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# Ann Loades as practical theologian and Christian educator

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## ABSTRACT

This article attempts to frame the theology and teaching of Ann Loades within the categories of practical theology and Christian education. After outlining the author's academic relationship with Loades, the author analyses the meaning of the phrase 'practical theology' and some aspects of the debate surrounding the term. He contends that Loades's wide-ranging reflections on the practices of Christian prayer and spirituality, worship and liturgy, and ethics and belonging may be regarded as examples of such a practical theology. The author's concept of 'ordinary theology' is then employed as a bridge into an exploration of Christian learning and teaching, which draws parallels between both Loades's interpretation of a 'learning Christ' and her perspectival account of spiritual vision, and the views of other Christian educationalists and theologians. Although Ann Loades did not inhabit the rather specialised worlds of practical theologians or Christian educationalists, her work has much to contribute to both.

## KEYWORDS

Ann loades; Christian education; Christian learning; correlation; ordinary theology; practical theology; religious education (RE)

## Introduction

I first met Ann Loades in 1974 when she took over as supervisor for my part-time doctorate,<sup>1</sup> shortly before she became a full-time lecturer in philosophical theology in Durham University's Department of Theology (later 'Theology and Religion'). At the time I was serving as Chaplain and lecturer at St. Hild's College (later the College of St. Hild and St. Bede) in Durham. I believe that I may have been her first doctoral student. Durham University's obituary notice reported of her that 'Ann Loades will be remembered with most affection by her students, especially perhaps her research students, to whom she was an extraordinarily kind and invariably supportive mentor'. That was certainly my experience.

I worked with her again after I returned to Durham in 1981, after a spell teaching in Lincoln, to take up the post of founding Director of the North of England Institute for Christian Education ('NEICE').<sup>2</sup> This independent ecumenical charity was the brain child of Ann's colleague, Stephen Sykes, who at the time held the post of Van Mildert Professor. NEICE was founded in order to forge links, both at the theoretical and the practical level, between Christian theology and education, so as 'to contribute towards the

<sup>1</sup>Astley, 'A Critical Analysis of the Religious Epistemology of Ian T. Ramsey'.

<sup>2</sup>See <https://neice.webspace.durham.ac.uk/>.

further education of those with a responsibility for teaching the Christian faith'. To this end, its objectives included the research dimension of promoting 'the study of how children, young people and adults understand the concepts and participate in the experiences of the Christian faith, in the context of all the influences which bear upon them in contemporary culture'. Additionally, it was to be involved in practical teaching and other activities that were primarily oriented towards developing and encouraging the educational (teaching and learning) dimension of the Christian church itself, processes that were to be viewed as an integral aspect of 'its being, belonging, mission, ministry, and worship'.<sup>3</sup>

Ann proved to be equally encouraging of my work in this very different role, including promoting my own and the Institute's links with Durham University. Initially, NEICE was housed in university premises in exchange for my participation in some teaching and supervisory work in its School of Education, but also in the Theology Department where I found myself teaching on Ann's course on 'philosophy and the Christian religion'.

Inevitably however, my work at NEICE fell much more under the broad category of 'practical theology', and especially the sub-category of Christian education.<sup>4</sup> Yet, I never found that this change of scholarly, research, and increasingly empirical<sup>5</sup> attention separated me from Ann's more fundamentally theological interests: rather, they proved mutually illuminating. In any case, as I shall try to show in this article, I came to think of Ann Loades, at least to some extent, as a practical theologian and Christian educator – although, to my knowledge, she never applied either label to herself.

## Coming to terms with practical theology

'Practical theology' was still regarded as a rather obscure, even slightly embarrassing, term to employ in many English universities and seminaries in the 1970s and 1980s. Ann's former department in Durham University has become both greatly enlarged and much more diverse (and gender balanced) than it was in her day. Its current academic staff now includes a professor of theology and ministry,<sup>6</sup> and one of practical theology,<sup>7</sup> in addition to faculty members specialising in the anthropology and sociology of religion, 'receptive ecumenism', 'medical humanities', and Catholic social practice.<sup>8</sup> At the time of Ann's appointment, however, it was dominated by biblical studies, church history, and the study of patristic theology. The appointment of the Anglican theologian (later

<sup>3</sup>Astley, 'Researching the Field of Christian Education', 336.

<sup>4</sup>See Roebben and Warren, *Religious Education as Practical Theology*.

<sup>5</sup>'Empirical' in its broadest dictionary sense is concerned with observation or experience rather than theory or pure logic. The 'empirical theology' of Hans Van der Ven or Leslie Francis constitutes one type of practical theological investigation, which adopts the approaches and tools of the social sciences (see Francis, Robbins, and Astley, *Empirical Theology*, xiii–xiv; Van der Ven and Scherer-Rath, *Normativity and Empirical Research*, 140; and Van der Ven, *Practical Theology*). Much practical theology, however, while experientially and observationally reflective, does not employ social-scientific methods of hypothesis testing.

<sup>6</sup>This particular post involves academic leadership for Durham University's validation of the 'Common Awards' in Theology, Ministry, and Mission offered by many churches in their theological colleges and courses. Prior to his appointment, the holder of this chair had produced a book on the theology of secular universities (Higton, *A Theology of Higher Education*).

<sup>7</sup>Pete Ward, who now chairs the Network for Ecclesiology and Ethnography (<https://www.ecclesiologyandethnography.net>), was formerly engaged in the practice of youth ministry.

<sup>8</sup><https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/theology-religion/about-us/staff/>. 'Research staff' currently listed include some with interests in 'Christianity and the Armed Forces', 'theology and spirituality', 'digital death', and 'theological education'.

bishop) Stephen Sykes in 1974 significantly broadened the department's curriculum (in this case, to include systematics and a wider range of historical theology), as did the later transfer of staff from the Religious Studies Department of Newcastle University. The teaching of liturgy was also subsequently extended, and staff changes consequent to the merger of Hild-Bede College with Durham University led to a strengthened concern for ethics.

These last two subject areas form, at least in principle, regions within the territory of practical theology. The study of both Christian ethics<sup>9</sup> and worship<sup>10</sup> involves reflection on Christian practice. And practical theology is always, of course, about practice. It is concerned with practical matters, both in the everyday sense of performing activities and exercising skills by 'doing things', and also in the more technical sense of engaging in 'practices' that are understood as co-operative human activities governed by implicit rules.<sup>11</sup>

In Christianity such practices encompass a wide range of overtly and implicitly religious activities: pastoral care, counselling and spiritual direction; the forming and maintenance of community; the teaching and learning of religion (and therefore preaching, education, evangelism, and other forms of communication); social and political action; prayer, worship and liturgy; responses to moral issues at an individual, interpersonal, communal and global level; and so on.<sup>12</sup>

While such ministries and behaviours have often been regarded as *applications* of theology, the points at which 'pure theology' is applied deductively to the life of the church and the world, the use of the term practical theology rather than applied theology has become the norm in Europe and the United States since the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> Practical theology is best conceived as referring to a type of study constituted by the field of Christian practices and concrete situations, together with the interdisciplinary approach (including theology) used to explore it.<sup>14</sup> Its centre of attention has

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<sup>9</sup>We may note the historical precedent of the seventeenth-century Puritan, Richard Baxter's four-volume publication, *A Christian Directory or a Sum of Practical Theology and Cases of Conscience*, which divided Practical Theology into four areas, each of which was concerned with 'duties'. One was designated *Christian Ethics (or Private Duties)* and another *Christian Politics (or Duties to Our Rulers and Neighbours)*.

<sup>10</sup>Etymologically, worship is the practice of ascribing (supreme) worth, often through ritual texts ('liturgies') and ceremonies. Liturgical theology has been defined as 'the elucidation of the meaning of worship' (Schmemmann, *Introduction*, 16, cf. 190).

<sup>11</sup>In practical theology circles, Christian (and other religious) practice is sometimes referred to as *praxis*: that is, as reflective action or 'value-directed and value-laden action'; although *praxis* is also more loosely thought of simply as the use of a theory or a belief in a practical way.

<sup>12</sup>Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, 2. We should add to this list other 'specific practices by which we respond to God's grace', including forgiveness and hospitality (Bass and Dykstra, *For Life Abundant*, 358). Other relevant practices include spiritual disciplines and the manifest behavioural effects of spirituality (see Astley, *Religious and Spiritual Experience*, 10–12); the latter effects may result from our *moral* dispositions being 'expressions of determinate states of our spiritual life' (McGhee, 'Facing Truths', 243; see also Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension*, 3–5, 147–9). The issues involved in defining 'Christian practices' are well rehearsed in Dykstra and Bass, 'A Theological Understanding'.

<sup>13</sup>But note Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 3–4.

<sup>14</sup>I am employing here the useful distinction between (1) a 'field' of knowledge, in the sense of the subject area, subject-matter, data, territory, 'facts', or set of phenomena targeted for study; and (2) the different approaches and methodologies ('disciplines' or 'forms of knowledge') that are brought to bear on this field, each of which has its own concepts, theories, logic, skills, and testing procedures. Systematic, philosophical, biblical, moral, and doctrinal theology may be identified as the most salient *theological* disciplines to apply to this field, but they are often employed in concert and conversation with a variety of other disciplines, including social-scientific ones. While I agree with Swinton and Mowat that practical theology involves 'critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world', I would not wish to limit the application of the phrase as they do to *one* (even one 'rich and diverse') discipline (see their *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 3, 7). The 'reflective process' which the church should pursue in order 'to articulate the theological grounds of practical living' (to quote Browning, *The Moral Context*, 14) frequently needs to include non-theological disciplines as well.

been identified as ‘Christian life and practice within the Church and in relation to wider society’.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the tendency in many divinity/theological schools in the USA and elsewhere, practical theology should not be restricted to the so-called ‘practical arts of ministry’<sup>16</sup>; the whole church is engaged in Christian practice. Practical theology certainly cannot, in principle, be regarded as outside the interests and insights of a lay theologian such as Ann Loades.<sup>17</sup>

Practical theology is often said to involve an inductive move from practice to theory, routinely followed by some species of ‘return to practice’. Where ‘applied theology’ might seem to imply that theology itself is not affected by interaction with practical issues and has somehow acquired an ‘immunity from having to change in the light of experience’, practical theology involves a more interactive and dialogical process of mutual change.<sup>18</sup> This is often thought of as taking place within a ‘circular movement from practice to critical reflection and back to corrected practice, or to radically transformed practice’.<sup>19</sup> Some apologists for practical theology go further, however, arguing that Christian theology *as such* ‘should be seen as practical through and through and at its very heart’.<sup>20</sup>

Reflective practice, it might be said, always has an underlying *theological* dimension that comprises the framework of religious meanings and values – and in our culture this applies even to many of our secular practices.

Our practices, and therefore our experiences, are thus undergirded by meaning, in so far as these things are ‘meaningful’ to us. It is these meanings that shape the questions, concerns and criteria that we bring to our more ‘theoretical’ discussions about the Bible and Christian doctrine, which have themselves arisen in very specific contexts of human and religious activity. All real theology, it may then be argued, arises in a *dialogue* between ‘us’ (our lives and experiences) and ‘them’ (the Christian tradition).<sup>21</sup>

On this view, all Christian theology may be thought of as an attempt to *correlate* – etymologically, to bring (back) together – two things: human life experience and our reflections on it, on the one hand, and the Christian heritage of faith (which is itself partly a product of similar dialogues in the past), on the other.

For David Tracy, in his revision of Paul Tillich’s ‘dialectical theology’ (in which Christianity offers answers to our culture’s contemporary questions), all Christian theology involves a *mutual* critical correlation between these two ‘conversation partners’: that is, of ‘the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the Christian fact [its scriptures, doctrines, rituals, witnesses, symbols, etc.] and the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the contemporary situation’. Tracy claims that the traditional sub-disciplines of fundamental, systematic, and practical theology only differ in the emphasis which each

<sup>15</sup>Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 1.

<sup>16</sup>This usage would follow from Friedrich Schleiermacher’s restriction of the term practical theology to the practice of church leadership, in his *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* (1830). (For Schleiermacher, interestingly, practical theology was the ‘crown’ of theological study.)

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Graham, ‘On Becoming a Practical Theologian’.

<sup>18</sup>Pattison and Woodward, ‘An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology’, 3.

<sup>19</sup>Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly*, 123. Very different accounts have been given of the ways in which the reflections of the practical theologian may guide Christian action and, indeed, inform Christian being. See, for example, Ballard, ‘Practical Theology as an Academic Discipline’; Heitink, *Practical Theology*, chs 8, 9, and 11; Osmer, *Practical Theology*; and Van der Ven, *Practical Theology*.

<sup>20</sup>Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 7; cf. Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit*, 148.

<sup>21</sup>Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, 3.

side of the correlation receives.<sup>22</sup> Theology construed in this way is always contextual, rooted in some particular life experience or issue, as is every conversation.

According to this interpretation, then, all theology is practical, and all theology is ‘in context’. Hence we may be permitted to assert that Ann Loades was a practical theologian, because *all* theologians are practical theologians.

But that may seem too facile an argument, if it doesn’t attempt to distinguish between degrees and types of theological discipline, and between particular kinds of contemporary context. Surely, even when we allow for the ubiquity of the hermeneutical dialectic, some forms of theology (such as biblical textual studies, descriptive historical theology, or philosophical theology,<sup>23</sup> perhaps) are much less dependent on interpretations of the contemporary situation? It is where and when the contemporary conversation partner’s voice is manifestly and deeply spiritually, religiously, and/or morally *self-involving* that it needs to be more clearly heard. And it is where and when the theological discipline itself, in its content and form, is most spiritually, religiously, and/or morally *sensitive, aware, reactive* and *evocative* – and hence *catalytic* – that this conversation is likely to prove salvific.

And that state of affairs is not restricted, I would argue, to the traditional domains of practical theology. It even obtains in the study, and undeniably in the communication, of systematic theology, and even more in that of Christian doctrine (‘teachings’). Such theology is always in conversation: in the scholar’s interpretation and understanding, the teacher’s ministry of communication, and the learner’s interactive ‘reception’.<sup>24</sup>

It is perhaps pertinent to note here that Ann described herself as ‘notoriously “unsystematic”’ in her own interests and also ‘astonished at the range of Theology wholly ignored by [many] “systematic theologians”’.<sup>25</sup> As I have maintained elsewhere, many of these theological concerns, and a generally non-systematic approach, are both typical of the ‘theology’ of those Christians who do their thinking about God outside the academy. *Ordinary theology* is my term for the ‘theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the [reflective] God-talk of those believers who have received [little or] no scholarly theological education’.<sup>26</sup> (This type of theology is always in conversation with more academic forms of theology in much academic theological education, something I shall say more about later.)

Nevertheless, practical theology is especially ‘conversational’ because it is oriented towards human practice. Ann’s work frequently focused on practices that are meat and drink to practical theologians, or which should be – even if they are not self-evidently ‘Christian’ practices. These practices included moral behaviour and forms of human belonging, in particular in her contributions to ecclesiology and feminist theology (including her reflections on the lives of female saints), and her extensive writing on worship, sacraments, and liturgy.<sup>27</sup> But they also embrace many of the Arts – and, especially in her case, the art of dance (she taught ballet to adults for many years).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Tracy, ‘The Foundations of Practical Theology’; see also Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, chs 3 and 4 and his *The Analogical Imagination*, 255, cf. 101, 167, 452.

<sup>23</sup>According to David Brown, this was not only the area of expertise of Ann’s first full-time appointment but also a continuing concern throughout her academic work (see Watson and Burns, *Exchanges of Grace*, 272–3).

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Astley, *Christian Doctrine*, ch. 1.

<sup>25</sup>Loades, *Serendipity*, 56.

<sup>26</sup>Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, 1, cf. 52–8, 86–8, 94, 144; ‘Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology’, 1.

<sup>27</sup>She rightly acknowledged that ‘worship is the root of theology’ (‘On Music’s Grace’, 25).

<sup>28</sup>Loades, *Grace and Glory*, 102–4, 115; cf. also her ‘Theological Reflection’; ‘Sacramentality and Christian Spirituality’, 262–4; ‘On Music’s Grace’; ‘Anglican Spirituality’; and ‘A Priestly Role for Music’.

Her contributions to connecting spirituality, theology, and practice (especially in the Arts) include the collections she co-edited with David Brown, *The Sense of the Sacramental* and *Christ the Sacramental Word*.

I especially value Ann's work in prioritising what I would call 'ordinary' activities, events, and experiences<sup>29</sup> (and which she sometimes described as 'the common' things of life),<sup>30</sup> ranging from the matter and actions of the sacraments to our bodies and those of others, including children – and our faces, including Christ's.<sup>31</sup> Referencing Karl Rahner, she writes of 'finding the divine depth of ordinary life'.<sup>32</sup>

Elsewhere, she aligns herself with other feminist theologians who regularly highlight women's experience, and thereby provide a more inclusive, integrated, and humane approach than much academic theology has to offer, by taking as their starting point a celebration of such 'ordinary' experiences as friendship, love, sex, embodiment, child-birth, and nurture.<sup>33</sup> At the same time they promote a holistic spirituality that is not one of 'separation from the chaos and messiness of ordinary living, but of *immersion in it*'.<sup>34</sup> In her own feminist writings, Ann wished to 'enlarge feminist perspectives' so as to make their insights available as a theological resource for all, especially in a broader and embodied 'sacramental understanding of the world'. These insights include what Ann called 'graced responses . . . however inchoate and incoherent' – a description that maps onto my portrayal of the nature of much ordinary theology.<sup>35</sup>

## Coming to terms with Christian education

Talk of theology's conversation partner and her voice (see above) are exceptionally significant in a number of areas of church practice that have customarily attracted the interest of the practical theologian: locations where the language of 'dialogue', 'conversation', and 'voice' may be literally applied. These include apologetics, preaching, and prophecy; Christian love, worship, fellowship, and belonging; and pastoral ministry and counselling. But one that is often overlooked, despite its significant contribution to many of these other practices, is the activity of Christian *education*.

While the phrase 'Christian education' is sometimes used to denote more or less academic forms of education *about* the Christian faith, in school religious education and university religious studies programmes, it is more frequently employed in Britain to label a general education that is (often implicitly) 'of a Christian nature', in church schools and some church-founded institutions of higher education. My preferred definition, however, lies closer to its broader North American usage, which applies this expression to any activities that are or include processes of formation or nurture that

<sup>29</sup>Using this word once more in a non-disparaging sense, to refer to what is 'normal' and of the 'usual' kind: see Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, 47–9.

<sup>30</sup>Loades, *Grace and Glory*, 29, 112.

<sup>31</sup>Loades, *Grace and Glory*, chs 16, 18. ('We don't expect to see grace and glory on one another's faces . . . and I don't see why we shouldn't' (83).). Cf. her *Grace is Not Faceless*.

<sup>32</sup>Loades, *Grace and Glory*, 95–6. Cf. Astley, *Christ of the Everyday*, ch. 2.

<sup>33</sup>For example, Moltmann-Wendel, *I Am My Body*. See Loades, 'Sacramentality and Christian Spirituality', 261.

<sup>34</sup>Grey, 'Sapiential Yearnings', 82. Cf. Soskice, 'Love and Attention', 66; Loades, 'Sacramentality and Christian Spirituality', 259–60.

<sup>35</sup>Loades, *Feminist Theology*, 1, 167–8; 'Finding New Sense in the "Sacramental"', 169. Cf. Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, 126–9. Although she never drew my attention to the parallels with her own work, Ann always supported my claims for the significance of people's ordinary theology and the importance of its study in the academy.

involve education (understood broadly as ‘facilitated learning’) into Christianity, through the adoption and growth in characteristically Christian beliefs and affects, and in dispositions and skills for Christian behaviour.<sup>36</sup> Where the focus is on Christian beliefs, and the content, context, and processes are specifically theological, this may represent one species of Christian ‘theological education’.

As it happens, Tracy’s critical correlation approach is closely followed by one eminent Christian educationalist, the Irish-American Catholic scholar (and former priest), Tom Groome.<sup>37</sup> Groome refers to ‘the whole faith tradition of the Christian people’ using the ‘more open ended’, metaphorical term ‘Christian Story’, and has adopted the phrase ‘Christian Vision’ as a metaphor for people’s ‘lived response’ to this Story and the promise it offers.<sup>38</sup> In the dialectical movements of his ‘shared praxis’ approach, learners ask themselves both ‘How does this Christian Story/Vision affirm, question, and call us beyond present praxis’, and ‘How does present praxis affirm and critically appropriate’ this version of the Christian Story/Vision – so that they may take it into ‘their own lives and contexts’, make it their own and move on, choosing ‘a personal faith response for the future’.<sup>39</sup>

This approach is fruitful for exploring the correlation and conversation that I believe does, and must, take place at many levels in Christian education and (‘confessional’) theological education. Specifically, it occurs between the learner’s ordinary theology and any more ‘extraordinary’ theology they may encounter that is ‘largely derived from the academy’ but sometimes takes the form of ‘an ecclesiastical theology defined by church councils or other formal authorities’.<sup>40</sup> Such learners,

never enter into any task of theological learning with empty minds or hearts; they always come with something to contribute themselves – something to say on their own account. In this conversational dialogue, it is unlikely that the new theology they are being taught will wholly erase the students’ own ideas and imprint its own . . . . And when students do ‘take over’ or ‘take up’ a piece of teaching, it will be subtly changed in becoming part of their own belief- or value-system. As the ideas of another converse with the learners’ own ideas, the two sets will interact and eventually transmute into something that may be rather different from either – in a way that is often as individual and personal as the ordinary theology from which it began.<sup>41</sup>

Did Ann Loades regard herself as a confessional Christian educator? Again, I am not aware that she ever adopted this expression as an explicit self-description. Nevertheless, her teaching and supervision, more than that of many academic theologians, fulfilled this role in the case of some students (overtly Christian students?) some of the time. And it was, of course, a role that she expressly adopted in her sermons. Her support for the aims

<sup>36</sup>Astley, *Philosophy of Christian Religious Education*, ch. 1; ‘Researching the Field of Christian Education’, 327–34; see also my ‘Forms of Faith and Forms of Communication’. In the debate over the nature of religious education (‘RE’) in schools in Britain, my definition would often be described as ‘confessional’ (meaning here religiously formative rather than specifically denominational): cf. Astley and Francis, *Critical Perspectives*, sections 1–4.

<sup>37</sup>Although he has recently expressed a preference for the term ‘integration’ rather than ‘correlation’ (Groome, *Will There Be Faith?* 283, 300, cf. 152, 282).

<sup>38</sup>Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, ch. 9.

<sup>39</sup>Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, 207–8, 217–23; *Sharing Faith*, 146–8. In *Sharing Faith*, Groome applies the same movements to different styles of Christian ministry (331–4), as well as to elements within preaching (374–8), social action (400–3), and pastoral counselling (417–23).

<sup>40</sup>Astley, ‘Ordinary Theology and the Learning Conversation’, 46. By comparison with academic theology, ordinary theology is essentially ‘lay’ – in the sense of not ‘expert’ or ‘professionally qualified’ (*Ordinary Theology*, 64).

<sup>41</sup>Astley, ‘Ordinary Theology and the Learning Conversation’, 47; cf. Astley, *Christian Doctrine*, 7–13.



and work of NEICE clearly showed her commitment to the study of Christian education within the academy, and its practice within the churches.

Perhaps even more pointedly, Ann recognised the significance of the category of learning within Christianity, even from its origins. Thus, in an Ash Wednesday sermon, she acknowledged that Christ *learned*, through his desert and through other experiences, 'what to resist and what to embrace; what to reject and what to love'.<sup>42</sup> Although the language of learning is scriptural, it is naturally enough most often applied to the disciple (*mathetes*, 'the one who directs their mind', but identified more as an holistic apprentice-learner than a purely intellectual student-learner).<sup>43</sup> The disciple 'learns Christ' as well as learning his teaching (Ephes. 4:20, Matt. 11:29). And although the language of teaching has been routinely applied to the instruction of converts, and therefore distinguished from the activities of evangelisation in its aims, intentions, and outcomes (*kerygma* as distinct from *didache*), in their broader definitions the terms 'learning', 'teaching', and 'education' may be applied to both practices.<sup>44</sup>

Ann uses educational terms in this broad way in her reference to Christ's learning, and in doing so she follows the lead of the Letter to the Hebrews, which affirms that, though a Son, Jesus 'learned obedience through what he suffered' (5:8).<sup>45</sup> There is, I think, much to be said for the idea of Jesus as a learner, indeed as a 'learning teacher', an insight that has been claimed to be more consistent both with Christ's humanity and with the nature of his own teaching.<sup>46</sup>

I would argue that in our case, and perhaps also in the case of Jesus himself, what is largely being learned is a form of 'spiritual vision' that is essentially grounded in our perception of the ordinary, although for some it may be first provoked by dramatic and explicitly 'religious experiences' of a much more out-of-the-ordinary kind.<sup>47</sup> This 'revision of everyday experience' is largely 'a matter of seeing the same things differently', and I have described the spiritual learning required for it as being 'essentially ophthalmic . . . a correction of vision' that results in a seeing 'in depth', as through the eyes of Christ.<sup>48</sup> This is surely allied to what the systematic theologian Mark McIntosh (who also briefly taught at Durham) meant by the 'new perspective' that thinks about everything 'from God's point of view', and which he regarded as the essence of true theology.<sup>49</sup> And it is what we find, too, in Ann Loades's account of Evelyn Underhill's looking on the world 'with the eyes of contemplation'.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

Ann Loades was a theologian who knew how wide and varied the study of theology is, or at least should be. It is true that she did not inhabit the rather specialised (and inevitably

<sup>42</sup>Loades, *Grace and Glory*, 23–4.

<sup>43</sup>Astley, *Christ of the Everyday*, 8–13. See also Astley, 'Forming Disciples'; Alexander, 'The Gospel and Acts', 8; and Hayes, 'Early Church Discipleship', 23–5.

<sup>44</sup>Astley, *Philosophy of Christian Religious Education*, 12–13 and ch. 3.

<sup>45</sup>Although she strenuously rejected the 'morbid over-identification with Christ as suffering victim' that marks out certain unhealthy spiritual viewpoints (Loades, *Searching for Lost Coins*, 41, 43).

<sup>46</sup>As in Chater, *Jesus Christ, Learning Teacher*, xix–xx, ch. 2 and *passim*; cf. Hull, *What Prevents*, 204–9.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Astley, *Religious and Spiritual Experience*, ch. 5.

<sup>48</sup>Astley, *Christ of the Everyday*, 5, 11, 16–18; 'Forming Disciples', 12–15. Cf. Perkins, *Jesus as Teacher*, 60; Melchert, *Wise Teaching*, 243.

<sup>49</sup>McIntosh, *Divine Teaching*, 18.

<sup>50</sup>Loades, *Evelyn Underhill*, 27–8.

limited) scholarly and research worlds of practical theologians or Christian educationalists, by reading their literatures, attending their conferences, or publishing in their journals. But that does not mean that she did not share their fundamental concern about engaging in critical theological reflection on the practices of Christian prayer and spirituality, worship and liturgy, belonging and caring, and learning and teaching. She was a member of the Christian church and she therefore took part in these practices. And because she was instinctively a theological person, her practice was bound to involve theologically reflective action that expressed, and often conveyed to others, what the Christian gospel meant to her. She was, I believe, a sophisticated theologian of practice and a dedicated communicator of Christianity.

The enterprise of practical theology, in all its variety, lies much closer to the studies of many 'more academic' theologians than is often acknowledged. In framing Ann's work within the categories of practical theology and Christian education, however, I do not intend to imply that her theology or her teaching would have been much enhanced had she read the literatures or connected with the internal debates associated with these studies, or with their proponents.

It is rather, I would argue, that they – and, unquestionably, I – have still much to learn from Ann Loades.

## Disclosure statement

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## Notes on contributor

*Jeff Astley* is an honorary professor in Durham University's Department of Theology and Religion, UK. He was supervised by Ann Loades for his doctorate in philosophy of religion and later taught with her at Durham University for several years while he was Director of the North of England Institute for Christian Education (NEICE). He has authored or edited over forty books on Christian education, ordinary theology, religious faith, and Christian doctrine.

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