
The Osmer Model Created By Richard Osmer

Richard Osmer created the Osmer model for practical theology in which his focus and purpose was to teach church leaders how to react and how to approach or handle pastoral situations. Another purpose Osmer had with his model is to equip lectures to help and prepare their students with insightful information and the best skills of a practical theologian.

Osmer has a model with 4 tasks, I will mention them now and explain each one in detail.

The descriptive task which asks, "What is going on?" The function is Priestly listening.

The Imperative task which asks, "Why is it going on?" The function is sagely wisdom.

The normative task which asks, "What ought to be going on?" The function is prophetic discernment.

The strategic/pragmatic task which asks, "How might we respond?" The function is servant leadership.

Osmer states that although these four tasks are different and distinct, they still relate to one another. The person that is interpreting this model must continually move between the four tasks which then creates an interpretive spiral. Thus, we realise that there is a strong relationship between all four of these tasks that cannot be missed.

The Descriptive/Empirical task: Priestly listening

The starting point of practical theology is a specific situation or an episode of some kind that needs some interpretation and deciphering. This first step asks the question of, what is going on in this specific situation in the specific context as well. Thus, practical theology in essence wants to understand the lives, actions and practices of human beings. Osmer's plan with task one is to attend to figuring out what is going on in individual's everyday lives and why they do certain actions, as well as what is going on in families and different congregations. He calls this attending to human beings lives as priestly listening. When priestly listening becomes more formal than informal it is focused on investigating a specific situation with a specific context, whereas informal casual attending to these matters are not that much investigative of nature. Osmer further has a research design in this task which consists of four key elements: 1) The purpose of the project, 2) The strategies of inquiry, 3) The research plan and finally 4) the reflection on the metatheoretical assumptions.

The purpose of the project. It is of great importance to know the overall purpose of Osmer's study and model. Osmer gives five purposes of research, he lists them as follow: basic, applied, summative, formative, and action research. Usually academic research belongs to the folder of basic research, where the essence is to add onto the important knowledge of a certain project.

The strategies of inquiry. There is more than one method to do inquiry, one has to choose between a quantitative or qualitative method of inquiry. When choosing qualitative, you are

focusing more on intense research. When choosing quantitative, you are concerned with extensive research and more results. Osmer however discusses six different types of research in his book. Narrative-, case study-, ethnographic-, grounded-, phenomenological-, and advocacy research

The research plan. Osmer states that a research plan has different aspects and again important decisions needs to be made at the hand of four things. The first being to choose what program, who or what setting will be investigated. Secondly the method discussed in the previous paragraph needs to be decided upon to know how data will be gathered. Thirdly the research will be done by a team or an individual. Lastly the team or individual must decide how much research will be done and what steps will he, she, or they follow. In all four of these decisions, aspects such as financial resources and time must always be taken in consideration with the availability of resources this should be discussed beforehand.

Reflection on the metatheoretical assumptions. When it comes to empirical research, there arises a double crisis. The first crisis is the representation because the observations that was made is theory-laden, this then results in data that is not purely factual. The second crisis is depending on the type of research the legitimation will always be different and vary from situation to situation. Thus, we can see that researchers must be certain that their own views being ontological, epistemological or philosophical and scientific, in their metatheoretical perspectives are always self-consciously reflected upon.

We realise the importance and significance of task one as it is the task where one gathers up data and information. This data and information is then analysed and used to recognise and understand certain situations and contexts better. In practice we should have an attitude of priestly listening.

The Interpretive task: Sagely wisdom

The second task wants to know the reason for first task, in other words, task two is figuring out why is it going on. The interpretive task should identify the core of the issue at hand in the observed situation and furthermore this task is used to fully understand the situation or episode. Osmer talks about this task as sagely wisdom which holds a connection between three characteristics being thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation and wise judgement.

The interpretive task is split into two strains regarding biblical wisdom literature, these two strains being Israel's wisdom traditions, and Jesus Christ as Gods hidden wisdom revealed. The wisdom writers of the Bible pay attention to everyday life and they then map out theories based on these observations of everyday life. In exactly the same way practical theologians also formulate theories both biblical and scientific. When we look at Jesus Christ the other strand of wisdom, we know that He is the one who provides us with wisdom. We as people of God must interpret His wisdom through the scriptures. Finally, Osmer argues that a communicative model of rationality should be the measuring stick of the interpretive guides and the model should contain three basic elements. 1) Perspectivalism: When you receive or observe a reason it should always be grounded into a certain perspective. 2) Argumentation: To come to a conclusion weather it being a consensus or dissensus, people will always offer rational argumentations to support and explain their various claims. 3) Fallibility: Scientific theories must always be used with caution and be offered with humility because they are fallible.

The significance of task two in practice is that it shows us how to better understand and explain the situations we get confronted with and also teaches us why specific patterns or dynamics arise. We should think about the situation with a sagely wisdom.

The Normative task: Prophetic discernment

The third task in Osmer's model is the normative task, here the question that is being asked is "What ought to be going on?". Osmer also refers to this task as prophetic discernment. This task investigates God's will for all of our present realities. When Osmer refers to this task as prophetic discernment he is referring to the dual play of human shaping and God's divine disclosure. It concerns God's word in terms of human shaping as well as divine disclosure. There are three methods that prophetic discernment uses to explore God's word for the present.

- a. Theological interpretation: It is easily confused with traditional disciplines of biblical studies and theology and even systematic theology, but one should not confuse this with theological interpretation because these other that was mentioned studies the word of God all by itself. These traditional disciplines still support and inform theological interpretation, but the main focus is the interpretation of everyday situations and contexts in our present time. It rests on theological concepts while exploring and interpreting present events and realities.
- b. Ethical reflection: This points out rules and guidelines using ethical principles. Our present practices are filled with lots of norms and values which are often in conflict with each other. The second task, the imperative, should help develop these ethical rules, principles and guidelines to act as a medium for behaviour in certain situations in the practice to end morally.
- c. Good practice: This method has two contrasting roles in the prophetic discernment aspect of Osmer's model. Firstly, when analysing everyday examples of good practice, a new perspective of God and the Christian life with good values and social morals are developed.

In practice this task signifies the importance of using theological concepts to decipher and clarify certain situations and building up a norm that is ethical and that can be used to guide how we respond. In practice we should apply some prophetic discernment and consult the Bible for answers concerning the situation.

The Pragmatic/strategic task: Servant leadership

The final task of Osmer's model is the pragmatic task. Here we ask the question "How might we respond?" this task seeks to know the answer to this question. Osmer tags this final step as the servant leadership task where leaders of a congregation should be guided and use to ask the question on how we should respond, but also to take action and to respond in practice. In Osmer's book he mentions three forms of leadership, they are: Task competence leaders who is more focused on leading an organization. Transactional leadership is where a leader is using a process of trade-offs to influence people. The third and final form of leadership is transforming leadership, where the leader is responsible for leading a group to big change in all aspects such as identity, missions and culture. These three forms of leadership are all needed in a congregation. All of them has to be competent enough in serving their congregation. Task four really zooms in on the organisational and leadership aspects in practice. In practice this task is of great importance, it is this task that determines the approach of actions that will be taken to

influence and change certain situations or events. This task also leads to engaging conversation that will reflect the outcomes and actions that should be taken. It is very important because this task will influence situations in the desired ways.

Osmers model is extremely well thought out and it is easy for everyone to understand. His four questions being, what is going on? Why is it going on? What ought to be going on? and How might we respond, makes it easy to interpret an event or situation and it is easy to apply in practise and in any pastoral situation. It is very useful also in training leaders of churches. To do practical theology in practice one should do it with the attitude of a servant leader

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