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# ACADEMIC MUSIC MINISTRY TRAINING FROM A PRACTICAL- THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

## ABSTRACT

*What kind of training does equip leaders for the ministry as it actually is? The processes of change within Christian music and worship is an ongoing and global phenomenon impacting on the ministry, the role of the leader, and academic training. Approaching the training from a theological perspective requires an intentional integration of theory into ministry and music practice. Borrowing from interpretative methods of practical theology, recent developments of music ministry and training are described and analysed. A case study of an academic training programme introduces possible standards for an approach that is based on a practical theology of worship leading to an outline for a practical response when approaching worship training programmes from a theological perspective.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to answer the question as to the nature of an academic programme for training church musicians that prepares leaders for local church ministry as it actually is, but avoids needs-based pragmatism or primary definition by music style. When reflecting on the training of music ministers, there is a choice for one of three starting points. First, one might begin with the music, be it classical or popular. Such a programme would be designed or evaluated



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according to the level of effectiveness its graduates can function within a specified range of musical styles.

Secondly, one could take a purely pragmatic perspective and begin with the needs of the actual church ministries. In this view, a good programme would meet the requirements of the majority of churches within the target group.

Thirdly, one could choose to begin with a theological perspective that becomes the basis for musical and pragmatic considerations. Ward (2017:7) notes that one of the tasks of practical theology is the training of ministers and that it

does need to be fully rooted in the everyday practice of the Christian faith in the church and in the world.

When approaching ministerial training from this starting point, worship theology provides the theory that integrates all aspects of ministry practices in worship training. The new role and responsibilities for worship leaders suggest that their academic education could be approached from a practical-theological perspective rather than from a music-educational or needs-based pragmatic perspective.

## 1.1 Method

The thesis of this article is that an academic education in worship studies for ministry as it actually is should be approached theologically. I will, therefore, use interpretative methods for practical theology in developing it. Klein (2005:53) distinguishes the two tasks of practical theology, namely

to develop concepts for supporting pastoral praxis; and to survey the life- and faith-realities of people, and form theories about them.

The first task is relevant for my discussion, in this instance, where a new reality of church music requires concepts for training leaders to minister within it, approached from a theological perspective.

Osmer's (2008:4) four tasks of practical theology (describing, interpreting, standardising, and pragmatising or responding) provide the basic outline for this work. To that end, I will describe and compare selected examples of ministry and training for church musicians in the USA and Germany. Borrowing from the second task of interpretation, I will outline a thematic analysis of key developments in ministerial training. A case study of a theologically based worship training programme will indicate a possible route towards standardising. Turning to the task of responding, I

suggest good practices for worship leader education, approached from a theological perspective.

## 1.2 Focus

This is not an empirical study, but it seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on developing relevant and effective training programmes for music ministry. Even though interviews and personal observations contributed, it is primarily a review and interpretation of historic developments through literature and other publications. Within the wide ranges encompassed by the terms “worship studies” and “church music”, this article primarily focuses on worship leadership by musicians in evangelical free-church traditions, exploring developments in the USA and Germany, in particular. The reason for this is threefold. First, biographically, I have an evangelical free-church background and have studied for a considerable time in the USA. I currently serve in a pastoral capacity in a German local church, and I am also involved in academic training for local church ministry at Bible Seminary Bonn. Secondly, the developments in the USA in contemporary worship forms and their global influence have been widely studied and documented. Thirdly, from personal experience and through a preliminary survey of song repertoire used in worship services in Germany, I found that developments of music and worship in the USA influence the music ministry in evangelical free-churches internationally.

## 1.3 Clarification of terms

In the USA context, Christian worship of God can be broadly defined as “an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible” (Peterson 1992:20). For the purpose of this study, the focus is on the musical form of worship response because, even though worship is not fully equated with music, it is rarely discussed apart from it (Woodward & Bishop 2014). In Germany, the term *Anbetung* is connected with devotion, prayer, and religious service (Niebergall 1956:116), and in evangelical free-church circles with the musical *Lobpreis* (praise) in worship services and everyday life (Hartje 2009:371). In this discussion, I use the term “worship” generally for the active participation of believers in religious service, primarily through musical means, even though it is understood that such a limitation fails to encompass the full extent of the term.

The terms “church musician” and “worship leader” are used to differentiate the traditional paradigm from a newly emerging leadership role in music ministry. The church musician is primarily trained as a musician who assumes responsibility for all musical aspects in local church ministry.

Generally, the worship leader is any person accommodating communal and liturgical worship (Saliers 2011). For the purpose of this study, this definition is narrowed down to church musicians with spiritual leadership responsibilities or a pastoral role in addition to musical responsibilities who usually operate within popular music styles. Kauflin (2008:51) reminds that they stand in a “long line of musical leadership in the church [including] [c]antors, ... song leaders, conductors, and organists”. It should be noted that a growing number of church musicians are being trained in popular music styles (Naumann 2020).

## 2. DESCRIPTION

Osmer’s (2008:4) first task of practical-theological interpretation is to ask: “What is going on?”. Klein (2005:25) explains that

[t]he subject of practical theology is the praxis of people ... and as such it takes into account the diversity and change-processes of everyday life.

Descriptions of everyday life in worship ministry are found where practice and theology are taken seriously (Ward 2017:9). Consequently, practical theology may move beyond the academic, which leads Ward (2017:9) to be open:

To include within the accepted academic work in practical theology a whole range of material that might normally not be seen as belonging to the discipline.

The task of description will take two directions, namely developments in ministry and developments in academic training.

### 2.1 Developments in ministry

In the next sections, I describe recent developments in music ministry and training. When describing the development of ministry, I follow Ward (2017) in that, by examining the reality of ministry as it actually is, non-academic sources were found to describe “the praxis of people” more vividly at times (Klein 2005:25). I focus on those developments that had a direct impact on the ministry of church musicians in the USA and Germany.

Church music has changed significantly since the 1950s. Beyond style and sound, a new form of worship liturgy emerged in free-church circles, as well as within the “charismatic” strands of traditional mainline churches, giving the church musician a new set of responsibilities and tasks. Music

and popular music, in particular, have gained more significance in worship services and spiritual life. Saliers (2011) summarises:

The past three decades have brought an unprecedented set of challenges to those who lead and participate in worshipping communities.

Often, new worship is first realised in popular or commercial music styles, but also includes creative elements, a more casual atmosphere, spontaneity, and various ways to communicate in culturally attractive and relevant ways.

### 2.1.1 Developments in the USA

To trace the development of music ministry in the USA evangelical free-church, “The Great Worship Awakening”, as defined by Redman (2002), provides a helpful framework. Four trends are central to this awakening (Redman 2002:xii), including the seeker service movement, the praise and worship movement, the Christian worship music industry, and the liturgical renewal movement. Cultural factors such as diversity, generational dynamics, popular culture, postmodernism, emphasis on personal experience, as well as new media and technology have shaped and accelerated the change of worship. This has led to a shift in church music, the integration of new elements in church liturgy, and a new role for the church musician.

Beginning in the mid 1950s, church music has experienced rapid and international changes. The most prolific was the emergence of the so-called Praise and Worship music. Woodward and Bishop (2014:20) observe:

Both informal observations and formal research confirm that Praise and Worship rapidly is replacing English hymnody and American gospel hymnody as the dominant form of congregational song in American Evangelical churches.

The Praise and Worship movement introduced itself in its various forms and expressions to evangelical worship. Saliers (2011) even argues that, “over the past 50 years, every Christian denomination has engaged in reform or renewal of worship”. These reforms impacted on the planning, celebration, and evaluation of worship in local churches. The new music forms impacted on the liturgy and atmosphere of the actual service. According to Bachmann (2018:276), “the invention of modern praise is perhaps the greatest liturgical invention of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”. Hartje (2009:371) agrees:

P&W definitely has shaped evangelical worship services in such a way that today we can speak of an evangelical liturgy. Giving services a structure and structuring the lives of believers outside of the service, this music has taken a permanent place in the evangelical community.

Praise and Worship, in this sense, can be structurally defined as an extended time of singing, often using popular music styles, and sometimes other arts for the worship experience (Redman 2002:34-35). With the developments of new music and liturgy, church musicians were given a new role, as Ingalls (2008:107-108) describes:

Perhaps the most important structural change in church worship that the adoption of contemporary worship instigated was the shift from 'music minister' to 'worship leader'.

In ecclesiastical practice, the task of worship planning and leading is increasingly associated with the church musician nowadays. The new church music and liturgy necessitate a new type of music minister. Boer (2019:1) observes:

The shift from 'music minister' to 'worship leader' modified the tasks for church musical leaders, placing greater emphasis on contemporary musical styles and increasing the leader's responsibility for worship planning, public prayer, spoken transitions, and sensitivity to the congregation's emotional involvement.

Kauflin (2008:252-254) argues that a worship leader must be more than simply a contemporary musician. Green (2009:184) describes her as the "lead liturgist", and Hendricks (2012:1) notes that

[t]oday, musicians are required to do more than simply choose several hymns or gospel songs to fill spots in the worship order, scheduling soloists, and preparing "special music" by the choir. Now, church musicians, often called worship leaders, plan services with teams of people intentionally seeking to provide a flow of worship that creates a type of holistic worship experience. Organ and piano accompanists are supplemented or replaced by praise bands complete with guitars, synthesizers and drums.

Cherry (2016:3) provides a definition for a worship leader with theological, musical, and spiritual leadership implications:

[A] spiritual leader with developed skill and God-given responsibility for selecting, employing, and/or leading music in worship in ways that serve the actions of the liturgy, engage worshippers as full

participants, and reflect upon biblical, theological, and contextual implications, all for the ultimate purpose of glorifying God.

These changes are driven by a new paradigm, at least in evangelical free-churches:

1. To see the music minister or worship leader primarily as a pastoral presence. The responsibilities include liturgical practices, discipleship, and spiritual leadership.
2. With the increased reliance on electronic technology, the management of these systems rests on the worship leader (Ottaway 2020:172).
3. The advent of contemporary pop and rock styles that require a more musically versatile leader who has an appreciation and aptitude for the old and the new.

### 2.1.2 Transfer to ministry in Germany

Seeking to enrich the ongoing discussion of liturgical studies and church music, I will attempt to compare the “praxis of the people” (Klein 2005:53) in German evangelical free-church contexts with the developments described in the USA. In the USA, the worship reforms and renewal have contributed to changes in church music with its implication for worship services and the role of the music minister. How does this translate into the German ministry context?

In general, one must distinguish two individual processes. One is observed in the Protestant mainline churches and the other in the evangelical free-church tradition. The mainline churches primarily developed popular song material and musical styles beyond the music of the Praise and Worship movement to include a broad spectrum of contemporary forms. The training of church music reflects the technical requirements for these styles and their integration in pop masses (Naumann 2020). In the free-church tradition, the development is musically narrower in Praise and Worship, but also went beyond popular music and impacted significantly on both the worship services and the role of the church musician.

### 2.1.3 The mainline-church process

Bubmann (2010:461) speaks of an “epochal break in church music behaviour” in the 1960s and 1970s. In the first half of the last century, music was dominated by clergy and church music elites who chose the song repertoire. In the second half, church music pluralised into scenes and milieus. “Neues Geistliches Lied” (New Spiritual Song), “Sacropop”,

“Gospelrock”, “Populäre Christliche Musik” (Popular Christian Music), or “CCM” (Contemporary Christian music) are some descriptors for the new musical forms (Heizmann 1994:243). The process of music ministry in this context has certainly also affected liturgy. Bubmann (2010:465) observes a “changed attitude towards liturgy”, where recipients not only seek “the Holy or the Other, but comfort and support for everyday life”.

Hartmut Naumann, prorektor at the University for Church Music Herford-Witten, oversees the training of pop cantors for Lutheran Evangelical Churches. In an interview (2020), Naumann reported that, after years of attempts to establish modern music forms in church practice and formal training, he was able to start an accredited training programme in 2016. At this point, there are more job openings available than graduates to fill those positions. With new music forms come new liturgical practices, for which church musicians must be prepared. However, the trend from “church musician” to “worship leader” has not been widely observed in his context, as Naumann explained.

#### 2.1.4 The free-church process

The developments of mainline churches and evangelical free-churches are, in some ways, interconnected, as Bubmann (2010:462) describes: “the influx of Beat, Rock, and Pop into the church was connected to a penetration of free-church youth-spirituality”. Without avoiding a somewhat arbitrary distinction, the free-church has taken a more extensive process as far as music ministry is concerned. The Worship Awakening, described by Redman (2002), has also arrived in its own right in Germany. Heizmann (1994:244) observes:

Since the beginning of the 90s a new type of song catches on in a significant way: *Praise Songs* ... The development of popular spiritual music over the last fifty years clearly indicates, that the young generation in the church wants to tread their own musical paths and make their own experiences – and that they indeed are capable of finding new and contemporary forms of expressing their faith (emphasis in original).

When Faix and Künkler (2018:92-95) presented their findings of the *empirica Jugendstudie 2018* among highly religious youth, they found that young Christians seek the experience of faith, first and foremost, through music and worship, especially for those aged between 14 and 19 years. However, this was not limited to worship services or events, but extended to everyday life (Faix & Künkler 2018:103). They described *Lobpreis* (praise & worship) as the postmodern liturgy that has meaning to young people because of its music, emotionality, physicality, simple lyrics, but first



and foremost because of the lifestyle of authenticity it embodies (Faix & Künkler 2018:239). In a sense, the young generation is replacing the old liturgy with one of their own making (Faix & Künkler 2018:243). It is a kind of worship awakening with new music styles and a new expectation for worship liturgy that exceeds the boundaries of the worship event.

The worship leader's role in this context compares to the expectations observed in the USA. Baltes (2014:180) explains that "[c]orporate worship ... requires good leadership". This kind of leadership is a "shepherd's ministry". Baltes (2014:181) further appeals to the churches:

We need people, who are both courageous and humble, to step anew into this long-forgotten role of the worship leader.

Baltes describes the role of a worship leader as a worship theologian, team leader, conflict manager and visionary who serves as a called and anointed musician, shepherd, fighter, friend, prayer, servant, and leader under the grace of God. Reich (2012:48-49) describes worship leaders as people who lead the church musically and substantially. Prerequisites include authenticity in life, relationships and ministry, being of strong character, socially competent, a team player, gifted for leadership, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and sincerely God-loving. Frey (2019:159-165) emphasises both calling and gifting as indispensable aspects for worship leaders. Worship leadership starts from "within". First, the worship leader needs to have the gift of worship. According to Frey (2019:161), both the musical and the technical training are important, but he senses "danger to not take the gift of worship serious enough, because we are so fixed on being 'professional'". Secondly, the worship leader must have the gift of music. Thirdly, the worship leader must have the gift of leadership.

Pepper (2019:15-223) outlines the tasks and requirements of a worship leader structured in the phases of preparation, leading, and accompanying. During the phase of preparation, worship leaders must be able to set the goal for worship, discern the needs of the congregation and team, ready their own souls, review the repertoire, create the set-list, update media and technology ministries, and prepare the team. For the leading phase, Pepper addresses attitudinal aspects and skill sets required for effective worship leadership in the church. The accompanying phase includes a musical, organisational, and spiritual branch. Aspects in the organisational branch to be noted are delegation, motivation, teamwork, and coaching. The spiritual accompaniment of worship leaders lets them disciple the team, pray for them, alleviate false perfectionism, and support roots and wings to help people grow deeper and fly higher.

Even though these authors write for a non-academic audience, they show how the new worship leader is defined in church practice. When listening to writers and leaders in contemporary worship in Germany, they seem to indicate a similar development as the Worship Awakening (Redman 2002), with its impact on music liturgy and the role of worship leaders as described in the USA context.

## 2.2 Developments of academic studies

Worship practices have become a means for Christian identity and theological understanding (Faix & Künkler 2018:239). At the same time, musicians are in charge of communal worship. The developments in academic programmes mirror the new requirements for church musicians. These programmes are switching from degrees in church music to degrees in worship studies at seminaries and universities. Scientific studies and the institutions' official publications will describe the developments of academic programmes.

### 2.2.1 Academic programmes in the USA

The reality of ministry has changed, calling for new approaches to training music ministers. Saliers (2011) observed:

As a result of changes in worship during the past half-century, local communities of faith are much more self-consciously involved in negotiating the meaning of worship. Consequently, the teaching of worship in seminaries and graduate schools of theology has generated the need for interdisciplinary approaches.

Since the 1980s, the National Association of Schools of Music has been pressurised to reform the accreditation of sacred music programmes to accommodate the new requirements of the job market. In 2012, the Association created a new accreditation for worship degrees.

Simultaneously, there has been a considerable increase in numbers and growth of specified academic worship programmes in the USA. Regent University was the first to accredit a worship studies certificate in 1997. In 1998, Liberty University partnered with Integrity Music for a similar programme. The Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies started in 1999. In 2000, already 52 schools offered some form of programme or certificate in worship studies (Aleshire 2008) and, by 2013, this number had grown to over 100 (Ottaway 2020:162-163).

At the same time the traditional Master for Christian Music (MCM) and Master of Sacred Music (MSM) programmes had dropped from 550 to 160 between 1988 and 2008. From 1999 to 2000, student enrolment in sacred

music programmes accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music dropped 40 per cent, and 45 programmes closed (Ottaway 2020:160). However, these types of programme are still ongoing, as the Association of Theological Schools reported 286 graduates from MCM and MSM degree programmes in the autumn of 2019.

In summary, since 2002 in the USA, newly emerging ‘worship’ degrees have moved to the centre of academic Christian music education. The number of schools in the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities prove the point. In 2018, only three schools offered sacred music programmes, 22 schools had a church music degree, and 113 schools (or 82 per cent) offered degrees in worship or music ministry.

New academic worship training programmes have been the answer to an increasing demand for trained worship leaders. It is my observation that both academic and non-academic programmes of worship training in Germany often, though not exclusively, match the worship studies programmes developed in the USA, to a certain degree.

## 2.2.2 Academic programmes in Germany

Germany has not been as quick to adopt the worship degree as the centre of Christian music education. However, there have been some important developments. In German-speaking Europe, to my knowledge, a few evangelical free-church institutions and one academy within the Protestant mainline-churches offer an academic programme that responds to the changes in church worship and music ministry.

The Evangelische Pop-Akademie at the Hochschule für Kirchenmusik in Witten (2019) was established in 2016 to train popular church musicians for the mainline churches’ context. This is a unique programme that follows a multidisciplinary format (Naumann 2020). Accomplished specialised faculty and guest lecturers teach all the courses at a unique location. This programme is a major contribution towards the professionalisation of popular church-music training in general, and specifically within the Lutheran church.

The Theologisches Seminar St. Crischona (2020) offers a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Theology and Music, accredited through the Middlesex University in London. This programme is distinctively modelled in an interdisciplinary format, including basic theological and professional musical training. Coordinated by the dean, Susanne Hagen, music professionals and theologians teach as guest lecturers. The programme aims to provide a firm foundation for future music ministry, engagement

in schools or Christian organisations, or professional careers in Christian music. The focus is primarily on contemporary forms of worship.

The School of Worship at the Europäischen Theologischen Seminar (2020) in Freudenstadt offers a Bachelor of Theology (equivalent), accredited by the European Council for Theological Education. This programme seeks to develop competencies in the fields of biblical studies, theology, social sciences and Christian ministry, leadership, communication and relationship competency, discipleship, and practical skills. More specifically, students learn to develop the music ministry in the local church in the Pentecostal traditions of worship, practise worship leading, build a worship team, develop and describe a personal worship philosophy, and understand the impact of culture and subculture on worship.

The Theologische Hochschule Elstal (2020) developed specialised modules in spirituality and worship in their Bachelor of Arts programmes. These modules focus on the history of worship and spirituality, music practices, reflection on personal spirituality, and experiences of practice. The training seeks to equip students to use their spirituality and musical abilities in their future professional life. This additional qualification is added to their regular Bachelor diploma.

The educational formats in German-speaking Europe, especially in the free-church traditions, often follow the pattern of worship studies in evangelical North America. Theological studies, leadership skills, and diverse music practices are the common denominator of these training programmes, while substantial denominational and programmatic differences remain.

### 3. INTERPRETING

Borrowing from Osmer's (2008:4) second task of practical theology, interpretation will take the form of a closer analytical investigation of key developments within the described developments in music ministry and training. Essentially, it is a change of perspective examining academic programmes from a thematic angle, as they respond to the new ministry reality through a complementation of content and a realignment of pedagogy.

#### 3.1 Complementation of content

The education of worship leaders includes elements of traditional church music programmes, and is complemented by a variety of emphases.

These address the fields of theology, music, and spiritual leadership. A summary of exemplary studies by Tuttle (1999) and Sheeks (2016) show the content complementation. Tuttle (1999) approached the definition of content by asking practitioners about their expectations towards a worship training programme. Sheeks (2016), on the other hand, compared the curriculum of nine schools that offered worship training programmes. The programme descriptions of the Evangelische Pop-Akademie (2021) and the Theologisches Seminar Chrischona (2020) are examples that reveal, to some extent, similar content in academic programmes in German-speaking Europe.

### **3.1.1 Theology and spirituality**

The changes to the role of a worship leader increased the expectations towards biblical foundations. Tuttle (1999:100) found that a vast majority of the participants suggested that such a programme should have strong biblical foundations in both Old and New Testament principles, and biblical characters. Sheeks (2016:36-38) added topics of worship theology, biblical worship, devotional life, pastoral abilities, integrity, and Christian lifestyle. The Theologisches Seminar Chrischona (2020) requires their worship students to take biblical studies, historic theology, systematic theology, and practical theology. The curriculum of the Evangelische Pop-Akademie (2019) includes theological foundations.

### **3.1.2 Music and technology**

Tuttle (1999:102-106) identified musical expectations towards contemporary music and its practical issues. Sheeks (2016:25-38) found learning outcomes concerning popular and commercial music theory, song-writing and arranging, contemporary band leadership, sound systems, video projection systems, stage lighting, projection software, stage design, and music administration software. The Evangelische Pop-Akademie (2019) offers courses in instrumental leadership, choir, band, percussion, arranging, song-writing, sound, computer technology, recording, production, and hymnology. The Theologisches Seminar Chrischona (2020) training includes lessons in rhythm, band coaching, musical worship leadership, and several electives including arts, preaching, theatre, and song-writing.

### **3.1.3 Spiritual and organisational leadership**

Tuttle (1999:101-108) found that a specialised programme should include content on current trends, various worship models, worship evangelism, current resources, special productions, and relationships with other

leaders. Sheeks (2016:36-38) also identified courses in current corporate congregational worship models and worship planning. Students at the Theologisches Seminar Chrischona (2020) complete coursework in worship service practices, leadership competency, team leadership, and ethics. Graduates from the Evangelische Pop-Akademie (2019) complete work in pedagogy, psychology, cultural management, and liturgy.

## 3.2 Realignment of pedagogy

Reflecting on the way in which the institutions have responded to ministry and academic changes, one can distinguish a realignment of pedagogy towards the worship practices of the church in two ways. First, either a scaling back of musical proficiencies in favour of worship and ministry-related courses, or a creative integration of worship and ministry focus into music pedagogy (Ottaway 2020:171). These can be summarised as the interdisciplinary approach. Secondly, Whaley (2020) added the multidisciplinary approach, in which a new department is developed on represent all aspects of worship training.

### 3.2.1 The interdisciplinary approach

The interdisciplinary approach is most often used in contexts where existing programmes have been reshaped to suit the new demands of music ministry. Depending on the existing programme, either essential theological or musical courses are being kept and then supplemented with courses from the other field. In essence, specialists in each field teach their material relatively independently of one another. One example is the Theologische Seminar St. Chrischona that operates primarily with professional guest lecturers for their music and worship degree. The curriculum blends theological foundations with musical practices and skills, thereby using existing theological pedagogy and supplementing it with the skills and knowledge specific to the worship ministry (Theologische Seminar St. Chrischona 2020).

### 3.2.2 The multidisciplinary approach

The multidisciplinary approach combines all worship-related programmes and courses under one umbrella. All the multiple disciplines required for the training of worship leaders are being taught, bearing the theological foundation and ministry orientation of the worship leader in mind. Liberty University's Center for Worship is structured this way (Whaley 2020). Naumann's (2020) Evangelische Pop-Akademie also operates with this approach. The faculty body shares a common understanding of the

educational goals for their students, even though each lecturer teaches his/her specific discipline.

The difference with the interdisciplinary approach is that, for the multidisciplinary approach, worship theology or educational goal becomes the unifying factor. Instead of specialists from all required disciplines teaching as they would in their own world, the pedagogy in a multidisciplinary programme is driven by a shared understanding of worship theology or music ministry and how it is applied to practice. This observation lays the groundwork for an attempt at Osmer's (2008:4) task of standardising.

#### 4. STANDARDISING

Osmer's (2008:4) third task of practical theology is standardising: "What ought to be going on?". I will approach this question using a brief case study of an institution that started one of the first worship training programmes in the USA and became the largest of its kind, the Center for Worship at Liberty University. "Ought to be" is too strong a phrase to use for an individual case; however, understanding the reasons for its success could prove instructional for adaptation in other contexts.

Prior to the developments in church music that began in 1950, music ministry training was defined from a musical starting point. The developments of the ministry and the role of the worship leader necessitated pragmatic changes. In 1998, Liberty University partnered with Integrity Music to develop an accredited degree in worship studies. In 2005, Vernon M. Whaley, for his academic credentials and church ministry experience, became the second director of the Center for Worship, which set the programme on a course of rapid growth and influence (Randlett 2019:234). Starting with 89 students in 2005, the number increased to 518 within two years (Randlett 2019:230).

In 2012, Whaley became dean of the newly formed School of Music that combined degrees in worship studies, commercial music, music performance, and music education into one school. In 2015, the School of Music was accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music. In the autumn of 2019, the School of Music at Liberty University enrolled roughly 1,700 students with over 800 studying in undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate worship programmes (Whaley 2020). Drawing from personal experience, an interview with Whaley (2020) and a comprehensive historic study on the development of the Center for Worship by Randlett

(2019), the theological vision, ministry orientation, and application-based curriculum are identified as trademarks of the programme.

## 4.1 Theological vision

Whaley (2020) stated that “[i]t all begins with who God is”, and outlined his vision: “Your theology determines your philosophy. And your philosophy determines your practice.” This means to actually know the normative dimensions of the material (worship theology), before investigating and evaluating philosophies and practices. Refuting the idea of only training contemporary praise and worship music, Randlett (2019:241) quotes him further: “[W]e set out at the very beginning to establish a program that would build biblical principles of worship.”

Worship ministers trained in this institution would be prepared to function in a variety of styles and cultural contexts, because they can encounter practice, trends and desires within the congregation from an empirical perspective that is informed by a normative theological position. To summarise, the vision of worship studies must be to train leaders who have a strong biblical foundation, a practical theology they can apply to any church context, and a comprehensive musical ability that transcends musical styles.

## 4.2 Ministry orientation

When Whaley started the B.S. in Music and Worship Studies, the major was set up from a multidisciplinary approach. The Department of Worship Studies housed all worship-related programmes and courses under one roof (Randlett 2019:151-152). Prior to developing the programme, Whaley (2020) recounts asking the churches: “What do you need?” and asking practitioners: “How would you have liked to be trained?”. The answers became the basis for the core curriculum that combines theological, leadership, and musical coursework, as well as a plethora of interdisciplinary courses on the undergraduate level, including biblical studies, business studies, cross-cultural studies, drama ministries, pastoral leadership, women’s ministry, worship leadership, worship technology, artist development, song-writing, and cinematic arts. Whaley (2020) explains why ministry orientation must be a core vision of a training programme:

Musicians would always lean heavy towards the practical techniques.  
The theologians would emphasize their discipline. But the program  
is driven by its applicability to local church ministry.

To prevent such a programme from becoming merely needs-based and market-driven, it must operate from a unifying practical theology of worship



that informs the understanding of what is expected from a worship leader. Whaley (2019:86-119) operates from a multi-faceted perspective on the role of worship leaders (see Table 1).

Table 1: Role of worship leaders

Spiritual	Professional	Personal
Worshipper	Professional practitioner	Mentor
Disciple	Artist	Teacher
Theologian	Musician	Counsellor
Philosopher	Servant leader	Family leader
Proclaimer – preacher, evangelist missionary	Pastor	
	Administrator and visionary	
Prayer warrior, leader, partner, intercessor, mentor	Staff member serving the pastor	
	Team member	

In their approach at Liberty University, all the multiple disciplines required for the training of worship leaders are being taught with the theological foundation and ministry orientation of the worship leader in mind.

### 4.3 Application-based curriculum

Whaley (2020) asserts that “we have to learn how to connect the theology that we believe in our hearts with the people we are leading in the pew”. At Liberty University, the Department of Music and Worship Studies termed their approach “action-oriented, practitioner-based ... Application-based” (Randlett 2019:240-241). This approach involves the training of practitioners in that students have an immediate opportunity to apply what they learned in and beyond the classroom; the training by practitioners through integration of active leaders and professionals as guest lecturers; intentionally designing the programme towards skill acquisition and practical application, and integrating all specialised training into an overarching worship theology and ministry philosophy.

One example for the application-based curriculum is the music theory developed and investigated by John D. Kinchen, III. In his doctoral thesis, Kinchen compared the ministry-focused approach developed at Liberty University with more traditional approaches at comparable university programmes. He described the effects of the new curriculum:

[It] provided a means for students to learn and immediately apply principles of music theory within the context of their field of specialization. ... students training as church musicians ... had greater achievement, more positive attitudes towards a variety of music styles, and a stronger sense of personal preparedness to fulfil skills related to the church musician than those taught in a traditional, conservatory-based music theory curriculum (Kinchen 2012:264).

The main goal with application-based education is not only to teach the skills required by the church at the moment, but also to equip the student with a theological foundation, ministry-oriented content, and application-based musical skills. This way, students graduating from the programme can function effectively and confidently in a variety of contexts, even if styles and forms are changing.

## 5. RESPONDING

Osmer's (2008:4) fourth task of practical theology is responding: "How might we respond?". Ultimately, this question must be answered in each individual context. However, resulting from this study, several introductory suggestions can be voiced concerning orientation, content, and format that guide the development of an academic worship training programme.

### 5.1 General orientation

Returning to the case study of the worship programme at Liberty University, one can summarise the general orientation as being theologically grounded, ministry oriented, and application based. At the beginning of the development of worship leader training, there must be a clear vision for a worship theology that is informed by how God reveals himself to man, and how man is to respond to God's self-revelation (Ross 2006:41-60). Music in the local church is a primary form of responding to God in worship. Those who lead music must not only have the technical skills of musical leadership, but also be aware of the greater implications of worship as practical theology that becomes a way of life and thus informs all choices and practices of music ministry. Application orientation follows theological orientation, and since praxis is at its core living in wisdom (Ott 2013), the essence of worship theology must be about being a worshipper as an identity. The ministry of worship leading flows out of this identity into all other aspects of ministry and practice, thus integrating the theory of worship theology.

## 5.2 Core content

Upon review of the new definition of church musicians as worship leaders who have a pastoral presence, increasingly rely on electronic technology, and have to function as a more musically versatile leader, a curriculum for worship training would entail theological, musical and interdisciplinary courses.

Following the general orientation, the content should address the theology of worship and biblical worship that provide guiding principles for music ministry and leadership. A review of the history and philosophy of liturgy and worship emphasises the use of liturgical and musical forms throughout church history. From a musical perspective, the emphasis should be on theory taught as common practice and in popular vernacular. Applied studies could include ensemble techniques for worship leadership, conducting with a focus on lay ensembles, classical and popular vocal techniques, and studies in instruments suitable for accompaniment in musical worship. Additional interdisciplinary courses from various areas could be added, depending on resources and institutional orientation. Spiritual leadership, worship leadership, team-building, communication, sound and media technology, drama and video techniques, as well as worship service design are recommended.

## 5.3 Pedagogical format

Pedagogical changes have been approached in two ways, which I term the interdisciplinary and the multidisciplinary approach, respectively (Ottaway 2020:171; Whaley 2020). An interdisciplinary approach works best when existing programmes are restructured to accommodate worship studies or when it seems necessary to include resources of a theological institution. The existing curriculum is complemented by specialised worship courses, which are added to the existing curriculum being taught by faculty outside the worship programme. The multidisciplinary approach would assume an individual institutional identity and offer all worship studies-related courses itself. This approach seems idealistically favourable; however, due to the high requirement of resources, it is only seldom realised.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This article sought to answer the question concerning the nature of an academic programme for training church musicians, that prepares leaders for local church ministry as it actually is, but that avoids needs-based pragmatism or primary definition by music style. Borrowing from Osmer (2008), I described and analysed the reality of music ministry and

training, drew possible standards from a case study, and suggested a practical response.

The most significant changes observed in music ministry were the introduction of popular music styles and a change of the role of the music minister to a worship leader. An academic training institution responded by complementing course content and realigning their pedagogy. The case study of the Center for Worship at Liberty University showed that suggested standards for the training of worship leaders could begin with a theological vision, feature a ministry-oriented curriculum, and apply an application-based pedagogy. These were then reformulated into a practical response that outlines a possible general orientation, the core content, and the variants of pedagogical format to be considered for programme development.

As skill sets, forms and worship culture change, musical style and ecclesiastical needs shift, but the theological foundations remain unchanged. Approaching music ministry training from a perspective of practical worship theology would provide the principles for theory that can be integrated into practical aspects that address ministry needs and musical pedagogy. Future studies could investigate more detailed practical responses to the issues raised in this article within specific contexts.

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