

An Introduction to
Practical
Theology

HISTORY, THEORY, *and*
the COMMUNICATION *of the*
GOSPEL *in the* PRESENT

Christian
Grethlein

Uwe Rasch, *translator*

"In *An Introduction to Practical Theology*, one finds a vigorous presentation of the international scope of practical theology today, its grounding of the practice of communicating the gospel, and its relationship to a fast-changing and secularized social context. Students, practical theologians, pastors, and church leaders working in the field will benefit greatly from Grethlein's excellent work."

—CHRISTIAN B. SCHAREN, Vice President for Applied Research,
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—MARY McCLINTOCK FULKERSON, Professor of Theology,
Duke Divinity School

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*History, Theory, and the Communication
of the Gospel in the Present*

Christian Grethlein
Uwe Rasch, translator

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FOREWORD

This book is based on the textbook *Praktische Theologie* (de Gruyter: Berlin, Boston 2012; second, improved edition 2016).¹ This present version has been abridged to about half its original length and presents the fundamental principles of this discipline that is informed by the—hitherto only adumbrated—concept of the communication of the gospel while at the same time elaborating it. The reader who wishes to be informed in greater detail about the historical backdrop of Practical Theology or the specific ecclesial backgrounds in Germany is advised to consult the German version of this book, which also provides more detailed references to the German literature. In comparison, this version proposes a systematic and condensed conceptual groundwork for an internationally oriented Practical Theology, which would have to be elaborated to integrate regional ecclesial aspects. The reader is nonetheless advised to keep in mind that this book has been written from a German perspective, and that the pertinent issues are first and foremost discussed with reference to the German context. This not only reflects the formative background of

¹ First reactions to the first edition have been collected in Michael Domsgen and Bernd Schröder, eds., *Kommunikation des Evangeliums: Leitbegriff der Praktischen Theologie* (APrTh 57) (Leipzig, 2014).

the author, but also pays tribute to the fact that Practical Theology emerged in the German-speaking world and has been developed here for the past two hundred years.

My arguments are based on the observation that practical-theological theorizing and, in consequence, ecclesial praxis are encumbered with an imprecise terminology that impedes an accurate and theologically reflected perception of present-day reality. Therefore, considerable emphasis will here be placed on the exact definition of terms. Particularly the context from which a term originates needs to be heeded to avoid “zombie categories” (Ulrich Beck).² Such an approach at the same time offers new possibilities for the integration of biblical perspectives into practical-theological work more than has hitherto been the case. A context-sensitive, communication-theory-oriented analysis shows that particularly the example of Jesus’ appearance, ministry, and destiny still contains high innovation potential for Practical Theology.

To encourage closer study, I have placed basic literature at the beginning of each section. In the subsequent pages it is then cited only parenthetically within the text, not in separate footnotes. All abbreviations for cited publications follow the encyclopedia *Religion Past and Present*.³ As a rule, all quotations from German sources have been rendered into English. Italics or spaced lettering appearing in the original have not been adopted.

The German version of Practical Theology was enabled by a two-year opus magnum grant of the Volkswagen Foundation. The foundation also graciously provided the funds for the English translation, kindly undertaken by Uwe Rasch, M.A.

My thanks also go to Marcell Saß, who took over my teaching obligations for the duration of the opus magnum grant, and who provided the decisive impetus for the English translation; Michael Domsen, Lutz Friedrichs, Jan Hermelink, Erhard Holze, Christhard Lück, Claudia Rüdiger, and Bernd Schröder, with each of whom I have been privileged to work in close collaboration for a number of years, and who are important dialog partners; my colleagues Martin Rothgangel and Robert Schelander from Vienna, my colleagues Wolfgang Drechsel, Johannes Eurich, Fritz Lienhard, and Helmut Schwier from Heidelberg, and my Catholic colleagues Reinhard Feiter and

² Approvingly quoted by John Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology: The Impact of Globalization* (Hampshire, 2008), 1.

³ Hans Dieter Betz et al., eds., *Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, 14 vols. (Leiden, 2007–2013), hereafter *RPP*.

Norbert Mette for illuminating discussions during the preparation of the book; my son Jonas Grethlein, whose literary and cultural-hermeneutical expertise provided invaluable insights.

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Münster, Westphalia, summer 2015

Christian Grethlein

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INTRODUCTION

Practical Theology is facing two major new challenges:

First of all, the number of church members is declining. The facts of baptism and church membership are drifting apart. A growing number of people, partly church members, partly members of other religious communities, to a certain extent lead non-Christian lives informed by non-Christian values. In this situation, the conflation of church, Christianity, and religion, hitherto customary in Practical Theology, stands in the way of a discerning perception of present-day reality.

And second, the triumph of the new electronic media cannot be overlooked. The forms of communication that have thereby become possible alter our perceptions of reality, the way we live, and our forms of social interaction. Assumptions that have so far been taken for granted in Practical Theology need reviewing.

In these circumstances, the ecumenical phrase of the “communication of the gospel” offers the theoretical framework capable of a differentiated empirical analysis and theologically sound orientation for praxis. In keeping with its ecumenical origin, it does not presuppose any specific ecclesial conditions. It was Ernst Lange who introduced this phrase in the context of his program

of German church reform.¹ In doing so, he pointed to the dialogic quality of what had thus far been referred to as “proclamation.”

At the same time, the “communication of the gospel” incorporates the insights of theories that face up to the challenges posed by the processes of individualization and the resultant fragility of institutions. “Communication” is the key term here.² Advances in defining communication now allow a more sophisticated approach than Lange’s. Furthermore, the related question of the social forms in which communication takes place has gathered momentum due to the recent development of media technology.

Empirically, the “communication of the gospel” goes further than “the church,” which becomes less and less important due to its marginalization as an institution or organization. In this sense, the phrase responds to Dietrich Rössler’s concept of contemporary forms of Christianity.³ In a new context, it will however be formulated differently, that is, in terms of communication theory. The instituting question of the communication sciences is: “How is communication possible?”⁴ To answer this question, all communication theories offered from diverse disciplinary perspectives concentrate on the observable. They zero in on observable interactions—as opposed to the customary focus on subject and belief with their empirically nonvalidatable introspection.

Theologically, the “communication of the gospel” designates, more precisely than the term “religion,” the subject of practical-theological reflection; clearly, the “gospel” forms the center of Christian belief. Non-Christian religious praxis will be taken into consideration insofar as it contributes to the understanding of present forms of communicating the gospel. Moreover, the “communication of the gospel” easily connects with contemporary theology. In an advanced encyclopedic reflection, Ingolf Dalferth defines Protestant

¹ See Ernst Lange, “Versuch einer Bilanz,” in *Kirche für die Welt: Aufsätze zur Theorie kirchlichen Handelns*, ed. Rüdiger Schloz (Munich, 1981), 101–29.

² See Horst Firsching, “Warum ‘Kommunikation’? Auf welche Problemstellungen reagieren kommunikationstheoretische Ansätze in der Soziologie—insbesondere in der Religionssoziologie?,” in *Religion als Kommunikation*, Religion in der Gesellschaft 4, ed. Hartmann Tyrell, Volkhard Krech, and Hubert Knoblauch (Würzburg, 1998), 187–240.

³ See Dietrich Rössler, *Grundriß der Praktischen Theologie* (Berlin, 1986), 79–83.

⁴ Klaus Beck, *Kommunikationswissenschaft* (Konstanz, 2007), 150. All translations of German quoted material are by the translator unless otherwise noted.

Theology as an “interpretational praxis of communicating the gospel.”⁵ The gospel as the center of Christian faith reveals itself to people through communication. Similarly, traditional dogmatic terms such as “doctrine,” “word of God,” or “proclamation” indicate forms of communication. They are, however, oriented along the lines of a scientifically outmoded one-track sender-receiver model, thus impeding accurate perception and consequently appropriate action. At the same time, the concept of “communicating the gospel” establishes the connections between Practical Theology and all other theological disciplines.

To understand what “gospel” means one has to refer back to the Bible. This biblical term is connected in a variety of ways with other biblical themes and concepts. Moreover, the Christian history of (partly erroneous) interpretations of the Gospels need to be called to mind to make the insights and findings thus gained in the scholarly investigation of the Bible productive for present-day challenges. Also, the doctrinal and practical interpretations in dogmatics and ethics need to be considered to the extent in which they critically reflect and assist the ongoing process of interpretation.

With regard to Practical Theology, recourse to “communication” helps integrate the traditional perspective of Pastoral Theology, now, however, considering the changed situation of the pastoral profession. On the one hand, it should be quite clear that ministry today essentially means interaction (as opposed to one-way instruction). On the other hand, it remains in view that communicating the gospel is not the sole prerogative of ministry.

Combining theology with communication science, the concept of communication opens up a wide range of opportunities for multiperspectival approaches to the issues and tasks of Practical Theology. In this sense, Practical Theology is “fundamental”⁶ for Protestant Theology if it wishes to accomplish the Reformers’ mission of mediation.⁷

To summarize, Practical Theology elaborates theories for the understanding of communicating the gospel. It is not the praxis itself, but critical

⁵ Ingolf Dalferth, *Evangelische Theologie als Interpretationspraxis: Eine systematische Orientierung* (ThLZ.F 11/12) (Leipzig, 2004), 53–128.

⁶ Here I build on the practical-theological concept of Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, 1996 [1991]).

⁷ See Christian Grethlein, “Theologie und Didaktik: Einige grundsätzliche Verhältnissbestimmungen,” *ZThK* 104 (2007), 503–25.

reflection on praxis.⁸ This characteristic of Practical Theology is cogently expressed in the theoretical concept of communication. Practical Theology is—as the etymology of the term “theory” (Gr. *observation*) indicates—constitutionally concerned with concrete praxis.

⁸ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Die praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, ed. Jacob Frerichs (Berlin, 1850), 12.

PART 1

Historical Introduction to Practical Theology

With regard to its genesis, Practical Theology is a “regional science.”¹ Its development had for a long time been (largely) confined to the German-speaking world. Similar problems were of course addressed in other parts of the world, but it was only in German theology that a proper theory was elaborated seeking to integrate all the different ecclesial fields of praxis conceptually. There are several likely reasons for this development: the secure position of theology at German universities, and its diversification of disciplines at the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth; the particular relationship of church and state in Germany; the German two-church system, which allowed both churches the development of state-like structures.

It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that a homegrown variety of Practical Theology was developed in the United States.² Some of

¹ Friedrich Schweitzer, “Praktische Theologie in Nordamerika,” in *Geschichte der Praktischen Theologie—Dargestellt anhand ihrer Klassiker* (APrTh 12), ed. Christian Grethlein and Michael Meyer-Blanck (Leipzig, 1999), 565–96, 565.

² See, for an overview, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “The Contributions of Practical Theology,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Miller-McLemore (Chichester, 2012), 1–20.

these pastoral or ecclesial fields of praxis underwent in part rather tempestuous changes, particularly in the area of hospital chaplaincy. The overall practical-theological perspective, however, was not able to attract much attention. Praxis-oriented theology, on the other hand, could stake out greater claims than in Germany.

Furthermore, for a long time it was primarily in Protestant Theology that the discipline of Practical Theology found a home. In the first half of the nineteenth century, under the auspices of the Enlightenment, there were only some forays into similar approaches in Catholic Theology. They were, by the token of a papal renunciation of the general cultural developments as expressed in the *Syllabus* (1864), the dogma of papal infallibility (1870), and the supremacy of neo-Scholastic Theology, pragmatically reduced to canon law and liturgy. Only with opening up in the course of the Second Vatican Council did an independent Practical Theology within the Catholic Church start to emerge.

Owing to the significantly different origins of Practical Theology in the United States and its slower emergence in Catholic Theology, I will treat these developments separately in chapter 2, focusing on the comparative aspects pertinent to the development of an international Practical Theology.

A budding interdenominational internationalization of Practical Theology seems to take form in new projects such as the International Academy of Theology³ and the *Journal of Practical Theology*.⁴ Both emerged in the 1990s, thus belonging to the more recent developments of the discipline.

For the time being, however, it still seems difficult to push forward to a concerted formation of a comprehensive theoretical basis that would integrate practical-theological work in different countries and across different denominations. This can for example be studied in the “international reports” of the *International Journal of Practical Theology*, which give insight into the practical-theological work in different countries and regions. These reports primarily reveal the differences. Transnational or cross-cultural projects, on the other hand, are generally missing. In terms of science theory, the reason for this is to be found in the contextuality of practical-theological reflection.

³ For their objectives, see Don Browning, “The Idea of the International Academy of Practical Theology,” in *Practical Theology—International Perspectives*, ed. Friedrich Schweitzer and Johannes van der Ven (Erfahrung und Theologie. Schriften zur Praktischen Theologie 34) (Frankfurt, 1999), 157–64.

⁴ For their objectives, see *IJPT* 1 (1997), 1–5.

Thus, the historical development of Practical Theology reveals the essential insight of the theory of communicating the gospel, which will be elaborated in the second part of this book: the gospel is communicated in concrete contexts. For this very reason, all pertinent theorizing is regionally determined. General terms such as “religion” or “society” seem to imply a more comprehensive theoretical claim, but they obscure this basic characteristic of communication. At the same time, the obvious tendencies toward globalization warrant the internationalization of the present practices of practical-theological theory.

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PRACTICAL THEOLOGY IN GERMANY

The development of Practical Theology as an independent theological discipline in the nineteenth century happened along convoluted paths. It is not possible to give an exact date for the emergence of this late theological discipline. Its concerns reach back to the early Christian era and have been treated in a wide stream of pastoral theological writings.¹ Only at the beginning of the nineteenth century did an independent theological discipline emerge from this, establishing itself within two important contexts: first, within the encyclopedic definition of theology, resulting from the general differentiation of the sciences; and, second, within the reform of academic theological studies and of the formal training of pastors that seemed necessary to bridge the distance between everyday life and doctrine-based pastoral practice.

The emergence of Practical Theology was closely linked with major political, social, and cultural changes challenging churches and theology. Ecclesial traditions, institutions, and practices were no longer in sync with the times. Practical Theology is a theological attempt to deal with this critical situation

¹ Compare the list of the most important works in Uta Pohl-Patalong, "Pastoraltheologie," in *Praktische Theologie: Eine Theorie- und Problemgeschichte*, ed. Christian Grethlein and Helmut Schwier (APrTh 33) (Leipzig, 2007), 515–74, 519–24.

constructively. A similar process could be observed with regard to society as a new sizeable factor, and the subsequent emergence sociology as a new discipline.²

To this day, the crisis concept has been the driving force of Practical Theology. It defines its concerns from the perspective of crises, that is, problematic situations that require innovative action. In concrete terms, three such “crises” mark the stages of practical-theological theory formation: first of all, the political, social, and cultural changes since the beginning of the nineteenth century; next, the challenges of “modernity” at the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth; and finally, the diverse reform efforts since the end of the 1960s.

In this manner, practical-theological work is constantly informed by the present situation, principally turning its attention to difficulties and social injustices. When reading practical-theological literature, this lopsided focus must be kept in mind to avoid adopting a distorted, negatively biased view of the circumstances.

1. Challenges in the History of German Practical Theology

Literature: Volker Drehsen, *Neuzeitliche Konstitutionsbedingungen der Praktischen Theologie: Aspekte der theologischen Wende zur soziokulturellen Lebenswelt christlicher Religion*, 2 vols. (Gütersloh, 1988); Christian Grethlein and Michael Meyer-Blanck, eds., *Geschichte der Praktischen Theologie: Dargestellt anhand ihrer Klassiker* (APrTh 12) (Leipzig, 1999); Christian Grethlein and Helmut Schwier, eds., *Praktische Theologie: Eine Theorie- und Problemgeschichte* (APrTh 33) (Leipzig, 2007)

The Beginnings in the Nineteenth Century

Looking back today, the expansion of theology by a practical discipline seems only consequential. Its task was to integrate lifeworld changes into theological discourse. At the same time, the alignment of changing ecclesial praxis and theological bodies of knowledge and thus their Christian identity had to be

² See the overview in Bernhard Schäfers, “Sociology: II. History,” *RPP* 12 (2012), 117–18.

ensured. However, it took nearly a hundred years to establish the independence and singularity of this task.

In this context, the emergence of Practical Theology in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century can be appreciated only by recalling the major political, social, and cultural as well as the ecclesial and theological upheavals of that period:

First, in 1806, after a period of nearly a thousand years, the Roman Empire of the German Nation came to an end. From the hundreds of prince-dom, dukedoms, and so on, a confederation of at first thirty-nine, then forty-one states emerged. Whereas before Catholics and Protestants had lived in different states, for the first time denominational plurality made itself felt in everyday life.

Second, the demographics during that period changed dramatically. The old empire contained roughly thirty million people at the end of the eighteenth century, in 1865 there were already fifty-two million.³ This required a new social order, also in the church.

Third, traditional estate-based society was transformed into a civil society. Accomplishment and profession replaced status based on lineage.⁴

Fourth, and connected with these developments, the process of individualization emerged as another important factor transforming religious life and the church. Beginning in the upper strata of the social order, it continued its way into other social groups.

In addition, further major cultural changes exerted their impacts: since the beginning of the nineteenth century, church and Christianity had been drifting apart. Scientific discoveries were putting pressure on theology. The philosophical demolition of metaphysics called for new rationales for Christianity and religious praxis. A second major wave of change was produced by the triumph of historicism at German universities, casting doubt on the hitherto unquestioned implicitness of traditions. In the wake, basic religious assumptions were also put into perspective.

To take up these and further challenges, time-honored dogmatics proved inadequate. A new field of theology opened up that would respond to these challenges: Practical Theology. Important catalysts of this movement were

³ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat*, 5th ed. (Munich, 1991 [1983]), 102.

⁴ See Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 255.

Friedrich Schleiermacher's encyclopedic work,⁵ which defined theology as a positive science with a constitutive function regarding the governing body of the church; the Practical Theology of Carl Immanuel Nitzsch,⁶ which developed the church as starting point and subject of Practical Theology; and, finally, the ethics-based Pastoral Theology of Christian Palmer.⁷

However, the oft-cited characterization of Schleiermacher as the "founding father of practical theology as a science"⁸ is only partly true. Indeed, based on his idea of a theology integrated by its practical task (of church leadership), Schleiermacher arrived at the necessity of a practical discipline. His idea, however, was to consign it merely to the application of the knowledge that would be furnished by the other theological disciplines.

Thus, Practical Theology emerged during the nineteenth century. It set out to deal academically and theologically with the challenges posed by the political, social, cultural, and religious changes. Even in Nitzsch it became clear that this was not only a methodological challenge but one that requires a specifically theological, a practical-theological, effort. Right from the start, the chief concerns of Practical Theology were the church and its praxis. Here, it follows in the footsteps of traditional Pastoral Theology, if pastoral praxis is seen as an important expression of ecclesial praxis. At the same time, it reaches beyond pastoral care since ecclesial praxis clearly is not exhausted by pastoral duties. Two alternatives offer themselves in the approaches to the concrete relation with the church: Nitzsch's dogmatic and Palmer's ethical orientation. Nitzsch's solution, which asserted itself first, put the life and praxis orientation of practical-theological work second to dogmatic regulations and, later, historical elaborations. This historical accent helped Practical Theology underscore its academic rigor when historicism had gained a foothold. The price was a removal from the reality of practice.

⁵ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Behuf einleitender Vorlesungen*, ed. Hans Scholz (Darmstadt, 1973).

⁶ See Carl Immanuel Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, vol. 1 (Bonn, 1847).

⁷ See Christian Palmer, "Zur praktischen Theologie," *JDTh* 1 (1856), 317–61.

⁸ Ernst Christian Achelis, *Lehrbuch der Praktischen Theologie*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1911), 14.

*Empirical Incentives—At the Beginning
of the Twentieth Century*

In the course of the reform efforts concerning church and (the study of) theology at the threshold of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Practical Theology developed a distinct profile.⁹ In view of the social and cultural changes and the pastoral duties under changed ecclesial conditions, the empirical approach proved to be the most efficient.

Holistic concepts of life, as in the form of guild laws, receded. The concomitant process of individualization, which started to reach lower social classes, caused widespread insecurity with regard to proper conduct of life. At the same time, new empirical sciences began to establish themselves: psychology, sociology, and ethnology. In the natural sciences, disciplines diversified. In the medical field, for example, different medical disciplines emerged, and in each of these different chairs each pursued increasingly differentiated research goals. Also, the relevance of theology in universities decreased. The year 1914 saw the first foundation of a German university without a theological faculty (Frankfurt; 1919 Hamburg). And finally, at the cultural level, the youth movement at the end of the German Empire began to establish a critical stance toward civilization, which has accompanied social development ever since. Particularly the sons and daughters of the protestant-liberal bourgeoisie set the agenda. Equally, in the field of religion, the search for viable forms of experience was on.

Practical Theology reacted to these and other challenges by expanding its repertoire. New practical-theological disciplines, religious ethnology, church studies, and religious psychology, broadened its horizon and scope. Research in these fields required cooperation with other disciplines, such as ethnology, psychology, and sociology. However, for an interdisciplinary Practical Theology of this kind, no methodological toolkit has yet been created.

The disaster of the First World War led to a reappraisal within Protestant Theology, which was fundamentally opposed to the fresh start envisioned by Practical Theology. The (aimed-for) exclusive focus on the word of God allowed no room for an independent, empirical Practical Theology interested in culture and successful communication. As a result, between 1930 and 1965, the discipline largely fell into a deep sleep. In the context of the more recent

⁹ A seminal read: Paul Drews, *Das Problem der Praktischen Theologie: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Reform des theologischen Studiums* (Tübingen, 1910).

liturgical movement, a sideline of Practical Theology attempted to adopt an aesthetical approach. However, it failed to assert itself against the prevailing dogmatic word-of-God theology. Other practical theologians were beguiled by national socialist ideology.

Overall, the further development and the increasing emigration of the church from society clearly show the price to be paid by a theology that eclipses the empirical approach of Practical Theology: remoteness from life and, therefore, insignificance.

*Nontheological Impulses—In the Last Third
of the Twentieth Century*

After the interlude of the word-of-God theology, the (second) empirical turn of the 1960s and 1970s reconnected Practical Theology again with the developments in nontheological studies. As before, radical changes in state, society, and culture now affected the church and the religious outlook of people,¹⁰ and required practical-theological reflection. There were the horrors of the Vietnam War, which had been escalating since 1963, and which television brought right into people's living rooms. This fueled people's fears, also fanned by the arms race between the United States and Soviet Union. In 1973 the unprecedented rise of oil prices marked a major watershed. The limitedness of natural resources and the concomitant ecological challenges have been a central issue of social discourse ever since. Simultaneously, beginning in the 1960s, a growing pluriformity became evident with regard to individual lifestyle choices. It was not least the influence of the foreign workers who had been recruited by German industry since 1955 who helped put the customary predominant middle-class lifestyle into perspective. With the influx of Turkish migrants, Islam took root in Germany. Religion, hitherto clearly synonymous with Christianity, became a problematic term. And finally, beginning at the end of the 1960s, churches were faced with a constant loss of membership, which, among other things, weakened them financially. Theologically, the word-of-God theology failed to persuade because it opposed a differentiated perception of people's needs. The churches, however, increasingly resorted to empirical instruments to capture their members' attitudes and criticisms.

¹⁰ See Thomas Grossbölting, *Der verlorene Himmel: Glaube in Deutschland seit 1945* (Göttingen, 2013).

In this context practical-theological research earned new recognition. The reception of socioempirical methods helped individual research projects in Practical Theology gain independence, particularly in the fields of pastoral-psychological counseling and religious education at school. Various influences from the United States amplified this tendency because the U.S. clergyman's training focuses on individual assignment-specific forms of praxis as opposed to general practical-theological theory formation.

Three important textbooks managed to pool practical-theological research while at the same time integrating the diverging individual studies. In the first of these, following the paradigm of sciences of action, Karl-Fritz Daiber¹¹ focused on the practical requirements of the theological and clerical professions. He recommended conceiving Practical Theology as the theory of its own practice. In addition, he wished to limit the scope of Practical Theology for reasons of methodology. The second, by Dietrich Rössler,¹² is such a theory for the pastoral profession. However, Rössler solved the problem of describing the subject area by drawing on the differentiations from the theory of Christianity. In this way, he could, on the one hand, integrate extant practical-theological forms of theory with their ecclesial connections and the requirements of the pastor. On the other hand, he also broadened the view to include the processes of pluralization and individualization. His concrete suggestions, however, remained restricted to the pastoral-theological outlook. In his textbook, Gert Otto¹³ took a conceptually more radical approach. He left the previous ecclesial paradigm of Practical Theology behind and drafted a Critical Theory between the poles of society and religion. Rejecting the commonly accepted sectoral architecture of Practical Theology, he recommended a perspectival approach. Similar to Rössler, he did however not attempt to answer the methodological questions that his suggestions begged.

A closer look at these concepts reveals that the weaknesses of one mark the strengths of the other. First, opening up for fresh perspectives (Otto) broadens the scope for Practical Theology, but at the same time threatens to destroy its systematic coherence (Rössler). Second, clear job orientation (Daiber) allows methodological precision, but narrows the scope. And finally, as

¹¹ See Karl-Fritz Daiber, *Grundriß der Praktischen Theologie als Handlungswissenschaft* (GT.P 23) (Munich, 1977).

¹² See Dietrich Rössler, *Grundriß der Praktischen Theologie* (Berlin, 21994 [1986]).

¹³ See Gert Otto, *Praktische Theologie*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1986–1988).

the (exclusive) point of reference for Practical Theology, the church seems to be too limited (Otto), society, on the other hand, too broad (Rössler). And yet, Daiber, Rössler, and Otto were trying to come to grips with the very same problem: how to describe the subject matter of Practical Theology within the context of a pluralistic society.

2. The Current Situation of Practical Theology in Germany: Struggling for Its Subject

Literature: Wilfried Engemann, *Personen, Zeichen und das Evangelium: Argumentationsmuster der Praktischen Theologie* (APrTh 23) (Leipzig, 2003); Wolf-Eckart Failing and Hans-Günter Heimbrock, "Von der Handlungstheorie zur Wahrnehmungstheorie und zurück," in *Gelebte Religion wahrnehmen: Lebenswelt–Alltagskultur–Religionspraxis*, ed. Wolf-Eckart Failing and Hans-Günter Heimbrock (Stuttgart, 1998), 275–94; Wilhelm Gräb, *Lebensgeschichten–Lebensentwürfe–Sinndeutungen: Eine praktische Theologie gelebter Religion* (Gütersloh, 1998); Albrecht Grözinger, *Praktische Theologie und Ästhetik: Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der Praktischen Theologie* (Munich, 1987); Manfred Josuttis, *Religion als Handwerk: Zur Handlungslogik spiritueller Methoden* (Gütersloh, 2002)

The current state of the debate in German Practical Theology can be understood only in its context. All of its practical-theological concepts are united in their effort to face up to the changes, however, in fairly different ways.

Context

Political and social: The dissolution of the Eastern Bloc only briefly gave rise to the hope for a peaceful global community. As early as 1993, political scientist Samuel Huntington had caused a stir with his *Foreign Affairs* article "The Clash of Civilizations," a thesis that he extended to book length in 1996: "In the post–Cold War world, the most important distinctions among people are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural."¹⁴ And: "The rivalry of the superpowers is replaced by the clash of civilizations."¹⁵ This brought

¹⁴ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996), 21, quoted from the paperback edition of 2003.

¹⁵ Huntington, *Clash*, 28.

religion into the sphere of political debate. Indeed, at the very latest with the media attention paid to the Twin Towers and Pentagon attacks on September 11, 2001, a new conflict began to dominate the headlines, which, in the general discussion, still today boils down to the controversial question: is Islam a threat to Western civilization? This debate became dramatically heated when the United States and its allies invaded Iraq. The equally controversial American military intervention in Afghanistan is also fraught with problems of Islamic fundamentalism.

Since then, the dialog between the religions is top of the political agenda, particularly since the local Islamic populations—to the surprise of many Europeans—identify the Western troops as “Christians.” The programmatic use of the term “crusade” in the speeches of then–U.S. president George W. Bush only helped to reinforce this impression.

A few years after the al-Qaeda attacks, the financial breakdown of major banks—and states—shook the economic world and led to a global financial crisis. The hitherto unchallenged economic prosperity of the wealthy nations seems to be fundamentally at stake, entailing disastrous consequences for the poor countries. Thinking about the future can no longer be shelved. In the days after the collapse of the Lehman Brothers investment bank, a *New York Times* front-page headline implored: “Confidence.”

This is equally true for ecological issues. Reputable scientists agree that climate change is largely caused by human action. In some regions, these changes have already begun to imperil the lives of people: the increase of adverse weather and floods, droughts, and prolonged spells of heat are among them, just as changes to vegetation and the extinction of animal species. In connection with the global economic problems sketched above, we here witness incalculable conflict potential for future generations in the making. This is particularly true of the issue of energy production. The Japanese nuclear disaster of Fukushima in March 2011 again—twenty-five years after Chernobyl—brought drastically home how fragile modern civilization is.

Cultural: The political and social changes sketched above are necessarily accompanied by cultural changes. Overall, received notions have become rather brittle. Quests reflecting this situation are particularly evident in contemporary *art*. Styles are blended, the past quoted and recontextualized, and so on. Electronic data processing engenders new forms and effects, ranging from installations through music and sound to theater and performance through to feature films. Overall, an intimate connection between art and economics