# Personal Theology of Discipleship

## Introduction

The concept of theology has been tackled by many scholars and researchers over time. Basically, the concept of theology focuses on describing the Christian way of life according to Jesus. During the ancient times or in the Old Testament, it was common for students to be under the care of a teacher or master. The teacher would then pass knowledge and skills to the student. For effective discipleship, the teacher would develop a close relationship with the student. This relationship became the foundation or cornerstone for the early disciples and church. Although the early church did not provide an extensive definition of the term ‘discipleship’, it is vital to note that it refers to a follower of a teacher. The follower had a commitment to imitate the conduct and character of the teacher. Thus, an effective personal theology of discipleship is based on being in Christ, sharing and hearing Jesus Christ’s word, and converting new followers into the church. This leads to discipleship. In light of this, the paper will review three vital pieces of research related to the theology of discipleship. These are Anderson (2001), Grab (2012), and Himes (2011). Subsequently, the paper will synthesize these three pieces of research to form a single personal theology of discipleship.

Anderson (2001)’s the shape of practical theology: empowering ministry with theological praxis

Anderson (2001) argues that the separation of practical matters of leadership and theological reflection has greatly contributed to the impoverishment and weakening of Christian practice, and Christian faith. Thus, Anderson (2001) advocates for the merger of theological reflection and practicality of leaders. He therefore, theologically and practically analyses the elements of worship, family, ethics, therapy, homosexuality, theological education, and preaching.

Anderson (2001) defines practical theology as a theological enterprise. He deviates from the normal description that states that practical theology is merely the possession, understanding and mastery of theological methods and skills. Hence, practical theology is the bridge between God’s word as contained in the scriptures and what is happening in the contemporary church. Practical theology therefore fuses the word of God with the happenings and experiences of what is going on in the church or ministry. The church has to comprehend the needs of its followers and relate them with the word of God.

## A review of Gräb (2012)’s Practical theology as a religious and cultural hermeneutics of Christian practice.

Grab (2012) acknowledges that practical theology tends to address and tackle the contemporary challenges facing the church. To effectively address the modern challenges facing the church, practical theology has to create link between the plight of the people and the word from the scriptures. Religion, therefore, has to be interpreted in light of the changing culture in the society. The church’s role has expanded from its traditional form where it was tasked with conveying and interpreting the ideal life of a Christian. Today, a practical theology of discipleship has the role of interpreting the bible scriptures and doctrines in light of the contemporary culturalization of the church or religion. It is only through theological practicality that the leaders or teachers will be able to advance the concept of religion, Christian faith and understanding in the modern world.

People comprehend an issue when they possess a pre-understanding of the issue. Thus, an individual will be able to understand God when he has a pre-understanding of Him (God). This illustrates the significance of communication. Practical theology, through, empirical procedures tries to understand the religious pre-understandings of people or individuals in society. it follows and tracks any changes or transformations or development of new socio-cultural dimensions in the church. It is only through understanding these new changes that the leaders will be able to know the pre-understanding of individuals in relation to issues in the society. to be abreast with the changing religious culture, practical theology should explore and subsequently incorporate religious communication found in social media sites, fan culture, and holly wood films.

Grab (2012) states that the church should encourage and allow individual participation in interpreting the church’s proclamation. The inclusion of individual interpretation will give the church’s interpretation of religion wholeness gained from the life experiences of the participants. In turn, the participants will continue to view the church as an institution that understands them. As such, practical theology should take into consideration the interpretations of individuals since individual’s interpretations and views helps to connect them with the Christian faith, thereby bringing life to the church. The creation of a church environment that incorporates religious individual interpretations leads to the rise of practical theology.

## A review of Himes (2011) Discipleship as theological praxis: Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a resource for educational ministry

Himes (2011) uses Bonhoeffer as a resource for his analysis. Bonhoeffer structures his evaluation of discipleship around the question of “what does it mean to follow Jesus?” (Himes, 2011). The question covers both what ought ot be happening in a Christian’s life and the church’s life. Thus, a normative task is employed to understand specific happenings in the life of a Christian and the ministry. A normative task focuses on ‘what ought to be going on”. Bonhoeffer tackles discipleship through four movements; revelation as the basis of discipleship, discipleship reality, action of discipleship, and the possibility of discipleship. God reveals Himself through Jesus Christ. Hence, the revelation of God through Jesus Christ is the foundation of discipleship. The element of revelation addresses various questions such as; who is Jesus? And, what does it mean to follow Jesus?

Jesus is the truth. He has been speaking the truth since the beginning of creation. Thus, the concept of discipleship should be based on the revelation that Jesus is the word and the truth. Further, the reality of discipleship is the church. The element of discipleship is based on the interactions between Jesus and his disciples. This forms the church. Individuals use the teachings and doctrines of Jesus to guide their relationships with other members of the society. Moreover, christopraxis is an important factor in the action of discipleship. Christopraxis refers to the deeds that define and embody theology. It brings together or bridges the gap between practice and theory. Lastly, Bonhoeffer argues that religionless Christianity defines discipleship. The act of discipleship is based on the word of Jesus Christ and not on the acts of an institution. Therefore, discipleship should not be conducted on an institutional level, but rather on a worldly level (Himes, 2011). The disciple must venture out of the church into the world and hence take the place of Jesus Christ in the world.

## Personal theology of discipleship

An effective theology of discipleship must merge theory with practice. Practical theology takes into consideration the experiences and interpretations of individuals and merges them with the teachings and doctrines that guide the life of a Christian. To comprehend the contemporary interpretations of religion by individuals, leaders and teachers have to be aware of the changing cultural interpretations. Good communication between the church and the participants will lead to the creation of a compatible religious interpretation of events and actions. Compatibility will be a sign that the church cares and facilitates the faith of the participants leading to church growth.

## Conclusion

Theology as a discipline describes the Christian way of life according to the word of Jesus. Nevertheless, the separation of theology from practice has weakened the Christina faith and church. For a stronger and robust Christian faith, practice should be merged with theory. This equips the ministry to analyze and relate contemporary individual events with the scripture and doctrines outline by Jesus.

## References

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