

Utilising Osmer's Practical Theological Loop and Mutual Critical Correlation in Field Education to Develop Reflective Practitioners.

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Abstract

One of the goals of field education is to help students to develop as reflective practitioners. The usefulness of Practical Theology in this endeavour has been well recognised. This paper seeks to develop a series of questions to help students to be able to take Osmer's loop and utilise it in their context. In addition, it will develop a simple methodology that will enable the students to bring the normative and interpretive tasks into mutual critical correlation in order to be able to derive more faithful practice for the Church.

Introduction

In the introduction to his book, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, Richard Osmer recounts the story of how the location of a children's swing set ended in the resignation of the long-time church treasurer. As he stood on the front porch of the former-treasurer's home holding a large stack of ledgers which he had just been presented he laments, "I wish at that time I had known something about practical theology."¹

When many students hear the term "Practical Theology" they think of it as an umbrella term for the knowledge and skills related to a range of practical ministry activities like preaching, pastoral care and leadership. However, Practical Theology is a sub discipline of Theology in a similar way that Systematic Theology or Biblical Theology are. Far from just being the practical knowledge and skills that you learn at the end of a theological degree, it is a sophisticated way of approaching life, social science and Scriptures. Hence, Swinton and Mowat define Practical Theology as "critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world."²

Although there are a number of models of Practical Theology that would prove useful to students completing theological field education, Osmer's model is a good starting point because of its simplicity and the way it incorporates other models of reflection. Osmer proposes a model of practical theological interpretation with four tasks:

1. The descriptive-empirical task asks, "What is going on?"
2. The interpretive task asks, "Why is it going on?"
3. The normative task asks, "What ought to be going on?"
4. The pragmatic task asks, "How might we respond?"

Osmer offers these four tasks of Practical Theology as a model that ministers can use to interpret episodes, situations, and contexts (or what we will call "ministry issues or events") theologically. Although the four tasks appear to be distinct and sequential the practitioner

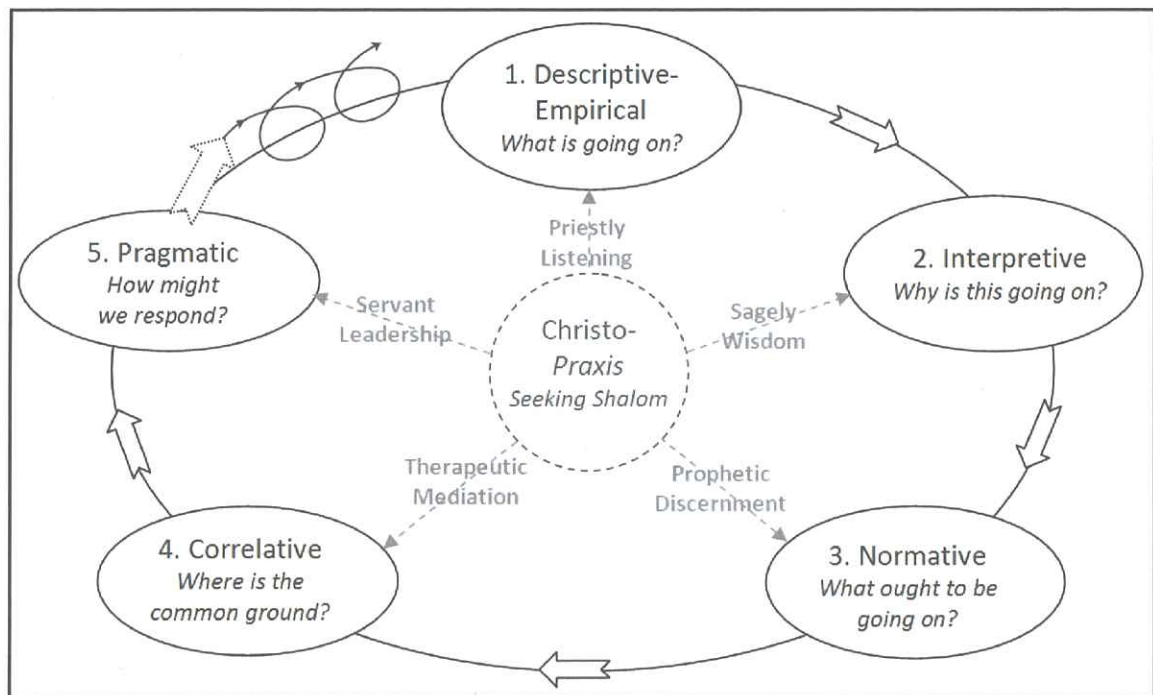
¹ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2008), 3.

² John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 6.

should look to spiral through the tasks seeking deeper and more profound understanding of, and response to, the ministry issue and or events.³

One of the key features of Practical Theology is the place of dialogue between different elements.⁴ Swinton and Mowat talk of the activity of Practical Theology being hermeneutical, correlational, critical and theological.⁵ It is hermeneutical because it involves interpretation of the world. It is critical because it is “suspicious” of both the world and its interpretation because of human fallenness and the complexity of the world. It is theological because it seeks to interpret the world in light of the unfolding gospel narrative. It is also correlational because it brings together three different perspectives — the situation, Christian tradition and another source (social science).⁶ This correlation should be both mutual and critical to ensure the process is dialectical and gives equal voice to each participant.

In his PhD thesis,⁷ my Malyon Theological College colleague, David Benson, adapted Osmer’s model to incorporate a fifth task (which Benson calls a “movement”)—the Correlative—to concretise the dialogical nature of Osmer’s model:



Benson’s model is adopted here because the language of “movement” emphasises Practical Theology as a fluid process more so than the language of “tasks.” It also centres the process on the continuing ministry of Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and defines it’s focus—seeking *shalom*. Finally it introduces the correlative movement as a distinctive activity of identifying the “common ground” between the descriptive, interpretive

³ Osmer, 11.

⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵ Swinton and Mowat, 76.

⁶ These roughly correspond with Osmer's descriptive, normative and interpretive tasks.

⁷ David Matthew Benson, "Schools, Scripture and Secularisation: A Christian Theological Argument for the Incorporation of Sacred Texts within Australian Public Education" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 2016), 17. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/43391498.pdf>

and normative movements, rather than leaving mutual critical correlation as something that occurs simultaneously with the other movements. Making the correlative activity a separate movement is helpful for students developing skills in Practical Theology to ensure they perform it with due diligence. Once they learn the skills of mutual critical correlation they can apply it throughout the practical theological process.

The goal of this paper is to operationalise Osmer's and Benson's model and make it more accessible to the undergraduate or graduate theological student undertaking field education. As those involved in teaching field education know, the practice of Practical Theology, especially mutual critical correlation, is a difficult activity requiring diligent guidance. So, for each of Benson's five movements some subcategories and related questions for the student to answer have been generated. We start with the descriptive-empirical movement.

The Movements of Practical Theology

The Descriptive-Empirical Movement: Priestly Listening

Practical Theology begins with ministry events or issues that call for interpretation. This first movement is "empirical" in the sense that it is referring to something that can be measured and described. Sometimes social scientific techniques are used to perform this movement although this is not always necessary.⁸ For the field education student, most often the starting point of the practical theological exercise is simply a ministry event or issue which is of sufficient complexity to require more than an unthinking response.

Osmer describes pastoral care as a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations.⁹ He refers to such attending as priestly listening. The term is based on the idea that true intercessory prayer involves more than praying for people; it involves listening closely to their needs so that one can represent their needs to God. In a congregational setting, priestly listening can be informal, semiformal, or formal.

However, in other ministry contexts, the descriptive movement is potentially more than listening to people—it can be thoughtful descriptions of ministry events and issues. The reflective practitioner will consider a ministry issue or event, say a youth group night, in a more rigorous manner than just superficial experience and description.

In understanding an event or issue, context is critical. Similar events and issues can occur in different contexts, but each event or issue has a unique location and participants. Students not only need to describe the event or issue but the context in which it occurred in order to be able to more deeply understand it.

There are three umbrella questions that can drive the reflective practitioner to describe a ministry event or issue more rigorously.

1. The Contextual Question: What was the context of this issue or event?

⁸ Richard Robert Osmer, "Toward a Transversal Model of Interdisciplinary Thinking in Practical Theology," in *The Evolution of Rationality: Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen*, ed. F. LeRon Shults (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 328.

⁹ *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 34.

We use the term “context” in the broadest possible sense here. The student is encouraged to think as expansively as possible in defining the context of the issue or event. Physical, chronological, historical and social dimensions should all be taken into account when seeking to describe the context. Some helpful questions to ask may include:

- What was the context of the issue/event? (e.g. church hall on a Friday night)
- Who were the participants in the issue/event? (e.g. 6 leaders and 20 youth (5 senior, 15 junior))
- Who did what? How did other participants respond to this issue/event?
- Are there any trends discernible? (How does attendance compare with previous youth nights?)
- Are there any cultural dimensions in play?
- Are there any artefacts available that will help describe the issue/event (e.g. plans, feedback, images)?

2. The Reflexive Question: What baggage am I bringing to this issue or event?

By reflexivity we mean the ability of someone to be aware of their own feelings, reactions and motives and how these factors influence their thoughts, actions and perceptions. In describing ministry events and issues it is helpful for the practitioner to reflect on how their perception is distorted by their life experiences and subsequent biases. **Why has this issue/event affected me the way it has?**

3. The Perspective Question: How would others see this issue or event?

A more holistic and balanced description of a ministry issue or event can be obtained if it is observed through multiple lenses. In particular, what is the meaning of these events or actions to the people involved?¹⁰ The best approach would be for the practitioner to ask others how they perceive the ministry issue or event, but even the practice of considering how others may perceive something is worthwhile.

The Interpretative Movement: Sagely Wisdom

The interpretive movement seeks reasons for the phenomena observed in the descriptive movement. The question is, “Why is this going on?” Here the practitioner must identify the issues embedded within the ministry issues or events and draw on theories from the arts and sciences to help understand why patterns and dynamics are occurring.

Sociologists distinguish between “thin description” and “thick description” of phenomena.¹¹ For example, a thin description of an incident might be “the opening and closing of an eyelid.” A thick description of the same incident might be “a wink.” In other words, a thick description is not just concerned with a description of a phenomenon, but its interpretation. The interpretive movement of Practical Theology can be thought of as a thick description of the descriptive-empirical movement.

¹⁰ “Toward a Transversal Model of Interdisciplinary Thinking in Practical Theology,” 329.

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

Osmer grounds his interpretive task in two strains of biblical wisdom literature, namely, Israel's wisdom tradition and Jesus as God's hidden wisdom revealed. Israel's wisdom literature (specifically Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes) models "deriving general insights from the observable patterns of nature and human life."¹² Much like the social sciences, the wisdom writers carefully observed everyday life and formulated theologically informed heuristics based on their observations. The Practical Theologian does the same, and also draws on the theories of others.

The second key strand of wisdom is Christ. In Colossians 2:3, Paul says that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are in Christ. He is not implying that there are secrets about Christ hidden to all except a select few; rather, he means that every Christian has access to wisdom and knowledge enough for holy living. While the Church continues to grow in wisdom, reflecting on the meaning of the discernible patterns of life, it places such knowledge in the theological context of the redemptive work of Christ. This wisdom has strong elements of reversal and subversion, pointing to the counter-order of God's royal rule.¹³

There are two umbrella questions helpful for the student in seeking to complete the interpretive movement to discern wisdom related to the issue or event:

1. The Social Science Question: What wisdom from social science can help explain what is going on?

There are three broad categories of resource here. The first are the broader social sciences (including anthropology, psychology and sociology). The second are those resources that focus on church ministry and practice including those produced by the National Church Life Survey, journals in Practical Theology and the multitude of books on church life. The third resource would be empirical research carried out by the practitioner themselves in order to better understand the issue or event.

2. The Elder Question: What wisdom from elders can help explain what is going on?

Western culture has largely lost the capacity to acknowledge and value elders.¹⁴ This has resulted in the loss of wisdom for future generations as elders are marginalised and rendered invisible. "The more challenging our world, the more we need our elders with us to share the lessons they have learned, to lend us their problem-solving skills, and to enhance our lives by imparting their unique gifts."¹⁵

Of course, by "elders" we are not just referring to people older than ourselves. Wisdom is not the exclusive possession of the aged. However, we need to recognise those in our communities who are wiser than ourselves in certain areas. The particular value of elders is their contextual wisdom. They are able to give insights emerging from an organisation's history that the practitioner may have no comprehension of.

The Normative Movement: Prophetic Discernment

¹² Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 89.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁴ Angeles Arrien, *The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates of Wisdom* (Accessible Publishing, 2010), xv.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

The normative movement asks, "What ought to be going on?" It seeks to discern God's will for present realities. Osmer refers to this task as prophetic discernment. Although the Old Testament prophets spoke directly on behalf of God, they were also interpreters of past traditions and present revelations. Prophetic discernment involves the application of God's Word to the covenant people in a particular time and place.¹⁶

Prophetic discernment uses three methods to discover God's word for the present: (a) theological interpretation, (b) ethical reflection, and (c) good practice.

- a) While theological interpretation is informed by Biblical and Systematic Theology, it focuses on the *interpretation of present ministry issues and events* with theological concepts.¹⁷
- b) Ethical reflection refers to using ethical principles, rules, or guidelines to guide action towards moral ends.¹⁸ Christian ethics are shaped by doctrines related to the *imago Dei*, the Torah, the values of the Kingdom of God and more specifically the Sermon on the Mount.
- c) Good practice plays two different roles in Osmer's model of prophetic discernment.
 - First, the prophet draws on historical models of good practice to reform a congregation's present actions.¹⁹
 - Second, analysis of present models of good practice can generate new understandings of ministry beyond those provided by a particular tradition.

Three umbrella questions are suggested to help students perform the normative movement:

1. The Theology Question: How can theology inform what ought to be happening?

In answering this question, students can draw on four resources.

- a. Specific Scripture passages that inform a description of what should be happening. A concordance can be a powerful tool in this respect.
- b. Systematic Theology. The index of a Systematic Theology textbook would enable students to access more sophisticated understandings of an issue or event.
- c. Christian ethics. In particular the student should ask what ethical insights inform what ought to be happening.
- d. Salvation history. The chapters of salvation history (for example, creation, fall, Israel, Christ, church and consummation) can serve as lenses through which a more profound understanding and/or response to an issue or event can be formulated.
- e. Feminist, majority-world and minority commentaries and theologies can significantly broaden the students understanding of the event or issue and bring a richer theological response.

2. The Tradition/History Question: How can church tradition and/or history inform what ought to be happening?

In ages past churches have worked out how to respond to ministry issues and events. However, over time churches sometimes "forget" these ancient and time-tested

¹⁶ Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 133.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

practices and the thoughtful practitioner will seek to recover them for, at the very least, consideration in addressing contemporary ministry issues and events.

3. The Exemplar Question: How do exemplars inform what ought to be happening?

Contemporaries will usually be facing similar events and issues in ministry. The student should consider whether there are any instances where, in a similar context, the issue or event is being addressed in an exemplary manner in order to identify good practice. By performing case study of exemplars, the student can gain important insights into what ought to be happening.

The Correlative Movement: Where is the Common Ground?

In his paper, *Straw for Bricks*, Stephen Pattison advocates a conversation as the metaphor of mutual critical correlation.

The basic idea...is that the student should imagine herself as being involved in a three way conversation between (a) her own ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions, (b) the beliefs, assumptions and perceptions provided by the Christian tradition (including the Bible) and (c) the contemporary situation which is being examined.²⁰

Although Pattison's model does not include engagement with social science, as Osmer and Swinton and Mowat do, the metaphor of conversation is a valuable insight in developing reflective practitioners. As Allen points out:

A conversation often affects us. It may reinforce what we already think, feel or do. It may prompt us to modify our thoughts and actions. It may introduce us to possibilities that are so generative and promising that we turn away from previous patterns of thought, emotion, and action and towards new ones. It may raise questions that we have not previously considered and about which we are not ready to make up our minds.²¹

Pattison identifies that the participants in the conversation may not know each other.²² It is more helpful to think of the participants as actually being friends. A friendly conversation carries with it the notion of an attentiveness to, and respect for, other ideas as opposed to an adversarial posture that can sometimes exist between theology and science. The participants in a conversation do not always end up agreeing with each other, but that does not mean the conversation has failed.

The idea of Practical Theology as incorporating a conversation is also analogous to de Bono's Six Thinking Hats.²³ De Bono recognises that for good decision-making the decision-makers need to at least recognise, if not intentionally adopt, different perspectives on the same

²⁰ Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward, Stephen Pattison, and John Patton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 139.

²¹ Ronald J Allen, "Preaching as Mutual Critical Correlation through Conversation," in *Purposes of Preaching*, ed. Jana Childers (Chalice, 2004), 4.

²² Pattison, 139.

²³ E. De Bono and J. Markland, *Six Thinking Hats* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1999).

problem. Some people will naturally be focused on information, others on feelings, hunches or intuition, others will play the “devil’s advocate.” Others will be optimistic; some will look for creative alternatives and new ideas while others will be focused on good process. The conversation between these different perspectives is the crucial dynamic in reaching the best decision and may call on participants to intentionally adopt a perspective other than the one they would naturally take.

Similarly, mutual critical correlation can call for the student to intentionally adopt a particular perspective on the problem (descriptive, interpretive or normative) almost like a hat they wear. While wearing a particular hat they see new perspectives on the ministry issue or event, but also ask questions of the other hats as they converse.

The different movements should interrogate and inform each other as they are brought into conversation. The discipline of Conversational Analysis is useful here. It identifies that the building blocks of conversation include turn-taking, sequencing, and overall organisation.²⁴ Talk tends to occur in responsive pairs: Questions-Answers, Offer-Acceptance/Refusal and Compliment-Response. Hence in a conversation the basic form of organisation is “turn taking.” Turn order, and size, is not fixed, but varies. The length of conversation is not specified in advance nor is the relative distribution of turns.

These insights provide guidance for the practice of the correlational movement. Like in a conversation between friends, the responsive pairs allow the participants to:

- affirm one another
- challenge one another
- build on one another’s ideas

Although the interaction is essentially turn taking, the contribution of the participants varies both in size and frequency.

Benson’s model brings the three perspectives (normative, description and interpretive) together in the Correlative Movement to discover “Where is the common ground?” However, the Descriptive movement has already been in dialogue with the interpretive and normative movements. Hence, to sharpen the focus, simplify the process, and reduce repetition, the correlative movement should concentrate on the dialogue between the normative and interpretive movements. It is here that the greatest challenges, and the greatest fruit, lay.

The Pragmatic Movement: Servant Leadership

This movement seeks to answer the question, “How might we respond?” Osmer explores various aspects of leadership but frames the overall task as servant leadership. We serve our communities by leading them towards orthopraxy—just as we talk about orthodox faith we can and should talk about orthodox practice that is informed by the movements of Practical Theology. But the changes necessary for orthopraxy need to be brought about in an intentional, but godly, way through leadership that does not lord it over congregations, but in servanthood.

²⁴ Harvey Sacks, Emanuel A. Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, “A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation,” *Language* 50, no. 4 (1974).

In light of this, four umbrella questions are suggested:

1. The Orthopraxy Question: What is orthopraxy relating to this ministry issue or event?

The goal of the process of working through the descriptive, interpretive, normative, and correlative movements is a better practice. Students need to be able to concisely describe the theoretical outcome of their practical theological exercise.

2. The Action Steps Question: What are two specific action steps that can be taken towards orthopraxy?

Theory that does not result in changed practices is the mark of an incomplete practical theology exercise. Practitioners need to move beyond theory into implementation of reformed practices for the good of the Church. The adjective “specific” is used to drive the students towards concrete activity.

3. The Ethical Question: What is professional, safe and ethical practice in implementing these action steps?

Ministry practitioners should meet the standards of professional, safe and ethical practice. Most denominations will have their own codes of ethics for ministers. As well as these resources, students should draw on their own personal theology in answering the ethical issues related to ministry events and issues. Ethical research should value respect, research merit, integrity, justice, and beneficence.²⁵

4. The Formation Question: How have I been formed into the image of Christ through this exercise in Practical Theology?

The outcome of Practical Theology should not just be transformation of church practice but also transformation of the servant leader. God’s purposes are related to individual transformation as well as transformation of the world as a whole. The servant leader understands this reality and humbly responds to God’s formative hand.

Conclusion

This article has identified 15 questions which will guide the students through the movements of a practical theological model. These questions can be integrated into a worksheet as presented in appendix A. An example of the process is presented in appendix B.

As suggested by Benson’s diagram above, the practical theological exercise is more like a spiral than a circle which begins and ends. Good reflective practice is not just a formula to be followed but a way of being. The goal is not people who can reflect on practice, but people who are reflective practitioners, continually reflecting on their life and ministry in the light of

²⁵ The National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, and the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2007 (Updated May 2015)).

their careful analysis of events, their engagement with social science and theology and the articulation and implementation of revised orthopraxy.

Practical Theological Reflection Sheet		
Descriptive Movement: What is happening?		
1. The Contextual Question: What was the context of this issue or event?		
2. The Reflexive Question: What baggage am I bringing to this issue or event?		
3. The Perspective Question: How would others see this issue or event?		
Interpretive Movement: Why is it happening?		
4. The Social Science Question: What wisdom from social science can help explain what is going on?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social sciences Congregational Research Personal Research 	
5. The Elder Question: What wisdom from elders can help explain what is going on?		
Normative Movement: What ought to be going on?		
6. The Theology Question: How can theology inform what ought to be happening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scripture Systematics Ethics Salvation History Feminist, majority-world and minority perspectives 	

7. The Tradition/History Question: How can church tradition/history inform what ought to be happening?		
8. The Exemplar Question: How do exemplars inform what ought to be happening?		
Correlative Movement: Where is the common ground?		
9. The Affirmative Question: How do the movements affirm one another?	How does the interpretive movement affirm the normative?	How does the normative movement affirm the interpretive?
10. The Challenge Question: How do the movements challenge one another?	How does the interpretive movement challenge the normative?	How does the normative movement challenge the interpretive?
11. The Synergy Question: How do the movements build on one another?	How does the interpretive movement build on the normative?	How does the normative movement build on the interpretive?
Pragmatic Movement: How might we respond?		
12. The Orthopraxy Question: What is orthopraxy relating to this ministry issue or event?		
13. The Action Steps Question: What are two		

<p>specific action steps that can be taken towards orthopraxy?</p>	
<p>14. The Ethical Question: What is professional, safe and ethical practice in implementing these action steps?</p>	
<p>15. The Formation Question: How have I been formed into the image of Christ through this exercise in Practical Theology?</p>	

Practical Theological Reflection Sheet			
Descriptive Movement: What is happening?			
<p>1. The Contextual Question: What was the context of this issue or event?</p>	<p>I normally play in the worship band at church, but due to an instrument malfunction one week recently I was on stage singing. This gave me the opportunity to look at the congregation more intently during worship. I was struck that about 50% of those present were not singing. The nonparticipants were mainly men. A good portion of the congregation looked bored.</p> <p>The congregation is diverse in both age, denominational background and ethnicity. The lack of engagement was not particular to one segment of congregation.</p> <p>The church building is over 130 years old and features a choir area and a large pipe organ.</p>		
<p>2. The Reflexive Question: What baggage am I bringing to this issue or event?</p>	<p>As a worship leader and musician, I have a keen interest in singing in church. I find it personally irritating when I see people apparently deliberately not engaging in singing. I have at times wondered about their spirituality.</p>		
<p>3. The Perspective Question: How would others see this issue or event?</p>	<p>I spoke to some of the other worship leaders. They too had concerns about the lack of engagement of many people in the congregation.</p> <p>There must be a reason why some people are not engaging in the worship. Perhaps they don't know the words. Perhaps they don't like singing.</p>		
Interpretive Movement: Why is it happening?			
<p>4. The Social Science Question: What wisdom from social science can help explain what is going on?</p>	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social sciences • Congregational Research • Personal Research </td> <td style="vertical-align: top; width: 50%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As a result of rigid forms of masculinity, Australian men have expressed reluctance to sing in certain settings.” Harrison, Scott D. "Singing, men and Australian culture." In <i>Perspectives on males and singing</i>, pp. 65-75. Springer, Dordrecht, 2012, 73. • “There is good evidence of the community building dimensions of communal singing.” Southcott, Jane, and Dawn Joseph. "Sharing community through singing: The Bosnian Behar Choir in Victoria, Australia." <i>E-journal of Studies in Music Education</i> 8, no. 2 (2010): 17-27. • Bell identifies four reasons why people do not sing in church: vocal disenfranchisement, the fallout from a performance culture, poor architecture to encourage good singing, and bad leadership. Bell, J.L. 2000. <i>The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song</i>: GIA, 122. </td> </tr> </table>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social sciences • Congregational Research • Personal Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As a result of rigid forms of masculinity, Australian men have expressed reluctance to sing in certain settings.” Harrison, Scott D. "Singing, men and Australian culture." In <i>Perspectives on males and singing</i>, pp. 65-75. Springer, Dordrecht, 2012, 73. • “There is good evidence of the community building dimensions of communal singing.” Southcott, Jane, and Dawn Joseph. "Sharing community through singing: The Bosnian Behar Choir in Victoria, Australia." <i>E-journal of Studies in Music Education</i> 8, no. 2 (2010): 17-27. • Bell identifies four reasons why people do not sing in church: vocal disenfranchisement, the fallout from a performance culture, poor architecture to encourage good singing, and bad leadership. Bell, J.L. 2000. <i>The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song</i>: GIA, 122.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps I could do a survey of the church congregation to ask them why they do not sing?
<p>5. The Elder Question: What wisdom from elders can help explain what is going on?</p>	<p>I asked one of the older members of the congregation why she thought people did not sing as enthusiastically as they once did. She did not really know but did tell stories of how the choir section of the church used to be filled with enthusiastic male and female singers. She lamented that she struggled to sing some of the newer songs because she did not know how they went.</p>	
<p>Normative Movement: What ought to be going on?</p>		
<p>6. The Theology Question: How can theology inform what ought to be happening?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scripture • Systematics • Ethics • Salvation History • Feminist, majority-world and minority perspectives 	<p>The command to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18–21) is bound to five activities that fill out the dimensions of this exhortation: speaking to one another in songs, hymns and spiritual songs; singing; making music; giving thanks to the Lord; and submitting to one another. Three of the five activities have to do with music. But if singing is a sounding image of the unified church, the connection makes a great deal of sense. The unified church is—like Jesus—the temple of the Holy Spirit, the place on earth filled with God's glory. Why should Paul associate all of this with singing?</p> <p>First, singing together is one way of enacting the unity of the church. As Jew and gentile sang together, the "one body" of the church was no longer an abstraction but became a reality that could be heard.</p> <p>Second, in its congregational song one could hear the gathered church as a church of Jew and gentile with all of its various regional accents, all the distinctive pronunciations of aristocrats, slaves and free people—male and female voices, young and old, all perceived at once in a single melody.</p> <p>What a difference it might make if we were to take music as the model of mutual submission between husband, wives, parents, children, slaves and masters—if song were the school we attended to learn this kind of submission! (https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-12/united-we-sing)</p> <p>Ethics: people should not feel coerced into singing if they don't want. Use of guilt must be avoided.</p> <p>Singing is good (creation) but can be used for good or bad (fall). Christ has redeemed our songs and when we gather in the church to sing and at the Great Banquet (consummation) we will sing</p>

		songs around the throne (Rev 14:3). The instruction to make music implies that a variety of musical instruments and rhythms can be used. God is not concerned with the type of music but with its content. Tokunboh Adeyemo, Africa Bible Commentary (Zondervan, 2006), 1462.
7. The Tradition/History Question: How can church tradition/history inform what ought to be happening?	Through Christian history congregational song has ebbed and flowed. Augustine appeared to have an ambivalent relationship with congregational song but did state when they were sung, sacred words stirred his mind to greater religious fervour and kindled a more ardent flame of piety than they would if they were not sung. Congregational singing almost vanished from Sunday worship (Mass) during the Middle Ages before being revived during the Reformation. Although initially the focus was on singing psalms, later new songs came to feature in many traditions. Subsequently, enthusiastic community singing has been the hallmark of several Christian renewal movements, including Methodism.	
8. The Exemplar Question: How do exemplars inform what ought to be happening?	I recently attended a worship service where the singing was loud and enthusiastic. It was a more traditional service in an older building which had good acoustics. The church had a choir that could be clearly heard by the congregation. The hymns were clearly well known.	
Correlative Movement: Where is the common ground?		
9. The Affirmative Question: How do the movements affirm one another?	How does the interpretive movement affirm the normative? The sociology affirms that singing together builds community as identified by Ephesians 5:18-21 and as experienced by the Church through history..	How does the normative movement affirm the interpretive? Theology and tradition demonstrate that singing together has positive social consequences for communities including unity and renewal.
10. The Challenge Question: How do the movements challenge one another?	How does the interpretive movement challenge the normative? The interpretive movement suggests non-singing might be more of an issue for men than women. Is culture or the issues Bell identifies more of an influence than religious conviction?	How does the normative movement challenge the interpretive? Can real community exist unless there is mutual submission? Do people in secular singing submit to one another? On what basis?
11. The Synergy Question:	How does the interpretive movement build on the	How does the normative movement build on the

<p>How do the movements build on one another?</p>	<p>normative?</p> <p>The normative movement concluded that Christians should sing as an expression of community. However, the interpretive movement concludes that factors such as gender, architecture, performance culture, song key and poor leadership may undermine this good intention.</p>	<p>interpretive?</p> <p>Singing builds community because it allows for mutual submission.</p>
<p>Pragmatic Movement: How might we respond?</p>		
<p>12. The Orthopraxy Question: What is orthopraxy relating to this ministry issue or event?</p>	<p>Christians should sing together as an expression of community and mutual submission. However, there may be factors that discourage this practice including gender, architecture, performance culture, song selection and poor leadership. Despite these deterrents congregational singing needs to be fostered.</p>	
<p>13. The Action Steps Question: What are two specific action steps that can be taken towards orthopraxy?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a survey of the congregation to better understand why they do not sing. 2. Preach a sermon on the theology of church singing in order to encourage congregational singing 	
<p>14. The Ethical Question: What is professional, safe and ethical practice in implementing these action steps?</p>	<p>The survey should demonstrate respect, research merit, integrity, justice, and beneficence. The sermon should avoid creating guilt or shame and be encouraging rather than condemnatory in tone.</p>	
<p>15. The Ethical Question: How have I been formed into the image of Christ through this exercise in Practical Theology?</p>	<p>An exploration of the practical issues which may disinclined people to sing has challenged my judgemental attitude towards them. The situation is far more complex than I had initially perceived. However, the normative movement has convicted me a fresh of my personal need to ensure that I seek unity with my brothers and sisters as I sing as an expression of mutual submission.</p>	

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