Goals of TR

North American theologian David Tracy identifies three audiences or “publics” for theology:

- Academy (for example, universities and schools of theology)
- Church
- Society

We often tend to associate theology with the work of experts in the academy. However, practical/pastoral theology may be addressed to any of the three audiences. And it is especially important for the local church within its local cultural context and for addressing the needs of society.

Note on p. xii in your assigned reading from the Whiteheads’ *Method in Ministry* how TR may be conceptualized along a continuum between a local Christian community (left side) and the academy (right side). For our purposes in the course, TR will be oriented more toward the “left” and “middle” of this spectrum, since we’ll be drawing on pastoral questions arising from ministers’ experiences (left column), as well as using theology and social sciences for exploration of the questions (middle column).

TR in ministry may have a number of goals:

1. Growth in spiritual wisdom and ability to discern God’s presence and activity
2. Strengthening of one’s identity and sense of wholeness as a person
3. Increased sense of meaning for one’s life and ministry
4. Strengthening of ties in a church or other faith community (such as a Basic Christian Community)
5. Determination of appropriate action by an individual or group to address a problem or need

Unit 5: Goals, Participants, and Elements
While all of these are valuable, TR for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation will always include the final goal:

5. Determination of appropriate action by an individual or group to address a problem or need

Participants in TR
TR may be done by one person, and this can be especially helpful for working on Goals 1-3 from the above list. However, a group usually provides a better setting for TR. This is due to the likelihood of deeper and more fruitful reflection occurring in a group than in one person, which clearly is helpful for Goals 1-3. A group also makes it more possible to work on Goals 4 and 5.

Where are such groups found and formed? I hope that you students and coordinators in JPIC will constitute a TR practice group during this course. Like you, others often learn TR in an educational or formational setting (such as a ministry training program or seminary). There they attempt to acquire it as habitus and as integral to their spirituality and as an important tool for effective ministry.

When you are already involved in a ministry setting, you may be able to establish a TR group for regular meetings, as with the group I described in my lecture. Such peer-minister groups can be exceptionally helpful for mutual support and generating imaginative approaches to pastoral questions.

But most importantly, for TR with a JPIC focus, you’ll want to foster such groups among your parishioners and other local people. This is crucial to pastoral leadership and planning, as will be discussed more fully in a future course. I believe it’s also an indispensable part of forming and transforming Christian communities to become committed to JPIC activities.

Unit 5: Goals, Participants, and Elements
Elements of TR
Recall our TR circle:

We’ve already discussed how TR is conducted within particular cultural contexts (Unit 4), and always within our spiritual conviction that God is working in our contexts and our reflection (Unit 3). Let’s now look in more detail at each of the four elements in the TR circle, following upon their definitions in Critical Concepts. In Unit 6 we will discuss how these elements relate to one another, and in Unit 7 we’ll begin to work with specific examples.

Experiences and Situations: TR normally begins with someone naming and describing “an urgent concern, a pressing issue arising in personal or communal experience.”¹ In

Whitehead and Whitehead, 9.

Unit 5: Goals, Participants, and Elements
our ministry, we usually do not lack for such concerns! Recall my use of the “fish” metaphor in the article on John 21 (Unit 2) to evoke the number and variety of experiences and situations available from which to choose. We do not need to choose only difficult or negative examples; sometimes there will be successes to draw upon and explore in TR.

**Social Analysis:** This will be treated more fully in a later course. For now, we can think of this element as the careful study and interpretation of the experience or situation, using responsible research by members of faith communities themselves as well as experts. The use of social sciences is especially valuable here. As many practical theologians have noted, it is vital to think in interdisciplinary ways that draw upon multiple sources and perspectives. Thus a minister might use local demographic information, public health records, environmental impact studies, surveys of his/her faith community, and other such resources in doing social analysis related to JPIC.

**Christian Tradition:** The quote from Thomas Groome in Critical Concepts gives a sense of the vast and rich storehouse that Christians draw upon. When we use the word “tradition,” often Scripture and official Church teachings first come to mind. However, many other elements of tradition can be formative and transformative in the TR process. For Mexican Americans, for example, the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe has become central to their participation in TR. For people in religious congregations such as the Claretians, Spiritans or Sisters of St. Joseph, the biographies and writings of their founders are indispensable parts of the tradition.

**New Actions:** The TR process typically culminates in imaginative strategies for ways of living in faithfulness to the Kingdom of God and to our communities through our ministry. Sometimes the process helps us to affirm what we are already doing well, and continue to do it. At other times we are challenged to fundamental change in our practices. As with all the TR elements, deciding on meaningful New Actions—and doing them—tends to be more effective when performed by a community.
• **Culture:** all the interrelated elements that are produced by people to create their way of life, including objects, beliefs, customs, symbols, values and worldviews.
  
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• **Context:** the particular setting in which a particular group of people has experiences. This includes time and place as well as members’ self-understanding of their identity and the factors shaping it (including history, social class, etc).
  
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• **Experience:** participation in an historical event or episode. There is no “pure” experience; it is always interpreted through use of our bodily senses, cognitive, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Example: a specific encounter with another person in ministry.
  
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• **Habitus:** "a cognitive and affectional disposition or orientation toward God, others, and creation"\(^2\) that shapes how Christians live; and the way in which such dispositions and orientations are consciously cultivated. For our purposes, theological reflection in ministry will be understood as a habitus that promotes orientation to service of God and God’s Kingdom in the real-life circumstances of our world.
  
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• **Spirituality:** our orientation to the deepest dimensions of life, encompassing our relationship to God, other humans and the entire created order. Prayer is an essential part of spirituality, but spirituality is not limited solely to prayer.
  
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• **Situation:** an ongoing set of experiences constituting a recognizable pattern. Example: a series of encounters with another person in ministry revealing certain recurring characteristics, styles of interaction, etc.
  
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• **Social Analysis:** analysis of the political, economic, social and cultural factors uncovered in experiences and situations. Typically this incorporates some use of relevant social sciences and their findings (sociology, economics, politics, anthropology, cultural studies, etc).
  
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• **Christian Tradition:** what Christians receive and pass on in their faith communities through teaching, preaching, worshipping, and other central activities. Tradition is drawn from “Scriptures, symbols, myths, rituals, liturgies, creeds, dogmas, doctrines, theologies, practices, spiritualities, expected life-styles, values, art, artifacts, structures, and so on.”
  
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• **New Actions:** The specific, practical measures that people decide upon and perform in order to realize the fruits of TR.
  
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