content. This prepares the ground for the final section which discusses the form/content relationship with respect to Christian faith-content.

II.1 A bipolar continuum

Many learning style theories propose two fundamentally different and alternative ways in which people engage with the content of their learning, although there are certain notable exceptions. Honey and Mumford's 1992 categorisation of four styles, originating with Kolb's work, and mentioned in Chapter One is one example. Sternberg also refers to a theory of learning styles designed by Dunn and Dunn and which is 'widely used in education', which has 18 different styles divided into four main categories: environmental, emotional, sociological and physical. He nevertheless

states that it is 'hard to say ...exactly why they are called styles. They refer more to elements that affect a person's ability to learn than to ways of learning themselves' (Sternberg, 1997:146). The bipolar model seems to have gained the greatest credence amongst the leading scholars in the field, however.

'Cognitive style literature has produced dichotomies or bi-polar constructs representing preferences towards one or other way of thinking' (Entwistle, 1981:217).

While Entwistle then goes on to propose a third position that represents a merge of the two, no serious challenge from scholarship that approaches the subject from a cognitive perspective has yet been presented to this dichotomous arrangement. In a previous study (Le Cornu, 1998) a case was made that agreed with Schmeck's conclusions (above), and a number of parallels were drawn out between the work of Pask (1976), Witkin *et al.* (1977), and Belenky *et al.* (1986). This was presented in diagrammatic form and is reproduced in Figure 5.1.

Certain slight disparities are apparent. There is little evidence of Witkin *et al.*'s passive, spectator approach in Pask's learners, for example, although this could be explained by the fact that Pask did not offer his subjects the opportunity to wait and see: they were obliged to make immediate choices and construct quick hypotheses. Nevertheless, the two are not incompatible. Pask's 'teach-back' technique required participants to articulate verbally their process of reasoning, and this permitted him to identify a pattern of thought that indeed might well have been conveyed as a 'wait and see' approach without this articulation. Pask's and Witkin *et al.*'s work should therefore be seen as complementary. Similarly, Belenky *et al.*'s study might be considered somewhat alien to a study of learning styles. In the first place, this was not the stable from which their work emanated. Secondly, it does not immediately cohere with one of the basic principles of learning style theory: that people's styles are stable over time. No scholarship is set in stone, however, and the data and results from the afore-mentioned small-scale research project (Le Cornu, 1998) suggested that men, in particular, shifted their approach as they grew older, thus challenging this fundamental premise.

Figure 5.1: A comparison of learning style characteristics

Witkin et al.	Pask	Belenky et al.
Field-dependent	Holist	Connected
Don't analyse	Complex hypotheses	Acceptance
Don't structure	Use of analogy, illustration, anecdote	Little evaluation
Work with the field 'as is'	Remember and recapitulate a whole	Purpose of connection
Spectator approach	Many goals	Empathy
Passive role	Assimilate information from diverse topics	Relationship
Relevant, constant features emerge	Ask questions about broad relations	Self allowed to participate
	Form hypotheses about generalisations	Trustworthy knowledge comes from personal experience
	Look ahead	Believe rather than doubt
	Understand the topic as a whole	
	Wide focus of attention	
	Build the overall picture from the start	
Field-independent	Serialist	Separate
Analyse	Step by step	Impersonal authority
Structure	Make use of the bare essentials	Voice of reason
Governed by principles abstracted from experience	Look for logic	Public language
Seek to identify constant features	Straightforward	Critical reasoning
Form and modify hypotheses	Relate items by simple data links, moving to the next topic only when the first is mastered	Adversarial
	Form and use specific hypotheses	Suppression of self
	Ask questions about narrow relations	Use of techniques
	Focus either on abstracts, or on real-world topics at one time	Tendency to doubt
		Exclude feelings and personal beliefs

One additional dimension to Belenky *et al.*'s bipolar structure is the parallel they draw with Latin languages' differentiation between knowledge of acquaintance and knowledge that (compare also Ryle, 1949). Connected knowers know almost by primary, sensory experience. They become familiarised with their knowledge because they experience it. This is the French *connaître* and the Spanish *conocer*. On the other hand, Separate knowers extract information from that experience. They are able to articulate something about it in a way that Connected knowers may not be. This is the French *savoir* and the Spanish *saber*. One of the highly significant contributions—perhaps *the* most significant—that Belenky *et al.*'s work made to scholarship was their demonstration that to know by acquaintance involved different procedures, but was nevertheless an approach to learning that occurred in similar circumstances and at a similar developmental stage as those who naturally learnt 'separately'. Traditionally, knowledge of acquaintance has been viewed as an epistemological 'first stage', necessary but inadequate since it struggled to separate, and hence to analyse and manipulate. Belenky *et al.* not only identified the *ways*, or procedures that characterised that way of knowing, but put it on an equal par with Separate knowing: 'Connected knowing is just as *procedural* as separate knowing, although its procedures have not yet been as elaborately codified' (1996 [1986]:121). Reference to Figure 5.1 reveals two major differentiating factors: firstly the degree to which the self is allowed to participate and to which knowledge is therefore viewed in personal terms; secondly, a general attitude of either acceptance or critique, belief or doubt. The authors acknowledge that the two ways of knowing might be gender-related, with more women than men knowing in a Connected way, although they state that they know of no 'hard evidence (to use a very separate word)' to support such a claim (see later).

A bipolar approach to understanding the concept of learning styles therefore seems solid. It does, of course, find parallels with Kelly and his own understanding of how people go about the act of perception. For Kelly, people adopted a bipolar approach which asked whether something was like or unlike something else. While at one level this might appear to be an example of entirely objective 'separate' reasoning, at another it can be understood as embryonic forms of connected and separate knowing, those looking for likeness operating as Connected knowers, those wishing to perceive

difference as Separate knowers. Further parallels are identifiable in the fact that learning styles take the form of mental structures that then influence the way people relate to experience. Both of these features, according to Kelly, pertain to the formation of personal constructs through the act of perception. As with Kelly, the characteristic traits of learning styles are fundamentally internal to people and incorporate both the cognitive and the affective. However, particularly if incorporating the work of Belenky *et al.* one of the key features in learning style theory must be the degree to which the self is allowed to participate in the process of knowing and constructing knowledge, itself an indication of the degree to which people include or suppress the affective. Another key feature is whether people follow a linear, step by step logic that focuses on detail, or prefer to work with bigger overall concepts in order to grasp the whole picture. Lastly, some individuals are proactive in seeking to make sense of the object of attention, forming and modifying hypotheses as they go along, while others prefer a more passive approach, waiting for the important features to emerge. All of these characteristics, relate to the inner dimension of learners and in the last section the chapter argues that these contribute to people's epistemological 'form'. Thus far, however, little attention has been paid to how they relate to the external environment, to external content. The next section considers this under the rubric of people's relationship with knowledge.

II.2 People's relationship with knowledge

The idea that people are necessarily in a relationship with their external world is fundamental to theories of experiential learning which take a constructivist approach. It can hardly be otherwise. The realisation that people contribute a dimension of themselves to all knowledge was highlighted by Kant in the 18th century, and Jarvis's representation of the processes of internalisation and externalisation portrayed in Figure 1.3 interprets this in a learning context. Berger and Luckmann's (1966) emphasis on the role of language contributes to the same idea. Language implies the need for interpretation, and much of the study of hermeneutics focuses on where meaning resides, and whether this is primarily with the communicator, the audience, or both. In some sense, all social knowledge is like a ball on a piece of elastic which

people project away from themselves and which is held in tension in its social and cultural environment, but which is never completely divorced or separated from them.

As part of their process of analysis of women's ways of knowing, Belenky *et al.* compiled a list of what they termed 'educational dialectics'. These had been extracted inductively from the raw data resulting from their interviews and consequently contributed to and guided their analysis of it. One of the significant features of these dialectics was the focus of a number of them on the nature of the relationship between people and their external world. So one dialectic overtly asked, for example, what the relationship was between self and the content of one's learning; another what the relationship was between learning and 'life'. The full set of dialectics is reproduced in Figure 5.2.

Those most relevant to the discussion are:

- Discovery/didacticism
- Rational/intuitive
- Discrete/related
- Personal/impersonal
- Inner/outer
- Listening/speaking

Each speaks of a different aspect of learning, many relating to previous discussion. Listening and speaking return to the question of voice and the growth of the self. Inner and outer focus on validation of knowledge and potentially on epistemic primitives. Discovery and didacticism convey notions of authority, together with the development of autonomy in learning and self responsibility. More importantly, each speaks of a different relationship between the external and the internal.

A closer look reveals that most of these five dialectics can be subsumed under the personal/impersonal dimension. Inner implies the personal, outer the impersonal; discovery the personal, didacticism the impersonal; related the personal, discrete the impersonal. Only listening and speaking imply a (theoretically balanced) transaction between the inner and the outer, and are equally personal. Within a constructivist

Figure 5.2: Educational dialectics (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1996 [1986]:237-38)).

Process Oriented		Goal Oriented
Means		Ends
What are the aims of education?		
Discovery		Didacticism
Constructed knowledge		Received knowledge
How is knowledge viewed? How is the act of becoming a "knower" explained?		
Rational		Intuitive
Logical, analytical, objective		Gut feeling, subjective ESP
What method(s) are used for analysis? What method(s) are valued?		
Discrete		Related
Compartmentalization		Synthesis
What is the relationship between learning and "life"?		
Being with others		Being Alone or on Own
Collaborative, cooperative		Solitary, competitive
What arrangements for learning are preferred? Have been experienced?		
Breadth		Concentration
Generalist, dilettantism		Specialist, narrowness, blinders
What is the range of interests in learning?		
Support		Challenge
What are the optimal conditions for learning?		
Who and what are experienced as supportive/nonsupportive? Challenging/nonchallenging?		
Personal		Impersonal
What is the relationship between self and the content of one's learning?		
How are these relationships structured in terms of the curriculum, relationship with peers, relationship with faculty and staff?		
Self-concern		Responsibility and Caring for Others
Is concern for self vs. concern for others an issue in educational decision making?		
Inner		Outer
What factors control goal setting, pacing, decision making, and evaluation?		
Who and what is experienced as validating/nonvalidating?		
Listening		Speaking
What are the experiences of voice?		

paradigm, therefore, the thesis proposes that the personal/impersonal dichotomy most appropriately describes the relationship between people and the content of their learning, embracing a wide variety of traits. Indeed, even the idea of people naturally having a 'relationship' with social knowledge is incorporated into the concept. So a picture is formed of a two-dimensional activity that incorporates both learning styles and perception, representing the relationship between people's characteristic ways of

initiating and handling the processing of external knowledge. This can be portrayed in the form of a matrix. Each of its axes have a personal characteristic, and their poles are represented in relational terms. The bipolar continuum of individual learning styles lies along the bottom, indicating many of the procedures that people employ as they begin to engage with their external world, but this engagement is itself expressed as a relationship with knowledge. Figure 5.3 portrays the matrix diagrammatically.

Figure 5.3 *A matrix of people's relationship with knowledge*

Since each matrix is a continuum, then a variety of different positions along each is probable, indicated in Figure 5.3 by the greyed lines.

The final section argues that this provides a useful model for understanding the form/content relationship, and engages with the impact that content, in the shape of Christian faith-content, might have on form, understood in terms of learning styles. Before moving to this, however, greater consideration must be given to the procedural dimension of learning styles.

III. A procedural concept

The procedural nature of Belenky *et al.*'s Separate and Connected knowers has already been briefly introduced. The identification of procedures within the way of knowing they called 'connected' was one of the most revolutionary aspects of their study, not least because it demonstrated a potential validity to this form of knowing that had never previously been recognised. Procedures imply logic, reason, structure, systematisation... all attributes that humans prize on account of their contribution to ensuring a validity and degree of objectivity in knowing. Never before had a way of knowing which allowed the personal to play a significant role been acknowledged as equally as legitimate as those forms which excluded the personal. Placing both Separate and Connected knowers under the same banner of Procedural knowers, the authors state:

All the women who appear in this chapter were absorbed in the business of acquiring and applying procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge. Some ... were passionately involved in this process, while others ... treated it primarily as a game; but the emphasis on procedures, skills, and techniques was common to all' (1996 [1986]:95).

In a discussion on 'aspects of procedural knowledge' they suggest four specific characteristics of these procedures, as follows.

(i) Speaking in measured tones

'Women at this position think before they speak; and because their ideas must measure up to certain objective standards, they speak in measured tones. Often, they do not speak at all. But this is not a passive silence; on the other side of this silence, reason is stirring.' (1996 [1986]:94).

The procedure involved here is therefore to take time to take stock of a situation and the knowledge that is focused on. It requires people to 'engage in conscious, deliberate, systematic analysis', because things are 'not always what they seem to be'. To find the truth takes considerable effort and requires significant investment, listening, looking, thinking... Because of people's awareness that truth can be elusive, they err on the side of caution, holding back rather than speaking out, and using 'measured tones' when articulating their views and thoughts.

(ii) Knowing how

This is the preference for form over content referred to previously. Content is nevertheless affected. 'In learning to "do philosophy," Faith learns how to formulate questions; but the questions had to be of a particular kind, and the questions she might have formulated on her own might have been quite different from those she was being taught to ask.' In developing methods (forms) of reasoning that stood their ground and proved reliable, the interviewees in this category also acquired an increasing sense of control, demonstrating hence the link between this and their tendency to speak in measured tones.

(iii) Perspective taking

'The notion of "ways of looking" is central to the procedural knowledge position'. It involves people in acknowledging that different people look at the world in different ways, and in their being willing to explore these different perspectives. 'They are interested not just in *what* people think but in *how* people go about forming their opinions and feelings and ideas.' So in preparation for an exam, students would focus not so much on *what* questions might come up on the paper, but on *what sort* of questions would be posed, according to the mind and character of the teacher: the sort of things he/she would be interested in and concerned about.

(iv) Objectivity

'Women who use procedural knowledge pay attention to objects in the external world'. The authors contrast this against Subjective knowers who 'professed to be open to anything' and who were, 'in fact, stubbornly immune to other people's ideas'. Frequently, however, 'it takes time to learn to attend to the object, to wait for meanings to emerge from a poem, rather than imposing the contents of your own head or your own gut'. There are real similarities here with Witkin *et al.*'s Field-dependent knowers whose approach was to allow the relevant, constant features of their focus of attention to 'emerge' (see Figure 5.1). The nature of the objectivity involves people 'emptying themselves' simply so that they can attend to the other with the purpose of discovering its true identity. The authors do not comment on the role of the self in this procedure. However, their text suggests that it is not eliminated or repressed. Instead, it simply takes a back seat because it is sufficiently well-formed to do that. Before one can be self-giving and self-'retiring', the self has to have taken control of itself: once again, implied through the characteristic of speaking in measured tones.

From these four aspects, the authors go on to identify procedures specific to Connected and Separate ways of knowing. These are outlined in Figure 5.4. Many have been elaborated on in greater depth previously. Notes have therefore simply been added to accompany those introduced for the first time.

Figure 5.4: Separate and Connected procedures

Separate knowing	Connected knowing
<i>Doubting</i>	<i>Sharing small truths</i> Gossiping. 'As the gossip observes her friend's responses she learns about her friend's ways of making meaning'. (p116)
<i>Listening to reason</i>	<i>Refusing to judge</i>
<i>Self-extrication</i>	<i>Collaborating in connected-knowing groups</i> Collaborative explorations require individuals to 'stretch [their] own vision in order to share another's vision'. (p119)
	<i>Using personal knowledge</i>

For Belenky *et al.*, then, the term 'procedure' is used very broadly and might be understood as people's 'characteristics' as they go about the learning process. Immediately apparent is the familiarity of Separate knowing processes in the contemporary educational context and the unfamiliarity of those of Connected knowing. One might even be tempted to question whether the latter can be considered procedures at all, as well as their legitimacy for the purposes of formulating a systematic understanding of how people construct knowledge. However, the authors draw attention to a further dimension, highlighting the fact that the two alternatives may well be based on different ethical and moral systems, the one prioritising justice, the other care.

Returning to the discussion of learning styles and the proposal that Connected and Separate knowing should be viewed as contributing to and augmenting scholarly understandings of learning styles, a natural assumption is therefore that learning styles should be seen as a group of interacting procedures. There is little in any of the characteristics provided in Figure 5.1 to suggest this is inappropriate. Before the suggestion can be accepted as generally sound, however, a number of potential difficulties must be considered. Firstly, as section I highlighted, learning styles are commonly thought to be traits that are implicit to people throughout their lives, and reasonably stable over time. While challenges to that position have already been raised, questions must nonetheless be raised within the context of Belenky *et al.*'s own work. Their Procedural knowers were presented as fourth of five perspectives, and although their insistence that the perspectives are not hierarchical has been noted, the implication is that none of the other perspectives, with the possible exception of Constructed knowers, employed these procedures or functioned in a connected or separate way. The difficulty is heightened by the authors' suggestion that only those who have received a formal education, possibly at university level, develop these procedures. Two main responses can be made. The ethical and moral preference to either justice or care may well be innately present in people, inclining them to either a separate or connected approach, but the associated procedures take time and training to develop. Silent, Received and Subjective knowers may also use procedures linked to separation or connection as part of their way of knowing, but these were less apparent than other dimensions of their epistemology and the authors focused on these.

There seems little reason, therefore, to reject the idea that bipolar learning styles have a procedural dimension to them, although further research needs to take place to establish this more securely. Those procedures extend beyond the work of Belenky *et al.* and incorporate the conclusions of Witkin *et al.*, Pask, and potentially others such as those identified by Schmeck (see section I). In many ways, returning to the definitions presented previously, learning styles might best be understood precisely as the range of mental procedures (as distinct from processes) people habitually use in a diversity of situations. The next section firstly argues that these also represent an aspect of people's 'form' which in turn interacts with 'content', and then considers

how this works out when that content is specifically Christian. In so doing, it reintroduces a number of dimensions focused on in previous chapters, hence beginning the process of drawing a number of different threads together.

IV. The form/content relationship and Christian faith-content

The relevance of the form/content relationship to the interests of the research was first highlighted in the Prologue. Section II.2 above offered a basic analysis of its structure, understanding this as the interaction which takes place between people's 'natural' and inner way of approaching the construction of personal knowledge which is then directed outward during the process of engaging with their environment and experience. Judging from Belenky *et al.*'s work, it seems probable that those with a 'separate' inclination based on the ethic of justice may also perceive and relate to content in a separate, impersonal way, whereas those inclined towards connectedness and care may perceive and relate to it in a relational, personal way. The pivot between the two axes lies in the procedures people employ to bring the two together. Referring to previous discussion, these procedures are part of the means of internalisation, relating both to the patterns of reasoning employed and to the process of reflection. Each axis has a number of strands, the horizontal continuum including the different traits identifiable within people's learning styles, the vertical incorporating a range largely grouped under the impersonal/personal dichotomy.

Although the questions identified previously about the connection between learning styles and procedures still play a role, certainly in Belenky *et al.*'s work, the procedures of Procedural knowers constituted their form, or their way of knowing. It was through focusing on these procedures that the authors were able to identify the salient characteristics of form. At least for this group of individuals, form and its procedural structures were more or less synonymous. Perry expresses something of the same understanding of form. His definition, first quoted in the Prologue, bears repeating.

We describe in this monograph an evolution in students' interpretation of their lives evident in their accounts of their experience during four years in a liberal arts college. The evolution consists of a progression in certain forms in which

the students construe their experience as they recount it in voluntary interviews at the end of each year. These "forms" characterize the structures which the students explicitly or implicitly impute to the world, especially those structures in which they construe the nature and origins of knowledge, of value, and of responsibility. (1970:1)

Perry talks of students 'construing their experience' rather than interacting with content. However, Jarvis's analysis of the relationship between experience, its social situation and social context considered and re-worked in Chapter Two suggests that experience and content, although conceptually separable, are generally intricately linked and largely inseparable in practice. For the purposes of the research, therefore, the form/content relationship was understood in terms of the procedural interaction between the two axes of the matrix depicted in Figure 5.3.

When considering the impact that Christian faith-content might have on the form/content relationship, different possibilities come to the fore. Of the various interwoven threads on the vertical axis, the inner/outer dichotomy rises to prominence. The discussion on reflection and epistemic primitives provided in Chapter Four indicated that Christians might well attribute greater weight to external authorities such as the bible, Christian doctrine and Church leaders than they do to their own understandings and inner convictions. As a result, the procedures they employ and the structures which they impute to these authorities may have specific characteristics potentially unique either to Christian learning or to learning in general when attention is focused primarily on an external authority. It is difficult to predict exactly what these procedures might look like; at this point in the thesis, their identification through an examination of empirical data can be envisaged but the detail cannot be forecast other than anticipating particular configurations between the personal and impersonal using separate or connected techniques. With the weighting biased to the impersonal and external, it is also conceivable that the balance between listening and speaking may be influenced. Chapter Three linked this with the concept of voice and the growth of the self. In the context of a discussion on procedures this dichotomy may be evidenced in how people make use of Christian faith-content, whether they 'submit' to its 'authority' or not and what form either option might take. In an article entitled 'The Educational Mission of the Church to Adults—a Quest for

Truth?' Jarvis (1999) argues that the Church needs to move away from providing answers, and instead to find ways of enabling people to construct their own religious identities. Here the didactic/discovery dichotomy comes into play, once again potentially influencing the growth of the self, but procedurally a heavy didactic authority may result in people relating to content in a surface manner, relating to it impersonally and adopting 'surface procedures'. Lastly, the discrete/related dichotomy suggests that different procedures may be adopted depending on the degree to which Christian faith-content is integrated into people's overall lives; indeed, there is a hint that people may be able to use one set of procedures for their 'Christian' knowing, and a different set for other types of knowing.

Belenky *et al.*'s work demonstrated that all these vertical aspects combined together with the horizontal to form people's overall 'way of knowing'. Given the specifically Christian application to many of their vertical categories, and given the fact that Christian people are required, in some way, to engage with this authoritative content, an alternative to 'ways of knowing' is proposed: people's ways of believing. These ways represent the procedures and forms that Christians adopt when engaging with authoritative faith-content, and are living examples of the influence that people's faith has on the way they learn.

V. Summary and conclusion

This final influence of faith-content on learning has focused on the form/content relationship as expressed through the interaction of people's bipolar learning styles and external content. That interaction was understood as represented by a set of procedures that people employ as they engage with the content of their learning, and the chapter argued that the procedures were likely to take particular forms according to both the nature of the content and the learning style people employed as they related to it. The argument demonstrates how the necessary influence of faith-content on learning may be analysed—how Christians actually learn—since the implication is that content with particular and authoritative characteristics such as that of the Christian faith will require a context-specific set of procedures, which in turn can be interpreted as 'people's ways of believing'.

Summary of the theoretical argument

These first five chapters of the thesis have argued firstly that Christian faith, as represented by its living representatives, its corpus of teaching and traditions, and individuals' personal commitment, has the potential to affect the way in which those same individuals learn. That potential lies in its authoritative nature, which is identifiable a) in claims to divine authority made by the faith of itself; b) in the propositional articulation of its doctrinal framework; and c) in its separation from other forms of social knowledge. While this authority may be either intrinsic or attributed, the thesis argued that this was unlikely to alter the hypothesis that the learning patterns and processes of Christian adherents would be identifiable and potentially specific to a Christian context.

Within an overall context of theories of experiential learning, different aspects of the process of learning were then considered, and a case made that the authoritative nature of Christian faith-content could affect:

- The configuration of the components of learning
- People's patterns of reasoning
- Their use of time
- The development of individuals' biographies
- The growth of the self
- The process of internalisation
- The process of reflection
- People's learning styles, as represented through a range of procedures and 'ways of believing'

There is both overlap and distinctiveness in these aspects. People's patterns of reasoning, for example, relates to the process of reflection and to learning styles, while the growth of the self, particularly when considered through the metaphor of voice, stands alone. The final chapter, however, suggested that the majority of these dimensions could be incorporated into an understanding of the relationship between form and content, form being represented as a horizontal axis of people's inner epistemology, interacting with the vertical axis of their relationship with external content. The resulting procedures were

indicative of the nature of this interaction, which, when largely focused on Christian faith-content, could be understood as people's ways of believing, a more general way in which the influence of faith on learning was evidenced.

At various points it was acknowledged both that the argument necessarily remained at the theoretical (and therefore hypothetical) level, and that specific details of the outworking of the theories could only be determined through empirical research. This was conducted amongst twenty-one interviewees, and the chapters to follow outline the procedure.

Chapter Six

Research design and methodology

Introduction

Chronologically, the empirical research took place alongside the thinking and reading in preparation for the theoretical analysis presented in Chapters One to Five. In part, this was because certain decisions were relatively straightforward and required little complex thinking-through; in part it was a result of good familiarity with Belenky *et al.*'s and Perry's work and the fact that the former's inner/outer dichotomy was quickly perceived as an appropriate methodological tool. This chapter outlines the design and methodology, providing a rationale for the various decisions made.

I. Methodological rationale and approach

I.1 A qualitative investigation

The decision to conduct a qualitative piece of research had been made at a comparatively early stage. It was not made in thin air. None of the three major concepts involved (faith, experience, learning) lent themselves to a quantitative analysis. Certainly 'faith', as an umbrella term, was a somewhat fluid and indefinable notion, especially in a personal and individual context. One person's 'faith' was likely to be significantly different from another's, in terms of understanding, structure and expression—indeed, the original research questions somewhat depended on this being the case! Similarly, the way in which people responded to Christian faith authorities would be qualitatively different rather than quantitatively, and the goal of the investigation was to draw these differences out. The emphasis would therefore be on individual description rather than on establishing frequency or aiming for representativeness. In order to do this, the study needed to be conducted amongst people of 'lived faith', in such a way that the 'lived' was focused on as much as the 'faith'. While Christian theology abounds with treatises and sermons on the nature of faith and how it should be lived, such theories may well not correlate with reality.

Despite intellectually 'knowing' what their faith 'should' consist of (and very possibly aspiring to put this into practice), Christians may actually live something different. It was this natural, experiential element that the research intended to relate to experiential learning, and which in consequence led to a qualitative approach, since Patton's criterion of using qualitative methods in order to 'understand naturally occurring phenomena in their naturally occurring states' was met (Patton, 1990:41). Posing a series of reasonably open questions for exploration would both respect these principles and also allow data to emerge inductively.

1.2 A phenomenological enquiry

One of the difficulties that had to be faced once the decision to conduct a qualitative piece of research had been made was how to select the interviewees. Not only did comparatively routine questions focusing on the mechanics of selection (asking for volunteers, every Xth name from a list, etc.) require consideration, but more profound questions revolving around the issue of Christian identity came to the fore. What might define a Christian? For a number of decades in Britain it has been commonplace to have people with no religious belief or commitment to call themselves 'Christian' simply, it would appear, on account of the fact that this was the official religion of their place of birth. Furthermore, while conceptually it makes little sense for people to speak of being a Christian sometimes and not other times, or to be part Christian and part something else, either case would nevertheless seem to be a frequent reality. People may attend church every Sunday but consign their religiosity to this sole occasion during the week. It is thus possible to 'box' faith. Christianity itself recognises in its doctrine of sanctification the fact that people are 'Christian' to varying degrees, and teaches that the development of faith and the growth toward godliness is a lifelong pursuit. These methodological questions could only be solved at base level by accepting a phenomenological principle, interviewing individuals who both confessed Christian faith and interpreted their lives and experience through this lens. Given the accompanying interest of the research in learning, it was possible to put one or two extra security measures into place. All those interviewed were actively and formally studying theology in one context or another, and were doing so as a faith 'act'. Although some had embarked on their studies without any clear idea of what

they would do afterwards, the majority anticipated working in a Christian leadership capacity. Six interviewees were training for Anglican ordination, for example; one other for ordination as a Catholic Priest. Others were already ordained or anticipating ordination into other denominations either in Britain or abroad. Some were considering positions as Christian youth workers in churches. The two obvious exceptions were two French Roman Catholic nuns. These were my own private contacts as I regularly visit the Convent in which they live. Members of the Benedictine order, they lead highly contemplative lives in a strictly regulated environment. The rules of the cloister are such that no members of the community should stray beyond its limits, and the interviews were conducted in a small '*parloir*' ('parlour') with bars down the middle separating the community from the outside world. The inclusion of these interviewees (and the Roman Catholic seminarian, who was also French and connected to the community) added a very different dimension to the data and final results. Yet they fulfilled the criterion of actively studying theology, since this was a regular part of their community life. All the interviewees also shared in common the fact that they were studying as a result of making a life-changing faith-related decision. Many, if not all of the eleven full-time students had made significant sacrifices to attend college. The part-time students all expressed similar challenges and pressures resulting from the course of action they were pursuing. The nuns were the most obviously committed for life and had ostensibly made the biggest sacrifice. (One emerged as the eldest of all the interviewees. At the age of 88, she had been 'inside' for 60+ years.) The fact that all were formally studying theology (a faith-related discipline), that all had made a life-changing decision to do so, that this had implied significant sacrifice and challenge, and that all had committed themselves to or envisaged a faith-related profession resulting from their studies, helped address these methodological questions. Their 'faith' encompassed the whole of their beings, and therefore the research could be reasonably confident of a relationship between their faith and their learning, whatever that might be.

Philosophically, therefore, the research was based on phenomenological principles. Phenomenology:

- 'is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which see behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality' (Cohen and Manion, 1994:29).
- 'focuses on the question: "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?"' (Patton, 1990:69)
- focuses on 'how we put together the phenomenon we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world, and, in so doing, develop a worldview. There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means. The subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and a person's reality (Patton, 1990: 69).

While something of a tension should be recognised in the fact that the faith of many Christians is based precisely on the premise that there is a separate, objective reality in the person of God, the last of the three points is particularly relevant. For people of 'lived faith', and even more so for students who enrol on full-time courses which expressly aim to focus as much on the vocational aspect of Christian life as the theoretical, a natural rationale for sample (and possibly population) selection emerged, since it was possible to discount learners on non-vocational courses such as might be found in university departments and look more towards the independent, often (but not exclusively) denominational colleges whose express intent is to begin from a position of faith and allow that faith both to develop and change as well as interact with—and often seek to influence—the world around.

The purposive nature of phenomenological sampling was therefore considered appropriate, since 'phenomenological studies are designed to describe the essence of a given phenomenon and informants are chosen because they have lived the experience being investigated' (Baker, 1992:1358). The primacy of the *subjective* experience is emphasised, and participants would frequently be involved in the final validation of the results.

Phenomenology thus respected the basic criteria implicit in the research question by:

- enabling the *experiential* side of faith to be emphasised and focused upon;

- providing a means by which this could be explored qualitatively rather than quantitatively;
- allowing individual similarities and differences to be identified and categorised inductively rather than deductively.

The research therefore committed itself to a qualitative approach, based on phenomenological principles. Measures were also taken to address the question of how lived faith should be identified and the extent to which it played a role in people's lives. These principles then provided the foundations for the data collection.

1.3 The interview sample

Few of the standard methods of selecting interviewees in an orderly fashion were available. Given the reasonably intimate nature of the investigation (Christian faith is often seen as a private and personal matter) it would have been inappropriate and probably counter-productive to select individuals at random from any lists that might have been available (such as church electoral rolls or lists of registered students). Such an approach would also have depended on those selected both being willing to participate, and on their responding honestly and openly. These are issues that every piece of empirical research faces, but they were heightened in this particular case. Asking for volunteers was considered the most productive way forward. Three sources of volunteers were identified: the independent and vocational theological college where I was at that time employed, an Anglican ordination course with around seventy adults studying part-time and whose summer week-long residential school was held at my workplace, and the afore-mentioned Benedictine Convent in France. With the exception of the French contingent (permission had to be sought in advance from the Mother Superior of the Convent who then elected two 'volunteers', and the Seminarian agreed to be interviewed on the spur of the moment simply by dint of visiting the Convent at an opportune time) requests for volunteers were made publicly, with a brief outline of the purpose of the research. Eleven were recruited from the full-time programme, seven from the part-time; these combined with the three French interviewees made a total of twenty-one. While the size of the sample might appear small, it cohered with the recommended number of interviewees in

research of this nature, as well as with the space and time constraints imposed. Somewhat fortuitously, an extremely good balance between the various extraneous variables was present: nine male and twelve female volunteers, aged between twenty-one and eighty-eight, representing all levels of theological study from first year undergraduate to PhD (or equivalents), a good variety of churchmanships and backgrounds, and of previous education. No control group of people of 'no' faith was used. As indicated previously, there were a number of ways of interpreting the research question. While to speak of faith 'influencing' learning might require proof that faith was an agent as opposed to anything else—and certainly this dimension needed to be considered—the possibility of interpreting the question by asking what the correlation between faith and learning was has also been demonstrated. In other words, how did people 'of faith' learn? The question of whether this was significantly different from how other people learnt became tangential. It was this latter angle that the research chose to pursue, hence obviating the need for a control group.

1.4 The interviews: type, design, questions, implementation, transcription

Given the goals of the research, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were deemed the most appropriate. Belenky *et al.*'s inner/outer dichotomy provided a conceptual *fil conducteur* which neatly encompassed the essential aspects of the hypothesis and research question, and interview questions were designed which focused on drawing out where people's ultimate epistemic authority lay, whether this was 'inner' or 'outer', and how it operated in their lives and learning. A range of 'outer' faith authorities was identifiable in the bible, the Pope, other ecclesiastical authority figures such as priests, vicars, bishops, ministers etc., theological scholars (both authors and lecturers), God himself (however perceived), and the all-important faith-content... Certain questions also left room for other external and thus far unidentified authorities to come to the fore. 'Inner' authority was anticipated in statements of self-assertion over and above external authorities, examples of independent thought and autonomy, strength of self, and, potentially, in reasoned instances of change of behaviour. One or two questions were included of a more general nature to encourage participants to think more specifically about the relationship between their faith and the way they

learnt. The questions were formulated and then piloted on six individuals. The pilot stage revealed a number of weaknesses, and the refined questions were then piloted on a further two people. The final set of questions was established, and each was written out on a card. Since most were profound in nature, it was hoped that giving the interviewees each question written out in this way would help keep them on track—all except the nuns were used to writing essays and having to keep to the essay question! The questions needed slight modification from one group of students to another, according to the social context. 'Why did you decide to come to study at this college?', for example, became 'Why did you decide to seek ordination and from there to go into ordination training?' and 'Why did you decide to become a nun?'. Apart from the three French interviews, each was conducted in my office. Thought had to be given about the dynamics involved with this. Would it have been better to find somewhere neutral? Since I had a position of authority in the college, would this in some way affect the responses? Other potentially influential factors might have emerged regarding faith and theological positions: would interviewees be cautious not to step outside what they perceived as prescribed theological boundaries? Did any of the questions specifically require a position to be taken that might prove awkward or embarrassing and hence cause the respondent to answer 'falsely'? These were all considerations. However, there were also counter arguments. Despite being in a position of authority in terms of being a member of college staff, this was not directly exerted in any capacity, and students and I would never normally come into contact with each other. Especially for students from the college itself, its theological 'position' was well known and accepted. Corresponding assumptions would be made about its staff, and hence incur trust rather than suspicion. The office itself was a neutral environment, with an easy chair, plants and an unimposing desk and computer. Little about it was likely to intimidate.

The interviews were taped. Respondents were asked to give their agreement to this, and assured of total confidentiality. Names and other information likely to reveal specific identities would be changed in the write up, and tapes destroyed subsequently. They were also encouraged to draw their own lines in the interviews and only to say what they felt comfortable sharing. They were not informed of the purpose of the research or the overall thrust behind the questions, although they were

told that the general theme was to investigate the relationship between their faith and the way they learnt. The interviews lasted approximately an hour and fifteen minutes, and respondents were also warned of this beforehand so that if time became an issue the whole interview could be rescheduled. Finally, they were given an indication of how the interview would be conducted: they would be given sixteen questions, each written on a card. They could say as much or as little as they wanted, there were no rights or wrongs, nor was anything in particular being 'sought'. The interviewer would remain silent as much as possible, speaking only to seek clarification, to clarify if this proved necessary, or on the odd occasion to prompt. They should not find a general silence intimidating, however, since the point was to get them to speak, not to have a two-way dialogue.

The data were therefore collected through sixteen questions, provided in Appendix A. With few exceptions, the questions were asked in the same order, the exceptions being on the occasions when respondents moved voluntarily and inadvertently to speak about something that another question asked.

The interviews were conducted over a period of two months, in the summer of 1999. Each was transcribed in its entirety by myself. Since each was in the order of 10,000 words, this was a lengthy procedure, but deemed worthwhile on account of one major advantage: transcription by the same person who conducts the interviews permits the latter to re-live the interview experience, particularly if done within a reasonably short period of time. In this instance, most were transcribed within a week of the interview, facilitating not only a re-living of the occasion but also (in some cases) permitting one or two areas of unintelligibility to be worked out. In general, the interviews were clearly intelligible; certain techniques to ensure this was the case had been put into place, with a carefully-placed microphone and both interviewer and interviewee sitting in good range. On one occasion, I informed the respondent during the interview that I was deliberately going to move further away from him since he was speaking very quietly. I hoped that by sitting further away he would naturally raise his voice. It worked! Most of the interviews contained one or two sentences or words that had to be replaced by 'tape unintelligible', but these were comparatively few, and very rarely at times that proved to be of real significance for their content.

The transcriptions included both dialogue partners, and indicated the occasions when one had interrupted the other. Verbal conversation pauses, hesitations, voice inflexion, such as 'umm' and 'err' were included, but the transcripts were not provided with coding to indicate specific inflexions, body language etc.. Particularly long pauses, intonation indicating significant surprise, concern or other emotions were indicated as appropriate. The tapes were kept until the end of the research, thus offering the possibility of returning to them for verification, after which they were discarded. The French transcriptions were somewhat more demanding to transcribe both because of the need for accents in written French, and because there were a number of areas of uncertainty (vocabulary, spelling, grammar). A first draft of these three interviews, plus tapes, was sent to two independent French friends, with no connection with the interviewees, who corrected the draft, and their amendments were then incorporated into the final transcript. As all the interviews were worked on during the whole of the analysis, other errors were noted and corrected, and where necessary, the tapes returned to. As a result of the process, the interviews became highly familiar, and on each reading the interviewees appeared almost to be speaking in real life, their voices clearly 'heard' behind the written words. This was an advantage in the analysis, as it ensured the research continued to represent each individual as closely as possible; any potential separation between researcher and interviewee was lessened in this way.

The transcripts were printed out leaving a wide margin on the right hand side of the page, with continuous line numbering every five lines. Each interviewee was allocated a research name (pseudonym) and any other indications that might reveal their true identity also changed as much as possible (spouses' names, towns of residence, for example). Although they had been instructed not to reveal any information that they would feel uncomfortable about being used and potentially made public through the research, I was aware that this was a somewhat dubious instruction, since a) they might easily say something on the spur of the moment and only later consider it inappropriate, and b) they might have shifted their position in the intervening time between interview and publication of research, resulting in embarrassment that they would not originally have felt. There was little that could be done about this, however, other than work with sensitivity and awareness of the issues, and take any subsequent

measures as considered appropriate. Other means of protecting identity were also incorporated, not only regarding the interviewees, but also other people they may have mentioned. Lecturers and friends were typical examples, and where possible these too were changed. It was often not possible to eradicate all indications of people's identity. Those recounting the content of their PhD research, for example, would be readily identifiable to anyone familiar with the research. Similarly, those with a distinguishing background or experience would be recognisable to their lecturers, friends and family, as would those with an 'agenda' that was actively pursued. Given the relevance of the research to the world of theological education from whom the interviewees were drawn, there was a (continuing) risk that confidentiality would be broken in this way. Ultimately, the research had to rely on the fact that interviewees had spoken freely and willingly, and indeed, had volunteered to participate, being aware of the risks. The example transcripts provided in Appendix B, however, have nevertheless been amended to take these considerations into account.

1.5 Preliminary analysis: thick descriptions

Patton (1990) argues that 'the first task in qualitative analysis is description'. Distinguishing between description and interpretation, the former of which 'analyses and answers basic questions', the latter 'involves explaining the findings, answering "why" questions, attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework' (1990:375), he suggests that fundamental to any analysis of qualitative data is the presentation of 'solid descriptive data ... in such a way that others reading the results can understand and draw their own interpretations' (1990:374-75). These 'thick descriptions' function as a type of summary and overview, identifying and describing the main issues, thus providing a context within which the final results can be interpreted and generally ratified by those not involved in the research.

Faced with a mass of data constituting over two hundred thousand words, to formulate a thick description of each offered the possibility of bringing order and focus. The task was begun by drawing up a detailed concept map of certain interviews, in which

the primary, secondary and subsidiary themes were identified and plotted in such a way as to show their essential inter-relationships. The maps were complex, and clearly a little contrived, particularly regarding the inter-relationships. They were also very time-consuming, and after compiling half a dozen, it proved easier to make a list of the major themes that were emerging in each interview. From here, it was a reasonably small step to write a summary, including what were perceived of as pertinent quotes, constituting between five and seven thousand words per interview: the thick description. The descriptions of the three French interviews were written in English. This homogenised the data linguistically. Although there are always question marks about translation both of words and of ideas and concepts, the shift from one language to the other was done with reasonable confidence, given my own competence in both languages, and thorough familiarity with French culture and 'spirit' not only in general terms but also with the monastic culture from which the interviewees were drawn.

One of the difficulties the research was then presented with, however, was a lack of common emphases and major themes running through various interviews that could be grouped and categorised. This was possibly due to the interview questions being less focused than they might have been: something which is discussed in detail in Chapter Ten. In many ways they were significantly different, with, for example, certain people emphasising doctrine, church and beliefs; others people and ministry. In some the role of the self was prominent, and in others not at all. Clearly (and naturally) people's personal circumstances influenced the way they were learning, the concerns that they had, the way they led their lives and understood their faith to relate and function in their lives. Quite frequently individuals referred to changes that had occurred in these same areas, previously having behaved in one way, and as a result of their theological education, now thinking and behaving in quite another. These changes were multi-faceted, ranging from the view and function of the self, to a loosening interpretation of previously hard-held faith authorities such as the bible, to an increasing tension between faith and life experience, to a more general bringing together of 'faith-logic' and traditional rationality. For a short period, the research considered focusing on some of the differences that had emerged, and/or on the

changes which had taken place, but too much of the argument was based on silence. An alternative way of analysing the data would have to be found.

The thick descriptions proved their use in providing an initial first handle on what issues and themes were present, and would potentially serve a useful purpose in relating the final conclusions back to their original context as a cross-check. At this point, therefore, they were put to one side and renewed focus was placed on the original research question and the rationale that had lain behind the interview questions.

II. Summary and conclusion

The data collected in any piece of research are obviously crucial to the overall quality of the finished project. One of the more unusual aspects of this particular research was the fact that the interviews were designed and conducted at an early stage. In a phenomenological project, this can be an advantage, since of prime importance is the need not to lead the participant(s) in any way, and questions should be of the kind as to encourage participants to talk freely, with no motivation to provide what it might be thought the interviewer is looking for. This demands skills of the interviewer, particularly if he/she is well informed about the subject in hand and already has some possible notion of the type of information that might be forthcoming. Baker makes the point that 'the phenomenological method is based on the notion that essences can be discovered by reduction which involves bracketing and imaginatively varying the description. To bracket, the researcher must identify and suspend what he or she already knows about the experience being studied and must approach it without preconceptions' (1992:1337, citing Oiler, 1982). This proved a challenge in the present context. The research question had been formulated on previous knowledge; my own work context meant that I was surrounded with many of the issues the project was looking at, and it would be increasingly difficult to block out thought and reflection about how faith and learning inter-related. While there were no fool-proof ways of handling these issues, other than raising awareness and consciously bearing them in mind, to conduct the interviews at an early stage might help avoid the intrusion of a number of presuppositions since a lot of the significant reading would

not have taken place. There was always a risk that this was putting the cart before the horse, and that the subsequent reading would influence the interpretation of the data. However, the decision was finally taken to pursue this route. The research therefore took on an iterative dimension, with an in-built flexibility that would allow the overall structure to emerge inductively. This accounts for the presentation of the thesis as it stands. The stages corresponded to those outlined by Moustakas as inherent to phenomenological research:

Step 1: The Problem and Question Formulation—the phenomenon. The researcher delineates a focus of investigation... formulates a question in such a way that it is understandable to others.

Step 2: The Data Generating Situation—The Protocol Life Text... researchers start with descriptive narrative provided by subjects who are viewed as co-researchers... We query the person and engage in dialogue, or we combine the two.

Step 3: The Data Analysis—Explication and Interpretation. Once collected, the data are read and scrutinised so as to reveal their structure, meaning configuration, coherence, and the circumstances of their occurrence and clustering... emphasis is on the study of configuration of meaning... involving both the structure of meaning and how it is created. (Moustakas, 1994:15, citing von Eckartsberg, 1986:27).

The inductive dimension continued to be significant throughout, and Appendix C, entitled 'People's Ways of Believing', provides a descriptive outline of the behavioural patterns identified which are organised into a typology in a similar way to Belenky *et al.*'s positions. From there, it became possible to refocus on the research question and draw specific conclusions.

Content analysis is a complex activity which can be approached in a number of ways. In this instance, rather than turn to computer-aided calculations of word frequency or thematic prevalences, I adopted a modified form of the Grounded Theory method, which again supported the use of a comparatively small sample (Baker, 1992). A number of ways of structuring and organising the data were tried, most giving the impression of something being forced or contrived long before any useful conclusions could be drawn. At these points, there was also a sense of regret that more people had

not been interviewed, as larger numbers might have seen more conclusive results emerging. Even at the end of the project, with results that proved satisfying and sound, there was a continued vulnerability due to the small sample. A productive analytic method was nevertheless found and is outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Data analysis

Introduction

Chronologically, a significant period elapsed between the compilation of the thick descriptions outlined in Chapter Six and the formal process of analysis presented in this chapter. When the interviews were eventually returned to, guidance regarding the analysis of qualitative material was once again sought from a range of sources (e.g. Patton [1990], Oppenheim [1992], Cohen and Manion [1994]), and Silverman [1997]. Various approaches were trialled; some were completely abandoned, others proved more fruitful. One in particular appeared to provide a coherent way forward, and it wasn't until an independent judge was asked to work through a sample of interviews and code them according to a set of criteria that its weaknesses were revealed as untenable. The foundations of the approach nevertheless provided the necessary framework from which the final structure and interpretation was drawn.

This chapter focuses on these two major stages in the analytic process, while incorporating the important methodological considerations that were grappled with *en cours de route*. The first stage was that of developing a matrix as an interpretive framework; the second the emergence of a typology that highlighted the relationship between individuals' faith-content and their experience. Each is explored in turn.

I. The formation of a matrix

Using the guiding questions formulated by Belenky *et al.* to elucidate their inner/outer dialectic, it was possible to begin identifying instances of people turning to an inner or an outer authority in the set of interviews. The evident success in eliciting responses that revealed this inter-relationship was gratifying. The interviews abounded with examples, many of which are quoted as part of the findings in the next chapter, as well as in the transcripts provided in Appendix B. Acknowledging a degree of repetition, they can be summarised as:

Outer authority

- Statements showing interviewees consciously and deliberately acquiescing to 'higher authorities' such as the Pope, bishops, and the bible, on the grounds of their divine authority and/or their superior intelligence.
- Statements of conviction about something 'because the bible tells me so'.
- Evidence of acceptance rather than challenge; passivity rather than pro-activity.
- Talk of 'disobedience' and 'humbling oneself' with regard to God and the bible.
- A fearfulness about being angry with God.
- A determination to evaluate everything according to scriptural principles. The establishment of principles which functioned as an objective framework.
- A reluctance to express or even form a personal opinion, and the desire to be told, or discover 'the truth'.
- Evidence of people taking a course of action because God had told them to do so, in a range of ways. Similarly, some had refused to go in a particular direction because God had *not* confirmed it.

This latter obviously involved a subjective interpretation. It was generally linked to a perceived objective reality, such as God's word as found in the bible, or a particular experience or set of experiences. The subjectivity could never be eradicated, but the weight that was put on God having authenticated or been at the origin of these occasions meant that the ultimate authority appeared to be external.

Inner authority

- Self-assertion in a variety of forms: the construction and expression of a personal opinion; the assertion of this over against other people's; the making of autonomous choices and decisions without reference to any authority; As evidenced by, for example:
- A willingness to over-ride, discard, dismiss biblical 'teaching'.
- The construction and exercising of an individual theology.
- Evidence of struggle and wrestling between a faith authority and people's natural understanding/inclination.

- Doubt.
- Personal commitment and loyalty.
- Gut feeling, instinct.
- Self-confidence.
- Question posing; challenging authorities such as lecturers and preachers.
- Working things out for themselves. Working things through.

There was also evidence of people turning tail and escaping, neither able to acquiesce to an external authority nor assert themselves 'against' it. Escape routes meant shelving issues, putting things into an 'I don't know' box, depending on others to work something out rather than do it themselves... To a point, escaping could have been an act of self-assertion. However, frequently this was a preferable alternative to challenging a faith authority overtly, and hence might be considered as retreat. (Genuine instances of uncertainty should nonetheless not be ruled out.)

As this route was pursued, however, a new dialectic emerged inductively: people could also be classified as validating their *faith* in one of two principal ways. Certain respondents declared they were Christians because of an experiential relationship with God, while others held their faith because it made intellectual sense of the world.

'God is real to me, you know. There's nothing kind of irrational about that. I mean, there's nothing irrational about, I'm not making it up, you know? Umm, or believing in something that's abstract or, or an idea, or something else somebody's told me.' (Chris)

'I am a Christian because I feel I have met God and experienced God. And felt his presence and his love. And that there is a relationship between us. And so, in a sense, for me it is not a lot different from being a friend or a partner or a parent or a child or whatever. It is a real relationship, one to one, with somebody else.' (Frances)

'My understanding of my faith is based on my intellectual understanding of a creator God that creates humanity for relationship with him. And if you like,

my intellectual understanding of the story of the bible and salvation history. But then I'd also want to include an experiential dimension...' (Denise)

'When I observe people that do have different beliefs and see that their beliefs make even less sense or are even less practical in their own lives, I don't need to go down that avenue. And to date I haven't found anything else as attractive as the Christian faith and having my doctrine right gives me confidence that there never will be anything like it. So in a sense this is a consolidation that I should carry on.' (Jon)

While a number wanted to affirm the partnership between doctrinal beliefs and experience (as both Denise and Jon's quotes demonstrate), it seemed that most interviewees leaned more towards one or the other in the understanding and outworking of their faith.

The research was thus provided with two sets of dialectics, one of which had underpinned all the questions and which was fundamentally about learning—the internalisation of the external—the other of which had arisen inductively from the interview material itself, and which expressed something of the way people's faith operated. The relationship between faith and learning was essentially what the research was all about, and the next step became the drawing up of a matrix in which these two continua intersected each other (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1: A matrix of intersecting faith authorities

The formation of the matrix was a significant step forward, since it opened the door to a systematic way of ordering and grouping interviewees according to the quadrant into which they fell. The research then embarked upon the process of colour coding each interview, putting a coloured mark in the margin on each occasion when individuals demonstrated acquiescence to an outer authority, self-assertion in opposition to an outer authority, placing confidence in experience as a reason for faith, or alternatively, in the cognitive, intellectual domain. A fifth colour indicated instances of retreat. The interviews were coloured coded once, and the matrix began to take shape. The smaller score was subtracted from the larger for each continuum, giving a final 'positioning' which indicated either an inner or outer weighting, and either a cognitive or experiential way of validating their faith. Each was individually plotted on the matrix. The preliminary results suggested that the approach had been reasonably successful. All three Roman Catholics fell in the outer/experiential quadrant; all those in the inner/experiential quadrant were women; and those in the inner/cognitive quadrant were, with one or two exceptions, men studying full-time at the same theological college. One sole individual was placed in the outer/cognitive quadrant. He was there legitimately, although his interview suggested that in reality he could have been placed either as a cognitive or an experiential believer. His faith was primarily based on intellectual and rational conclusions. However, once these had been established, he lived a highly experiential life of faith. The fact that the three main quadrants so clearly showed a degree of cohesion with the real-life circumstances of the interviewees was reason to consider the results at least provisionally indicative of their validity.

There was nevertheless still the need for a greater degree of security. The colour coding had been done by one individual who had relied on subjective judgement in each instance. The unreliability of this had been clear from the outset, given the high degree of re-consideration, replacing, and rubbing out that had taken place. A sample of interviews was re-worked in order to see whether they emerged with the same results. While the scores differed, the interviewees maintained their place in the original quadrants. Another difficulty had been that sentences frequently indicated both instances of two poles simultaneously. Was it necessary to choose one or the other? Should these occasions be given the colour code of each type? More

importantly, did this suggest that the developing analytic framework was not yet clear enough? As the interviews were re-worked, ways of ensuring consistency were worked out, as was a set of criteria that helped determine the coding procedure. Belenky *et al.*'s guiding questions continued to hold water. A second set that helped ascertain the foundations for faith were also worked out and adhered to:

Cognitive

Experiential

How is faith legitimated?

What factors govern the understanding and outworking of faith?

These provisional results then led to a subsequent analysis in which characteristic traits representative of each quadrant were identified. Certain themes began to emerge. Experiential believers made use of experience in a variety of ways, for example, while cognitive believers often expressed a tension between their intellectual beliefs and their everyday lives. The role and functioning of the self was very apparent, with a few interviewees rarely asserting themselves and obviously living lives of uncertainty and (mild) self deprecation. In the main, however, most were self-confident and at ease with themselves and their faith. There were also early indications of precise answers to the research question. Faith appeared to influence learning by forcing the development of learning strategies: techniques employed particularly by cognitive believers that linked their faith and their experience together. It also heightened aspects of the learning process as outlined by Jarvis (1995, 2001).

This embryonic way forward continued to be vulnerable to attack in such a way that its conclusions were undermined, however. The findings were still based on the subjective judgement of one person. There were still too many inconsistencies in the emerging patterns for them to be considered generally coherent. It was possible to respond to this last with reference to the small sample. Nevertheless, despite the fact that an overall approach seemed to have been determined, it continued to feel as if it was on shaky ground.

The interviews were therefore set aside once again for a number of months. During this period an independent 'judge' was asked to colour code seven interviews, two

from the three principal quadrants, and the one individual who occupied a quadrant alone. Seven represented a third of the total twenty-one. As he approached making his final conclusions, so the original interviews were returned to one last time, with new, unmarked copies, and the coding process was repeated. As each interview was finished, the results were compared with the previous conclusions, and a final decision was made. There was a clear consolidation of thought that took place during this stage about what constituted each dialectic and how decisions were being made, although the results for many interviewees had altered in this third analysis from the first.

When these conclusions were compared with those of the independent judge, however, there were significant differences. The judge had been provided with a Guide to Coding Practice (Appendix E), in which the two sets of dialectics plus their guiding questions had been laid out, as well as instructions about how to code repeat instances within the same sentences, references to the interviewees' past habit rather than present, and sentences which indicated more than one type of behaviour. The intention was to ensure consistency of approach between the original researcher and the independent judge. He had also been primed verbally about the general nature of the research, but this had not been discussed in detail on the grounds that his conclusions might be adversely influenced. It would also have been inappropriate to use the interviews, or even 'mock' interviews, to work through together to help him get a feel for the coding practice. The judge had a PhD in theology and had done a certain amount of reading in the field of Christian education and in the area with which the research was concerned. It was a calculated gamble to ask him to code semi 'cold'. This background could well have accounted for the differences between his results and those of the researcher. Briefly summarised, the essential differences were as follows:

- The judge had been much more economical in identifying examples of each colour code, frequently returning scores that were a quarter of those of the researcher. While this would not necessarily have meant a change in quadrant in which each interviewee was placed, his scores were at times so sparse that the calculations became difficult.

- On a number of occasions the judge had coded sentences with the opposite dialectic from the researcher. Hence one set of results might indicate an 'inner' sentence, and the other an 'outer'.
- The judge had clearly not found the exercise easy, and had resorted to intertwining squiggly lines of different colours down complete paragraphs which he considered represented behaviour of one type or another.

The most probable explanation for the major differences was that of inadequate briefing. Nevertheless, his findings brought home the fact that the overall approach was still too vulnerable and unstable to base solid research results on. Despite having constructed the matrix semi-inductively, its use seemed inappropriate, since it tended to force people into one quadrant or another and hence function deductively which prevented the interviews from speaking for themselves. While the reasoning behind the matrix was not abandoned, and indeed, was the key to the approach finally adopted, this way of analysing the content of the interviews needed to be reconsidered.

II. A typology of learners

Despite the fact that the matrix with its four quadrants was eventually discarded, it nevertheless paved the way for the way of interpreting the results finally adopted, since it identified some of the major differences between the various learners. These revolved around:

- a) The relationship between faith authorities and experience. Some interviewees kept the two quite separate, others integrated them so that they became inseparable in their lives.
- b) How people went about appropriating their external faith authorities. Depending on the relationship exercised in (a), different people employed different techniques that brought their faith authorities and their experience together.
- c) The nature of people's faith (cognitive, intellectual and impersonal, or experiential and personal). This was directly related to the cognitive/experiential continuum that formed part of the matrix.

- d) The use people made of experience. This was essentially a validating role, but exercised in a variety of ways.
- e) The role of the self. Some interviewees were naturally self-assertive, spoke out with confidence, aired and justified their personal views that were frequently in direct contrast to those of others. Other respondents expressed great hesitation and reservation about their 'right' and the 'rightness' of allowing their selves to function in this way. A small proportion were obviously in a transition stage, moving from the latter to the former.

One of the tentative steps taken in constructing the matrix had been an attempt to give each quadrant a label which described the general learning characteristics of its members. Inner cognitivists had been given the provisional label of 'strategic learners' since virtually all its members had employed learning strategies of one sort or another that integrated their faith into their lives. Outer experientialists had been labelled 'assimilative' due to their desire to assimilate their faith into their lives. Inner experientialists displayed less cohesiveness between themselves. Nevertheless, there was a proportion that clearly relied on interpreting all aspects of their experience in a faith-related way, which was not characteristic of the other quadrants. These were the 'interpretivists'. It was these characteristics which provided the next step forward: the construction of a typology. Each of these groups expressed and epitomised a particular way of relating their faith to their experience. Some did so by maintaining a distinct separation. Their faith was largely cognitive, operating in a separate domain from their lives and experience. Interaction took place two-directionally, yet separately: faith considered experience, yet without necessarily affecting or being affected by it, and the reverse. Others began with a faith perspective, immediately related it to their experience and reconstructed their faith position accordingly, owning it thus in a very personal way. The Roman Catholics obeyed a faith authority that was perhaps the most rigid in its construction, although akin to the cognitive believers in emphasising and focusing on a doctrinal belief system. Their interaction with their experience was quite distinct, however, which was evidenced by an entirely different perception and appropriation of its nature and role in their lives. Finally, a small group related their faith and experience by interpreting the latter according to the (perceived) precepts of the latter. These were the interpretational learners.

It proved possible to depict these four ways of relating faith to experience visually, and Figures 7.2, 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5 outline each position, accompanied by quotes from interviewees.

Figure 7.2: Cognitive learners

'My experience over the last few years of my life is that I feel, I have felt very distressed over being single. And out of that experience, I have been on quite a long journey really to think about the control of God over my life. So is my singleness something that God decided beforehand that I would be, or is it something to do with me, or what is it? And initially I would say I used to blame God totally for it. But because of the things I've learned, so in a way it's my, my experience has been I felt very distressed by my circumstances, which has then made me reconsider, well, what do I think about God? And the way that he exercises his control in my life.' (Denise)

Denise's faith and experience related, but as impermeable constructs. There was clear two-way interaction, yet the two remained separate. She looked for her faith to affect her experience in a particular way, but faced reality in the fact that it didn't. She then moved to look at how her experience might make her reconsider her faith, and the passage following this quote indicated that she was just beginning to adjust her view of God as a result of this experience (see later). For many years, however, she had been at an impasse, not able to reconcile the situation and living a profound doubting of even God's existence as a result.

Figure 7.3: Experiential learners

‘When I had my children, it was a very positive relationship. I learnt a lot about God from giving birth, and, umm, and the whole... when I was pregnant, because I had no control over what was happening to me. And for me that was very like how God is.’ (Beth)

Beth developed her understanding of God through her experience. Her interview showed her continually relating her experience to her faith framework and re-working the latter accordingly. The re-working did not result in a profound theological shift that moved her away from mainstream Christian doctrine—in fact, by her own admission she held fast to a reasonably orthodox position—but she did understand it in a different way. Rather than functioning as an outer framework, her orthodox position provided an inner core which she then developed by reflecting on her experience.

Figure 7.4: Assimilative learners

‘Allowing God to take the word within me, and there’s been various occasions when, when that hasn’t happened that day has become that much flatter often

as a result of it. Whereas when the word is, I allow the word to speak to me or to have an effect upon me or God speaking through me, even if it's just a sense of wonderment from taking the wonder of David for creation and going outside and actually seeing it for myself and being able to relive that word in that sense, then it's having its effect. And so life can be a lot more refreshing, having encountered, if you like, God in that sense.' (Craig)

Assimilative learners adopted a personally-directional approach. As Craig's quote demonstrates, faith authorities were external and had to be internalised by creating or re-creating a faith experience. Experience was highly personalised, and surrounding reality was simply the means by which faith experiences occur. The two were linked through and in individuals themselves, in a similar way to interpretive learners, the prime difference being that assimilative learners brought faith into themselves, whereas interpretive learners projected faith from themselves onto their experience.

Figure 7.5: Interpretive learners

'Yes, I mean my whole life, really, is sort of, I suppose, I suppose underneath everything there's this question, Where is God in this? Umm... Yes, I think I see most things from the perspective of Where is God in this? Varying from personal situation, family, wider situation, and, uh, politically, you know, umm, everything can be kind of boiled down to man's nature and, and... I can give you an example which is probably a bit flippant, but we, umm, we had a holiday last week with a friend who's, umm, just about to get divorced, and her two boys. And it was us and the two younger boys. And it was pretty hard work, and we realised actually that three of the children had statements, and one was at stage three, so it wasn't surprising that these four boys were pretty

hard work, and umm, we'd arranged on the journey back home to meet at a certain time for lunch, and my husband said, I want to go a different way. And we'd arranged if we didn't meet that was fine, you know, but there was the opportunity. And we felt slightly guilty about this, but, yes, we, we took the detour, and the car broke down! And (laughs) I didn't think, Oh, there! That's, you know, God's punishing you because you didn't... But actually, where we broke down, and we found this garage, opposite a little restaurant where we had lunch, put the car in the garage. The place, that was a village where there was the most wonderful Abbey, and one hotel opposite it, and through negotiating with our insurance company we had a night in this hotel, that they paid for, and, umm, we had a meal together as a family in this very smart hotel, and, uhh, actually found we could all sit round the table and this was just wonderful. It was like a gift! And, umm, the, the cost of the room was 587 francs, and umm, we had a lot of hassle over the insurance and what boat we were getting back, and eventually we, we, we were given a, a boat on an evening crossing with a berth. We'd never had a berth before! We go to our room and the room, berth number is 587! And I thought, Oh gosh! You know, I just felt that was God saying, Look, I'm just giving you this little bit extra for you as a family, because it was quite a hard holiday and we hadn't really felt we'd had one. And although we'd had this horrible bill for the car, yet it was cheaper than it would have been in England, and we just had that little bit extra for us! That's probably a very naïve way, but I just (?) God within that! Yeah.' (Miranda)

Miranda's question 'Where is God in this?' led her towards a position of interpreting even the smallest of experiences in a faith-related way. Faith and experience were intricately related, but rather than understand experience in 'normal' rational terms (this instance could otherwise have been considered an insignificant coincidence, for example), interpretive believers put a faith interpretation on it. As opposed to experiential learners, whose experience informed their faith, for interpretive learners, their faith informed their experience.

There were a number of notable factors that came to the fore through this initial exploration. The notion of directionality has already been mentioned. Assimilative

and interpretive learners tended to operate a one-directional (although opposing) emphasis, the former bringing faith and faith authorities *into* themselves, the latter externalising their faith and projecting it onto their experience. Cognitive and experiential learners, in contrast, both operated a much more balanced process of internalisation and externalisation, albeit in different ways. (At the same time, as has been stressed previously in the thesis, the processes of internalisation and externalisation *are* cyclical. The emphasis of the points being made here is the direction, focus and 'weight' of the faith and experience poles as lived out by individuals.)

Linked with the question of directionality was the degree to which faith authorities were 'bigger' than experience, equal to it, or indeed 'smaller'. Cognitive and assimilative learners both gave faith an authority that meant it encompassed the rest of their lives. Their goal was to fit their experience into their faith framework. In contrast, experiential and interpretive learners gave experience a far higher degree of authority and constructed their faith from an experiential position. The former adopted a 'top down' approach, the latter a 'bottom up'. A notable progression between the groups was the degree of personal-ness exercised in their faith position, which related also to the role of individuals as people, and the function and development of the self. The faith of cognitive learners was intellectual and impersonal, akin to Belenky *et al.*'s 'separate knowers', as opposed to the highly personalised faith of experiential learners. Both groups exhibited a general faith world-view, but the former was largely impersonal and the latter highly personal. Between the two positions, assimilative and interpretive learners exercised a faith revolving around themselves as individuals, rather than extending beyond themselves as a world-view.

The research had arrived at an important turning point through this exercise of comparing and contrasting. Rather than analyse the data through a matrix into which people were 'placed' according to a 'score', four types of learner had emerged, all of which inter-related, and with clear signs of movement from one type of learner to another amongst the interviewees. In addition, these types were based on the relationship between people's faith and their experience. While the types in themselves did not answer the research question directly in identifying ways in which

faith might influence learning, they did reflect the way in which people learnt and hence pointed towards answers. As was shown previously, theories of experiential learning involve the internalisation of the external and suggest that learning itself takes place at the intersection between people and their inner biographies, and experience as an external reality. Faith-content functioned as a form of external knowledge for members of all the groups, and the emerging types revealed the ways in which people went about the process of learning by depicting how people related them together. As an identifiable and discrete variable, juxtaposed against all other forms of external knowledge, the process of learning could be re-examined. Not only so, but the discreteness of this variable would mean that once the learning types had been determined in greater detail, then it would also be possible to study whether faith had been influential in any way.

A typology of learners was therefore drawn up, depicting the inter-relationships between the four groups, as shown in Figure 7.6. Belenky *et al.*'s educational dialectics provided one further clarification in their discrete/related category, expressed through the notions of compartmentalization and synthesis, coupled with the guiding question: What is the relationship between learning and life? This was clearly what the types were exploring and depicting, and the titles 'discrete' and 'related' were consequently adopted in place of 'cognitive' and 'experiential'.

Figure 7.6: A typology of learners (1)

With the typology, and with reference to the discussion above, certain fundamental relationships could already be identified, as shown in Figure 7.7.

Figure 7.7: A typology of learners (2)

The typology went on to become the framework and foundation upon which the conclusions of the thesis and research are based. Certain preliminary observations can be made, however.

II.1 Impersonal to personal

There was a gradual progression 'downwards' amongst the learners, in terms of how personal or impersonal a faith people exhibited and lived. Discrete learners were characterised by a largely impersonal faith that was understood and expressed in intellectual terms. Moving down the types, people's way of relating their faith and

experience became increasingly personal, firstly focusing essentially on the individual in both assimilative and interpretive learners, and then broadening out to become more of a personalised world-view. Unsurprisingly, the categories of personal and impersonal had been identified by Belenky *et al.*, whose guiding questions behind the dialectic asked:

'What is the relationship between self and the content of one's learning?'

'How are these relationships structured in terms of the curriculum, relationship with peers, relationship with faculty and staff?'

Although they do not explicitly say so, it seems likely that this dialectic lay at the root of their category of 'procedural knowers', with its joint 'procedures' of separate and connected knowing. As indicated previously, separate knowers favoured an objective approach to constructing knowledge, distancing themselves from the object of their attention, working towards a general mastery of its content and assuming that this would be in some way public and available to all. In contrast, connected knowers deliberately sought a relationship with their knowledge, investing themselves in its construction, frequently knowing empathetically and allowing information to emerge inductively rather than be identified deductively. Separate knowers was the only category in their findings where women demonstrated an impersonal way of knowing; self-investment and inclusion was typical of all other groups. Nevertheless, a progression from the individual to the more generally personal was evident amongst their interviewees. Subjective knowers asserted themselves as 'inner experts', trusting their own individual intuitive instinct over and above the rational and public. Constructive knowers, on the other hand—the last and most developed of Belenky *et al.*'s categories—placed that personal expertise in a wider public context, integrating personal with general in such a way that it was personally known yet sufficiently related to reality as to provide a different way of looking at the world.

The typology almost takes the form of an hourglass, the top and bottom positions reflecting two distinct ways of looking at the world, but similar in that each represents general world-views. Amongst discrete learners, the self is largely removed and people's external faith authorities provide a public 'truth' that explains the world and gives it an overall sense. Related learners resemble Belenky *et al.*'s Constructive knowers in incorporating their own experience into a general contextual world-view that moves and shifts with them as they grow and develop. Here lies a further significant difference between the two positions: faith in the former is largely a static framework, while the latter is dynamic.

In between these poles, assimilative and interpretive learners function with a far more individualised focus. The move towards related knowledge is clearly there, but remains at the particular level rather than the general, although both groups assert the transferability of their position to others.

'I don't believe in God just because somebody's told me he's there cos they've had an experience of him. You know. *I've* had an experience of him and if it comes to the point with someone where they're saying, Well, that's rubbish, how can you possibly believe that? That is the point at which I have to say to people, Well, look, you know, I've met with God and I know he's real. If you met with him, you'd know he's real. And we're not going to agree on this now, because, you know, until your experience is the same, well, not is the same as mine, but until you have an experience that is similar to mine, there isn't an awful lot of point in us going on talking about this.' (Chris)

Subsequent sections of this discussion will indicate certain similarities between these two groups and Belenky *et al.*'s subjective knowers. This is particularly the case for interpretive learners; assimilative learners stray beyond the boundaries in ways that suggest potential for further research, while at the same time affirming the hypothesis that faith-content is indeed a potentially influential agent in the learning process.

11.2 Strong and weak selves

The hourglass structure is paralleled in certain ways by the role of the self. Both discrete and related learners displayed strongly developed selves. Everyone in these groups exhibited a robust capacity to reason using the paths of traditional logic,

confidence in their ability and 'right' to express their views, and they lived their lives as an expression of faith that was correspondingly personally 'owned', albeit in different ways. The self played a very different role for assimilative and interpretive

learners. Amongst the latter were found the greatest number of interviewees who deferred to external authority as described by Belenky *et al.* and which was implicit in Perry's (1970) work. This deference was one of instinctive, unconsidered—and as such, involuntary—submission that appeared to hamper people's personal growth. Self in these instances was weak and vulnerable, a fragile entity that was easily damaged. Assimilative learners displayed a different role of the self in their lives and learning, that paralleled that of interpretive learners in that it was unassertive and submissive to external faith authorities. However, the two groups differed in one essential way: assimilative learners showed a developed reflective capacity and strong sense of self that they were trying to 'transform' into a new, spiritually-defined entity, whereas interpretive learners had yet to move to a position of strength of self. The hourglass is therefore somewhat lopsided, yet the metaphor holds water.

II.3 Movement

As the interview material was worked and re-worked, so the strength of the typology became apparent, particularly because of its ability to handle movement. This was evidenced through people moving from keeping faith and experience separate, to beginning to find ways of relating them together, or from a weak sense of self to a gradually strengthening one. Denise, whose quote under Figure 7.1 exemplified a discrete (cognitive) learner, went on to say:

In a very profound way, I would say that I've come to understand that maybe God doesn't promise us things in life that people think he does. And I think that God promises us faithfulness, but he doesn't promise us a good job or a big house or good health or a husband or children or any of those things. And sometimes I think as Christians we can be led to believe that those things, that God will. And therefore when they don't happen or when you suddenly become very ill, or life doesn't meet your expectations, it makes you seriously question the nature of God. So for me, it's probably been something that's

driven me to question the very existence of God. So it's not a specific experience, but an ongoing experience.

Her experience had led her to a point where she had had to reformulate her understanding of God, which she had started to do in a way that cohered with her life. She had begun a transition. Miranda revelled in the fact that her course directors were encouraging her to think for herself and providing her with the equipment to do so, and was clearly beginning to develop as a person with an autonomous, more 'rooted' faith. Her embryonic transition from interpretive to related involved this 'self-strengthening' and deliberate attempts to connect her faith with her life through 'theological reflection'. Penny too acknowledged a shift in the way she approached and understood her faith, moving from a highly subjective faith-interpretation of her experience to one she considered much more secure.

I think the bible is the one thing that I can hold onto as the word of God and therefore it plays a more vital role that I'm... It's an objective thing as opposed... That my faith is now based on Scripture as opposed to before when it was based on my, how I reacted to certain things and what God's telling me. Umm, but, so now I just cling onto that because I can look at it and think, Well this is God's word to humanity.

Occasionally the interview experience itself suggested people might have been seeing something differently for the first time: it itself was a learning experience. 'I've never thought about it like this before, but...'.

II.4 Placing of interviewees

Interviewees were placed within a group with reference both to the original matrix, and to the five evaluative criteria outlined at the beginning of this section. The former provided a semi-objective method of placement as a reasonable starting point; the latter permitted its modification and honing. A number of people were 're-placed' during this second analytic stage. As would be expected, in some ways none of the interviewees fitted their type exactly. People are not necessarily consistent to themselves, and occasionally contradicted themselves during the course of their interviews. (The independent judge scribbled in the margin of one of the scripts he studied that the person concerned had, on page 16, flatly contradicted everything he

had previously said!) In addition, ideal types are by very nature inexact, and it would be inappropriate to expect human beings to conform precisely to an artificial construction. The difficulties were compounded by the fact that the research was working with a comparatively small sample (although compare Belenky *et al.*: a team of four studying 135 women over a period of four years). Inevitably, certain individuals were placed somewhat tenuously, and one was kept out of the framework for a significant period of time as he appeared to have too little in common with any of the other groups. He was eventually incorporated, but tentatively...

The compilation of the typology was important not only in bringing order to the raw data, but also because it was in and of itself a basic response to the research question. The typology was dependent on people having found ways of relating to external faith authorities, and reflected these ways. If those authorities were to be removed, so the typology would cease to exist. For that reason alone, it was possible to affirm a connection between faith and learning: people's faith authorities were integral to the way in which they learnt, and this resulted in various characteristic traits that depended on those authorities. The question could still be begged as to whether similar characteristics would be displayed in a non-faith context, yet as far as the research was concerned, this proved inconsequential. The inextricability of faith authorities from the patterns of learning displayed by the interviewees, coupled with their clear distinctiveness in contrast to other categories of external 'knowledge', indicated that for this particular group, there was a relationship between the way they learnt, and their faith. In the first instance, given the foundational stones undergirding the typology, this related primarily to the way in which people internalised and externalised information.

III. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has outlined the journey that took place in order to establish an adequate methodological procedure for analysing the qualitative data. Two main issues arose:

- Finding a framework that would underpin the research in such a way that resulting conclusions would permit a concrete way of addressing the research question.
- The appropriateness of a deductive analysis which, despite having been formulated semi-inductively, nevertheless pigeon-holed people into rigid positions;

The typology as eventually drawn up had a number of strengths, not least the fact that it centred around the relationship between faith, as understood as an authoritative body often represented by external social knowledge, and people's experience. The interaction between these two entities depicts aspects of the process of learning, and hence a firm foundation as regarded the research question was established. In addition, to a certain extent the typology allowed for people to be viewed as growing, developing—learning—individuals.

The analysis was therefore inductive, allowing analytic categories to emerge of their own accord from the data. These were then progressively filled out, helped also by reference to the concepts and aspects of learning identified as relevant in the early chapters. The basic framework of the typology became a broader description of people's ways of believing in general, providing the first of a range of responses to the research question. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Eight

The influence of faith on learning

Introduction

One of the discussion points throughout the thesis has been the specific nature of any identifiable 'influence' of Christian faith on learning. It became progressively apparent that the study was as much one of Christian learning in general, hence indicative of a simple corollary between Christian people and the object of their faith-related learning. This was very much the case with the compilation of the matrix and ensuing typology outlined in the previous chapter. In the first instance, this is presented as a result of the research in its own right. Once each description ('form') had been compiled, the respective learning procedures pertaining to each were also identifiable and open to analysis and categorisation.

This chapter therefore demonstrates a range of ways in which both hypothesis and research question were affirmed and addressed. It provides a series of 'conclusions', many of which emanate from this corollary relationship. Nonetheless, as Chapter Two argued, Christian faith-content has a particularly authoritative dimension, both intrinsic and attributed, and this also contributes to the conclusions presented in the chapter. As a qualitative enquiry which aimed to explore various dimensions of what is basically the same phenomenon—the act of learning—there are points of overlap and interaction between many of the categories. All contribute, however, to demonstrate the many and varied ways in which faith influenced the learning of those interviewed.

1. People's ways of believing; people's ways of learning

The typology itself is therefore the first and most overt answer to the research question. Here the form/content interaction between faith-content and people's individual learning preferences was evidenced and four distinct 'ways of believing',

paralleling Belenky *et al.*'s 'ways of knowing' identified. The full text of these descriptive analyses is provided in Appendix D, space prohibiting their inclusion in the main body of the thesis. A summary table is provided in Figure 8.1, with a corresponding articulation of the first response to the research question: **people's faith influenced the way they learnt by integrating form and content into specific faith-related ways of believing and learning.**

Figure 8.1: People's ways of believing; people's ways of learning

	Ways of believing	Ways of learning
Discrete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation between faith authorities and experience • Intellectual approach to faith • Search for objectivity • Dualistic self, often experiencing tension • Construction of a world-view that makes sense and that provides structure • Indications, in varying degrees, of characteristics representative of other types on the typology • Use of conventional logic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment of learning strategies that bridge or overlay gap between faith authorities and experience • Varying degrees of intellectual and emotional commitment to a belief system • Occasional deliberate self-restraint vis-à-vis faith authorities • Conscious retreat when faced with clashes
Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on the personal: focus on a personal faith authority, understanding of faith in personal terms, construction of personal faith knowledge • Self plays a larger role than the faith authorities, allowing an equal inequality, evidenced through factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Techniques to bring faith to life, that include use of imagination, verbal articulation, and cultivating means of internalising information • Emphasis more on acquiring faith-related skills and less on content

	<p>such as anger with God and doubt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith a process not an end • Conventional use of logic, yet allowing for mystery and a place for the incomprehensible 	
Assimilative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of a faith-experience cycle that focuses on quality and end goals of life • Prime role of faith is to transform self • Emphasis on submission and obedience • Developed and deliberate use of instinct • Use of a pre-determined faith-logic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of techniques that restrict and prevent development of autonomous self • Use of other people as role models of 'faith reflection' • Conscious and deliberate affirmation and celebration of faith content • Functioning as receptors, looking to understand, not master
Interpretive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of a faith-reality bubble • Employment of 'faith reasoning': faith-authenticated patterns of thought that allow for the miraculous, do not require rigorous logic, make use of subjective judgment, and uphold the bubble in which they exist • Deference to uncontrollable authorities such as other people and God • Often a weak role and sense of self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscious and deliberate desire to be 'open', avoiding and rejecting opportunities to critique • Conscious development of experience as a learning tool: events 'strike', guide, influence...

A general overview reveals certain essential characteristics. The question of how people related to Christian faith authorities was significant, and (predictably, given the provenance of the research) seen clearly to fall into either a personal or impersonal bracket. A third alternative appeared to be present, however, in that Assimilative and Interpretive believers both adopted a 'submissive' posture and relationship to faith authorities. The personal/impersonal dimension seemed to fade into comparative insignificance in favour of allowing 'truth', however perceived and attributed, to have its 'way'. There were indications of alternative realities, different worlds, in which people lived, depending on which of the components in the learning equation they turned to as primary port of call. This in turn affected, and to some extent determined, the form of logic and reasoning they employed. For a number, their approach was theologically justified and reasoned, adding weight to the thesis's basic premise that faith and faith authorities influenced learning. Ways of believing and ways of learning were necessarily interconnected and it was often impossible to determine which had priority in the cycle. The two-sided dimension of the original research question was affirmed.

Many of these features are picked up and explored in subsequent sections, placing them with greater precision within the analytic framework of the different theories of learning presented in the early chapters.

II. People's construction of knowledge

Chapter Two (section IV.1) suggested that one of the possible ways in which faith-content might affect learning was in the subdivision of social knowledge into two categories, faith-content and non-faith content, hence creating a fourfold configuration of learning components. This was confirmed by the empirical data. While fundamentally the Christian interviewees were all engaged in the process of constructing knowledge in the same way that anybody else is when interacting with their external environment and its body of social knowledge, the interviews nevertheless revealed that for all concerned the body of Christian faith-content was lifted into high relief from the surrounding background and deliberately referred to in preference to other alternatives. This was evidenced through statements of

commitment to the bible and its teaching ('the bible says, so...'), acknowledgements of a tension between two different ways of interpreting a situation created by individuals' commitment to the Christian belief system, and overt rejection of 'non-Christian' understandings of the world and experience. Many interviewees associated their Christian identity with an intellectual and emotional commitment to the Christian tradition, and in so doing necessitated its isolation from other forms of social knowledge. This was often directly linked to questions of Christian identity. Only by specific reference to Christianity expressed through its principal articulations of faith could people claim to be 'Christian'. In varying degrees, the demarcation lines were important, some individuals making clear black and white distinctions between what could be considered Christian and what couldn't, others allowing the lines to be much fuzzier. Other differences were identifiable in the extent of people's 'range' some deliberately aiming to incorporate and honour the whole system as they perceived it, others identifying and focusing on a much narrower core. Nevertheless, all operated a procedure in which Christian authorities and the belief system they represented were seen as distinct from other contenders.

A quadratic combination of learning components was therefore very much in evidence. More significantly, however, four different configurations of those components emerged as representative of the four types, as follows.

II.1 Discrete ways of constructing knowledge

Discrete believers, looking to faith content to provide them with an overall world-view, also generally accorded that content an equal place to the social knowledge that enabled them to interpret and analyse it. Both were of equal importance and they used one to examine and explore the other. In so doing, faith content was subjected to the same rational procedures as social knowledge, and was expected to conform to these. A basic triad was set up between reason, faith content and social knowledge in which all three interacted in equal measure. Frequently excluded from the equation, however, was experience. Jon, for example, agonised over the fact that his experience did not cohere with his rational understanding of the world, and his interview includes the following quote:

Part of my thesis is the Doctrine of God. How do we understand God? And I'm leaning towards the orthodox tradition that understands God in terms of persons. The basis of God is the person of the Father who out of love created the Spirit and the Son, so it's all relational. God is primarily relation and people. It's not a matter of substance. Substance is impersonal and in a sense completely unimportant for your faith. So if love is fundamental to God, and relation is fundamental to God, how come that in my life, it doesn't work out? Uhh, I understand that you can't feel the love for God because it's a different kind of love that we can't really (tape unintelligible), but somehow that should feed back that there should be kind of an interaction that you sense that God loves you in your daily life. Maybe not everyday, but once in a while. Uhh, unless you've got completely wrong expectations, which I might have. But it's the knowledge that that particular doctrine, I think of it as orthodox, is correct. But in practical life I so often run into a wall which I can't get through. That causes, that... insurmountable tension.

Jon had eventually had to seek medical attention to help deal with the effects of this tension. All members of this group affirmed the desirability of including experience, yet for many this was quite a problem and it continued to play the role of 'poor relation' in their construction of personal knowledge—with the result that they often felt they lived two lives. Martin spoke of feeling 'schizophrenic' and of not expecting his Christian faith and his learning to cohere: by their very nature, they wouldn't! Denise, quoted in Chapter Six section I, indicated that her Christian faith was primarily intellectual and it was on this that it was based. Experience came second, although when there were mismatches, she worked hard to reconcile the two, often—unlike Jon—shifting her theology and modifying her belief system accordingly.

Of the four components integral to the act of 'faith-learning', therefore, Discrete believers tended to marginalise experience, and the basic configuration of their way of constructing knowledge is depicted in Figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2: Discrete configuration of learning components

II.2 Related ways of constructing knowledge

Related believers, on the other hand, operated with a different construction. They too reasoned according to the precepts of social knowledge. However, this cohered firstly with their experience, and only secondly with their faith content. Felicity, training for ordination, understood her studies to be a means to an end:

... and the end is ministry, and the ministry is people. I prefer people to paper! Theology, faith-content, provided her with a framework and a discipline for thinking things through. However, her faith was an experiential faith, and she interpreted her faith authorities in such a way that it related to experience.

When Moses saw the burning bush and the burning bush spoke to him of God, it doesn't really matter whether the bush was actually on fire, or it looked as if it was on fire. That's irrelevant. It spoke to him of God. And if we see things or hear things or know things that speak to us of God and we know incontrovertibly that that is God speaking to us, you can't dislodge that.

Beth protested vehemently against teaching she had received which jarred with her life.

In the evangelical church, the spirit often has to be 'over' the body. Victory over the body. And I, it was against my experience. ... When I did the

Christology essay, umm, I kept coming up against this and I thought, Death is a little problem here!

Simon too emphasises his experience, although tries more overtly to bring experience and the Christian belief system together in an equally-balanced coherent whole.

I defend being a Christian from the fact of, from those two facts. So I'd say it's true historically and it works for me, and it works for my, umm, my character in that the more I've understood it the more I have been at ease in life. And I know that to be true. ... Even if I'm not at the stage where I can say I accept every event in the Gospels to be, to have happened exactly as it says, which is how I would have taken it in the past, I'd still know I've got that through the whole picture. I've got a certain foundation that these things really did happen, the event of Jesus really did take place, and what I've experienced in my life in terms of God's forgiveness and acceptance matches up with that. The two go together.

Simon's position perhaps exemplifies most clearly the balanced configuration between the four different components in the learning process. None is left out in the cold, a marginalised and side-lined dimension of life. Instead, all four combine to allow people to live coherent, unified lives. Felicity states:

I don't feel that my faith is something apart from my life, or apart from my studies. What my studies then I think so with my faith, there doesn't seem to be that division.

Figure 8.3 shows the configuration of learning of Related believers.

Figure 8.3: Related configuration of learning components

An important link between Discrete and Related believers was the employment of a form of reasoning that cohered with the methods and principles characteristic of society around them. Both groups used conventional reason in equal measure. However, Related believers allowed their personal experience to play a far more prominent role in their construction of knowledge.

II.3 Assimilative ways of constructing knowledge

Assimilative believers, like Related, found ways of incorporating all four components so that each interacted with the others. The major difference was the reversal of the positioning of faith content and social knowledge. For Assimilative believers life was a life of faith, and faith content guided and informed the way in which they reasoned. Nevertheless, that reasoning also needed to conform to the patterns of social knowledge since they lived in the real world and a rational interpretation of their experience was important. The Assimilative configuration is portrayed in Figure 8.4.

Figure 8.4: Assimilative configuration of learning components

Roger, for example, is clear that living life according to faith precepts not only results in a happier, fuller life, but that it is the call of every Christian.

Je suis la voie, la vérité et la vie, quoi. C'est le Christ. Il est la voie, la vérité, donc c'est de l'ordre de l'intelligence, et c'est cette voie, ce chemin, cette intelligence, elle mène à la vie. A plus de vie.¹

He continued this faith-logic by asserting that even those who consider themselves to be happy and fulfilled outside the bounds of the Christian belief system cannot actually be so. An immense swathe of Craig's interview revealed a self-understanding that was highly faith-determined. He was a sinner, in need of forgiveness and redemption. It was this view of himself which provided a framework for the rest of his life. Assimilative believers did not place social knowledge outside their triad of themselves, their faith and their experience. Indeed, they regularly touched base with this since their major focus was to ensure that the two dimensions of life cohered. Of the two, however, faith was clearly superior.

¹ I am the way, the truth and the life, you see. It's Christ. He is the way, the truth, so it relates to our intelligence, and it's this way, this path, this intelligence, which leads to life. To a fuller life.

11.4 Interpretive ways of constructing knowledge

Interpretive believers, alone amongst the groups, permitted social knowledge and its rational patterns of thought to be sidelined. While Discrete believers marginalised their experience, Interpretive believers marginalised social knowledge, sometimes giving the impression of living in another world.

You see, nothing would surprise me about God. You know. God, I don't think there's anything surprising in a way about raising somebody from the dead or somebody being able to have a baby when they haven't actually had sex with somebody else. Umm, because if God wants to do that that way, I have no problem with thinking that he can do it. Umm, I get, you know, I'm amazed sometimes, and I do feel it's an arrogance in some people, particularly perhaps some theologians, I don't know, who will explain everything, you know, Well, this doesn't really mean this. Actually, when Jesus comes again there aren't really going to be trumpets in the sky because a trumpet wouldn't be able to float in the sky because it would be too heavy! Now, I've actually heard somebody say that. I've actually heard somebody say that in a lecture, and I thought, Well, how small-minded can we get here. Umm, that, you know, if God wants trumpets to float off the ground, there is really no problem for him to be able to do that. You know. Wonderful. Umm, yeah, so, so, no, I don't have a problem with that. (Chris)

This was a paradoxical group, since in many ways they had most obviously faced life's hardest questions head on. Margaret's agonies over the plight of the homeless, Chris's involvement with those living in immense social hardship and deprivation, Ruth's struggle to find a meaning in one friend's death and another's stroke during pregnancy, Miranda living with two handicapped children... These women were immersed in social and existential issues that one might have expected would have hardened up a form of social reasoning. Instead, they turned to faith to provide answers, reasons, meaning.

Well, with the friend who died... Well, because she'd been very ill before she died, so though it was a shock when she died, and we were all very upset, I think it got us talking... we realised that for her, she was better off, in a way, she'd had in many ways rotten things happen to her here so it was a relief in a

way. And also just the way that she had lived her life. You didn't feel that it was a waste that she'd died quite young. So that was, that caused us to talk about that, and how we lived our life and how she'd lived her life. We talked about heaven... With the friend who had the stroke, probably not so positive. It's harder to be more positive, because almost you can't see the point of it. It just seems pain for pain's sake. We can't say that she's better off now, or, and so that's been more of a bewildering... I think making us all realise that to live life day to day and to be responsible and to make the most of each day, but also just causing us to accept that some things are unexplainable, and also just to think that you're not going to sail through life just because you're a Christian and everything's going to be fine, you know, but to actually think about the fact that bad things do happen and also, I think one of the big things that certainly hit me and one or two others is, how on earth would you cope with these things if you didn't have a faith. It's hard enough when you do, but without God, how would you cope? I don't know. (Ruth)

This was not always satisfactory, and Margaret in particular indicated the inadequacy of her position yet seemed unable to move beyond it. Penny, an interviewee who had clearly made the transition from an Interpretive position to a Discrete, identified that one reason for the inadequacy was in the fact that most faith reasoning was subjective.

My mum's a very spend five or six hours in prayer a day, you know, puts everyone else to shame. But, and I think as a result of that she has a much deeper relationship with God than a lot of people, but a few of the things she comes out with aren't heretical, but I just think, Did God really speak to you or was that, or Is that the right thinking, or is that you just reading into it?

Subjectivity was very prevalent amongst Interpretive believers:

I don't feel what I believe is irrational because *I* know it's true... (Chris)

The marginalisation of social knowledge amongst Interpretive believers was primarily as a result of their living highly individual lives. Despite the fact that each was sociable and valued contact with friends and family, most had developed a belief system which was individual and personal to themselves and had no need to cohere with the network of surrounding social knowledge. They found reassurance in the fact

that other individuals functioned and reasoned in a similar individual way, and this fact was more significant than the conclusions drawn.

Interpretive ways of constructing knowledge followed a configuration as depicted in Figure 8.5.

Figure 8.5: Interpretive configuration of learning components

The second conclusion of the research is therefore that **Christian faith influenced people's learning by requiring them to incorporate an additional dimension into their construction of knowledge. This resulted in either the marginalisation of one component, or in the development of techniques to incorporate all four. A fourfold configuration permitted four different ways of constructing knowledge.**

While the identification of these four ways of constructing knowledge is significant, and indicates an important and relevant dimension of the way Christians learn, the real significance of the finding appeared to be in the way in which these configurations then affected the process of reasoning and reflection. The process of analysis had quickly identified the fact that people turned to one of two epistemic

primitives, experience or reason, to provide a basis for faith and a means of relating this to life. It seemed likely that this on its own would guide subsequent deliberations and conclusions. The four different configurations, however, suggested that reasoning was not simply a matter of where people started and grounded their thought processes, but also that this required an 'end': a source which enabled them to connect themselves to the world and reality. Interpretive believers had frequently given the impression of living in a type of 'reality bubble', a world with its own form of reasoning, its own logic, its own bank of social knowledge, separate from its surrounds. The analysis above shows both how and why this was the case, since not only was reason directed specifically at faith-content and authorities, but it also involved the marginalisation of social knowledge. The contrast with Assimilative believers was striking. Both groups tended toward an experiential faith; both focused on faith-content for the interpretation of their experience. Yet Assimilative believers incorporated social knowledge, constantly touching base with its precepts and insisting that faith-content and social knowledge found ways of cohering.

The marginalisation of experience displayed by Discrete believers contrasted in a similar way against its inclusion by Related believers, although the effects were somewhat different. Both groups lived in the same world, using the logical systems of social reasoning to ground their thought processes. The disjuncture experienced by certain Discrete believers was primarily a result of their inability to relate their experience to their intellectual conclusions, although in some cases (Martin, for example) there was a real difficulty reconciling faith-content and social knowledge.

II.5 People's patterns of reasoning

Only limited information regarding the forms of reasoning employed by the various types could not be ascertained from the data, something which correctly reflected the character and emphasis of the interview questions. Further research is recommended to explore this dimension of the relationship between Christian faith-content and learning in greater depth. However, certain characteristics were identifiable. The clearest example was in Interpretive believers' willingness to accept and rejoice in the miraculous, as demonstrated in Chris's quote in section II.4 above. Experience of this

order was something to be expected and was a right and proper characteristic of Christian reality. While Interpretive believers embraced the new world most fervently, God's intervention in the world was something that individuals from each of the groups affirmed. This was generally accompanied by a pattern of reasoning which enabled people to live with situations in which God's hoped-for intervention did not come about. Ruth's struggle to come to terms with the serious health problems of two of her close friends also cited in section II.4 above is revealing in her repeated attempts to find a positive faith-related purpose in what would otherwise be inexplicable and seemingly meaningless events.

This pattern of reasoning fits into a bigger picture in which experience is always interpreted in ways which affirm God's goodness. Nevertheless, a number of interviewees highlighted times when they dared get angry at God. These were almost without exception significant turning points.

How would you say your faith had changed [...]?

Umm, it, it's moved away from being a faith that was, I suppose, a cultural thing. You know, going to church, saying the right words, but actually a faith that looks at suffering, looks at what people are really like, not what, not the façade. And, umm, actually, yeah, I can think of one example, I really got angry with God, and remember, that was such a break through, I just swore at him! How can you let this happen to me! I just let him have it all, and, ohh, then realised that that was what he was wanting me to do all along. Be honest with him. And, uhh, yeah, I think that was a break through. (Miranda)

Affirming God's goodness resulted in a form of reasoning which, once again, tended to make individuals passive recipients, even victims, of experience, both good and bad. The disjuncture was made sense of in a faith-related way, cohering with a fundamental (perceived) understanding of a God who loved people and who would only act for their good. The ensuing reasoning followed that path, yet threatened to turn people into acquiescent vegetables. Break throughs involved bursting through the boundaries and beginning to reason in a different way. They were also important steps in the development of people's individual selves, since they were often the first significant time that people had been self-assertive in the face of a respected authority.

These examples are indicative of an influence which faith-content had on the process of learning in a number of ways. Firstly, reasoning was underpinned by a fundamental faith tenet which many did not dare to transgress. This guided and directed consequent reasoning, channelling it down a comparatively narrow pathway. This in turn developed further forms of reasoning, one following from another as the former proved difficult to maintain. Secondly, as reflection, reasoning implies a degree of individual control. Once again, it would appear that the cultivation of a 'faith reasoning' was commensurate with people's desire to allow God to have his way in their lives and not to take control, inappropriately, themselves.

III. The processes of learning

This analysis relates primarily to Jarvis's model of the processes of learning. It focuses primarily on people's use of experience and provides a third indication of how faith influenced learning: a) by **'imbalancing' the 'normal' relationship between experience and social knowledge;** and b) by **facilitating an alternative interpretation of experience and hence the construction of alternative realities.** The data highlighted two principal ways in which the learning patterns and processes of the interviewees appeared to have been influenced by the faith-content they were engaging with, both of which related to its ideological characteristics.

III.1 The use of experience

People's use of experience was something already highlighted in the compilation of the four different configurations outlined above. One of the direct results of this was the opening of opportunities for experience to be used in a faith-related way. Two examples were evidenced. On the one hand, individuals gave experience and its interpretation a heightened significance; on the other, in direct contrast, they gave faith-content an exaggerated importance to the point of marginalising experience.

The section looks at each in turn.

a) Experience: a faith tool

For Interpretive believers in particular, partnered on occasion by Assimilative believers and, in much smaller measure, across the board, experience was a way in which God was seen to communicate to people. Margaret, for example, indicates how she saw God speaking to her through specific situations. For that reason, the smallest of events might have significance and should not be overlooked. A number of Interpretive believers therefore used sensitive antennae to probe the world 'outside' themselves, if not actively looking for signs and messages, then consciously wanting to be 'open' to being 'spoken to'. A frequent and conspicuous theme was that of people being 'struck' by things. Often, in a devotional context, this occurred through the bible. Verses, phrases, words 'leapt out', rang bells, spoke to a situation, and were relevant to a particular circumstance. Similarly events were explored in view of a potential significance, which may hit somebody between the eyes. Links were made between different events, and a series of occurrences which all appeared to carry a similar message, pointed to a particular course of action often resulted in an individual being 'convinced' and taking measures accordingly. Other people played an important role, particularly (perhaps exclusively) as members of the community of faith where they are seen as representatives of God himself, porters of his will, communicators of his message.

Interpretive believers thus became either masters or slaves of experience. Since it was an important way in which God communicated to them, they adopted a generally submissive attitude, willing to be guided and moved. At the same time, since they themselves were responsible for the interpretation of those experiences, they also had to take possession of them, attributing significance and fitting them into the overall constructed framework that constituted their life of faith. They did this primarily by asking what God's purpose was behind the experience, hence giving it meaning. At the opposite end of the spectrum, people—far fewer, amongst those interviewed for this research—could also be slaves, potentially victims of their experience, even when it related to faith. Margaret, who returned to study almost as an act of self-assertion, described in strongly-worded terms how she had acquiesced with the will of others for her life until she almost felt a non-person. Her experience of other people's interaction

with her—in a church context which meant she felt it inappropriate to challenge—was so directive that she led a highly reactive existence. Even the self-assertive act of enrolling at theological college was tinged with a continued seeking of approval: those in 'authority' whose wills had so dominated hers could not criticise her desire to deepen her faith through study in this way. Margaret was beginning to get her life on an even keel. Part of the process involved identifying when her reactions were inappropriate; a standing back, a momentary halting of time that allowed her to take control of the experience and interpret and use it to ends she deemed preferable. A shift from victim to master had taken place.

The use of experience in this way seemed to have the effect of slowing time. People lived with a raised consciousness in everyday life, permanently alert to hearing God's voice. The 'taken-for-grantedness' described by Jarvis (1997) as indicative of a harmony between people's past learning experiences and their present situation, characterised by a low level of consciousness and only a vague awareness of the passing of time, was significantly disrupted by Interpretive believers. These individuals changed the learning process from the totally reactive described by Jarvis to a more even partnership between reactive and proactive. On the whole they did not initiate situations of disjuncture; that would have been in some way to manipulate the hand of God. On the other hand, they deliberately sought out significance, consciously freezing time in order to examine experience. This was one extreme in the learning process of Interpretive believers. It was typically (and paradoxically) partnered by a desire to be 'open' to God which was often characterised by a refusal to think and evaluate. To quote Ruth:

Listening to preachers and lecturers, listening to preachers... umm... I don't set out to listen to, to critique them. I think because, I think if I'm listening to a preacher I'm going there to learn something or to try and be filled or blessed or whatever language you want to use. And so I try to be more open-minded and try even if I, maybe even if I don't like their style or their particular theology, I still try and learn something or benefit in some way. Because I think, I'm very conscious that if I'm too critical, if I go with a critical attitude, I'm closing myself off to learning things, or to being taught and spoken to.

The discussion returns to this dimension of learning at a later point. However, the thesis suggests that Interpretive ways of learning actually reversed many of the precepts outlined by Jarvis. In an informal life context, rather than experience function as an initiator and the degree of learning be commensurate with the sense of disjuncture experienced, it became a tool in the hands of people actively wanting to learn. In a formal situation of learning, however, rather than critique and evaluate, these capacities which normally indicate people's control of their learning, were turned off. Both had the same motivation at root, however: hearing God's voice. For that reason it can be seen that faith and faith-content significantly influenced people's ways of learning.

b) Faith-content and the interpretation of experience

The second use of experience relates to its interpretation. As theories of experiential learning all emphasise, social knowledge provides the major referent for the interpretation of experience, giving it meaning and enabling people to harmonise it with their existing biographies. Once again, however, the four configurations outlined above indicate that individuals used it unconventionally in a faith context. The two significant groups here were Discrete believers, who marginalised experience, and Interpretive, who marginalised social knowledge. The former can be accounted for both on the grounds of their natural *penchant* towards a cognitive approach to life as contrasted against experiential. Their commitment to Christian faith-content was primarily intellectual, and hence their most basic concern was to have a reasoned understanding of the world. Experience was frequently a casualty of that concern. Rather than focus on harmonising social knowledge and experience, Discrete believers tended to prioritise the harmonisation of social knowledge and faith-content, discovering to their consternation that their 'real' lives did not necessarily cohere with the resulting available interpretation. To quite a significant extent, they experienced conflict between two warring interpretations of the same experience, resulting in many cases in the development of 'bridging' strategies as learning techniques (see later). Interpretive believers, on the other hand, could abandon the basic premises of social knowledge in favour of those of faith. Interpretation of experience was thus liberated, and it could be understood in any number of ways that were either peculiar

to the individual or characteristic of the group or Christian context to which they belonged.

Both Discrete and Interpretive believers lived in a form of 'reality bubble', the latter more pronounced than the former. Their disaggregation of experience from social knowledge created an alternative universe, with its own rules, reasoning, logic, systems and experiences. The faith-reality bubble of Discrete believers was one that haemorrhaged, constantly confronted ('popped') by the experiential world which they could not deny. The challenge was to find ways of bringing the two together. On occasion, unlike their Related counterparts, Discrete believers were unequal to the task, although the bridging techniques went some way to addressing the difficulty.

The influence that faith-content had on learning in these instances was rooted in interviewees' prioritisation of this authority over and above other alternatives. It resulted in the construction of alternative realities, and from there in either a range of tensions or in the habitation of a faith reality which permitted an interpretation of experience only shared by those living in the same reality.

IV. The process of internalisation

The process of internalisation was discussed in Chapters Three and Four, which demonstrated its multi-faceted nature. Questions of profundity, the growth of the self, and procedures and learning styles were all shown to be integral to the concept. The sections which follow draw conclusions regarding the influence of faith on each of these dimensions. Broadly summarised, however, they conclude that **faith content influenced learning by a) impeding, b) 'diverting', c) changing the nature of internalisation.**

IV.1 Levels of internalisation

Different levels of internalisation (surface, deep, integrated, tacit) were discernible within the four groups, although a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity in the conclusions must be acknowledged. It was tempting to suggest that levels of

internalisation got progressively deeper clockwise around the types, with Discrete learners exhibiting the least profound levels, and Assimilative the greatest. While the evidence suggested that might be the case, such a conclusion must be tempered with the realisation that Discrete learners did find ways of internalising. The implication of lack of reflection must also be rejected. However, indications of levels of internalisation were as follows:

- A tendency of Discrete believers to focus on the sign rather than the signified. These learners emphasised propositional truth to which they made an intellectual commitment. For a number this then became a platform from which to progress beyond the sign. Nevertheless, the conflict between two opposing, or non-homogenous interpretations of experience could often be accounted for by the fact that Discrete believers operated a propositional system.
- Interpretive believers looked for meaning, yet sometimes favoured a meaning that did not require them to engage profoundly. Their inclination towards an unrooted form of reasoning had the effect of hindering the degree to which meaning was genuinely seized.
- Related believers looked for links and connections, seeking significance and discounting dimensions of their belief system which they saw as superfluous. Its propositions were tools; members of this group emphasised process rather than goal, the means of getting somewhere rather than the specific end in itself.
- Assimilative believers spoke in terms of 'illumination', 'insight', 'wisdom', and of particular aspects of their belief system 'ringing true' in ways in which they found difficult to articulate. None of these terms suggest a propositionally-articulated focus or expression of faith; instead, clear similarities with Polanyi's tacit knowing are indicated, which, Chapter Four argued, was the deepest level of internalisation through reflection.

Of all the research conclusions, this is an area where the cyclical dimension of learning must be borne in mind. Can it be asserted with confidence that faith actually affected the level of internalisation, or was it more people's own disposition and learning preferences that encouraged them to take this approach? If these observations

were presented in a vacuum, separate from all the other findings, then the chicken-and-egg aspect would verge toward their nullification. However, the arguments of Chapter One, highlighting the authoritative nature of faith-content, coupled with the learning characteristics of each type identified in other sections, suggests faith-content plays a more significant role than individual tendencies.

IV.2 People's 'faith styles' and learning procedures

Both sections I and II indicated that, in different ways, the interviewees were required to bring two (or more) potentially incompatible learning components together. The form/content discussion understood this occurring through a set of procedures. This section examines the procedures used, identifying a further way in which faith-content influenced learning: **by requiring them to develop procedures specific to the task of harmonising faith-content with another area of their lives.** This was particularly the case for Discrete and Related believers, albeit for different reasons. Interpretive and Assimilative believers were not faced with the same challenge. Both led more holistic lives, as was evidenced from the configurations presented in section II. In these instances, **faith content influenced the way people learnt by requiring them to develop techniques of absorption.** The thesis has classified both types of influence as examples of 'learning procedures', although an overlap with reflection is evident and they might also be considered examples of theological reflection. Details of each are provided below.

IV.2.1 Linking faith content and social knowledge

In the lives of many Discrete believers, these two elements functioned as knowledge of a similar kind—generally propositional with ideological characteristics—which in certain areas clashed. At an immediate level, there appeared to be no way in which the two could be brought together: Hull's (1991 [1985]) notion of an ideological time lag which requires people to merge value-laden information from one time period with that of another is relevant here. While the literal time lag did not appear to pose a significant challenge to interviewees, bringing two separate knowledge 'sources' together certainly was, requiring the employment of a number of techniques.

a) Construction of a big picture

Denise, Tina and Martin constructed an intellectual faith framework that matched what they considered to be the most essential points of life and reality. It became a hermeneutical framework, but was generally not all-encompassing. To varying degrees, each was prepared to incorporate aspects of Christian doctrine according to appropriateness and relevance. The strategy involved a good degree of evaluation in order to prioritise which aspects of people's faith authorities were tenable and reasonable and could therefore be adhered to, and which could legitimately be discarded.

I suppose I tend to go for the big pictures of God's relationship with humanity. And possibly I would, I mean I can understand, yeah, from what you've said that.. but then, you know, I would probably want to argue with people that, you know, a God who is willing to identify himself with the humanity that he's created. Now the fine details of that, as in the virgin birth, I probably wouldn't lose too much sleep over actually. I'm not even sure I believe it myself! It's not really a problem for me. I think Joseph and Mary could have had sex and Jesus could have been born out of that. You know, I don't believe in inherited original sin, or whatever. (Denise)

b) Epistemology

Martin's way of resolving the tension between faith and experience was epistemological. In actual fact, the two dimensions of his life remained separate, but they lay comfortably alongside each other.

I've learnt about different epistemological approaches that carry with them views of, about objective thinking, subjectivism, what is public knowledge, what is private... etc. Various approaches. Umm, and I think that that has changed my faith in the sense that I was previously thinking very much along the lines of objective means, factual means, everyone should accept. Which is a very modernist way of thinking. Which is in line with to some extent my law degree, and to some extent with the society I grew up in abroad, which is by and large fairly modernist. So having the chance to explore epistemologies that are not based on that distinction, between factual and personal or subjective, umm, that is actually workable, has had a major impact on my

faith, because it allows for the possibility of knowledge based on relationship and based on trust which has much to do with the sort of faith that the church talks about. So suddenly that's become credible in my own thinking. And that's had a major impact, I think. In that I now have the categories to be able to say, Well, maybe that thinking's wrong. Because before I only saw one way of thinking about the world. So, yeah, that's had a major, and that way of thinking that I thought was more or less universal didn't work for my Christian faith at all. Because I couldn't prove with certainty that my faith was right or true in any sense, because by definition faith was private and subjective and non-factual. ... This whole study of knowledge as based on the revelation of the other is very exciting. That's been, you know, suddenly I have a credible base on which to talk of, you know, talk about faith and God as personal, which is in my own mind, credible, and which works for, you know, works both for the physical hard ... as well as, you know, the human sciences. So, yeah, that's quite liberating. And it's, you know, non-dualist.

c) Hermeneutics

Tina and Penny emphasised the necessary skill of learning to interpret their major faith authority, the bible, appropriately. In so doing, they would find an appropriate way of applying it to their lives and the bible would thus meet their interpretation of experience. As Martin, this followed largely modernist principles.

d) Extraction of principles

Phillip turned to the bible to provide him with guiding principles about how to live life. He spoke of the need for checks and balances in life in general, and these were to be found in and through his prime faith-authority.

I can just outline five criterias. Five criteria to determine my position. First I say, Is it exclusively written in the bible? For example, if the bible says Don't commit adultery, or Don't steal, it's exclusively in the bible. And then, having got the direct commandment, you know, to do or not to do, the bible is very difficult if you are literally to determine what action involves. Like for example, if anyone says stealing, not to steal, does it involve plagiarism, does it involve ... , does it involve copyright laws. I mean, there are many other

things that would also involve stealing. So the second thing I would ask is... So the second thing I would ask is... Let me first state the points and then I will explain... The first is, Is it Biblical? The second is, Does it, is it harmful to the body? And then thirdly, I would ask, Can I do it for the glory of God? Fourthly, fourthly... the weaker brethren. So there are four instead of five. Can I cause another brother to stumble on account of this? So after you have used these four criterias, I accept something. But even after using these four criterias, I sometimes find it very, very difficult to say something is biblically acceptable or not.

It will be noted that each of these techniques is highly intellectual. Commensurate with Discrete believers' emphasis on the cognitive, so their solution to straddling two forms of knowledge is cognitive. This differed significantly from Related believers, whose challenge was to bring faith-content and experience together.

IV.2.2 Linking faith content and experience

The techniques employed to join faith content and experience were in many ways more subtle and difficult to identify, not least because they might very well be identical to those employed to connect all forms of social knowledge with their experience. Certain strategies that were faith-specific were notable, however, most revolving around how faith could be 'brought to life': a concept that early stages of the analysis identified as particularly typical of Related believers.

a) Focus on the person of Jesus

A major common characteristic of Related believers was their emphasis not on Christian doctrine but on the person of Jesus. Reference to Jesus peppered the interviews, individuals often deliberately asking themselves what he might do or say in a particular situation and acting accordingly. All were self-confessed 'people people' and while their faith generally took on a traditional doctrinal shape, becoming like Jesus was far more significant to them than making sense of the world. Theirs was a relational faith, not necessarily expressed in terms of having a 'relationship' with Jesus, but certainly using him as a role model, focusing on the theological

understandings of his life, death and resurrection, and applying all these dimensions to their own and others' lives.

b) Use of imagination

Both Related and Assimilative believers used their imaginations to bring the bible to life. As the quote from Beth below indicates, this is a well-known technique employed as a particular spiritual discipline. Nevertheless, it was meaningful to her on account of the fact that it provided a means of connecting her life with a faith authority.

This Ignatian thing. It's very biblical. And, I mean, like what I'm doing at the moment, in fact, is, umm, is imagining myself into, umm, the, well, we're starting. I never know where we're going with this, so I can't tell you where it's heading, but, umm, the nativity and imagining myself in my prayer time, umm, as either Mary or Joseph and, I suppose cos I'm a woman, I tend to gravitate towards Mary, but, umm... And, the task is to see how, how that relates to my life. And I find that really, it's been really interesting, because, I mean, what I'm finding with this particular bit, especially because I don't know where I'm going for my parish and stuff like that, and it's very frightening, and, umm, the, I've seen Mary completely differently. You know, it's like God came to her and told her that this thing was going to be done and put inside her, that she didn't ask for, and, umm, although, interestingly, it was in line with what she wanted. You know, she was planning to marry Joseph and have a baby anyway. And, umm, you know, and sometimes I'm up in the night and scared about my future and stuff, and I feel like, I'm up in the night with a baby, you know. It feels like this baby that, that I'm, you know, I'm giving birth to, and it's really helped the bible for me.

Felicity too would 'think [her]self into different [biblical] situations' as a result of which she would have a better idea of what the core aspect of importance was.

c) Articulation

Putting her faith more explicitly into words had been of real significance to Felicity.

I think that my faith has become more explicit. In the sense that when you announce to people that you're on a Training for Ministry course, umm, you can't just sort of keep it all vague and furry. It's got to be clear. And so I've,

umm, I've articulated my faith both to myself and to other people in a way that I hadn't perhaps before. Umm, and I feel that in articulating my faith, umm, it's become more real to me, and it's become more liveable. Umm, everything was sort of behind a screen before... I don't know what I think until I see what I say. It, it's very wordy. If I can articulate it then I've got it clear and the course has made me articulate things. Even more than I did before. And the more articulate I become, the clearer it becomes, and the easier it is.

In general learning theory, articulation is a means of both internalisation and externalisation. However, it was also a learning technique for Felicity who relied on it as a means of bringing her faith to life and making it 'real'.

d) Understanding

Frances spoke of her need to internalise and absorb aspects of her study that related to her faith. While the quote below speaks of her conversion, internalisation was characteristic of her life in general; it was the means of ensuring things became personal and real, and she was also concerned to allow this to happen during her studies.

Some of my friends who were Christians clearly had something going for them that intrigued me. And that sort of went on and off, down the years. And I didn't... There were moments when I sort of caught a glimpse of something out of a corner of my eye, but it was really quite late on before that sense of the reality of the personal relationship really broke in. And it began to make sense. So I, I began to recognise at that point that what I had been taking in as a taught thing suddenly became a real, internal thing.

All three techniques shared the common characteristic of making faith 'real' and hence, in some way, incorporated it into their experience. Edward, too, a highly Discrete believer, considered that he was happier being a Christian than he would be if he weren't. While this is not strictly a learning strategy, it predisposed a positive attitude to his faith authorities, linking them to his experience.

IV.2.3 Merging faith-content and life

This section outlines characteristics typical of both Assimilative and Interpretive believers since, although their foci were mutually opposing, many of the techniques used to achieve their ends were the same. Certain of the features have been referred to previously; in these cases, no further discussion is provided.

a) Open-ness and receptivity

Typical of Interpretive believers was the tendency to delay actively constructing their experience until a faith interpretation became apparent. This involved cultivating an open, uncritical spirit; refraining from a quick evaluation, and waiting until something 'struck' them as true. Craig, an Assimilative believer, expressed a similar approach in stating that he acted as a 'receptor'. This meant that he didn't evaluate and critique using sophisticated intellectual and logical procedures, but received, mulled over, 'chewed the cud' and absorbed by understanding.

I'm a receptor rather than objectively thinking, Now is he telling the... I don't think that way.

b) Affirmation

All three RC interviews contained expressions of joy, amazement, delighted astonishment at the truth of the faith they were exploring and developing and the validity of their faith experiences. At times, this was reactive. Anne, for example, spoke of occasions when the wondrous truth of Jesus Christ, and the miracle of the overall coherence of the Christian faith suddenly struck her between the eyes. More pertinently, however, was the *penchant* of all three deliberately to affirm the truth of the Christian faith as a conscious learning strategy, and this affirmation over-rode all other learning responses and approaches. To quote Roger:

J'essaye toujours de positiver. Je crois que je reconnais objectivement les choses que je ne comprends pas, mais je me dis, si c'est là, c'est que ça a un sens, quoi, c'est que ça veut nous dire quelque chose et, je prends pas forcément la peine de chercher jusqu'au bout. C'est peut-être un tort. Trouver

la réponse. Et ça ne me scandalise pas plus que ça quoi, si vous voulez. Je m'arrête pas au scandale. Je ne m'arrête pas.²

He 'positivises' what he doesn't understand by affirming that it has meaning, even though that meaning is not clear to him at the time. Not only so, but this enables him to move beyond an apparent 'scandal' or unpleasant aspect. 'Je ne m'arrête pas.'

Anne asserts the need to trust her faith authorities.

C'est comme le premier jour qu'on prendra la bible, qu'on aille dans la Genèse, dans des endroits pas très folichons, enfin, pas très intéressants, on aura envie de fermer le livre, quoi, si on n'a pas, si on n'a pas, justement, cette confiance en la Parole. Il faut quand même donner sa confiance.³

That trust is cultivated by a spirit of celebration which pervades the whole of her study and life.

Le mystère de l'incarnation, c'est quelque chose que j'ai beaucoup plus creusé depuis que je suis ici par la Liturgie principalement. Et que je vais continuer, et d'autres choses à découvrir quand j'avancerai un peu en âge monastique, puisqu'après on fait des études de théologie que j'ai pas encore commencé. Quand on verra ça plus systématiquement, ça va certainement m'apporter beaucoup plus. Alors dans le contexte monastique, comme ensuite on célèbre ce qu'on apprend, ça va certainement... c'est un petit peu... c'est un peu la mise en pratique de ce qu'on apprend qui se fait tout de suite après, donc je pense que ça va aussi modeler ma vie de foi.⁴

² I always try to 'positivise'. I suppose I recognise objectively things that I don't understand, but I tell myself, if it's there, it's there for a reason. It's there to tell us something, and so I don't necessarily make an effort to pursue it to the end. Maybe I'm wrong. Find the answer. But it doesn't overly bother or trouble me. I don't allow the hard stuff to block me. I just carry on.

³ It's like the first day that you pick up the bible. You might open it at Genesis, or somewhere not terribly gripping, not very interesting, and you'd want to close the book if you didn't, you didn't, that's what I mean, if you didn't trust that it was worthwhile. You have to trust.

⁴ I've really dug deep into the mystery of the incarnation since I've been here, largely through the liturgy. And I shall continue, and there will be other things to discover as I progress in monastic 'age', because later on I have to study theology, which I haven't started yet. When I understand everything more systematically, that will undoubtedly open things up even more to me. So in the monastic context, since we always celebrate what we learn, that will certainly... it's a bit like... it's really putting into practice something we've learnt immediately afterwards, so I think that that will also change the way I live my faith.

c) Understanding

Roger, Anne and Yvonne all asserted that to understand was of far greater importance than to seize accurate information. This too altered their way of reflecting in giving them an alternative focus. Those who are concerned with factual accuracy reason in a way that permits them to determine whether or not this is the case. Assimilative believers were comparatively unconcerned about this dimension of their faith. Instead, their focus was on meaning, comprehension and insight. Commonly-used vocabulary was that their intelligence was 'enlightened' (*éclairé*) or 'renewed' (*renouvelé*), both of which are qualitative terms rather than quantitative. As previously mentioned, a common way of dealing with difficulties was to seek understanding and find/give meaning, rather than challenge and critique.

d) Use of other people as role models of reflection

One of the characteristic features of Roger's interview was his recourse to historic figures both to articulate his own views and to support his reasoning. Careful examination revealed that this appeared to be for two reasons: firstly because he was personally on more solid ground—from a faith perspective, it was 'better' to cite others than oneself—but secondly, because these fathers in the faith had lived a proven and admirable life of faith which he wished to emulate. The way in which this could be done was to follow their way of reasoning and reflecting.

Je pense à une parole de Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: 'Je n'ai jamais cherché que la vérité.' C'est vrai que ça, ça c'était assez prononcé pour moi au départ, surtout.⁵

Roger also provided one of the starkest quotes of all the interviewees:

Le Prêtre doit transmettre ce que dit l'Eglise. Ce que le Christ, lui, a transmis à ses Apôtres et ses Apôtres ont transmis aux autres. A la limite, on a même... Je pense à savoir... effacer son jugement personnel pour se soumettre encore une fois à l'enseignement de l'Eglise et puis transmettre le plus fidèlement

⁵ I think of something St Thérèse of the Child Jesus said: 'All I have done is seek the truth'. It's true that that, that was quite important for me, particularly at the beginning.

possible ce qui dit l'Eglise. Moi, je pense que c'est ça qui, qui, un des critères de justesse.⁶

Here, as well as following the thinking and accepting the conclusions provided by his faith authorities, he combines it with the need, even responsibility, to suppress and eradicate his own personal views.

IV.3 Forms of commitment

Throughout the thesis, different types of commitment have been referred to and identified as significant to the overall process of learning. Commitment was a fundamental dimension of internalisation, representing for both Perry and Boud *et al.* the final stage in the overall process of transforming experience into personal knowledge. Perry's nine positions reflected a progressive internalisation associated with where people's dependency lay. At the early stages, this was clearly external and was linked to a perceived absolute; the later stages were characterised by an internal commitment within relativism, and was linked to the assumption of personal responsibility.

If Perry's scheme is representative of a 'normal' developmental pattern, then certain characteristics are identifiable. Firstly, and importantly, commitments are expressed in singular terms. In other words, people are committed *either* to an absolute, external view of truth which they depend on, *or* to an internal, relative view for which they assume personal responsibility. Perry does not allow for the two to be held simultaneously: a position which Fowler too upholds. The transition from understanding knowledge as absolute to relative seems to be one that is commonly accepted in simple rather than complex terms, the two being mutually incompatible. Personal commitment is therefore also simple as opposed to multiple, and Perry traces a reasonably straight line as students move from simple dualism to complex dualism to relativism and finally to commitment in relativism.

⁶ The Priest ought to transmit what the Church says. What Christ himself transmitted to his Apostles, and his Apostles transmitted to others. I suppose in actual fact, we have to... I think we need to know how to... eradicate our own personal judgement and submit ourselves once again to the teaching of the Church and then transmit what the Church says as faithfully as possible. Personally, I think that it's that which is one of the criteria for 'soundness'.

This comparatively straightforward progression was not unequivocally endorsed in the interview data, however, which revealed, in particular, different types of multiple commitment which in turn appeared to affect people's overall growth and development. Two alternative types of commitment were specifically noteworthy, enabling the research to conclude that **faith-content had influenced learning by affecting the nature and role of commitment.**

a) Artificial and/or 'trailing' commitment

Both Perry and Fowler suggested that a 'commitment in relativism' (Perry, 1970) was a natural dimension of the process of maturation. As such, it had a number of characteristics. It involved a gradual assumption of personal responsibility for people's individual views, and while commitments were not made in thin air with little to support them, they were also not fixed and immutable for all time. Perry's final position (9), he describes in terms of

... developing commitment(s) [which are] expended or remade in new terms as growth. Balances are developing in the tensions of qualitative polarity of style, especially alternation of reflection and action. Acceptance of changes of mood and outlook within continuity of identity. A sense of being "in" one's life. (1970: chart of development, inside back cover).

Personal development is obviously an ongoing thing, characterised by the forming and remaking of commitments as people encounter new experiences which force them to re-evaluate their previous conclusions and modify their constructed knowledge, committing to these modified versions on an everyday basis. Normally the modifications are minor, but occasionally they might be major. This bears similarities to Fowler's understanding of conversion as individuals shift their commitment from one knowledge base and understanding of the world to another which is significantly different.

There were signs in the interviews conducted for the present research, however, that people often made 'artificial' and/or 'trailing' commitments. The former were often transferred from an initial commitment that an interviewee had viewed as significant

and because this was to an element of a bigger belief system, the whole of that belief system was given credibility. What the thesis has termed 'artificial' commitments took the form of a strong adherence to aspects of that belief system *without people having had a prior experience with which to back up their conclusions*. So Clive had discovered the validity of the bible and its message in one area of his life, and by extension accepted its authority in all other areas, even when there appeared little, if any, experiential reason for so doing. This appeared to turn the normal experience → learned outcome progression on its head, with people beginning with faith-content and matching their experience to it.

We had a bible study of about ten people. The person leading it was deliberately and quite correctly not letting her own views come out or saying very much, so leaving her out of it, I found myself in a minority of one. Umm, or so it felt, umm, on the subject of universal salvation. Now that is, to my way of thinking, a fairly fundamental point. There was one chap who was quite willing to say he believed in universal salvation. And quite a lot of people unwilling to say that they didn't. I'm not sure that I want to disbelieve in it, but St Paul is firmly agin it, and I'm afraid, and he wasn't an apostle for nothing, so I mean, if that's what Scripture says... (Clive)

Linked to this was a form of 'trailing' commitment. People had discovered a 'truth' at a particular point in their lives, and the experience had been so strong that they carried it with them as it stood into their subsequent experiences, often indefinitely. The modification and remaking of their commitment that Perry identified as significant never took place. Instead, the commitment and its context 'trailed' into the rest of life, constructing an increasingly uncomfortable dualism as a different side of people developed more as Perry described. A double commitment was evident in a number of interviews: one which was typical of people living in a relativistic world, the other holding fast to an absolute. Martin described a transition he'd made from this dualistic position to a more unified one.

I would say I was committed to Christianity at an intellectual level, yet knew little of what that meant in practice. Although I'd been to church for most of my life. So the first eight months or so, first coming to Britain, no immediate family, making friends from scratch, everything from scratch, so that prompted me to re-think, well, you know, if there's no cash value to, in

practical terms to being a Christian, what's the point?! Umm, and the main issue at that time was dealing with my father's death. Not the fact that he'd died, but the fact that he'd led a pretty unpleasant life. ... He'd been a diabetic, his mother had died young, loads of stuff had happened that had made his life not very nice. But I knew him as a very nice person. So my question was, well, there doesn't seem much justice in that. What does God have to say about this? And, yeah, that... It's interesting that there is a... I was watching a play in London where, well, *Les Misérables*, where the central character, obviously, has an awful life and, but he's, it seems justified at the end when the young girl that he's adopted as his own daughter acknowledges, you know, discovers, you know, everything he's done for her and her fiancé, and that's entirely significant, and that made a huge impact and made me re-think who God was.

Previously he had felt that any form of commitment was problematic.

I didn't have any way of assessing these different positions, which in themselves seemed, or came across as quite sure and quite convinced that this was the right way to go. So, yeah, I think the lack of tools to assess these distinct positions was disconcerting because, lacking any way of assessing them, they were either both right or both wrong! So that didn't make sense in my thinking. And ultimately a lot, maybe a lot of things you can leave to one side and say, Well, I don't need to make a decision here. That may be fair enough, you know, on a day-to-day basis. But a lot of other things are very important and you sort of think, well, if I am a Christian, how should I react to this or that, or what should I think about this or that. And that had a lot of spin off effects which tended to neutralise my Christian faith, or to reduce it to a very personal level, and beyond that it was very, very tentative. Because I was aware of all these options, and not being able to assess, I didn't feel I could commit to any of them. So that would, how shall we say, hamper any, you know, any sort of conversation I would shy away from because I would, *because* I was aware of the difficulties and I was not committed to any, feel I could commit to any particular view, you know, I felt kind of locked out, shall we say. Nothing to say.

This coheres very strongly with Perry's 'temporizing', when people put their growth on hold by avoiding making *any* commitments for a prolonged period which they eventually move out of.

Artificial and trailing commitments were particularly characteristic of Discrete believers and largely accounted for the dualism they experienced which required the development of bridging techniques in their learning. For Hull, describing something similar in his concept of an ideological time-lag, this was simply a matter of people's Christian faith 'into which they were nurtured ... always lagging behind realistic adjustment to the world as it has come to be today' (1991 [1985]). This was accompanied by a developmental lag. In these interviews, the same lag was identifiable, but its effects were more specifically related to the form and nature of their epistemic commitments.

b) Existential commitment

It was difficult to find an adjective which accurately described the commitment exhibited by Assimilative believers. While the commitment of all three other groups tended to be principally intellectual and emotional, the nuns and Roman Catholic Priest in particular lived their commitment in a way which incorporated their whole selves. Something of the phenomenon is indicated in the title 'Assimilative': their commitment was one of self-transformation which involved the assimilation of faith-content since this was the means by which the transformation would occur. In many ways, therefore, their commitment was beyond that of the faith-content and the faith-authorities they were engaging with, although paradoxically, these authorities were accepted more whole-heartedly and in a less discriminatory fashion than was the case with any of the other groups.

Existential commitment defied categorisation within any of Perry's positions. Interviewees seemed entirely at ease with a world that operated on relative principles, but wrapped it in unshakable absolutes which informed the relativity. Equally significant was their high degree of abdication of responsibility at a personal level for the construction of their personal knowledge and their self-development. The result

was individuals who bore little resemblance to Perry's developmental progression. The commitment to an absolute was not only maintained throughout but so assumed and 'lived' (hence 'existential') that it was never even questioned. That then informed all subsequent epistemological growth, which on the one hand was very weak, and on the other grew and developed in a way identified as desirable. To a degree, Interpretive believers displayed a similar commitment, sometimes sidelining any conflict between absolute and relative, but this bore stronger resemblances to Perry's 'escape' and/or 'retreat' than it did to the genuinely different developmental path taken by their Assimilative counterparts.

From these two examples, the thesis concludes that the overall growth and development of the interviewees occurred in 'atypical' ways. If commitment 'normally' involves a simple progression from absolutism to relativism and this is linked to human development, then the inclusion of an absolute when people were clearly at home in a relative environment both affected their unity of selfhood and their overall path toward maturity as the process of internalisation took place in ways untypical of those not aiming to keep absolutes and relatives together.

V. Faith authorities and the self

Although it was not a clearly articulated hypothesis at the beginning of the project, an important dimension of the research question originally focused on whether authoritative faith-content could hinder or impede the growth and development of the self. The relationship of the self and learning was explored in the opening chapters of the thesis, identifying two salient components in the act of vocal self-assertion and in the process of reflection. This section looks at each in turn, concluding that **faith-content can have an influential effect on the growth of the self when it is used in particular ways. That influence relates to, and to an extent depends on people's own temperament. At the same time, as with other results, its effects can be simply to augment what would naturally take place in a different learning context.**

V.1 Faith authorities and self-assertion

One of the themes that ran throughout many of the interviews was people's feeling of anger with God. Asked for her reaction to reports about God changing people's ordinary dental fillings into gold, for example, Beth replied:

I think I'd want to know... It, I'd want to know more about the story. Umm, not, that's very interesting actually. I mean, would I believe it? I sort of tend to want to believe it, but as well as whether you believe it or not, I'm quite interested in why God would do that. I'd be very angry with God if God had done that when there's the situation in Kosovo and things like that. I'd be very angry indeed actually. I really don't think it's... But, you know, if, if the story was, you know, if there was more to the story, there might have been a purpose or something... I don't know. Yeah. I guess I do, I would want to know that the person was very poor or something. I don't know... I'd want to know there was some kind of justice thing there. I mean, I know God heals, but... I don't know.

Penny described a period of transition in her Christian life which the thesis came to understand as a shift from an Interpretive to a Discrete way of believing, and this involved gaining the 'right' to be angry.

I think to some extent we're so taught to love God no matter what, and to trust him and to, and I think to a certain extent they're right. But there's always, maybe in the denomination back home where I've come from there's no room to be angry at God and there's no room to express fully how you feel towards God. And I think this is the first time since I've been here that I've sat down and I've really said, God, I'm so angry that you've done this, or I'm so upset about this. And I think I have become very honest with God. And very honest with others as well.

Miranda's description of her 'breakthrough' has already been quoted (section II.5).

Allowing themselves to be angry with God was important in learning terms because at these points, individuals started to look at and use various faith authorities, and in particular the bible, in a different way. Simon spoke of a growing realisation that just because something is in the bible does not necessarily mean that God approves of it or

condones it. Whereas previously he had 'submitted' himself to 'God's way of doing things', he had found a way of looking God in the eye and working things out in partnership rather than in submissive obedience. One of the characteristics of Assimilative believers was their deliberate and conscious submission to faith authorities as a faith response and outworking; this often resulted, as demonstrated in Roger's quote above, in their abandoning their own critical faculties, or perhaps more accurately, in the training of their reason to behave in a particular pre-determined, faith-dictated way.

Submission to a faith authority such as the bible was also characteristic of many Discrete believers, whose ultimate reluctance to transgress beyond its bounds was very evident. Frequently, people's inability to bring two sides of their lives together was because they gave the bible an equal role and importance in making sense of and decisions in life, and the thesis suggests that this in turn led to the sense of a divided self so often experienced. For Discrete believers, this was largely a conscious, thought-through position that involved the imposition of a faith framework.

The weak self exhibited by many Interpretive believers, however, functioned in a different way. Here, faith authorities did not appear to function overly authoritatively, nor were the members of this group preoccupied with adhering to their precepts. Instead, individuals themselves expressed a range of innate insecurities and lacks of confidence. Sometimes this was reasoned, on other occasions it appeared instinctive. So Miranda marvelled at the fact that she was being encouraged to think for herself and form her own individual theological conclusions after spending quite some time retreating behind the conviction that her opinion didn't count for much in comparison with those of all the eminent theologians she was being taught about. Ruth too was beginning to blossom as she gained confidence in herself and in her ability to reason. At the same time, faith authorities, or their perception of them, certainly provided a rationale for people with an apparently natural weak sense of self to maintain that weakness, and even cultivate it.

Strength and weakness of self was therefore not exclusively linked to the way in which people related to faith authorities. However, when this was the case, then the

ensuing learning was affected. Imposed boundaries, coupled with a strong self, accounted for the tensions and disjuncture which led to the requirement to construct bridging strategies. Faith precepts determined that the self should be weakened (transformed) and provided a structure by which this could happen. This latter, in particular, links with the relationship between self and reflection: the focus of the next section.

V.2 Faith authorities, self and reflection

One of the most distinctive aspects about Assimilative believers which in many ways set them apart from the other groups was the fact that their entire lives and learning were set within a faith development context. This was regularly articulated, and Assimilative believers had a particular view of themselves—sinful people—that linked with a desired goal: eternal life. While sinfulness was understood to affect all areas of life, attention was primarily focused on the self, and the means of attaining their goal was generally expressed as a matter of self-transformation. The agent of transformation was God, not themselves, and a means had to be found that allowed him to do his work. Faith authorities, of every kind (liturgy, bible, saints, Pope...) were therefore turned to in order to provide the means by which the transformation happened. This accounts for Roger's deliberate (instinctive?) turning to other sources as he articulated 'his' thinking. By quoting scripture, by citing saints and other People of Faith who had provenly trodden the path before, he was not only adopting a method of reflection that would supplant his own, but he was allowing this external content to do its work in him. Roger himself, the self which other learners in particular experienced as developing through autonomous thought and independent assertion, was diminishing: a task aided by the techniques employed that radically altered the nature of his autonomy and independence. So his view that he had a responsibility to eradicate his personal judgment in favour of that of his various faith authorities (section IV.2.3(d)) was not an instance of retreat as it might have been with Interpretive believers. Instead, it was a way both of making sure that he himself diminished and that he was 'taken over' and transformed by these authorities, since this was the means to his ultimate end of eternal life. Each of the three Roman Catholic interviewees exhibited similar traits. Anne and Yvonne turned to the Pope, to

their Bishop, Abbot and Abbess, to 'des gens plus intelligents que moi' in the faith (Anne), and were largely content both to allow them to think through the tough questions and to defer to them in case of need. Craig, the only non-Catholic of the group, nevertheless emphasised other people's views and other people's judgments for his life.

... within three weeks of me preaching at evening service, at least fifteen people separately came up to me and said: Look, do you remember that you said you were going to consider doing this? Well, now I can tell you, you should be doing this. Or I've been praying and I'm telling you that you should go to college, etc. So, having explored it, we went for it.

All made significantly greater reference to faith scholars in their interviews than members of other groups; Anne and Yvonne emphasised the transformative role of the liturgy in their lives; while Craig again and again sought ways in which he and his own self-assertive nature would be diminished.

Three different types of self were therefore apparent amongst the four groups, each linked to reflection. Discrete and Related believers both demonstrated a strong, independent and autonomous self typical of that so emphasised in western culture, and had developed the patterns of reflection and the logical skills commensurate with its individual growth. Interpretive believers appeared often to reject the strictures of formal 'earthly' logic, constructing a system with its own regulations and *modus operandi*. Part of this involved being 'open', a technique which perhaps mirrored the rejection of autonomous thought characteristic of their Assimilative counterparts. Certainly (with the exception of Chris) the Interpretive self was insecure and unconfident, generally relying on its own subjective judgment both because this appeared to be the only resource available, and because it was a necessary defence against the potential of their being submerged by bigger, stronger external authorities. Assimilative believers deliberately submitted themselves to faith authorities, yet developed the skills of reflection linked to and characteristic of those authorities. Theirs was a two-fold approach, rejecting personal independence while developing an autonomy that involved treading in the footsteps of others.

VI. Summary and conclusion

It is very evident that each of the categories employed in the analysis of the data relates to and overlaps with others, so that an overall picture of adult Christian learning has emerged. The organisation of the analysis of the data has been presented in such a way that many of the inter-relations were apparent. So, for example, people's ways of believing and learning, the overarching forms displayed by individuals could be accounted for through the specific way of constructing knowledge and the configuration of learning components put into place, which in turn involved different uses of experience, and different procedures as they brought the various components together. None of the analytic categories is self-contained, therefore. At the same time, it has been possible to identify a wide range of ways in which faith-content and faith authorities appear to have influenced people's learning. The most obvious, partly also because it is the most overtly cyclical with authority being both exerted and attributed (the intrinsic and extrinsic varieties mentioned in the Prologue), was the influence on Assimilative believers. In the Roman Catholic interviews, we are left with the impression of a highly thought-through, well-developed educational system in which the *fil conducteur* of self-transformation guides all other ways of being and learning. The cycle involves individuals placing their confidence in the theological interpretation of the world and its people and the theological solution to this interpretation, and then working themselves to allow faith authorities to do their job of bringing this about. Interestingly, Craig, the only non-RC Assimilative believer, exhibited learning characteristics that were far less polished than his counterparts, emphasising the importance of the (RC) Church's educational role in more sense than one. Theirs may have been a true example of a form of theological reflection, although this differed significantly from that of Related believers, their nearest counterparts in terms of successfully merging all the learning components (see Figures 8.3 and 8.4). Fundamentally, the different configurations outlined in Figures 8.2 to 8.5 may be seen to underpin and account for almost all of the other learning characteristics identified, with the possible exception of the growth and development of the self; yet even here if this is inextricably linked with the process of reflection, then the configurations which permit a holistic integration

through effective theological reflection seem to contribute to the growth of a more profound, rounded and authentic self.

Each section identified specific ways in which the influence of faith on learning was apparent. These, then, are the basic conclusions of the research, which is able to affirm—perhaps even more than it had anticipated—the validity of the original hypothesis.

Chapter Nine

Comment and discussion

Introduction

The analysis of the data presented in the previous chapter raises two specific questions which this chapter addresses. Firstly, the quality and therefore the validity of the data themselves must be evaluated. Secondly, while the project set out to investigate how Christian adults learnt, the scene was semi set through a consideration of Hull's reverse thesis of a consideration of what prevented them from learning. Little consideration was given in the data analysis itself to non-learning, and the theme must be picked up and examined, both with regard to Hull's own conclusions and to the notion of non-learning itself. Both discussions enable more concrete conclusions to be drawn regarding a specific response to the research question, which is the focus of the third section.

I. Data validity

While the subjective involvement of the researcher's interpretation and biases is increasingly recognised in both quantitative and qualitative projects (Slee, 1993), its role in the latter is of particular relevance when evaluating the 'validity' of data. 'Validity' may in itself be an inappropriate term, with its conveyance of qualitative values. Nevertheless, all research is beholden to consider the significance of its results, which itself implies an assessment of its overall structure and the precepts on which it stands. In the case of the present study, a number of factors were identified as relevant.

1.1 The involvement of the interpreter

My own involvement and the influence of my personal background and biography became increasingly clear as the project progressed. The study originated from my work context, which contributed, together with other sources which were all personally known and familiar to me, all the interviewees from which raw data was

collected. This had various repercussions. Some of the issues were identified and discussed in Chapter Six, and revolved around the use of self-selecting volunteers, the fact that theology as a discipline can provoke negative theological sensitivities which would affect the level of trust between interviewees and myself, and hence the degree to which their responses could be taken at face value. More subtle 'research destabilisers' became apparent, however. The phenomenological approach presupposes the researchers' ability to bracket and isolate their own presuppositions, experience, and expectations using a technique termed as 'epoche'.

Epoche is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things. In the natural attitude we hold knowledge judgmentally; we presuppose that what we perceive in nature is actually there and remains there as we perceive it. In contrast, *Epoche* requires a new way of looking at things, a way that requires that we learn *to see* what stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe... In the *Epoche*, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego.

(Moustakas, 1994:33; italics in original)

With hindsight, the research achieved this only in part. While the typology *did* emerge inductively to the point of causing astonishment as its salient features came to light, from that point on it had a tendency to take on a life of its own. I instinctively wanted to fill it out with reference to other Christians who had not participated in the research, reasoning that this was a way of testing it. This may have been the case, but it may also have had the effect of allowing the typology to assume characteristics that either were not there at all, or of then actively looking for features from the interviewees to see if they were present. In addition, given my own Christian and educational background, I frequently found myself questioning where I would place *myself* on the typology, once again allowing it to fill out beyond what it could stand in terms of the research itself. A growing awareness of these tendencies helped restrain them, but it would be erroneous to claim total freedom from them.

The same issues, of course, re-emerged throughout the analysis of the data, and at each stage questions had to be asked regarding whether identifiable features were actually there, or whether they had simply been read into the raw data. Had time and

circumstances permitted, the results would have been returned to the interviewees who would have been asked to place themselves on the typology, and/or to identify themselves with one or other dimension of the analysis. This proved impossible. The interviews had been conducted three years before the project was in a position to communicate its results. In that time, people had moved on, not only physically and geographically (with the exception of the nuns!) but also in terms of their Christian growth. Students from both the vocational theological college and the ministerial training course had dispersed potentially throughout the world in the intervening years. Tracking many would prove extremely difficult. In addition, the many clear signs of movement from one type to another as people had pursued their course of study was an indication that few people would remain static, most shifting to new positions on—or beyond—the typology over time. Furthermore, I sensed that some might not respond positively to their placing and accompanying description. An emotional reaction to the types was hard for me as a researcher to avoid: one type gained my respect, another induced both awe and terror, another I was tempted to view as 'sad'... If these were my own reactions to data which were highly familiar to me, how might interviewees respond? The real possibility of denial was obvious, playing a significant role in determining whether returning the analysis to the respondents for 'validation' was a viable course of action. Once again, my emotional reaction may have played its part in the transmission of the results, and I had to make every effort to lift myself beyond this when attempting to provide an objective analysis, ensuring as far as possible that I did not home in unnecessarily on what I considered particularly negative or positive traits, or exaggerate features beyond what was contained in the data.

1.2 The place and role of the typology

One of the more difficult issues in analysing the raw data was where to stop. As Chapters Six and Seven indicate, there were various stages in the process, which began with the thick descriptions, moved to matrix, from there to the typology, and from there to the identification of specific ways in which faith and faith-content appeared to have affected the learning of the interviewees. At each stage, more precise information was gleaned in response to the question, but with the recognition also that the typology itself was one global response. As the results were written up, it was

clear that even more precise information might be available, and that different approaches to analysing the data continued as viable options. A more standard content analysis which focused as much on the sign as the signified might have yielded quite different results, for example. The results as presented are therefore the product of the particular approach taken, but this was one of a number which might have been pursued.

Perhaps because of the similarity with Perry's 'positions', Fowler's 'stages' and Belenky *et al.*'s 'perspectives', it was tempting to draw a line under the typology and focus on this as the ultimate conclusions. In other words, the existence of the typology with its four groups itself was an indication that faith influenced learning, and there was little further to go in the analytic process.

This would, however, have put the conclusions on less secure ground than I think was eventually the case, primarily on account of the small sample. Assimilative, Related and Interpretive believers each only had four members, Discrete nine. The categorisations were vulnerable, however. The low numbers meant that people had to be placed with very general shared characteristics, and while the thesis is reasonably confident about these, areas of lesser commonality were evident in the finer detail. At times this provoked questions about where a particular individual did actually belong, and the frailty of a typology with so small a population was very apparent.

It is therefore necessary to emphasise that the typology and its categories in the first instance should contribute to the conclusions of the research in partnership with and alongside the results outlined in sections II to V in Chapter Eight. While clearly relating to the typology, these also stood beyond it to some degree and considered what characteristics could be identified across two or more types, rather than putting significant store on each of the types individually. One of the recommendations of the thesis is that the typology should be tested in greater depth with a much larger sample since its potential significance for the study of Adult Christian Education is considerable, but for the purposes of the present research it should not assume a greater importance than it can bear. It was nevertheless a valuable analytic tool for the purposes of the analysis which begs further investigation in its own right. Of all the

empirical data, it is also groundbreaking in offering an early understanding of the nature of Christian faith and Christian learning.

1.3 Hermeneutical issues

The various analytic stages introduced a range of hermeneutical considerations relevant to the validity of the results also. Different levels of interpretation of data were apparent throughout the whole project, from the interviewees' interpretation of their faith-content, to my own interpretation of the raw data provided through the transcripts, and further interpretive distillations in the thick descriptions, matrix, typology and eventual conclusions. At each point I had to make decisions about what was being said, what this signified, and whether and how it should contribute to the overall results. Gadamer makes a point which relates to the discussion of section I.1.

It is not so much our judgements as it is our prejudices that constitute our being... Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something - whereby what we encounter says something to us. This formulation certainly does not mean that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, "Nothing new will be said here." Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity. But how do we know the guest who we admit is one who has something *new* to say to us? Is not our expectation and our readiness to hear the new also necessarily determined by the old that has already taken possession of us? (Gadamer, 1966:9)

Some of my own educational prejudices were readily apparent: an already formed view of what the ultimate goal of adult education programmes was (autonomy, independence, responsibility...) and how this was best to be achieved (critical reflection). These not only contributed to my positive and negative reactions, but also provided ready-made handles by which to assess the data. One inadvertent and perhaps paradoxical dimension of the research was the chronological order in which different stages took place. The interviews were conducted relatively early, and the

analysis of the data was worked on and put down again, worked on and put down again over a period of three years. The opening chapters of the thesis, however, which laid the theoretical foundations for the various concepts to be explored, were written at a late stage, inductively identified as of fundamental relevance. This posed a secondary dilemma revolving around how and to what extent the research findings should contribute, either overtly or covertly, to those discussions. However, in terms of hermeneutical prejudice, the force of Gadamer's observation was lessened.

Other significant hermeneutical aspects were also present. On a number of occasions, judicious decisions had to be made regarding the interpretation of educational terminology. This was the case even—and perhaps particularly—for some of the key concepts. What constituted 'form', for example? Perry himself was only able to provide an anecdotal explanation, sidestepping the need for a definition. Similarly, Belenky *et al.*'s 'procedures', which became crucial for an understanding of learning styles, was a term which the research had to appropriate as it saw fit. Critics of the research would be correct to observe that Belenky *et al.*'s understanding was notably loose (see Chapter Five, figure 5.4) and that the 'procedures' identified as representative of Christian reflective styles in Chapter Eight, section IV.2, bore little resemblance to those of the scholars whose work had nonetheless provided the analytic tool.

A final dimension relates to the fact that three of the interviews were conducted in French, amongst Roman Catholics. Both factors were significant. My own competence in French, coupled with the fact that I had lived in both France and Spain—both Roman Catholic countries—for a combined total of seven years meant that I was aware of some of the hermeneutical complications. These had already raised their heads (French would use the singular 'head'!) at the point of adapting the interview questions for the French interviewees: this was not simply a matter of altering obvious factors such as place names ('monastery' for 'educational institution', for example) but involved a reconceptualisation of what was being asked and for what purpose so that the question would achieve the desired results. In some instances, this was a question of rephrasing; in other cases, the question was completely reworded. While I did not translate the French interviews into English as full transcripts, I did make the transfer from one language to the other at the point of

compiling the thick descriptions, but then returned to the original when conducting the more detailed analysis and identifying salient quotes. Here the issues were reversed, heightened and complicated by the Roman Catholic dimension. 'Christ' for a British Protestant has quite a different sense to the French 'le Christ', the latter conveying a much more theologically laden notion. At times during the interviews I had to intersperse questions that would help me in the interpretive process. As the analyses took place, I was also able over the three years to pose questions to other French friends with whom I maintain contact in order to clarify points of uncertainty. Just the fact that three interviews were in French while the remainder were in English automatically suggested a group apart, which may have been a contributory factor in the compilation of the matrix and typology. It was therefore heartening to discover—the impression was one of having blinkers removed!—one further interviewee from a completely different, protestant background who so very clearly displayed characteristics common with the three French participants.

The conclusions of the independent judge brought many hermeneutical issues into focus for many of the same reasons as those already cited. The judge did not interpret the data in the same way. He did not have the same educational background, nor, therefore, did he share the same prejudices, although would have introduced his own.

The hermeneutical considerations involved in the project as a whole were therefore considerable, and the research had to evaluate their significance. It concluded that enough measures had been built in for their effect to be reduced sufficiently for the conclusions to stand. It also took heart from the fact that all qualitative research has to wrestle with the same issues. While Belenky *et al.* were able to introduce a number of extra precautions, these would have been going beyond the reasonable for a project that was immensely smaller in scale. One further factor, of particular relevance to the judge's conclusions, was the scholarly context of the research. The thesis has to make an assumption that those working within the field of adult education and of adult Christian or Theological education have a common hermeneutical base from which to understand and situate its conclusions. However, it is impossible to rid research of the many and varied hermeneutical issues that arise, and those identified should be borne in mind in any evaluation of this project.

1.4 The interview sample

The frailty of the typology when constructed with a small sample size has already been mentioned. A further significant issue regarding the validity of the results revolves around the nature of the sample itself. Interviewees were drawn from three main sources: an independent vocational theological college, an Anglican part-time training course for potential Priests, and a French Roman Catholic Convent. The advantages of having a diverse spread of sources are clear. However, a number of questions remain. In the first place, how should the fact that three of the four groups of the typology were largely populated, albeit with some exceptions, with individuals from the same source? Assimilative believers were primarily Roman Catholic. Related tended to be from the part-time ordination course. Discrete and Interpretive believers were a genuine mix, but the latter was notable on account of the fact that all its members were women; the former was weighted towards to independent vocational theological college. Other factors also come into play. Those from the ordination course tended to be older, most over the age of 40; those from the independent college were mostly younger, many under 40. Those training to be Priests were highly people-focused, having deliberately chosen a people-centred 'ministry'. This may well have accounted for Related believers' emphasis on the person of Jesus as their faith basis. The independent theological college put great store on the bible and its interpretation, running its only Master's degree in 'Aspects of Biblical Interpretation'. The nuns and Roman Catholic seminarian similarly came from and lived within a specific theological context. While these various emphases and backgrounds did not in any way invalidate the research results—each offered legitimate insights into different ways of believing and learning—the question of whether the inclusion of people from other contexts and backgrounds would have resulted in a significantly different typology must be asked. Astley, for example, commenting on the 'openness of the Christian religious education process', observes:

There are limits to the openness of the Christian learner, although these limits are simply a function of where we draw the boundaries around what we are willing to regard as Christian learning outcomes. It is clear that so-called "liberal" Christian religious educators draw these limits more widely than do "conservatives", and are much less willing than the latter group to describe as

a "Christian future for our children" a situation in which the children's "own distinctive contribution to it" was distinctly curtailed. (1994:96)

'Liberal' and 'conservative' are difficult theological labels which have little bearing on the discussion at hand. However, Astley's comment confirms the view that different theological positions result in different educational approaches and outcomes. While this is a further clear indication of the influence of faith on learning, it also suggests that a typology resulting from research such as this can only 'represent' those of the theological persuasions present in the sample. A much larger sample which extended into a broader spectrum of theological positions *might* be able to generalise to the point of constructing a typology, be that fourfold or otherwise. This *might* bear significant similarities with those presented in Chapter Eight, especially if the same analytic criteria of epistemic primitives, the growth of the self, and the relationship between faith authorities and experience were used. Nonetheless, the limited theological representativeness of the sample used, and the potential impact on the research results, must be acknowledged.

II. Learning and non-learning

The major focus of the research has been to study how people's Christian faith interacted with their learning. However, the opening chapter also highlighted Hull's (1991 [1985]) thesis that Christian faith prevented adult Christians from learning, turning to this to support the initial theoretical discussion. A brief consideration of the data with respect to non-learning is therefore appropriate.

II.1 Does anything prevent Christian adults from learning?!

Hull specified a range of reasons why he considered people's Christian faith might prevent them from learning. These were primarily based on the ideological characteristics of Christianity and the cognitive dissonance and discomfort Christians experience when this jars with other areas of their lives and experience. Hull puts significant emphasis on the psychological and affective domains, highlighting the 'totalitarian grip' of ideologies that people are often reluctant to break out of, their psychological need to be right, and a corresponding fear of being wrong. He also identifies a 'pain' within learning that contributes to people drawing back from

engaging in the process. Specific results include the employment of thought-stopping techniques, vagueness, piety, authoritarianism, objectification, and spiritual passivity (see Chapter Two for more detail of each of these).

Before looking at Hull's conclusions with respect to the empirical data from Chapter Eight, a brief reminder of Jarvis's position on non-learning within the context of theories of experiential learning is apposite. Chapter Two commented on the fact that his model described the two proposed outcomes of learning in different ways according to its various stages of development and suggested that those which spoke in terms of people emerging 'unchanged' were less accurate than those which understood certain experiences functioning as a 'reinforcement' of people's previous learning. Especially with a time-centred model, which disallows any literal repetition of experience, since no two experiences can ever be identical, then true non-learning can never actually occur. Reservations were also expressed about the possibility of any learning taking place which was devoid of reflection, although Jarvis's recent modifications of his model and accompanying typology were acknowledged.

Strictly speaking, therefore, Hull's position would seem unlikely, at least in its most literal sense. The purpose of this section is to explore the data and typology presented in Chapter Eight and consider the sort of learning exhibited, assuming from the outset that individuals did not engage in non-learning yet questioning whether any of the characteristics identified by Hull were nonetheless evidenced. If this were the case, then an alternative interpretation of his conclusions would also need to be found. An important aspect that might differentiate Hull's suggestions from those of the research is the fact that the interviews were conducted among individuals who were deliberately engaging in formal programmes of the study of theology, albeit vocationally, while Hull seemed to focus on Christian learning more generally and apply his conclusions to the 'ordinary' Christian living everyday experiences.

It should perhaps not be surprising, therefore, that only a very few of Hull's reactions to the authoritarian and ideological features of the Christian faith and its faith-content were apparent amongst the interviewees, and even at these points a direct parallel would seem debatable. Assimilative believers, for example, regularly deferred to authorities on account of their superior knowledge and status in the Christian faith.

Hull speaks of 'authoritarianism' which is represented by the conviction that the minister/bible knows, and hence we shouldn't/mustn't question. Yet for Assimilative believers this was as much a positive act of placing trust in individuals so that they could tread in their footsteps and acquire the same capacities: learn from and through them. The line is necessarily subtle and one could argue for a significant degree of overlap, much depending on the degree of individuals' proactivity in their learning. Nonetheless, it is at least a demonstration that authoritarianism as described by Hull does not necessarily imply withdrawal from a learning situation. Instead, a different form of reflection is present. Interpretive believers also deferred to superior authorities, often expressing genuine surprise that their instructors were encouraging them to challenge and critique them. Here again the root of the approach to learning vis-à-vis authority would seem to be different from purely a response to any perceived authoritarian dimension: people's selves were fragile to the point of affecting their ability to critique and take a stand against, or in contrast to the views expressed by faith authorities. The chicken-and-egg aspect implicit in the research question resurfaces, since it is impossible to determine whether people's weak selves result from an overtly authoritarian Christian faith, whether they are simply a dimension of epistemological development as Belenky *et al.*'s study would suggest, or a mixture of the two. There was little in the interviews of Interpretive believers to suggest a specific connection; more, perhaps, that indicated a combination of the two. If this was the case, then Hull's authoritarianism played a contributory but not definitive role. His spiritual passivity was also something potentially identifiable in Interpretive believers' 'openness' and desire not to shut themselves off from being spoken to, yet as with Assimilative believers, this does not necessarily imply a lack of any intellectual activity or even a shutting down of emotion. Rather, these interviewees demonstrated a form of reflection and of 'positivising' (see Roger's interview) that Hull could make no allowances for. Of all the types, Discrete believers demonstrated the most clearly a tendency to objectify, which Hull understood as a refusal to engage with the bible or theology at a personal or internalised level. Yet the discussion of Chapter Four suggested that while learning was affected, it was not prevented. This was a type of reflection which led to a particular level of internalisation, but it cannot be considered an instance of non-learning.

II.2 Learning and emotion

One of the important factors in Hull's analysis were the roles, respectively, of fear and of pain. These emotions and affective reactions resulted in people drawing back from the pursuit of learning in favour of remaining in the comfort zone of apparent non-learning. A similar phenomenon is identifiable in Jarvis's category of rejection as a form of non-learning, and in Perry's retreat, temporizing, and escape. In each instance, people either deny or withdraw from engaging with a challenging experience. While neither Jarvis nor Perry emphasises the emotional dimension, it is nonetheless there: Jarvis suggests that 'some older people, and the not so old, may not wish to change their understanding of things since their whole identity is based upon it and so they deliberately reject the opportunity to learn new things' (2001:16); Perry describes his variants of retreat and escape in affective and attitudinal terms.

Of all the interviewees, Margaret demonstrated the greatest degree of fear and anxiety associated with learning and life in general, although three of the four Interpretive believers were unconfident and often anxious. In Margaret's case, however, a clear corollary was evident between her ethic of care and her approach to learning. Her concern to please others, to the point of acquiescing to their perceived will, resulted in her fearing negative repercussions should she form her own position, much less assert it. Other instances of withdrawal were evident amongst Discrete believers who refused to transgress valued faith boundaries such as principles identified within the bible. If non-learning is not an acceptable option, how might these cases be interpreted? One of the strengths of Jarvis's definition of learning (first cited in Chapter One) is his emphasis on how all aspects of human being is a result of learning, including the emotional domain. Margaret, therefore, might be considered not to have transformed an aspect of an experience into intellectual knowledge or factual information, but she may well have developed her emotional and affective side. She herself was conscious of this, and conscious too of the fact that this development might not be beneficial or contribute to her increasing well-being. She spoke frequently of having to stop herself from emotionally reacting as had become her habit in order to re-examine and often choose an alternative path. So 'non-learning' in her case would appear to take the form potentially of 'inappropriate' or even 'damaging' learning. Cohering well with Jarvis's 'reinforcement', her fear plus

her ethic of care regularly reinforced her emotional approach to learning and the associated emotional learning outcomes.

Probably a more common result of emotional retreat, however, is Perry's 'temporising', which he suggests is 'a prolonged pause (full year) within any of the ... positions, without evidence of entrenchment through structures of Escape' (1970: chart of development, inside back cover). Perry's entire focus was on how people made the transition from dualism to relativism, and hence his temporizing was his identification of occasions when that transition was too unsettling or demanding to make. Nonetheless, people seemed to acknowledge that the time would arrive when they would begin to take initial faltering steps, and their 'temporizing' also provided them with space to adjust and prepare. The variety of possible instances of this amongst the interviewees must be considered tentative since true temporizing can only truly come to light in a longitudinal study such as that conducted by Perry. Frances's willingness (uncharacteristically) to accept something the bible said was the case might be a 'Christianised' version of something similar, however.

I think the whole thing about atonement is really difficult and I haven't properly begun to get my head round that. And that is the area I think where I most have to say, Well, I believe this because the bible tells me so. But at some point I will get to a stage in my life where I need to unpack it and it may be because I'm made to unpack it on this course, or it may be because I just have arrived at that time in my own spiritual development when I need to unpack it. And at that point I will find people to talk to, and I will pray, and I will read, and I will theologically reflect, and all those other things. And see where I get to. (Frances)

Less positive examples of people not engaging with specific issues were more common. Many interviewees admitted to burying their heads in the sand or putting difficult dimensions of their faith on the shelf, particularly with reference to violent or unpalatable biblical passages. In the context of a study of learning, this provokes the question of how a simple response 'I don't know' should be interpreted. Is this an (exclusive) instance of non-learning? Where does putting something on the shelf, potentially for a significant amount of time, fit into Jarvis's model and typology? While at one level it might indicate an indefinite progression around the cycle from which people never 'emerge', this supposes that they continue to think and reflect,

which is almost certainly not necessarily the case. Frances's quote above suggests an alternative is simple acceptance of something even though it is beyond her comprehension. Others genuinely refuse to engage with an issue and put it behind them, rarely, if ever, returning to it. In a time-centred model of experiential learning, such examples might be considered 'non-learning' in the sense that individuals either don't appear to emerge from the cycle, or they do so reinforced. Yet in the first instance, this suggests no learning takes place at any point around the cycle, and in the second, that reinforcement is not a form of learning.

These were issues first introduced in Chapter One. No firm conclusions can be arrived at specifically as a result of this project, in part since this was not its intention. However, the discussion does suggest that theories of experiential learning need to develop a more sophisticated understanding firstly of the connection between learning and human growth and development, and secondly, linked to the first, of the nature of human change.

It is appropriate, however, to suggest one modification of the understanding of learning that results from this consideration of learning and non-learning, with particular reference to the occasions such as demonstrated by Margaret, above, which imply learning and non-learning can walk hand in hand.

II.3 Primary and secondary learning

The terms primary and secondary deliberately recall their use in the analysis of different types of experience introduced in Chapter One. There, primary experience referred largely to sensual experience, whereas secondary experience was mediated, often through language and gesture. Of particular significance was the fact that secondary experience could never take place devoid of primary. So even if people's attention was highly focused on speech and conversation, they would still be marginally conscious of their surrounds, the physical context in which dialogue was taking place, and the way in which this contributed to their overall experience of it.

It is possible to suggest that something similar occurs with learning and, potentially, non-learning, albeit in a different way. So, while a particular experience would appear

to have a central core that provokes the sensation of disjuncture and which therefore initiates the process of learning, the latter is nonetheless also experiential, requiring responses to subsequent experiences of disjuncture. Boud *et al.*'s (1985) assertion that reflection is an experience is relevant at this point, for example. Two streams of experience would appear to run concurrently, therefore: that of the initial experience and that of reflecting upon it. At first sight, it might appear that one follows the other in sequence. However, logic suggests that the initial experience has to be carried through until its associated disjuncture is resolved. This is the experience that people constantly touch base with as they move through the different components of the learning cycle, and the two experiences draw to a conclusion together once a satisfactory meaning has been found for the first, the 'primary', that allows harmony to be restored. So 'primary' learning is the outcome that results from that initial disjuncture. 'Secondary' learning, on the other hand, is the learning that comes about as people grapple with the demands of forming that primary outcome. When viewed in this way, Jarvis's model would appear to focus on primary learning, emphasising the final outcome of an original experience. Although the thesis has queried the legitimacy of viewing any two experiences as identical, and therefore of people emerging 'unchanged', within a framework of primary and secondary learning it is possible to suggest that at one level no learning has taken place, no outcome has been arrived at and in one way people emerge unchanged. At a secondary level, however, other, potentially less tangible learning has taken place, and entirely different outcomes have been constructed. Hence the argument that literal non-learning cannot be a constituent dimension of theories of experiential learning.

It is difficult to support the argument substantially from the evidence of the interviews, but this was not their purpose. Nonetheless, certain observations are pertinent. An 'I don't know' position does not imply non-learning, for example, nor even, necessarily, a temporary shelving of reflection. Reflection, evaluation and the various other components of Jarvis's cycle can all contribute to the construction of smaller conclusions within the bigger overall learning outcome, which itself may never be reached. A number of interviewees acknowledged that some aspects of their faith were too big, too challenging for them ever to anticipate fully coming to terms with, but they were content to make progress, steady or unsteady, towards some resolution. Frances's quote above suggests another route is to accept intellectually the

final outcome and then to find ways of combining the experience and the learning components so that they finally converge harmoniously with the outcome. Often, it would seem that primary learning has a greater bias toward the cognitive, while secondary incorporates more of the affective, but these are by no means exclusive. Many of the interviewees, however, in one way or another indicated that they could—and did—shut down or reduce their intellectual engagement, but none appeared even to attempt the same with their emotions. In these cases, as exemplified by Margaret, affective learning continued to occur, often reinforcing itself to the point of imprisoning people. It is quite conceivable that this would be the type of learning Hull categorises as vagueness and piety.

The section has therefore argued against Hull's overall assumption that Christian adults can be prevented from learning, reinterpreting his conclusions according to Jarvis's model and an understanding of experiential learning that excludes non-learning from its *modus operandi*. Time itself ensures that no experience and no individual is the same even if a situation appears familiar. Nevertheless, if learning can be understood in primary and secondary terms, then something akin to non-learning may be accompanied by other, less specific and less quantifiable forms of learning, even if it continues to be preferable to speak of 'reinforcement' rather than 'non-learning'. This may be associated with the affective domain, but its more qualitative nature suggests that the traditional relationships between learning and human growth and development, and learning and change, need further in-depth investigation.

The challenge to Hull's position of non-learning does not, however, invalidate his analysis of the potential for Christian faith-content to influence learning, which the data presented in the previous chapter affirmed in a variety of ways.

11.4 Learning and reinforcement

Pervious discussion of the various versions of Jarvis's model of the processes of learning highlighted the fact that he had replaced his original outcome of people emerging 'reinforced but relatively unchanged' with them emerging simply 'unchanged'. The suggested unfeasibility of literal non-learning also challenges the

notion that people can genuinely emerge from a situation unchanged. However, there have been a number of indications throughout the thesis that learning can reinforce aspects of their biographies. Prime amongst these, perhaps, was the formation of personal constructs which the discussion suggested could become more and more rigidified. Hull, too, speaks of 'sedimentation' in relation to his understanding of ideological enclosure.

Ideology narrows the field of what is available to us for interpretation. In the same way, there may have been and there may still be many possible ways of interpreting the significance of the founding event or the founding lives of the community, but the ideology restricts these, so creating an orthodoxy. This act of selection leading to an orthodox interpretation we may call 'ideological enclosure'.

This creates a sort of 'sedimentation' in which layer upon layer of interpretation is laid down in the consciousness of the group and this provides a kind of inertia which makes the group resistant or cautious in responding to the novel. (Hull, 1991 [1985]:68)

The focus of the thesis has been on individuals, not on groups. Nonetheless, the idea of sedimentation can equally apply to personal learning, especially with respect to reinforcement. A particular interpretation of experience is judged valid and effective, and so is used on a subsequent occasion. If its validity is maintained, so a cycle of interpretation is built up, and at a certain point this becomes an automatic response, functioning to reinforce people in their existing positions. Margaret's increasing awareness that some of her existing emotional reactions were probably inappropriate is a good example of this. She was now taking steps to re-evaluate these and allow other responses to experience to play a role. As an Interpretive believer, she was a member of the group which also exemplified 'reinforced learning' to the greatest degree. Interpretive believers tended to maintain their reality bubble by relying on tried and tested interpretations of experience, often rejecting the possibility of subsequent re-interpretation. So significant events retained their significance, even if they were comparatively small in nature, primarily because they fulfilled a role in maintaining an overall structure, and these then served to reinforce both people's past conclusions and their present learning. The notion of biography already suggests that individuals are, to a degree, prisoners of themselves, certainly in the fact that they have to turn to themselves as a referent for interpretation as well as the external

situation and context; this process of reinforcement augments the imprisonment, to the point that it is almost surprising to see signs of movement away from an Interpretive stance in each member of the group. This seemed to be significantly linked with the growth of the self, and hence it might be concluded that as the self is given space to grow, so the process of reinforced learning diminishes. At the same time, reinforced learning should not be considered an instance of non-learning. Reinforcement implies change; people grow in their existing convictions, attitudes, habits and patterns of interpretation... Once again, the partnership of primary and secondary learning comes to the fore.

III. Summary and conclusions

This project has therefore investigated the influence that faith-content and faith authorities have on the way people learn by emphasising the authoritative dimension of that content. Basing itself on three different types of relationship that committed Christians have with this knowledge—a necessary relationship, an authoritative relationship and an influential relationship (see Prologue)—it identified in the opening chapter a range of authoritative characteristics of faith-content, one of which in particular had already been linked to the activity of learning, although under the rubric more of non-learning than learning. The concept of non-learning was challenged throughout the thesis, particularly from the perspective of time-centred theories of experiential learning which implied by the fact that individuals and experience were different in every situation of disjuncture that some form of learning had to take place. Questions about Jarvis's connection between non-learning and reflection were also raised, while recognising his own re-working of his model and understanding of the learning process. Nonetheless, the potential for Christian faith-content and authorities to influence learning in an adverse fashion was readily acknowledged and demonstrated, although this was not to prove the major focus of the investigation. Instead, a progression from considering a detrimental authority to an integral, necessary one was traced, primarily through the concept of internalisation. An initial study of the processes of experiential learning suggested that an engagement with this corpus of authoritative material would divide social knowledge into two, modifying the common threefold configuration of learning components by introducing a fourth. Thereafter, different outcomes and processes integral to internalisation were

considered, and the potential effect of the Christian authority on the way these were constructed demonstrated. The connections between internalisation, the epistemological inner/outer balance, and the form/content relationship proved significant in providing a conceptual framework by which the necessary relationship between Christians and their faith-content could be analysed, and the 'positive' influence of the former on the latter ascertained.

In this way, the project achieved its aims, and can conclude that faith influences learning in the ways outlined in the previous chapter. The project's original contribution to knowledge therefore lies a) in its identification of four ways of believing which represent a close connection between people's form of learning and their engagement with content; b) in its identification of four different configurations of the major components in the learning process: people, two forms of social knowledge, and experience, and in the demonstration of how these affect different dimensions of the same process; c) in its identification of different procedures associated with the four ways of knowing; d) in its identification of ways in which people's faith influence their use of experience and hence exaggerate and/or modify dimensions of the learning process; e) in its identification of two forms of commitment, neither of which figure as characteristic in studies of non-faith-related learning; and f) in its identification of ways in which faith premises and principles directly affected the growth and development of the self.

These conclusions remain provisional, however, until subjected to a general evaluation of the project as a whole. This is the purpose of the next and final chapter.

Chapter Ten

Overview, critique and significance of study

Introduction

This final chapter evaluates the project as a whole, asking questions about the overall approach taken before relating its conclusions to other relevant areas of scholarship. It summarises the original contribution to knowledge that it makes and recommends consequent areas for further research.

I. Evaluation

I.1 The research question

The thesis has already identified certain areas which, as the project progressed, proved problematic. The most basic of these was the research question itself, which, it will be recalled, was expressed in two parts, asking:

- a) Does the faith of adult Christians influence the way they learn? If so, how?
- b) Does the way adult Christians learn influence their faith? If so, how?

Difficulties were identified firstly in the concept of 'influence', and secondly in the fact that the question was based on scholarly indications suggesting that both could be answered in the affirmative. The questions therefore presupposed the answer 'yes', potentially directing the project into a circular argument. Both these factors introduced complexities into the research which may have affected its quality, principally in the write up of the thesis itself—what to put where—but also by adding a variety of foci with the result that the desired straight line from beginning to end risked interruption and/or deviation. Rather than have a single-stranded question with a focused set of conclusions, the question was multi-stranded and the conclusions varied and spread throughout the final chapters. An immediate point of evaluation therefore has to ask the degree to which this adversely affected the project as a whole, which includes questioning whether a similar approach would have been taken with the benefit of hindsight, and if not, what might have been done differently.

Fundamentally, however, despite the complexities, the project yielded results which I consider significant, and which did, at heart, provide answers to the questions posed. Not only so, but those questions continued to be relevant both to the study of adult learning *per se* and to that of Adult Christian Education. They also had immediate relevance to studies in other areas, such as the nature, even concept, of faith, when form and content were explored together, and the nature and role of reflection in human growth and development, including a differentiation between critical, non-critical and 'affirmative' reflection. The thesis was not able to enter any of these discussions as a routine dimension of its overall considerations. Nevertheless, the implications and repercussions were clearly present throughout, meriting at least brief introductions and explorations in this, the final chapter (see later). Additional bonuses which can be considered original contributions to knowledge in their own right are the discussions of the opening and concluding chapters, which:

- Advanced the scholarly understanding of the processes of learning and how the various components inter-related, with reference to Jarvis's model (Chapters Two and Nine);
- Emphasised the significance of internalisation as part of the learning process, recognising in so doing the limitations of a time-centred, quantitative and 'horizontal' approach to the study of learning (Chapter Two);
- Reworked the scholarly concept of learning styles, amplifying and modifying some of the tenets previously held as fundamental (Chapter Five).

In each instance there is further to go, taking the discussion into a consideration of subsequent research. This is focused on in section II.

1.2 The concept of internalisation

Core to the research methodology, of course, was the process of internalisation, accompanied by Belenky *et al.*'s educational dialectic:

Inner

What factors control goal setting, pacing, decision making, and evaluation?

Who and what is experienced as validating / nonvalidating?

Outer

A central question relating to the quality of the research must revolve around this as a concept, and whether the questions designed to explore its perceived integral components adequately served their purpose. One of the strong points of the dialectic was the fact that the authoritative, external nature of Christian faith-content might imbalance the relationship between inner and outer, thus having an effect on ensuing patterns of learning. In general terms, this seems to have achieved its purpose. While the goal-setting and pacing did not play a major role (perhaps also because the interview questions did not provide for this), there were many instances of people turning to faith authorities to aid in decision-making, evaluation and validation. Indeed, it was these which lay at the heart of the conclusions presented in the previous chapter, supporting the view that the dialectic had served its purpose. Different types, forms and levels of internalisation were also apparent in the four types, with obvious connections to the development of the self and to the reflective process.

The interview questions also, eventually, yielded their fruit. As indicated in Chapter Six, they had been designed to tease out different dimensions of the inner/outer dichotomy with particular reference to the Christian belief system. The pilot stage had seen a number of modifications and refinements. It had *not* permitted a trial analysis. As was evident in the main thesis, the analytic process was complex and immensely time-consuming. Part of this was due to my own inexperience in analysing qualitative data. It would seem probable that it was also on account of the questions posed and the desire to pursue an inductive yet structured analysis. The questions did not tackle the issues head-on, asking directly, for example, how people used the bible to validate their knowledge and construct their experience, but approached the same issues 'from below', preferring not to make assumptions about how individuals behaved. This necessarily complicated the analysis, since the responses were very wide-ranging and at times appeared to have little in common. While to have used a bigger sample would have been advantageous in the expectation of more shared characteristics coming to the fore, this had to be balanced against the time needed to transcribe and analyse each interview. Although Belenky *et al.*'s project was much wider, in terms of sample size, researchers and timescale, the ratio from one project to the other may not be disproportionate. The advantages of an inductive approach are that people find it hard to second guess what the interview question is focusing on, and that unanticipated

common dimensions can come to the fore and play their duly significant role. The disadvantages are the complexity of analysis, coupled with the fact that with a small sample, conclusions are vulnerable to over-generalisation. In this particular instance, the inductive approach proved its worth in highlighting the cognitive/experiential dichotomy which in turn led to the formation of the matrix. However, since for the most part the dichotomy was only apparent in respondents' answers to one of the interview questions in particular, the matrix became very flat, and one dimension of the typology was constructed on comparatively fragile evidence.

Were the project to be developed, it would benefit from certain modifications. Firstly, following Perry (1970), it might be useful to devise a 'checklist of educational views' (CLEV). Perry used this as the initial means of trawling and then sorting a much larger sample than he then interviewed. Interview questions could be subdivided into categories according to the significant dimensions which had arisen. Belenky *et al.*, for example, wanting to gain a much broader overall picture of women's epistemological behaviour than I had needed, had nine sections:

A: Background

B: Self-descriptions

C: Gender

D: Relationships

E: Real life moral dilemma

F: Education

G: Ways of knowing

H: Hypothetical moral judgments

I: Conclusion

(1996 [1986]:231-36)

A similar approach would ensure a more even balance between the various salient components. From there, the inductive approach would continue to seem appropriate, while affirming Belenky *et al.*'s estimation of their own conclusions:

We recognize (1) that these five ways of knowing are not necessarily fixed, exhaustive, or universal categories, (2) that they are abstract or "pure" categories that cannot adequately capture the complexities and uniqueness of an individual woman's thought and life, (3) that similar categories can be

found in men's thinking, and (4) that other people might organize their observations differently. Furthermore, the small number of women in our sample who fell into the position of silence makes these observations particularly tentative and underscores the need for continued efforts to understand the developmental consequences of severe violence and social isolation. Our intention is to share not prove our observations. (Belenky *et al.*, 1996 [1986]:15-16.)

This thesis reiterates their statement and its underlying thrusts with respect to its own conclusions.

1.3 Faith-content and faith authorities

One of the research techniques employed was the argument that the Christian propositional set of doctrinal content—its faith content—could be isolated from other forms of social knowledge. While continuing to consider this to be the case, questions must nevertheless be asked about the effect of this position on the research. Can faith-content be as totally isolated from other forms of social knowledge as the thesis has suggested? If not, what are the implications for the research? What does the typology reveal? Are people's ways of believing in any way indicative of how they live the rest of their lives? If not, how should they be interpreted and their significance ascertained?

A number of responses can be made. Since the object of the exercise was to investigate how faith-content impacted upon learning, then some way of isolating this had to be found. Perhaps an equally relevant accompanying question is whether the research managed to isolate faith-content effectively enough! Ultimately, however, the project had to rest with the awareness that boundaries are necessarily fuzzy. Faith-content and faith authorities were often understood almost synonymously on the grounds that the latter very frequently established, communicated and represented the latter. While a core of specific faith-content might be common to all, it was potentially very small and itself subject to different interpretations and uses. At a very basic level, the research aimed to explore the process of internalisation with regard to how people interacted with authority, but this authority was set within a faith context

which presupposed a role of certain identifiable sources such as the bible. Within these overall parameters, it was left to individuals to define where their authorities lay and the extent of their power. This, in fact, provided the means for the variations leading to the typology itself to come to the fore.

It is impossible to know whether the ways of believing outlined in the typology were indicative of how people lived the rest of their lives. This was not the purpose of the research. However, given the social context of vocational training which presupposed a high degree of individual commitment to the Christian belief system, then it is reasonable to presume that the title 'ways of believing' reflects a significant dimension of interviewee's lives. A proportion of the interview questions extended beyond the exclusively 'Christian' into wider life in general in order to give the opportunity for individuals to demonstrate whether and how their faith principles influenced other areas. As the thesis argued previously, therefore, in these particular instances, people's Christian identity was inextricably bound up with their Christian commitment and with their whole lives. Had the research been conducted with Christians in different life contexts, the results and conclusions might have been different. Perhaps the best way to view its findings is therefore as 'pure' or somewhat extreme examples of ways of believing and of how faith influenced learning, more modified versions of which might be typical of people in less focused situations.

II. Significance of the study, and recommendations for further research

The thesis proposes that its overall content, typology and final conclusions are significant to three specific areas of scholarship. Firstly, and most substantially, to the area of formative Christian education, although the term must be understood loosely, acknowledging and endorsing Astley's (1994) objections to indoctrination. The context in which the research took place was that of vocational Christian education, amongst people and within institutional frameworks that were concerned for individuals' Christian growth and development but in ways that allowed for this to happen as each saw fit. Of the four types, Assimilative believers followed the 'strictest', or best defined formation, to the point that a potentially well-formed

underlying theology of learning was sensed. Nonetheless, this did not involve a significant focus and emphasis on faith-content and belief, but rather on the desired goal and the method by which this was to be achieved. Section II.1 outlines a variety of ways in which it considers the research results are of importance to those pursuing vocational Christian education, both for educators and learners alike. Some of the discussion overlaps with the second area of significance which steps outside the specifically Christian domain and discusses the relationship between adult learning and ideologies. This is an underworked area of scholarship, and section II.2 explores the major issues involved. Thirdly, the section turns to the concept of faith, suggesting that the research results (embryonically) challenge Fowler's conclusions and indicate that the relationship between form and content is less separable than he proposes. The final section provides a summary of the various discussions, drawing the threads together and identifying a range of areas recommended for further research.

II.1 Formative Christian education

The distinction between formative and critical Christian education was first introduced in Chapter Four. Astley (1994) acknowledges that it is an overly hard distinction. Referring to McKenzie, he states:

All critical education involves some formation in values (including, presumably, the value of critical thinking); and most formative education in our culture goes along with at least some elements of critical education. Further, formative and critical education really occupy two points on a continuum along which *actual* education programs may be plotted. (Astley, 1994:78-79)

The area of the thesis where the two forms, to an extent, appear to merge relates to the growth and development of the self. The four types on the typology exhibited very different forms of selfhood, from Assimilative believers whose learning was designed to eradicate and transform, to Interpretive whose sense of self was generally insecure and unrooted, to Discrete, some of whom experienced a divided and schizophrenic self. Only Related believers appeared to harmonise the different elements in a way which allowed them to live a reasonably harmonious, integrated yet balanced life. The

thesis has already commented also on the different levels of internalisation apparently characteristic of each type.

One of the significant aspects of the research for those involved in any form of formative Christian education, therefore, is the provocation of the question of what sort of self is understood as desirable. The question is fraught with difficulties. Some, for example, might consider it inappropriate even to attempt to define the characteristics of a 'desirable' Christian self. Is it possible, either theologically or otherwise? If so, does it not imply a closed educational programme that verges on indoctrinisation? One of the strengths of the Assimilative position was that the precise outcome was not specified; by contrast, the means of transformation was. Yet most societies and cultures have values and understandings of selfhood embedded within them which are transmitted in a formative way. Christian educational programmes cannot be considered alone when (if) attempting to define what constitutes a 'good' or 'desirable' self. The thesis too has committed itself to the same, suggesting in its early chapters that developed, mature selves are those able to take responsibility for their autonomy and independence, exercising these in acts of self-assertion.

It is not appropriate for the thesis to engage in theological discussions about selfhood. However, it is interesting to note that little, if any, of the literature on theological reflection includes a specific discussion on the subject. Perhaps even more significantly, rarely, if ever, does this literature outline exactly *why* the activity is considered to be advantageous, necessary, beneficial... . Pattison's observation referred to in Chapter Four that teachers requiring students to engage in the activity find it difficult to say what it is they are looking for should almost certainly be prefaced with the acknowledgment that the rationale for theological reflection is also largely undefined. Yet the growing thrust of the thesis has been to link learning, internalisation and reflection with the growth of the self. The argument would also suggest that the evidence from a large sector of interviewees indicates that for many this growth results in, at the very least, uncomfortable and/or weak selves. The implications of this are significant for the Church at large which sees itself as having a message to communicate to its secular surrounds. While recommendations for further research do not include a call for a 'theology of the self' for the reasons provided

previously, the thesis considers nonetheless that a more thorough understanding of how the Christian self has developed through the ages and across denominations, cultures, and theologies would be of real significance. This would focus on the dimensions identified within the thesis as important: internalisation, reflection, reflective styles, self-assertion. It would include gender, and would consider the educational means by which different forms of the Christian self were fostered, constructed and formed. Such a study would deliberately avoid, as far as possible, forming and/or communicating any value judgments. Its purpose would be to *inform*, not persuade. However, the value of the information would be to allow those providing programmes of Christian education, at whatever level and for whatever purpose, to understand more fully the role of these processes in the educational endeavour. If self-assertion through the medium of voice is accepted as integral to the concept, then the thesis suggests that the Church getting to grips once again with an understanding of self may well be one way in which it can resume its role of having an authentic and authoritative prophetic voice.

A second dimension in which the conclusions of the thesis impact on formative Christian education revolves around the question of epistemology and cognitive learning styles. The case was made previously for people's ways of believing to have a direct correlation with their way of knowing and of learning. Section II.2 considers the relationship between ways of believing and the concept of faith. Nevertheless, there were clear indications of a Separate and a Connected learning style amongst the four types, which linked, necessarily, with the way in which they lived and understood their faith. Those of a Separate inclination, while often demonstrating strengths in skills valued by education—analysis, logic, intellect—also seemed to encounter the greatest difficulties in internalisation and in constructing a whole, united self. This is significant to educational programmes which take the development of people's faith seriously, even if it is not their central focus: to the vocational institutions amongst whose students the research was conducted, for example. If, as scholarship into learning styles suggests, people are predisposed to learn in a particular way, then this suggests that their way of believing will bear similar hallmarks. While it is almost certainly stretching the point too far to suggest parallels between Connected ways of knowing and the conformist, passive acceptors of

authority Astley (1994), following Hull (1984), rejects, the discussion on learning styles suggests that some learners critique and evaluate in a different way from others, and that people's relationship to authority is not as cut and dried as simply 'submissive' or 'self-assertive', 'conformist' or 'challenging'. Further study into how these dimensions relate to the formative and critical dimensions of Christian education would nonetheless be beneficial, especially with regard to how Connected knowers critique and how Separate knowers internalise, with a view to strengthening their respective weaknesses.

II.2 The concept of faith

Chapter Two raised the question of how Perry's, Belenky *et al.*'s and Fowler's respective studies inter-relate, asking whether in fact Fowler's stages should not more accurately be viewed as sophisticated portrayals of general human growth and development. Little in the ensuing discussion has suggested otherwise. His emphasis on faith as a human universal, plus his use of scholars whose life work was the study of aspects of human growth and development (Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg...) rendered it almost impossible for him to avoid the tension. Retrospectively, a more appropriate title for his *Stages of Faith* might have been 'Stages of human and faith development', or even 'Stages of human and spiritual development', since this would have acknowledged more overtly his emphasis on the spiritual dimension which he considered integral to human life. In today's climate 'spirituality' is becoming a buzz word often used in contradistinction to 'faith' which, as Fowler's work and Cantwell Smith's before him, reveal, has for decades been contrasted against 'belief'. Faith and belief have traditionally been associated with specific religions, hence the difficulty Christians have often had with Fowler's separation of form from content. Spirituality, on the other hand, is increasingly readily accepted as a human universal, and one area of further research recommended by the thesis is that of the distinction and inter-relationships between spirituality, learning and faith. For Jarvis (1999), learning too is a religious (spiritual?) activity and/or experience, lending weight to the recommendation for more work in these areas to be conducted.

More immediately, however, the conclusions of the research challenge Fowler's separation of form and content. The thesis chose to understand the four types of the typology as 'ways of believing', or 'ways of faithing' if a noun can be made from the verb. However, in essence they bear remarkable similarities to Belenky *et al.*'s 'ways of knowing', despite differing in content and being far more limited in scope. 'Ways of believing' seemed an appropriate title since this unequivocally conveyed a form/content relationship in a faith context. Do the ways of believing presented in the typology cohere with Fowler's scheme, however? And if not, what might this say either about these results, or about Fowler's stages and his form/content separation? Discrepancies are quickly apparent. Nowhere in Fowler's stages is a relationship with the 'ultimate conditions of existence' described in the way it is depicted by Assimilative believers, for example. Fowler's scheme presupposes a steady, progressive development of the self, very much linked to the shift from an absolute to relative perspective of life equally propounded by Perry. (It is interesting to observe that Fowler was apparently ignorant of Perry's work despite the fact that the two men shared a scholarly context at Harvard and only eleven years separates the publication of their respective works.) Its mechanism for allowing the simultaneous cohabitation of absolute and relative is fragile, yet this is precisely the scenario that virtually all the interviewees of the present research constructed, and is something that can only be accounted for by the impact of content on form. One of two conclusions may be drawn: either Fowler traced an 'ideal' progression and development in faith the likes of which was only possible because of the separation of form and content, or, when faith is examined within a specific faith context which emphasises the role of content, then the separation is, in fact, inappropriate. In both instances the real contribution of his study is called into question. The thesis treads cautiously at this point, recognising and respecting both the significant impact that *Stages of Faith* has had within the Christian community at large, as well as the particularly small scale and sample size of the present project. The typology, as previously emphasised, is far more fragile than any dimension of Fowler's study. Nevertheless, Smith calls to attention Mosely's three terms to 'distinguish different relations between structure and content in a conversion experience' (see Prologue for Fowler on content and conversion):

- (a) *lateral conversion*: a change of content but with no change of stage structure;
- (b) *conversion*: a change in both content and structure;

(c) *intensification experience*: a renewal and enlivening of the faith which already exists but with no change of contents or structure. (Smith, 2003:192)

In each of these instances, content is perceived as something 'inanimate', entirely separate from individuals, and without the power to act as an influential agent. The significant difference between this and the approach taken by the thesis lies in the notion of learning styles, conceptualised as people having a relationship with their external knowledge and content, a seesaw balance existing between the two players. If this is truly the case, as constructivist theories must necessarily affirm, then Fowler's stages can only be understood as telling part of the story.

The discussion is significant in a number of areas and calls for further investigation in a range of directions. Since people's four 'ways of believing' lie at the heart of most of its contentions, then the need for the typology to be consolidated and its fundamental characteristics and features confirmed, adjusted or refuted (as appropriate) is paramount. A much larger sample must be used, and alternative methods employed to discern the reliability of its structure, as well as those incorporated into this study. Secondly, as indicated above, renewed investigation into the concept of faith and how this relates to learning and spirituality is a pressing concern in a contemporary climate which suggests the boundaries between the three are increasingly ill-defined. Thirdly, the relationship between form and content in a faith context, and in particular in the Christian faith context would benefit from further consideration with regard to people's individual faith development.

Both the development of the Christian self and that of individual faith development fall in the domain of adult Christian education, and potentially into that of formative adult Christian education. The study is significant to the area of adult learning in its own right, however, albeit in a slightly less direct way. This is the focus of the next section.

II.3 Theories of experiential learning

Many aspects relating to the relevance of the research to the study of adult learning have been highlighted as the discussion has progressed. Different theories pertaining

to different dimensions of the learning process were used as tools for data analysis and suggestions for modification made at each stage. The research results, therefore, do not directly indicate the need for further revisions. Two loose ends can usefully be tied, however, springing not from the actual results, but from the general research context.

The early chapters identified the fact that Jarvis's model of the processes of learning was strongly dependent on the role of time. Not only did this result in a sequential and quantitative understanding of the learning process which the thesis suggested was overly simplistic, but it was also unable to do justice to the process of internalisation. While the model served its purpose in providing the means of understanding a variety of ways in which people's faith-content and faith commitment influenced their learning, the question of the appropriateness formulating theories of experiential learning by starting with time (see Jarvis, 1995:65) requires further scrutiny. It will be recalled that Jarvis uses the concept of time as a means of understanding that of experience, linking it with degrees of consciousness. Repeating for ease of reference, he defines 'experience' as:

Experience is a subjective awareness of a present situation, the meaning of which is partially determined by past individual learning. (1995:67)

Marton and Booth, on the other hand, suggest:

An experience is an internal relationship between the person experiencing and the phenomenon experienced: It reflects the latter as much as the former. If awareness is the totality of all experiences, then awareness is as descriptive of the world as it is of the person. A person's awareness is the world as experienced by the person. (1997:108)

At first sight there is little of significance to distinguish the two. However, Marton and Booth, commensurate with their overall concern to do away with the division between the internal and external, understand experience in relational terms, and in a way which deliberately internalises, or unites people and environment. The chapter does not propose to rehearse the arguments made previously that critique the scholars' position. Nevertheless, this learner-centred approach has much to commend it in its ability to incorporate both the processes of learning as delineated by Jarvis and the process of reflection which recognises different levels of internalisation.

The challenge would appear to lie in where the origin, or root, of learning theories is placed. Jarvis, faithful to the name of 'experiential' learning, sees learning as originating with experience and therefore experience 'opens' his model. Marton and Booth make no attempt to formulate a model of the processes of learning in the way Jarvis has. They also clearly recognise the importance and significance of experience in learning, and for that reason may be considered to be working within an overall framework of experiential learning theory. However, rather than place experience as something external to people, something to which they respond and react, they place it within people's awareness, and this awareness precedes, accompanies and continues beyond each experience. Experience is placed within the context of individual learners, rather than within that of a situation and social context. Two models of theories of experiential learning begin to emerge: the socially-centred version developed by Jarvis, and the learner-centred one embryonically present in the work of Marton and Booth.

This is a significant area in which the thesis recommends further research. The development of a learner-centred model of the processes of learning has the potential to address a number of the difficulties that arose during the analytic process, namely the issue of time, the incorporation of reflection as part of the process of internalisation, and the reactive view of learners. An interesting observation with respect to the analysis of the interview data is that in holistic terms Jarvis's model did not offer the opportunity for the influence of faith on learning to be understood: only certain dimensions of the model proved relevant. This may of course have as much to do with the data themselves and the means used to collect them as it does with the model. However, with a strong focus on the inner/outer relationship, a horizontal approach was limited in its usefulness. The potential for a learner-centred model of experiential learning to overcome these difficulties, even if only in part, is clear.

II.4 Learning and content

One of the questions that must be asked as a result of the conclusions of the study is whether they are applicable to other subjects and other disciplines. Christianity is not

the only religion which falls into an ideological bracket, although Cantwell Smith's (1970) view that it alone is based around a set of propositional doctrines should be borne in mind. Nor are religions the only manifestation of ideologies. By implication, therefore, the conclusions of the research are of significance to a wider scholarly audience than purely that of Christian educators. Other questions are posed with the re-introduction of ideologies also. Brookfield, for example, argues for a 'critical theory of adult learning' which 'should have at its core an understanding of how adults learn to recognize the predominance of ideology in their everyday thoughts and actions and in the institutions of civil society' (2001:20). As Hull, Brookfield sees exposure to ideologies as an inescapable dimension of human life, and one which necessarily impacts upon the process of learning. In a discussion of Gramsci's analysis of hegemony he laments:

The dark irony, the cruelty of hegemony, is that adults take pride in learning and then acting on the beliefs and assumptions that work to enslave them. In learning diligently to live by these assumptions, people become their own jailers. (2001:17)

Later he states:

Getting adults to learn oppression is the central educational task of hegemony. (2001:17)

The issues are complex when resituated in a formative Christian educational context. Astley (1994) endorses Hull's view that Christians have to find a way of critiquing while remaining committed to certain (unidentified) basic tenets of the faith. Without this, as the thesis argued previously, Christian identity is called into question.

The acceptable limits to criticism are presumably partially defined by the firm ground on which the Christian is to stand while critically testing and assessing more doubtful terrain. Criticism is therefore "directed towards the uncertainties but it (springs) from the certainties". (Astley, 1994:95, quoting Hull, 1984:193, 220)

The scholars call for a 'critical openness', or, with reference to Watson, a 'critical affirmation', each of which involves both critique and confirmation, evaluation and acceptance. Paradoxically, in the light of the basic premises of the research, they do not acknowledge the oppressive side of ideologies, although Hull touches upon it in his *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (1991 [1985]).

It would seem that Brookfield's call for a critical theory of adult learning should encompass not only an understanding and critique of the oppressive sociological factors surrounding ideologies, but also incorporate an awareness of the ideological dimensions of language (see Kress and Hodge, Chapter One). This is of particular relevance to Christian education and Christian educators, especially if their 'schooling' is to be considered one which develops a critical openness. The ability to critique the prime medium of ideological communication must surely be an essential tool in the critically open Christian's box.

III. Summary and conclusion

As a research project, this study was complex and multi-stranded, not helped by the ambiguous nature of the original research question and the necessary overlap between the study of adult learning and that of formative Christian education. With hindsight, it is tempting to cite the well-known story of a traveller stopping a local person and asking directions for a town at quite some distance. The reply? If I wanted to go there, I wouldn't start from here! While the intention had been to conduct a study into the impact of an authoritative entity such as the Christian belief system on the learning process as a means of enhancing scholarly understanding of the latter without necessarily entering the realms of Christian education, the subtleties and variety of dimensions contained within the notion of 'influence' resulted in a more multifaceted investigation than originally anticipated. It also became of more direct relevance to those involved in the field of adult Christian education than to the study of adult education *per se*.

Nevertheless, in general terms, I consider its ultimate goals were achieved. A study was conducted which considered a variety of ways in which people's Christian faith, and specifically their faith authorities in the form of faith-content and its transmitters, impacted on different aspects of the process of learning. As a result of the investigation, this was shown to affect: a) people's use of time; b) people's patterns of reasoning and their reflective procedures; c) the growth and development of the self; d) the functioning and role of 'normal' learning processes; and e) their

epistemological make-up. These outcomes were a consequence of different forms of influence, both intrinsic and extrinsic, as well as the correlative influence implicit to formative Christian education. It was the latter which proved the most significant, and for that reason the research can also be seen as providing a study into the formative learning processes of adult Christians.

In response to the research question, therefore, the thesis affirms the hypothesis that adult Christians' faith influences the way they learn. It also affirms the hypothesis that the way they learn influences their faith on account of the conceptual and epistemological relationship between learning styles and faith.

As a result of the study, a range of original contributions to knowledge have been made. No other empirical study of Christian processes of learning has previously been conducted in a context which demonstrates not only a variety of specific characteristics, but distinguishes these from other learning patterns outside the Christian context. Never before have the inter-relationships between the scholarly concepts of learning styles, reflection and internalisation been demonstrated. A new approach to the study of experiential learning has been propounded. Within the context of Christian Education, the form/content relationship has been shown to be more significant than previously understood. Each of these leads to a series of new questions, ensuring the furthering of more research pertinent to these domains in the future.

It is hoped that this project will inspire such research. It is hoped that both those involved in the study of adult learning and in that of adult Christian education will find the conclusions relevant and significant enough for them to be influential in their work. Most of all, it is hoped that this study will contribute not only to scholarship but also to an understanding leading to changes in practice so that learners, Christian or otherwise, will grow to become themselves.

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Acknowledgements

All research is indebted to those who have contributed to it, and this study is no exception. I am grateful to all of the following who, in various ways, allowed the project to come to fruition. In the interests of confidentiality, particularly of interviewees, names of institutions and staff associated with them have been withheld.

Thanks to..

The individual interviewees, each of whom willingly gave time, thought and energy to ensure their contributions were as full and as relevant as possible. The Principals of the two institutions from which these interviewees were drawn, for allowing me to make use of their students. The Mère Abbess of the Convent in France who not only permitted (volunteered!) two members of her Community for interview, but also regularly provided a haven for study and writing. The S Hotellière, for being a faithful companion and friend throughout the length of the project.

My supervisor, Professor Peter Jarvis, for his constant encouragement and support, plus wisdom, advice and timely chastisement. Without him, this thesis would not exist.

Rev Dr Kevin Ellis, a trusted and honest personal friend who showed sufficient genuine interest in the research to agree to act as judge. The clash between his conclusions and mine proved to be a turning point crucial to the quality of the project.

Anne and Claire Aveline, French friends who were not only interested in the research but were prepared to spend many hours on holiday in Denmark correcting interview transcripts.

My previous and present employers, for providing both financial support and time to study throughout the length of the project. Both were indispensable, and I hope the research is of use to both institutions in their future work.

Friends, neighbours and colleagues, too numerous to mention individually, who provided listening ears, constructive comments, and refreshing cups of coffee when the going got tough, as well as offering social contact. Thanks to you all—you know who you are—I didn't turn into a complete PhD freak (you may disagree...)!

My extended family and relatives, to many of whom a harrowed face behind a computer was a more familiar sight than anything else! Thanks for your patience and understanding.

Lastly to my parents, John and Florence Le Cornu, to whom the results of the research would have been of genuine significance had they had the same educational privileges and opportunities as have been mine. The thesis is dedicated to them in recognition and appreciation of the exceptional people they are and were.

Alison Le Cornu

April 2004

People's Ways of Believing: learning processes and faith outcomes

Appendices

Appendix A

Interview questions

1. Why did you decide to come to college? Has it met your expectations?
(Variations: Why did you decide to seek ordination and come for training?
Why did you decide to become a nun?)
2. Give me a brief outline of how your faith and your learning at college have interacted in your life.
(Variations: 'on your course', or 'as a nun'.)
3. Please outline and give examples of any or the various roles the bible has in your life.
4. Do you engage in debate about matters of faith with friends? If so, could you please describe an example or two?
(Respondents often enlarged this to include family.)
5. If you had to give a defence of your faith, what would you use as the basis for your justification?
6. Do you make a specific difference between reading books to aid you in devotion and reading books for study? How does your reading of the two differ?
7. Do you read theological books or listen to preachers and lecturers with an eye to whether they are 'sound' or not? If so, what criteria do you use?
8. When presented with a number of alternative positions or interpretations of biblical teaching, what is your normal reaction?
9. Tell me something you've learnt which has resulted in your faith changing in some way? What? How?
10. Tell me something you've experienced in your life which prompted you to revisit your understanding of your faith.
11. Are there any instances when you disagree with or react against something the bible says? What do you do with those passages?
12. Are there times when you find it difficult to accept your faith because people say, or you feel that what you believe is irrational?

13. Have there been times when your experience of life has not backed up what you have been taught at college either generally, or from a specific lecturer? How did you respond?
14. There have recently been reports about God miraculously changing people's ordinary dental fillings into gold in a church service. How do you react to such reports?
15. Is there an ethical issue or major social issue that you feel particularly strongly about? Could you explain to me the way you went about deciding on the position you adopted? What criteria did you use?
16. Do you think the faith position you hold affects the way you perceive the world and process information about it? If yes, can you explain how?

Appendix B

Sample interview transcripts

Four sample interviews have been included, with no claims to representativeness. All twenty-one interviews were very different and space precluded even a sample based on such fundamentals as age, educational context, sex, nationality, churchmanship (denomination) and way of believing. The four provided were selected to give one example from each way of believing that included two men and two women, and one of the French interviewees. The latter is in French. A translation can be provided if required, although I did not translate the interview in order to work with and on it.

Margaret, 32, Interpretive believer

Right, well here's your first question then, which is ever so easy. Why did you decide to come to college, and has it met your expectations?

OK. Right. The first part of the question: for several reasons really. I was a teacher for the last seven years before coming to college. That's something which I'd felt was going to be my life work as it were, when I started, but after seven years of teaching I realised that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life doing that, and coming to college is partly to seek where my life ought to be going from here. That's one reason. Another reason is that I have never engaged with my faith in the way I'd engaged with other issues, umm, and I wanted to do that. I felt a very uninformed Christian really. And with coming up against quite a few people in my church and other contexts, throwing things at me that I didn't really know how to deal with and felt I should be able to deal with, umm, and then on a personal level as well sometimes coming up against things which I was seeking an answer for and felt that I needed better equipping, for that. As far as has it met my expectations (laughs), umm, I don't think that I would ever have guessed what it could have been like really, before coming. Umm, it's beginning to answer the thorny question of Where do we go from here? Though not in any very concrete way, it's just throwing up options, really. As far as dealing with questions, answering challenges maybe that were thrown at me by other people, other Christians, or sorting out issues for myself, yes I can see I am working towards more confidence in that area. Umm, but at the same time, I can see that where I'd hoped to find answers, I'm maybe just in some cases finding that even the experts don't have answers and that really all there are are a lot of opinions. So in some cases where I was really hoping to come to a conclusion on something I'm just learning what the questions are, and realising that finding answers is a lot more difficult than I had thought.

Yes, (laughing). I know what you mean! OK. Next question. You may find as you go along some of these questions overlap, so that won't matter, but could you give me a brief outline of how your faith and the learning that you've experienced through your study have interacted in your life.

Right. Umm. My immediate thought is to talk about umm, how it interacted with my serving God. Will that be OK? Umm, the point that I came to college, as well as being quite disillusioned I suppose and having lots of questions about the career I'd been in and sort of feeling that wasn't right for me any more, I'd also had a lot of questions about how I was to serve God particularly in my local church. I'd been you know in a lot of situations where umm, specific umm avenues of service had been thrust upon me rather than me choosing them really, and there'd been always a lot of pressure applied. I'd been at the same church ever since I was a child so I'd sort of grown up with this really. A lot of pressure applied (tape unintelligible) that this is something you ought to do or we really think this is something you'd be really good at and I'd very often felt that after I'd done whatever it was for a while that I really wasn't very happy doing that. One of the significant changes that happened about the same time as coming to college was that I made a decision that I was going to find out how I

wanted to serve God in my local church. So it meant cutting off a lot of the things that I'd been doing before and exploring ways of serving God that I felt fitted to my particular gifts and things that I liked to do. And I approached it from that point of view. What do I like and enjoy doing? Rather than what do I feel other people are pressuring me to do? Or where are the gaps that I feel ought to be filled in? Umm, that has been something which I, I felt supported in in what I've learnt here, that, the whole idea of seeking service where you are happiest and most fulfilled rather than as I say where people are throwing you. Umm, and yes, in what I'm doing at the moment, and in what I have done in my practical placements in my work and my service at church since I've been here has actually been informed an awful lot by what I've studied. And I think that's happening on two levels really. There is the direct input and information from lectures and the application issues I'm being forced into doing by following the course, but also of course with the whole practical training structure there's a whole lot more option for reflection and feedback and monitoring how things are going. So that's helped in that area too. I think as far as, what I'm learning is reacting with my personal faith and I probably touched on that with the last question. Sort of where are the answers. This is more things like practical.

Good. Thanks. Third one. Please outline and give examples of any or the various roles the bible has in your life.

(Pause) That's changing an awful lot at the moment, so (tape unintelligible) there's a shift. (Pause) As far as reading the bible, in the time before coming to college, I would use various study guides or devotional aids to read the bible quite devotionally, and probably not that critically really (laughing). That's changed an awful lot since I've been here. At the moment, I don't spend time very regularly reading the bible in that way because I've, I've not found it a helpful exercise given all the other things that I'm thinking about and grappling with as far as the bible is concerned, in my studies. But that is not to say that it's not having an impact cos as I study and read and think about what it has to say more critically I find that it's impacting in a different way. (Pause).

Can you give me any examples?

Yes, I'm trying to think of one. Umm, I think that one of the most obvious ones and clearest ones for me would be the way that I would probably have read the Psalms before I came to college. In a very sort of 'this is reflecting my situation' type of response and umm, 'I'm feeling very down today. Where can I find a Psalm that reflects my mood and bat it back to God?' That sort of thing. And that's something we actually discussed in our Old Testament lectures last year, the beginning of this year at some point. Umm, and I would now be reading those in a very very different light. Umm, I definitely wouldn't be jumping to them very quickly in a situation like that. Quite what I'd be doing I'm not sure. I'd probably be going to other books as well to sort of back up what I was reading. Just trying to think if there was any other (pause) I feel, I sometimes sort of question this whole thing really, with the critical approach to reading the bible. I've been part of the Navigators group that's been meeting in college, and we've had bible studies as part of that, and we've all noticed how hyper-critical we've been almost to the extent that well, Can it actually say anything to us any more? Are we just going to keep adding caveat after caveat? It

might say this after all, or it could say that. So I'm aware of the danger of maybe difficulties, being so aware of questions and issues on a more academic critical level. I think I'm finding this quite difficult to answer and I think it's something which I'm right in the middle of. It's blowing up at the moment.

Mmm. Right, that's fine. Yes, no problem at all. Absolutely no problem. Let's see. Here's the fourth one. Do you engage in debate about matters of faith with friends? If you do could you describe an example or two?

Well definitely yes, for the first question. Umm, and on two levels really. Umm, one in the context of our studies, very very (tape unintelligible). Why do issues or specific issues that we're studying umm touch on us, on our lives, umm, just being involved in whatever ... somebody's writing an essay on divorce, which I've just done last term so we were having a very very deep discussion about the whole issue of divorce and remarriage, so that I suppose for most of us there was an issue that was a little bit outside of our experience but none the less quite sort of relevant. Umm, (pause) and yes, I would also be debating umm matters of more personal things, maybe things less connected specifically to studies. Umm, something which, to give a specific example, has come up a couple of times recently has been an appreciation of how God, or as myself and a friend concerned have seen it, has spoken to each of us very differently about the same situation. Umm, to move us from maybe the extreme position that we stand in somewhere further towards a middle ground somewhere. Umm, and the friend concerned really felt God speaking to her concerning being more strict with herself, more disciplined with herself in her devotional life, and in her faith and perhaps in general. Umm, she felt that she'd been taking grace for granted, almost, whereas I felt that because I've been in the habit of taking, of being quite harsh on myself, that I, I was being spoken to about relaxing a bit more, almost coming back to what you were talking about in chapel a few weeks ago, about being rather than doing, things like that, but our reactions were set off by the same incident and we actually spent quite a lot of time arguing at complete cross purposes with each other about it until we realised where we were both coming from and why we had such a different reaction.

Mmm. That's interesting.

The matter which set it off was umm, a Keith Green song which I react to very very badly (laughing), because I sort of heard the very powerful message and immediately felt quite condemned about what it was saying and then sort of felt, well, why should I feel like this? She said, Oh no, I don't feel it's condemning me at all, I just feel it's encouraging me to be more disciplined! And so that was what set it off. And then we began to notice that we were reacting in similar ways to all sorts of other stimuli as well.

Mmm. Thank you! OK. Here's another one. There are sixteen in all. And they've got numbers so you can see how far you've got up to (laughing). So number five: If you had to give a defence of your faith, what would you use as the basis of your justification, and why?

(Pause) My justification, or my justification of my faith?

Both and; either or...

Umm, before I came to college, I would have always tried to defend Christian faith by trying to use as logical an argument as I possibly could, given whatever the situation was that was being discussed. Umm, and one of the things that really struck me in the first year here was that that has a definite limit. And I was really really stunned by lecturers and cases in books as well where people that I maybe would have looked to for the ultimate logical argument would just turn round and say, Well in the end my experience is all I can offer you here, as a defence of the Christian faith. Umm, so I would now be more inclined to use that as a (*interrupting: Your experience?*) my own personal experience. That's not to say discounting logic at all (*sure*) but I think previously I would have felt I'd lost the argument completely or I'd failed completely if I hadn't managed to persuade someone of the logic of something. Umm, so that has undergone a change there. (Pause)

Would you be able to think of an example of an experience that you would use in that sort of an argument?

I don't think I would necessarily be able to use one specific experience. I think I would have to talk about God's leading and guiding in my whole life. Particularly in retrospect. I'd have to use that rather than any one dramatic experience.

OK. That's great. Thank you. Umm, here's number six. Do you make a specific difference between reading books to aid you in devotion and reading books for study? And then if you do, how does your reading of the two differ?

(Pause) In principle yes, I do. Umm, although I find myself sometimes slipping from one to the other in the sense of reading a book for study which is really impacting me in some way, which can become devotional. But I do tend to keep the two separate. And I would separate them out by the time and place of reading. And also when I read to study, I make copious notes, which I wouldn't do if I was reading devotionally. I'd just be reading, basically. Relying on my memory to take things on board. Umm, I'm also aware of reading much more critically when I read to study, which I often get caught out in, because I can get very carried away in reading devotional books, and maybe not be as critical as I ought to be. Does that help?

When you take notes when you study, what sort of notes do you take?

It depends really on how the whole thing's set out. I'm trying to train myself at the moment to take less notes than I have been in the past. Umm, so I'm now trying to read two or three pages and then to do a summary... whereas before it was kind of paragraph by paragraph almost. Very very detailed. Umm, but obviously it depends on the structure of the argument and the way the whole thing is set out. And I am also now trying to read books for study purposes and actually not make notes at all. Sometimes, in some cases. Cos I just find myself too bound to the whole process of writing and not thinking. Does that answer your question?

Yes, that's fine. Thank you. OK. Umm, so number seven. Do you read theological books or listen to preachers and lecturers with an eye to whether they are sound or not? If so, what criteria do you use?

Hmm. Yes, I touched on that there. I possibly, if I'm reading theological books for study then I'm more likely to read, have my critical antennae up, than if I was reading for devotional purposes. Although I, I find now umm, after my ... here that I'm getting much more critical. Just generally. And I'm not always sure that I like that in myself. I sometimes wish that that wasn't the case. I can almost feel myself becoming hyper-critical in some cases. Umm, (long pause) the criteria I would use for judging whether somebody's sound or not, that's difficult. I'd probably be looking for or considering how they'd base their argument on scripture. Whether they based it on a passage that they claimed to be drawing it from, or if what they said matched with ideas on the same subject, or could ... to the same subject elsewhere in scripture. (Long pause). I can't really think of any other...

No, that's fine. If, you know, as we go on, if you want to come back to any of them, that's also fine. Sometimes that happens, doesn't it!

Yes, it does. It's sort of a...

Right. Here's the next one. When presented with a number of alternative positions or interpretations of biblical teaching, what's your normal reaction?

Despair! (Laughter) Umm, this is a situation which I can think of principally as occurring when I'm writing an essay. I would be going into a number of positions. It could come up preachers mentioning two alternatives in a sermon, but it actually makes me think more of my studies in essays. I'm trying to think of any specific recent examples. Yes, I mean, my essay on divorce I suppose, that I've just done for the (tape unintelligible) and the approach, the reaction that I took. The approach that I took was to, obviously for the purposes of the essay, reading up on all four of them and then coming to a decision, not just for the sake of the essay but for myself personally, which one of the four I felt was the one that I (tape unintelligible: took a stand on?).

How did you come to that decision?

In reading. In reading round. And thinking also of specific instances, things that had happened in my church, trying to think of applying situations pastorally rather than just academically. Yes, I'm not happy if I end up sitting on the fence when there's more than (tape unintelligible). My ideal would always be to try and work out where I was on a particular issue. I'm not particularly happy with loose ends. Umm, although as I said before, having come here, I'm beginning to understand that there are so many of them, and that maybe some things I'll just have to leave in that position. But I still sort of have this feeling that wanting to find answers and knowing that I'll be expected to have answers. Umm, so yes, I would want to, you know, come to conclusions.

Right. Thank you. Tell me something you've learnt which has resulted in your faith changing in some way. How has it changed, and why?

(Pause) I'm trying to think of something that I've learnt here.

It doesn't need to be, actually.

(Pause) I'll just have to start talking and hope that this comes out! I may have to backtrack and go over it a few times before it, it's clear (OK). Umm, the biggest change, biggest lesson that I've, I believe I have learnt in my Christian life, which is going back now nineteen, eighteen years, is the relationship between faith and works. Umm, I spent a lot of my early years as a Christian in a fairly nominal Anglican church where obviously, you know, one was 'doing the right thing' being moral and upright, that's my family background anyway. And that sort of teaching laid over what was actually a very, a fairly typical conversion experience in evangelical terms. It drove me into a position of always feeling that I had to somehow earn God's favour. It's quite complicated, but that was essentially what it was. And that, that came to a head when I was at university previously being challenged with all kinds of (mission?) opportunities and (...) opportunities which were just so huge and realising for the first time just how much there was out there that could be done. The challenge of being faced with that, and against the background of feeling that God's favour was something to be earned was almost too much to cope with really. And (tape unintelligible) trying to sort out the relationship between faith and work, and being clear about that, trying to be clear about that. That, that came about by being in situations where there was better teaching on that particular issue than what I was subjected to earlier on. Only because it's been something that I've really had to pursue for my own ... because it's been such a big issue for me. So it's something which I'm working out. (Tape unintelligible) And I think it's also related very much to what I was talking about in terms of learning to serve through things I enjoy rather than things I feel I ought to do. It hasn't been something which I've learnt necessarily in an academic channel, it's something I've gradually picked up through experience as it were. And has been reinforced.

Mmm. That's grand. Yeah. Great example. Thank you. This one is a little bit similar, but it's got a slightly different nuance to it. Tell me something you've experienced in your life which has prompted you to revisit your understanding of your faith.

(Long pause) It's difficult to think of something which is bigger. Than ... that's the example which I have come back to time and time again and got wrong and failed to understand and had to rework through again.

Could you... OK, don't change the example then, but that one was looking at the learning, and this is looking at the experience. So what was it that you experienced that ... (Right) Can you see what I'm saying?

Yes I can, yes.

What was it about the experience that made you...

The experience which prompted seeking I suppose. The idea that this awful feeling of I can never be good enough and I've got to keep on doing as much as I can and more has come to a head several times by being challenged with something which is just too huge for me to cope with. A feeling that there was a need which I ought to have met, somebody else's need which I ought to have met and wasn't able to, or being shocked maybe by my own selfishness and having to re-evaluate where ... I suppose an example would have been something similar to listening to the speaker on Wednesday evening. And obviously what she had to say was very very challenging, and my experience, my response at one point in my life would have been a sense of condemnation, that here was this woman doing all these wonderful things, so obviously it was humanly possible, and to feel that well I jolly well ought to be out there doing the same thing really. It was things like that that brought that on. Whereas now, although that was my first reaction, my second reaction was to get hold of myself and say right, this is the issue that we're always trying to deal with now, so sit down and try and work out how God wants you to react to what you've just heard. And what your response should be rather than the immediate thing of condemnation. And just being totally unworthy.

That's great. Two different sides of the same question, really. That's lovely, thanks. OK. Now we go back to the bible. Are there any instances when you disagree with or react against something the bible says? What do you do with those passages?

(Pause) Yes, is the answer to the first part of the question. Definitely. I, what I do with those passages depends very much on what it is that I disagree with. Sometimes it's plain disobedience. In which case I struggle with it and hope that one day I would learn to obey it, or come to want to obey it. My first reaction is to try and find a way round the obvious meaning, I think, really (laughter). By reading an interpretation I actually like. But I'm aware when I'm doing that, that I'm playing games with myself. Yes, usually what I do now is try to stand back and say, does this actually say what I think it says? Let's try and find that out first. But then, well I can do that one of two ways. I can either be back again faced with the same issue that I didn't like when I first read it cos, how I'd reacted to it was actually the way that most people do anyway, or maybe discover that there is another way of looking at it.

Mmm. Any examples?

I'm just trying to think. Umm, Again, this (tape unintelligible) and it's something which I'm in the middle of working through at the moment, so I may not have a valid conclusion, the whole issue of singleness is something which I'm working through before God at the moment. And when I read certain passages which seem to suggest that that is the, almost the preferable way of Christian life, something inside me rises up in revolt (laughter) because I don't want that to be the answer. Umm, so my reaction has been to go and get commentaries on 1 Corinthians 7 and try and find out it doesn't actually mean that after all. Umm, and obviously it's always possible to find people who say that it actually doesn't, but then I'm always brought back to the fact that there is something there that I need to face up to and work through.

What brings you back?

I suppose if you read enough you always come back to somebody with the opposite point of view. (Pause) I suppose different things, that, and just going back to the passage again and reading it again and thinking, well actually, from all the interpretations of ... I have read, there's still something here which I do need to explore because it is my situation. Even though I don't like it. I'd much prefer it if the bible said you should get married. That's something that is very personal. I (tape unintelligible). I can't think of anything else that would bring me back. There again, I think it's just because I'm, having read that, I would then go out and explore different (tape unintelligible) bring you back to what you felt when you first read it. But no conclusions on that one!

No conclusions. OK! (Laughter) Fine. Thanks. Here's the next one. Are there times when you find it difficult to accept your faith because people say or you feel that what you believe is irrational?

(Pause) I think I mentioned earlier there are certainly times when I've tried to argue the logic, rationality of my faith, believing in a way that I would try to persuade people, justify it. (Pause). Yeah, and I would still like, I like people to think that I'm very well thought out and worked out. So yes, having this sort of unexplained element which I can't quite get a handle on it is very difficult at times. (Long pause).

An example? (Laughter)

No, I'm just reading again the first bit where it's 'finding it difficult to accept my faith...'; Umm, I suppose the situation it tends to put me in is that I just shut up about it really. I don't think, it doesn't give me any problems with my faith in myself, umm, because as I say, it's irrational and I don't have a problem with that in myself but I would then go on to not share with people, not talk about it. (Long pause). It's more likely to come from people saying, than me feeling that what I believe is irrational.

So you don't particularly

No, no, it's not something that comes from me. I've always seen I suppose the need to justify logically something that other people need rather than me as a believer as it were. (Pause) I can't think of any specific situations...

That's fine. I don't want to, you know, prolong things if there's nothing more to say; on the other hand I don't want to shut you up if you're thinking still (laughter).

Yes, they're getting shorter my answers.

No, not really, not really. Umm, have there been times when your experience of life has not backed up what you've been taught either generally or from a specific lecturer? If so, how did you respond?

(Pause) I can't think of an example, from a lecture. I can think of an example from the reading I was given for an essay, which, where, in the context of a pastoral theology essay, where the advice that was coming from a lot of what I was reading was not matching an experience. I was pursuing this particular topic because of the experience

of a friend at church who's had a particularly serious mental illness, and has undergone counselling and has been told there are things in her background as a child which have contributed to this, and so out of interest, I was exploring those issues, for a pastoral theology essay. And having spent a lot of time with that friend, and having seen how that experience completely undermined her faith, her ability to respond to Christian encouragement, I found the advice I... the reading that I was doing on how to deal with that particular situation pastorally, quite inadequate. It was coming from a very very specifically Christian viewpoint. That particular issue wasn't touched on in lectures, but that's where I found a mismatch, and because she's now very much better, I showed her some of the literature that I was reading and she was absolutely aghast at the idea of having some of these ideas thrown at her in that particular state. So that made quite an interesting conclusion to the essay as well! To come back with the actual specific experience... Yes, I can't think of anything other, apart from that one.

That's fine. There have recently been reports about God miraculously changing people's ordinary dental fillings into gold in a church service. How do you react to such reports?

I was reading about it in the Students' Centre and my reaction was just, how stupid! (Laughter). Why would God want to do that? Scepticism, with a huge S, I'm afraid.

Yes, so scepticism to the report, or scepticism to God...?

Scepticism about God actually doing this.

And could you push that a bit further? Cos there are implications to that...

Yes. Umm, for me it smacks of prosperity theology really. And I don't see how there's any gain physically or spiritually to be got for anybody by having their dental fillings changed into gold. I think that's, actually not a good explanation.

Yes, sort of, I mean... I suppose what I was trying to get at was more ... because my reaction also is the same, so therefore do I believe the reports, does it actually happen? Does God do that?

OK, in theory, yes, God can do that. I don't have a problem with the idea that it's possible in theory. But I suppose my, just my view maybe of what God is about, or what, I suppose my expectations of what he would or wouldn't do maybe are driving this one. (Long pause) I don't know what else to say! (Laughter)

No, that's fine. That's fine. That makes me laugh, that question. Yeah, no, that's fine. We're nearly at the end here, so... Is there an ethical issue or a major social issue that you feel particularly strongly about and if so, could you explain to me the way you went about deciding on the position that you adopted and what criteria you used?

(Pause) Umm, I suppose in this case I could give a specific example of an issue that challenged me in the way that the lecture last night did. Umm, when I was at university before, I came across for the very first time in my life homeless people...

which I'd never noticed before, walking around my home town. But when I went to university, there were the homeless, very very obvious. My reaction was at the time was, I ought to do something about this, which was very typical, for me, in that particular state of mind. The problem was what and how to react, and as I explained earlier on, it actually became quite a theological issue in working out, part of the working out of the relationship between faith and works really. (Pause) Umm, because at the time it was obvious that I had more of a, a problem with the theological aspect of the issue rather than actually getting up and doing anything, umm, I chose to, to not do anything at that particular time but to try and sort out what my motivations were for wanting to do something, and to try and really sort out my view of my salvation and serving God and the relationship between faith and works... umm, (pause) and I suppose in a way, that situation now is an ongoing extension of that, because, well, I have an interest still and support from a distance, as it were, and through supporting the right ... charities, and things like that. I've never actually got into the situation where I've got personally involved and actually done something about it, or rather, I've actually (tape unintelligible) umm, yeah, I think for me, in trying to react to that issue, or another issue like it, first of all making sure I'm feeling what I'm feeling or doing what I'm doing for the right reasons and the right motivations, and ... my relationship with God, rather than just this gut reaction of guilt, that I didn't have... And that would be the criteria I would probably use again. I now realise I'm absolutely sure I made the right decision to stop (tape unintelligible) was actually moving in the other direction and thinking, well, that's fair enough, but now that maybe you are a bit more sorted, what *are* you going to *do*? The practical thing came back again. I have really struggled with the whole issue of practical outworking and my relationship with God. (Tape unintelligible)

Right, that's fine. Thank you. That's great. Don't ever get worried, That's fine! Here's the last one. Do you think the faith position you hold affects the way you perceive the world and process information about it, and if yes, can you explain how?

I would definitely say it does, yes. Umm, I'll have to think for a bit to give you some examples. (Long pause) I've got two tracks going on ... global, and my environment.

Talk about both, if you want. Or one or the other, it really doesn't matter.

(Long pause) (Tape unintelligible) I'm not being very helpful here. (Laughter)

Don't worry.

I mean, I want to say yes, in every way. You know, it's the ... through which I think through everything, but how to get a handle on, where to start, by describing that... I suppose in a general way, well, in both senses, in my immediate world and the larger world, I would always want to ... and wondering what God ... trying to do in that particular event. Umm, I suppose, maybe, maybe the issue about providence, you know, is this something which is of God, or not of God in a particular event on both levels. In my immediate world, my immediate environment, the question would be I think it's something which I have to just accept and learn from, or am I meant to try to change things. And in the larger context, as it were, international events, trying to work out what my reaction in prayer should be to that. (Tape unintelligible). I wanted

to say something about having a particular slant on my view of things in the world, because I know that in the past I have reacted to situations almost unthinkingly, I've been really taken aback by non-Christian friends who have just turned round and said 'How could you possibly have thought that?' and just been really, totally unaware that my reaction to an event or incident was just not the same as other people's. Umm, but I'm afraid I can't think of any specific example. As I say, in that sense it is unconscious, but it's very different and I'm not even aware most of the time of the way my faith position does affect the way I perceive the world, but I know that it does. And that's what I'm struggling to try and find a concrete example, but I really really can't think of something specific, but I know it has happened. I also think that (...) I've reacted to things with other Christians and I've realised at that point how within my faith position, my personal position is very blinkered, and my reading of what I was expecting Christians ... not the only one. So I think the faith position you hold has also got a double-edged thing. Christianity ... my own personal faith ... (laughter). So the more I look at this and the more I think about it, the more sort of permutations I can think of. Ways of answering it.

You tell me when to switch the tape off. If you think there's no more you'd like to say, then that's fine.

I probably need to write an essay on it actually! (Laughter). Yes it does, I know that much. In a personal way and in an overall way. But because no specific examples spring to mind at the moment, I really can't explain. I think I need a, I need a concrete example to get my hands round if I'm going to give you that information. That's as much as I can say.

That's fine. Thank you very much indeed.

Frances, 52, Related believer

OK. The first question is fairly predictable I think. Why did you decide to train for ordination and has the training met your expectations?

It was not really a decision about training for ordination. The decision was about whether or not I acknowledged a vocation, and then having acknowledged it, whether I decided to test it. And so, in a sense, the training was a given if my sense of vocation was confirmed. And so it wasn't a, it wasn't a decision about the training, it was a decision about something else, about responding to something else. Umm, and because it was a given, I don't suppose I actually stopped and thought about it. In my youth, I trained as a solicitor, and I had fairly clear expectations about what that would do. And I didn't think about this in the same way. And, I think as far as I had expectations, it hasn't met them. I expected that it would be more, more practical. More about the doing and less about the believing. Umm, and so I was surprised at how much of the course is actually really a theology course, and how little we are getting, so far, although I'm sure it will come...

This is the end of year one, isn't it.

Yes, that's right. About other aspects. About things like organising worship and, umm, we get taught about the theory of things like baptism, but we have not had at this stage tucked into it a chance to practice, umm, the difficulties of being gowned and holding a baby and trying to pour water on it without dropping it on the stone floor.

(Laughing) I'd never even thought about that!

And it's those sort of things, umm, that I had expected there would be more of. And again, some of the work we've been doing this week is useful but it has again surprised me I think, because it has been more focused on us as people than on working with others. And I can see why that is, and now it's happening I can see that that is almost certainly right, and appropriate, and that it will be helpful and that I will, as I work through it, internalise it, and it will be extremely useful, but it is not what I expected. And I think that's it.

Mmm. I can see... to prod you a little bit then, umm, why ordination, then?

Why ordination? Umm, because for a long time I had this sort of prodding, poking, being umm, whatever it is a sheepdog does, having that sort of done to me. And I tried all sorts of other things, because I didn't really want to be ordained. And I kept thinking, well if I... It's how I got into the work I'm doing, for goodness sake. Well, this is useful, it's nice, it's helping people, I can express my faith here. In a pragmatic, practical, useful way. Umm, and so I kept on trying different things, and they were none of them right. And so eventually, this was about all that was left. Umm, and it was a very long and in some ways quite painful process. And I was very fearful when

I went and spoke to my parish Priest and said, I do have this horrible feeling that... And he said, Oh, I've been waiting for you to come...

Oh really.

Yes. I mean, it had been there, I think, in, in his mind for a while. And so he was very supportive. And then there was a series of discussions with the ADO and, uh... But once I'd, I'd started down that road, all the internal, spiritual discomfort and the proddings and the pokings and the, the being drawn back from paths I'd chosen, stopped. And it just felt right. And although it hasn't been easy, and I don't expect it to be easy, there is an internal comfort and tranquillity that wasn't there before, even at the worst times.

Mmm. I can understand that. Highlights of the course? And lowlights?

Highlights. Oh, well. Umm, some of the highlights are some of the things that have been intellectually most difficult. I think partly because they have been taught by someone who just, well, he's got a Rolls Royce mind. There is no, no other way I can find to describe it. And because he has that sort of mind, he is not afraid to share with us in humility. His questing and journeying and voyaging, and that is actually very encouraging when you see someone who has spent years and years wrestling with these very complex, difficult, unfathomable things, trying to make some sort of human sense of them. And having the, the generosity to, to try to express them in a way, or indeed to succeed usually in expressing them in a way that makes them accessible to the likes of me, who do have difficulty with them, so I think those are highlights. Umm, some of the, some of the things we've done which have been fun. That have made us laugh and that we have shared in those ways, I think have been highlights, because again it could be terribly stodgy and solemn and pie, and I don't... I think if all the time you're being solemn and focused on the task and not taking that relief and relaxation that comes with laughter, it's hard. Lowlights. Lowlights... the first weekend we had away, we had a man who came and talked at us for an hour and a half at a time about the origins of the communion service.

(Laughing) For your first weekend!

And we discovered afterwards that he's claustrophobic, so that clearly was difficult for him too. But he, he gave us what he described as umm, an abridged book list, and it was two very closely typed sides of A4. And he had clearly just put down everything on it that came to mind, whether it was accessible, whether it was in English, whether it was in print... And as I say, he talked to us for an hour and a half at a time. And when you're my age, your joints do begin to protest if you have to sit still for an hour and a half, and pay attention, faithfully! Umm, and I think he was a real lowlight at that point. And the other thing that was a lowlight, and again I think it's because of where I come from. We had a few sessions on looking at social issues. Issues in society, and there were things in there like crime, and discrimination, and I'm not at all sure what the objective was or what we were meant to get out of them, and I felt that in some ways they actually confirmed people in their prejudices rather than making them think again, and the evening when we were looking at race in particular was difficult because we had a visitor. And he was very full of himself. And

he was, there were a group of four, five of us, and he and the person he'd come with were clearly not, no I'm being judgmental, the impression I gained of them on that evening was that they did not really understand what the question is when it comes to thing like racial discrimination and prejudice. And the other members of my group began by trying to have a sensible discussion and we rather got swamped by this character and in the end, they shut up. And as we left, one of the others came up to me and said, I really wanted to hit him. And I said, Well, I do wish you'd said something, cos I would have held him so you could! And he woman who'd been sitting in the next group who'd been having a not dissimilar thing, and she said, Did you notice there was a point in the evening when I was rolling my sleeves up and clenching my fists! And so that was a bit of a lowpoint because all that we achieved was to confirm ourselves in our own positions and we didn't actually meet in any constructive or educative way. And so there was no possibility of movement. All we did was dig ourselves into trenches. And I'm sure that wasn't the purpose, but it was what happened.

Mmm. The result.

Mmm.

OK. Thank you. That's fine. Let's move onto the next question then, which asks you to give me a brief outline of how your faith and your studies on the course have interacted in your life.

Gosh. That's a big one.

Yes, it is. Probably the biggest, actually.

Umm, (pause) I think they have... A number of things have happened by starting down this road, and by being on this course, it has become much clearer to many more people what my faith is and how important it is to me, which is an indictment of how I was before, I suppose. But nevertheless, it's what's happened, and it was possible before to go, say, to regional meetings of the association I work for, and it is quite possible to be in those meetings with a whole lot of people who are all committed to a juster society... I don't think you can survive in the association unless you have some sense of a more just society. I really don't. So it was possible to be in those meetings and look round them, and not be able to distinguish people by religious conviction or anything else. And there was no reason why you should. And indeed, if you've got people there who were particularly proselytising in any way, then in a sense, they weren't getting it right, because one of the things in the association is you, you cannot impose your views and ideas on others. So in a sense that was right. But since I started on this course, it has meant that people have known about it, because they say, What are you doing now, and I tell them. And so it has... I don't think it's actually changed a lot about how we relate, but it has added something to their information about me. Umm, and in some ways I'm quite glad if it hasn't changed how we relate because it means that neither then nor now have I been false either to myself or my faith, which I'm pleased about. At home, the only real difference it's made is that there are times when I say very firmly to the family, Look I have got to get my head down and do some studying, or I've got to be away at the

weekend. And so we've had those sort of negotiations, but again it's not major, it's, umm, more about the practical things in life. And making sure, because I'm a widow and I have, for most of this year, had three adult children at home, all of whom have needed different sorts of support and what have you. It has been a case of making sure that they have felt that I am not going off and doing this and abandoning them, and that I do still have time for them, and they are still important. In the wider family, almost all my other relatives and a great many of my friends are atheists, and they all now have this slightly suspicious view of me. My parents are particularly anxious, and it really has affected my relationship with them and my brother, quite seriously, and we're having to work on that, hard. And I'm not sure that they have recognised how differently they are treating me as a result. But my friends have been OK, and it hasn't been the same problem for them, interestingly, as it has for my blood relatives.

Mmm. It's often the case, isn't it.

Yes. How else have they interacted with my life? The other thing that I think has happened is that, as I've come across different ideas and new ideas, and new perspectives on things, it has related back into all sorts of aspects of my life in various ways, and I suddenly will find myself in the association or at a school governors' meeting or whatever, suddenly making links that I don't think I would have made before.

Can you think of any examples of that?

Umm, not immediately. If I think of one I'll tell you later.

OK. That's fine. Well, let's go on to number three, which is, Please outline and give examples of any or the various roles that the bible has in your life.

Gosh! (Pause) I think it's a source book. I think it is a book that tells us about God's relationship with his creation and about how that has developed, and what it means, and as a result, I think it contains guidance on how we should behave towards other people, towards God, towards creation, and not necessarily in that order. I, having said that, I get very uncomfortable and have never been able for myself to see it as a book where, when somebody says, Is this right or wrong, I can open it and find something that says, Yes, this is right or wrong. And this relates particularly... One of the great things at the moment is the debate on homosexuality that's going on, and some of the things around sexual matters generally and some of the things about authority, and I do have problems with some of the things in there about the role of women, because I'm aware that there is a danger when you pick and choose and say, yes this is universally applicable down the years, and that is culturally moderated and we can disregard it. But nevertheless, I think one has to be intelligent about it and look at, look at it as a whole, almost. And pick out the things that are consistent, and stick with those. And I think there are things in there that are just wonderfully consistent about God's love and God's patience, and about the need to treat everything that is with respect because it is made by God, because it is good. And because this is what is asked of us, I think. I think if that's where you come from, then a lot of the other issues actually begin to sort out. But that's a personal view. I think the bible can be an inspiration in all sorts of ways. Umm, sometimes reading it and

looking at it, thinking about it, praying it through, finding what it says at that moment, either as part of a course of study or regular bible readings or just those moments when you sit down and think, I'll open it and see what's there. That can be useful. Umm, I think it can be... I use it sometimes when I cannot find the words to say what I want. And... what else... I think it is also something that prompts a lot of questions, because the more I look, and the more I read, the more I realise I don't know. Or haven't thought through.

Mmm. Yeah, yeah. It's a challenge, too, isn't it.

Yes.

Great. Thank you. Number four. Do you engage about matters of faith with friends or family? If so, please describe an example or two.

I think it's probably truer to say that friends and family engage in debates about faith with me!

(Laughs) Alright.

Yes. Umm, which can be quite uncomfortable, because they sort of suddenly come at you from out of vision, and plonk something down in front of you.

And say, Deal with this!

Yes. And it's not always a good answer to say that that's in year two of the course! And I haven't done year two. Umm, I can remember sitting in a garden in Somerset a year ago, nice weather, having had a really good meal with very dear friends, and one of them suddenly said that How can you believe in God when there is suffering? And I began to discuss this, but one of the difficulties we had was that they were, it felt that they were unwilling to hear a distinction I would make between suffering which is in a sense naturally occurring and suffering which is created by man, because I really think it is wrong, deeply wrong, to blame God for what we do. And I would include in that some of the things that humanity has done, like building cities in places that are perhaps, umm, commercially desirable but subject to flood or earthquake or whatever. Take the earthquake in Turkey today. It seems to me that a lot of the problem there is that humanity has not worked with the rest of creation but has put up buildings that in fact work against it. And I think it's revealing that houses built by the Ottomans in the fourteenth century have survived pretty well intact, and it's the twentieth century concrete blocks which are designed to get maximum accommodation, and so presumably maximum rent or maximum land value out of a small space, that have failed. So that was difficult, umm, and we didn't actually resolve it. And another occasion, I was staying with my brother, and he suddenly said, I can't agree with you because you won't accept Buddhism or anything else. And again, we had this... It was a conversation where we missed each other because he felt he knew what I believed and was telling me, but wasn't asking. And was not altogether comfortable when I tried to explain. But something must have gone in because when my daughter went and stayed with him this year, she said that he suddenly said to her, Well of course, the problem I have with your mother is that she

won't accept Buddhism and all these other things. And my daughter started explaining where she thought I was coming from, and she said, he suddenly reacted as if he'd heard part of it before and could hear more, so that was useful for me, because even though I feel I'm not being listened to at the time maybe some of it is sinking in and I can come back and... But those are the two that spring to mind most forcefully.

Mmm. They're good examples. OK. This one I think you're probably having to do quite a lot of. If you had to give a defence of your faith, what would you use as the basis for your justification? And I suppose in the first instance what I'm thinking of is how you defend your faith to yourself. In other words, why are you a Christian, if you had to explain to somebody else why you are a Christian...

I am a Christian because I feel I have met God and experienced God. And felt his presence and his love. And that there is a relationship between us. And so, in a sense, for me it is not a lot different from being a friend or a partner or a parent or a child or whatever. It is a real relationship, one to one, with somebody else. And why that relationship is expressed through the Christian faith is, I suppose, partly because of where I was born and brought up, in that nothing else was presented to me until really quite late in life. But also because even allowing for the very, very limited knowledge and understanding I have of other faiths, the relationship that I feel I have seems to me best expressed through the, through what the bible says and through my understanding of that loving, concerned, present, unique, forgiving, reforming God. And I mean reforming in the sense of taking all the mess we make and being able to reshape it. Like a good potter, into something which is good and beautiful and right.

Which came first? Your, umm, your relationship with God or, or the Christian part, if you see what I mean.

I think the Christian part came first, and it was quite an intellectual thing for a long time. And it began, really, when I was in my teens. I, as teenage rebellion I joined the church youth club. Sad, but true!

Wonderful! Was that to rebel against your parents?

Yes. Umm, and part of the reason I did that was because my friends went, and part of it because it was, it was a way of expressing me, safely. But part of it was because I couldn't see any other explanation for the existence of people and the world and everything else. And I still can't. I think if you don't have a God, if I don't have a God I can't explain how things come to be. And when scientists got wonderfully excited about a year ago because they thought they'd found the origin of life on earth and it came from Mars, I didn't think it actually answered the question, because it was just moving the locus away, but it didn't actually explain how life began on Mars in order to translate to earth. So I sort of began from there. Really. And some of my friends who were Christians clearly had something going for them that intrigued me. And that sort of went on and off, down the years. And I didn't... There were moments when I sort of caught a glimpse of something out of a corner of my eye, but it was really quite late on before that sense of the reality of the personal relationship really broke in. And it began to make sense. So I, I began to recognise at that point that what I had been taking in as a taught thing suddenly became a real, internal thing.

Mmm. That's great. Thank you. OK. We're moving into study, so this is number six. Do you make a specific difference between reading books to aid you in devotion and reading books for study? If so, how does your reading of the two differ?

No I don't make a difference. Umm...

Now, or at any time? Never have?

No. Umm, and I think it's because I can't separate them out in a way, and so I may be reading a book that I might not have chosen to read but because it's on the booklist and I need to read it to study. And it throws up all these wonderful ideas and insights and... casts light into dusty corners, shows me where my spiritual garden needs weeding, which is part of what devotional reading is about. Or just suddenly brings me up short. Umm, and in the same way, reading devotional books, which I don't do as much, it must be said, I will suddenly find something in there that relates to study and, again, casts light on that. And I suppose the only way that my reading of the two might differ is that if I'm reading something for study and there's a lot of it, I might make notes on it. Umm, and I'm less likely to do that with a devotional book. But in terms of using the content, I don't think I do make a difference.

Mmm. So would you call it an intellectual exercise? Or a spiritual exercise? Or do the two join together?

They join together. Sometimes it's more intellectual than spiritual and sometimes it's more spiritual than intellectual. But I don't find that I ever pick up a book intending that my approach to it would be either specifically spiritual or specifically intellectual.

Sure. Yes. And does one feed the other, would you say? The intellectual feeding the spiritual and the spiritual feeding the intellectual?

Yes. Yes, I think for me they have to. I don't think I can do the one without the other.

I don't suppose you can give me any examples, can you?

Oh gosh... Yes, I can. We had, recently, this term, to write an essay on the Trinity. Or Christology, or something in that area.

In year one!

In year one. Being asked to read through impossible things before breakfast and give reasons for my answer, really! And one of the books that was recommended for us to read was by two American sociologists who were applying sociological theory to wide aspects of Christian faith. And as I was reading that, which was quoting various psychologists, sociologists and what have you, and so it was in many ways quite an intellectual exercise, there was this wonderful truth leapt out about the most effective way of persuading people is by non-violent means. And that was a really, that was a devotional experience. The stopping and the thinking about it and how it was exemplified in Christ's life and about that conflict between the innocent Jesus by his

actions and his death, calling into question the whole value of earthly human power and authority, with its corrupt and abused form which we still have today. And that informed my thinking and my praying, and in fact turned out to be the main meat of my first sermon. And that for me was quite a devotional thing, because, I mean, I'm still finishing working through it. But it was from a book which was ostensibly a scientific treatise.

Mmm. It's great, isn't it, when that happens!

Yes. Loved it.

Yes. I've had sort of similar experiences and it really sort of makes your heart jump. Great. OK. Thank you. Number seven. Do you read theological books or listen to preachers and lecturers with an eye to whether they are 'sound' or not? If so, what criteria do you use?

Yes, I do. And the sort of criteria I use are first of all how closely or otherwise they fit with what seems to me to be the major themes that run through the bible and Christianity. And sometimes people are wonderfully selective, and that always makes me suspicious, if people are being that selective, what is it that they are leaving out that would counteract their arguments. Some of it relates to whether or not it fits with my own personal experience and what I have seen and observed around me. And there will be times when people will say things which are just so out of tune with my own experience of God that I, I find it very hard to give it credence. Umm, and there was something else in there which was... it's slipped for a minute, umm, sometimes too it depends on whether or not I think they've got a particular line that they want to throw us.

Mmm. A drum to beat.

Yes. And sometimes I think, umm, and I, I get particularly anxious about people writing or preaching on the New Testament. I have great trouble with Alpha material because of some of this. People using the Gospels and quoting some of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels as though they had the same validity as an accurate record, word for word, as say, a court-room transcript. And...

This is your background training coming out, isn't it!

Yes, it is. Umm, and I think it's because... Yes, I believe the Gospels, but I think that what the Gospels record is the story and the message, and I don't think they necessarily record verbatim all that was said. And I think also there's a lot they leave out. And so when you have people standing up and saying, And Jesus said... And expecting people to hang on it, and we've got all these problems. We've got the problems that it's come to us in translation so it's been filtered through the translator's mind; we have the problem that it comes to us through corrupt manuscripts so we have that problem, you know, the people who put together the best understanding of the text they could get; and it comes to us through the person who wrote it down; through the people who told the person who wrote it down. And even if it came from a culture that was very orally based, by the time it's gone through all those sifts and

has also been through my brain to see what I understand by those words, then I think it is potentially quite dangerous to rely on that, that sort of absolute, evidential accuracy. I think there are other ways in which it can be used as evidence. But I think saying, Teacher told us we should sit over here and not over there is not the way that it's meant to be taken, and so that's a criterion.

Mmm. Mmm. Yeah. That's fine. How do you use it? No, sorry, I was sort of following that train of thought and forgetting the question! No, that's fine. No, that's fine. Cos you were referring to the bible, and I was thinking, well how do you use the bible? Do you use the bible as a proof text? Obviously not. At all.

No. Not in that sense. And I do get anxious about people who do.

Yes. That was what was coming through. Great. OK. So let's go on to number eight then. When presented with a number of alternative positions or interpretations of Biblical teaching, what is your normal reaction?

Oh good! (Laughs) Because, I suppose because I'm fundamentally lazy and it gives me something to start work on without having to do that bit of work myself. Because it gives me a degree of confidence that I'm not being sold a line. Because it gives me an opportunity to work out what I think and what I believe, and to be able to live with that, because if I have worked it out for myself, then I am much more likely to be able to explain it to someone else than if somebody says, This is what this means, and there is nothing else to be done, or said. So I really quite enjoy it, and one of the great... when I look back about six years ago I started on another course of study which was home study and group study, and we began with Genesis, and very early on it talked about the different sources. And that was just... it was wonderful. For all sorts of reasons. It explained to me why there are two creation stories. Which nobody had ever done before. And I suppose I could have gone away and found out, but I didn't.

Well, this was going away and finding out, in its way, wasn't it!

Yes, that's right. And, but that was just wonderful because it, it opened up so many possibilities, and new ways of seeing things, new ways of looking at them, new ways of understanding what the bible was saying to me. About why the Priestly source was included and why people thought... and why, for goodness sake, why the Priestly source actually bothered to write the Priestly source! And, so yes, that was great. And it still is, and I find that more helpful than being presented with a much more fundamentalist, I suppose, approach, which says, There is only one way of looking at this, or hearing this. And again, part of it, I think, is that for me, if somebody tells me that this is so, and something crops up later, to make me think, maybe this isn't so, then it, it's a great fracturing. And it raises questions and destroys credibility in all sorts of other ways. But if you know that there are alternative positions, it gives you... I suppose it's like the difference between living in one of those awful cells where you can't sit down or lie down, and actually having a room that you can move around in.

Mmm. That's a good analogy.

And it's, I think, about being comfortable and not having a small God, for me.

Yeah. I can identify with that. Now, I'm going to give you numbers nine and ten together because they're similar but there's a different emphasis in each of them. So if you look at number nine it asks you to tell me something you've learnt which has resulted in your faith changing in some way. And number ten is something you've experienced. So number nine is emphasising very much the sort of cognitive, perhaps something that you've, you know, learnt in your course work - in fact, you've already touched on, on one or two things - and number ten is something that's happened in your life. Something, you know, a real life experience. A crisis of some sort, perhaps, or... And you can do them in either order. I don't really mind.

Umm, does it have to be something I've learnt on this course?

No, not particularly. No.

No, because I think, I do think one of the things that really stands out for me is that business of finding that there are lots of different sources from the bible. And that was wonderfully liberating...

I was just going to say. Yeah.

Because, oh, for all sorts of reasons. It opened doors and windows and let the light in and blew the cobwebs away. It made me realise too that as the bible came to be put together in whatever way it was, that the people who put it together recognised that different people had different perspectives, each of which had something really important to tell posterity about God. And that was liberating both in the sense of, of realising that there are different perspectives in there which all contribute to a coherent picture. And make it a sort of 3D thing rather than a 2D thing. But it was also about, if it was true then, then it must still be true now. And again, it allows us... I mean, God is so vast. We can all of us only see a tiny fragment. And I don't believe we all see the same fragment. So if we share our little bit of the jigsaw puzzle, as it were, we get a better picture. A better understanding, a better relationship, I think.

When you say, blow the cobwebs away, and you know, let in the light, how would you have been before?

Well, I think before, it felt very dull, and it felt more like a children's story. More... It didn't have the same layers in it. It, umm, it had less meaning for me, because it felt much more like a simple sort of one thread faith.

Mmm. One dimensional.

Yes. And it's not. It's shot silk. With the most wonderful colours in it. And so instead of all being woven from natural cotton, it's actually got all these other wonderful things in it. And you can keep looking at it and exploring it and seeing different things.

And so how has your faith changed? It's become more vibrant.

Yes. And, umm, I think the other thing that has changed is allowing that to become more than one dimensional. Because it doesn't have to be constrained in this... I think the change in my faith really is about being freed from that childhood narrow, stereotype of God into something much bigger and grander and more varied. You know. It's a dreadful thing to say it took me so long to get there, but it did. Umm, something I've experienced in my life. I think the thing that had the biggest impact on me was when my husband died and it was a dreadful time in many ways but it was also a time when I really, really felt God. And... that really did change my faith, because although it was such an awful time it was also a very beautiful time. And I think that's probably all I want to say.

Sure. That's fine. Great. Number eleven. Are there any instances when you disagree with or react against something the bible says? What do you do with those passages?

Umm, I think there are some things, and I think they relate mainly either to the position of women or some of the, umm, laws in the Old Testament. Umm, I do enjoy bacon, for example! (Laugh)

(Laughing also) And shell fish!

Yes. Exactly. And there are other times when I come up against something which it is not so easy for me to look at and say, Well, of course, the laws about food were because of the climate and where they lived and you can see that if you're wandering around the desert there are sure fire ways of getting food poisoning, and these laws actually protect against most of that. Umm, and some of the stuff about women, you can say, Oh well, it's the culture. And, and I can separate that out in my own head, rightly or wrongly, from things that seem to me much more related again to this, this, I mean, the whole of my faith at the moment is about this God-creation relationship. And being in it, and so on. So, I find it fairly easy to separate out some of those things that seem to me cultural. I mean, I really don't see why God should want me to have my head covered in church. I really don't think it makes a ha'p'orth of difference. He knows the hairs on it anyway, so why do I have to wear a hat? Every one! So, you know, why do I need to wear a hat? Umm, so those are... I don't exactly sort of write them off completely, but I, I can see... I can find ways of saying that I think they don't apply. Others do sometimes bring me up short, and I can't immediately call to mind something, I'm sorry. But those, I think, I have to go away and think about and read my way round, and discuss with other people, and pray about, and reflect on theologically. To see if what is going on there is something in me or whether again it is something that I can honestly and faithfully say, we may, as a society, have outgrown.

Mmm. What about, umm, if I prompt you, cos people sometimes find it difficult to think quickly, but things like the imprecatory Psalms, where you know, the Psalmist is praying for the complete destruction of his enemies, or...

I tend to put those into the culturally desirable at the time things.

The, umm, the sacrifice of, uhh, is it Jephthah's daughter where he vows that the first living thing that he sees coming out of his home when he returns home...

Yes, but again, everything else about that story is so culturally alien to me in terms of the way the business was conducted, that I fit it into the culture.

So what does it... What's it there for, then?

It is there, I think the theological message in it is that one needs to be careful when one... It's like a lot of things, it's like praying appropriately, isn't it. Because sometimes you ask something and you get what you ask for, and it was not actually what you meant at all! (Laughs) And I think...

(Laughs) Sounds like the voice of experience here!

And I think in the same way, I think the theological message of the story is to say that in your dealings with God, you have to say what you mean and mean what you say. And having said it and promised it, you are bound, whatever happens next. Umm, and I don't have a problem with that as a theological message.

Mmm. Mmm. Yeah, sure. So a lot of the ones that, a lot of the instances where it would be culturally, uhh, where you can in a sense bracket it culturally, you would then look for a theological message.

Yes. But I still have trouble with the hats in church!

You do?

Well, I mean, I just don't see why. I mean, I can see why it was a cultural thing then, but I have not yet found the theological message in it.

OK. You've already touched on this one also, but you might want to say a little bit more about it, I don't know. Umm, Are there times when you find it difficult to accept your faith because people say, or you feel that what you believe is irrational?

No. There aren't, actually, because I think it is of the nature of faith that it is not entirely susceptible to reason. I think if it were, if it were one of those things that could be proved like Pythagoras' theorem, it wouldn't be faith, it would be knowledge. Umm, and it seems to me, what is of the essence of faith, that it is knowing something that you can't ultimately demonstrate to anybody else. However real it may be to me, I cannot prove that relationship. And when my family and friends say how irrational it is, it occurs to me that there are all sorts of things in their lives that they do and believe that they can't possibly demonstrate. I think, for anybody the act of getting married is an act of faith. But if you try challenging people on that, they will defend it completely. I think having children is an act of faith. Umm...

Mmm. It's like entering the unknown, isn't it.

Yes, that's right. And so I don't find it difficult to accept my faith on that basis, umm, it is irrational. And if it wasn't irrational then it wouldn't be faith.

What aspects... Can you just give me one, one, one example of something you would think is irrational and in fact...

Umm, yes! Working in the association, one sees all sorts of people. And we had a client who knew that she 'had' a radio receiver in her stomach! Which was receiving messages transmitted from a local transmitter telling her all sorts of things about Mrs Thatcher's private life. And I thought that was irrational and unbelievable.

But your faith... I mean, a specific example of your faith?

My faith. Ah, yes. Sorry. Yes. Umm, go back to the question... I think the whole thing about atonement is really difficult and I haven't properly begun to get my head round that. And that is the area I think where I most have to say, Well, I believe this because the bible tells me so. But at some point I will get to a stage in my life where I need to unpack it and it may be because I'm made to unpack it on this course, or it may be because I just have arrived at that time in my own spiritual development when I need to unpack it. And at that point I will find people to talk to, and I will pray, and I will read, and I will theologically reflect, and all those other things. And see where I get to.

That's great. Thank you. Thirteen you have touched on also. As I say, as we go on they tend to sort of merge a little bit... But you have made an allusion to an instance of this. Have there been times when your experience of life has not backed up what you have been taught either generally or specifically? How did you respond?

You say I've alluded to it. What did you...

I think you did. If I'd have been taking notes I would have been able to return to it.

Right, that's fine. Umm, I think... I'm sure there have been, and I'm afraid right at this minute I can't think recall anything specific. But my general reaction when that sort of thing happens is one of two things really. If it's so stark that I can't keep it to myself then I will actually challenge it at that point and say, But I don't find this, or I don't, you know, it's not how it is.

That's... It was in the question about listening to preachers and their being sound.

Yes.

And that's when you made a reference to...

Yes. Yes. That's right. So that's one thing. The other thing is that I might... indeed, I would go away and think about my experience and think about what I understood we'd been taught, checking both to see if my recollection was right and if I'd understood the teaching properly. And if there were still a distance between them, I think I would set about trying to work out why. And trying to see which one seemed

to me the more valid. Because there are times when I have life experiences and I interpret them one way, and can see years later that in fact my original understanding was wrong. Umm, and so I think, if after time spent trying to relate them I still couldn't get anywhere, then I think I would go and find someone I trusted to talk to. A spiritual director or my Parish Priest, or my course tutor, or whoever.

You mentioned 'valid'; umm, valid... Do you have a gut reaction, you know, does your inside tell you when something is valid or is it...

They tell me when it's valid for me.

Yes. OK.

Don't think I can answer for anybody else but, yes, they tell me when it's valid for me.

So it's an intellectual and a, a sort of gut reaction in the process that's going on.

Yes. Yes. So that the work we're doing this week on the course, for example, I find very valid and very real for me as well as intellectually quite, umm, satisfying. But I know from conversations I've had with others that they don't find it valid and they have all sorts of concerns about it, and, uh, use words like manipulation, which I don't, I don't agree with. Umm, but that's their choice.

Yes. Yes. Yes, absolutely. OK. Three more to go. Here's number fourteen, which is probably the most amusing. There have recently been reports about God miraculously changing people's ordinary dental fillings into gold in a church service. How do you react to such reports?

With great scepticism.

Yes. Scepticism about what?

That it happened. I... I'm not sure what God would be saying to us. If you suddenly took a church full of people with mercury amalgam fillings and changed it into gold. Umm, I'm not sure what the benefit, apart from some sort of weird financial benefit might be to the individuals. I'm not sure what the benefit would be to the church. And I'm not sure what the benefit is in terms of witness to the world. Because it seems to me to be saying... It could say two things, couldn't it. It could say, I, the Lord, have the power to make anything of anything, and I wouldn't argue with that. Or it could be saying something much more mercenary about material things, and that is so completely outside my experience of God. It's outside everything really, isn't it. It's outside what the church teaches, what the bible tells us, what my experience is, that God is a God of materialism. So I find this... It may well be true, but my reaction is scepticism.

Yes. Interestingly, one person has actually sat in that chair and said to me that she knows, personally knows people to whom that has happened. And my jaw sort of went...!

I'm not surprised! Yes. I mean, all things are possible with God. But that, I really, I find that so, so out of line with everything else. But maybe that's it. I mean, maybe it's to stop us thinking that there is a line that can be drawn. In which case, hooray(?).

OK. Fine. Thank you. It always makes me laugh, that one. Now fifteen, Is there an ethical issue or a major social issue that you feel particularly strongly about? Could you explain to me the way you went about deciding on the position you adopted? What criteria did you use?

Oh gosh. Where to begin.

Yes. Given your background, I can quite see.

Something about which I feel very strongly at the moment, very strongly indeed, is what this country has been doing in the past few years, first about reducing the possibility of people coming to live here, uhh, becoming immigrants, but much more particularly, the way in which this government has, and the last government, and large sections of the media, have used fears of being overrun by idle benefit-seeking whoevers, to try to shut down the asylum system and to try to prevent asylum seekers from reaching this country. I... It shows a lack of understanding of all sorts of situations in other parts of the world. It seems to me a fundamentally unloving, disrespectful approach to other people, and I think one of the reasons I feel so strongly about it is because I have sat and listened to all sorts of people who either have relatives that they have been trying to get into the country, away from persecution, or people who have entered the country illegally and are trying to find a way of getting to stay, or people who are trying to avoid going back to a dangerous situation. And the whole structure of the machinery that is used is brutal and inefficient. And so these people are made to suffer for the inefficiencies that are built into the system. And they are made to suffer because they are disbelieved and they are... Something really quite core about them is denied. And in the process, they are dehumanised, and demonised. And the lack of generosity and the lack of love and the lack of understanding in people with whom I should be feeling some sort of affinity as part of my society, is deeply wounding. It really, really upsets me. I, I cannot, cannot accept any of what is being done or said in my name. And so much of it happens out of sight, and that we don't even know about, but still in my name. And that really, really gets me.

Mmm. This, I think relates, or leads into it as the final question. Do you think the faith position you hold affects the way you perceive the world and process information about it? If yes, can you explain how?

Yes. Yes, it does. I think it affects the way I perceive the world and process the information because I'm coming from a position where I think I can do no less than value everyone. And I mean everyone. In the way the God values them. And that actually does include Myra Hindley, and wife beaters, and mass-murderers and child abusers. Umm, it also affects the way, it affects the way I process information about it because I suppose I measure what is done and what happens against that same standard. Against the standard of, Is this valuing of and affirming of people? Is this a loving thing? And also in relation to the wider world. A sense of, umm, I suppose in a

way it's a sort of slow motion suicide, isn't it, the way that we're damaging our, our environment. And that too is about not, ultimately about not being in a right relationship with God because we are not valuing what he values. So, yes, it affects it mightily. (

Great. Well, that's the end. Many thanks indeed.

Clive, 52, Discrete believer

First question is slightly badly worded, in that it said, Why did you decide to train for ordination, and I know you don't make the decision to train, so it's probably more a question of why did you feel that you wanted to take the step of being ordained? And then, has the training met your expectations?

You're not going to like this! I'm not training for ordination!

Oh, you're not an ordination candidate? Well, that's OK. Explain what you're doing.

Right. The... the, the ministry course is predominantly a training for ordination, but it can be a training for other things, and one of the things it can be a training for is lay reader. Umm, now, my position, in fact, this is probably starting to answer the question so far as I can answer it, is that I felt I was being called to train for something, umm, and I'll try and elaborate on that in just a moment. Umm, then I went to see the lady, who is the, half the DDO if you like for this diocese. She deals with I think it may be all women candidates, and those for non stipendiary ministry. Umm, she sent me off to talk to people, which is the standard initial bit, umm, and in the light of what they said, she thought I should not go forward to ABM. Umm, and having talked to our incumbent, he didn't feel inclined to challenge that view. I have also approached the Reader board whose view was that they were not going to recommend me for training at this stage, but feel free to come back to them towards the end of the course, which would be sometime in this year. Uhh...

So the course lasts...

The course is a three year course. I'm just about to enter the third year of it. I think that when they said that, it may well be that they felt I should, I should be keeping options open. So, why did I decide to train for whatever it is I'm training for?! (Laughter) Umm, it... the story goes back several years. I, umm, it's almost a question of where to begin. I've been a Christian ever since university. Umm, going to our present church for quite a long time. When the Toronto blessing came along, I got the chance of a business trip to not too terribly far away and umm, came back via Toronto. Our vicar and his wife went to Toronto not too much after me and life and the church have never been the same since. Not, umm, I won't say it's necessarily affecting everybody in the church, but there are certainly differences, umm, and in the period not too long after that, our vicar felt that we were in need of outside input. And he got some help from the pastor of the local Vineyard church, or assistant, oh I don't know. It doesn't really matter. Somebody. Umm, and on one occasion a number of people from that church came round, umm, and during the course of the evening, one of them said to me, 'I've had a picture for you.' Which seemed to be a slightly ministry sort of context, perhaps.

What, the picture did.

Yes. Umm, a bit startled, didn't do much about it, umm, another time I went to a day at a local church. There was a ministry time at the end of the afternoon and suddenly one of their ministry team is fighting her way along the little tiny narrow rows they have there to get at me! Umm, so she had a picture for me. Umm, rather more direct, this one. Umm, talking in terms of burning off stubble. To make the ground fertile, and there being sort of infertile. Bit startled, very nice, umm, didn't do much about it, and then over a period of time the idea began to grow, and don't ask me where it came from, like Topsy, it just grew, you've heard stories like this before, I'm sure, umm, but that I ought to be doing something about it. Umm, eventually got round to telling my wife, and the following day one of the church wardens, the other one of the church wardens, because my wife was a church warden at the time, comes up to me and says, Have you thought of ministry? Or words to that general effect. I was absolutely gobsmacked, but that was what made me start looking. Umm, and it's, it was a sufficiently convincing series of events that made me think that, coupled with the fact that I've had this feeling growing that I ought to be doing something. Umm, as to what it is, umm, I'm still waiting to find out. Right. Second half of the question. Has the training met your expectations. Since I don't know what the expectations were, umm, or didn't have too much idea, it's not easy to, to say that I came along with a preconception. I think in so far as I had a preconception it's doing tolerably well. And where it hasn't met the preconceptions, I think I'm inclined to say it was the preconception that was wrong and the training is right. The sort of thing which I've got in mind there is that I would have expected it to focus quite a lot on biblical material and theology. Now, it has that in it, but the content is a bit less than I would have expected. Umm, some of the other things that come in, there's a certain amount of psychology in there, or, now, it's not full psychology but a certain amount of human awareness and self awareness figures quite strongly. Now, I didn't expect it, but I've found that very valuable.

Yes. So what would the highlights and the lowlights of the two years that you've done be?

Umm, highlights and the lowlights. Ohh. Umm, the group of people is wonderful. Umm, we've got over twenty in our year. And we have come to become a very closely bonded group of people. Partly, I think, out of sheer, umm, self-defence against the, the training. We, we had one rather unpleasant weekend which I think pushed us into uniting against what we reacted to as a common enemy. And we've been a lot closer, I think, ever since that weekend. Umm, the, there's a lot I'm getting out of it. Umm, I know I've changed. And I wouldn't want to go back. I, umm, the doctrine and the theology I find fascinating. Umm, the, the biblical materi... I would say about 80% or more of the content of the course I find very interesting. Umm, even if I don't do too well with one particular lecture. When I get to it with, umm, umm, having to do an assignment in the area, it turns out to be fine. The lowlights? Some of the psychological self awareness type material. The presentation of it has been to experience it rather than be taught it. And that rattled some people. Umm, we did the Myers Briggs weekend and I think it took me a month to get over it. And yet I found, I have actually found that, of all things, the thing which I could apply most immediately. Partly because it enabled me to cope with somebody I work with. To understand where he's coming from. Don't think I can do much more with that one.

That's fine. No problem at all. Now, could you give me a brief outline of how your faith and your studies on the course have interacted in your life...?

Gulp. Umm... (pause) I think I once wrote something for the church magazine and gave it the heading 'Nothing has changed and everything is different' and it almost was an answer to this question. Umm, my, I think my belief in Christ and in the Gospel message hasn't changed. Umm, the course hasn't managed to convince me that the doctrine of salvation is other than what I thought it was.

Mmm. Has it tried?!

At least unwittingly, yes, it has.

Gosh.

Umm, and, umm, so what I believe in remains the same. I think my understanding of it has filled out. Umm, the course has not surprisingly put some pressure on spirituality. Umm, I do think it tends to undo all the good work by then asking for assignments to be got in, because, umm, as far as, actually, spirituality can't be done quickly, and having too much to do like assignments is a deadly enemy of, of, of a spiritual life. But nevertheless, umm, hanging on to discipline, or at least some semblance of it, does seem to be a bit better. Not a lot, but a little bit. Umm, so that is I think a bit of a change. Uhh...

Do you find your life has, has altered? Your sort of working life? Your more general...

Right. Well, there has been a change there. I'm just wondering whether there may have to be another one, in this way. The, umm, the job I was doing, am doing, sort of, is to be a partner in a, a private practice. We tend to be driven by the demands of clients. Umm, if a client wants something and has a tolerably good reason for wanting it for a specific date, we try to comply if it's possible. Umm, it is not a well-managed system and I'm possibly a bad manager of the system anyway. But it tends to be pressured. At the start of the course, I, or no, before the start of the course I felt I wasn't going to cope. And I actually went to my partners and said, look I want some sort of leave of absence, or something. Well, I didn't get it, but I did get a, something of a change of status. Umm, with a corresponding reduction in what I'm paid. It's still pretty good. Umm, and the idea was to reduce the workload. It hasn't actually worked out as well as I'd hoped and this last couple of weeks have been particularly viciously bad. Umm, so that has made... There was a deliberate decision to make a difference, and actually carrying the decision into effect has proved difficult.

Yes, so that's a practical thing. Would you say that the, the actual spiritual aspect has, has changed your life? Has the course had a direct effect on your spirituality that you do in a day to day context?

It's not an easy question to answer. I mean, the answer is yes. More difficult is to pin down how, and also more difficult is to pin down how far it is the course which is the causative factor. Umm, I think always when answering a question like this, you cannot separate, umm, what the course principal and the staff try to achieve and what

God is determined to achieve. Umm, since one of them is working through the other, umm, the boundaries, it's very hard to determine. Before I started the course it would be fair to say that if I got excessively pressured at work I tended to get my head down, tried to get on with the work, and quiet times went out of the window. That is not quite as true. I still have a tendency to get my head down and get on cos I can't see how to escape from it. Umm, but quiet times don't go quite so far out of the window, and I sometimes manage to reach out and grab them before they've gone all the way down. Umm, there is, I think, a proc... I think I'm aware in myself of a process of growth, and of increasing faith. Whether I would blame that on the course, umm, or whether I'd blame it on surrounding circumstances and other things that have happened is very hard to tell. Umm, I mean, as a for instance, umm, my daughter in the middle of A levels, had a particularly bad time half way through a four day exam in Art. I was all for going and banging on the headmaster's door. Well, actually what happened was that I ended up praying with a small group I'm in, other people were praying, we had a wonderful... she sort of got her jaws back together, and I kind of think, well, if it can happen once it can happen again, can't it. Umm, and I don't think I'm ever going to be the same again, but you can't blame that sort of thing on the course. Would it have happened if I'd not been on the course? I've no idea.

Mmm. Maybe you were more willing to try it because of the course.

Possibly. Possibly, yes. Umm, and possi.. yes, thinking about it. Yes, to that one. Umm, so the course certainly pushes us towards spirituality. It's not the on.. I think what I'm saying is it's not the only input and you can't blame the results on only one input. I think that may be the best I can do with that one.

That's fine. No, that's fine. That's quite a complicated one, or a complex one, isn't it. This one's a bit more straightforward. So number three. Could you give me, could you outline and give examples of any or the various roles that the bible has in your life?

(Pause) It's... oooh... it's a teaching book, and it teaches first of all a belief, it teaches a system of belief and it is a system of belief which, amongst other things, says that there is an afterlife, to which those who believe are going. Now that has, an effect of that, and an essay done recently has rather rubbed this one in, does change the approach to life. Umm, I look at someone I'm in business with, umm, very moral, upright character, but for all that, just occasionally you pick up an awareness from what he says that he is aware of his own mortality and what's he got to look forward to. I know I've got something to look forward to and so this present life is somewhat temporary. Which means that success in career maybe is not so important as umm, God's appreciation of me over a much longer term. This world suddenly becomes a short term expendable. Now that is a fairly fundamental difference in thinking, and that is certainly one that has gone home to me. It doesn't make immediate difference much of the time. Umm, if somebody offers to buy me a drink, the answer's going to be the same whatever. But in terms of strategic thinking, I think there is a difference there. Umm, occasionally, I am confronted by an issue where I will consciously look for a biblical answer. Umm, it doesn't happen that often because the effect of the bible and its teaching ought to be, and I hope to at least some extent it's not, umm, something put into practice, but something that becomes pervasive. It, umm, you know, it changes your whole mindset. But then when you actually start doing things

which actually are with reference to biblical teaching, you've forgotten you had the input. Umm, but I mean, for instance, we did have an issue at work, oh, a couple of years ago, over somebody, and I'm actually trying to think, what would the biblical answer be? Umm, the bible is consciously a source of role models. Umm, particularly over questions of faith and believing and trusting. Umm, and the other one which is in some ways the most difficult to put into any form of words, is the effect of the Psalms. Umm, this is partly the effect of something the course has done, but I've taken to trying to read a Psalm every morning. As often as not on the train, and they have a confoundingly uncanny habit of turning out to be exactly appropriate to the circumstances that day. It defies all laws of probability, it's also quite unprovable. But there is an aware... the effect is very often to stop me short and stop me looking at the short term issue and the circumstances and how I feel ugh, and look further, or to feel I've got support. As David no doubt did. I didn't know he took (?) on Thameslink, but I think he did, you know!

So have you tried 119 on the way into town?

I haven't tried that one yet. I think it may take one... If I manage to get through that in one trip, it will be a letter to the complaints department! But, umm, I'm not sure how helpful an answer that is. A lot of it, I'm aware that it's there but it's sufficiently intangible, it's very hard to put into words.

No, that's grand. Thanks. Alright, so number four. Do you engage in debate about matters of faith with friends or perhaps family? If so, please could you describe an example or two.

(Pause) The answer is almost no. Umm, the... everyone in my immediate family, my wife, my daughters, is Christian. Umm, of the generally evangelical if not downright charismatic persuasion. And, right, there is then, there is certainly then discussion of matters of faith sometimes. It usually takes the form of one of the children throwing some awkward doctrinal question at me over breakfast.

Saying, You're doing this course...

Well, not necessarily because of that. Just, Do you know...? Umm, there was the episode when I walked into our small bible study group, umm, two minutes after somebody had asked a question on predestination and I got asked to explain predestination. Umm, working out a doctrine of predestination in thirty seconds flat was an interesting exercise, but I think I put up quite a reasonable answer. Umm, so that has happened to me. Umm, I, I haven't got very many friends in the area who are not in church. That is partly I think because I commute. Work colleagues don't live locally and so any work friendships don't easily translate into social relationships at home. Umm, discussion of matters of faith at work generally doesn't happen. I think it would be wrong to push it. Umm, I have had a couple of chats with one lady, umm, not even in our London office but down in Bristol, umm, she heard a bit about what I was doing, expressed a bit of interest, umm, I think she might be teetering on the brink. She feels she's lost her faith. Her husband's a believer, her mother's a believer. Umm, she may feel vulnerable, or interested, or some mixture of the two. But

generally opportunities don't present themselves and I'm not very good at making them.

Mmm. And with people on the course? Do you, you know, would you find that lecturers and things stimulate debate and discussion?

Rather rarely. Umm, now that may be a feature of this particular course. Umm, it is a course which extends over almost as wide a range of churchmanship as you can get. Almost. Umm, we can certainly produce the Anglo-Catholic wing of the church, umm, through to fairly aggressively charismatic, umm, I think I have heard suggestions that this has caused some stress in other years, but I don't know them well enough to know that sort of thing. In our own year, any such stress is avoided. I think there is almost a conscious avoidance of it. Umm, I don't remonstrate particularly with the, umm, with the people who would say they are sacramentalists, particularly since she so obviously knows more about spirituality than I do. I'd rather learn, thank you very much, cos I've got somebody in mind there. Uhh, the, the conversation tends to be social rather than faith oriented. Umm, possibly almost as a reaction to lectures, I don't know. Umm, the only time I can really think about debate happening was a debate in a bible study. So it's not a regular thing.

OK. That's fine. Thank you. Number five then. Umm, if you had to give a defence of your faith, what would you use as the basis for your justification? And the question is in the first instance focusing on how you defend your faith to yourself. Why are you a Christian? Umm, rather than me asking you to debate who you are talking to.

Right. Umm, OK. Let's start with the first half of those. Umm, I... At one time, I think I would have said, umm, that the, I was convinced of the historicity of Christ and that that was a central thing. Umm, and yet it has never been quite central. When I came to faith, it was a realisation that the Gospel message and the message of forgiveness was something I needed. Umm, subsequently, I started thinking, well, this is all very well and very nice but has it actually got an adequate basis. And that's when I think the historicity of Christ became fairly important as a part of the overall structure. And the, the part that had some tangibility to it. I still firmly believe in it, and if I were to cease to believe in the historicity of Christ I'd be in fairly serious difficulty, because as Paul said, if Christ wasn't raised, we of all men are the most miserable. But I am also, now that, in the, it's really I think since the time I went to Toronto, I am much more conscious of God being, and he's visibly present. Actually, visible it isn't, but there is a very conscious reality. God is much more something that can be felt. And who answers. Sometimes when you don't want him to, but the reality of God being there and present and speaking and available, and doing miracles. We've seen a few, umm, and even the historicity is eclipsed by that and yet that is still the thing which is in many ways the tangible historical thing. Now that's I think my sort of internal justification of it. Umm, if I were to be talking to someone else, I would probably, depending on how the conversation went, be quite willing to mention all the things I've just said. I could hardly expect someone else to be convinced by the fact that I feel the presence of God. It's not a very verifiable fact, mostly. Umm, and I would, I think, put quite a bit of stress on the historicity. Umm...

Of...

Umm, I think of Christ and of, of Christ of the resurrection and of this fundamental change in the disciples and the growth, the explosive growth of the church after the resurrection. Umm, somebody once said they felt the virgin birth was terribly crucial. While I do believe that's important, as a historically verifiable fact it must be notoriously the least verifiable of everything! But the resurrection, appearing to more than 500 people at one time has, I think, got slightly better evidence for it.

Mmm. Fine. Grand. Thank you. Now we go on to reading books. So this is number six. Umm, do you make a specific difference between reading books to aid you in devotion and reading books for study? If so, how does your reading of the two differ?

The answer's... Right. The answer to the first question is yes and no. Umm, I hadn't really thought about it and so I hadn't already got a prepared conception in my mind. Umm, there is a difference. Now, when you say reading books for study, I'm assuming you're meaning books with an overtly Christian content. Rather than... Well, you see, for instance, I'm sort of ground clearing a bit for the moment. If we'd done a module on human development, an entirely secular book on human development may be extremely interesting, but I wouldn't expect it to have any devotional content. Umm, whereas if I'm reading say, a book on the theology of St Paul, that may well be a highly academic textbook and not at all written with devotion in mind, but nevertheless, umm, it don't always stay in the box. And that's part of the answer. If I'm reading a book for study, it may well be succeeding in showing me what the bible says and what St Paul thought, and then behind that you get to what God did. Umm, and I was absolutely bowled over when I had to give a lecture on Luther, and it suddenly dawned on me that I think Luther was set up. Umm, he didn't seem to be going particularly out to become a leader of anything, he simply put something up in academic debate and some wretch printed it. But for a man suddenly thrust into the limelight, it's not many that stay there for 30 years after having got there by accident, are there! It looks like a put up job to me! Umm, and I got bowled over by that. And what St Paul thought... So, a textbook can suddenly show me something of what God did, and there's a large devotional element. On the other hand, if I am reading a book which is overtly devotional, well, I don't do that very much. Umm, I am probably looking at the subjective view. So part of the answer here is that a book which is expounding Scripture or recounting history I will treat in a way, really somewhat similar to the way I treat a scientific textbook. I don't make much distinction between that sort of book and a book on chemistry. Uhh, they are actually accounting for objective facts, as far as I'm concerned. Umm, a book which is an aid to devotion is probably someone expressing their subjective view of God, or their perception which even if they don't think so, I won't think need be the same perception that everybody else holds. And so that distinction will be consciously in mind. Umm, so, the distinction is probably there for those reasons, but I haven't been particularly aware of it and it does sometimes blur itself. And I've probably answered the second half of those, how does your reading of the two differ, in everything I've said.

Yes, I think you have. Thank you. Alright, number seven then. Do you read theological books and listen to preachers and teachers with an eye to whether they're 'sound' or not, and if so what criteria do you use?

Uhh, answer is yes. And the criterion is, is it biblical. I'm not sure I need elaborate that one all that much. The view I take is that Christianity is a revealed religion, and the revelation is firstly in Scripture. So if someone says something which is consciously against what I believe Scripture says, I will react to that. And will either, or will be possibly critical of what they've said, or taught, with that in mind. So there is constantly a standard of, is it, is it in accordance with Scripture.

Mmm. And in accordance with an interpretive position that you have formed? In other words, how do you know what Scripture says in terms of interpretation?

Reading it! Sorry, that... That of course is partly what we are being taught. And it may, it may well be that the, somebody's view of Scripture isn't my view of Scripture. Now, the course, this course is trying very hard not to tell us what to believe. It tries to confront us with the issues and make us aware of the issues, but not to force our own views or belief. Umm, there is almost a tendency amongst the lecturers to hide their own views, umm, to varying extents unsuccessfully. Umm, the Principal makes no secret of his views, umm, firm evangelical, got criticised at his previous place of employment for not being quite sound enough.

So I hear!

Umm, so, umm, but views aren't forced upon us. The, the position I take at the moment is that if you read Scripture, you, what comes out of the New Testament, and I think the Old, well, the Old is less overtly doctrinal, is a position which is fairly consistent. Umm, somebody, we had one weekend on Scriptural interpretation which for me actually left some unanswered questions, umm, and somebody used the phrase, 'it feels fairly firm'. And I think that did put it into words quite well, that if you read what St Paul says, umm, you get a fairly consistent whole. You will find little pieces that look very odd and that you can't quite cope with and don't appear to match up with something else, and then you've got to try and make sense of the two in tension. And it, so far, it has pretty well made sense, and I haven't come across a contradiction that really troubles me. Umm, I did feel a bit troubled about something for a while, but it sort of fell into place all by itself in odd circumstances. Has that...?

Yeah, that's fine. Thank you. No problem. And in fact, you've just started touching on this one a little bit, so we'll carry on in the same vein. Number eight, when presented with a number of alternative positions or interpretations of biblical teaching, what's your normal reaction?

Umm, a bit of background which might turn out to be of importance so I'll mention it now, is, is what I do. Umm, my initial university training was a training in, in a scientific subject, as it happens, chemistry. Umm, but I'm working in an area of law, which involves quite a lot of written material. I am not a lawyer, I have not trained as a lawyer, and have no intention of doing so. On the other hand, a certain amount of law goes across our desks and a certain amount of it soaks in. Perhaps not very effectively, not the right bits, umm, but that is a little bit of my background which is going to emerge. Umm, if I'm confronted with different interpretations of Scripture, on a point that is not very important, I tend to forget about it or dismiss it as not

important. Umm, if I am confronted with a, an issue which is fundamental in its importance, my reaction is to rush frantically back to Scripture and check whether I am right. Uhh, we had an illustration of this at the Summer School. We had a bible study of about ten people. The person leading it was deliberately and quite correctly not letting her own views come out or saying very much, so leaving her out of it, I found myself in a minority of one. Umm, or so it felt, umm, on the subject of universal salvation. Now that is, to my way of thinking, a fairly fundamental point. There was one chap who was quite willing to say he believed in universal salvation. And quite a lot of people unwilling to say that they didn't. I'm not sure that I want to disbelieve in it, but St Paul is firmly agin it, and I'm afraid, and he wasn't an apostle for nothing, so I mean, if that's what Scripture says... Now, that quite got me going on that point, and I, I did make a conscious effort to try and pin down why people seemed to think something different and to check my own, my own view of Scripture. I tried to check my own view on Scripture, and indeed went off to a friend to see if I was being silly. If it's a, umm, if it's a less important issue, then I might simply live with an 'I don't know'. One view which I've rather come to as a result of the course, is to say that I wouldn't treat Scripture as law. Umm, when St Paul was writing the Epistles, he was not writing a legal text. Indeed, if you wanted me to recommend somebody as parliamentary draughtsman for the writing of statutes, I would not think of St Paul as qualified for the job. And I read his letters in the light of that. You need to look at the whole, well, this is just to my way of thinking, you need to look at the whole, and if you pin down one isolated bit, umm, and take it out, even if you take it in context but don't look to see whether the teaching squares up with the rest of Scripture, you may find that you've accidentally accentuated something he never intended. Umm, hats in church being a fairly obvious example.

Mmm. Grand. Thank you. Now, numbers nine and ten sort of inter-relate, so I'm going to give them both to you. They focus on different aspects of the same thing. So number nine is, Tell me something that you've learnt which has resulted in your faith changing in some way, and number ten is, Tell me something that you've experienced in your life which has prompted you to revisit your understanding of your faith. So, number nine is focusing very much on the cognitive aspect, something that you may have learnt on the course, whereas number ten is something, an event in your life, perhaps a crisis, or something which has happened, which has made you re-think your faith. And you can take them in either order, I don't mind.

Right. OK. I'm going to have to reinterpret the question a little bit. Umm, possibly to what you meant anyway, I don't know. But, umm, faith can mean, what do I believe in, or it can be taken to mean, umm, a whole system of belief which both has a fundamental core and things which flow from it. Umm, I'm not sure that anything I have learnt on the course has touched the fundamental core. Umm, I didn't go to the course a Hindu and become a Christian, or anything as fundamental as that, and of course it would be out of the question that that sort of thing would happen. So in that, rather restricted sense, the course has not changed my faith. In terms of the system of belief changing, umm, I would be tempted to say that it hasn't changed, but that wouldn't be right. What has happened, I think, is that some areas which I never paid very much attention to have become expanded. Umm, and the area which I think I would pick out as the one that's most obvious to me is in fact connected with the second coming. Umm, this is partly because I think it is the most significant area of

change, and partly because it's reasonably recent. The, in the course of writing an essay on Paul's understanding of salvation, and in fact also, for the same lecturer, trying to write a sermon on the second, on the passage in 2 Thessalonians to do with the second coming, umm, and then getting stuck on one and starting the other, the two did get very much related together. And it rather led me to see, and then I found textbooks that were actually saying not dissimilar things, although not spending the entire book saying it, that the second coming was more important to Paul's understanding of faith, salvation, and the belief system, than I think our churches actually bring out. So that is an area where an under-emphasised area has come into a much greater prominence. It's the nearest you'll get to a change, I think.

Yeah. Thanks.

Umm, number ten. Something I've experienced in life. I think it would have to be homosexuality. That's the, the one which seems to be the most crucial issue. Now, again, this is not very much to do with the core of faith, it's the, it affects the outworking of faith. Umm, I seem to have been confronted with a few people, either known to me or children of good friends who are homosexual. If you'd asked me ten, fifteen, twenty years ago you'd have got a very naïve and doctrinaire point of view. Oh, it's wrong. Umm, it's not so easy to maintain that view when a) the person you're talking about is the dearly loved son of somebody I love very much, umm, and secondly when you've met the guy and he's just so jolly helpful and you see how kind he is to everyone else. Umm, so that is one way in which I've had to re-think and I don't think I'm at the end of the re-thinking process.

Mmm. How would you say your faith had changed as a result of that? Is that affecting your interpretation of the bible, for example?

Umm, nnnoooo, I don't think it would be doing that. Umm, I think, I mean, I hold to the view that the bible is God-breathed, and you don't change the interpretation of Scripture merely because circumstances make you look for a change. Indeed, if somebody starts suggesting that, I tend to get very angry indeed and either walk out or hit them! Umm, on the other hand, umm, an understanding of Scripture and the nature of Scripture is something which does change. Perhaps I grew up a bit, or got more sensible, or weaker, or something. I mean, certainly the point I made earlier about no longer seeing it as a legislative document, but as a document, I didn't say it then but I will say it now, written by man who was at times very polemical, it doesn't invalidate what he said, it doesn't mean you can't understand what he said, you just read him slightly differently to see what is there. Umm, I think, ahh, something's coming to mind. Umm, in a way it's homosexuality and in a way it's feminism. And actually, the two link together because we have a few people who either are or were feminists, on the course, and I began to see that, where they were at, I nearly said coming from, changed it, where they were at, and where homosexuals who want to have Christian belief are at, is a feeling of being an isolated, rejected group. And to that extent, they're in the same position. Umm, if I'm treading on your corns, I'm sorry!

No, not at all. It doesn't offend me in the slightest.

Umm, but, umm, I was asked to lead worship for one evening and it happened to be at a weekend when we were on the subject of Scriptural interpretation, and feminist interpretations were quite clearly going to come in, and indeed they did. Umm, and one of the two people that was doing it with me suddenly came up with the idea of doing an overtly feminist version. And that was something I'd not had to cope with before. And I found myself struggling quite a lot. Umm, and having to go away and think very quickly what I did believe, umm, in fact, asking church, please could, please God, umm, if we want prayer in church it's always available, and I got someone to pray with me. Umm, but that would God mind telling me what His view of the matter was. It seemed to me that he didn't care very much for the isolation of these poor people either, and that that bothered him too. Umm, which might not be the first thing that the, umm, traditional evangelical viewpoint will come out with. It did. Has it changed what I believe? No. Has it made me aware of bits I don't understand? And I know I don't understand? Yes. Has it changed the emphasis of what I say, and what parts of belief come out first? Yes.

Mmm. That's great. Very coherent. Thank you.

No, very incoherent!

No, it's fine. Right, here's number eleven. Are there any instances when you disagree with or react against something the bible says, and what do you do with those passages?

We've probably touched on this sort of thing already. Umm..

Yeah. I've been keeping an eye on the time as well, and realising that in fact, as we go on it will get quicker because you've covered some of it already.

Yes, fine. Yes. Are there instances when I react against something the bible says? Yes. Umm, where our modern twentieth century culture appears to clash with a biblical teaching which is somewhere in the fourteenth century, or maybe the seventeenth. Umm, I have problems. And the sort of thing which, where it, it comes up, umm, could be the, where the bible seems to put women in a very subservient place, which is certainly not modern culture. Umm, two years ago I wouldn't have said that! And I'm suddenly aware that I wouldn't have said it two years ago. Umm, but some of Paul's statements do seem to be a very harsh, harsh and unnecessary subjection of women. Now, how do I cope with that? Well, in part I've already said that I no longer see Paul as a legislator, and then you look elsewhere in what Paul says and you begin to find a different message. Umm, for somebody who was apparently a misogynist he had a pretty high view of Christian marriage and the status of women in marriage. Umm, women are not allowed to speak in church, unless they're prophesying, which apparently they have to do silently. It's illustrations of the way I now see I have to interpret Paul. So, I suppose when I've run into these passages which I might disagree with, I've looked at the broader context and in some cases I have found a satisfactory answer in saying Paul is being polemical, or because you cannot reconcile a legalistic interpretation of that sentence with elsewhere in Scripture, you have to see Paul as being polemical and in the context of his culture. That's a slightly dangerous thing to do, cos then you discover you can dismiss

everything in terms of culture and you've got nothing left. Umm, but I think on the broad reading of Paul you can sort out what is and is not. A consistent view on what is and is not cultural, you may have to work at it here and there, but I'm not, there's nothing that's left me in serious difficulty. So generally I've been able to sort out that sort of thing in that way. Umm..

Old Testament passages? Violence...

Oh. Desperately difficult. Bury my head in the sand is my answer to that one! Umm, yes. When I was confronted with the bloodthirstiness of the book of Joshua, it is a difficulty, and I think there are things there that I don't understand. I, I suppose I'm left with the somewhat unsatisfactory explanation that, umm, I think some of the tribes who were, umm, demolished by the Israelites, umm, may well have been so immersed in fairly dire practices that umm, maybe what they got was no more than they deserved. It's just that we're not used to people getting as much as they deserve. And it's hard to reconcile that with a Christian culture where Christ's done a great deal to stop us from getting what we deserve. But, it is an unresolved question. And I don't have all the answers by any means. And I know I don't. I suppose because I'm sufficiently convinced by other bits, I manage to live with the unresolved issue.

Mmm. Thanks. You're not alone.

I'm sure I'm not.

Mmm. Number twelve, then. Are there times when you find it difficult to accept your faith because people say, or you feel that what you believe is irrational?

No. Is probably the answer. Umm, one of our lecturers, and he was mentioning a particular book at the time, either said or came very close to saying and the authors of the book say that God does not coerce faith. And I think I've rather come to believe that that is true. Umm, although it is not, that I'm aware of, explicit in Scripture. Umm, so I think I am persuaded that it is not God's plan to make faith and his existence so apparent to force people into belief. Consequently, I know that there is going to be, that what I believe is something which is not going to be so comprehensively provable that nobody can deny, whether they want to or not. Umm, and so I'm going to find that people won't accept what I believe. Umm, I'm also conscious that the subjective feelings are personal and I could not completely share them with another Christian. Umm, if they have similar subjective feelings we might each understand what the other is talking about, but that's the nearest we will come to it, and so to some ex... That is, I won't say it's irrational, although the boundary between supernatural and irrational is probably a bit vague. But I, I accept that some of that is going to be considered not provable. Umm, I've not, I think, had anyone determinedly saying that what I believe is contrary, is, is overtly disprovable. That might cause me some difficulty if they sounded more than, if they were convincing rather than ranting, but I haven't had it.

Mmm. Fine. Thanks. Now, number thirteen. Have there been times when your experience of life has not backed up what you have been taught during your theological training? And if so, how did you respond?

(Pause) I think first of all the answer is not much. Umm, the, this is a course with a lot of mature people on it, many of them a lot older and wiser, possibly younger and wiser than I am. Umm, that... the course could not survive if it was teaching things that were naïve and doctrinaire and so inconsistent with life that people are confronted by this, the people saying, oh the lecturers are being daft. It just wouldn't happen and it doesn't happen and there hasn't even been an attempt to make it go that way. Umm, so since I think we, or that we're being taught is being taught with a lot of people with experience of life, who themselves have dealt with these issues, we're not really actually getting situations where experience and teaching have parted, badly parted company. Umm, I think there are times when local churches, our own particularly, umm, can get a somewhat one-sided view of life and not give sufficient account, sorry, not sufficiently take into account circumstances of individual members of the congregation. And that actually can be quite hurtful. That's churches not the course. The course hasn't caused me trouble in that way.

Fine. Thank you. Now, number fourteen, miracles. There have recently been reports about God miraculously changing people's ordinary dental fillings into gold in a church service. How do you react to such reports?

Quite possibly he did! I think it might be slightly out of character, but there again, maybe not. I believe in a God who does miracles. We, there's one lady I know in church, umm, we actually both taught Pathfinders some years ago, and she came to church one Sunday having been diagnosed with cancer, absolutely out of the blue three days before. As it happened, two very charismatic people who had actually been pushed out of their church for being so charismatic, umm, were there visiting. And I got the two together. I don't think she had cancer when she walked out. Umm, I have no doubt that that is what God could do. Given what I was saying just now about coercion, umm, he don't show off that much, but just now and again he does. Yeah. There we are.

Fine. Thank you. Alright, penultimate. I think we'll be OK. Is there an ethical issue or a major social issue that you feel particularly strongly about? Could you explain the way you went about deciding on the position you adopted, and tell me what criteria you used.

(Pause) Mmm. (Long pause) I'm finding some difficulty, which is why I've gone very quiet, umm, to think, and not even think very effectively. Umm, there are plenty of ethical issues, umm, and social issues, major or otherwise, on which I have views. Whether I would pick out any one in preference to others, I don't know, and knowing me, the chances are that if I pick on one it's not because it's the most important but because it's the one that's most recently been in front of me. Umm, the, uhh, maybe the best thing I can do is try and pick on one issue, as it happens, one that has come up on the course, umm, and try and say how I go about thinking about that. Umm, we, we, one of the things which we had was a weekend on marriage, and one of the issues which was aired, though nothing was ever resolved, umm, was to, was the question of re-marriage. Umm, we were actually given the titles of two books taking directly contrary opinions, to, so that we could see both views, umm, reading the book that was flatly against re-marriage after divorce, you realise just how much pain it could

cause, particularly where the first marriage was not long-lived and plainly a mistake. Umm, it's an issue which I haven't completely sorted out in my own mind, umm, probably because if I were to really make an attempt to sort it out, or felt I had to sort it out, I'd want to do quite a bit more reading and I haven't had time. Umm, but how did I go about deciding on a tentative position. Umm, I think it would be partly through looking to see what Scripture said, or didn't say about it. Umm, partly through, whether I would have done it or whether I found I had done it cos somebody had the sense to make me do it, I'll skip over. Umm, trying to look and see what the different positions are and why people hold them, and what the implications are. This is probably I think a bit more idealised than what I really do in practice. Umm, but those would be good criteria even if I might forget to use them. Umm, and I think probably to try to understand what the Scriptural position is, umm, and perhaps taking the view that Paul isn't entirely a legislator. And try to make some sense of it. Umm, the, one of the passages which I think is quoted against re-marriage, umm, is Paul saying that, I think this might be in the context of a Christian, somebody who becomes a Christian and their spouse doesn't want to, but if they want to separate, then they must, then let that happen. But he or she shouldn't promptly go off and marry some, you shouldn't go off and marry someone else, which is taken as you should never. And thinking about that, I think I might say that what was in Paul's mind was, there should certainly be no rushing straight off to someone else, but he probably isn't legislating for years and years ahead. Umm...

Sure, Yeah. That's grand. Thanks. I think, because in many ways you've already umm spoken on this subject, uhh, do you think the faith position you hold affects the way you perceive the world and process information about it? And if so, can you explain how?

I think I've said a lot about it already, haven't I. Umm, I wouldn't regard myself as someone whose faith or belief lived in a box and only came out on Sundays. Equally, I might very well find that in some areas it's just not occurred to me to see how my faith can carry into the area concerned. Even if I've been told it's possible, sometimes I can't see it. Umm, people who talk about theology of work haven't quite managed to get me on board. Umm, I suppose the fundamental is that since I believe that God is real and present, umm, he is as entitled to have a view about anything as anybody else umm even though in one case I can see them and in the other case I can't. Umm, he's King, they aren't. So it should affect everything. Umm, and where I'm aware that there's a need to think about it that way, then I try to do so. Umm, not always successfully, umm, Scripture is the revelation of God and I would say it ought to be the standard to be applied to everything. Now of course that doesn't mean it has all the answers to every detailed question. Of course it doesn't. It gives principles. And if you don't have the detailed answer you may have to ask for it. If you need to ask, if you need the answer. Umm, but then the answers are there when they're needed, so I believe that too. So I suppose I'd say that everything relates to God's revelation, and if you don't know what God's view on the matter is, umm, I would say, ask him. He always seems to me perfectly willing to answer sensible questions.

I think we'll draw to a close, if that's alright with you. Many thanks indeed.

Roger, 31, Assimilative believer

Bonjour. Vous pouvez m'expliquer un peu qui vous êtes, votre nom, votre âge, s'il vous plaît, et ce que vous faites, tout ça, dans la vie.

D'accord. Donc je m'appelle Roger, et j'ai trente et un ans, et je suis actuellement séminariste. Je suis en, j'ai terminé ma troisième année de théologie. Avant de rentrer au séminaire j'ai, hum, j'ai fait une école de commerce pendant quatre ans à Paris, et j'ai travaillé deux ans. Après, je suis rentré au séminaire.

Ah oui. Donc ça fait, c'est la fin de la troisième année.

Bah, c'est ça. Donc, heu...

Et ça marche en trimestres comme chez nous? Vous avez trois trimestres d'études, avec des grandes vacances?

Oui, c'est ça. Oui. C'est pareil.

Ah oui. Effectivement. Donc il y a beaucoup de liens. C'est vrai. La Soeur avait raison! Bon. Je vais voir si ça... Si vous êtes prêt, on passera à la première question. Elles sont toutes écrites sur un papier, vous voyez ici, mais j'ai fait les papiers pour les moniales puisque je ne savais pas qu'il y aurait la possibilité d'interviewer d'autres personnes. Donc pour la première, c'est pas devenir Moniale, c'est devenir Prêtre, finalement, pour vous. Pourquoi vous avez décidé de devenir Prêtre? Est-ce que votre, euh, vos études, euh, vous ont permis de réaliser vos aspirations originelles?

Euh, attendez, vos études, c'est à dire que vous marquez...

Oui, je sais. Mais c'est pour les Moniales.

D'accord.

Donc, ce serait... Avec mes élèves j'ai dit, Est-ce que vos études ici dans notre institut vous ont permis de réaliser vos aspirations?

Donc, pourquoi j'ai décidé de devenir Prêtre?

Oui.

Je crois que c'est avant tout pour, euh, par amour du Christ, euh. Parce que je pense souvent à cette parole du Curé d'Ars, qui dit: 'Le Sacerdoce, c'est l'amour du coeur de Jésus.' Et je pense que c'est, avant tout un amour du Christ, et puis, euh, de par là même un amour qu'on a envie de, de, de transmettre aux autres. Faire découvrir la foi. Donc amour du Christ à travers les Sacrements et à travers la Parole.

Oui. Vous avez senti un appel?

Oui. (Il rigole)

Vous savez expliquer un tout petit peu?

Ben, disons, je crois que c'est, c'est humm, c'est un appel, c'est pas, c'est pas quelque chose qui a été très, euh, c'est pas, ça n'a pas été très, comment dire, ça n'a pas été un moment décisif, donné. C'est plus un cheminement. Cet appel est sous forme de cheminement. Et, euh, donc un chemin, un chemin avec le Christ.

A partir de quel âge?

Vers seize ans. Seize ans.

Et comment vous avez senti... c'était comment votre cheminement... C'est trop personnel?

Non, mais non. Je suis en train de réfléchir. Qu'est-ce que vous voulez savoir, exactement?

Ben, ce que je ne comprends pas trop, un cheminement pour être Prêtre, c'est très loin de mon expérience. Je ne comprends pas trop.

Et qu'est-ce que vous ne comprenez pas?

Euh, qu'est-ce que ça veut dire un cheminement, un cheminement de devenir Prêtre.

Euh, c'est une rencontre. Une rencontre avec une personne, un amour, qui grandit. Une rencontre avec une personne qui est le Christ. Et, et qu'on rencontre, justement, donc, à travers les Sacrements. Principalement l'Eucharistie, et là, et là, la réconciliation. Et qu'on rencontre aussi, euh, donc, à travers les autres, à travers les grands rassemblements comme par exemple des, les grands rassemblements... les journées mondiales de la jeunesse, que, j'en ai fait plusieurs. Et c'est une rencontre aussi à travers la Parole de Dieu, et l'oraison, des temps de silence. C'est aussi une recherche de la vérité. Je pense à une parole de Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus: 'Je n'ai jamais cherché que la vérité.' C'est vrai que ça, ça c'était assez... assez prononcé pour moi au départ, surtout. Et puis, c'est, euh, c'est l'expérience de, de, comment dire, de... Je vais à Lourdes depuis l'âge de huit ans, tous les ans, pour servir les malades, et je crois que là, ça aide aussi. Le contact de Sainte Bernadette, la ville de Lourdes, ce qui se passe à Lourdes. Et là, dernièrement j'ai lu un livre justement sur Lourdes, écrit par Monseigneur Théasse: 'Ce que croyait Bernadette.' Et, et je me suis rendu compte que j'avais beaucoup reçu à Lourdes, notamment l'essentiel de la foi, mais que c'était pas toujours, c'était pas très conscient en moi. Et qu'en fait, l'essentiel du message de la foi est divulgué à Lourdes, à la fois par la vie de Sainte Bernadette, à la fois par, euh, par la ville de Lourdes, ce que ça représente, les apparitions, et le lien en fait qui existe entre Lourdes et Rome, Lourdes et le Pape et l'Eglise.

Oui. Je connais Lourdes. J'y suis allée deux fois. C'est beau, euh? J'aime bien! Là je comprends mieux. Merci! Alors, on passe à la deuxième. Et alors... Décrivez, s'il vous plaît, comment votre vie de Séminariste, donc votre vie, pas votre vie ici, mais votre vie de Séminariste, et les leçons apprises dans vos études ont modelé votre vie de foi. Et comment votre vie de foi a influencé les leçons que vous apprenez en tant que Séminariste.

Moi, je, je dirais que les leçons apprises, c'est vraiment un éclairage au niveau intellectuel, mais justement qui, cet éclairage appelle à une mise en pratique. Donc je pense que le Séminaire, c'est vraiment un lieu où il y a vraiment une unité de vie entre ce qu'on nous enseigne et ce qu'on nous demande de vivre. Et, euh, donc les cours que l'on recevait le matin étaient vraiment une incitation finalement à, à vivre de plus en plus ce qu'on nous demandait de vivre, c'est à dire, à la fois l'Eucharistie que l'on faisait entre les cours, et notre, donc, il y a la dimension spirituelle, la dimension communautaire, notre vie fraternelle, et puis notre vie de prière. Donc la vie de prière était éclairée par la vie de l'intelligence, et de même, l'intelligence était éclairée par la vie de prière.

Je comprends, mais est-ce que vous pouvez me donner un exemple? Un exemple concret, euh...

Oui, oui... euh,

Si non, c'est pas grave.

D'accord. Comme ça, j'en vois pas très... J'en vois pas des (?masses?), mais c'est sûr qu'il y en a plein, quoi! Comme, par exemple, on a eu des cours sur, Si, un exemple, on a eu des cours sur la confession, par exemple. Donc, c'est sûr qu'après, dans la mise en pratique, moi, cette année, ça a changé ma manière de confesser. Pas encore, mais, euh, c'est un projet, quoi. L'exemple était de dire, euh, il faut surtout se confesser à la lumière de la Parole de Dieu. Parce que c'est Dieu qui nous éclaire. C'est sa parole qui nous éclaire sur ce que nous sommes. C'est pas nous, notre propre intelligence qui éclaire sur notre propre vie, on doit, on doit, on doit regarder sa vie à la lumière de la parole de Dieu. Ça, c'est quelque chose que je ne faisais pas tellement, Je pense que j'ai ... Je vais m'y mettre.

Oui, d'accord. Et la confession commence à changer, donc?

J'ai pas encore, j'ai pas encore tellement, j'ai pas encore passé à l'acte, quoi.

Oui. Vous savez déjà comment ça va se faire? Ou ça va se faire au fur et à mesure, petit à petit comme ça.

Je crois que ça va se mettre en place petit à petit.

Oui. Oui.

Ou alors, si, d'autres exemples sur...par exemple, on a eu des cours sur les funérailles. Donc, moi, j'ai pas encore mis en pratique, mais bien souvent je pense que quelqu'un de ma famille meurt, et ben, je serais un peu plus au courant.

Au courant de quoi?

Ben, des différents étapes des funérailles. Comment ça se passe concrètement pour un Prêtre. Pour une famille, comment est-ce qu'il faut préparer les funérailles, le choix des lectures, les intentions de prière, le déroulement des funérailles en elles-mêmes, est-ce que par exemple le corps, moi je ne savais pas, est-ce qu'on a intérêt à garder le corps de sa famille chez soi, ou plutôt, ou non. Donc, c'est plutôt oui, parce que c'est, c'est, c'est mieux pour, euh, pour l'ensemble de la famille. Il y a un temps de prière, il y a un temps de... c'est, beaucoup de choses qu'on a découvert. C'est sûr que par exemple dans un autre domaine au niveau métaphysique, c'est sûr que moi, je me suis rendu compte que dès que je suis arrivé là où je suis, la métaphysique répondait, la philosophie répondait à beaucoup de questions que je me suis posées. Que je me posais et dont j'avais pas les réponses.

Comme?

Ben, toute cette, euh, donc là au niveau métaphysique, c'est assez loin, euh. Et c'est, uhm, alors, plus au niveau anthropologique, ça répondait à, Qu'est-ce que l'homme? Donc, toute le, toute, on a fait une année d'anthropologie sur l'homme. La volonté, l'utilisation des sens, l'intelligence, la mémoire, l'imagination, comment est-ce que tout ça se met en place. Donc ça aide à mieux, à mieux se connaître, et puis...

Oui, tout à fait. Nous on fait moins de ça. On fait moins ça. Ce serait bien de le faire, mais on en fait moins.

Ou alors, la métaphysique aussi. C'est vrai que j'aime beaucoup aussi la métaphysique. C'est plus... c'est sur l'être, donc, Qu'est-ce que l'être? Donc, euh, c'est plus compliqué.

Oui. Ça influence votre foi?

Ben, ça répondait sûrement à des questions beaucoup, très profondes. C'est sûr que j'ai été émerveillé quand j'ai lu ça. Notamment, un livre du Père Hemoney, Pierre Marie Hemoney, qui s'appelle, 'La Métaphysique pour les Simples'. Donc c'est un traité, il a fait une trilogie: 'La (?) pour les Simples', 'Une Métaphysique pour les Simples', et puis, le troisième livre je ne me souviens plus. Donc c'est vraiment, bon, c'est un Dominicain qui a... pas loin de quatre vingts ans, et qui est de Fribourg. Et, son but était vraiment de rendre accessible à tout le monde les données fondamentales de la métaphysique.

Ah oui, en effet. C'est bien. C'est intéressant. C'est ce que j'aime bien avec les questions. J'apprends beaucoup de choses aussi! Bon, la troisième. Décrivez, s'il vous plaît, et donnez des exemples du rôle que la bible joue dans votre vie.

(Longue pause). Moi, je prendrais plus, umm, je prendrais un aspect un peu... hum, d'ordre mystique. De la prière. Umm, il y a une parole que j'aime beaucoup, c'est, et puis, c'est surtout une méthode d'oraison, parce que, comment dire, la distinction entre oraison, méditation, contemplation n'est pas très, finalement, pas très facile. Et, euh, et donc, moi je sais que j'aime bien partir, par exemple, à partir des Chartreux, il y a notamment une phrase de Guy de Chartreux sur la Lectio Divina. Donc, la lecture méditée de la bible, et qui dit, qui dit ça en fait: Euh, Chercher en lisant, avec l'Ecriture, Trouver en méditant, euh, Frapper en priant, et Entrer en contemplant. Et alors après il explique, et il dit, La lecture porte la nourriture à la bouche, la méditation donc de l'ordre intellectuel, (c'est moi qui rajoute), la mâche et la broie, la parole, la prière on acquiert la saveur, et, et, et la contemplation, cette saveur est elle-même qui réjouit et refait le coeur. Donc, moi, c'est plus, comment dire, pour revenir à la question, euh, je pense que la Parole de Dieu est source de joie si elle est, si on prend le temps de bien la méditer, de bien la lire, de bien la, la prier. Elle peut vraiment être source de joie, et je pense que c'est la source de joie qui peut vraiment combler le coeur humain.

Oui. Oui, je comprends très bien. Est-ce qu'elle a d'autres rôles, vous pensez, dans votre vie? Ou c'est principalement ça?

Non, c'est sûr qu'elle a sûrement beaucoup d'autres rôles, comme, euh, la révélation, la révélation chrétienne, donc la bible, c'est la révélation chrétienne. C'est, c'est, c'est une loi qui, qui peut être perçue comme extérieure à nous-mêmes. C'est d'abord une loi qui, qui, qui est plus un guide, un chemin. C'est à dire que, je penserais plutôt à St Bernard, sur la liberté humaine, parce que j'avais fait un travail qui m'avait beaucoup éclairé sur ce que je voulais savoir, un peu l'articulation entre le libre arbitre et la grâce. Comment ça s'articulait. Et euh, et alors, St Bernard distingue le libre arbitre, le libre bon vouloir et le libre bon plaisir. Et en fait, il dit que le libre arbitre c'est la volonté, le libre, euh, le libre bon volonté c'est le savoir, et le libre bon plaisir, c'est le vouloir. Et en fait il dit que tout le monde est doué de volonté, même, chaque être humain est doué d'une volonté humaine. Ça, c'est ce qu'il appelle le libre arbitre. Mais, euh, si vous voulez, c'est bien d'avoir de la volonté, mais il faut savoir ce qu'on peut en faire, ce qu'on doit en faire. Et le premier rôle, d'après moi, de l'Ecriture, c'est de nous indiquer ce qu'il faut faire. Et c'est pas quelque chose qui vient nous contraindre notre liberté, mais qui vient, justement nous la donner. Et je pense souvent à l'exemple d'un petit enfant, par exemple, qui est dans une cuisine, où il y a une plaque chauffante, et le père dit, ben, ne mets pas ta main sur la plaque. Il peut très bien percevoir ça comme une contrainte, s'il le fait, il verra qu'il se brûlera. Eh ben, moi, je pense que la révélation chrétienne, la loi que Dieu nous donne, c'est du même ordre. Donc c'est un éclairage de notre intelligence, pour savoir ce qu'on doit faire. Et le libre bon plaisir, parce que St Bernard dit 'C'est bien de savoir ce qu'il faut faire mais encore faut-il pouvoir le faire.' Il dit que sans le Christ, on ne peut pas. Sans la grâce, on ne peut pas. Dans la prière on obtient le pouvoir de faire ce qu'on sait, ce qu'il faut faire. Voilà un petit peu.

Oui, oui. Ça, ça rejoint notre tradition aussi un peu. Si vous voulez, après, je peux vous parler de ça. Bon, c'est bien. Merci. Alors la quatrième. Trouvez-vous qu'il y a des aspects de votre foi qui entrent en conflit? Pouvez-vous donner un exemple, s'il y

en a, et si vous n'en avez pas, quels sont les aspects de votre foi avec lesquels vous avez le plus de difficulté à vivre?

(Pause) Je ne pense pas qu'il y ait, enfin, comme ça, à brûle pour point, je pense pas qu'il y ait des aspects de ma foi qui entrent en conflit. Je ne pense pas. Je pense que c'est justement quelque chose qui unifie. Qui nous unifie, qui est unifié. Et, euh, je pense que les différents mystères de la foi s'éclairent l'un l'autre. Et n'entrent pas en contradiction. Je crois pas. Je crois pas qu'il y ait de contradiction interne dans les différents mystères de la foi. Je crois qu'au contraire, quand on approfondit un mystère, on comprend mieux les autres.

Oui. Vous pouvez me donner un exemple de ça, alors? De cette unité?

Des Dogmes?

Oui.

(Pause) Pas facile comme ça.

Non, ben, c'est pas grave s'il n'y en a pas. Donc, votre foi c'est... c'est pas vraiment difficile à vivre?

(Pause, puis il rigole)

C'est pas une question, euh...

Non, non, non. Je réfléchis, parce que... la foi, en fait, je ne crois pas que ça soit la foi qui soit difficile à vivre. C'est l'acte de foi qu'on pose qui est difficile à poser. Je crois plutôt ça, moi. Et l'acte de foi implique une soumission de notre part. Et ça, je pense que c'est difficile. Je pense que c'est la difficulté majeure. C'est de se soumettre.

A quoi?

A la volonté de Dieu sur nous. Je pense que c'est une des causes, une des conséquences du péché originel. C'est l'homme qui veut prendre la place de Dieu. 'Vous serez comme des dieux'. Il ne veut pas se soumettre. Il veut pas revenir petit enfant. Je pense que c'est l'obéissance qui est le, quelque chose de plus difficile, dans la foi. Et je pense que, la foi en elle-même, le contenu de la foi, ne me pose pas de problème. Je ne crois pas, parce que ça, c'est un mystère, si vous voulez, qu'on approfondit, au fur et à mesure qu'on avance mais c'est plus accepter de se soumettre. Ça, ça m'est difficile. Mais quand j'y arrive, je me rends compte que c'est source de joie. Donc, euh, on, ça incite à continuer...

Oui. Ça je comprends aussi! Oui. Tout à fait. Bon, c'est bien. D'accord. Merci. La cinquième. Si vous deviez défendre votre foi, de quoi vous serviriez-vous pour la justifier, et quels arguments avez-vous pour la justifier à vous-même?

Moi, je, ma réponse, c'est pas de l'ordre de l'argument. C'est de l'ordre de la vie. C'est à dire que, euh, là je pense notamment une foi, euh, avec, il y avait un chef

d'entreprise qui était venu à Ars, et j'avais, on m'avait demandé de lui faire visiter le village. Alors, il m'avait, il m'avait, il m'avait interrogé notamment concernant tous les problèmes de, de la sexualité vis-à-vis des jeunes. Il m'a dit, comment est-ce qu'on, comment leur transmettre le message? Et moi, je leur avais répondu, et je crois que je suis toujours d'accord avec ça, je leur avais dit, écoutez, proposez-leur, si vous avez des jeunes qui font un peu, qui ne respectent pas ce que dit l'Eglise, proposez-leur de vivre comme dit l'Eglise pendant un mois, et puis qu'après ils viennent vous revoir. Et puis s'ils sont plus heureux, bah, qu'ils continuent, et puis s'ils sont malheureux, bah, qu'ils s'arrêtent. C'est pas de l'ordre de l'argument, je pense que c'est de l'ordre de l'expérience.

Oui, oui. D'accord. Donc, c'est, Faites-le et vous verrez.

Voilà.

D'accord. Et dans votre vie, bon ben, évidemment vous essayer de le faire, et c'est votre expérience donc, si vous le faites, vous trouvez la raison.

Oui.

Un exemple?

Oui. Je suis la voie, la vérité et la vie, quoi. C'est le Christ. Il est la voie, la vérité, donc c'est de l'ordre de l'intelligence, et c'est cette voie, ce chemin, cette intelligence, elle mène à la vie. A plus de vie. Donc, mais un exemple concret...

Oui. Ça, ça m'intéresse. Comment vous savez que, par exemple, donc, c'est le bonheur qui vous dit finalement que...

Que c'est le bon chemin.

Qui justifie le choix que vous avez fait. Le bonheur.

Oui, c'est l'épanouissement, je pense.

Oui, c'est la paix, d'accord. Donc, c'est ça qui juge finalement si, si le choix que vous avez fait est le bon choix ou pas.

Oui. C'est vrai que je pense quand vous dites ça, un saint triste est un triste saint et on est tous appelé à la sainteté, mais je crois que c'est dans la joie, et je crois que, bon, ben, c'est vrai que la souffrance fait partie du chemin puisque nous sommes chrétiens. On porte une croix, mais cette croix est inséparable de la joie. C'est paradoxal, c'est de l'ordre de la foi, mais je crois que c'est vrai.

Oui. Ça m'intéresse. C'est bien. Donc, votre argument c'est qu'on est appelé à être joyeux... Est-ce qu'il y a, donc, si on arrive à avoir ça, on est dans la bonne voie.

Je pense, oui.

Et s'il y avait un non-Chrétien qui vous disait qu'il avait la paix mais d'une autre manière. Qui n'était pas dans la voie chrétienne?

Là, je pense que, que... Comment là, c'est j'allais dire oui. C'est plus, c'est le fruit de cours qu'on a reçus mais qui nous disent que tous les, que dans les autres religions non-chrétiennes, il y a des vérités, qui sont vraies, et qui découlent finalement de l'Eglise catholique. Tout passe par le Christ. Et c'est une, c'est à dire que la paix qu'ils trouvent, en fait, c'est une partie de ce que nous on a. Et nous, on a la plénitude. Donc on est privilégié. Je ne sais pas si ça répond à votre question.

Oui. Je pensais par exemple à, bon, un petit exemple concret, s'il y avait un couple qui vivait sans être mariés, hors de mariage, et ils vous disaient, ils vous disaient que ils ont la paix dans ce qu'ils font. Et ils sont joyeux, ils ont le bonheur ensemble, etc etc. mais c'est contre l'enseignement de l'Eglise.

J'en douterais.

Quoi, de leur...

Oui. Oui, je pense, oui.

Pourquoi?

C'est à dire... Quelle est leur situation?

Bon, ben, ils vivaient ensemble, hors de mariage, ils n'étaient pas mariés, et donc, bon, ben, ça, c'est contre l'enseignement de l'église. Mais ils vous disent qu'ils sont heureux, ils ont la joie, ils ont la paix.

(Pause) Je ne sais pas si j'en douterais, mais, euh, mais euh, mais je pense qu'il y aurait une plénitude de notre côté qu'ils n'auraient peut-être pas, à laquelle ils n'auraient peut-être pas accès. Mais je ne sais pas si je peux douter du fait qu'ils soient heureux. Même s'ils vivent pas comme l'Eglise le dit. Je pense quand même que la Révélation est faite pour faire grandir l'homme et pour son bonheur. Donc, à partir du moment où on, c'est pas qu'on n'obéit pas, mais, enfin, moi, je peux, pour prendre un autre exemple très concret, on se rend compte quand même que le Sacrement du mariage, c'est, c'est avec le Christ, quoi. C'est le Christ, c'est l'union au Christ, c'est la prière qui permet aux époux de rester fidèles toute leur vie et de se supporter. Et qu'on s'est quand même rendu compte avec soixante huit, notamment en France où il y a eu une désertification des églises, que le nombre de divorces a augmenté, et je pense qu'on peut le mettre en corrélation quand même. Si une foi qui n'est pas fondée sur le Christ, l'homme, l'homme voué à lui même, qu'est-ce qu'il peut faire, quoi.

Oui, oui. C'est sûr.

Donc c'est un peu dans cet ordre-là que je dirais j'en douterais, mais, mais je ne suis pas sûr de mon coup du tout. Ils peuvent très bien être heureux. Mais c'est sûr que

l'homme est pauvre. C'est ce que je dirais, quoi. L'homme livré à lui-même est pauvre.

Donc, c'est moins heureux qu'il ne le seraient s'ils vivaient autrement.

Oui, ou alors, c'est, ou alors je dirais ils n'ont pas découvert un amour qui est l'amour du Christ. Voilà. Peut-être ça.

D'accord. Oui.

A la limite, je comprendrais qu'ils n'aient pas conscience de ça. Oui.

Oui, oui. Je vous comprends. Je vous pousse un tout petit peu parce qu'il faut que j'ai les mots! Même si je comprends, je ne peux pas, je ne peux pas baser mes arguments sur le silence si vous voulez. Donc je vous demande parce que j'ai besoin de réponses, c'est tout. Bon, ben, merci. Alors, la sixième. Est-ce que vous faites une différence entre lire des livres pour vous aider dans votre vie spirituelle et dévotionnelle, et lire des livres simplement pour l'étude? Si oui, lisez-vous ces livres différemment?

(Pause) Moi, je pense pas qu'il y ait de, non, je, je, comme je vous disais tout-à-l'heure, c'est vrai que notre vie au Séminaire est très unifiée. C'est à dire que le côté étude éclaire vraiment notre vie tous les jours. Et c'est vrai que, donc, il y a des livres comme la vie des Saints, qui est plus, qui sont plus orientés vers la vie, la dévotion, et c'est vrai aussi que les livres intellectuels aident aussi beaucoup. Pour moi, l'homme on forme un tout, quoi, si vous voulez. Je pense qu'on formale tout. Je lis pas, je ne peux pas dire que je lise les livres différemment. J'essaie de les comprendre aussi bien les uns que les autres.

Oui. Et vous... vous préférez un certain genre de livre, ou vous favorisez...

Oui, plutôt les... la spiritualité.

Oui. Pourquoi?

Je ne sais pas. Je suis attiré par ça. La sagesse.

La sagesse?

Mmm. La philosophie, j'aime bien aussi. J'aime beaucoup la philosophie.

Et vous le mettez en pratique, ou qu'est-ce que ça vous fait?

Oui, le but, une de mes grosses questions, c'est de savoir comment mettre en pratique. Comment. Le comment.

Moi aussi! Donc le livre... Est-ce qu'il y a des livres qu'on vous oblige à étudier qui vraiment vous ne disent rien du tout?

Pas beaucoup en fait dans mon séminaire. Là on a une très grande liberté. Liberté de choix. On est très peu contraint à lire des livres.

Ah oui? Donc ils ne vous disent pas, Il faut lire ça, il faut lire ça.

Non... Bon, ben, si, on nous conseille, quoi, mais on n'est jamais obligé.

Et vous choisissez? Vous dites, bon, je prends celui-là et pas celui-là?

Oui.

C'est quoi qui fait le choix alors?

Je peux difficilement dire. Mais, comment dire, j'ai pas, ça tourne toujours autour du même sujet, moi, les livres que je lis, voyez. C'est pas, par exemple, le choix entre un livre de science-fiction et puis un livre sur la foi. Moi, c'est souvent, c'est à l'intérieur de la foi donc c'est suivant la question que je me pose.... Ou l'état dans lequel je me trouve.

Oui, d'accord. Donc c'est selon les questions que vous vous posez.

Mmm.

Oui. Donc c'est à la poursuite de ça.

Mmm.

Jamais l'inverse. C'est jamais que vous lisez quelque chose et puis vous avez des questions qui jaillissent.

Non, c'est vrai que c'est rarement comme ça.

D'accord. Comme je vous dis, il n'y a pas de bonne réponse, ni mauvaise! Bon. On continue. La septième. Quand vous lisez des livres théologiques ou écoutez les orateurs ou enseignants, utilisez-vous des critères pour juger de la justesse de l'enseignement? Quels sont ces critères? Qu'est-ce que c'est 'juste' pour vous?

(Pause) C'est sûr que... Comment dire... Moi, si j'ai choisi un peu le Séminaire où je suis, c'est parce que, je, je, j'avais besoin d'être, d'être en confiance par rapport à l'enseignement. Donc, euh, je, je, c'est vrai que ça m'aurait été très pénible à chaque fois de devoir me demander si ce qu'on m'enseignait était juste ou pas. Donc, moi, je rentre bien dans une, dans une situation de confiance dès le départ. Je ne remets pas en cause l'enseignement que je reçois.

D'accord. Et votre critère pour faire ce choix, c'était quoi? Quels étaient les critères pour faire ce choix de Séminaire?

Ben, je crois que c'est un ensemble du, c'est l'ensemble de la vie du séminaire qui était proposée. La conception de, de ce que proposait le séminaire en tant que vie pour

un séminariste. Je pense que c'est ça qui m'a décidé. Qui m'a, qui m'a fait dire ça me paraît, ça me paraît juste, ça me paraît bien. Donc c'est à dire avec une vie de prière forte, une vie, une vie communautaire forte, une vie intellectuelle qui, qui est mise en troisième position, qui est forte mais avec peut-être un manque de temps par moments. Mais c'est surtout une vie de prière importante, avec une vie communautaire forte qui est plus, qui est difficile à mettre en place, mais je pense que c'est par la confrontation avec les autres que, qu'on arrive à découvrir soi-même. Donc c'est les trois axes fondamentaux du séminaire. Et au niveau intellectuel, bon, ben, c'est sûr que peut-être inconsciemment je fais souvent le, le, les critères pour juger de la justesse d'un enseignement, c'est sûrement souvent par rapport à l'expérience de la vie. Je pense que ça doit être de cet ordre-là.

La vôtre?

Oui.

Donc vous entendez ou vous voyez quelque chose et vous voyez si ça revient à votre vie?

Oui, ou à l'enseignement de l'Eglise. C'est surtout ça quand même. Ce que dit l'Eglise.

Oui. Selon Vatican II, ou selon...

Oui, Vatican II. C'est sûr qu'au fur et à mesure de ma formation je me suis rendu compte que vraiment, surtout pour un Prêtre, ce que pense un Prêtre de telle ou telle question c'est bien, mais c'est pas le problème. Le Prêtre doit transmettre ce que dit l'Eglise. Ce que le Christ, lui, a transmis à ses Apôtres et ses Apôtres ont transmis aux autres. A la limite, on a même... je pense, à savoir... effacer son jugement personnel pour se soumettre encore une fois à l'enseignement de l'Eglise et puis transmettre le plus fidèlement possible ce qui dit l'Eglise. Moi, je pense que c'est ça qui, qui, un des critères de justesse.

Est-ce qu'il y a un Evêque Catholique qui prêche contre quelque chose du Vatican II? C'est ce qui arrive en France parfois? Votre réaction?

C'est délicat. Je sais qu'on doit obéissance à l'Evêque, ça c'est clair. Mais après on n'a pas le droit de poser des inquisitions contre la conscience, contre notre propre conscience. Si on sait que l'Evêque nous demande pas de faire ce que demande l'Eglise, je pense qu'on peut, en bonne conscience, lui désobéir. On n'a pas non plus à violer sa conscience, je pense.

Est-ce vous avez jamais trouvé que vous étiez d'accord avec un Evêque qui était contre l'enseignement du Vatican II, ou l'inverse, en accord avec Vatican II et contre un Evêque?

La première question c'était quoi?

Je vous ai donné deux situations, la première c'était d'être en accord avec un Evêque qui était contre le Vatican II...

Non, je ne pense pas que ça me soit arrivé.

Ou l'inverse. En accord avec le Vatican II et en désaccord avec un Evêque.

Si moi je suis en accord avec le Vatican II? Ça revient à la même. Ça doit être la même chose que la première, non?

Là, c'est, s'il y avait un Evêque qui... Comment je peux vous le dire... Si, si, si c'était votre Evêque qui n'était pas en accord avec le Vatican II. Si vous seriez plutôt en accord avec le Vatican II ou si vous seriez plutôt en accord avec l'Evêque.

Ah, d'accord. Je serais plutôt d'accord avec Vatican II. Avec l'Eglise.

Oui. Et il y a plusieurs Evêques en France qui, qui, qui ont des problèmes avec des aspects du Vatican II?

Là je ne connais pas assez. Je ne peux pas vous dire. Ce que je peux vous dire, je pense qu'il y a un renouvellement des Evêques en France. Qui me paraît bon.

Chez nous l'Eglise Catholique en France a une réputation d'être une église... plus ouverte, fin, plus moderne, plus, plus disponible, plus prête à aller en désaccord avec le Vatican II. Je ne sais pas. J'ai vécu aussi en Espagne et l'Eglise en Espagne est plus traditionnelle que l'Eglise en France. Je ne sais pas si c'est vrai.

Mmm. Peut-être c'est en train de changer maintenant, il me semble.

Quoi, l'Eglise en France?

Oui. Au niveau des Evêques, je pense qu'il y a une plus grande fidélité à Rome, il me semble.

Et pourquoi vous avez choisi, fin, vous m'avez déjà dit pourquoi vous avez choisi votre Séminaire actuel, mais, est-ce qu'il y a un Séminaire que vous pouvez nommer auquel c'était absolument hors de question que vous alliez à ce Séminaire?

Je n'y tiens pas tellement, nommer.

D'accord, c'est bon! Impeccable. C'est pas grave, c'était juste par intérêt. La huitième. Lorsqu'on vous présente plusieurs vues ou différentes interprétations sur un enseignement biblique, quelle est votre réaction?

(Pause) C'est pas... Comment dire... Est-ce que les... C'est sûr que c'est pas très facile. Mais euh, c'est pas forcément contradictoire, je pense, mais, hum, quand on présente plusieurs vues différentes, elles ne sont pas forcément contradictoires, opposées, mais peut-être qu'il y a une profondeur de la vérité qui, qui nous dépasse et qu'il faut accepter. Et qu'en fait peut-être ces différentes interprétations sont

différents éclairages qui éclairent la même vérité et qui ne sont pas forcément contradictoires. C'est un peu ce que je dirais. J'essayerais de comprendre dans ce sens là.

Même si elles paraissent contradictoires? J'essaye de vous donner un exemple mais je n'arrive pas à trouver non plus!

D'accord.

Non, je n'arrive pas à trouver. Bon, dans ce cas là, donc, c'est pas un problème finalement. Est-ce que l'Eglise Catholique a un enseignement, je ne connais pas très bien. Est-ce que l'Eglise Catholique a un enseignement sur toute la bible? Ou elle accepte plusieurs...

Non, je pense qu'il y a des données de foi qui ne sont pas arrêtées. Qui sont, qui sont laissées ouvertes à la recherche. Il y a certains domaines où l'Eglise s'est prononcée. Où je pense que la question est tranchée. Il y a d'autres domaines où c'est, c'est, c'est ouvert à la réflexion, quoi.

Et vous connaissez la foi protestante un tout petit peu?

Un petit peu.

Huh, alors par exemple, pour vous donner un exemple simple, sur la Vierge. La foi protestante dit que quand Jésus est né, c'était d'une Vierge, mais que Marie n'était pas restée Vierge après la naissance de Jésus. Tandis que, si j'ai bien compris, l'Eglise Catholique dit que elle est bien restée Vierge /après/ après. Alors ça dépend d'une interprétation de la bible. Donc voilà deux, deux vues contradictoires sur ce que la bible dit.

Mais la différence, je pense, c'est que la vérité, nous, on la reçoit de l'Eglise, euh. Vous comprenez? Et que pour nous l'Eglise est une mère.

Oui? Donc, dans ce cas-là, c'est l'Eglise qui a décidé...

Oui, je pense qu'on fait confiance à l'Eglise.

Oui. Et l'Eglise, c'est l'Eglise Catholique.

Oui. L'Epouse du Christ.

Oui. Je vais vous pousser un tout petit peu car ça m'intéresse!

Il me semble avoir vu ça en cours, que le, le, le protestantisme refuse l'Eglise, refuse la médiation de l'Eglise. D'après ce que j'ai compris.

Euh, oui. Mais il y a l'Eglise anglicane qui est au milieu. Elle aussi elle dirait que Marie n'était pas restée vierge après la naissance de Jésus. (Rire doucement) Fin, vous m'avez donné votre réponse. C'est bon. Je comprends. Bon, on continue.

Pouvez-vous me donner un exemple où vos études chrétiennes vous ont conduit à modifier ou adapter ce que vous croyiez ou pratiquiez auparavant? Alors, 'auparavant', ce serait avant de devenir séminariste. Vous m'avez déjà parlé de quelques exemples en tous cas...

Oui, oui. Au niveau de la confession, par exemple?

Oui, oui.

C'est sûr que par exemple au niveau de la métaphysique, pour prendre, c'est sûr que ça, c'est notre rapport à l'être qui nous, qui nous, qui est différent après avoir fait de métaphysique. C'est à dire que rapidement, le, le, je crois que le but un peu de la métaphysique c'est un peu de parvenir à s'émerveiller de l'être, de l'existence des choses. Savoir qu'une chose, ça existe. Ça paraît banale à l'heure actuelle, mais je pense que justement on a perdu beaucoup de choses et ça a rapport à l'être, le fait qu'une chose existe, qu'elle soit, j'allais dire, pour utiliser un langage métaphysique, portée au dessus du néant, à chaque instant, je crois que c'est une merveille. Donc là, pour citer un exemple, par exemple, une étude où on apprécie où on se reconnaît que, que cette chose existe, non pas par elle même mais par un autre. Donc c'est... source d'émerveillement.

Oui. Oui. Très bien. Vous m'en avez déjà parlé de ça avant aussi. C'est bon. Alors, celle-là, elle est un peu pareil: Est-ce qu'il a eu un événement dans votre vie qui vous a fait 'repenser' la façon de laquelle vous compreniez votre foi? Quelque chose qui s'est passé dans votre vie?

C'est sûr, c'est sûr, mais je ne sais pas comment le formuler. C'est sûr que la foi, c'est hum, c'est, c'est pas quelque chose de, comment dire, à un moment donné j'ai pu percevoir la foi comme une espèce de refuge. Et euh, c'est difficile à expliquer! C'est plus la découverte que vivre avec Dieu c'est vraiment une aventure et que il n'y a pas de chose toute faite. Et que, que c'est toujours nouveau, la vie est toujours nouvelle, c'est pas, Il faut faire ceci, il faut faire cela, et si on a fait ça, c'est bon, c'est OK. C'est euh, c'est plus rentrer dans une dynamique de... d'aventure, de combat, qui est en même temps source de joie, de...

Oui. Et un événement qui vous a fait repenser parce que c'était un événement dur, un événement qui a posé un défi, par exemple, à vos croyances...

Ben oui, c'est sûr, comment dire, j'ai eu un événement où je, je peux..., dans le courant de mes études, donc je, j'ai, j'étais parti pour Rome et puis j'en suis revenu. Parce que ça pas été. Ça a été trop vite donc j'étais un peu perdu, quoi. Donc, je suis resté cinq semaines et ça, c'est pas bien passé donc je crois que c'est à partir de ce moment-là qu'il y a eu un peu une prise de conscience, de beaucoup de choses.

Et... Dites-moi non si vous voulez, mais est-ce vous voulez bien m'en parler un peu plus?

Euh...

C'était quoi, par exemple, vous m'avez dit que vous n'étiez pas prêt. Prêt comment?

C'est, c'est, c'est, c'était le passage entre le premier cycle et le second cycle. Et quand on rentre dans le second cycle, parce que... on dit généralement au séminaire que le premier cycle, on a une année de discernement, et deux années de philosophie. Bon, donc, on dit que l'année de discernement c'est fait pour discerner. Donc, après l'année de discernement ça doit être clair, et on considère quand même globalement que le premier cycle est quand même un temps de discernement général. Et qu'une fois qu'on rentre au second cycle, moi, je ne sais pas, moi, ce que je voulais, c'était que les choses soient vraiment claires, au niveau de l'engagement, et, et ben, c'était un peu trop vite. Donc je suis passé du premier en second cycle un peu trop rapidement. Ce n'était pas mûr. Donc, euh...

Alors, c'était quoi le choc?

Oh le choc, c'est que, j'étais pas, j'étais pas prêt, quoi. J'ai changé à la fois de communauté, bon, ben, c'était très compliqué. Il y a eu plein de choses qui se sont mises ensemble. A la fois des problèmes de santé, des changements de lieu...

Les changements de...?

De lieu. J'ai changé de séminaire. Je suis passé au Séminaire français à Rome. Changement de langue, de pays, de... changement de Diocèse, enfin, de dépendance de Diocèse, tout ça, donc il y avait un ensemble de choses, et finalement, m'ont perdu, quoi, un petit peu. Donc je suis revenu.

Et vous allez y aller encore une fois? Vous irez à Rome après?

Ah, ben, je ne sais pas. A moins qu'on m'y envoie, mais pour le moment c'est pas prévu.

D'accord. Et comment cela vous a fait... Dans votre foi. Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé à votre foi, votre façon de vivre. C'est une question de déstabilisation? De rétablir un peu.

Oui, c'était plus une question de déstabilisation.

Pas les croyances.

Pas la croyance en elle-même, mais la manière de la vivre peut-être. Pas au niveau de l'objet à croire, ça, ça n'a pas changé, mais c'est la manière de le faire. La manière de vivre, je pense.

Comment?

Euh... En étant plus, euh, plus combatif finalement. Plus...

Maintenant.

Oui.

Contre?

Contre la vie en elle-même. Le combat un peu de la vie. Et accepter que les choses ne soient pas mises en place, euh, que la vie c'est perpétuellement nouveau et que, on n'a pas à chercher de fausse sécurité, quoi. Finalement, approfondir sa foi en se reposant sur Dieu uniquement, je pense que c'est ça, que ça a dû m'apporter.

Oui. Bon, merci. Alors, le onzième. Y a-t-il des fois où la bible provoque en vous une réaction négative? Que faites-vous avec ces passages? S'il y en a.

Oui. Ben, j'essaie toujours de positiver. Je crois que je reconnais objectivement les choses que je ne comprends pas, mais je me dis, si c'est là, c'est que ça a un sens, quoi, c'est que ça veut nous dire quelque chose et, je prends pas forcément la peine de chercher jusqu'au bout. C'est peut-être un tort. Trouver la réponse. Et ça ne me scandalise pas plus que ça quoi, si vous voulez. Je m'arrête pas au scandale. Je ne m'arrête pas.

Vous pensez à un passage en particulier, ou...

Ben, je pense par rapport à..., oui, à des..., par exemple dans tout l'Ancien Testament, tous les massacres, toutes les guerres entre les ... C'est sûr que ça paraît scandaleux, quoi, en pleine. Mais...

Vous les mettez à côté, alors?

Bah, non. Pas forcément. Je m'arrête pas forcément au, au sens littéral, si vous voulez. Je ne sais pas comment expliquer. Humainement parlant, c'est sûr que c'est scandaleux, tuer quelqu'un. C'est clair. Ben, je ne sais pas. J'ai peut-être une vie un peu trop, trop, spiritualiste. Je ne sais pas. Mais non, parce que je pense que le plus important c'est quand même la vie éternelle, si vous voulez. Donc est-ce que tous les gens qui sont tués à la guerre sont finalement damnés? Je n'en sais rien, moi. C'est ça le plus important. 'Fin, c'est ce que je me dis.

Donc, vous prioritez dans la bible. Il y a des choses qui sont plus importantes. Le plus important. Puis il y a des choses qui sont moins importantes... Oui, d'accord. C'est ce que je fais aussi! Alors, celle-là, je crois que vous avez déjà répondu. Parce que ça revient plus ou moins à une autre question, donc, je ne sais pas s'il y a d'autres choses à dire... Peut-être pas.

Ben, comment, c'est pas vraiment des aspects de la foi en elle-même, et c'est peut-être la manière de la transmettre. Ça, ça fait difficulté. Ça c'est clair. C'est pas vraiment la foi en elle-même. C'est la manière de transmettre la foi. Dans le monde actuel. Avec les difficultés, les pressions, le mass-média, tout ça. C'est sûr qu'on a à faire à une forte opposition. Et euh, c'est plus dans ce sens là, quoi.

Juste pour moi, parce que je ne sais pas si là, si c'est une question de langue... Mais, qu'est-ce que vous... Quand je vous parle de la foi, qu'est-ce que vous comprenez de la foi? Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire, la foi?

La foi, c'est le contenu de la foi, c'est l'enseignement. C'est, c'est les différents articles du Crédo, quoi. Fin, c'est ce que je comprends. C'est ça, c'est ce que vous voulez dire?

Oui, oui, non, c'est parce que, bon, ben, évidemment il y a le mot 'foi' en anglais, et je voulais juste vérifier que quand vous parlez de la foi, ou quand en français on parle de la foi, ça veut dire la même chose que quand nous on parle de la foi. Et donc, vous faites une différence entre les croyances, la foi, ça fait les croyances et la pratique. Il y a cette différence.

Oui, je pense. Entre le contenu et puis le fait de la vivre.

Oui. Oui. Oui, c'est la même chose. Mais ça doit revenir finalement à la même chose.

Parce qu'il y a des gens qui croient mais qui ne pratiquent pas, quoi. Alors, est-ce qu'ils sont vraiment croyants? Ils peuvent très bien tout savoir mais pas mettre en pratique.

Oui. Oui. Mais finalement, quand on parle, quand on parle de la foi en général, ça, ça doit être la pratique du contenu? Non?

Euh, je ne sais pas.

Non, je, je, je vous pose la question. J'explore. Je fais une petite exploration.

Oui, oui, oui. Je réfléchis. Je ne sais pas. Mais, je ne sais plus. Ça me fait penser à une parole d'Écriture, quoi. C'est pas celui qui dit Seigneur, Seigneur, qui entrera dans le Royaume de Dieu, mais celui qui fera ma volonté, quoi. Vous voyez? Donc, euh, moi, j'aime bien distinguer la foi, ce que nous demande l'Eglise, mais après, bon, ben, soit on fait, soit on ne fait pas, quoi. Ça rejoint un peu le savoir et puis le pouvoir le faire, quoi. Je pense qu'il y a des gens qui peuvent très bien savoir ce qu'il faut faire puis pas vouloir le faire.

Oui. Oui, c'est sûr. Oui. Très bien. La treize. Avez-vous vécu des conflits entre votre expérience dans la vie, donc c'est pas dans la vie communautaire parce que ça c'est pour la vie ici (Notre Dame)...

On a une vie communautaire forte aussi, nous.

Ah oui, bon, ben, vous pouvez parler de votre vie communautaire, ou dans la vie quotidienne si vous voulez, et l'enseignement chrétien que vous avez reçu, qui venait soit de l'intérieur ou de l'extérieur du Séminaire. Comment avez-vous réagi?

Bon, sûrement, j'ai pas vraiment d'exemples en tête. Mais c'est clair que, bon, ma réaction c'est, de plus en plus qu'il ne faut pas juger les autres. Ne jugez pas. Je pense

que ça c'est très important. Je pense souvent aussi à St Jean de la Croix qui dit, pour réussir à la vie spirituelle il faut être bienveillant. Et puis je pense qu'on est vraiment des pauvres. On est des pauvres, donc euh, je crois qu'euh...

Alors, ça m'intéresse parce qu'il y avait l'autre question qui demandait sur la justesse de l'enseignement, par exemple. Alors, pour juger la justesse, il faut juger!

Ah oui, mais là, c'est pas juger la personne. Là je pensais, là on juge plus euh, conflit, moi je pensais qu'il s'agissait de juger des personnes. Comment avez-vous réagi...

Oui. Fin, c'était peut-être... Non, c'est l'enseignement chrétien. C'est pas la personne chrétienne.

Ah, d'accord. C'est l'enseignement. C'est sûr que là, si vraiment il y a, il y a quelque chose qui ne va pas entre ce qu'on nous demande de vivre et puis l'enseignement de l'Eglise, je pense qu'il faut aller le dire. Il faut réagir. Je crois que... J'ai pas... J'ai pas de souvenirs comme ça en tête, mais je crois que je l'ai fait. Fin, si vraiment c'étaient des choses importantes je crois que je l'aurais fait, euh. Si vraiment on nous demandait de faire quelque chose en contradiction avec notre foi, je crois que je l'aurais fait, c'est clair. Je prends un autre exemple. J'allais faire un BAFA (un BAFA, c'est pour être animateur de camp) et j'étais, j'étais inscrit avec une association qui soi disant était chrétienne, et euh, c'était pas, franchement, l'enseignement était, était mauvais, moi je suis parti, quoi. Je suis resté une journée et je suis parti.

Une journée!

Oui!

Qu'est-ce qu'il y avait dans l'enseignement qui, qui..

Huh, je ne me souviens plus bien mais, euh, ça n'allait pas!

Plein de choses.

Oui, oui, oui. Ça n'avait rien à faire, là.

Donc vous êtes parti.

Oui, oui, oui. (Rire, tous les deux).

Bon, ben, c'est bien. D'accord. Alors, la quatorzième, qui me fait rigoler. En Angleterre, des reportages ont été donnés sur Dieu qui aurait transformé par miracle le métal de plombages dentaires en or lors d'un service de louange. Comment réagissez-vous à cette nouvelle?

Bof...

Dites ce que vous voulez, euh?! (Rire)

Je suis méfiant vis-à-vis des reportages. Je suis méfiant vis-à-vis de la presse en général, première chose. Je suis très méfiant. Et puis, ben, moi j'ai envie de dire, je ne sais pas, quoi. Si, Dieu est libre. Il peut faire ce qu'il veut, quoi. Mais c'est pas fondamental pour ma foi, quoi. Je ne remettrais pas forcément en cause, euh. Je serais méfiant. Voilà un petit peu ce que je dirais.

Et si, parce que j'ai posé cette question à nos élèves, il y avait une, une jeune femme qui, qui était assise en face de moi, comme vous, elle m'a dit, oui, oui, oui, c'est vrai, parce que je connais quelqu'un. Je connais quelqu'un, et c'est pas de l'or jaune, c'est de l'or blanc, et euh, je connais une personne qui a reçu ce miracle.

Non, parce que moi, j'ai déjà assisté à d'autres miracles, effectivement. Comme, par exemple, par le Père Tardiff. Mais là, c'était des miracles d'ordre, d'ordre... de la santé. Et ma réaction a été de dire, euh, j'avais vraiment l'impression d'être un peu comme, parce que je me le disais souvent, si j'avais vécu aux temps du Christ, et que j'assistais à tous les miracles qu'il faisait, j'aurais une foi beaucoup plus grande. En fait, je me suis rendu compte que non. Parce que là, j'avais assisté à des miracles et je me suis dit, 'T'es toujours le même avec ta foi.'

Qu'est-ce que vous avez vu?

Ah bah, des gens qui par exemple ne pouvaient pas marcher le matin et qui marchaient le soir, oui.

A Lourdes?

Non, non. Pas à Lourdes. C'était en Belgique. A l'église de Coupelberg. Le Père Tardiff était venu.

Et vous en avez vu.

Ah oui, oui, oui. Et puis même, je sais que ça existe, quoi. Des prières de guérison, et des gens qui sont guéris. Oui. J'y crois, quoi. Mais d'après moi, il faut être prudent. C'est quand même un domaine où il faut être prudent, quoi.

Mais les plombages dentaires, c'est pas, c'est pas une question de santé.

Non, non. C'est pour ça que ça paraît un peu gros, mais bon, j'y mettrais pas ma foi, comme je vous disais, mais bon...

Ça ne vous fait pas poser des questions sur Dieu?

(Pause) Bon, c'est vrai, ça paraît bizarre, quand même. C'est vrai que ça paraît bizarre, quoi.

(Rire) Moi aussi! Très bizarre!

Oui, oui, oui. Parce que ça nous emmène à, un peu, à aimer Dieu pour argent, quoi. Alors que c'est un peu contradictoire. On ne peut pas aimer Dieu et l'argent. C'est pour ça que je serais très, très suspect.

Très méfiant. Moi aussi! Bon. On continue. Y a-t-il un problème éthique ou social qui vous touche particulièrement? Expliquez comment vous en êtes arrivé à une solution sur ce problème et les critères que vous avez utilisés.

(Pause) Je ne sais pas. Non, j'ai pas vraiment, j'ai pas vraiment réfléchi.

Vous avez des cours en éthique?

Oui, oui.

Qui, qui touchent quoi?

Donc, on a eu des cours sur, surtout pour les moyens de contraception, tous les problèmes de sexualité, tout ça.

Oui.

C'est très, comment dire, je pense qu'au niveau de l'éthique, c'est, à chaque fois on a affaire à une personne unique. Et que donc il y a les grandes principes de l'Eglise. Si, moi, ce que je retiendrais, c'est de dire, moi, ce que j'ai retenu du message de l'Eglise vis-à-vis de tous ces problèmes-là, par exemple, c'est de dire qu'il n'y a pas de, de loi de gradualité, qu'il n'y a ... Attendez, hein... Je me trompe à chaque fois... Il n'y a pas de gradualité de la loi mais il y a une loi de gradualité. C'est à dire que la loi est la loi, on ne peut pas la changer. Il n'y a pas la gradualité de la loi. Et il y a une loi de gradualité, c'est à dire que les personnes évoluent petit à petit. C'est avec le temps qu'on va faire entrer dans, dans ce que dit l'Eglise. Et qu'après chaque personne est un cas avec une situation donnée et, et que je crois que il n'y a pas de système, même si on veut avoir de grandes orientations, des grands principes qu'on a, c'est à dire qu'on connaît le chemin à suivre, mais après, euh, je crois qu'il faut adapter au, cas par cas. C'est un peu ce que je dirais. J'ai pas, et alors, euh, par rapport aux problèmes sociaux, bah, c'est sûr que... on est un peu dépassé par, euh, par euh, par le monde, dans le système à la fois politique, économique et social dans lequel on vit. Pas tellement l'impression d'avoir, euh, d'avoir beaucoup d'accès pour modifier les choses.

Oui. Revenons par exemple aux problèmes éthiques, sans doute, comme chez nous l'Eglise catholique prend une position sur l'homosexualité, par exemple, alors, euh, quand, votre position sur l'homosexualité, comment vous avez... vous arrivez à formuler cette position? A travers l'enseignement de l'Eglise Catholique, je suppose.

Mmm. C'est sûr. Moi, je pense que surtout ce sont des personnes qui sont blessées, dans leur affectivité, et qu'il faut aider. C'est pas d'abord les rejeter, c'est clair. Mais l'Eglise ne peut pas accepter l'homosexualité dans la mesure où c'est un désordre. Je pense. C'est un désordre profond. Donc, c'est plus des gens qui sont blessés qu'il faut aider. Les entourer, leur faire comprendre que... ils n'ont pas fait le bon choix, quoi, et

que, il y a quelque chose qui ne va pas en eux. C'est un peu comme ça que je vois les choses.

Oui. Et ça, ça vient de votre raison, ou ça vient de l'enseignement de l'Eglise, ou un peu les deux, ou...

C'est un peu les deux, je pense.

Oui. Ça, c'est... fin, je vous expliquerai tout à l'heure. Pour l'instant il faut passer à la dernière. Pensez-vous que votre foi influence la manière dont vous voyez le monde et l'analyse que vous en faites? Si oui, expliquez comment, s'il vous plaît.

C'est sûr.

(Rire) Expliquez comment, s'il vous plaît!

Ah, c'est sûr que je pense que pour un chrétien, pour un croyant, le plus important c'est la vie éternelle. Et, bon, en parlant de l'Eglise, par exemple, on a une conception trop, trop humaine de l'Eglise. Quand on parle de l'Eglise, c'est vraiment une réalité mystique qui, qui, qui est(a?) opposé(e?) des chrétiens qui vivent ici-bas, mais également de ceux qui sont au ciel, et puis de ceux qui sont au purgatoire. Et je pense qu'on ne vit pas assez dans la foi, de vie de foi. Je pense qu'un chrétien, c'est vraiment quelqu'un qui, qui doit vivre avant tout, de foi. Vivre avec Dieu au quotidien et donc dans cette perspective-là, dans la mesure on sait que Dieu est infiniment bon et, et qu'il est tout puissant, bah... on s'en remet, on s'abandonne.

Oui. Et donc, comment vous voyez le monde?

Mal! (Rire) C'est difficile. On vit dans un monde difficile. Mais, euh, là c'est plus de l'enseignement que j'ai reçu. Je pense qu'il y a un combat entre le bien et le mal et je pense que les deux augmentent en même temps. Et à la fois il y a une augmentation des forces du mal et puis en même temps une augmentation des forces du bien. Je pense que c'est... faut pas dramatiser non plus. Voilà ce que je dirais, quoi. Hein, mais bon... c'est sûr qu'il y a quand même des choses dramatiques qui se passent. Mais il y a aussi de très belles choses qui se passent. Il faut savoir voir les deux, quoi.

Et les belles choses qui se passent sont toujours, euh, des choses saintes, ou il y a une zone neutre, si vous voulez?

Qu'est-ce que vous appelez, hum...

Neutre?

Oui.

Mmm, ça, j'essaye de, de, de voir si les choses qui sont bonnes sont forcément des choses chrétiennes.

Non. Pas forcément, je ne crois pas. Non, c'est sûr que comme je vous disais tout-à-l'heure, il y a, il y a du bien en dehors du chrétien, euh. C'est clair.

Donc, il y a, c'est ce que j'appelle une zone neutre.

Oui, oui, oui. Non, c'est clair que... C'est à dire, que quand même tout homme est créé avec une conscience. Dans la mesure même s'il ne connaît pas Dieu, s'il n'a jamais entendu parler de Dieu et qu'il vit selon sa conscience, d'après moi il fait de belles choses.

Oui. Oui. Bon, c'est bien. Vous avez terminé! Merci beaucoup.

Appendix C

People's ways of believing

Introduction

The compilation of the typology was important not only in bringing order to the raw data, but also because it was in and of itself a basic response to the research question. The typology was dependent on people having found ways of relating to external faith authorities, and reflected these ways. If those authorities were to be removed, so the typology would cease to exist. For that reason alone, it was possible to assert that faith influenced learning in some way: people's faith authorities were integral to the way in which they learnt, and this resulted in various characteristic traits that depended on those authorities. The question could still be begged as to whether similar characteristics would be displayed in a non-faith context, yet as far as the research was concerned, this proved inconsequential. The inextricability of faith authorities from the patterns of learning displayed by the interviewees, coupled with their clear distinctiveness in contrast to other categories of external 'knowledge', indicated that for this particular group, there was a relationship between the way they learnt, and their faith. In the first instance, given the foundational stones undergirding the typology, this related primarily to the way in which people internalised and externalised information.

The typology therefore represented four distinct 'ways of believing', paralleling Belenky *et al*'s 'ways of knowing'. This Appendix outlines the principal characteristics of each type, focusing in particular on the 'lived faith' exemplified, its nature and salient dimensions.

I. People's ways of believing

The thesis employs this phrase to express people's relationship with their faith authorities. Each description to follow outlines the major characteristics of this relationship.

I.1 Discrete ways of believing

Clive, Denise, Edward, Jon, Martin, Penny, Phillip, Tina, Trevor

The majority of members of this group had been placed in the inner-cognitive quadrant of the original matrix, although Penny, Tina and Phillip were fairly near the line straddling experiential and cognitive positions. Clive had been the odd one out, primarily expressing outer-cognitive ways of understanding the relationship between his life and faith, although in reality living a largely experiential faith. There were a number of signs of leanings towards other types. Clive himself established his faith intellectually, but then interpreted his experience in faith terms in very similar ways to Interpretive learners. Penny displayed clear signs of having moved from the Interpretive position that had characterised her faith when she arrived at college and at times harking back to these. Her academic training had 'pushed' her into a Discrete way of believing, yet to a degree her experiential thrust was resisting the resulting enforced separation between faith and life. She appeared not (yet) to have the intellectual skills necessary to bring the two together, but I hypothesised that these would develop and she would eventually become a related believer. Phillip too acknowledged a move away from fundamentalism that had meant he had interpreted his experience according to rigid doctrines and faith principles. His faith was primarily intellectual and had been separate from his life, but his education was introducing him to new ways of looking at things with the result that he was appreciating other perspectives and other people's experiences. He held fast to his Discrete faith, but was beginning to recognise the validity of other ways of believing. Denise's journey has already been mentioned, and (as will be seen) Jon and Martin describe significant tensions that they resolve more, or less, successfully. Discrete believers exhibited more discomfort than any of the other types: discomfort resulting from strong 'selves' battling with strong faith convictions; from a disjuncture that

separated their faith from their experience and set the two potentially against each other; from being semi-‘forced’ to shift from a dearly-held faith position to another...

Discrete believers were the most diversified of all the types. Their overarching common characteristic was a cognitive, intellectual faith. The way in which this was exerted, however, was not totally uniform, despite certain shared features as described below.

1.1a Separation

(i) Faith and experience

A separation between faith and experience was a basic characteristic of this group of believers. For one or two, this was quite a problem.

Part of my thesis is the Doctrine of God. How do we understand God? And I'm leaning towards the orthodox tradition that understands God in terms of persons. The basis of God is the person of the Father who out of love created the Spirit and the Son, so it's all relational. God is primarily relation and people. It's not a matter of substance. Substance is impersonal and in a sense completely unimportant for your faith. So if love is fundamental to God, and relation is fundamental to God, how come that in my life, it doesn't work out? Uhh, I understand that you can't feel the love for God because it's a different kind of love that we can't really (tape unintelligible), but somehow that should feed back that there should be kind of an interaction that you sense that God loves you in your daily life. Maybe not everyday, but once in a while. Uhh, unless you've got completely wrong expectations, which I might have. But it's the knowledge that that particular doctrine, I think of it as orthodox, is correct. But in practical life I so often run into a wall which I can't get through. That causes, that... insurmountable tension.

Jon had eventually had to seek medical attention to help deal with the effects of this tension.

The separation lived out by these interviewees took a variety of forms. For Jon it appeared to be a clear-cut division between intellectual conclusions and real-life experience. Martin lived a more subtle tension. Not only did his faith framework and experience not cohere...

I suppose I've always assumed that what I'm taught doesn't necessarily have to be backed up with experience in my life (laughter). So I've never, I've never kind of made that connection if you see what I mean.

...but as a result of his theological education he had begun to understand this in epistemological and philosophical terms.

I've learnt about different epistemological approaches that carry with them views of, about objective thinking, subjectivism, what is public knowledge, what is private... etc. Various approaches. Umm, and I think that that has changed my faith in the sense that I was previously thinking very much along the lines of objective means, factual means, everyone should accept. Which is a very modernist way of thinking. Which is in line with to some extent my law degree, and to some extent with the society I grew up in abroad, in a country which is by and large fairly modernist. So having the chance to explore epistemologies that are not based on that distinction, between factual and personal or subjective, umm, that is actually workable, has had a major impact on my faith, because it allows for the possibility of knowledge based on relationship and based on trust which has much to do with the sort of faith that the church talks about. So suddenly that's become credible in my own thinking. And that's had a major impact, I think. In that I now have the categories to be able to say, Well, maybe that thinking's wrong. Because before I only saw one way of thinking about the world. So, yeah, that's had a major, and that way of thinking that I thought was more or less universal didn't work for my Christian faith at all. Because I couldn't prove with certainty that my faith was right or true in any sense, because by definition faith was private and subjective and non-factual.

The realisation that different types of knowledge functioned in different ways was a major revelation to Martin, and he was consequently able to hold the two concurrently in his life. They did not integrate, but neither were they at war.

(ii) Objectivity

Objectivity was a dearly-held value to most Discrete believers, and this too resulted in separation between faith authorities and life. Penny consciously and deliberately turned to the bible, putting her trust in it because of its objectivity.

I think the bible is the one thing that I can hold onto as the word of God and therefore it plays a more vital role that I'm... It's an objective thing as opposed... That my faith is now based on Scripture as opposed to before when it was based on my, how I reacted to certain things and what God's telling me. Umm, but, so now I just cling onto that because I can look at it and think, Well this is God's word to humanity. At the same time I do use it as encouragement and I do seek after the bible. I don't use it as much as I should and that's at my own peril, I know. But I have thoroughly enjoyed the few times I've preached, or the few times I've had to do an essay really grappling with one or two of, I mean you can spend days and days just understanding and taking out verses and working out what they mean. And to me that speaks to me more than reading a whole passage or a whole book. It's just really understanding what the two, and I don't know whether or not that is just reading completely into the bible, whether or not that's two thousand years of scholarship who have really, I don't know what it is, but I think, I do find it amazing that God can use every single word of the bible to me. And that, that really does, that speaks to me more in my life. I do use it for Quiet times and I do use it for words of encouragement, for me and for other people.

Her transition from Interpretive to Discrete was evident, as were (probable) continuing remnants of her previous position which lessened the degree of discreteness between this faith authority and her life. The need for objectivity was an important theme in her interview, and she constantly spoke of 'bringing things down to scripture', as opposed to using herself as a referent and hermeneutical centre. Clive similarly sought objectivity, but found it intellectually rather than 'physically' and conceptually. He spent time considering the biblical evidence of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and was intellectually convinced that these events were historical fact. As with Penny, having established an objective core on which to pin his position, he then tended to operate as an Interpretive believer.

(iii) Two selves potentially at war

The tensions experienced by certain Discrete believers has been indicated in the above discussion. Nevertheless, a separate section focusing on the role of the self is warranted since it was a very noticeable feature among certain members of this group. While it is certainly appropriate to describe Jon's struggle in terms of a faith/experience dichotomy since this is how he lived it, it had its roots in two different sources of epistemic validation: reason and experience, each with its own forms of reasoning. Jon had a highly developed ability in both forms. Each appeared equally valid, and he found each equally convincing and necessary. He experienced two sides of himself at war with each other. Martin too articulated the sense of having been almost schizophrenic for similar reasons. Discrete believers had a well developed self. They were well able to articulate their views, assert and defend their opinions, think autonomously and reflect on their own and other positions. Difficulties arose, nevertheless, when two different alternatives were either equally intellectually convincing, or an intellectual and/or emotional commitment to either or both resulted in a stand-off. While Jon and Martin exemplified the difficulties most clearly, there were signs of impending crises in other members of the group. Trevor and Clive were both faced with mismatches between their faith authorities and their experience. Once again, due to their developed selves, they were beginning to struggle...

The members of this group displayed differing degrees of separation according to the techniques they employed to join their faith authorities and their experience. These techniques have been alluded to in this section, and are explored more fully in the next as they represent concrete 'ways of learning'. It should also be noted that the desire for objectivity was not exclusive to Discrete believers, although was certainly more heavily emphasised in this group than in others. Nevertheless, Simon, for example, categorised as a related believer, also focused on the historicity of the gospel accounts and based the rest of his life and faith on this. Discrete believers were so categorised because the prime faith authorities were located outside people themselves, and this provided such a vital anchor that it was never relinquished and was constantly, or regularly, referred to. Those who cultivated a highly intellectual faith experienced the greatest degree of tension; those with less tension also employed techniques representative of other ways of believing.

I.1b A world-view that made sense

Making sense was a common theme among Discrete believers. They adhered to the Christian faith because it 'made sense' according to their personal powers of reasoning. They often emphasised a creator God that contrasted against a sinful human race, and this Interpretive paradigm both made sense evidentially and meant that since their Christian faith authorities and (observed) experience cohered at these important points, they accepted it as a framework by which to understand the rest of life. Their way(s) of reasoning did not jar significantly with that/those of the world around them and hence Discrete believers tended to follow conventional patterns of thought employed in the wider world (contrasting thus against Interpretive believers, see later). As a result, they gave the impression of being well rooted with both feet firmly on the ground. While wanting to affirm the possibility that God could and did intervene in human life and reality, most employed an earthly rationale in order to determine whether this was the case or not. Denise, for example, asked for her reaction to reports that God had changed ordinary dental fillings into gold confessed to personally knowing people to whom this had apparently happened. Yet she was unconvinced.

I think God's created the world in a certain way, and by and large, not that I want to have a Deist view of God, but I think by and large it ticks over more or less according to the laws of nature. But I do think God can intervene. But I'd have to be persuaded. I'd be like Thomas, you know. I want to see the marks! At the same time, earthly sense could and did occasionally conflict with other 'senses' as was indicated in Jon and Martin's cases above.

As an intellectual approach to the world, the role of the Christian framework making overall sense of the world was that of providing Discrete believers with an intellectual world-view. Denise and Tina both emphasised the importance of having (constructing) a 'big picture' into which they fitted other elements. This approach was clearly influenced by a particular lecturer with whom they had studied. Nevertheless, it worked for them, although in different ways. Martin spoke of his need for a 'structure' which he was continually revising.

[The bible] helps me to think about life generally, and because of how I think, my mind operates more easily with the big picture, the systematic level, and I

try to, I'm constantly revising my picture of the world and how I, how I understand it in my own thinking.

The role of people's faith authorities in the living out of that world-view varied. As the typology of believers grew and began to take shape, it became apparent that Discrete believers 'pointed' towards any of the three possible routes to another position. People's world-views could be highly rigid, or reasonably flexible, the most rigid appearing to function at the topmost pinnacle of the apex, with increasing flexibility as people slipped toward another position. This 'slippage' involved a number of strategies which the thesis elected to categorise these traits as ways of learning rather than ways of believing, although there is significant overlap.

1.2 Related ways of believing

Beth, Felicity, Frances, Simon

The uniting characteristic of these four individuals was the virtually seamless integration of faith and experience, coupled with a strength of self that generally meant their own views took supremacy over their faith authorities. Simon was the odd-one-out of the group, firstly because he was the only man, and secondly because all three women were also Anglican ordinands studying part-time. Simon was a full-time student still undecided on what he would do on completion of his studies and on their exact purpose. Once again the strength of the typology became apparent in its ability to handle diversity.

1.2a Personally 'owned' faith authorities

Related believers all found a central core around which they based their lives and their faith. This differed from person to person, yet all were linked by a common characteristic: that of a personal, or personalised faith authority, as opposed to the intellectual and doctrinal focus of Discrete believers. In a similar way to Assimilative learners they had so internalised their faith authorities that personal instinct was considered reliable, and they took what Frances expressed as a sense of being

'prodded or poked, like a sheepdog' seriously. In general, however, this was always tried out and tested with reference to other people. Friends were vitally important as trusted sounding boards, as opposed to the authority figures they so often became to Interpretive learners.

Related believers did not live a highly individualised faith in the same way that Assimilative and (particularly) Interpretive believers did. Nevertheless, the essence of their faith was in their very selves as opposed to primarily in their intellect as was the case of Discrete believers. They exhibited 'big' selves: beings that invested themselves in life and reality, making sense of the world by integrating as many aspects as possible according to well-reasoned precepts.

(i) Integration

In direct contrast to Discrete believers, Related believers' faith authorities were highly integrated into individuals' lives to the point that they saw them as totally inseparable.

I don't feel that my faith is something apart from my life, or apart from my studies. What my studies then I think do with my faith, there doesn't seem to be that division, umm, and I talked to one of my students last year, and, umm, she was very depressed and she said, I just don't see what the point is in going on. I don't see what my purpose is in life. And I said, the purpose of your life is that you have to live it. That you're unique, that you're special, you're important. You are who you are and nobody else can be you. You have to do this. Umm, can you believe that? And she said, Well, I know that you believe that. As if this was a belief that I sort of, you know, entertained. And I said, Look, this is not something I'm just sort of bringing in to help you. It's not a, a, a belief that is separate from me. I said, I couldn't be who I am or do what I do unless I believed what I believe. This is, this is a truth. This is not something I'm just... It's not a theory, it's not like a psychological theory I'm offering you to bolster you. This is what I believe. (Felicity)

(ii) Reflection

These believers by and large constructed their own faith by using external authorities as sources which they then compared with their experience, contemplated, reflected upon and decided—autonomously—if they made sense in and for their lives. Even when they had been accepted as authoritative, the process of reflection continued and their faith was constantly being worked and re-worked, always relating it back to their selves, lives and experience. Related believers were in no way prepared to take someone else's word about faith and how it should function. Frances, for example, was aware that accepting a faith precept at face value was inadequate for her.

I think the whole thing about atonement is really difficult and I haven't properly begun to get my head round that. And that is the area I think where I most have to say, Well, I believe this because the bible tells me so. But at some point I will get to a stage in my life where I need to unpack it and it may be because I'm made to unpack it on this course, or it may be because I just have arrived at that time in my own spiritual development when I need to unpack it. And at that point I will find people to talk to, and I will pray, and I will read, and I will theologically reflect, and all those other things. And see where I get to.

She, as the others, was very prepared to discard aspects of faith teaching that she considered irrelevant, inappropriate or simply ridiculous, although each articulated a slight unease regarding a potential danger of discarding more than one should.

Talking about the authority of the bible, Frances states:

I do have problems with some of the things in there about the role of women, because I'm aware that there is a danger when you pick and choose and say, yes this is universally applicable down the years, and that is culturally moderated and we can disregard it. But nevertheless, I think one has to be intelligent about it and look at, look at it as a whole, almost. And pick out the things that are consistent, and stick with those. And I think there are things in there that are just wonderfully consistent about God's love and God's patience, and about the need to treat everything that is with respect because it is made by God, because it is good. And because this is what is asked of us, I think. I think if that's where you come from, then a lot of the other issues actually begin to sort out. But that's a personal view.

I.2b Personal/personalised faith authority and life focus

(i) Focus on Jesus

I'm very Christocentric, so it would come down to the story of Jesus. (Beth)

Related believers put a high emphasis on the person of Jesus as the most authoritative dimension of their faith. Felicity's interview abounded with references to Jesus as she described how she reflected and made important decisions, often specifically asking 'What would Jesus do?'. This emphasis was evident not only in the focus of how they worked out and lived their faith but also in how they prioritised their faith authorities. Jesus, his words, his gospel, his life... all took precedence over other dimensions of the bible, for example. The gospels were easier to relate to than Paul, and many of the wranglings the church had entered into over points of doctrine, order etc were considered both irrelevant and tedious.

(ii) People-centred ministry

All these believers were primarily concerned with people and their ministry amongst people. Felicity saw her training very much as having a people-oriented goal:

I think you need, you need the theology and you need the discipline of the understanding of the, umm, theories behind the Eucharist and the history and that sort of thing, but that in itself is not an end. That's a, a means to an end.

And the end is ministry and the ministry is people. I prefer people to paper!

Beth agonised over the 'institutionalisation' that training for ordination inherently involved, seeing it as a process of depersonalisation, and Simon's major concern was to see other people discovering the transformative effects of the Christian message for themselves.

Related believers shared the personal emphasis with Interpretive believers, who also valued the human over and above the doctrinal. Related believers were notable for the specific techniques that they employed as a means of personalisation, however. A focus on Jesus was notably absent from Interpretive behaviour, and could well be included as a related way of learning rather than a way of believing. The overlap between these two dimensions of the research is evident.

I.2c Role of self

(i) Self assertion

Related learners demonstrated a confident self-assertion over and above their faith authorities that meant that in many ways—and ways that were entirely uncharacteristic of the other groups—the authorities were left standing. The use of and role of faith authorities is considered in the next section as a way of learning. However, Beth's highly feminist emphasis, Frances's pragmatism and Felicity's no nonsense approach all cohered with Simon's assertion that his own position was 'right' in the face of an uncomfortable aspect of faith.

I tend to distance myself from say, the behaviour of Israel in the Old Testament, as an example. Where it seems God says, You've got to go in and destroy the Canaanites. And especially at the moment with the Balkan situation, it sort of throws up questions. So how do I react to that? What do I do with it? My reaction to it is to hold back a bit and say, This part of the bible isn't so much authoritative in the sense of it telling us what to do, but it is an authoritative recording of what happened. And it's an authoritative recording of how the people at the time understood God, and that's a part of our faith, but our faith is something that develops and grows. So rather than saying, This happened in the bible. It says God wanted it to happen, therefore I've got to adjust to God, I do tend more to say, This reflects their understanding of God at the time, but I'm right!

(ii) Balance between self and authority

The preceding sections have indicated how vital personalising faith was to related believers. These individuals demonstrated a real strength of self, and while respectful of their faith authorities, neither did they experience them as oppressive or dominant. They were simply 'there', one of life's givens, yet not to be accepted on the grounds of authority alone. There was evidence in the interviews of a delicately-held balance between being overly self-assertive, and overly submissive, although holding the balance did not appear to be problematic. Instead, interviewees appeared to appreciate the challenge of finding and maintaining it, understanding this as part of their overall walk and journey of faith.

The balance was most clearly articulated in Beth's interview. Asked how she reacted to reports that God had changed ordinary dental fillings into gold, she replied:

I'm quite interested in why God would do that. I'd be very angry with God if God had done that when there's the situation in Kosovo and things like that. I'd be very angry indeed actually.

Anger with God was something that members of the Interpretive group also expressed, but with far greater hesitation, and portraying a degree of fearfulness. Beth's anger was straightforward and natural, indicating a form of evenly-matched balance in the relationship between herself and God. She was able to assert her self over and against her faith authority. Nevertheless, she also spoke of a significant period of doubt that she had lived with difficulty. It was occasioned through the making public of her faith as a result of moving towards the public role of an ordained Anglican priest, but focused on deeper, more profound dimensions of her faith, provoking new questions which required new, as yet undiscovered resolutions. She was unwilling to abandon her faith, yet obviously lived through a time when she seriously questioned it, primarily (and typically, for a Related believer) regarding how it should be lived. Beth's doubt differed from Denise's in that it had a different focus. Nevertheless, the two women probably came the nearest of all the interviewees to meeting in the middle of the typology, each from a different initial position.

The thesis originally entitled this section 'an equal inequality with faith authorities'. In many ways, Related believers saw their task as working out the balance between self and faith authorities in a way that it cohered with life, providing them with a holistic world-view with a different structure from that of Discrete believers. Related believers had much in common with Belenky *et al*'s Constructivists.

I.2d A mysterious faith

Related believers often sought to integrate ordinary logic with what they saw as a faith logic, to construct something mysterious and intangible. Unlike Interpretive believers whose reality bubble lifted them into new, unrooted realms of existence, Related believers kept one foot firmly on the ground, while acknowledging aspects of lived faith that nevertheless broke normal logical conventions. They reasoned that this

was part of the nature of faith, yet another important part was that it did obey 'natural law': were it not to do so, it would be so totally incomprehensible that it would be outside their ability to commit to it.

I know that what I believe is irrational! Umm, and I also know that it's true. Umm, that's not... I never... I never, I think that spiritual knowing and spiritual discerning is different from ordinary knowing and ordinary discerning. And when people say, you know, umm, I'm asking these questions and I need answers, I say, Well, it doesn't work like that. And they say, Oh, yes, yes. I just need an answer to this question. And you say, Well, that's like saying, you know, umm, What colour was the symphony? You know, or, How did the music taste? You know. So it doesn't apply. You know, you can't say, I just need an answer to this spiritual question, because spiritual questions don't admit those kinds of question and answer processes. Umm, so people say, well that's not a rational feeling or, umm... What really must have happened is something completely different. Umm, I say, Well, but... you know... it's how we apprehend what happened that counts. So, yes, it doesn't sound, it's not, it doesn't sound rational cos it's not rational, but it's, it's a different order of knowing. Which I know is contradictory to my wanting logic in sermons, but, I think you've got to, to show respect for the, the spiritual, which includes treating it logically and rationally. Umm, even though it itself is not rational in the same sense that a, a theorem is rational. Does that make sense? (Felicity)

Felicity was happy to 'be in the mystery'; Frances accepted that faith had an essentially subjective dimension to it; Beth described an awareness that she was becoming 'more irrational' despite the fact that she understood her faith better. Simon alone focused on the 'real historical events of Jesus' and considered them entirely rational. His struggle was more with what he considered 'other rational alternatives' that were equally viable explanations for the phenomenon he experienced as faith.

1.3 Assimilative ways of believing

Anne, Craig, Roger, Yvonne

This group consisted of the three Roman Catholics: Anne and Yvonne, both Benedictine nuns, and Roger, a seminarian. Craig was a surprising 'wild card', since he came from a very different stable. It had been apparent even at the time of his interview that he lived his faith, life and experience very differently from his peers, but only detailed analysis revealed important characteristics that placed him as an Assimilative learner. He was nevertheless less able to articulate a number of the finer details that related his faith to his experience, lacking the educational structure and well-worked-out rationale that the Roman Catholics benefited from.

1.3a A faith-experience cycle

Je suis la voie, la vérité et la vie, quoi. C'est le Christ. Il est la voie, la vérité, donc c'est de l'ordre de l'intelligence, et c'est cette voie, ce chemin, cette intelligence, elle mène à la vie. A plus de vie.¹

Roger quoted a verse from the bible as part of his response to the question of how he would defend and justify his faith, but this response immediately indicated that through assuming and assimilating the intelligence and knowledge of faith, its truth becomes apparent through the resulting quality of life. Earlier, he had stated that he wouldn't defend his faith through reasoning, but through the fullness of life which is experienced by those who live it. Roger's argument was cyclical and allowed no deviation or alternative through its absoluteness. By implication, however, those who did not follow the same path experienced a lesser quality of life, and they did so because they did not accept the wisdom of faith.

Roger articulated this position the most clearly of the four members of this group, although there were hints of it in others. Anne, for example, stated on a number of occasions that her call, and that of faith in general, was to a life of well-being and happiness, which was achieved by learning to allow faith and faith authorities to have supremacy over her (see later). She asserted that her intelligence was formed through

¹ I am the way, the truth and the life, you see. It's Christ. He is the way and the truth, so it falls into the realm of intelligence, and it's this way, this path, this intelligence, which leads to life. Or rather, to a fuller life.

her faith authorities, and she took on a new way of thinking and acting which led to her general well-being and ultimately to eternal life.

The cyclical nature of this reasoning resembled that of Interpretive believers. While the latter constructed a reality 'bubble' (see later) that was largely removed from conventional reality, Assimilative believers also lived in an alternative reality that was essentially self-contained. The major difference between the two groups was that one focused on the faith authority, the other on 'life on earth'.

I.3b Faith authorities: a means of self-transformation

Assimilative learners used their faith authorities as a go-between which bridged various dimensions of experience. Craig highlighted the fact that these authorities were turned to with the express purpose of transforming his own self. The conviction of a need for self-transformation was very apparent in all four members of this group, although this involved a high degree of circular reasoning. Anne and Roger both spoke of their ultimate goal being that of eternal life. The way of achieving this was through a process of self-transformation, since 'on est des pauvres' (Roger: 'we are poor and worthless'). Craig did not articulate an emphasis on eternal life.

Nevertheless, he stated:

I'm totally guilty, and stand from the point of being in the gutter, I've done most things that other people haven't, in terms of sin. I've had more opportunity for having bad habits than most, I've had more freedom in at least two or three different types of lifestyles at once than people, and taken often full advantage of them. Even as a Christian, and my life has been a meandering either close with God or telling God exactly what I think of him and going off accordingly, doing my own thing because, before he pulls me back again. So I don't have any justification for me whatsoever. But his initiation and his calling worked for me to turn round and follow him, and that he would forgive my life and sins, and all that I was. It isn't just the sin itself but the sheer pollution and the effects. And despite who I was and who I've become through my way of living, he's prepared to take me and shape me and mould me. On the basis of Jesus Christ and his work, with a purpose that he gives to my life and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

At another point he asserted that:

I think that the three years that I believe that I've been given whilst I'm at college, only probably thirty to thirty-five percent of it at all relates to the academic style and way of thinking. And the rest of it is sorting out Craig. The view that such a transformation was necessary was a faith-dictated view that each had taken to heart. An impermeable circle was created that began and ended with faith, reinforced by the conviction that this faith represented ultimate and absolute truth. Nevertheless, in learning terms the focus was very much on people themselves. Experience, passed through a faith filter, had its prime role in changing people into new beings fit for a faith goal.

Faith authorities were therefore highly authoritative, and took a variety of forms. Christian doctrine and teaching, the bible, Church leaders of various ranks, Christian saints and ancestors in the faith... All existed with the primary goal of enabling these learners to be transformed. Part of the process involved complete submission. Craig's quote (above) indicates how he saw himself as inappropriately rebelling against God. Anne stated that one of the aspects of her faith she found difficult to live was bringing her own natural and 'easy' inclinations under control. Submission took place in different ways. Some of it was emotional and linked to the will, as people strived to control their instinctive desire to assert themselves. Other techniques involved deliberate thought-stopping. This took place in three ways:

(i) As a deliberate and conscious faith principle.

Le Prêtre doit transmettre ce que dit l'Eglise. Ce que le Christ, lui, a transmis à ses Apôtres et ses Apôtres ont transmis aux autres. A la limite, on a même... je pense, à savoir... effacer son jugement personnel pour se soumettre encore une fois à l'enseignement de l'Eglise et puis transmettre le plus fidèlement possible ce qui dit l'Eglise. Moi, je pense que c'est ça qui, qui, un des critères de justesse.²

Roger's statement is stark, and to some would be astonishing. His faith convictions led him to a position where he felt he was bound to refrain from exercising his own

² The Priest has to pass on what the Church says. What Christ communicated to his disciples, and his disciples passed on to others. I suppose really we ought to... I think, we probably have to know... how to eradicate our own personal judgment in order to submit ourselves again and again to the teaching of the Church, and then pass what the Church says on as faithfully as possible. I think that that has to be one of the criteria of soundness for me.

critical and evaluative powers. As before, the argument and reasoning is cyclical. Nevertheless, his position was consciously thought through and deliberately adhered to as a faith principle.

(ii) As a faith response of reverence and obedience

Certain faith authorities demand a high degree of reverence. Anne, for example, preferred to seek what the bible was telling her in passages which provoked a negative reaction in her, rather than challenge the text. This involved approaching the text with respect and humility, and refraining from engaging with the difficulties.

J'essaie de garder ce respect quand même. C'est la parole de Dieu. Il ne faut quand même pas... C'est, c'est là. C'est dans le livre. On ne va pas l'enlever (?si on a envie d'autres choses?). Donc il y a peut-être quand même quelque chose a me dire... quelquefois c'est surprenant. Quelquefois on a un verset qui nous parle, et n'a jamais parlé à personne! ... Il faut avoir cette humilité aussi, vis-à-vis du texte, je pense.³

Craig welcomed the 'humbling' that many of life's experiences resulted in, and saw his overall goal in life as learning to submit to God's rule in his life.

There's a constant sense of challenge in so far as actually picking up the word and humbling oneself to it. And I find the same problem with prayer, or challenge with prayer. And allowing the word to take precedence in me rather than me wanting to take precedence in the word.

(iii) As a faith response of trust

On the occasions when Anne could have employed her evaluative powers, very frequently she preferred not to. When faced with incomprehensible texts or situations, for example, she would immediately turn to other authorities to provide an answer, and if these were either not available or proved inadequate, she was comfortable in assuring herself that it wasn't necessary to understand in the immediate and that at some point in the future she would. Similarly, both she and Yvonne were at ease with

³ I try to maintain a certain respect all the same. It's God's word. We can't... It, it's there. It's in the book. We can't just take it out (if we don't like it?). So perhaps it's there to tell me something... Sometimes it's surprising. Sometimes a verse speaks to us (me) which has never spoken to anyone ever before! ... We need to have a certain humility before the text I think.

accepting certain positions simply because 'des gens plus intelligents que moi' (more intelligent people than me) had made a decision. For members of the other groups, this would have been an act of retreat. For members of this group, the thesis has classed the act as a response of trust. In the first place, in general, most important faith questions had already been discussed and decided upon at a high level, so answers already existed; it was simply that she did not know what they were. 'Normalement il doit y avoir une explication, quoi' (Yvonne: there would normally be some sort of explanation). This was an area where Craig's response differed slightly from the others. He too turned to external authorities when perplexed (commentaries, other people...) but as a result of his studies had moved to less secure ground. He did not exhibit the same degree of trust, but lived instead with an increasingly uncomfortable niggling. The outcome, however, was the same: 'The thing gets chunked in the area for mulling and don't know. Into my "I don't know" area'.

Secondly, and very pertinently for the thesis, the overall goal of Assimilative learners was to assimilate their faith authorities to the point of eradiating themselves, and the way to do this was to avoid developing their own critical faculties. This would have been totally counterproductive to their overall goal. Roger states that:

Je pense qu'il y a des données de foi qui ne sont pas arrêtées. Qui sont, qui sont laissées ouvertes à la recherche. Il y a certains domaines où l'Eglise s'est prononcée. Où je pense que la question est tranchée. Il y a d'autres domaines où c'est, c'est, c'est ouvert à la réflexion, quoi. ... La vérité, nous, on la reçoit de l'Eglise, euh. Vous comprenez? Et que pour nous l'Eglise est une mère.⁴

'Free' reflection and evaluation is an activity for those appointed to the task, and who can be trusted by dint of their position and faith standing not to move beyond the established boundaries. The major duty for 'normal' Christians is to evaluate all other aspects of life according to the established faith framework.

I.3c Instinct

Most commonly, this evaluation was an instinctive one. Anne spoke of something inside her 'vibrating' when what she was being taught cohered with her faith

⁴ I think that there are certain dimensions of faith which are still open to question. Which are, which are still open to being researched. There are certain areas where the Church has declared its position. Where I think the question is closed. There are other areas where it's, it's, it's open to reflection, ... We receive the truth from the Church. Do you see? And for us, the Church is a mother.

framework. Yvonne too said she knew instinctively whether something was right or wrong. She confessed 'une grande fidélité à l'enseignement de l'Eglise.... Ne pas remettre en question des choses qui ont été définies par des conciles ou par des autorités vraiment, enfin, sérieuses.'⁵ This fidelity, coupled with her family and monastic background, gave her an interior sense of what is right and wrong. This corresponded, of course, with the overall goal of those in this group of self-transformation and merging faith, learning and life: Yvonne knew, in her very being, because she had been formed, moulded and trained precisely for that. Craig had developed a lifetime's experience of filtering situations and information through his experiential and faith frameworks, which meant that he could instinctively know whether something was right or wrong, and he felt more able to trust that than his intellectual powers. Asked whether he read theological books or listened to preachers and lecturers with an eye to whether they were sound or not, and if so, what criteria he used, he responded:

I don't do it objectively. Umm, I don't think, at all, in the way that perhaps I should, as I haven't been ever a person who naturally is critical and has a critique in my way of thinking to be able to be as insightful as other people that I know here do as a matter of course. It's something that I've had to learn more. So I pick up flavours and distinctions of what preachers may say and relate them back to my own as it were experience and source and pool of resource, if you like, that I've gained over the years. So that would be the distinctions that I would be constantly making. Whether they would be distinctions or Oh, that's new and different, is that right? Or, That's a new angle on that one. Let's experience and see if it's sound or not. But I'm not naturally, I don't have the natural critique of a person and therefore I don't think I can answer this question very well or say that I'm good at doing that. *OK. That's fine. Essentially you're saying that no you don't. Very much.*

I think I do. I think I'm learning to. It's probably the best answer I could give. I would say that, I would certainly know instinctively whether something was true or not, because I've lived for twenty years being a broker, having to judge truth from even the most effective of lies.

⁵ 'A real faithfulness to the teaching of the Church. ... We don't question those things which have been established by councils or by authorities which are genuine and serious.'

Lacking the defined structure of the Roman Catholic faith framework that would have directed and trained his instinct, Craig had developed a highly personal and individual approach to faith and life. While he displayed very similar traits to the other members of the group, in his case this seemed to be more as a result of temperament and intellectual acumen than faith convictions, although one fed and influenced the other. He had found a way of living his faith that 'instinctively' suited him.

1.4 Interpretive ways of believing

Chris, Margaret, Miranda, Ruth

The major common theme joining these people was the way in which they looked beyond themselves to an external faith authority in order to interpret their experience. Individuals used their faith authorities to interpret and give meaning to their experience, and used this, re-externalised, to reinforce and continually construct and reconstruct their faith as they understood it. The total number of people interviewed was evidently much too small to assert any 'findings' with confidence, especially with regard to the individual types. However, I hypothesize that there may be significance in the fact that this group consisted entirely of women...

1.4a Construction of a faith-reality bubble

Somewhat inevitably if all experience is interpreted according to a particular set of authoritative dicta, so an all-encompassing reality is constructed. These interviewees saw the whole of life in the light of God, his word, Christian teaching and the faith lives of those around them. Since (by implication and experience) these dicta did not provide a ready-made interpretation of all aspects of life, a degree of filling-in was necessary. This took place via a number of techniques, some of which are more fully developed in the sections that follow. Faith-reasoning, for example, functioned as an essential partner within a faith-reality bubble. One could not exist without the other. Faith was a much 'bigger' entity for these believers than for members of other groups, therefore: essential faith cores were embellished, developed, extended, personalised and individualised as the Interpretive construction of faith took place. These

extensions themselves often then became authoritative, providing an ever-increasing outer faith boundary within which Interpretive believers lived.

I.4b 'Faith reasoning'

(i) Allowing for the miraculous

One significant characteristic of these interviewees was the willingness to work with a faith logic and rationality that allowed for the miraculous. While virtually every person interviewed, across the board of all the groups, wanted to assert God's right and power to intervene in everyday life and contravene the ways of the world in one way or another, Interpretive learners actively sought these occasions out, discovering them in ordinary everyday occurrences and 'coincidences'. (We might recall, for example, Miranda's quote in which she spoke of becoming aware of God's particular and individual love for her during a particular stressful time, as a result of a series of events all of which included the same [unusual] numerical figure.) This expectancy of seeing God's miraculous and supernatural hand in everyday life resulted in the superseding of 'traditional' rationality. To quote Chris:

You see, nothing would surprise me about God. You know. God, I don't think there's anything surprising in a way about raising somebody from the dead or somebody being able to have a baby when they haven't actually had sex with somebody else. Umm, because if God wants to do that that way, I have no problem with thinking that he can do it. Umm, I get, you know, I'm amazed sometimes, and I do feel it's an arrogance in some people, particularly perhaps some theologians, I don't know, who will explain everything, you know, Well, this doesn't really mean this. Actually, when Jesus comes again there aren't really going to be trumpets in the sky because a trumpet wouldn't be able to float in the sky because it would be too heavy! Now, I've actually heard somebody say that. I've actually heard somebody say that in a lecture, and I thought, Well, how small minded can we get here. Umm, that, you know, if God wants trumpets to float off the ground, there is really no problem for him to be able to do that. You know. Wonderful. Umm, yeah, so, so, no, I don't have a problem with that.

(ii) Avoidance of rigorous logical and critical thought

Coupled with this willingness to allow for and welcome the miraculous was a tendency in all four Interpretive believers to avoid rigorous logical thought. Chris, on a number of occasions, confessed to never really having thought about something, or saw herself as 'bumbling along' not really knowing what she thought. She had a high degree of antipathy toward the value of academic study, and understood theological soundness as being evidenced through someone being 'open to the Holy Spirit and the inspiration of God'. As indicated above, all also relied heavily on the views of other people, and tended to leave intellectual wrangling to those to whom it was of interest! Margaret, as is shown in section 1.4c, wanted to be given answers and tended to bypass the process of reasoning that had led to these and that would have equipped her to evaluate them. This characteristic links significantly with the sense of self and relationship to faith authorities outlined in section 1.4c, and is more fully developed at that point. Faced with the fact that to critique was becoming more familiar to her due to the demands of her course of study, she was then caught in the conundrum of no longer knowing whether the bible could actually say anything to her any more, and wasn't at all sure that she liked being as critical as she had become in general.

(iii) Use of subjective judgment

In the original analysis of the interviews, Interpretive learners had been classed among those who turned to experience to validate their faith. This permitted a highly individual and subjective way of reasoning. In a similar way to Assimilative learners, Interpretive learners entered a cyclical pattern, since their experience validated their faith which in turn validated their experience. So Margaret, for example, understood God to be speaking to her directly through a worship song. The fact that it was saying completely the opposite to her friend next to her was not only of little import, but actually underlined the marvellous individuality of God's concern for his people.

Something which, to give a specific example, has come up a couple of times recently has been an appreciation of how God, or as myself and a friend concerned have seen it, has spoken to each of us very differently about the same situation. Umm, to move us from maybe the extreme position that we stand in somewhere further towards a middle ground somewhere. Umm, and the friend concerned really felt God speaking to her concerning being more

strict with herself, more disciplined with herself in her devotional life, and in her faith and perhaps in general. Umm, she felt that she'd been taking grace for granted, almost, whereas I felt that because I've been in the habit of taking, of being quite harsh on myself, that I, I was being spoken to about relaxing a bit more, almost coming back to what you were talking about in chapel a few weeks ago, about being rather than doing, things like that, but our reactions were set off by the same incident and we actually spent quite a lot of time arguing at complete cross purposes with each other about it until we realised where we were both coming from and why we had such a different reaction. ... The matter which set it off was umm, a Keith Green song which I react to very, very badly (laughing), because I sort of heard the very powerful message and immediately felt quite condemned about what it was saying and then sort of felt, well, why should I feel like this? She said, Oh no, I don't feel it's condemning me at all, I just feel it's encouraging me to be more disciplined!

With such an individual and experiential approach, adhering to a commonly-held public rationale was of little importance. As Assimilative learners, Interpretive learners turned to their own instinct and their own personal knowledge to validate knowledge.

When presented with a number of alternative positions or interpretations of biblical teaching, what is your normal reaction? Ooh. Umm, I think probably it's to look at each one carefully and try and find out where I feel the truth that I can relate to is. (Chris)

Rationality was subjective...

I don't feel what I believe is irrational because *I* know it's true... (Chris) ...and a commonly-used word throughout all the interviews was 'feel' (see Margaret's quote above). Interpretive believers relied on their subjectively-felt judgment to discern what was right and wrong, what was of God and what wasn't. This was one area in which it became clear that Penny had made the transition from an Interpretive to Discrete believer. Her interview revealed a real discomfort with the vulnerability of basing her faith on such total subjectivity, and she had found ways of identifying objective authorities.

(iv) Attribution of faith significance to the incomprehensible

This links directly to the overall theme of people interpreting their experience according to faith premises. However, it was sufficiently marked amongst the members of this group to warrant specific comment. Unpleasant and incomprehensible dimensions of life were dealt with differently in the learning patterns of each group, provoking a serious re-working of faith in some instances. Interpretive believers did the opposite, and employed techniques that brought even the incomprehensible into their faith reality. No experience was outside the bounds of a faith interpretation. Even the most challenging did not push these believers into re-thinking the way they lived and understood their faith.

Well, with the friend who died... Well, because she'd been very ill before she died, so though it was a shock when she died, and we were all very upset, I think it got us talking... we realised that for her, she was better off, in a way, she'd had in many ways rotten things happen to her here so it was a relief in a way. And also just the way that she had lived her life. You didn't feel that it was a waste that she'd died quite young. So that was, that caused us to talk about that, and how we lived our life and how she'd lived her life. We talked about heaven... With the friend who had the stroke, probably not so positive. It's harder to be more positive, because almost you can't see the point of it. It just seems pain for pain's sake. We can't say that she's better off now, or, and so that's been more of a bewildering... I think making us all realise that to live life day to day and to be responsible and to make the most of each day, but also just causing us to accept that some things are unexplainable, and also just to think that you're not going to sail through life just because you're a Christian and everything's going to be fine, you know, but to actually think about the fact that bad things do happen and also, I think one of the big things that certainly hit me and one or two others is, how on earth would you cope with these things if you didn't have a faith. It's hard enough when you do, but without God, how would you cope? I don't know. (Ruth)

I.4c Deference to uncontrollable authorities

The word 'deference' has deliberately been chosen in contradistinction to 'submission' which was the position of Assimilative learners. The latter identified and 'appointed' faith authorities, and followed this by cultivating a specific relationship with these authorities. The submission and obedience outlined in section I.3b was conscious and thought-through, and was seen to achieve a specific goal. Interpretive learners, however, with perhaps the exception of Chris, lived a different relationship with their faith authorities and representatives thereof. (I would actually ask whether a similar deference was also characteristic of their relationship with other, non-faith-related authorities, but had no data to provide an answer.) Rather than appoint the authorities as a conscious and deliberate decision, the authorities somehow appointed themselves and exerted a significant power over these people. For that reason, they tended to be the sort that couldn't be 'controlled' by interpretation, and took mostly a human form through other people, or an intangible divine form such as God himself. Miranda, Ruth and Margaret each expressed concern about potentially not being or doing 'right' in the eyes of others, communicated a vague sense of anxiety that she might somehow fall out of God's will—which might even lead to him punishing her—and generally deferred to other people's intellectual ability and conclusions. All three also shared a common characteristic of wanting to establish more firmly what they believed so that they could stand firm in the face of opposition or questioning. Other people were immensely influential: often more so than impersonal faith authorities. Margaret's interview oozed with 'duty' and she was struggling desperately with what she termed the 'faith-works balance', or the be/do relationship. She was tired of being the subject of a form of faith-related emotional blackmail when other people, or even her own reading of the bible, told her what she ought to be doing if she was fulfilling God's will for her. She, like her counterparts, was beginning to develop attributes that would eventually see her moving to another type.

I.4d Role of self

Coupled with this deference to uncontrollable authority was a notably weak sense of self, albeit a growing one. At varying points, Margaret, Miranda and Ruth all revealed an ambiguous functioning of the self, particularly vis-à-vis other people. This was the

research finding that corresponded most closely to the original hypothesis and to Belenky *et al*'s and Perry's previous work. Other people were 'right' and as a result there was little point in even trying to develop their own individual views. The fact that this was something they were now being asked to do was a real eye-opener and confidence booster to them.

When I started on the course, that, to realise what they wanted was our opinion, and I was thinking, Well, who am I to have any opinions? You know, with all these eminent theologians... But actually, to sort of have the confidence to try and find out my own position, and umm, has been a very good experience in a way. (Miranda)

Margaret had originally started her college years wanting to be 'told' what the truth was because this would enable her to deal with the questions other people 'threw' at her about her faith. She was having to change her original perceptions about the nature of faith and its relationship to absolute and relative truth.

As far as dealing with questions, answering challenges maybe that were thrown at me by other people, other Christians, or sorting out issues for myself, yes I can see I am working towards more confidence in that area. Umm, but at the same time, I can see that where I'd hoped to find answers, I'm maybe just in some cases finding that even the experts don't have answers and that really all there are, are a lot of opinions. So in some cases where I was really hoping to come to a conclusion on something I'm just learning what the questions are, and realising that finding answers is a lot more difficult than I had thought.

In Perry's terms, Margaret was making the vital move from relating to Authority to relating to authorities; in Fowler's terms, she was at a point of potentially moving from Stage 3 to Stage 4. Both involved a strengthening of the self that meant developing the means of owning one's personal and individual faith conclusions.

Chris was the exception at this point, since she displayed no sense of inadequacy or self-doubt. This may have been temperamental, which raises questions pertaining to the research that were explored in an earlier chapter. She shared other major traits characteristic of the group, however.

Lack of self-assertiveness and a weak sense of self also linked clearly to Interpretive learners' avoidance of rigorous logical thought. Since they considered themselves intellectually inferior to the eminent theological scholars whose views they were studying, and to their bright student peers, these believers seemed to quail at the prospect of acquiring similar intellectual skills, preferring instead to develop a set of their own. Once again similarities with Belenky *et al*'s research was evident. The scholars state:

Subjectivist women distrust logic, analysis, abstraction, and even language itself. They see these methods as alien territory belonging to men. As we listened to subjectivist women describe their attitudes about truth and knowing, we heard them argue against and stereotype those experts and remote authorities whom social institutions often promote as holding the keys to the truth—teachers, doctors, scientists, men in general. It was as if, by turning inward for answers, they had to deny strategies for knowing that they perceived as belonging to the masculine world. (Belenky *et al*, 1986:71)

There was no evidence at all among these believers that they saw their position as gender-related. To suggest that they 'distrusted' logic, analysis and abstraction is also probably incorrect. These women conveyed more a sense of being unable or unwilling to adhere to the patterns of thought being asked of them. They rebelled against them, as Chris's quote under section 1.4b(i) demonstrates, yet rather than resent or distrust these methods of reflection, some were beginning to wonder in the revelation that they too could develop the capacity to think in such a way. As Interpretive believers, however, they were content to accept the considered views and conclusions of these experts, appropriating the given framework to their own lives in a way that made sense to them. The issue was more one of self-confidence (and perhaps 'practice') than of gender-related distrust, although given the masculine origins of theology, patterns of Interpretive belief might well trace back to the same roots.

II. Summary and conclusion

Figure AC1 depicts in tabular form the essential characteristics of the four types.

Figure AC1

	Ways of believing
Discrete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Separation between faith authorities and experience• Intellectual approach to faith• Search for objectivity• Dualistic self, often experiencing tension• Construction of a world-view that makes sense and that provides structure• Indications, in varying degrees, of characteristics representative of other types on the typology• Use of conventional logic
Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emphasis on the personal: focus on a personal faith authority, understanding of faith in personal terms, construction of personal faith knowledge• Self plays a larger role than the faith authorities, allowing an equal inequality, evidenced through factors such as anger with God and doubt• Faith a process not an end• Conventional use of logic, yet allowing for mystery and a place for the incomprehensible
Assimilative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction of a faith-experience cycle that focuses on quality and end goals of life• Prime role of faith is to transform self• Emphasis on submission and obedience• Developed and deliberate use of instinct• Use of a pre-determined faith-logic

Interpretive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction of a faith-reality bubble• Employment of 'faith reasoning': faith-authenticated patterns of thought that allow for the miraculous, do not require rigorous logic, make use of subjective judgment, and uphold the bubble in which they exist• Deference to uncontrollable authorities such as other people and God• Often a weak role and sense of self
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The analysis brought to light a number of further characteristics that linked different types, in addition to those on which the construction of the typology was based (see previous chapter). These added further weight to its strength and validity. Briefly summarised, they consisted of the following.

- a) Discrete and Assimilative believers shared an emphasis on doctrine and belief. The content of faith was very important. Although it was used differently at the extreme position of each type, the two poles were also connected through a form of submission that was highly characteristic of Assimilative believers, yet present also in some Discrete believers.
- b) Assimilative and Interpretive believers exhibited a number of common features. Their faith was predominantly individual, as distinct from the world-view representative of Discrete and Related believers. Neither type practised or cultivated autonomous rigorous thought, preferring instead to be 'open' and ready to be moved and changed. Each used a specific form of faith logic, on the one hand pre-determined and well-established, on the other individually constructed. Experience too was individually focused and used to achieve faith goals.
- c) Discrete and Related believers were both concerned to use as high a degree of conventional logic and reasoning as possible. This meant that both types gave the impression of being more firmly rooted and grounded than their counterparts. Nevertheless, the groups differed in that Related believers were prepared to accept a non-conventionally-reasoned dimension of their lives that

related to their faith, which was hardly, if at all characteristic of Discrete believers.

The analysis also revealed a number of dichotomies that represented in more general terms the structure of the typology.

- a) Evidence vs experience. Discrete believers based their faith on evidence, but often found that their personal experience did not cohere with the resulting framework. Related believers emphasised their personal experience in order to construct a personalised world-view in which their views were 'evidenced'.
- b) Belief vs faith. This was the difference between intellectual commitment and lived construction of experiential knowledge. Again most strongly contrasted between the Discrete and Related believers, this characterised either a top-down pattern of constructing faith, or a bottom-up.
- c) Doctrinal vs human. This dichotomy is similar to the previous ones in that the emphasis on doctrine removes the personal and (potentially) subjective, whereas the human includes and welcomes it.
- d) Critique vs acceptance. To critique also involves a distancing, whereas to accept implies welcoming and embracing. The various groups tended to favour one approach or the other.
- e) Impersonal vs personal authority. Certain groups favoured, accepted, respected and cultivated a personal faith authority, while others sought an impersonal and objective authority. Each side had a degree of misgiving vis-à-vis the other.
- f) Goal vs process. This dichotomy has already been explored. Nevertheless, people tended either to focus on faith content as an end in itself, or use it and their faith authorities as sources from which to move and develop.

It is perhaps curious that the way in which the analysis took place resulted firstly in the identification of people's ways of believing and only secondly in their ways of learning, especially in light of earlier claims that the thesis would take an 'inside-out' approach. The fact that people's reflective styles emerged from their ways of

believing perhaps tacitly acknowledges the inter-relatedness of the two components and affirms the wording of the original research question which was articulated in two halves. The inside-out approach was fundamentally present, nonetheless, since the interview questions had centred around a core epistemological component.

Appendix D

Guide to Coding Practice

Learning and Faith dialectics

Learning

Inner

Outer

What factors control goal-setting, pacing, decision-making and evaluation?

Who and what is experienced as validating/non-validating?

Faith

Experiential

Cognitive

How is faith legitimated?

What factors govern the understanding and outworking of faith?

Guidance for coding

Coding procedure

Please identify instances where you consider the above dialectics are represented by putting 'blobs' in the margin. I have used the following colours:

- Inner: BLUE
- Outer: RED
- Experiential: LIME GREEN
- Cognitive: BROWN

If you consider a sentence or phrase represents two categories at the same time, put a blob of both colours.

Past or present habit

When a respondent refers to a previous habit that is no longer representative of the way he/she behaves, thinks or operates, *do not code these instances*. The research is interested in present behaviour.

Repeat of the same example in the same sentence

If the respondent repeats exactly the same point, or even the same words *within the same sentence*, only mark one example. If, however, he/she repeats the same point in a subsequent sentence, mark both instances.