

An Introduction to Theological Reflection

Jon J. Marlow

*'How do we think about practice theologically in a way that sheds light on and then makes a difference to the ongoing life of the church?'*¹

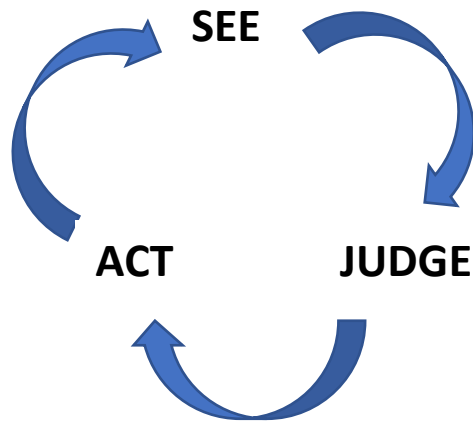
*The Theologian always starts 'in the middle of things'*²

'Practical Theology' – Tautology or an Oxymoron?

A 'successful' presentation of a theological reflection will include:

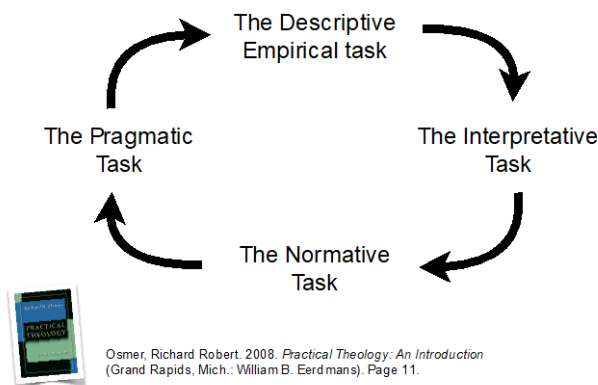
- Saying which method you chose, and why (Methodology).
- Awareness of what you bring to the situation and reflection (Reflexivity).
- Insightful application of the chosen method (Theological Reflection).
- A practical outcome (Application).

The Pastoral Cycle – The most common method of Theological Reflection



Joseph Cardijn (Belgium, 1882-1967)

Richard Osmer: The Four Core Tasks of Practical Theology



Osmer, Richard Robert. 2008. *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans). Page 11.

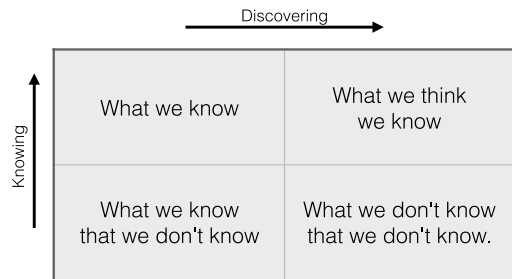
¹ Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). Page 96

² Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

Richard Osmer - The Four Core Tasks of Practical Theology³

Descriptive-Empirical: What is going on?

- Description
- Research (Known and Unknown Unknowns)
- Reflexivity
- Other 'Voices'⁴



David Coghlan, and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*. 3rd edition (London: Sage, 2010), p 90-91

Interpretative: Why is this going on?

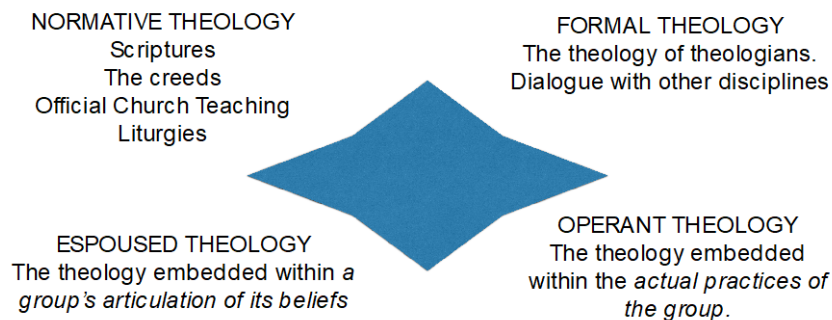
DIALOGUE With

- Psychology
- Sociology
- Organisational Theory
- Theology
- History
- Other Partners

Normative: What ought to be going on?

- Introduce theological concepts to develop ethical norms that guide action.
- The Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Scripture, Reason, Tradition, Experience)
- Four Voices of Theology⁵ (See diagram below)

The Four Voices of Theology (Cameron 2010: 54)



Pragmatic: How might we respond?

- Practical action or suggestions for action
- Communication of findings
- Further research (but be mindful of your limitations)
- Theological Action Research (TAR)

³ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2008). Page 4

⁴ Jane Leach and Michael Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook: Second Edition*, (London: SCM Press, 2015). Page 75

⁵ Helen Cameron and others, *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 2010). Page 54

The Discernment Cohort Programme

Months 9/10: Theological Reflections on an Aspect of your Current Context

- Content:** Over two sessions, each participant will present a twenty-minute theological reflection about a time when they worked as part of team engaged in a missional activity in a local church.
- Preparation:** Use one of the methods you have been taught (or any other which you discover and find helpful) to reflect on **a time when you worked as part of team engaged in a missional activity from a local church**. You will need to think particularly about the purpose of the activity, your role in the team and how you judge the overall impact of the activity. Please agree the subject of your reflection in advance with your group convener, who will also be your first port-of-call should you need any further help as you prepare. This reflection can be edited and used as a written piece of work for stage two of the national process.
- Resources:** The following journal articles have been chosen to give you scholarly examples of theological reflection based on empirical research and to introduce you to academic writing in the field of Practical Theology. Many of these are only available online with institutional access to the publisher through a higher education institution, so please contact your group convener if there are any you would like to read. Please note that these are **not** provided as a guide to what you are expected to produce for your 20-minute presentation.

Articles about Lockdown, the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the response of the church.

- Katie Cross, Clare Louise Radford & Karen O'Donnell (2021) Fragments from within the pandemic: theological experiments in silence, speech, and dislocated time, *Practical Theology*, 14:1-2, 144-158, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2020.1861802>
- Stephen B. Roberts (2021) Listening to lockdown: sound theology in a time of crisis, *Practical Theology*, 14:1-2, 74-85, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2020.1859733>
- Eric Stoddart (2021) Retreat, rebuke, recite: outliers in church responses to the current COVID-19 pandemic, *Practical Theology*, 14:1-2, 8-21, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2020.1860549>

Articles exploring aspects of mission and pastoral care in the church.

- Erin R. Burnett (2021) 'Different, not less': pastoral care of autistic adults within Christian churches, *Practical Theology*, 14:3, 211-223, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2020.1850402>
- Sarah Dunlop (2017) Is 'Being There' Enough? Explorations of Incarnational Missiology with Chaplains, *Practical Theology*, 10:2, 174-186, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1291228>
- Sarah Holmes (2021) Transforming the resourcing of christenings in the Anglican diocese of Liverpool, *Practical Theology*, 14:3, 224-241, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2020.1816409>
- Marlow, J., & Dunlop, S. (2021). Answers on a Postcard: Photo Elicitation in the Service of Local Ecclesial Strategy, *Ecclesial Practices*, 8(2), 165-184. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22144471-bja10014>
- Taylor, S., & Taylor, S. (2020). When '#xmasangels' Tweet: a Reception Study of Craftivism as Christian Witness, *Ecclesial Practices*, 7(2), 143-162. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22144471-BJA10016>

Further Reading

In preparation for this training session, you will have been sent a copy of Chapter 6 of Pete Ward's 2017 book, *Introducing Practical Theology*. There is no need to do additional reading before getting started on your theological reflection, but the following books will provide resources if you want to think more deeply about Practical Theology and theological reflection. Copies of Andrew Dunlop's Grove Booklet are available to purchase from the DDO Office.

Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*. 2nd edn (London: SPCK, 2006). pp 81-95

Helen Collins, *Reordering Theological Reflection: Starting With Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 2020).

Dunlop, Andrew J. *How to Do Theological Reflection: Thinking, Writing and Living Theologically*. Grove Pastoral Series; No 171. Cambridge: Grove Book, 2022.

Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005).

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006).

Judith Thompson, Stephen Pattison and Ross Thompson, *SCM Studyguide to Theological Reflection*. 2nd edn (London: SCP Press, 2019).

Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).