International Report

Recovering Practical Theology: Two Disciplines on the Way to Each Other at the University of Vienna

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1. Initial Situation and Context: The Situation in Austria

1.1 "Practical Theology" – Plural in Self-conceptions, Topics, Methods, Organizational Forms

As an autonomous, scholarly discipline, "practical theology" does not exist in Austria, neither in the five Roman Catholic faculties (at the state universities in Vienna,[1] Graz,[2] Innsbruck,[3] Salzburg,[4] and the Catholic Theological Private University in Linz[5]), nor at the Philosophical-Theological Academy of the St. Pölten Diocese[6] and the Benedict XVI Papal Philosophical-Theological Academy in Heiligenkreuz.[7] Instead, there were and are many autonomous disciplines considered to be more or less practically-theologically structured or close to practical theology, and that were and are traditionally allocated to an institute. Whether these individual disciplines are considered practical-theological, or whether they are considered linked to this theological approach, strongly depends in individual disciplines on the self-conception of the professional scholars involved. The situation is somewhat different at the Protestant theological faculty at the University of Vienna. An Institute of Practical Theology (and Religious Psychology) has existed there since 1922.[8] The term "practical theology" is used in the sense of an independent subject as a "theory of action which turns practice itself into the subject of reflection."[9] Various sub-disciplines are also included, however.

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1 Cf. http://www.univie.ac.at.
2 Cf. http://www.uni-graz.at.
3 Cf. http://www.uibk.ac.at.
4 Cf. http://www.uni-salzburg.at.
5 Cf. http://www.ktu-linz.ac.at.
6 Cf. http://www.pth-stpoelten.at.
7 Cf. http://hochschule-heiligenkreuz.at.
8 Cf. https://public.univie.ac.at/index.php?id=sitemap16.
9 See the profile of the Institute at its webpage (n. 8).

On the one hand, "practical theology" therefore designates a methodologically-oriented umbrella term as a formal object, a "disciplinary catch-all" in which various disciplines (may) collect: pastoral theology, pastoral psychology, pastoral sociology, pastoral medicine, pastoral care, proclamation, homiletics, church administration, liturgical scholarship and sacramental theology, moral theology, church law, religious pedagogy, religious and disciplinary didactics, catechetic studies, Christian social teaching, social ethics, and charitable service studies. Of them all, pastoral theology (including proclamation, pastoral care, and homiletics) is the only one that, as a rule, defines itself as practical-theological. The other courses mentioned in the bundle may also be considered as oriented in a systematic-theological or historical manner (such as church law, liturgical scholarship, or moral theology) or as not automatically theological, being subjects understood autonomously within a scholarly area that defines their proximity or distance to theology very differently (such as religious pedagogy or social ethics). This is perhaps why the terms "practical theology" and "pastoral theology" are often used synonymously in German. That equation is not at all legitimate, however, due to the variety of subjects that can be attributed to practical theology. On the other hand, all practical-theological subjects have human behavior in all of its complexity as their material object, perceived and reflected from the perspective of theology. The closer determination of which action is subjected to theological reflection can then be very different, from simply any human practice to a primary concentration on ecclesial action. Corresponding theories of action are similarly plural.

The discussion of an interdisciplinary-integrative concept of practical theology structured in terms of cooperation and integration of the multiple practical-theoretical subjects has been neglected in German-speaking areas. This concern gave intensive impetus to a discussion in the 1970s about the appropriate self-conception of practical theology. The five-volume *Manual of Pastoral Theology*, published during the 1960s and1970s, attempted to gather some of those disciplines under one roof.[10] Currently, systematic reflection on this issue is barely perceptible.[11] Although the two-volume *Manual of Practical Theology* from 1999 does indeed contain scholarly, theoretical considerations of the concept of practical theology,[12] as does the Festschrift for Ottmar Fuchs that is devoted to the future of practical

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10 Franz-Xaver Arnold/Ferdinand Klostermann, eds., Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie, 5 vol., Freiburg i. Br. (Herder), 1964-1972.

11 This is the critique of: Norbert Mette, Wünsche an die Praktische Theologie, in: Doris Nauer/Rainer Bucher/Franz Weber. eds., Praktische Theologie. Bestandsaufnahme und Zukunftsperspektiven, Festschrift Ottmar Fuchs zum 60. Geburtstag, Stuttgart (Kohlhammer) 2005.

12 Herbert Haslinger, ed., Handbuch Praktische Theologie, 2 vol., Mainz (Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag), 1999.

theology[13] and the *Introduction to Catholic Practical Theology* by Norbert Mette,[14] in specific practices it is primarily pastoral theologians who, as authors, establish the topics and contents. The other subjects are all but unrepresented in practical-theological discourse, or take this up within their own special discipline.

Due to social and ecclesial differentiation processes and related complex challenges, the variety of disciplinary self-conceptions and the ways they approach content and method, along with their related organizational forms, have resulted in extreme scholarly differentiation among the various disciplines. Highly pluralized and specialized disciplinary discourses, practical-theological knowledge whose state of questioning is rich and inestimable in quantity, and methodological indeterminacy and variety have become the strength of practical-theological scholarship – and its weakness.

This is because this development has also entailed a corresponding fragmentation of individual practical-theological disciplines, and not only these, at the theological faculties, and not only those in Austria. This threatens losing sight of the unity of theology. The practical reference and relevance of theology is weakened, as well as the exchange between practical-theological reflective knowledge and current discussions and urgent questions in church and school concerning education, society, and culture. In addition, the lack of cooperation between and integration of individual practical-theological disciplines, and not only these, entails that individual disciplines cannot know enough about one another or about the current state of research and questioning, in light of the quantity and differentiation of the individual disciplines, and often cannot even fully know what kind of time resources are needed to remain current in an individual discipline. Thus, the potential for developing the synergies and differences between the disciplines can scarcely be sufficiently noticed. Topics regarding new challenges in church and society are then easily overlooked or not handled cooperatively enough from different perspectives, and the joint (theological) horizon becomes lost from view. Individual disciplines lead their own separate academic lives. Even if individual border-crossers and universalists eliminate this separation and make sense of the autonomy of individual disciplines, of course the objectives and duties, reference and target groups, and professional fields and communication partners of the individual disciplines are different. The professional discourses of the respective disciplines (all too isolated from one another), their differentiations and plural self-conceptions, dependence on the personal approaches,

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13 Doris Nauer/Rainer Bucher/Franz Weber, eds., Praktische Theologie. Bestandsaufnahme und Zukunftsperspektiven, Festschrift Ottmar Fuchs zum 60. Geburtstag, Stuttgart (Kohlhammer) 2005.

14 Norbert Mette, Einführung in die katholische Praktische Theologie, Darmstadt (WBG) 2005.

interests, and preferences or dislikes of individual representatives of a discipline, and structural cooperation that is still insufficiently secured (being fragmented into individual institutes) quickly turns the variety and methodological indeterminacy of practically-theologically conceived disciplines into a disadvantage. Practical-theological disciplines that in a special way could bring a service to church and theology, society and culture, can carry out their tasks only in a limited way (for example, arbitrating between the discourses of science and theology on the one hand, and society, culture, and church on the other; or the mediation and communication of theory and practice).

Whether one now identifies practical theology with pastoral theology as "communication of the gospel" (Norbert Mette) or as a "theology of human practice" (*Manual of Practical Theology*), those who see themselves as practical theologians agree that practical theology is not a scholarship of application or conversion that serves to convert, mediate, or translate the contents of other theological disciplines into practice in a unilinear fashion. Instead, they consider it to be an independent theory of human practice. Differences arise when the question is posed about how practical theology qualifies as theology. While some place a value on pursuing theology itself, that is, having a critical-normative claim apart from the descriptive-phenomenological approach to human practice (Mette in Dortmund), others see practical theology as a "theory of experienced religion," a type of "religious contemporary study" (Wilhelm Gräb in Berlin). In any case, however, practical theology proceeds from life, from action, from the practice of concrete people, and places these in the center of its reflection.

1.2 New Opportunities: Consolidating University Institutes

In the course of the reform at Austrian universities following the Universities Act of 2002 (whose objective was the integration of the smallest scholarly units into larger organizational units for greater efficiency and reduced administration), various new organizational and cooperative forms developed at individual faculties during the past years, in individual disciplines that were considered to have a "practical-theological" orientation. These reforms, which forced increased cooperation and networking, were initially adopted not only positively, but also because the reforms were hierarchically regulated and imposed, scarcely participatory in structure, and primarily motivated by financial reasons.

However, resistance to university demands for the increased cooperation that is indispensable for scholarly politics in an internationalized scholarly field was due to all too human reasons. Along with the process of change, unquestioned self-evident truths, power relations, and vested interests become visible. Critical self-reflection, reorientation, and change become necessary. Change always means a loss of favorite habits that

have long ceased to be questioned. In addition, cooperative, interdisciplinary research in teams is still new territory even in practical theology, a scholarly field that still focuses on the individual scholar and her or his highest achievements and rewards these with a career.

Despite many concerns, some Austrian faculties have taken advantage of these reforms to rethink and change their self-conception, their way of working, and their organizational form, making something fruitful out of the enforced reform. Therefore, there has been an "Institute of Practical Theology" in *Innsbruck* since 2006, to which the disciplines of "intercultural pastoral theology and mission scholarship," catechetic and religious pedagogy, religion didactics, and church law are assigned.[15] Proceeding from people's experiences in their specific life situations and fields of practice, a holistic theology is being developed that embraces the perspective of a "culture of life," whose specific competencies are shaped by "communicative theology" and "intercultural and interreligious theology." Cooperative research projects and courses of study have led to greater significance and esteem for the practical-theological disciplines on the faculty, which traditionally had been strongly stamped by a dominance of philosophical and systematic disciplines, even if the new interdisciplinary-oriented self-conception was not acknowledged and appreciated by all disciplines in the same manner.[16] Such cooperation was facilitated by an interdisciplinary research center called "Religion, Violence, Communication, World Order" that already existed in Innsbruck, in which various theological disciplines participated. The "Practical Theology Discipline" in *Salzburg* includes pastoral theology, religious pedagogy, church law, moral theology, Christian social study, and liturgical scholarship and sacramental theology.[17] Individual scholars exchange their work in common research discussions. There is a common series of lectures and discussions on "Theology in the Signs of the Times" on current social and religious topics. A practical theology discipline was founded in *Graz* without consolidating individual institutes.[18] Its objective is supporting the common interests of the faculty as well as research and teaching cooperation, on a voluntary basis guided by interests. This does not have any structural expression, however. Independent of the state university reform, there has been an "Institute of Pastoral Theology and Religious Pedagogy" in *Heiligenkreuz* since it was promoted to be a Papal Academy, whose coworkers particularly emphasize educating their students toward competence in pastoral care.[19] Individual practical-theological disciplines continue to be repre-

15 Cf. http://www.uibk.ac.at/praktheol/profil.
16 Quotations from Franz Weber, Professor of Pastoral Theology in Innsbruck.
17 Cf. http://www.uni-salzburg.at/portal/page?_pageid=150,121243&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL.
18 Cf. http://www-theol.uni-graz.at/cms/ziel/26983/DE.
19 Cf. http://hochschule-heiligenkreuz.at/IV-Pastoraltheologie-und-Religionspaedagogik.pastoraltheologie-religionspaeda.0.html.

sented by individual institutes at the Private University in *Linz*[20] and the Philosophical-Theological Academy in *St. Pölten*,[21] which were likewise not affected by the university reforms. Thus, the situation concerning practical theology in Austria, its self-conception, organizational forms, methodologies, and main emphases, remains plural.

1.3 The Institute of Practical Theology in Vienna

There has been a new "Institute of Practical Theology" since 1 January 2007 at the Roman Catholic theological faculty of the University of Vienna.[22] It houses two disciplines: pastoral theology and proclamation as well as religious pedagogy and catechetics. Before that, the two disciplines were autonomous institutes, each with its own research and teaching profile and independent development plans. The Chair of Pastoral Theology in Vienna is the oldest in the world and has existed since 1774. The Chair of Religious Pedagogy and Catechetics was established in 1967. Here as well, the impetus for the merger was the intention internal to the university to establish larger interdisciplinary research units in the area of the Catholic theological faculty. From the university's standpoint, this had primarily administrative and thereby related financial reasons, but also scholarly-organizational ones. In times of increasingly complex social problems and challenges that make cooperation indispensable, all disciplines, including (and especially) theology, are compelled to adapt their research practice to interdisciplinary, multi-perspective, cooperative, and teamwork principles of organization and work.

Both institutes, which were the only ones in the faculty prepared to consider the merger process, were concerned from the outset with combining the organizational challenge with that of content. The new Institute of Practical Theology should not only bear that name but also be one. In order to structure the merger process professionally, the university financed consultation by an organizational developer. With her support, the employees involved (two professors, seven assistants, and two secretaries including outside workers) took a year to develop a common general model as well as a common organizational and administrative structure, including new procedural rules. Their goal was, on the one hand, to secure the autonomy of the disciplines and, on the other, to develop a common self-conception, a common identity, not only as an organizational unit but also in terms of developing an understanding of practical theology that was accessible to all. Both disciplines were to benefit from the merger in

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20 Cf. http://www.ktu-linz.ac.at/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=479 &Itemid=152.

21 Cf. http://www.pth-stpoelten.at.

22 Cf. http://www.univie.ac.at/ktf/content/site/pt/home/index.html. At this homepage there is a presentation of the institute's scholars and the main topics in research and teaching.

terms of scholarship and of teaching and research, and to succeed in the internal discourse of the respective scholarly communities of their own disciplines. It was and is a matter of further developing their respective professional horizons, but also of developing a common horizon, without thereby losing their own focus and competence merging themselves into a falsely understood unity that veiled and leveled out differences. Thus, from the beginning of the merger process it was a matter of bringing the security of autonomy and difference into tension and balance by developing cooperation, solidarity, and togetherness. Insofar as the administration and employees of both institutes could from the outset consider the anticipated differences and associated resistances and conflicts between the two disciplines as a place of learning and positive challenge, productive work was assured, although thereby rich with conflict.

After a year, the institute had a commonly developed general model,[23] in the multilevel development of which all the employees were involved, including the integration of external teachers and those on leave of absence from the institute, through appropriate possibilities for participation. The past year of 2007 served to put into operation concretely and implement gradually the principles of the general model in research and teaching (such as the conception of cooperative research projects, study courses, and meetings). Further, it was a matter of developing and/or consolidating new forms of organization and communication. Common spaces for scholarly reflection and discourse were to be set up and a common institutional culture was to be created, a process that is still continuing.

The development of a common development plan up to 2010 is slated for the coming year. Whither and how will the institute have developed by 2010? Furthermore, we are in a process of quality assurance for teaching (one-quarter of the faculty's teachers are located in our institute, which meant 250 studying in the 2007 winter semester alone) in which we develop criteria whereby "good," high quality, and lasting practical-theological teaching can exist. A common, interdisciplinary publication on "The Future of Practical Theology in Religiously Changed Times" is being prepared. We linked the founding of the institute to an opening symposium on this topic in early May 2007. It was attended by about one hundred experts in pastoral theology and religious pedagogy as well as other theological and scholarly disciplines, and practitioners from ecclesial and pastoral fields, schools and educational institutions from a dozen European countries. The symposium served not only to introduce and represent us but also as an impetus for internal scholarly development. The results will be published in 2008, combined with internal discussions on the concept of practical theology and its relevance in selected topical

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23 The full text of this general model is at: http://www.univie.ac.at/ktf/content/site/pt/leit-bild/index.html.

areas (such as the relationship of systematic and practical theology, the relationship of religion and politics from a practical-theological perspective, education and practical theology, young adults, and contemporary ritual culture and liturgy).

2. Difference as a Resource and Place of Learning

The differences between both institutes, now disciplines, at the outset of the merger process were not slight, since both of them had and have strongly distinctive focuses in research and teaching. The discipline of pastoral theology, with its intense, productive research prominent in the media, and the discipline of religious pedagogy, intensely active in occupational preparatory training and education and with so much mandatory teaching that it can only manage the task with a large number of external contract teachers, are often at full capacity and overloaded. In addition, there are great differences in the way of working, organizational form, and in the culture of communication and everyday culture. The one is strongly geared toward goal orientation, effectiveness, and a focus on results, while the other is strongly oriented to participation, sustainability, self-reflection, and a focus on process.

In the end, there are content differences. The focus in the discipline of pastoral theology is on empirical religious and value research, noting in its 2004 development plan the "research of the development of religious, spiritual and ethical dimensions of modern cultures in German-speaking areas and with emphasis on Eastern and Central Europe." In addition, pastoral theology includes research closely aimed at application, improved practice, and developing specific options for action, expressed in a strong, practical intervention of scholarly practice in political and pastoral areas (such as scholarly practical consultation and accompaniment of concrete projects like a "youth church," political consultation, and community development). Viennese pastoral theology stands for "productive, critically loyal intervention" and participation in concrete projects (by way of engagement in committees and projects). It has a sociological focus and considers its subject primarily in terms of social and political networking. The development plan makes this clear by naming concrete objectives, duties, and intentions.

For its own part, the development plan of religious pedagogy asks how "religious and ethical education and learning processes in pluralistic society within the horizon of globalization are or can be understood and conceived." It poses the question about the "perception of difference and dealing with it justly (religion, culture, sex, 'disability')." The emphases of Viennese religious pedagogy are intercultural and interreligious learning; the question of justice and (structural) power; and the topics of gender as well as school development and religion (where it is a question of

how religion can be shown, carried out, and promoted as an explicit and implicit reality in schools and their structures, and of how schools can structurally develop to become a good place of learning and living, and which role religion can play therein).[24] In addition, the area of religious pedagogy works on the development of a center for teaching methodology for Catholic religion, to which a "learning workshop" already in the present structure will belong. Religious pedagogy is also engaged locally, intervening in a critical-loyal way, but less in the mode of concrete recommendations than in the mode of guiding and promoting self-reflective learning processes and formulating important, often forgotten, and unanswered questions. It is oriented to its subject and considers society in light of this, with a strong option for children and youth. The difference between the two disciplines in theory and practice is thus already evident even in the different linguistic formulations in the development plans: in pastoral theology, an indicative thesis language expression, while in religious pedagogy the question mode predominates.

Thus workers of the institutes were confronted from the outset with a great diversity. Seemingly banal questions arose. What are the others actually doing? How and why are they doing it differently? They had to admit how little they knew each other, even though they were working as next-door neighbors. It was a matter of showing their cards, letting others look at their own research and teaching, letting them critically inquire and question, seeking commonalities without manufacturing or forcing them artificially. It was and is a matter of perceiving differences, naming them, and enduring them, without using them as an argument against merger. Learning on the boundaries that were thereby experienced was not always easy for all concerned. Resistance and conflict were and are often companions. The process was always accompanied by the disciplinary and personal concern: Can we be with one another at all? What should have continuity, and what should not?

3. Experiences, Discoveries, Consequences

3.1 Irritation, Uncertainty, Self-assurance

Without glossing over the difficulties, false steps, and conflicts, the process of merger has gone well up until now and proves again and again to be a challenging opportunity for development, learning, and self assurance, not only for teaching and research in individual disciplines but also for individual scholars. Since everyone is compelled (in the truest sense of the word) to pause because of the perspectives, questions, and irritations of the other group, every discipline and worker can be assured of and

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24 Cf. www.lebens.werte.schule.at.

develop their own implicitly and explicitly self-evident quality. In regular, thematically-structured team meetings, which are largely relieved of tedious organizational questions owing to appropriate information technology, we learn through concrete subjects (such as research projects of individual colleagues, common publication projects, and questions about the quality of teaching) to perceive and think from the perspective of the other discipline about social and religious realities to be researched. Following the thinking of the other disciplinary perspective is thus gradually internalized, without turning pastoral theologians into religious pedagogues, or vice-versa.

This is irritating because one discovers "blind spots," such as pastoral theology when it notices how little the question of education is a pastoral topic, or religious pedagogues when pastoral theology asks about the relationship of school and church. Exchange can also be unsettling. Do not pastoral theologians always know too quickly what is to be done without first investigating precisely and carefully? Do religious pedagogues succeed in letting their many questions then become relevant for and oriented to action? Yet interdisciplinary discourse also opens up new and exciting horizons. Does not pastoral theology need a community didactic, and does it sufficiently take on the topics of migration and religious pluralism? In turn, sometimes commonalities are discovered where no one had expected them, such as remarkable approaches to community development in pastoral theology, while religious pedagogy again works on school development programs, both of which are systematic viewpoints that also require fundamental theological reflection and are able to stimulate and question each other. Alternatively, if one considers the question of pastoral care within schools from the perspective of both disciplines, entirely new questions arise. What responsibility does the church have for school in the political, public sector? How can religion teachers systematically and structurally introduce into the church their experiences with the life and faith situation of children and youth, thus making the school a place of learning for the church? Does pastoral theology have sufficient liturgical-didactic competencies in times of liturgical crisis? Do both know at all sufficiently about the forms and types of celebrations of modern contemporaries, about contemporary Sunday culture, in order to be able to connect at all with the reality of people? The merger process opens up a welter of new research questions.

The situation in teaching is similar. The didactic competence of religious pedagogy unsettles pastoral theology. Are we teaching in our study courses so that students are actually sufficiently capable to make their theological knowledge relevant to action and sustainably develop the needed practical-theological competencies for their working life? Are we teaching so that they become capable of carrying out independent practical reflection? From the other side, the inquiry from pastoral theology about the relationship of religious pedagogy to theology and church aroused a

justified resistance to re-theologizing religious pedagogy and re-catechizing religious instruction. Naturally, however, it is also irritating that such a relationship must actually be rethought in religiously changing times, and how it can become a topic in education.

3.2 Process Changes Identities and Self-conceptions

The merger process is certainly not at all completed with the development of a common general model and the organizational merging or founding of an institute. Only then do the captivating questions begin. How does one concretize and put into operation the common visions and intentions that are needed in order cautiously to approach a common horizon for practical theology and give content to it? Which common projects in research does one develop, and how does one go about that?

We decided at the outset not to develop the concept and methodology of practical theology primarily in an abstract theoretical space on the meta-level, but to realize and obtain such a horizon on the basis of concrete questions at the intersection of theory and practice, accompanied by a multilayered, self-assured, scholarly-theoretical reflection processes. Thus, the work on the publication about our opening symposium is also the project in which we at the institute are working on and developing our implicit and explicit terminological concepts and methodological conditions. Another common project is an interdisciplinary study of the question of the interrelation of religion, migration, and integration, a research topic that is unplowed soil for pastoral theology. Yet another is the topic of pastoral liturgy, in which the concept of aesthetic religious pedagogy is confronted with pastoral questions (and vice versa), often virgin territory for both disciplines.

The plurality of approaches to practical theology internal to the institute was and is also evident within the scope of common research, not only between but also within the disciplines. Thus, the orientation to sociology is central to the one discipline in the methodical step of *kairology* (the systematically-structured scientific perception of social, cultural, and religious reality as the first practical-theological step), whereas the other discipline stands mainly in conversation with the area of modern art and culture. The former works empirically, the latter hermeneutically.

Regarding *criteriology* (the explanation and interpretation of attained perceptions on the basis of theological criteria), the one is oriented more strongly to a (theological) concept of righteousness, to political and kingdom of God theologies, whereas the other treats the question of perception in a strongly salvation-historical and soteriological way, in terms of ecclesiology or through a theology of religious pluralism. It became and becomes clear that these explanatory schemata are found explicitly and implicitly. Often the scope of explanation has implicit conditions that are noticeable only within interdisciplinary discussion.

Regarding *praxeology* (the formulation of concrete criteria or options for action), the one is oriented more strongly to ecclesial challenges, whereas the other asks about the relevance for society. By these differentiation processes, the plurality of places and associated perspectives from which a person or discipline pursues theology also became and becomes ever clearer. The question also arises as to the meaning of reflecting theologically from the standpoint of a scholarly institute. What does it mean if an academic institute arrives at an option for people in precarious life situations when, as scholars, they belong to the socially privileged class? Have we not ourselves "blind spots" there, as well as methodological ones? Who, for example, are our interview partners in qualitative interviews? How can our knowledge become truly useful for these people? How does one begin a dialogue with them? Something similar applies to the question of options. For whom are we pursuing practical theology: for children, youth, the poor, immigrants, or for decision-makers, disseminators, holders of social and religious power in society, in order to persuade them to make decisive changes? Can one, and how can one, bring together both perspectives at all? Does not the dependence upon third-party funding also corrupt the option for people in precarious life situations? How far can one cooperate with political parties?

Thus already through a few staff in a discipline whose work is methodologically similar, an unbelievable variety of implicit and explicit concepts of practical theology becomes clear. How does one deal with preserving the strengths of this diversity, working on the weaknesses, securing the freedom of research, and at the same time struggling for a common horizon? The merger process thus leads in a first phase to a growing perceptibility of the diversity and heterogeneity of individual approaches and to a process of differentiation and pluralization, which is then to be brought into a common framework.

It requires time and space to reflect and learn to understand one another and oneself, structured and well-moderated communication processes, as well as administration favorable to and competent for pluralization, which promotes and supports differentiation and individuality of scholarly approaches, and at the same time keeps the goal of a common horizon in sight, and ensures equally an orientation to processes and results. Particularly in the process of transition from old traditions to a renewed self-understanding and new practice, sensitive zones of conflict thereby become clear (often unconsciously, only becoming clear along the way). When old projects have expired, for example, it is then necessary to see to it when developing new research projects that these are tailored to the person and his/her research interests and questions but at the same time also correspond to the institute's profile. Securing the balance between freedom and commonality thereby becomes the challenge for leaders and staff. Collegial discussions, assistance, and common agreement on goals become necessary, as well as the development of an appropriate culture

of conflict and negotiation, independence, and the ability to hold in tension personal interests in scholarly progress with institutional interests. New, clear, and transparent work profiles for staff are needed, as well as accompanying measures for socializing new staff into the institute's structure. The balance in particular of promoting young scholars, supporting the planning of their scholarly professional biographies, and at the same time working on shaping the institute, also places before leaders new challenges and requires corresponding competencies.

Thus the merger process leads to changing the self-understanding of the administration of a scholarly establishment. Administration becomes responsible again and again in such acts of balance to perceive zones of conflict sensitively and often to address them, to encourage them but also to shape and moderate them, and thereby to hold them in tension, thus neither to reach a hollow compromise, nor to take sides, nor to harmonize a conflict quickly. These conflicts may be of a disciplinary but also a personal nature. Thus fears can arise that one discipline is beginning to dominate the other, or that one will lose one's present place in the institutional structure because one is engaged in topics that are farther away from the general model than others.

The institute's administration becomes a service to scholarly organization. It empowers and encourages staff toward plurality and individuality, and to develop an independent scholarly profile, their own questions, and their own theological approaches. Staff then do not serve the administration, but rather are dedicated to an institute and its profile, which is participatory and not normatively specified by the demands of a certain theological direction. The administration ensures the balance between individuality (one ultimately thinks and writes texts as an individual) and commonality of research (but in cooperation one can gain other perspectives) in the sense of a common profile. Thus the relations between staff also change: they can become egalitarian. Heterogeneity becomes a development resource for others. Certainly institutional administration then no longer means to impose mere progress and goals, but instead becomes scholarly management that requires new competencies (process shaping, conflict management, encouraging teamwork, etc.) which, in addition to specialized qualifications, one can and must acquire through "learning by doing" and continuing education. The administration thus also becomes open to criticism.

The mutual learning processes and associated inspirations promote and strengthen plurality, and that lets numerous new ideas develop for research projects and study course topics, motivating staff to more and better work. Not everything can be realized, however. Setting emphases and priorities is needed. Otherwise, the result is the recurring phenomenon of overwork: one could do so much more and so much better! All the more necessary are profile formation, self-discipline, and constant self-reflection, as well as letting go of perfectionist expectations, deliberate

creation of synergies, and seeking load reduction strategies in research and teaching. For example, it turns out to be sensible to link teaching closer to research, which in turn can integrate students closer to the research process and which stands at odds with training at universities, because the space for academic discourse is thus widened by those who should in any case stand at the center of a university, but who in times of increasing competition in research and the struggle for the best rankings are gladly overlooked: the students. Thus, for example, there is at the institute a research focus on youth, researching the religiosity of young people, which pastoral theology pursues in the Austrian Youth Values Study (a long-term project at the institute since 1990, which examines the values and attitudes of young people in Austria about work, family, relationships, politics, and religion[25]) and is an exciting topic for both disciplines, although also with specific interests. In a cooperative seminar of both disciplines on the question of perceiving the religiosity of young people in a religiously changed field, those prospectively active in church and school asked about whether and how the religiosity of youth shows itself, in order to be able to enter into conversation with them. In addition this requires more widely-developed scholarly perception sensors and methods. Despite different interest situations of school and pastoral work, both are united by the concern to be able appropriately to perceive and to understand the waywardness of youth religiosity.

The merger process, a process of personal and scholarly communication, turns out to be an adventure in communication. Experience has shown that the question of mutual information (Does everyone know everything they must know, particularly the part-time workers?) and sufficient time (scholarly and personal) for exchange and debate are key questions for successful merger. If this succeeds, then one can also deal with conflicts more appropriately and calmly. Nevertheless many things remain fragmented and incomplete. Cooperative work thus also requires appropriate leniency for errors, tolerance, generosity, and conflict skills from all involved, responding at the right time and acting in a solution-oriented way.

3.3 Struggling for a Common Horizon

In view of the plurality of our practical-theological approaches, options, and self-understandings, it soon was very clear to everyone that a common horizon is needed and why, what it can mean and what it may not mean. The horizon is needed for reasons of profile formation and

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25 Christian Friesl, ed., Experiment Jung-Sein. Die Wertewelt österreichischer Jugendlicher, Wien (Czernin) 2001; Christian Friesl/Ingrid Kromer/Regina Polak, eds., lieben.leisten. hoffen. Die Wertewelt junger Menschen in Österreich, Wien (Czernin) forthcoming 2008.

to avoid fragmentation of research and teaching at the institute. Apart from common premises, nothing is shared, and scholars act as solipsists. Such individualization may (still) be of service in traditional researchers' biographies, but it weakens scholarly effectiveness to overcome the remaining challenges in church, culture, and society. It may be that ingenious individual scholars find solutions for the remaining questions, but as a rule it will require scholarly, interdisciplinary networking.

A common horizon is also indispensable for the training of students. It is a matter of encouraging students already in scholarly professional preparatory training, whether for school, adult education, pastoral ministry, or society and economics, to reflect on practice independently and theologically, and this can only happen in the future cooperatively in teams and interdisciplinary ways. Strengthening the individual person is precisely as central as is strengthening the ability to cooperate in different contexts with each of the other professional groups. Multiperspectival thinking and abilities in plurality, discourse, and conflict are just as elementary as critical self-perception and self-reflection. Thus a common practical theological concept for university didactics also needs a common horizon. The development of such serves also here and now not for leveling and control, but actually to open first a common framework and space in which to move together – teaching, learning, and researching – as a common reference point, aligning goal, guidepost, and orientation amidst constant change.

3.4 Taboos

Within the framework of such a development process, it is interesting to discover and uncover scholarly taboos, taboos in scholarly practice, and taboos in the work organization at an institute. Some such taboos that we have disturbed and have had thoroughly positive experiences working out are presented here.

Researching and teaching together presuppose that one shows one's own research, methods, ideas, premises, didactic concepts, and teaching styles to others, and thereby makes oneself exposed and open to criticism, since aside from strengths, the weaknesses and deficits (all of them!) of approaches and styles become perceptible. In a culture of mutual esteem, with the willingness to learn from mistakes, and in a culture exercising critique that approaches the resources of others sincerely and not tactically, lenient about errors, this is a lesser problem.

Indeed, this presupposes that as a scholar one can admit not knowing everything, not always being up to the minute even in one's own discipline, let alone in another discipline. However, statements like "I don't know" or "I made a mistake" surely come from the lips of scholars only with great difficulty, especially in times of worsening competition where it is a matter of positioning and marketing oneself in order to establish a career.

At the same time, admitting to ignorance and errors, and acknowledging limits, could minimize conflicts.

For example, when pastoral theology complains of the lack of theology in religious pedagogy, one formulates this differently if one knows its history, struggling for autonomy in light of the hegemonic claims of the church and its frequent lack of sensitivity in light of the specific school situation in a religiously changed society, and thus if one learns to understand its justified concern about falsely conceived retheologizing. If one does not know and perceive all that, one becomes bent on unnecessary conflicts and once again awakens the impression of making a power claim over religious pedagogy, and thus contradicting a legitimate concern. Thus a central learning experience of merger recommends itself: before one exercises critique and makes demands on the other discipline, first actively inquire about the internal logic in order to understand the implicit concerns, cares, and prerequisites. Such inquiries serve both disciplines, and the concern.

Alternatively, it can be stressful for pastoral theologians to be observed by religious pedagogues about their own didactics. Yet if one turns this into an opportunity to learn for oneself, one profits from the competence of others and makes new discoveries. For example, I thus discovered in an interdisciplinary seminar that decelerated learning that focuses more on participation and does not always offer the same answers to students' questions or make concrete proposals for action, but instead poses questions in light of the students' questions, can secure the learning material in a much more lasting way than pushing through under pressure as much material as possible. It is helpful for all these productive irritations if scholars, teachers, and researchers think of themselves as learners who learn from staff, students, continuing education, and their own mistakes.

A further taboo is the question of individual, vocational interests with regard to research and teaching, that is, the profile of one's own scholarly work. To broach the topic of balance between individual and institutional interests and to maintain it is a delicate, sensitive matter. A culture is needed here in which personal interests (career, resources) are legitimate and can be formulated transparently and honestly, and also be made an explicit topic by the administration (promotion of aspiring talent). On the other hand, one must be able to expect of staff that they develop a consciousness that their work serves not only themselves, but also that it relates to the common good and in a certain way serves everyone, even colleagues and the institute. At the same time, the administration must learn that staff are dedicated to the institute, not personal interests. Only in this balance can one ensure that individual interests do not appear obscured as objective arguments, that staff do not become exploited or, on the other hand, that staff use an institute primarily for their personal advancement. Only in this way can objective topics be handled objectively and personal ones personally. Monopolies on topics and research are to

be avoided, whereby it is incongruous at the same time to commit oneself to a lecture topic for which a colleague is more qualified. To enable one another mutual contacts and access to networks is an important dimension of common scholarly life and mutual support and encouragement. One must surely be aware that such cooperation takes place in an environment of worsening competition for resources and recognition, and therefore the range of tension from cooperation to competition (a highly sensitive taboo) must also be considered.

The tension between individual versus institutional interests is also relevant in regard to planning for teaching. How does one ensure freedom of teaching, and the institute's teaching profile? We have developed a teaching profile with topical emphases as a framework, analogous to the research emphases, which can provide a framework for profile formation in teaching, but must also remain flexible for new topics. Moreover, in teaching there are the students' interests to be taken into account. An institute forum takes place once in the semester in which students can present their concerns. Together with the students, we will also be developing and evaluating criteria for the quality of teaching at the institute.

In Austria, still a very highly structured academic environment, there was also the question: Whom do the assistants and the secretaries serve, and for whom do they work? Among us at the institute there is this rule: They serve the institute and the attainment of its common goals and tasks, which are jointly developed and prioritized. This principle not only furthers egalitarian cooperation on an equal footing, but it also serves to resource optimization and enhances independence and motivation to work. It does not weaken but rather strengthens the possibilities of learning with the respective professors. The main focus of authority shifts away from function towards competence.

The mode of operation of the secretaries has also changed. Both secretaries organize their work largely themselves by means of transparent criteria from a work and task profile, which the administration (including supervisory support) develops with them. It is not for nothing that our secretaries won the University of Vienna's 2006 Annual Prize for administrative work. That it is indispensable that independently functioning secretaries facing organizational and cultural change at the institute should be paid adequately and in a performance-oriented way, is just as obvious as the fact that the secretaries belong to the team and can speak to and participate in decisions. The university structures and administrative procedures that can be found indeed do not always support such a concept, and are occasionally even troubling.

Just as difficult and taboo-afflicted are the irritations that the process of merger has in its effects in and on the faculty and university environment. At best, such change is not perceived at all, or within traditional perceptual patterns, but occasionally it also provokes irritation, alienation, competition, aggression, or jealousy. The reduction of the hierarchi-

cally-ordered organizational structure disturbs full professors, who then suspect so-called mid-level faculty by placing in question these professors' authority and competence or even belittling their reputation at the university and in public, because the persons with whom they speak are not sufficiently well educated. The strengthening caused through cooperation and expedited networking stokes jealousy in the faculty, university, and even public perception, as well as the suspicion that one is trying to make oneself important. The accelerated tempo, multitude of new ideas, and strengthened common identity that arise through a common process of reflection are sometimes experienced as competition or criticism. Change at an institution also irritates the self-understanding of others. Moreover, there is also the experience that the merger is experienced by others as a stimulus, a challenge to cooperate, and thus new collaborations in research and teaching arise. The irritations are also probably strongly connected with the fact that what happens within an institution is frequently not noticed outside it. How appropriate public relations can be effected here that do not promote faultfinding and proselytizing, but instead allow others to glimpse the strengths and weaknesses of the work, and the new experiences, is a topic for the future. So also is how we can learn reciprocally from other institutions.

A good example for the necessity of improved cooperation and communication with the faculty is our reflection on teaching quality at the institute. If we want to exercise our theologically grounded practical theological reflection on practice with students, we have to rely on the fact that the students are in the position to think theologically in an independent way as well as be able to transfer theological knowledge independently in a praxis context, and surely not oriented primarily to normative implementation, but instead to a hermeneutic of lived life and faith. The classical teaching practice, in lecture-mode and through exams aimed at reproducing material that is soon forgotten and that has little lasting effect due to its lack of possibilities for internalization, does not sufficiently ensure this. Since we, as practical theology as an individual discipline, direct our attention to the development of perceptual competence of lived religiosity and life, we rely on the fact that the ability to philosophize and theologize independently has been trained previously in other disciplines. This is, however, not always a given, and then theological reflection by us becomes too short or is flat and superficial. Thus, from the experiences of practical theology, the classical teaching practice of other disciplines comes into critical focus, which they then in turn defend with the accusation of the lack of theology in the practical disciplines. The tension on the one hand between the practical disciplines and on the other between systematic, philosophical, and historical disciplines, which as such is productive and creative, can then easily lead to mutual disrespect.

Not all practical theologians share this experience, since again and again there are dogmaticians and systematicians interested in concrete

practice even in the area of systematic disciplines. For instance, this cooperation functions outstandingly in Graz, where there are differences about content and method that have only a good effect on the academic discourse. It is precisely the practical disciplines that influenced the development of the curriculum and the faculty. In Innsbruck, the university research emphasis "World Order, Religion, Violence" and the faculty research emphasis "Religion, Violence, Communication, World Order" overflow into a project in which systematicians and practitioners cooperate in highly productive ways and the practical disciplines are present through the research program "Communicative Theology." At other places, however, the experience is continually reported that the practical disciplines are considered "usable" or "applicable" and condescendingly regarded as lightweight. As a conversation partner to development, practical theology is insufficiently noticed and taken seriously not only in practice but even also by theology itself. In particular, religious pedagogy still feels this in a special way, which one sees, for example, in the discipline's low rating (three ECTS [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System] points in the entire theology course of study) in the new Austrian curriculum. The question of religious learning, of religious education, key questions for the future of transforming churches in Europe, are perceived as school topics, as topics for children and youth, not as topics of theological relevance. Religious pedagogy and partly also pastoral theology are preparatory work, not automatically recognized as independent conversation partners that also can contribute to theological progress.

The new curricula that were designed in the framework of the Bologna proceedings offer new opportunities here, though, since they necessitate modularized cooperation. Mutual theological fertilization can thus be further developed, as can that of university didactics. Seminars perhaps then need not always be only a series of presentations, but can support independent theologizing and a common scholarly discourse, enriched by exercises, structured questions, and guided phases of reflection and integration. If, as Bologna requires, one thinks from the perspective of the competencies of students, many questions arise and the limits of classical teaching and learning soon become evident. Do we know our students' starting points at all sufficiently? What resources, knowledge, experience, and questions do they already bring with them? How can one let them and their heterogeneity become a relevant resource for the community of academic discourse? Which implicit understanding of theology is actual, implicitly distinct in which kind of teaching?

Our experience with practical theological teaching is that a certain understanding of theology is always conveyed in the kind of teaching. Teaching that is primarily aimed at lectures regards students as objects from whom something is missing and must be provided; theology appears primarily as a norm that imparts this. If one proceeds from the students' view, however, who bring along knowledge, experience, competence, and

above all questions relevant to the present and future, inputs and imparting knowledge (hence also lectures and norms) are by no means irrelevant. To the contrary, one pays still more attention to when, how, why, and for whom one introduces which content. However, the other view of the situation changes the kind and language of theological activity, and thereby theology itself. It becomes a critical and also thoroughly normative dialogue with God, the world and people, with tradition, present and future, and is not a monologue.

There are also taboos of content. Among them is the question of the role and meaning of theology in the practical disciplines. The danger is always great of getting stalled by empirical and social scientific, hermeneutically acquired findings. Theologically, such knowledge is first qualified through theological reflection, and this begins already before and during scientifically structured perception by means of "secular" instruments. Yet how is this connection to be ensured, learned, and exercised? Practical reflection, the essential problem of practical theology, degenerates into prescription without this theological reflection on technology and the guidance of action. Strengthening the theological dimension of practical-theological disciplines without conversely ensuring the autonomy, dignity, and self-will of non-theological supplementary sciences, is among the difficult balancing acts of practical theology.

3.5 Commonalities

In the course of the development, new commonalities became and become more and more distinct, and apparent opposites proved not to be as diverse as initially assumed. We agreed on the topics formulated in the general model.[26] A cautious initial horizon for an understanding of practical theology can also be named: practical theology as a theological hermeneutic and practical reflection of lived faith and life, as distinct from the systematic perspective that could be understood as a hermeneutic of traditioned faith. Each cannot do without the other. Practical reflection requires reflection on faith traditions, and conversely a hermeneutic of traditioned faith cannot take place without reference to and being embedded in lived faith and life as an interpretive framework. Practical theology, methodologically varied and with heterogeneous theological emphases, considers first of all concrete life and faith, with a view toward beliefs, theology(ies), and their traditions.

Also common to both disciplines is the orientation and attentiveness to the faith and life of concrete people in contemporary society, culture, and church, a kind of phenomenological fundamental orientation without rash evaluating and judging. Before every theological interpretation and

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26 See above n. 23.

evaluation stands the requirement of sensitive perception and description, of understanding the waywardness of reality, and whether that now happens in a sociological or religious pedagogical way is initially not so important. In the cooperative interdisciplinary seminar "Perceiving the Religiosity of Young People," the main focus of attention, even before the development of any religious pedagogical or pastoral option for action, lay upon intensive conceptual work, self-reflection on personal understandings of religiosity, the development of targeted research issues, and sensitive methods of perception in a changed religious field – a true challenge for teachers and students alike.

The mystagogical approach also proved to be a similar connection. "God is a god with and for people," the nearness of God to people, his irrevocable bond with and love for people, and the conviction that traces of God can therefore be found in the lives and actions of people even in an apparently secular Europe, is a commonly shared fundamental conviction. This even has a connection to the pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, its fundamental option and pastoral tenor, "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the [people] of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well,"[27] and therefore also of theologians. With this, neither the difference nor the transcendence of God is negated or overlooked, God as the complete Other who will pass the final judgment on human practice. But priority is directed to the perceptual emphasis on human reality and resources, without beautifying, denying, or obscuring the defects. Before evaluation and assessment of what should be or is lacking, one pays attention to what already is, since "God always anticipates us in our actions with his grace" (Karl Rahner).

This mystagogical approach is connected with an orientation to salvation history, that is, with the hope that God is able and wishes to establish his kingdom already here and now, that people are empowered and capable of contributing thereto, and theology can be a contribution to such a practice of empowerment. It is clear that such an approach must always be aware of the temptation to overlook misery and godlessness, to play it down, or to regard human action as the cause of God's kingdom. It thus needs the critique of those who place their emphasis on God as the completely Other, unnamable, distant, and foreign, who recall the powerlessness and limits of human action, the human history of misery, and that we cannot redeem ourselves through our own action. Both approaches need one another. Without ours, the latter for its part stands in

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27 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), in: Vatican Council II, vol. 1, The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents, rev. ed., ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., Northport, N.Y. (Costello Publishing Co.) 1996, 903 (par. 1).

danger of doubling the hopelessness of the world and becoming theologically atheistic, of not believing in God's effectiveness here and now.

The topic of values has turned out to be a further interdisciplinary topic, not only with regard to those normative values which have high status in Vienna (freedom, solidarity, and justice), but also with regard to the question of research into values (what is valuable and important to people) and the theological critique of these values. Research topics in pastoral theology (empirical research into values) and the question of values clarification, learning about values, and value formation, as well as the analysis of implicit value structures in school (as religious pedagogy does), can complement each other here. Thus both disciplines can contribute from two perspectives to a critical discourse on values, which at present is highly volatile socially.

To let practical theological reflective knowledge actually become relevant to practice in church, school, society, culture, and finally also in theology, and to communicate this publicly and effectively, unites the institute's staff. The styles of such communication are very different, more or less directive, initiative, and offensive. In every case, however, the institute understands itself as a turntable of scholarly communication, reflection, and learning: between university, church, society, and culture; between theology and practice; within the theological disciplines but also including other scholarly disciplines, in particular the humanities and social sciences.

4. Roof, House, Horizon

Recovering practical theology as a common horizon at the Institute of Practical Theology is an open process. Processes of such a type are encouraged in practical theological literature and take place at various locations. It remains open as to which spatial metaphor – house, roof, or horizon – will be most appropriate for our self-understanding. Personnel changes, university and faculty developments, learning experiences, and unforeseen duties are constantly changing this process.

As an interim step, we have planned a retreat for this year with our organizational developer with the aim of evaluating the developments of the first combined year. How far have we succeeded in concretizing our general model? How have our communication structures and workflow developed? How has our space for scholarly discourse changed? Have we learned to think from the perspective of the other disciplines? In which concrete projects is this manifested? How is the administration proving to be? When founding the institute, we developed and formulated our own catalogue of criteria, under which conditions we ourselves would speak of a "successful" merger. This catalogue and the criteria of the organizational developer form the basis for further steps in the learning process of both disciplines and the development of a common identity.

Learning is not always easy. It is a challenge for scholars as well. However, it is a fundamental process of human life, and modern societies will only survive if all who live in them (people and institutions) understand themselves as learners and shape targeted and structured learning processes accordingly. If one understands the church as a learning community, and thus also theology as a learning community (as a second magisterium of the church apart from the ecclesial teaching office), then one may trust that such a process is not only a contribution to a better standing in scholarship, church, and society, but also that God himself can be effective here, opening up new horizons that can only be perceived through such cooperation. Theology can then make an indispensable contribution to the practice of the kingdom of God in church, school, education, society, and culture.

Abstract

The consolidation of the separate disciplines of pastoral theology and religious pedagogy into a single Institute of Practical Theology at the Roman Catholic theological faculty of the University of Vienna in 2007 provides the occasion for this report. The author provides an overview of the situation of practical theology in Austria, with special focus on academic institutions and their history. Extensive discussion is given to what this has meant at an everyday, operational level at the author's own institution, including the emerging insights about, tensions about, commonalities within, and prospects for practical theological research and teaching there.

Zusammenfassung

Die Gründung des Instituts für Praktische Theologie an der Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Wien im Jahr 2007, hervorgegangen aus den beiden Disziplinen Pastoraltheologie und Religionspädagogik, ist der Anlass, diesen Artikel zu verfassen. Die Autorin bietet einen Überblick über die Situation der Praktischen Theologie in Österreich unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der akademischen Institutionen und ihrer Geschichte. Ausführlich wird darüber berichtet, welche Folgen dieses für das alltägliche Arbeiten bei der Institution der Autorin selbst hat mit Blick auf die wachsenden Einsichten über das Institut, Spannungen und Gemeinsamkeiten in seiner Mitte und Aussichten für die praktisch-theologische Forschung und Lehre dort.