O’Brien Micro-lecture 1A

Why take a course on theological reflection? Here are a few reasons:

- We as Christians seek to cooperate with God’s intentions as revealed by Jesus Christ, especially in Jesus’ inauguration of the Kingdom of God.
- To cooperate most fully and faithfully as ministers serving God and God’s Kingdom, we need to cultivate good habits of thought, prayer and action. Doing theological reflection is a good habit that brings these elements together.
- The more difficult our circumstances in ministry, the more necessary it is to have such habits to draw upon. Many of us were raised with certain special rituals and prayers in our families and churches. When times were hard, it helped to be able to turn to those for spiritual sustenance. In a similar way, we need a familiar approach that we can turn to for reflecting theologically in the midst of challenging issues and problems.

I believe that practical/pastoral theology and theological reflection for ministry should open us to new ways of discovering how God is present throughout all realms of our lives. Honoring this possibility means acknowledging that those who participate in the course as instructors, students and coordinators all bring rich and varied experiences from diverse cultural, economic and political situations. We walk on sacred ground when we share our stories with one another.

Here is one such story. Many years ago, I was part of a group from my church that formed to respond to homelessness in our community. Families, especially single women with children, were unable to afford their rents due to economic problems and were being turned out of their homes. Our group members wanted to help. Why? At first, it was because we knew some of the families personally. However, we also felt called as Christians to address this problem so as to show love for our neighbors and to protect their basic human rights. Through praying and talking together, through the hard work of building alliances with local city officials and with funding agencies, we eventually created a temporary shelter for some of the families.

In this project, I think, “practical theology” was at work. What do you think? You can come back to this in your group conversation.

In your reading and discussion, I hope you’ll keep in mind that:

- We are part of an open-ended journey of learning;
- We should seek to learn from one another in appreciation of our rich and diverse experiences as revealed in our stories;
• We should evaluate the readings, notes and concepts in relation to our particular contexts; and
• We should seek to learn from one another through our conversation in groups and, if possible, through using the Internet for dialogue with others taking the course in distant locations.