

Subject: Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis in a Theological Education

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Easily understood wording in plain English

Orthopraxis

Reflection on action

An accepted/agreed upon process of thinking a current topic through into behavioural action or conduct

A theological reflection (TR) process repeated as needed: present experience/action—thinking/reflecting on that action/experience in light of the biblical story and traditions—moving forward, renewed for future action.

Orthodoxy

An accepted/agreed upon doctrine/dogma/belief/teaching/worship

Definitions

Orthopraxis: derived from two Greek words 'orthos' meaning upright, correct, true, and 'praxis' meaning human action or conduct.

'Praxis' is more than a synonym for practice. When 'praxis' is combined with 'orthos' then the meaning of 'praxis' is extended, as reflection on action. "Orthopraxis is about correct action in the light of the valued belief system of a faith community"(Trainor 1992, v).

Orthodoxy: 'orthos' + 'doxa' meaning 'opinion' originally meant correct or sound doctrine and eventually came to mean the accepted or established beliefs of the Christian community (Trainor 1992, v).

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Issue: Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis are equal partners in the Christian Church, conversing together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration in the Way and in the ways of Jesus the Christ. In an Anglican Theological College, for example, orthodoxy and orthopraxis would ideally work together; they need each other, and neither one can do without the other. During ministry preparation orthopraxis would be the way that orthodoxy/doctrine is taught/presented to students. During ministry preparation students would also learn through intentional teaching ways to teach/present/use orthopraxis (TR) in ministry situations. In preparation for parish ministry for example an ordination candidate in the third year of theological study might learn to apply a life-Faith-life approach to educating in the faith (Groome 2011).

Just as the early Christian community in the Gospel according to Luke for example practised orthopraxis, so do we in the contemporary church. We bring our Christian beliefs (orthodoxy) and experience of God's sacred presence in Jesus the Christ, into dialogue with life today. We attend to the present situation, remember the Christian Story in biblical terms, are transformed/renewed through critical reflection, a reflective conversation between the present context and the Christian tradition, and then express in action/practice the outcomes from reflection undertaken (Trainor 1992, vi, 93-95; Groome 1980, 153; 2011, 299-338). Process repeated as necessary; practice-reflection-practice; reflection-in-practice. (NOT simply theory to practice)

Orthopraxis (TR) may be taught as part of a course on Christian education and/or a study of a learning community approach in parish ministry.

Background (Quotations)

Pope John Paul II, 1979; Groome, 1980; Trainor, 1992; Bevans 2002; Pazmino, 2008; Woodbridge 2010; Littleton 2012.

“It is useless to play off orthopraxis against orthodoxy: Christianity is inseparably both. Firm and well thought-out convictions lead to courageous and upright action; the endeavour to educate the faithful to live as disciples of Christ today calls for and facilitates a discovery in depth of the mystery of Christ in the history of salvation” (John Paul II, 1979, #22).

“But over the years an unfortunate division of labor arose between the ministry of knowing sound doctrine and the ministry of Christian education. This division has even led to antagonism, with charges and countercharges on both sides. Theologians often accuse Christian educators (and with some good cause) of not being theologically informed. But educators can, with equal cause, direct a similar criticism to many theologians and accuse them of abandoning their responsibility to be educators.” “We must come to view theology and Christian religious education (shared praxis) as equal partners in the vocation of the Christian community to live the faith it claims to believe and to form people in it” (Groome 1980, 229-230).

"A correct orthopraxis is one which takes into account that which is legitimate orthodoxy and enables one to come to authentic action in light of that orthodoxy."

"The close relationship between orthopraxis and orthodoxy has rarely been understood and acknowledged. Orthodoxy has sometimes been characterised as in apposition to heresy and orthopraxis so dependent on history and society that it disregards the faith tradition of the Christian community (Trainor 1992, vi).

“The Praxis Model.

(1) Committed action (2) Reflection-analysis of context: rereading scripture and tradition etc.

(3) Committed and intelligent action (praxis)” (Bevans 2002, 76, 142).

“An exclusive emphasis on content in orthodoxy (true or right belief) can ignore the essential dimension of Christian experience without which Christian education is empty. Likewise, an exclusive emphasis on experience in orthopraxis (true or right practice) can ignore the essential dimension of Christian content, without which Christian education is blind. An effective curriculum weds Christian content and experience and thereby is potentially life transforming” (Pazmino 2008, 223).

“This article explores the connection between life and theology. Today, many people do not understand the connection between theology and everyday life. In particular, many of today’s theological students are leaving theological institutions and entering the ministry with a fragmented theology instead of an integrated theology. A brief historical and literature review indicates that there are three perspectives in contemporary theology, namely the triad of orthodoxy, orthopathy and orthopraxis. A brief analysis of the three perspectives indicates a close connection between theology and everyday life: theology and life are linked in praise (orthodoxy), action (orthopraxis) and passion (orthopathy)” (Woodbridge, 2010, 1).

Research into Christian education (CE) courses available to Anglican undergraduates in Australia, during 2011, showed that the CE course was often an elective subject for ordinands in the Anglican Church. This was the case even though leading the teaching and learning in a congregation is a core aspect for the vocation and ministry of a priest or minister (APBA 1995, 793). A Christian education course was an elective at St Barnabas, The Diocese of Adelaide. A commitment to Christian Education as an ordination requirement in the Anglican Church demonstrates that educational ministry in congregations is valued. A Christian Education course on leading the learning and teaching in congregations needs to be compulsory as a subject in the degree required for the ordination of parish clergy (Littleton 2012).

References

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