AUGMENTING PRACTICAL THEOLOGY METHODS: DEVELOPING COMPETENCIES AND CAPACITIES TO AID ENACTMENT

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Abstract

This article arose in response to the theme of the 2017 annual meeting of the Academy of Religious Leadership: Leadership for Change. One way to lead change in a local congregation is to facilitate a corporate process of reflection whereupon a present praxis is reshaped into a new or renewed praxis. However, most existing processes underemphasize the reality that changes in praxis require transformation of the very people engaging the praxis. This article explores competencies and capacities participants should develop for fruitful enactment of action-reflection methods. Moreover, it explores how these abilities could be developed within the process.

Introduction

When considering "Leadership for Change," most practical theologians would unceremoniously prescribe the implementation of a practical theology (PT) method. The expressed telos of most methods—i.e., new or renewed praxis—is simply another way of saying "change." Yet, as this essay will assert, the usage of a method could be significantly enhanced. Most of the more prominent PT methods, including that of John Swinton, Richard Osmer, and Thomas Groome, underemphasize an element that is central to the success of the method—namely, the ability of participants to enact the various and often challenging steps competently. It will be suggested that practical theology processes be augmented by beneficial competencies and capacities in the participants. Moreover, it will be argued that some of these capacities can be cultivated within the process. This happens as each activity becomes developmentally enriched, with opportunities provided

for participants to be transformed in their way of being while they simultaneously discern how God might have them change what they are doing.

Practical Theology and Change

The discipline of Practical Theology hinges upon an assumption about the relationship between theory and practice; specifically, that they are consistently in symbiotic relationship. People do not come to theological reflection as a dry sponge, merely to absorb a theory and later put it into practice. Rather, theological reflection always starts with an existing praxis—a theory-laden practice—and then traverses through critical reflection toward a more faithful form of praxis.[1] This action-reflection movement not only provides guidance on how to engage a certain practice, but also clarifies the theology upon which the practice finds its foundation. Thus, practical theology is *practical*—it concerns practices—and *theological*—it generates theology.[2] Practice is not subservient to theology, nor are practice and theory distinct. Instead, as practical theologian Ray Anderson stated it, "all practice includes theory, and theory can only be discerned through practice."[3] In other words, practice and theology are consistently in dynamic interrelationship.

In considering how this action-reflection work plays out in a local, ever-changing context, practical theology seeks the telos of an ever-more-faithful form of praxis, whether that be a renewed form of the original praxis or a completely new praxis. That being the case, the typical
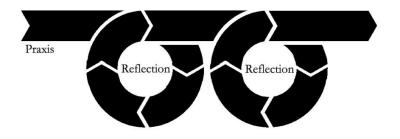
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[1] This term *praxis*, often employed by practical theologians, refers in its most basic sense to "action." But more substantially, *praxis* denotes a form of action that is value-directed and theory-laden. *Praxis* refers to a practice laden with belief, an act where an assumed telos is bound up within the action itself. Cf. Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 47–51.

[2] See e.g., Billings, J Todd, "Undying Love." *First Things* 248 (2014): 45–49. In this article, a systematic theologian muses on the impassibility of God. This profound reflection on a theory related to God was initiated by the Billings' experiences with terminal cancer.

[3] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 21.

portrayal of a PT cycle, shown in Figure 1, can be rather misleading.[4]

Figure 1. The Practical Theology Cycle

The diagram in Figure 1 makes it seem as though a community's praxis will stay on the same trajectory despite multiple cycles of critical reflection upon theory. It fails to stress the way in which this process yields a renewed or radically new form of praxis.[5] In other words, it fails to capture how this work leads to change. Practical theology exists for the sake of change—the change that comes about as a result of reflecting upon an existing praxis and making adjustments in order to enact a more faithful one. As such, leaders in Christian communities would be remiss if they did not employ insights from practical theology to lead change in their context.

By grounding all theological reflection in present praxis, practical theology trusts that local Christian communities can learn their way into God's emerging future by reflecting critically and constructively on their

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[4] Diagram created by the author. One can find similar depictions in Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 154, or Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 41.

[5] Of course, these sorts of diagrams, by their nature, are oversimplified. Yet, one can still imagine a diagram in which the trajectory of the praxis changes from its present course as a result of the reflection. In the case of a completely new praxis, the praxis line could perhaps be represented as starting anew in a nearby location (i.e., discontinuous change).

current engagement of practices in their setting. It is natural for them to do this work. At all times, the activities they do and the theology they claim are interacting. Consequently, it is not a matter of whether or not Christian communities will engage in some form of action-reflection. It is, rather, a question of whether or not they will do so faithfully and fruitfully.

Leading for Change by Enacting Practical Theology Methods

To ensure action-reflection is performed well, practical theologians devise processes, often called practical theology methods, for communities to enact. Although the various processes have different points of emphasis, they all encourage critical reflection consisting of several common elements: gaining an accurate picture of what is happening currently, followed by analysis utilizing cultural and theological resources, which then leads to a normative prescription toward a new or renewed praxis.[6] One can readily detect these elements in the following brief summaries of three prominent practical theology methods. The first comes from John Swinton, Scottish practical theologian at the University of Aberdeen. In *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*,[7] he articulates a theology of practice that prizes knowledge from the social sciences while maintaining the ultimate authority of theological resources. See Figure 2.

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[6] Few practical theologians summarize this telos better than John Swinton, who stresses that practical theology is primarily concerned with God's ongoing mission in the world: "As a theological discipline, its primary purpose is to ensure that the church's public proclamations and praxis-in-the-world faithfully reflect the nature and purpose of God's continuing mission to the world, and in so doing authentically addresses the contemporary context into which the church seeks to minister." *From Bedlam to Shalom: Towards a Practical Theology of Human Nature, Interpersonal Relationships, and Mental Health Care* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 12.

[7] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006). Although the model presented therein is aimed toward the practical theologian doing research, Swinton avers that the model is based on his pastoral theology.

Figure 2. Swinton's Method

John Swinton's Method Found in *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*

Stage 1: The Situation	A pre-reflective description of current praxis around a practice or situation requiring critical challenge; initial observations about what appears to be going on
Stage 2: Cultural/Contextual Analysis	Dialogue with other sources of knowledge to discover what actually might be going on
Stage 3: Theological Reflection	Intentional theological reflection that weighs God's intentions against the significance of what was discovered in stages 1 and 2
Stage 4: Formulating Revised Forms of Practice	Returning to the situation, participants use conversation to draw together the cultural/contextual analysis and the theological reflection in order to produce new and challenging forms of practice

In a similar fashion, Richard Osmer, practical theologian at Princeton Theological Seminary, suggests a model of practical theology with four "tasks." As explicated in *Practical Theology: An Introduction*[8] and shown in Figure 3, each of the four tasks includes a guiding question and a theological analogue.

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[8] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008).

Figure 3. Osmer's Model

Richard Osmer's Method Found in *Practical Theology*

The descriptive-empirical task asks, "What is going on?"	Because this "is a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations," this task calls for *priestly listening*.[9]
The interpretative task asks, "Why is it going on?"	Because this requires thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation, and wise judgment, this task calls for *sagely wisdom*.[10]
The normative task asks, "What ought to be going on?"	Because this entails "the interplay of divine discourse and human shaping," this task calls for *prophetic discernment*.[11]
The pragmatic-strategic task asks, "How might we respond?"	Because this requires implementation of change that must be handled in a humble manner, this task calls for *servant leadership*.[12]

Osmer recommends that leaders use this model to interpret episodes, situations, and contexts theologically. Both Osmer and Swinton thus provide methods for an individual to implement within a community. The next method, from Thomas Groome, professor in theology and religious education at Boston College, includes similar elements as the first two, but also stresses a process for a community to implement together. Indeed,

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[9] Osmer, 34ff.
[10] Osmer, 83ff.
[11] Osmer, 133ff.
[12] Osmer, 133ff.

he calls his method "Shared Christian Praxis" precisely because it is a shared partnership between leader and participants. The leader, while in charge of facilitation and resourcing, also participates as a "leading-learner" in a subject-to-subject relationship with participants.

This stress on communal discernment is vital because leading a change in praxis often involves what Ronald Heifetz calls an adaptive challenge. In the face of adaptive challenges, the whole congregation must do the work of change. As Heifetz once stated, "The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself."[13] Groome's method affirms that ministry is to be done *with* people (collaboratively), not just *to* them (coercively) or *for* them (without their involvement). Although originally proposed as a model for Christian education, Groome's approach shown in Figure 4 understands reflection on present praxis as the locus of true learning and faithful Christian action as the telos of that learning.[14]

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[13] Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 13. Moreover, Groome's method is appropriate for adaptive change because it works against any "flight to authority." By using a highly participative corporate process, Groome's method counteracts clericalism, both clerical over-functioning and congregational irresponsibility, by empowering all God's people to discern and live into a new or renewed praxis.

[14] In fact, Norma Cooke Everist claims his "Shared Christian Praxis" model became the standard for action reflection. Cf. Norma Cooke Everist, *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2002), 176.

Figure 4. Groome's Shared Christian Praxis

Thomas Groome's "Shared Christian Praxis" as
Found in *Sharing Faith*[15]

Focusing Activity	Under the assumption that God is actively revealing Godself, participants establish a "generative theme" (originally Paulo Freire's phrase) that they will subsequently engage.[16]
Movement One: Naming/Expressing Present Praxis	Participants name what is "going on" and "being done," including a sense of the operative values, meanings, and beliefs at work in the praxis.[17]
Movement Two: Critical Reflection on Present Action	Participants analyze whether or not the action reflects the theories they presuppose, often utilizing cultural resources that impinge on their issue.[18]

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[15] Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1998). Of all the methods summarized here, this method is most likely to be misunderstood because of the truncation caused by summation. Each word in each movement's name deserves to be unpacked in full.

[16] Groome, 155ff.

[17] Groome, 175ff.

[18] Groome, 187ff.

Movement Three: Making Accessible Christian Story/Vision	In contradistinction to having it imposed in a doctrinaire or "banking" manner, participants are encouraged to have a personal encounter with the demands and promises of the Christian narrative of past and future.[19]
Movement Four: Dialectical Hermeneutics to Appropriate Story/Vision to Participants' Stories and Visions	In this movement, three narratives collide: the narrative of what we think is happening, of the proposed world God presents, and of our past experiences. Participants seek to align the story they tell by asking, "How does the Christian Story/Vision affirm, question, and call us beyond our present praxis?"[20]
Movement Five: Decision/Response to Lived Christian Faith	The emphasis, like other methods, is on a concrete response of renewed Christian praxis, faithful to God's reign (not about a large master plan so much as a next faithful step … trying something out as a new experimental praxis).[21]

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[19] Groome, 215ff.

[20] Groome, 249ff.

[21] Groome, 266ff.

Despite the brevity of these descriptions, one can readily recognize how each method attempts to catalyze rigorous reflection that transforms local praxis. They prescribe concrete steps to overcome shortsighted perspective, faulty assumptions, and simplistic theological interpretation. As a result, a new or renewed praxis can emerge—one that changes the witness of the community so as to be more faithful and more fruitful.

Augmenting Methods: The Need for Competencies and Capacities

The practical theology methods outlined here not only contain common elements, but each one also makes a simple assumption; namely, that a process—a series of appropriate steps—is sufficient for achieving the desired ends. They might be variously labeled (stages, tasks, or movements), but they similarly presume that the process, faithfully enacted, will lead to ever-more-faithful praxis. This raises a series of questions: Is a faithful process, in and of itself, sufficient for achieving such ends? Will a community find their way forward simply by engaging in a different set of reflective actions? Will it solely be a matter of changing what they do in the face of what seems to be an inadequate praxis?

Some reasoning suggests the response to each of these questions should be negative in nature. A simple example should suffice. All of these methods, especially Groome's Shared Christian Praxis (see Figure 4), require communities to engage in deep dialogue regarding issues when opinions differ and emotions run strong. Regardless of whether the community is trying to name present praxis, express God's intentions, or sort through the options for a new praxis, they will have to do the difficult work of wading through conflicting perspectives. To be done well, this sort of dialogue requires a high level of emotional and spiritual maturity among those present (or at the very least, among a significant core). For instance, an immature community will struggle to name all the dynamics around their current praxis because participants do not want to hurt each other's feelings, especially if

many of these dynamics usually go unspoken. Poor execution of this dialogue will lead to inadequate naming of present praxis, and inadequate naming will doom a method from the very start. In such circumstances, prescribing dialogue will be insufficient in and of itself. If the community desires fruitful outcomes from the process, they will need to build their personal and corporate capacity to engage in dialogue. Without this capacity and other foundations present and growing, the community's enactments of the practical theology method will fail to meet its fullest potential.

Some methods might assume such foundations are not necessary because the process accounts for weaknesses in the participants. For instance, in laying out each movement of Shared Christian Praxis in Sharing Faith, Groome has explanatory subsections on "Procedures" and "Developing the Art of Facilitating." Both subsections empower leaders to elicit subject agency from participants. This is certainly to be applauded, but the leader is still at the mercy of the capacities of the people. Regardless of how artful the facilitation might be, it seems self-evident that the fruitfulness of any specific step in a practical theology method will be limited by a group's ability to execute that particular step as designed. To say it another way: the fruitfulness of the step will be directly proportional to the community's capacity to enact it. For example, Groome's method hinges on the ability of the community to articulate the Christian "Story/Vision." However, most lay people cannot articulate the Story (Scripture, tradition, and church history) and Vision (the characteristics of the coming Reign of God) without substantial divergence, distortion, and deficiency.

To enact any of these methods to its fullest potential, a community will thus need a growing set of competencies and capacities. Unfortunately, most processes presume personal faculties that might not be present among individuals. They fail to acknowledge that certain tasks might be difficult, if not impossible, for the group to fulfill. Participants in any process, in addition to

changing their praxis—what they do—will also need to transform their very way of being.[22] This growth and development can take place during the PT process, or alternatively at any time in the life of the community. After all, PT methods will only be implemented intermittently—when a current praxis needs to be reevaluated or when a crisis has precipitated the need for a change. In between those times, communities can prepare to enter into each new iteration with ever more faithfulness by fostering those competencies and capacities that cultivate an environment that breeds a readiness to enact the process and a capacity to do it well. Although strictly speculation at this point, a preliminary list of these elements may be attempted.

A Preliminary List of Competencies and Capacities to Support PT Methods[23]

Ever-increasing Spiritual Maturity—If, as Groome assumes, a community's reflection process begins (and succeeds) by noticing God's activity, agency, and presence in circumstances, in one's own being and in the other, then a growing awareness of the Spirit's work is necessary for the method as much as it is for life.

Ever-increasing Emotional Maturity—In any practical theology process, participants will need to have a series of hard conversations in which opinions differ and emotions run strong. They will increase their collective capacity to

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[22] It could alternatively be said that "changes in praxis require transformation of the very people engaging the praxis." This assertion derives from the language Heifetz uses to describe adaptive change—it requires people to change their "values, attitudes, or habits of behavior"—in other words, their very way of being, not just their way of doing. Cf. Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998), 87. But for the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to say that changes in praxis require transformation of the very people engaging the method.

[23] As a preliminary list, this collection of competencies and capacities lacks details and further references. A full list, including resources that would help communities foster them, is under development in a separate project. Surely, readers could also develop their own list of key concepts that inform group relations work.

have these conversations as they increase their individual emotional maturity (i.e., their ability to understand and manage anxiety created by conflicting viewpoints).

Developing Skill with Dialogue—Most lay participants in a congregation have never received training in dialogue and thus, when engaged in conversation, are prone to debate or discussion—alternatives that constrain potential in group work. Yet, this competency can be learned. For instance, participants can seek to understand and be understood by mastering the practices of active listening and humble inquiry.

Expanding Familiarity with the Christian Story and Vision—If communities want their action-reflection to be fruitful, they cannot wait for the right step in order to examine God's intentions. Instead, people need to be continually steeped in God's Story and Vision. Most importantly, a Christian community needs to have a conversation in response to this question: "What is it going to look like when God's Reign is fully consummated?" In their shared understanding, they can live from the future forward.

Growing Aptitude for Cultural Exegesis—Since the theories embedded in praxis are not only theological but also access other sources of knowledge, it is imperative that communities have a growing awareness of sociological resources and growing aptitude for interpreting the data.

Increasing Ability to Surface and Test Mental Models—Given that many communities are unaware of the disparity between their espoused theology and present actions, those communities that can surface and test faulty mental models and false consciousness will stand the best chance of experiencing fruitful outcomes. This ability is cultivated over time, not evoked over one iteration of a PT method.

A Communally Discerned Covenant—Before entering a process, a group should communally discern how they will be together in the process. This will include how they will interact (with trust, respect, and honesty) and how they will discern (i.e., seek the Spirit, question everything,

be data-driven, see the whole). Some methods are mindful of this while others fail to notice its importance.

While the development of these (and other) competencies and capacities will more than likely ensure the faithful and fruitful enactment of a PT method, emphasis on their necessity leads to an important line of questioning: How does one measure the point at which a group of people are adequately prepared to engage the method? When are these competencies and capacities sufficiently developed?

If, for instance, such capacities regard emotional and spiritual maturity, and if the journey to maturity in those matters is life-long, there is no point at which the people in a community will be perfectly prepared. Any method will, of necessity, be enacted by imperfect people at an imperfect time and thus, in an imperfect manner. To suggest otherwise is unrealistic. At some point, a community and its leaders will have to trust that the current level of preparation is adequate, that the process will bear some fruit, even if imperfect, and that the Spirit is at work in the process. Acknowledging these imperfect circumstances does not detract from the importance of developing capacities, but only serves as a caution upon placing undue emphasis on the completion of those preparations. Instead, such efforts toward growing the internal capacities of a community must be ongoing and regular. Each act of capacity-building or competency-strengthening lends itself to the next iteration of praxis-renewing.

Developmental Enrichment in Every Activity

Yet, a community need not relegate its efforts to one-off activities that are specifically dedicated to the development of these capacities and competencies. Instead, they can build development directly into the process. Organizational scholars Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey's latest book, *An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organization*, paints a picture of how this might play out in organizations like

congregations.[24] Although not written for a religious audience, this text demonstrates how any organization can grow the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual maturity of its people by ensuring that every activity is developmentally enriched. In most institutions, personal development is an "add-on" that takes place in external settings with irregular frequency. Kegan and Lahey, alternatively, draw attention to the ways development can be woven into the fabric of an organization. For this to happen, leaders create a culture that is demanding enough to confront limitations yet safe enough for members to come out of hiding to experience the transformation of these limitations in real time.

Kegan and Lahey contend that three dynamic elements must be simultaneously present for this to be possible. First, the environment must feature high aspirations for development, where it is assumed that adults can grow and that every event provides an opportunity to, as Kegan and Lahey aver, "get bigger."[25] They label this aspect *edge* because each person regularly identifies a growing edge. For people to be willing to accept the challenge associated with edge, the community must first create an atmosphere of shared trust and safety, which they call *home*. The ideal "home" for receiving challenges will feature a "well-held vulnerability," their "term for feeling simultaneously as if you are the furthest thing from your most well-put-together self but you are still valued and included."[26] Lastly, the organization must foster a set of practices that encourage ongoing development. Because these practices are built into the routine patterns of the organization, this final aspect is known as *groove*. Each aspect—edge, home, and groove—animates, strengthens, and reinforces the others. When all

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[24] Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2016).

[25] Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 62.

[26] Kegan and Lahey, *An Everyone Culture*, 154.

three are simultaneously present, an organization can be deliberately developmental; that is, the organization can ensure that every activity is developmentally enriched.

This could have profound implications for organizations engaging in a practical theology process. Instead of relying solely on preparation to build competencies and capacities, development of some of these skills and qualities could be built straight into the PT process. Each task, stage, or movement could be developmentally enriched such that people experience consistent changes in their way of being as they simultaneously discern Spirit-led changes to their praxis.

Deliberate Development in Ridder Church Renewal

The Ridder Church Renewal (Ridder) movement provides a good example. Ridder is an intense, multiyear process for pastors and lay leadership teams in the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America.[27] The process encourages deep reflection on congregational praxis for the sake of missional (re)alignment. Moreover, it recognizes that the ability to enact the presented content is directly dependent on the personal growth of each participant seeking to enact it. Although the movement encourages periodic retreats for the sake of personal and congregational formation, its real power resides in the way every activity is formatively enhanced.

At the outset of this multiyear process, a version of Kegan and Lahey's *edge* and *home* are immediately created. This takes place in a forty-eight hour retreat designed to help participants explore what they usually keep hidden from God, others, and even themselves. [28] The Ridder

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[27] More information is available at http://ridder.westernsem.edu/learning-change/.

[28] The Ridder community considers itself to be, in part, a spiritual formation movement wherein spiritual formation is the result of our first formation encountering a Spirit-led transformation. It does not seem coincidental that in these opening spiritual formation retreats, Ridder participants explore vows made in their first formation that might be considered akin to what Kegan and Lahey call "hidden commitments" in their Immunity to Change

leaders begin by sharing their own stories of personal transformation. While presenting these stories, they are not only authentic about personal patterns they hid for years, but they are also deeply vulnerable regarding wounds from the past and the long journey toward healing. Moreover, they stress the way in which important people in their lives challenged their way of being while simultaneously expressing love and care that made change seem possible. By exhibiting this vulnerability in the midst of stressing deep connection with others, these Ridder leaders establish what Kegan and Lahey would call *home*. The resulting atmosphere, which is carefully maintained over time, is challenging yet safe. Additionally, they establish *edge* by conveying an expectation that adults can and must continually mature in order to meet the challenges of discipleship in God's ever-emerging future.

This original retreat kick-starts a formation process maintained throughout the multiyear process. Participants continually reflect on their personal journey while engaging a corporate journey to reevaluate their present praxis. Subsequent formation primarily takes place by creating space for internal reflection in the midst of communal processes and activities. As a routine pattern—what Kegan and Lahey might call *groove*, participants are asked provocative questions that stimulate growth.

One of the most oft-repeated of these questions is "How did you be?" The phrasing of this question can be confusing at first, but it is merely a shorthand way of asking, "What was your *way of being* as we were *doing* that activity?" For instance, suppose a group of people from a particular Christian community dialogue about their current engagement of local mission. Ridder is not unique for having suggested such a conversation. As established, most PT methods assume the necessity of assessing the

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process. Cf. Kegan and Lahey, *An Everyone Culture*, 201ff. and *Immunity to Change*, 31ff.

present situation.[29] The uncommon contribution of Ridder occurs as the conversation becomes developmentally enriched. At the end of such a conversation about present praxis, or sometimes in the midst of it, participants might be asked, "How did you be?" or "How are you being?" To respond, participants must step back and see themselves in action.[30] A participant might observe, "I shut down because I was scared of how people might react if they knew how I really felt." Another might say, "I got anxious about the direction of the conversation and decided to intervene strongly in order to bring it back to where I wanted it to go." Still another person might remark, "I was engaged and seemed to be listening and speaking at the right times. That is, until Jack shared his opinion. Upon hearing it, I became enraged on the inside and wanted to scream at him. But nobody would have known that because externally, I simply went silent."

After this preliminary reflection, people are often coached in the moment. That is, they are asked, in a safe environment, to become slightly more vulnerable. In the process, they will most likely be asked deeper questions as to where their *way of being* originated and what God might be asking them to learn about themselves and their interaction with others. This internal work requires a deep level of self-awareness, and depending on the way in which the reflection is processed, a deep level of authenticity with self and others. Inevitably, this leads to personal transformation in the participants; even those not directly questioned learn and grow as a result of witnessing the public coaching of others. Each person grows his or her capacity to manage personal anxiety, the ability to engage in dialogue, sensitivity to the Spirit, and

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[29] To make progress, organizations must know what is going on (Osmer) or be able to express their present praxis via a fearless inventory (Groome).
[30] A version of what Heifetz would call "getting on the balcony," which he borrowed from the Jesuit desire to achieve contemplation in action. Cf. Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 27.

so on. The subsequent corporate reflection processes are strengthened by the individual's formation process.

In addition to asking a question like "How did you be?" at the end or in the midst of an activity, participants might be asked a question such as "How are you showing up?" at the beginning of an activity. Ridder leaders might further frame this question using their vision of spiritual maturity: "What is currently preventing you from being simultaneously present to God, self, and others at this time and in this place?"[31] By asking this simple question and providing space for reflection, the activity becomes developmentally enriched, regardless of whether the activity involves cultural interpretation or the creative discernment of a new praxis. By growing self-awareness in the moment, the individual participants are more capable of engaging the activity with rigor, authenticity, diligence, and curiosity. They notice and receive the Spirit's work and the other's presence.

The Ridder movement includes a host of other routines that might be considered part of the *groove* in Kegan and Lahey's parlance. For instance, Ridder leaders might pause participants in the middle of an activity and say, "Observe yourself. You cannot counteract negative tendencies unless you actually take time to see them. As you observe your internal state and your external behavior, what do you notice? What internal feelings do you need to regulate? What options are available for your external behavior?" Moreover, Ridder leaders might stop at the end of an activity and ask people to notice anxiety that is blocking progress, saying, "If the Kingdom of God moves at the speed of relationships and nothing impairs relational health more than anxiety, notice your own anxiety. What is the threat that's causing the anxiety? Is it real or perceived? What is the anxiety tempting you to do and how might you counteract that temptation by being who God created you to be?" Additionally, participants

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[31] In the Ridder community, spiritual maturity is defined as the ability to listen (and respond) to God, self, and others in any and all circumstances.

are encouraged to ask fellow participants for feedback after activities. That might go like this: "I'm working on growing my emotional and spiritual maturity. I'm cognizant that I cannot see everything there is to see about myself. So, I'm increasingly looking for outside input. Can you please tell me how you experienced me during that activity?" In each of these examples of *groove*, one can notice an *edge* at play and the sensitivity to a safe *home*. As participants exist in this dynamic space of determining a new praxis, they simultaneously grow as they go.

Conclusion

Practical theology and its associated methods exist for the sake of faithful change. Yet, as this paper has argued, there is reason to consider augmenting these change processes. Fruitful action-reflection is not simply a matter of doing certain activities; it also requires a transformation in our way of being so that our way of doing can be greatly strengthened. This demands the cultivation of competencies and capacities that are normally taken for granted in practical theology methods. The development of these skills sets and internal qualities will lend itself to more desirable outcomes from the action-reflection process.

One way to ensure these are continually developed is to build developmental enrichment into the activities. This is difficult work that requires the creation of an environment that is safe but demanding. Yet, Ridder Church Renewal demonstrates one way it is happening in religious organizations. As these communities engage in deep critical reflection on their present praxis, they simultaneously reflect on their way of being. Thus, the action-reflection cycle not only renews the community's praxis, but also the community's people. Transformed and transforming people, in turn, lead transformational change in their respective settings.

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