The EDNA Model for Doing Research in Practical Theology: A Biblical Approach

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Abstract

This article is a proposal of the EDNA model for doing practical theology using a Biblical approach. The proposed model covers four areas of research in practical theology. When placed together, these areas of research form an acronym that spells out the name EDNA: (1) Exploratory research asks: 'What has led to the present situation? (2) Descriptive research asks: 'What is happening now?' (3) Normative research asks, 'What should be happening?' and (4) Action research asks, 'How should we respond?'

The article is organised around these four areas of research. After grounding the EDNA model theologically and philosophically, an attempt is made to ground and describe the function of each of the EDNA model's four areas of research in practical theology. This is done, firstly, by defining each of the four areas of research, as presented in the social sciences; secondly, by conducting a phenomenological analysis of recurring themes in a selection of recognised theological research models by prominent practical theologians to provide a grounding for each of the four areas of research; and, thirdly, by analysing the function of each

area of research in the selected models. Finally, the EDNA model is illustrated using two examples from the New Testament and also applied to the local church.

1. Introduction

Numerous models are used in practical theology research today, such as the Osmer, the Browning, the DECIDE and the LIM models. Zerfass (1974:166) defines a model as 'a set order of signs and interconnections which should correspond to a certain number of relevant characteristics within reality, in real circumstances'.

As a researcher, one might choose to utilise one of the following models in practical theology: 'Paul Ballard and John Pritchard's "Pastoral Cycle" of experience-exploration-reflection-action or Richard Osmer's "four tasks" of empirical-interpretive-theological-pragmatic' (20). However, whichever model you might choose in your research programme, your approach should be able to answer the following questions: '"What is going on?" "Why is it going on?" "What ought to be going on?" and "How might we respond?"' (The Reflective Practitioner 2013:20).

However, despite the variety of models today, the author contends that there is a need for an optimal model for doing theology from a biblical perspective. The Osmer model is currently one of the most widely used models for doing research in practical theology. However, it can be argued that it needs to be adjusted to meet the requirements of doing theology optimally and scripturally. For example, Smith (2010a:111–113) points out the following weaknesses of Osmer's approach:

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[1] The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. 'Osmer approaches the tasks of practical theology from a liberal Protestant perspective' (p. 111). Smith indicates that he would 'prefer a conservative evangelical approach' (p. 111).

2. Osmer's approach was 'written for congregational leaders' (p. 111). Smith claims that he would prefer it to be focused more on 'seminary-based research projects' (p. 111).

3. Smith states that he 'would like to see greater emphasis on the scriptures, especially in the normative task' (p. 112). On the positive side, he indicates that Osmer's model does show 'a reasonable focus on scripture and his model is certainly usable even by those who hold more conservative theological views' (p. 112). On the negative side, however, Smith feels that it is regrettable that Osmer shows a greater reliance 'on theological concepts and on theories from the arts and sciences to guide practical theological interpretation than on in-depth study of scripture' (p. 112). Smith presents the following argument in this regard: 'For anyone with a high view of scripture, even practical theology must be exegetical theology' (p. 112).

4. Smith states the he is 'distinctly uncomfortable applying the label "normative" to new understandings of God or Christian life and values derived by observing contemporary models of good practice' (p. 112). He claims that 'for Osmer, all theories and theologies are fallible and perspectival, so such new understandings would be held lightly' (p. 112). Smith argues that 'for the overwhelming majority of faith communities in Africa … Christian doctrines and ethical norms are deemed to be based on the infallible word of God, and hold an authority akin to the very word of God' (p. 112).

5. Smith feels rather let down by Osmer in his chapter on the pragmatic task, when he says, 'I was hoping to find a system for developing a theological theory of action based on the three

foundational tasks, closing the circle of reflection from praxis through theory and back to praxis' (p. 113). However, instead of what he hoped for, Smith 'found a discussion of how to lead a congregation through change' (p. 113).

A further weakness of Osmer's model is that the interpretive task is placed after the descriptive task. In Osmer's model the key question for the interpretive task is: 'Why is it going on?' In this particular task the interpretive guide is required to 'identify the issues embedded within the episodes, situations, and contexts he has observed, and draw on theories from the arts and sciences to help him understand the issues' (Smith 2010a:104–105). However, it can be argued that the interpretive task should rather precede the descriptive task to enable the researcher to obtain a better understanding of, (1) what is the nature and extent of the present situation, and (2) what led to the present situation.

Traditionally, a literature review is placed at the beginning of a thesis, where the researcher is expected to provide an analytical overview of the significant literature published on the selected topic. It would, therefore, be more appropriate to combine the interpretive task with the literature review in the form of an exploratory task to gain better insight into the nature and extent of the situation and to seek explanations for observed problems in the situation. This would help the researcher to explain the situation, by answering the question: What has led to the present situation?

This argument correlates with the Zerfass model, which places the step of theological tradition before the situation analysis. The Zerfass model inter-relates theological tradition, praxis, situation analysis, practical theological theory and redefined praxis (Zerfass 1974:166 ff).

The purpose of this article is to propose the EDNA model for doing research in practical theology. An attempt will be made to ground the

EDNA model theologically and philosophically, then to define each of the four areas of research, as presented in the social sciences, and finally to ground and describe the model by analysing the function of each of its key areas of research, as presented in a selection of recognised theological research models by prominent practical theologians.

The author acknowledges that the EDNA model does not break any new ground *per se*. It is mainly a synthesis and reworking of other models along the lines of theory-practice-theory. In particular, the EDNA model seeks to remediate a perceived deficiency in the pre-existing approaches and, in doing so, offer a useful method that attempts to move in a more optimal direction.

2. The EDNA Model as a Biblical Approach: Its Theological and Philosophical Grounding

The EDNA model is grounded in evangelical theology, in which the Bible serves as the normative basis and standard for all Christian conduct and church practice. 'Indeed, much of evangelical theological identity and its Christocentricity [are] grounded in the confessional linkage whereby Scripture is the written Word of God' (Morrison 1999:165).

Furthermore, the EDNA model is based on the Five Solas (five Latin phrases) that emerged during the Protestant Reformation to summarise the Reformers' basic theological beliefs about the essentials of the Christian Faith. The Five Solas are as follows (Holcombe 2014):

1. 'Sola Scriptura ("Scripture alone"): The Bible alone is our highest authority'.
2. 'Sola Fide ("faith alone"): We are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ'.
3. 'Sola Gratia ("grace alone"): We are saved by the grace of God alone'.
4. 'Solus Christus ("Christ alone"): Jesus Christ alone is our Lord, Saviour, and King'.
5. 'Soli Deo Gloria ("to the glory of God alone"): We live for the glory of God alone'.

The EDNA model, as a Biblical approach to practical theology, is also grounded in the Christian philosophy of life. Heitink (1999:6) defines practical theology as the 'empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society.' In terms of a biblical approach, the purpose of practical theology is two-fold.

Firstly, practical theology 'draws on and responds to people's interpretations of normative sources from scripture and tradition and helps ongoing modifications and transformations of their practices in order to be more adequately responsive to their interpretations of the shape of God's call to partnership' (Fowler cited in Jaison 2010:3).

Secondly, in practical theology, 'the point of theological reflection is not simply to contemplate or comprehend the world as it is, but to contribute to the world's becoming what God intends that it should be, as those intentions have been interpreted by the great theistic traditions' (Cowan 2000).

3. The EDNA Model Summarised

What is the purpose of the EDNA model? In the EDNA model, like in most models in practical theology, theological reflection—regardless of the number of steps—is 'concerned with explaining a practical situation, understanding the situation through a dialogue between cultural and theological perspectives, and finally changing the situation with renewed praxis' (*Situational and Existential Sources for Theological Reflection* 2013; Heitink 1999:165). The methodology used in the EDNA model, as used in many other models in practical theology, covers, amongst other things, the following three perspectives: 'interpretation of human action in the light of the Christian tradition (the hermeneutical perspective), the analysis of human action with regard to its factuality and potentiality (the empirical perspective) and the development of action models and action strategies for the various domains of action (the strategic perspective)' (Heitink 1999:165).

How can the EDNA model be summarised? The four areas of research in the proposed model are represented by an acronym that spells out the name EDNA: Exploratory, Descriptive, Normative and Action. Hence the EDNA model consists of the following four areas of research in practical theology:

1. Exploratory research asks: 'What has led to the present situation?
2. Descriptive research asks: 'What is happening now?'
3. Normative research asks, 'What should be happening?'
4. Action research asks, 'How should we respond?'

The EDNA model provides four areas of theological research in practical theology. Like the Osmer model, it provides 'effective

interpretive guides' that can be used in 'practical theological interpretation of episodes, situations, and contexts' (Smith 2010a:104–105). The table below indicates the basic function of each of the EDNA model's four areas of research in practical theology (see Figure 1):

Areas of research	Exploratory	Descriptive	Normative	Action
Question	What has *led* to the present situation?	*What* is happening now?	What *should* be happening?	How should we *respond*?
Function	Investigation	Information	Interpretation	Implementation

Figure 1: The four areas of research in practical theology

The EDNA model makes use of the term hermeneutical circle, to explain the relationship between the four areas of research in practical theology (see Figure 2). Even though the four areas of research are quite distinct, they are nevertheless closely connected. For this reason, the researcher needs to constantly move between the four areas of research. Hence, the use of the term hermeneutical circle (Smith 2010a:105).
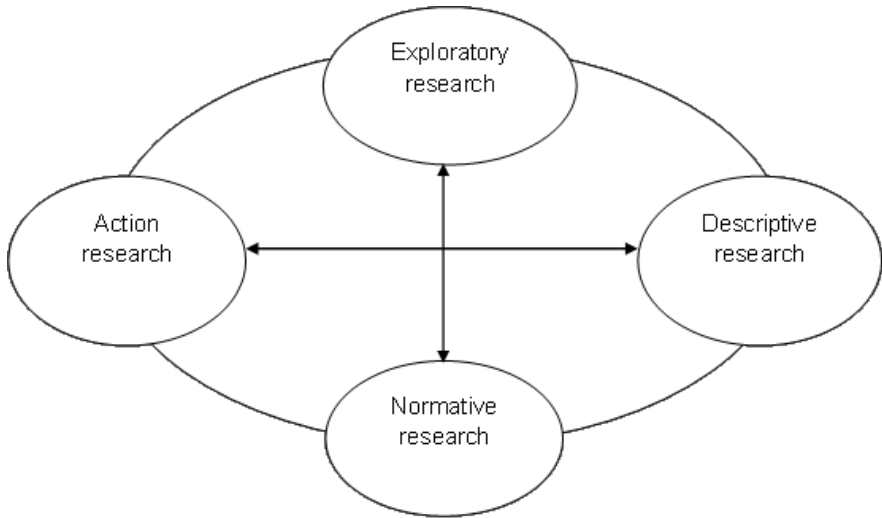
Figure 2: Relationships between the four areas of research

This article is organised around these four areas of research. In section 4, an attempt will be made to ground and describe the functions of each of the EDNA model's four areas of research in practical theology.

The interrelationship and correlation between each area of research in the EDNA model can be described as follows:

Firstly, exploratory research is closely related to descriptive research, since the former provides the latter with a good foundation and together they make up the theoretical and practical aspects of the present praxis. Exploratory research is also closely related to normative research, since the former requires the researcher to use biblical norms to evaluate the extent to which the church/community has departed from the standard of practice presented in scripture. Finally, there is a close correlation between exploratory research and action research, since the revised practice (the new praxis) could lead to a further exploration of the

present situation and an improved understanding of the biblical norms. This in turn could become a repeating cycle.

Secondly, the last three areas of research in the EDNA model are closely interrelated. For example, descriptive research ('the world as it is') is closely related to normative research ('the world as it should be'). Furthermore, descriptive research ('the world as it is') is closely related to action research, since the latter indicates the steps that need to be taken in order to transform the present practice into the new praxis, in accordance with the guidelines provided by the normative research ('the world as it should be').

4. The EDNA Model: Its Sociological and Phenomenological Basis

The EDNA model is also grounded in the social sciences, because all models in practical theology have their roots in sociology. Arguably the first model in practical theology was the praxis model for doing theology, which was derived from the social sciences. In particular, the praxis model originally had political connotations.

In this article, phenomenology will be used to ground each of the EDNA model's four areas of research. The phenomenological method in research can be described as follows:

- 'Phenomenology is the method … the investigator follows to disclose or to verbalise the essential elements of a particular appearance or phenomenon, as it essentially is in itself' (Van Rensburg and Landman 1988:442).
- 'Phenomenology of essences involves probing through the data to search for common themes or essences and establishing

patterns of relationships shared by particular phenomena' (Mamabolo 2009:50; Streubert and Carpenter 1999:52).

- A phenomenological analysis involves the following: 'The researcher listens to, compares and contrasts descriptions of the phenomenon under study.' This enables him or her to identify 'recurring themes and interrelationships' (Mamabolo 2009:54).

Biblical theology and systematic theology utilise a similar methodology in research. Biblical theology traces the chronological development of recurring themes throughout the Bible, while systematic theology examines recurring themes topically.

5. The EDNA Model Grounded and Described

An attempt will be made to ground and describe the function of each of the EDNA model's four areas of research in practical theology. This will be done, firstly, by defining each of the four areas of research, as presented in the social sciences; secondly, by conducting a phenomenological analysis of recurring themes in a selection of recognised theological research models (by prominent practical theologians) to provide a grounding for each of the four areas of research; and, thirdly, by analysing the function of each area of research in the selected models.

5.1. Exploratory research

What is exploratory research? Davies (2006) defines exploratory research as 'a methodological approach that is primarily concerned with discovery and with generating or building theory. In the social sciences exploratory research is wedded to the notion of exploration and the researcher as explorer' (Davies 2006).

Exploratory research is used in the social sciences to explore the situation and typically has four functions/purposes.

Firstly, it seeks to 'to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or person' (Bless and Hidgson, quoted in Smith 2000:42).

Secondly, it seeks 'to scope out the magnitude or extent of a particular phenomenon, problem, or behaviour … the nature and extent of the problem and serve as a useful precursor to more in-depth research' (Bhattacherjee 2012:6).

Thirdly, it 'seeks explanations of observed phenomena, problems, or behaviours … It attempts to "connect the dots" in research, by identifying causal factors and outcomes of the target phenomenon (Bhattacherjee 2012:6).

Lastly, it 'seeks to establish the general trend of things or activities in a given set up, without necessarily focusing on one single issue' (Exploratory research 2013).

Exploratory research invariably includes exploring relevant sources in the form of a literature review of a particular topic. A literature review has been variously defined as:

1. The 'process of reading, analyzing, evaluating, and summarizing scholarly materials about a specific topic' (Nordquist 2013).
2. 'An objective, thorough summary and critical analysis of the relevant available research and non-research literature on the topic being studied' (Hart 1998, quoted in Cronin, Ryan, and Coughlan 2008:38).

What is the basis of exploratory research in practical theology? To what extent is explorative research a recurring theme in selected models in

practical theology? Zerfass proposed a hermeneutical model (1974:167). 'He showed in this study how practical theology starts from the description of a concrete and usually unsatisfactory, praxis. Something must be done!' (Heitink 1999:113). Practical theology has 'the task to lead in this process of change in a way that is responsible from the perspective of both theology and the social sciences' (Heitink 1999:113). This requires exploring and interpreting church history, described in terms of the 'interpretation of human action in the light of the Christian tradition (the hermeneutical perspective)' (Heitink 1999:165). However, 'reflecting on this situation solely on the basis of church tradition does not lead to any real improvement. Praxis must first be examined with the use of a series of instruments from the social sciences' (Heitink 1999:113).

The first stage in Linton and Mowat's four-stage research process in practical theology is called 'situational exploration.' In this stage the 'situation refers the intuitive, pre-reflective stage; we begin to explore the nature of the situation and identify what we suspect [are] the key issues' (Smith 2010b:95).

In the Pastoral Cycle, the second stage is called 'exploration', which involves an 'analysis of the situation through insights from secular and religious critical perspectives' (Graham, Walton, and Ward 2005, quoted in, *The reflective practitioner* 2013:21).

In Schrier's DECIDE model, the second movement is called 'explore' (the interpretive movement) and is described as follows: 'Explore alternative non-theological models of explanation or understandings of this condition' (Schrier 2010, quoted in, *The reflective practitioner* 2013:22).

Cowan's (2000) LIM model (Loyola Institute of Ministries) has as its point of departure, identifying 'a problem in the real world, one that we have noticed and which concerns us … something of concern in the church or community' (Smith 2008:206). Using preliminary observations and reflections, one is required to 'state a problem and the underlying forces at work that are causing it' (Smith 2008:206). It appears that the first step in the research process of LIM model is of an exploratory nature.

The key question of exploratory research in the EDNA model is 'What has led to the present situation?' In line with the above definitions and on the basis of the above-mentioned models in practical theology, the main tasks of exploratory research in the EDNA model are presented in the form of an acronym that spells out the word SEARCH:

- **S**eek explanations for observed problems in the situation.
- **E**xplore the nature and extent of the situation.
- **A**nalyse the situation using insights gained from secular and theological perspectives.
- **R**ecognise and identify a real-life problem of concern in the church/community and 'the underlying forces that are causing it' (Smith 2008:206).
- **C**ritically analyse and summarise the available literature on the relevant topic.
- **H**ave key questions answered relating to the theological tradition (in church history) that has moulded present church practice.

5.2. Descriptive research

What is descriptive research? 'The descriptive research approach is an attempt to provide an accurate description or picture of a particular situation or phenomenon' (Dannelley 2013).

Descriptive research is used in the social sciences to describe the present situation and typically has four functions/purposes.

Firstly, its purpose is 'to observe, describe and document aspects of a situation as it naturally occurs' (Polit and Hungler 1999:195).

Secondly, it 'attempts to describe, explain and interpret conditions of the present i.e. "what is". The purpose of a descriptive research is to examine a phenomenon that is occurring at a specific place(s) and time' (Descriptive Research 2013: 70).

Thirdly, it 'presents an opportunity to fuse both quantitative and qualitative data as a means to reconstruct the "what is" of a topic' (Murphy 2013).

Lastly, it 'describes usually one or more characteristics of a group of people, technically known as a population … Sometimes the information gathered is strictly quantitative – numbers and percentages; other times it is qualitative, including the "why" along with the 'how many"' (Vyhmeister 2001:126).

In terms of the various descriptive research methods, 'The most prevalent descriptive research technique is the survey, most notably the questionnaire. Other forms of surveys include the interview (personal and by telephone) and the normative survey' (Thomas, Nelson, and Silverman 2011:19). Quantitative research methods 'emphasise

objective measurements and numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires or surveys' (Veneeva 2006). On the other hand, qualitative research methods focus on 'understanding social phenomena through interviews, personal comments etc.' (Veneeva 2006).

What is the basis of descriptive research in practical theology? To what extent is descriptive research a recurring theme in selected models in practical theology? Descriptive theology, as the first movement in theological reflection in Browning's model, is used to 'describe the contemporary theory-laden practices that give rise to the practical questions that generate all theological reflection' (Browning 1993:47).

In Osmer's model, the 'descriptive-empirical task asks: "What is going on?"' (Smith 2010a:99). This task involves 'gathering information to discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts' (Anderson 2012:73). In selecting a suitable method of research, Osmer claims that 'quantitative is ideal for extensive research, while qualitative is best for intensive research' (Smith 2010a:103). 'A combination of the two, previously frowned upon, is now considered acceptable' (Smith 2010a:103). Osmer provides a brief explanation of 'six methods of empirical research, namely, interviews, participant observation, artefact analysis, spatial analysis, demographic analysis, and focus groups' (Smith 2010a:104).

The second stage in Linton and Mowat's four-stage research process in practical theology is called cultural-contextual analysis. In this stage 'we use qualitative research and draw on theories from the social sciences to develop a deep and rich understanding of the complex dynamics of the situation' (Smith 2010b:95; Linton and Mowat 2006:96).

In Schrier's DECIDE model the first step is called 'describe' and is defined as follows: 'Describe the social condition, individual or group practice, activity or behaviour that you are addressing' (Schrier 2010, quoted in, *The Reflective Practitioner* 2013:22).

In Cowan's (2000) LIM model, the descriptive research requires one to 'interpret the world as it is' (Smith 2008:206). This task 'begins with a systematic investigation of the situation' and uses 'both empirical and literary methods' in order to interpret 'the what, the how and the why of the problem' (Smith 2008:206).

The key question of descriptive research in the EDNA model is 'What is happening now'?' In line with the above definitions and on the basis of the above-mentioned models in practical theology, the main tasks of descriptive research in the EDNA model are presented in the form of an acronym that spells out the word RECORD:

- **R**ecord, explain and interpret conditions of the present situation.
- **E**xamine a phenomenon that occurs in a particular place and time.
- **C**ollect information to discern patterns and dynamics in the present situation.
- **O**bserve and describe all aspects of the present situation.
- **R**econstruct a particular topic in the context of the present situation, by combining both quantitative and qualitative research. Use both empirical and literary methods to systematically investigate and interpret the world as it is.
- '**D**escribe the contemporary theory-laden practices that give rise to the practical questions' (Browning 1993:47).

5.3. Normative research

What is normative research? Normative research 'attempts to make prescriptions for how things should be done' (Das 2013). It 'tries to define how things should be' (*What is normative research* 2013a). Also, normative research is used in the social sciences to formulate and apply norms to the current situation and typically has four functions/purposes:

Firstly, it 'requires norms or values that we can use to determine what sort of social conditions is an improvement' (Fallis 2007:363).

Secondly, it 'is applied in order that it might affect change in social conditions' (Fallis 2007:363).

Thirdly, 'This approach has sometimes been called "applied research"' (What is normative research 2013b).

Lastly, it 'makes applicable and tangible recommendations' (Wollman 2013).

In addition, normative research in the field of theology takes into account the meaning of following ethical terms (Grenz and Smith 2003:19, 81):

- A norm 'is a rule, law or principle that governs or prescribes some aspect of moral conduct' (p. 81).
- Normative ethics 'has as its goal the formulation of standards and principles for human conduct, i.e. ethical norms' (p. 81).
- Christian ethics 'is the study of how humans ought to live as informed by the Bible and Christian convictions' (p. 19).

What are the characteristics of practical theology and its implications for the tasks required in normative research? First, practical theology is

normative, since it has as its goal the formulation of ethical norms, especially the norms of Christian ethics derived from the Bible. In particular, it deals with the 'application of God's revelation [The Bible] to the individual and the church.' As such, it 'represents the climax and the final point of theological endeavour' (Duce and Strange 2001:76, 77). In terms of the 'principles' approach to Christian ethics, the researcher 'seeks to discern, wherever possible, the principles underlying specific biblical commands, and then to apply them faithfully to current situations' (DeLashmutt 2013). Through reflection normative research seeks 'to correlate these insights toward guides for action' (Graham, Walton and Ward 2005, quoted in, *The Reflective Practitioner* 2013:21).

Second, practical theology is correlational. Practical theology can be defined as, 'the mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian faith with the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation' (Tracy 1983:76). It integrates, informs, and compares 'Christian resources with non-theological models to determine how they relate' (Schrier 2010, quoted in, *The Reflective Practitioner* 2013:22). Cowan (2000) stresses that practical theology research is correlational, since 'it evaluates the relationship between the world as it is and the world as it should be … [and] seeks an accurate understanding of the present situation and the preferred scenario' (Smith 2008:205). It is also critical, since 'it requires that we explicitly evaluate the inherited understandings that guide our interpretations and actions' (Smith 2008:205).

Third, practical theology is hermeneutical. Cowan (2000) stresses that practical theology research is hermeneutical, since it 'requires the ability to interpret accurately both our world and our traditions' (Smith 2008:205). Practical theology 'has the task of interpreting scriptures for

the life of the church today, in its structure, in its practice, its ethics and pastoral care' (Duce and Strange 2001:76).

Fourth, practical theology involves the application of the scriptures to the contemporary situation, in the life of the church. Practical theology is 'the study of theology in a way that is intended to make it useful and applicable … so that it can be used and is relevant to everyday concerns' (Houdman 2013).

What is the basis of normative research in practical theology? To what extent is normative research a recurring theme in selected models in practical theology? In Osmer's model 'the normative task asks: 'What ought to be going on?' It seeks to discern God's will for present realities' (Smith 2010a:99). Osmer describes the normative task in terms of 'prophetic discernment', which 'uses three methods to discover God's word for the present: theological interpretation, ethical reflection, and good practice' (Smith 2010a:99–110).

According to Osmer, theological interpretation 'focuses on the interpretation of present episodes, situations, and contexts with theological concepts' (Osmer 2008:139). 'Ethical reflection refers to using ethical principles, rules, or guidelines to guide action towards moral ends' (Osmer 2008:161). This is required because 'present practices are filled with values and norms' (Osmer 2008:149), which are often in conflict. In good practice the 'interpretive guide can draw on models of good practice, whether past or present, "to reform a congregation's present actions"' (Smith 2010a:100; Osmer 2008:153).

The third stage in Linton and Mowat's four-stage research process in practical theology is called 'theological reflection'. This stage requires 'critical reflection on the practices of the church in the light of scripture and tradition' (Linton and Mowat 2006:95). Although theological

reflection is present in the first two stages of the research process, it takes centre stage in stage three (Smith 2010b:95).

In Schrier's DECIDE model, the third movement is called 'Consider Christian resources' and is described as follows: 'Consider what biblical studies, historical theology, systematic theology, church history and other Christian resources might relate to the condition being studied' (Schrier 2010, quoted in, *The Reflective Practitioner* 2013:22).

In Cowan's (2000) LIM model, normative research requires one to 'interpret the world as it should be' (Smith 2008:206). He describes the research process as follows: 'we carefully select some aspect of our faith tradition … We undertake a historically and critically informed exegesis of the material chosen from our traditions' (Smith 2008:206). When Cowan uses the theological term 'our faith tradition' he includes the following: 'scriptural text, theological classic, church teaching, etc.' (Smith 2008:206).

The key question of normative research in the EDNA model is 'What should be happening?' In line with the above definitions and on the basis of the above-mentioned models in practical theology, the main tasks of normative research in the EDNA model are presented in the form of an acronym that spells out the word ACCORD:

- **A**pply the scriptures and church tradition to the contemporary situation in the life of the church. 'Interpret the Scriptures for the life of the church today, in its structure, in its practice, its ethics and pastoral care' (Duce and Strange 2001:76).
- **C**orrelate critically and evaluate the 'interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian faith with the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation' (Tracy 1983:76). Correlate

the insights gained from theological reflection on present church practice to obtain guidelines and ethical principles for action.

- **C**onsider and apply those Christian resources, which relate to the present situation being studied, such as 'biblical studies, historical theology, systematic theology, church history' (*The reflective practitioner* 2013:22). Construct and test a theory of action based on biblical, historical, and systematic theology.
- **O**btain an accurate understanding of the relationship between 'the world as it is' (the present situation) and 'the world as it should be' (the preferred scenario) in order to guide one's interpretations and actions.
- **R**eflect critically 'on the practices of the church in the light of scripture and tradition' (Linton and Mowat 2006:95). 'Interpret the world as it should be' by carefully selecting 'some aspect of our faith tradition', and then by undertaking 'a historically and critically informed exegesis of the material chosen from our traditions' (Smith 2008:206).
- **D**iscern the 'principles underlying specific biblical commands, and then apply them faithfully' to the current situation (DeLashmutt 2013).

5.4. Action research

What is action research? 'Action research is a practical approach to professional inquiry in any social situation … The context for professional inquiry might change, but the principles and processes involved in action research are the same, regardless of the nature of the practice' (Water-Adams 2006).

'Action research is intended to achieve both action and research. It is suited to situations where you wish to bring about action in the form of change, and at the same time develop an understanding which informs

the change' (Dick and Swepson 2013). It 'alternates between action and critical reflection. The reflection consists first of analysing what has already happened in previous steps, and then of planning what next step to take' (Dick and Swepson 2013).

Dick and Swepson (2013) indicate that action research can be described as typically cyclic and as critically reflective. The 'later cycles are used to challenge and refine the results of the earlier cycles … Researchers regularly and systematically critique what they are doing.'

Action research is used in the social sciences for improving the present practice/situation) and typically has the following functions/purposes: the 'improvement of practice, improvement of the understanding of practice, and the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place' (Carr and Kemmis (1986), quoted in Water-Adams 2006).

What are the characteristics of practical theology and its implications for the tasks required in action research? First, practical theology is transformative, since 'its underlying drive is to bring the world into greater harmony with the word' (Cowan 2000, quoted in Smith 2008:205). It draws on and responds to people's 'interpretations of normative sources from scripture and tradition' (Fowler n.d., quoted in Jaison 2010:3) and helps 'ongoing modifications and transformations of their practices in order to be more adequately responsive to their interpretations of the shape of God's call to partnership' (Fowler n.d., quoted in Jaison 2010:3).

Second, practical theology is cyclical. According to Zerfass, biblical, historical, and systematic theology form the basis for constructing and testing a theory of action (Zerfass 1974:171). This theory, influenced by tradition, leads to a reinterpretation of scripture and to a revision of the theory to form a new theory. This initiates a 'progressive spiral', in

which the new theory questions the existing praxis leading to a re-examination of the theory (Heitink 1999:153, 154; Heitink 1999, *lecture notes*).

What is the basis of action research in practical theology? To what extent is action research a recurring theme in selected models in practical theology? In Osmer's model, the pragmatic task is 'to provide congregational leaders with guidance for leading congregations through the process of change. It seeks to answer the question, How might we respond?' (Smith 2010a:104).

The fourth stage in Linton and Mowat's four-stage research process in practical theology is called revised praxis. In this stage the conversation [between stages 1 and 3] [the situation and theological reflection] 'functions dialectically to produce new and challenging forms of practice that enable the initial situation to be transformed into ways which are authentic and faithful' (Smith 2010b:95; Linton and Mowat 2006:97).

In the Pastoral Cycle the fourth stage is called 'action', which involves 'new practices directed by reflective-practitioners that, once implemented, start another progressive spiral' (Graham, Walton, and Ward 2005, quoted in, *The reflective practitioner* 2013:21).

In Schrier's DECIDE model, the fifth movement is called 'develop' and is described as follows: 'develop a practical, concrete new action that can lead to new practices to transform the condition' (Schrier 2010, quoted in, *The reflective practitioner* 2013:22).

In Cowan's (2000) LIM model, the final step requires one to interpret our contemporary obligations, namely, 'to develop a feasible action plan that faithfully represents the will of God as interpreted in our faith

tradition and provides a doable remedy to the problem' (Smith 2008:206–207).

The key question of action research in the EDNA model is, 'How should we respond?' In line with the above definitions and, on the basis of the above-mentioned models in practical theology, the main tasks of action research in the EDNA model are presented in the form of an acronym that spells out the word ACTION:

- **A**lter present practices by developing 'a practical, concrete new action that can lead to new practices to transform the [present] condition' (Schrier 2010, as cited in *The reflective practitioner* 2013:22).
- **C**ontribute towards transformation by providing 'congregational leaders with guidance for leading congregations through the process of change' (Smith 2010a:104).
- **T**ake note of existing models. 'Draw on models of good practice, whether past or present', to improve the church's present practices (Smith 2010a:100; Osmer 2008: 153).
- **I**nterpret our contemporary obligations 'to develop a feasible action plan that faithfully represents the will of God as interpreted in our faith tradition and provides a doable remedy to the problem' (Cowan 2000; Smith 2008:206–207).
- **O**ngoing use of dialectical dialogue between the situation and theological reflection (for evaluation purposes) produces 'new and challenging forms of practice that enable the initial situation to be transformed' (Smith 2010b:95; Linton and Mowat 2006:97).
- **N**ew practices implemented, when directed by reflective-practitioners, start another progressive spiral of change. Draw on and respond to people's 'interpretations of normative sources

from scripture and tradition' in order to make ongoing modifications and transformations of present church practices (Fowler n.d., quoted in Jaison 2010:3).

6. The EDNA Model Illustrated and Applied to the Local Church: Two Examples from the New Testament

The following two examples have been selected from the New Testament to illustrate the EDNA model and its application in the local church:

6.1. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)

1. Exploratory research asks: 'What has led to the present situation?'

What social and religious barriers (relating to the Priest, Levite, and Samaritan) could have caused a lack of neighbourly love towards the suffering Jewish man who was robbed in the parable? What historical and traditional factors have led to a lack of neighbourly love towards the disadvantaged and suffering in your local community?

2. Descriptive research asks: 'What is happening now?'

What happened to the Jewish man in the story as he was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho? (Luke 10:30). What is the present plight of the poor and the suffering in your community, in the vicinity of your local church?

3. Normative research asks, 'What should be happening?'

According to Jesus in Luke 10:27, how should we treat God and our neighbour? In the light of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, precisely who is my neighbour? What social and religious barriers need to be

crossed by your local congregation in order for them to show love towards their neighbours.

4. Action research asks, 'How should we respond?'

How did the Good Samaritan respond in a practical way to illustrate that he fully understood the meaning of genuine neighbourly love? (Luke 10:33–35). In which practical ways should your local congregation respond, to show their neighbourly love towards the poor and suffering in your community?

6.2. The cleansing of the Temple (Matthew 21:12–33)

1. Exploratory research asks: 'What has led to the present situation?'

What were the religious customs and financial arrangements that led to the money changers and merchants doing business in the temple and thereby desecrating it? What historical and traditional factors have led to the desecration of the place of worship in your local church?

2. Descriptive research asks: 'What is happening now?'

What were the money changers and the merchants doing in the temple that filled Jesus with righteous anger? Why did Jesus say that the temple had become 'a den of robbers'? What is presently happening in the worship service in your church that fills Jesus with anger?

3. Normative research asks, 'What should be happening?'

According to Jesus, in Matthew 21:13: 'My house will be called a house of prayer.' What is the meaning of the phrase, 'a house of prayer'? What practice(s) should your church be promoting to ensure that the place of worship is 'a house of prayer'?

4. Action research asks, 'How should we respond?'

How did Jesus respond, when he entered the temple area and saw all those who were buying and selling there? (Matt 21:12). What steps should your church be taking, in order to remove improper practices from the worship service and to encourage biblical practices that ensure the real worship of God, thus making it more like 'a house of prayer'?

7. Conclusion

In this article was a presentation of the EDNA model for doing research in practical theology from a biblical perspective. After grounding the EDNA model theologically and philosophically, an attempt was made to define each of its four areas of research in terms of the social sciences. A phenomenological analysis of recurring themes was then conducted in a selection of recognised practical theological research models to ground each of the four areas of research. This was followed by an analysis of the function of each area of research in the selected models. Finally, the EDNA model was illustrated using two examples from the New Testament, and it was then applied to the local church.

The 'name EDNA means delight or pleasure. It is generally used as a girl's name and is of Hebrew origin' (*Ask a question* 2013). I trust that researchers, who decide to use the EDNA model in their future research in practical theology, will find it to be both a delightful and pleasant experience. The Celtic 'meaning of the name Edna is fire' (*Behind the name* 2013). Hopefully, researchers will be fired with enthusiasm to use the EDNA model to the glory of God.

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