The Craft of Theology and Qualitative Research
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“What Should a Student of Theology Do Today?
One should, above all, only study theology [do qualitative research] out of the sincere opinion that one cannot choose any other course of study.”
Adapted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, DBWE 12:432.

1.) Like hanging a door, the craft of theology and qualitative research requires identifying the ‘hinge’ points for your research and writing.

2.) Before you begin, consider counting the costs, which may include:
   a. Time for IRB approval
   b. Time and cost for research
   c. Time away from family
   d. Time and/or cost for transcription
   e. Unpredictable hours for research interviews and participant observation
   f. Uncertain outcomes

3.) If you want or require additional training in social scientific methods, there are several great resources in the area:
   a. SSRI (Social Science Research Institute) at Duke University
   b. The Odum Institute at UNC Chapel Hill
      i. Annually offers a week-long seminar about qualitative research methods

4.) If you are conducting interviews, employ a range of digital resources to streamline your interview process. Some good options include:
   a. Smart phone apps:
      i. Rev Recorder App
      ii. IPhone voice memo App
   b. Handheld recorders
      i. Sony ICD-PX370
      ii. Sony ICD-UX560
   c. Always carry and use a backup!

5.) Prepare a work plan for research and writing, and revise it regularly.

6.) If at all possible, approach your writing as a practice of extended memo writing. This has several advantages:
   a. It frees you to work on the conceptual framework for your project early on.
   b. It frees you from the assumption that you will get it right the first time.
   c. The writing process itself can clarify your ongoing research.

7.) Leverage software for transcription and analysis:
   a. Transcription
      i. Rev.com
      ii. Dragon Naturally Speaking
   b. Analysis:
      i. NVIVO

8.) Identify an image or a metaphor for your writing. Some possibilities may include:
   a. A French braid
   b. A Rubik’s cube
   c. A fugue

9.) Write early, regularly, and in conversation with colleagues. Like riding a bike over hilly terrain, the craft of theology and qualitative research benefits from the momentum of steady and sustained effort.

10.) Pray: give thanks for the honor of holding the stories of communities and people of faith and seek discernment throughout the work and writing.