

Review of Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*

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Osmer RR 2008. *Practical theology: an introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

1. Purpose

Osmer's² primary purpose is to equip congregational leaders to engage in practical theological interpretation of episodes, situations, and contexts that confront them in ministry. A secondary purpose is to equip theological educators to train students in the skills of practical theological reflection.

2. Summary

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?'

Conspectus 10:1 (September 2010) p. 100

3. The *normative task* asks, 'What ought to be going on?'
4. The *pragmatic task* asks, 'How might we respond?'

The book is organised around these four tasks, with one major chapter devoted to each task. In addition, there is an introductory chapter which introduces the four tasks and places them within the framework of congregational leadership, and an epilogue dealing with teaching practical theology in Christian higher education.

In the interests of helping students embarking on research in the field of practical theology for the first time, I shall offer a fairly detailed, chapter-by-chapter summary of Osmer's book.

Introduction: The Four Tasks of Practical Theology

Although he is conscious it will be used by academic practical theologians, Osmer's book is intended primarily for *congregational leaders*. He embraces Gerkin's (1997) model of pastoral leadership, namely, the pastor as *interpretive guide*. His primary objective is to equip leaders³ to be effective interpretive guides for their congregations by teaching them how to engage in practical theological interpretation of episodes, situations, and contexts.⁴ Osmer offers the four tasks of practical theology (see *Figure 1*) as a model that interpretive guides can use to interpret episodes, situations, and contexts theologically.

Conspectus 10:1 (September 2010) p. 101

Task

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