Quick guide to Theological Action Research (TAR)

- Like Practical Theology, TAR uses a reflective method, drawing on interdisciplinary insights and qualitative methodology, and exploring particular contexts and the weight of various theological sources.
- As a type of Action Research methodology, TAR employs collaborative social research in particular contexts, with the expectation of new meanings and actions that improve a situation.

Distinctives of Theological Action Research:

- TAR is a collaborative process where outsider expertise operates alongside insider experience, each equipping and informing the other.
- TAR is both academically rigorous and also open to encountering and incorporating the unexpected through being relationship-orientated, flexible, and confessional.
- TAR's goal is transformation and renewal, including through enhancing the ‘theological fluency’ of the participants in relation to their context.
- TAR explores ‘four voices’ to disclose theology through conversation.
  - Normative theology – e.g. Bible, creeds, tradition
  - Formal theology – the theology of theologians, of the ‘academy’
  - Operant theology – the theology that is actually practiced
  - Espoused theology – the group’s articulation of beliefs

DEFINITION

Theological Action Research is a partnership between an insider and an outsider team to undertake research and conversations answering theological questions about faithful practice in order to renew both theology and practice in the service of God’s mission.

Cameron et al (2010: 63)

- All facets of the practices that are examined and the practice of research itself are theological, and can be transformative aspects of the research process.
- TAR employs a conversation-led process that seeks to disclose (i.e. reveal) theology.

The key text for both a theoretical and practical introduction to TAR (which informs this quick guide) is: Cameron, Bhatti, Duce, Sweeney and Watkins, (2010), Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology (SCM: London)
See also Susy Brouard’s video presentation on TAR: click here.

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