Part Four

Application

Persuaded but Daunted?

For many people to be persuaded of the value of the thinking processes described in this book is to be daunted, sometimes overwhelmed, by the thought of using them themselves in their work. Over and again I have seen these feelings gradually come over groups of people and depress them. This happens most often when people have experienced the value of the processes over a period of time through courses or consultancy sessions and they are reflecting on the implications for themselves of these experiences. And it happens even when we have discussed how to use the processes step by step as we have gone along—as, in fact, we have in this book—and people have felt confident at each stage that they themselves could use this method or that. Reflecting on the process as a whole when no aspect has been mastered is much more intimidating. Consequently, as you might be doing just that at this stage of the book, this is the time to look at four frequently recurring strands in the experience of being disturbed and daunted by the thought of using these methods rigorously:

— negative feelings about past practices;

— feeling inadequate to the intellectual challenges of thinking about work with people for human and spiritual development;

— the difficulties of finding the time and energy to acquire and use these processes in the working situation;

— the fear of losing control through getting people thinking for themselves, i.e. through adopting a non-directive approach.

I. NEGATIVE FEELINGS ABOUT PAST PRACTICES

Convictions about the need for change in our ways of working can make us feel badly about our past and present practices, which can now appear to be misguided, ineffectual or wrong. Time without number I have heard and voiced the plaintive cries, "If I had only known that ten (twenty, thirty or forty) years ago." "I should have been taught this in College." "Oh, the opportunities that I have missed and the time I have wasted." All too easily attention can be diverted from the challenge of the present through preoccupation with our remorse about the past. These feelings have to be overcome if we are to release

the energies, and to secure the freedom that we need to make our best response to the challenge of change and the problems associated with it. A thought that helps me to do this is that, whatever the merits and de-merits of our previous ways of working and our culpability in using them, the most important thing is that they have brought us to this moment of insight, opportunity and challenge. That is *the* way that *we* came. This is the point from which *we* must start. We might have come by another route, but we did not. (I have to struggle with myself to gain this orientation to the past and the present. I have to work hard to overcome my negative feelings about my past performance and missed opportunities. I have a strong propensity to go on blaming myself and others unhelpfully and at times masochistically.) Therefore, the vital questions are, "Where do I (we) go from here?" "Should I make changes in the way in which I work and if so what changes and how should I make them?" All too easily we can avoid the issues by dallying with questions such as, "Did I get here by the best possible route?"

Focusing on the here and now and the future in this way enables us to use rather than misuse our past experience of working with people and the insights into ourselves as workers. Evaluated experience and insights provide invaluable information by which we ourselves can assess present ways of working and any others that are on offer. Putting experience to such good use helps us to feel much better about the painful past because it helps to redress it. Doing this is, in fact, to use the reflective practices described in this book to tackle the negative feelings that they have had a part in generating.

Perhaps this is the moment for you to pursue this matter further. If so, the questions in Display 11:1 might help you to reflect on your ways of working and to identify any changes you might want to make.

II. FEELING INADEQUATE TO THE INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGES

Some people feel they do not have not the intellect to think things through in the ways suggested. This is painful, especially when they are convinced that thinking things through thoroughly and in depth for themselves and with others is of the essence of working with people in community for human and spiritual development, and that is what they want to do—a painful conjunction of thoughts, feelings and aspirations when all this is at the heart of your vocational yearnings. I know about this through repeatedly not being able to get my mind round some vital subject or to put my thoughts into creative order. This continuing experience must be taken seriously to see if there are things which will help us to handle it better and to think as effectively as we can. I restrict myself to the things that I have found helpful.

First, it is necessary to acknowledge that our intellectual abilities can never

1. Note significant characteristics of the ways in which you:
   — think, feel and worry about your work in general;
   — work out what you are going to do and how you are going to do it (proactive thinking and planning);
   — work through things that go wrong (reactive thinking);
   — fail to keep thinking.

2. Note the characteristics that you consider useful and any ways in which they could be developed to improve your effectiveness.

3. Note any characteristics that you consider unhelpful.

4. Reflecting on this book with its emphasis on reflection-in-action and any other approaches or methods which you have read about or experienced, note the ones you wish to acquire or develop.

5. What would be the overall effects, positive and negative, of
   — making any changes noted in 2, 3 and 4?
   — not making them?

6. What problems would you have to overcome
   — to make the changes?
   — if you did not make them?
   And how could you overcome them?

7. What do your responses to 1–6 say to you?

8. What would contribute to a realistic work/worker development programme for you?

DISPLAY 11:1. TAKING STOCK

master the complexity of the human and spiritual subject-matter with which we are grappling. The latter is always more than a match for the former. Therefore we are not intellectually deficient because we cannot master it. Getting our minds around human events and situations is difficult and at times quite impossible because they are so complex and the theories that purport to interpret them are often confusing and conflicting. Comprehensive understanding always eludes us. At times we simply cannot understand what is going on. Even in relation to the most ordinary human events we have to act in ignorance of vital information no matter how hard we think, and rely on such things as hunches, intuitions, guesses, probability. These limitations derive from our inability to think *and* from the nature and mystery of the human situation. Accepting this can help to get things into proportion, to realize our status before God and his creation, to marvel and respect the mystery with which we are working and of which we are a part and to give ourselves to using our minds to get the best understanding *we* can get of the situations in which we are working. Awareness of the limitations of our understanding helps to save us from the dangers of presumptive behaviour and arrogance.

Second, vital clues to understanding the things we are concerned about are in the people and their situation. Focusing on them and listening to them is a way to understanding. The non-directive approach is important here. Those who use it aim to help all kinds of people, separately and together, to think seriously, deeply, analytically, imaginatively and purposefully for themselves about the substance of work, life and faith and to act upon their conclusions. This involves paying very careful attention to the thinking of others. It takes practitioners into the inner places of individuals, groups, communities and organizations (religious and secular) where the human and divine are at work: places where there is a glorious confusion between processes of human growth and salvation and where the activities of God, self and others are fused. It enables them to do this with the respect God accords to us all. It takes their work and ministry to the very heart of human life. They could not be in a better position from which to reflect, nor could they have more relevant information, knowledge and insights upon which to reflect and act. Those who habitually take directive action are less likely to get into such privileged positions because they are inclined to overlay the thoughts of others with their own thinking and plans.

Using the non-directive approach means, therefore, that we are more likely to get to the heart of the matter and to be able to think realistically. It also means that we have more thoughts to think about.[1] Tools for thinking are needed. That is what we have provided in this book.

Third, concentrating only on the ability of individual workers to think things through misses an important dimension. Development depends upon people thinking things through together. The issue, therefore, is not whether *I* can get my mind around things but whether *we* can get our minds around things and whether *we* can help *each other* to do just that. Emphasis upon individual

competence can detract from the collective competence. Accepting this enhances our ability to think, generates mutuality and underpins our humility.

There are in fact two closely related themes in this book: enhancing the individual practitioner's ability for "reflection-in-action";[2] and the generation of reflective communities, organizations and churches in order that the members, separately and together, may become more effective agents of reflective action for the common good. Holding these together is a unique contribution of church and community development. Doing so is important because, as we have seen, reflective practitioners need reflective communities just as reflective communities need reflective practitioners. They go together. It is very difficult for either to survive without the other. My experience prompts an untested hypothesis, that those who fail to become habitual reflective practitioners are those who are unable to find or generate reflective groups, churches and communities. But, as we have said, communities of reflective agents are multipliers; they beget learning communities of reflective agents: they release the learning potential in church and community work which fosters human and spiritual growth and development.

Fourth, one of the problems is that thinking seriously about working with people for development in church and community takes us into so many disciplines, such as theology, the social and behavioural sciences and adult education. They all have significant contributions to make to church and community work. There is a temptation to think that to use these disciplines we have to master them. Most of us cannot master even one of them. I think of my excursions into other disciplines as foraging expeditions. I am looking for things which will help me in my work and I test their efficacy in relation to my own discipline and my experience of working with people in church and community for human and spiritual development. In fact, the processes I have described provide ways of finding out what works and what does not work— and how and why.

Fifth, it is helpful to clarify what we do not know; i.e. to define our areas of ignorance. This helps us to decide what action to take just as much as defining what we do know. It can lead us to seek more information by observation, research, survey or study. It helps us to know when to be tentative.

Sixth, it is necessary to give ourselves to the specifics of our situation and experience in relation to as much of the whole as we can grasp. Parts are within our grasp when the whole is not. The belief that all things cohere in Christ[3] releases me to give myself to the parts in the context of the Kingdom.

Finally, it is vital to keep on thinking; to remain a reflective practitioner, no matter how difficult it seems to be. I find that it always pays some dividends, and the more I get stuck the more I get out of it at the end. This helps me to struggle through the hard and painful aspects of thinking things through. This is one aspect of my experience where journeying is as important as arriving.

The temptation to opt out of thinking about our work must be avoided. Standard procedures and rubrics are useful. They help to find thinking space

but they can never be a substitute for thinking. As we have noted earlier, given that time for this is limited, we need to select carefully how we use it.

In various ways these things help to overcome intellectual intimidation and the accompanying emotional frustration, to take up the challenge of thinking things through and to enjoy the excitement of doing so. But they have not helped me to eliminate the frustration nor to avoid the pain.

III. DIFFICULTIES OF FINDING TIME AND ENERGY

Workers already stretched are at a loss to know how to find the time, energy and support necessary to change their own ways of working and to promote changes in the work culture of their church or organization. Quite often they feel that the task is hopeless. It is, if they are thinking in terms of immediate wholesale change. Making radical changes in work practice is a long-term development task and needs to be approached as such.

As we have seen, the process can start with quite small but important changes such as asking unloaded rather than loaded questions or using the problem-solving approach to tackle difficulties. If this proves to be helpful, as it is likely to do, people will soon notice that things are being done differently and enquire about the changes. That is a good beginning to a programme of education for change. Another way to introduce change is for workers to discuss with those with whom they work this way of working and the desirability and feasibility of making changes. Doing this effectively involves workers' adopting the non-directive approach, which means that the processes are demonstrated as they are discussed. The discussions might also include a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of previous ways of working, of those suggested here and of making changes. (Display 11:1 could help people to do this.)

Quite often, for instance, when people act without due thought they have to spend a lot of time racking their brains to find ways of overcoming problems that could have been avoided by forethought. Time and energy is absorbed in crisis management, whereas the approach in this book uses energy in a more purposeful, creative, satisfying and economic manner. Of course, there will always be problems, because we never do things perfectly and because of the unpredictability of human thought and behaviour. But more problems will be foreseen and avoided. Put starkly, the choice is between investing more time in thinking things through and less in sorting out messes. I am committed to thinking things through as thoroughly as circumstances permit because this leads to action that is most likely to be productive and satisfying: it builds up one's ability to work at things spontaneously; and it conserves time and energy to work at emergencies and problems caused by errors of judgement which are always with us and which could not have been foreseen.

From personal experience I know that it is possible to find time and energy, but not easy, especially in the initial stages. Generally speaking, we find time for what we really want to do. For seven years up to 1993 I led two-year part-time diploma courses in church and community development. All the participants had considerable experience in church and community work and had responsible jobs; some of them held senior positions in one or other of five denominations. They studied their work and wrote a dissertation about it. The aim was to discover how they could do their work better in the present and be more effective workers in the future. They found it difficult to make time to do the studies. By the end of the course, however, most of them had built in time for studying and researching their work as they did it: they had in fact overcome the "tyranny of the short-term".[4] They considered this hard-won change to be so important that they vowed to maintain it.

Readers who wish to change their ways of working might consider the alternative ways of doing so sketched out in the final section of Chapter Eight.

IV. FEAR OF LOSING CONTROL

People who benefit from using the approaches we have described frequently find themselves experiencing the following sequence of thoughts and feelings: a sense of greater control over themselves as workers and their work because they feel that they have got their minds round it; the desire to use the approaches to help others to do the same; the conviction that thinking things through for yourself and with others is essential to human and spiritual development; the realization that inevitably this will mean others gaining increasingly more control over things related to "your" work and life; fear of losing control; temptation to withdraw from acting non-directively towards those "under" your authority. Groups, organizations and churches as well as individuals experience this sequence.

The fear of losing control, with its rational and irrational elements, has to be taken seriously. It inhibits non-directive action and it nullifies attempts to take it. To gain the advantages of this approach, the fear of losing control has to be overcome and the dangers of doing so avoided. Understandably, clergy and laity of all denominations are most apprehensive of working on equal terms with people from whom they differ and those they have good reasons to believe will not be responsible. Working at the following has variously helped me to cope with these fears and to take calculated risks responsibly.

All that I say presupposes opportunities for face-to-face negotiations about sharing between people in positions of strength and weakness. It presupposes some willingness all round to share, even if it is reluctant willingness based upon questionable motives. I am not addressing the situations where those with power have no intention of giving it up and those without power are determined to gain it. What follows has some relevance to such power conflicts, as do the approaches and methods I have described, but power struggles raise issues beyond the scope of this book.

1. Facing the Fears

Facing the fears and examining their substance is a necessity. I find it helpful to write down or say aloud what are the worst things that can happen. This gets me away from dwelling on fearful feelings to working at avoiding or overcoming real dangers. That is, I am working on a vital part of the development agenda related to using the approaches beyond myself. Having done so I am more likely to be able to help others to deal with their fears of losing control. I am reminded of this biblical text:

> Fear, Fiend and Fate
> Are upon thee, Earth-dweller!
> Who runs from the voice of Fear,
> Falls down to the Fiend;
> Who clambers up from the Fiend,
> Is snared by Fate![5]

2. Recalling the Sheer Necessity of Everybody being in Control

Generally speaking, people make their best contributions to their own development and that of others when they feel in control of themselves and the part they are playing and when they feel they have a real say in the corporate control of anything in which they are engaged with others. For these conditions to exist—and it is of vital importance that they do in development programmes—individual control must respect collective control and vice versa. Both kinds of control must complement and reinforce each other; they must not compromise each other. This is tricky to obtain and demanding to maintain. The approaches and methods I have described facilitate this duality of control, never perfectly, often with difficulty, but generally creatively.

As we have noted, the analytical processes help workers to gain the maximum inner and personal control that it is possible for them to have in their circumstances over themselves as workers and their work. Putting their information and thoughts in order, analysing them and determining the implications gives them a thorough grasp of their own realities which frees, energizes and enthuses them. The more value they put on this experience the more they want it for others. They can help them to get it through introducing them to the same analytical processes. They can help groups to gain control through working *with* them, openly and on equal terms in the same analytical way. The outcome is dual work control, both personal and collective.

3. Giving up Control does not necessarily mean losing It

Transferring power and sharing control does not necessarily mean losing power and control. Corporate control of resources is much stronger than individual control. At best it is regulated by checks and balances.

4. Genuine Sharing of Control and Power

Sharing power and control is most likely to be effective when all parties feel comfortable with it, and, when arrangements to share genuinely represent stated intentions. Pseudo-sharing is counter-productive. People soon see it for what it is. Duplicity is counter-developmental. A common example illustrates this. To avoid the danger of losing control, many churches or organizations which enter into joint projects with others and "share" their premises and resources with them make sure that they retain the power to veto plans by, for example, having sufficient members on committees to outvote those with whom they are "sharing". This common surreptitious device can marginalize the minority, making them feel unequal participants and generating mistrust and faction. A much better way is to discuss mutual responsibility and accountability associated with shared control and, possibly, the circumstances under which those with ultimate responsibility will use their veto and the manner in which they will do so. Clear understandings based on freely negotiated contracts are bases for power-sharing most likely to lead to development. It is good practice to work on the basis that it is easier to give more than to take back what has been "given". Giving what can be given—and some responsibilities and authority cannot be shared—enables people to learn how to give and receive increasingly more.

5. Promoting Creative Forms of Participation and Sharing

Participating in communal life and shared tasks is not necessarily and always a good thing. Devastating experiences in families and in groups can injure people psychologically and spiritually, sometimes permanently. Aiming to get everyone participating (involved) equally in every aspect of a project is unrealistic and undesirable and can, for example, induce participatory processes which paralyse groups and render them ineffectual. Working to these realities is complicated by doctrinaire adherence to full egalitarian participation. Nonetheless, human and spiritual development depends upon people getting involved with each other. Some of the things which I find promote creative participation are:

- worthwhile tasks which are clearly understood and freely accepted with some enthusiasm by participants;

- agreed ways of going about tasks which enable people to get on with them to their satisfaction;

- participants having parts (i.e. roles and functions) about which they are clear and which they want to play;

- good working relationships;

- appropriate forms of participation.

These things interact to build up the quality of the participation. Engaging in worthwhile tasks can be frustrating when the way of going about things simply does not work—and the frustration is all the greater because the task is worthwhile. The introduction of procedures which do work—and that is what this book is about—breeds hope and generates enthusiastic participation. Here I want to comment in more detail on the last point.

Participation in human life is pluriform. Different modes of participation are more or less appropriate to people and their circumstances. No one form is always right. Establishing those that are appropriate from the repertoire of possibilities is part of the art of promoting development. I can best illustrate this by focusing on people—an individual or a group—who have the power to act in relation to some activity or other; for instance, organizing services of worship or leisure facilities. There are several things they can do. They can organize the facilities themselves or they can recruit others to do so on their behalf. Or they might discuss the need with others, consult them about the kind of services required and then decide and act. In all these cases they remain in control whilst providing opportunities for people to participate in different ways, ranging from using the services to negotiating the kind of services needed and wanted. On the other hand, the people with power might decide that they want to delegate, co-operate, collaborate, devolve or enter into partnership with others. In all these cases they share control and they and others participate on a different power basis and in different ways. These are but a few of the different modes of participation.[6] I represent them in Figure 11:1.

Basically there are, in fact, two forms of participation. The forms of participation above the centre point in Figure 11:1 allow people to *share in* the activities of the group with power on their terms. They might influence the way things are done but substantive power is not tranferred to them. The forms of participation below the centre point are quite different because power is *shared out.*[7] Getting people to *share in* what *we control* is very different from *sharing out* our power and control so that control and power are in the hands of others or an augmented "we". It is vital that we know in which of these forms of sharing and controlling we are engaged. Confusion, which bedevils developmental processes, occurs when one party thinks power is being shared out whereas in fact they are being invited to share in activities others control. After making these distinctions in a lecture someone said that he now saw why his attempts to consult a particular group failed and generated bad feelings. The group were acting as though the consultation were a negotiation. Clarity about the form of the participation proposed is vital. It helps people to decide whether or not they wish to engage in that form of participation: if they do, it helps them to participate to good effect; if not, it helps them to negotiate a form in which they are prepared to participate.

No one form of participation is always appropriate. I remember Dr Batten saying that he and Mrs Batten enjoyed dancing. Were the proprietors of the dance hall, he said, to press him to help organize the establishment, they would
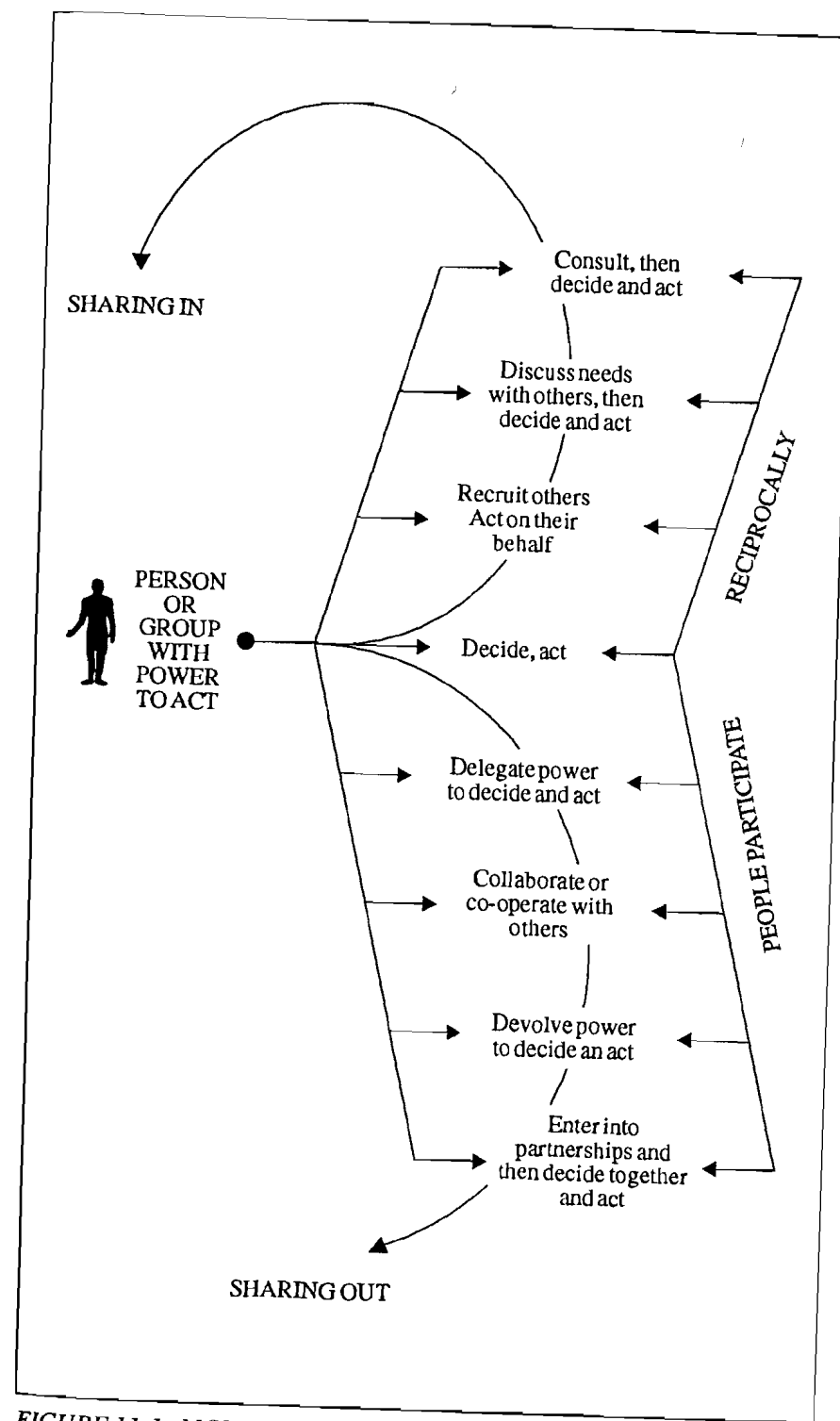
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FIGURE 11:1. MODES OF PARTICIPATION: SHARING IN AND OUT

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cease to attend. He wanted to dance, not to organize the event. He paid so that others could arrange for them to participate in this activity and no other. Appropriate forms of participation are determined by considering what is feasible and functional in the light of the needs and wants of all the participants, the form of sharing they can manage, and the developmental reference points.

Qualitative participation has many rewards: it facilitates purposeful creativity; it generates deep satisfaction and a sense of well-being; and it is an agent of all-round development in and through all the participants.

6. Sharing the Need to share

When people become committed to the non-directive approach they can feel that they must, as a matter of urgency, share or surrender in a much more vigorous way any power or control that they might have. The urgency can engender or exacerbate the fear of losing control. It can also drive people to act in contradiction to their new-found convictions about the non-directive approach when the felt need to share overpowers the fear of losing control. It is essential that this battle of feelings be resolved logically, not emotionally. To insist on power-sharing is to exercise a powerful form of control. It is to coerce people to have more power and control—and many people fear gaining control and power just as others fear losing them. It is, in fact, to be directive about non-directive working relationships. Means are at variance with beliefs and ends, and that transmits confusing and confounding signals. The urge to share must be controlled so that it does not lead to imposition. Sharing that is consonant with the non-directive approach starts with discussing with those implicated as openly and equally as possible the felt need to share and the associated emotions. Shared decisions to share or not to share are a sound basis on which to proceed. They help to hold in creative tension (or to resolve) feelings about the need to share and the fear of losing control. (There is further discussion about participation in Chapter 12 in relation to leadership.)

7. Prior Agreements about how to handle Problems

Prior agreement about how to handle problems can help to deal with them when they arrive and to reduce the fear of losing control. What I find helpful is mutual understanding about the importance of working our way through problems together and not giving up at the first difficulty; about ways and means of dealing with any difficulties that might arise; about the kind of difficulties we can foresee. This means that everyone is on early alert to work together on problems. Such an understanding makes it so much easier to raise problems because there is an easy opening: "When we decided to do this together we agreed that we would talk to each other about any difficulties rather than letting them slide. I am glad we did because there is something I need to discuss with you". People feel much more in control when there are agreed procedures and

working relationships to deal with those things which can make them feel they are losing control. Of course, we have to do this in such a way that it does not create the problems—even as we are anticipating them we are hoping they will not materialize.

8. Accepting that Complete Control is neither Possible nor Desirable

There is no intention in what I have written to infer that the diligent use of these processes—or for that matter any others—could enable people to have *complete* control over themselves, their work and their circumstances. That is not possible and it is probably undesirable. Much that happens to us and those with whom we live and work is beyond our control.[8] Moreover, some of the main power points in society lie outside the local churches, communities and agencies.[9] We never have complete control over ourselves, and we have the most minimal and fragile control over others. This we must accept but we must not allow it to undermine our attempts to work together with others for as much individual and collective control as possible over those things that affect our well-being and salvation. The processes described in this book help us to do just that.

Hopefully you will see what daunted you as part of your development agenda and you will be encouraged to tackle it with enthusiasm.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Lovell, George, *Reflective Practitioners in Church and Community Work:* the 1992 Avec Annual General Meeting Lecture (An Avec Occasional Paper, 1992), p. 3. First published as *Analysis and Design: Ways of Realising The Learning Potential in Church and Community Work.*

2. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

3. Cf. Colossians 1:13 ff.

4. *Involvement in Community: A Christian Contribution:* a report by the Community Development Group William Temple Foundation in collaboration with the Community Work Advisory Group British Council of Churches (1980), p. 40.

5. Isaiah 24:17–18, as translated by Frost, Brice Stanley, *Old Testament Apocalyptic* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p. 149.

6. Cf. Richardson, Ann, *Participation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983). There is an interesting discussion of Sherry R. Arnstein's eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation in Cahn, Edgar S. & B. A. Passett (eds), *Citizens' Participation: Effecting Community Participation* (London: Praeger, 1971). See also the cube of participation in Hallett, Christine, *Critical Issues In Participation* (Association of Community Workers Publication, 1987), p. 12.

7. The distinctions between sharing in and sharing out I owe to an excellent article by Mostyn Davies entitled "Sharing-in and Sharing-out" in *Theology* (?Spring 1977), pp. 91–94.

8. Sumner & Warren describe this kind of change as "crescive change", i.e. that which occurs independently of us. Cf. Warren, Roland L. , *The Community In America* (University Press of America, 3rd ed., 1978), p. 362.

9. Cf. *Involvement in Community: A Christian Contribution, op. cit.*, p. 38 f.