

Research Report

Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology

Claire Wolffeich

Introduction

The roof of the chapel at Vaughan Park, an Anglican retreat and study center in Auckland, New Zealand, rises to a point above the green landscape. Shaped like an upside down *waka*, or canoe, the tip of the roof seems to point out toward the ocean beyond. Part underground, part above ground, the chapel was built to embody a close connection to the land, a center for prayer that is visible but not dominant over the land. Within the chapel, glass windows look out over the Pacific, the sound of waves meeting the shore drift up as background music to morning prayer. Worship space blends with the surrounding land and water. The chapel design reflects an appreciation for Maori spirituality. Maori, indigenous of Aotearoa New Zealand who refer to themselves as *tangata whenua*, people of the land, perceive the land as sacred, infused by the gods with *mana*. The chapel architecture honors this sense of the sacred as it also signals a hope that diverse cultures might meet in the structure and life of the church. While the roof resembles the Maori canoe, prominent in Maori legends, the chapel doors feature European and Pacific Island figures. In this architectural vision, the particularities of cultures and context reflect the holy, making space for the sacred in their own distinct ways. The chapel points also to another place of integration. Wrapping around the exterior ring of the chapel is a modest research center, symbolizing a vision of intellectual and spiritual lives intertwined, theology enlivened by prayer at its heart, study framing prayer and worship.

The chapel at Vaughan Park provided for me a fruitful symbol and space within which to consider my own scholarly location and vocation: positioned at the intersection of practical theology and the study of spirituality, seeking to integrate study and faith, attending to the interrelationships of culture, context, church and tradition. Practical theology and spirituality interplay in my work, resonating, informing, providing perspective, suggesting fruitful methods for research and teaching. I sense that the intersection of these two disciplines can, like the chapel at Vaughan Park, open out to a more integrated practice of theology, one that perceives the interrelationship of practice and belief and that can bring diverse contemporary

contexts, communities, and cultures into a transformative dialogue with the diverse streams of the Christian tradition.

Scholars in practical theology and spirituality are beginning to come together for conversation. One important step in this process was the 2008 biennial meeting of the Association of Practical Theology, which focused on the theme: "Toward Wisdom and Transformation: Spirituality and Practical Theology." Speakers addressed the different meanings of spirituality in Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, issues and methods in research, and the complexities of teaching spiritual practices in diverse contexts, including universities, seminaries, congregations, and retreat centers. Contextualizing our own conversation, we met at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, integrating our sessions with participation in the rhythms of the Benedictine monastic prayer there.¹

Yet there is a need for more sustained dialogue and structured reflection on the relationship between spirituality and practical theology. This dialogue and reflection is critical for several reasons. First, any theology is impoverished when separated from the lived experience of faith and from critical study of that experience. Practical theology, if it is to be theology, must attend to spirituality and must develop methods appropriate to that subject matter. Moreover, the study of spirituality raises questions (for example, questions about pneumatology and the nature of religious experience) that impinge on the work of all practical theologians.

Second, practical theologians have some responsibility to address issues that are important for faith communities and wider culture. The widespread and diffuse use of the term "spirituality" in popular culture points to an interest in matters of the soul, cutting across religious traditions. Indeed, one can see a longing for something more, expressed in traditional religious terms or in the language of self-help, energy, or health. The spread of spirituality (easily noticed in popular magazines, talk shows, gift shops, and bookstores) and the multiplicity of uses of that term calls for critical theological reflection. Practical theologians are well-situated to study contemporary practice with close attention to the particularities of context, in dialogue with the historical traditions of Christian spirituality, and with an eye toward both analysis and constructive reflection.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, for example, practical theologians and religious leaders struggle to identify and nurture an incarnational spirituality in their own, highly secular context. Anglican Archbishop John Bluck describes his hope:

My claim then is that when it comes to a spirituality for Aotearoa that embraces our struggles and hopes, God is to be found in the detail.... We're accustomed to looking through telescopes to find evidence of the divine spirit in the universe.

1 Information about this meeting can be found at www.practicaltheology.org. This article develops my presentation there entitled "Dialogue of Disciplines: Practical Theology and Spirituality," St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn., April 12, 2008.

Let's spend some time looking through the microscope as well, to find that same spirit in the smallest detail of the most local, the most ordinary, the closest to home.²

For New Zealanders, this entails, among other things, grappling with their relationship to the first people of the land, the Maori. Amidst a resurgence of Maori cultural identity over the past four decades, the nation officially has embraced biculturalism and struggles to interpret and be faithful to the Treaty of Waitanga. Still, questions of culture continue to loom large and complex in society and within the church, posing significant practical theological questions. How can the structures of the church embody just relationships among Maori, *paheka* (white settlers), and recent immigrants from the Pacific islands, Iraq, and southeast Asia? How might the church create more dialogue with Maori who typically remain nominally Christian but resist institutional church participation? In what ways might Maori spirituality and Christian spirituality mutually inform one another, as reflected in, for example, practices of prayer, hospitality, and reverence for creation? Practical theologians may play an important role in helping communities to identify and think critically about the implicit and explicit spiritualities in their midst, and to live into a Christian spirituality that is faithful within their own context.

Finally, the dialogue between practical theology and spirituality is important because it stands to benefit both academic disciplines. These disciplines share some common methodological and pedagogical approaches and concerns. Dialogue between the disciplines will help to inform discussion about critical areas for research, the relationship between theory and practice, interdisciplinary methodologies, pedagogy and practice, the self-implicating nature of study, and the transformative dimension of the disciplines. These academic discussions should not happen in a vacuum, however, divorced from the lived experience of faith and from particular contexts and communities. Instead, scholarship in these fields should bring one to closer reflection on religious experience, practices, and communities (including one's own) and it should serve as a resource to those communities.

This article seeks to advance the conversation between practical theology and spirituality by outlining the current shape of the academic discipline of spirituality, highlighting points of resonance and areas for further discussion among practical theologians and scholars of spirituality, identifying several practical theological issues in spirituality, and sketching a practical theological approach to research in spirituality. I argue that spirituality should not be understood simply as a subdiscipline of practical theology but rather as a disciplinary partner whose subject matter, aims, and

2 John Bluck, "Kiwi Spirituality—long, white, and less cloudy now," address to the Association of Christian Spiritual Directors National Conference, New Zealand, August 2003.

methodologies overlap with those of practical theology in rich and mutually fruitful ways.

Defining Spirituality: From Angel Wheels to Mother Mary

One of the first questions that need to be addressed is: What is spirituality? What is the subject matter that we study? I would argue that in fact this is a practical theological question. To illustrate this point, I will sketch a picture of one context, that of Sedona, Arizona, known as the American capital of New Age spirituality, and my own brief engagement with that context. This discussion then will flow out to the scholarly literature in spirituality, showing the importance of definitional questions for the practice of faith communities and scholarship.

Angel Valley Spiritual Retreat Center lies about five miles outside of Sedona. Upon my arrival, I was given a map that outlined the location of the angel wheel, two labyrinths, twenty vortex sites and sixteen angel sites on the property. I proceeded first to the angel wheel, a circle with twelve spokes, a “wonderful tool to make your angelic connection” as one paused at one of twelve rocks bearing the names of twelve angels. Surrounding the property, says the co-founder, is the energy of different archangels: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. I was accustomed to the sight of labyrinths at Christian retreat centers, and proceeded next to walk first the seven-circuit one and then the eleven-circuit Chartres design labyrinth. The former was laid on the winter solstice of 2002, the latter dedicated on the autumnal equinox of 2007. After noticing a collection of rose-colored crystals near the labyrinth, I moved on again. The vortex sites intrigued me, and I took some time to sit at several of them, opening myself to see if I would feel the heightened awareness of the earth’s energies that the center described occurring at these spots. The identification of the twenty vortex sites occurred “after many years of international research,” according to the center website.³

The stated aims of this spiritual retreat center sound much like those of traditional Christian retreat centers: a secluded space for healing, re-energizing, and guidance, the opportunity to take time apart from the business of life. Of course, the practices of the center bear an implicit or explicit theology, one that sees the goal of spiritual formation as connection with and expression of one’s True Authentic Self. The self has an innate wisdom and divinity. Co-founder Michael Hamilton said, “when there is true awakening of the divine within, it can be Christ; it can be Krishna.... It’s about each

3 www.angelvalley.org.

person finding their Christed energy within, their own Buddha energy within, their own guru energy within and being able to express and live it.”⁴

At the Center for the New Age back in downtown Sedona, clients made appointments for aura photos, psychic readings, astrological reports, past life regression, Reiki, and channeling sessions. They bought crystals and books on topics such as Kabbalah, Tarot card reading, Native American spirituality, Buddhism, and animal communication. The center website describes New Age as “a free flowing spiritual movement comprised of believers and practitioners who share beliefs integrating mind, spirit and body,” an “amalgamation of ancient and new” that is a “modern spirituality.”⁵

New Age spirituality reflects the incredible diversity of spiritualities in contemporary society. The term “spirituality” is used now by many religious communities and speaks to many individuals who resist institutional religion. One text describes a range of “secular spiritualities” included in chapters on scientific inquiry, sports, social justice movements, gay rights activism, and the arts.⁶ What should one make of this great variety of spiritualities? Does it reflect the abounding grace of a creative God, or the delusions and confusions of contemporary persons? While visiting the Sedona sites, practical theological questions flowed through my brain. Should I, a Roman Catholic, participate in the Center for the New Age prayer circle, led by psychic Angel Lightfeather, a gentle woman who to my surprise called upon her “beloved Jesus and mother Mary” as she spoke about energy fields and invited all benevolent beings to enter the room with us? To use terms suggested by Browning, what “identities, nonidentities, and analogies”⁷ exist between New Age spiritual practices and “normative” Christian practices? What explicit or implicit challenges do New Age seekers raise to Christian practices, traditions, teachings, and style? How do, and how should, the Christian churches in Sedona engage the New Age spirituality so prevalent in the context?

Why Definitions Matter: Spirituality, Public Life, and the Work of Justice

Academic discussions about definition may prove helpful here. First of all, it is useful to distinguish between spirituality as experience or practice and spirituality as the study of that experience or practice. Bernard McGinn de-

4 Michael Hamilton, interview with Lane M. Badger, “The Angels of Angel Valley: An Interview with Michael and Amayra Hamilton,” *Four Corners Magazine* (February/March 2007), 30. Posted on Angel Valley Spiritual Retreat Center website.

5 www.sedonanewagecenter.com.

6 Peter H. Van Ness, *Spirituality and the Secular Quest* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996).

7 Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 68.

scribes these as, respectively, “first-order” and “second-order” spirituality.⁸ Walter Principe actually identifies three different though related levels of spirituality: first, the “real or existential level;” second, the formulation of a teaching about the lived reality” as expressed in multiple schools or traditions of spirituality; and third, the scholarly study of the first and second levels, that is, the discipline of spirituality.⁹ In this article, I discuss all three levels, arguing that practical theology must attend both to the animating center of lived faith as well as to the scholarly discipline of spirituality.

Scholars have not agreed upon any single definition of spirituality, much as there is not consensus about a definition of practical theology in the scholarly literature. Instead, there is, in my view, a healthy and lively discussion about such questions, with multiple definitions advanced, sometimes challenged and refined, often complementing one another. In my own work, I have proposed several different definitions, each of which I think are true, but which reflect a different emphasis in the Christian life: attentiveness and prayer, humility before Christ, perception of divine presence and absence, Eucharistic perception of grace-in-fragmentation, nurture of community, embodiment of excellence/virtue, discernment and living into vocation. I would suggest that the question of how we define spirituality is less an issue to be resolved and more a practical theological question for continual reflection, one that needs to be brought to our study of diverse contexts. How we implicitly understand spirituality can have direct effect on the well-being of individuals, congregations and communities, political life, and the environment. The question of definition warrants serious critical attention.

Faith communities need to gain clarity about how they and their own traditions define and embody spirituality, both in terms of their teachings and the practices that, in the words of Dorothy Bass, constitute “a way of life abundant”¹⁰ in those communities. The question of definition is far from a purely academic one. It is directly relevant to spiritual formation ministries in congregations, in contexts of theological education and ministry preparation, and in the work of retreat and spirituality centers. How we understand and practice “spiritual formation” depends on how we understand and practice “spirituality.” In congregations, retreat centers, and schools of theological education, faculty, students, congregation members,

8 Bernard McGinn, “The Letter and the Spirit: Spirituality as an Academic Discipline,” in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 29.

9 Walter Principe, “Toward Defining Spirituality,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 12/2 (spring 1983): 135–137. In this article, Principe also provides a helpful history of the use of the term “spirituality” and its varied meanings.

10 Dorothy C. Bass, “Ways of Life Abundant,” in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 21–40.

pastoral leaders, and retreatants carry many different (and not all compatible) notions of spirituality. Rather than responding to those differences by adapting a lowest common denominator generic notion of spirituality, we can look critically and respectfully at those different understandings and practices, clarifying and engaging them through hospitable listening, serious reflection, and dialogue. How will churches and seminaries form spiritual leaders if they do not grapple with what they mean by spirituality? How will we provide spiritual nurture and develop spiritual leadership if we are not clear about what constitutes (and what does not constitute) faithful spiritual practice?

As Dutch practical theologian Gerben Heitink points out, practical theologians seeking to address such questions are confronting fundamental hermeneutical and pneumatological questions. Heitink writes:

The central problem practical theology must face is the hermeneutical question about the way in which the divine reality and the human reality can be connected at the experiential level. This question focuses attention on the pneumatological basis of the theological theory of action. The fundamental choice to be made in this respect has its impact on the daily praxis in the church.¹¹

The question “How should we act?” cannot be separated from the questions “How is the Spirit acting in this context?” “How is the Spirit acting in us?” and “How can we discern or come to perceive how God’s Spirit is guiding us to act?” Thus, questions of how we understand the Spirit and spirituality are not relevant to practical theologians only if they study spirituality. Instead, such questions are highly relevant to any research project that concerns religious practice. What pneumatology undergirds our practice and our work in practical theology?

Such questions impinge directly on how we understand and embody the relationship between faith and public life, going to the heart of issues about body and spirit, social and environmental justice and holiness, private piety and public policy. If spirituality is understood primarily as related to the interior life and/or individual sphere, then the implicit spiritualities imbedded in political and economic actions go unnoticed and unchallenged. As New Zealand theologian Neil Darragh argues, “Although secular societies do not always recognize it, and may be unable to articulate it, still it is true that *any public policy on environmental, social, or economic goals is maintained by a spirituality.*”¹² Without attention to these implicit and often unnoticed spiritualities, faith communities buy into a privatized notion of spirituality and find themselves without language or tools for robust public engagement. This can have dire consequences. South African theologian

11 Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 193.

12 Neil Darragh, *At Home in the Earth: Seeking an Earth-Centred Spirituality* (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2000), 94.

John de Gruchy made this point about Christianity during the apartheid regime. De Gruchy lamented the “Christian sanctification of apartheid, and the unbiblical privatization of piety which has separated prayer and the struggle for justice.”

Christian spirituality has been rightly criticized for its otherworldly, disengaged, and body-denying distortions. Ada María Isasi-Díaz brought such a critique as she reflected on her increasingly dissatisfying life in the novitiate in Peru in the mid-1960s. She recalled that holiness in the convent at that time was defined in terms of long hours of prayer, meditation, and penance. Isasi-Díaz felt a growing call to work among the poor, and she came to challenge notions of spirituality that did not include this work of justice:

I began to question the meaning of “spirituality.” Much later I came to realize that what I could not accept was the false notion that the soul is a separate entity, that one can counterpose body and spirit as if the human person can be split in two.... Following the example of grassroots Hispanic women, I do not think in terms of “spirituality.” But I know myself as a person with a deep relationship with the divine, a relationship that finds expression in walking picket lines more than in kneeling...in striving to be passionately involved with others more than in being detached....¹³

What is the challenge here to practical theologians and scholars of spirituality? Are we called to abandon the term and the field of study, or radically to reevaluate the meanings and distortions of spirituality? In my view, it is important to take critique of Christian spirituality quite seriously while also recovering or sustaining the deep impulses toward transcendence, prayer, and contemplation embedded in traditions of Christian spirituality. The challenge is to nurture an embodied way of life grounded in prayer that flows into and out of engagement with social and political life, without reducing spirituality to either a political ideology or an individualistic program of piety.¹⁴

Similarly, we need to take account of the ways that spiritualities impinge on the larger created world. Darragh proposes an “Earth-centred” spirituality rooted in a revised, transformed Christian spirituality. His own perspective flows both from his religious identity and from his particular New Zealand context, which features striking biodiversity and had a long period of geographical isolation from human habitation (Polynesians arrived about 1,000 years ago, and Europeans only about 200 years ago). Recognizing the failures of Christianity spirituality to relate us to and preserve the natural world, he argues, “we will not be able to reform our behaviour to towards the Earth without a reform of our spiritualities...we need to be concerned with both the creative transformation of Christian

13 Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), 31–33.

14 For more on this topic, see Claire E. Wolfteich, *Lord Have Mercy: Praying for Justice with Conviction and Humility* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2006).

spirituality as well as the creative transformation of our customary ways of relating to the world.”¹⁵

One example of such creative transformation or reinterpretation of the tradition is fellow New Zealander Neil Vaney’s presentation of Ignatian spirituality.¹⁶ Vaney weaves together daily ecological and scriptural reflections, following the four week movement of the Exercises, as he seeks to open up a “multileveled reading of the text” that includes an embodied, transformative relationship to the natural world, attentive to God’s movement in all of creation. Another example is Elizabeth Julian’s discussion of landscape as “spiritual classic.” Julian, a Sister of Mercy who works in adult education through the Wellington (New Zealand) Catholic Education Centre, writes, “...a spirituality that belongs uniquely to Aotearoa New Zealand can be taken if we explore the formative role of our landscape in our spirituality.” She notes that while the idea of two books of revelation (the natural world and the Bible) can be found since early Christianity, for many in New Zealand, where few go to church but many go hiking, the first “book” is far more familiar than is the Bible. The landscape can function, she writes, as a “spiritual classic.” To the landscape people return again and again, engaging it with multiple readings or interpretations as the landscape reveals, challenges, inspires, and evokes response. In this way, the landscape is not only source of spiritual meaning but also “catalyst for transformation.”¹⁷

These various contextual discussions about spirituality and liberation, spirituality and public life, and spirituality and ecology, should be noted by practical theologians, who too often assume that spirituality focuses primarily on the individual’s personal journey of faith. Literature in spirituality questions this more circumscribed understanding of the nature of spirituality and our subject matter. Thus, for example, I would critique Heitink’s location of spirituality as a subject primarily “directed toward communicative action in relation to the individual,” as distinguished from those subjects primarily directed to action within or on the basis of church or society.¹⁸ Heitink does note that his three categories overlap, yet his map of practical theology still overemphasizes the individual dimension of spirituality. Instead, many writers in spirituality are critiquing just such individualistic, privatized, and disembodied understandings and practices of spirituality, pushing outward to a more relational, prophetic, liberating, and embodied Christian spirituality.

15 Darragh, *At Home*, 3.

16 Neil Vaney, *Christ in a Grain of Sand: An Ecological Journey with the Spiritual Exercises* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2004).

17 Elizabeth Julian, “Landscape as Spiritual Classic: A Reading from Paekakariki,” in *Land and Place: Spiritualities from Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Helen Bergin and Susan Smith (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2004), 99, 105, 107.

18 Heitink, *Practical Theology*, 251–252.

Spirituality in the Academy

At this juncture, an overview of the study of spirituality within the academy will be helpful. The academic discipline of spirituality has come into its own over the past twenty years. While spirituality often is seen by practical theologians as one of the subdisciplines of practical theology, I would venture to say that most spirituality scholars do not perceive themselves in that way. Spirituality is an academic discipline in its own right, with its own professional associations (Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality, founded in 1991) and scholarly journals (e.g., *Spiritus*, published by Johns Hopkins University Press, and *The Way*, published by the British Jesuits). Doctoral programs in spirituality are offered at a number of institutions, including the Graduate Theological Union in San Francisco, Fordham University in New York, Boston University in Boston, Milltown University in Dublin, Catholic University in Leuven, St. Paul University in Ottawa, and Gregorian University in Rome. Students also can do a research programme (thesis) in spirituality at the Catholic Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Protestant Free University in Amsterdam, Heythrop College University in London, and the Norwegian Lutheran Faculty of Theology in Oslo.¹⁹ The study of spirituality at a postgraduate level may be located within pastoral/practical theology, theology, church history, philosophy, or religious studies.

Like practical theology, studies in spirituality are both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, drawing upon and conversing with history, biblical studies, and theology as well as ethics, psychology, biology, anthropology, literary criticism, aesthetics, and sociology. Sandra Schneiders, a leading figure in the development of the academic discipline of spirituality and by training a New Testament scholar, writes, "Spirituality as an academic discipline is intrinsically and irreducibly interdisciplinary because the object it studies, transformative Christian experience as such, is multi-faceted. Every topic of study in this field requires that several disciplines be used together in a reciprocally interactive and not merely juxtaposed way throughout the process of investigation."²⁰ Examples of such interdisciplinary research includes the work of Joann Wolski Conn, who uses developmental psychology to illuminate themes of "self-knowledge" and "self-acceptance" in Salesian spirituality,²¹ or Mark Burrow's exploration of poetics, theological method, and mysticism.²²

19 My thanks to my colleague Philip Sheldrake for providing some of the information on the European situation.

20 Sandra Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," in *Minding the Spirit*, ed. Dreyer and Burrows, 7.

21 Joann Wolski Conn, "A Developmental View of Salesian Spirituality," in *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, 2nd ed., ed. Joann Wolski Conn (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1996), 313–326.

Several approaches to the study of spirituality appear in the literature. It will be helpful to note three prominent approaches: the anthropological, the historical-contextual, and the theological. Most agree that these are complementary approaches.

Anthropological Approach

The anthropological approach emphasizes the universality of spiritual experience, seeing it as a dimension of human nature that cuts across cultures and traditions. This approach often draws upon the tools of the social sciences to aid in the understanding of that common experience. Seeking to put language on this common experience, scholars have proposed general definitions of spirituality that could cut across multiple religious traditions and even encompass those who would claim a secular spirituality. For example, the editors of the “World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest” series²³ (which includes volumes on Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu, Confucian, African, Native, and secular spiritualities) note that they did not seek a precise definition of spirituality that would be accepted by such diverse traditions. Still, they propose a general description of their subject matter, to be amplified and clarified by authors of each volume: “The series focuses on that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions ‘the spirit.’ This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension...experiences ultimate reality. The series explores the discovery of this core, the dynamics of its development, and its journey to the ultimate goal” (preface of each volume in the series).

A benefit of such inclusive definitions of spirituality is their potential to bring people around a table for interfaith conversation and their potential to facilitate scholarship about the wide range of contemporary spiritualities. Indeed, some scholars would underscore the transformational nature of this attention to common human experience. Thomas G. Grenham, an Irish-born missionary priest who found deep spiritual encounter in his work in Jamaica and Kenya, argues for the development of an “intercultural spirituality” which

recognizes the integrity of religious and nonreligious traditions to transmit meaning and life, authenticity and relevance, not only for themselves, but also across religious and cultural boundaries. Such a diverse, integral spirituality has a ca-

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- 22 Mark Burrows, “‘Raiding the Inarticulate’: Mysticism, Poetics, and the Unlanguageable” in *Minding the Spirit*, ed. Dreyer and Burrows, 341–361. Burrows originally delivered this essay as the presidential address for the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality, November 2003.
- 23 *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* series, gen. ed. Ewert H. Cousins (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985–).

capacity to go beyond its historical particularities to give way to a universal or shared vision. This is an evolving process which I name *spiritual interculturalism*.²⁴

Anthropological approaches clearly make an important contribution to the study of spirituality. As Grenham notes, however, an intercultural spirituality requires participants not to give up their particular traditions but rather to understand and live out of those same traditions in the open encounter with another culture and spirituality. One problem with general definitions of spirituality common in this approach is that they often reduce the particularities of traditions to a vague generic longing or lifestyle, rather than a deeply rooted way of life that one learns in community. In this way, they may obscure the highly contextual and communal nature of spirituality. The anthropological approach is important but needs to be kept in relationship with other approaches to the study of spirituality.

Historical-contextual Approach

Like the anthropological approach, the historical-contextual approach also emphasizes the study of human experience, communities, and practices. Rather than exploring spirituality as a dimension of universal human experience, however, the historical-contextual approach carefully investigates the particularity of the historical and cultural contexts out of which a spiritual community, tradition, or practice arises. For example, scholars have published studies of the reading and interpretation of scripture in fourth century Egyptian monasticism, the development of mysticism in medieval Germany, lay devotional practices in the Middle Ages, and the use of maternal imagery in twelfth century Cistercian writing.²⁵ The Crossroads three-volume collection on Christian spirituality includes chapters on spiritual guidance in early Christianity; spirituality in late medieval Russia, early Jesuit spirituality in Spain and Italy, the spirituality of John Calvin, Puritan spirituality in America, and the spirituality of Afro-American traditions.²⁶ Gordon Mursell has published a two-volume historical survey of

24 Thomas G. Grenham, "Mutual Enrichment: Intercultural Spirituality in an Age of Cultural and Religious Pluralism," in *Lamplighters: Exploring Spirituality in New Contexts*, ed. Bernadette Flanagan and David Kelly (Dublin: Veritas, 2004), 74.

25 Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (New York: Crossroad, 2005); Andre Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1996); and Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

26 Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and John Leclercq, eds., *Christian Spirituality I: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1985); Jill Raitt, Bernard

English spirituality.²⁷ Such works indicate the range of historical scholarship in spirituality.

As Philip Sheldrake points out, “spirituality is unavoidably conditioned by historical and religious contexts...”²⁸ Thus, the historical-contextual approach is necessary to understand the intersection of those contexts and the lived experience of faith. Historical scholarship, drawing upon a wide range of new methodologies, also enables critical appraisal of received traditions and the recovery of texts and voices previously marginalized. According to Burton-Christie: “What is gradually emerging is a more fully realized and complex sense of the spirituality of persons and communities from the historical past, something that has tremendous potential for helping contemporary Christian communities reimagine themselves.”²⁹ Studying spirituality within historical context is invaluable for understanding spirituality, although McGinn notes that historical study “cannot, of itself, address normative questions.”³⁰ Instead, according to McGinn, the historical-contextual approach is complementary to the anthropological and the theological and may open out to them.

Theological Approach

Important as the anthropological and the historical-contextual approaches are in studying spirituality, neither takes responsibility for judging the authenticity, faithfulness, wisdom, or truthfulness of a particular spirituality. The theological approach takes on this critical task, providing normative frameworks for formation, assessment, and guidance of concrete spiritualities. Every spirituality is implicitly or explicitly theological, expressing, embodying, and enacting a particular understanding of God, self, creation, and community. Not all spiritualities are life-giving. Not all embody wisdom or cultivate greater discipleship. Theological exploration of spirituality is essential as a way of reflecting critically on spiritual practice, providing criteria for discernment, and shaping faithful communities.

McGinn, and John Meyendorff, eds., *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1987); Louis Dupré Don E. Saliers, and John Meyendorff, eds., *Christian Spirituality III: Post-Reformation and Modern* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

- 27 Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: From Earliest Times to 1700* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: From 1700 to the Present Day* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).
- 28 Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), 52.
- 29 Douglas Burton-Christie, “Introduction: Beginnings,” in *Minding the Spirit*, ed. Dreyer and Burrows, xxv.
- 30 Bernard McGinn, “The Letter and the Spirit: Spirituality as an Academic Discipline,” in *Minding the Spirit*, ed. Dreyer and Burrows, 34.

Particularly in Catholic teaching, spirituality was traditionally understood as spiritual theology and as a subdiscipline of theology. Thus, von Balthasar could call Christian spirituality simply “the subjective aspect of dogmatic theology.”³¹ Many spirituality scholars today affirm the interrelationship between spirituality and theology, yet reject a characterization of spirituality as a subset of theology. Instead, they seek to establish spirituality as a distinct, interdisciplinary field of study that is integrally related to theology yet also open to many other disciplinary relationships and not subsumed under any field. Michael Downey writes, “As an emergent discipline Christian spirituality may be said to be methodologically preoccupied. But such is the case with any discipline whose subject matter is still being weaned from under the tutelage of other disciplines with their own subject matter and methods.”³² There are parallels here, of course, with the situation of practical theology, as many practical theologians today insist that practical theology be understood as a distinct discipline and not be reduced to the application of the classical disciplines. So too, practical theology should be cautious about describing spirituality simply as one of the practical guilds or subdisciplines of practical theology. Understanding the self-conceptualization of the academic discipline of spirituality, it may be more accurate and more prudent to consider practical theology and spirituality as partners whose subject matter overlaps, who share several important aims and methodologies, and whose conversation can be lively and mutually fruitful.

There is growing understanding of the ways that theology and spirituality mutually inform one another, and how each is impoverished without the other. The relationship between spirituality and theology is not a one-way dialogue but rather an interdependent, symbiotic connection. Mysticism scholar Mark McIntosh expresses this point well:

So while it is very true that theology provides an indispensable critical function for spirituality, it is no less true that spirituality affords a radically critical perspective equally necessary for the health of theology.... The critical function which spirituality serves for theology is not a matter simply of adding one more source for theology to consider; it is not a matter of judiciously taking people’s experiences seriously along with supposedly more “rational” thought, but a matter of exposing theology to the profound questioning that animates the very heart of the community’s struggle to be faithful.³³

31 Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Spirituality,” in *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989); cited in McGinn, “The Letter and the Spirit,” 5.

32 Michael Downey, “Appropriative Method,” in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 122.

33 Mark McIntosh, *Mystical Theology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 17.

Transforming Knowledge

The importance of spirituality for theology should not be lost on practical theologians. Practical theology, however much it draws upon the knowledge of the human sciences and other disciplines, is most centrally *theology*. As theology, it should be inspired by and critically attentive to spirituality: the movement of the Spirit in concrete communities and contexts and the human practices that embody and cultivate responsiveness to that Spirit.

In my own work, I have resonated with Edward Farley's lament that theology has ceased to understand itself as a *habitus*, a sapiential knowledge, a "cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals."³⁴ The split between mystical and scholastic theology, followed by the Enlightenment-era shift to theology as a set of technical specialized sciences whose end was narrowed to the training of ministers, represented a loss of theology as *habitus*. The practice of faith became understood as something separate from theology. According to Farley: "Prior to the theological encyclopedic movement and in the time when the genre of theology was a *habitus*, a sapiential knowledge, practice was built into theology by definition. The reason was that this disposition of sapiential knowledge was a constitutive feature of Christian life in the world."³⁵ I understand this loss of *habitus* as part of a regrettable and false division between spirituality and theology that impoverishes the meaning of both. In my view, conversation and partnership between the academic disciplines of spirituality and practical theology is a hopeful place for creative reintegration.

Practical theology attends to the interrelationships between practice and theory. It also asserts the theory-laden character of practices and the epistemological dimension of practice. In other words, practices are not the application of theory, but rather practice and theory operate in a far more complicated and interrelated way. They not only enact belief but can even yield a kind of embodied knowledge or wisdom that might otherwise be unavailable to us.³⁶ Practical theology wrestles with what it means to do theology in a way that is deeply cognizant of and attentive to the integrally interrelated nature of theology and practice. What the study of spirituality brings is a deeper vision of the animating power of the life of faith and the way in which spiritual practice may lie at the heart of the theological endeavor. A practical theological study of spirituality begins as desire to understand the working of God's Spirit in the world and to understand the

34 Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 35.

35 *Ibid.*, 132.

36 On this point see Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 13–32.

varieties of ways that the human spirit seeks, receives, and responds to the Spirit. This desire stems from a love of that Spirit and not mere curiosity. It is the kind of desire to understand that which one loves for the sake of greater intimacy. Spirituality scholar Douglas Burton-Christie writes that initial engagement begins with “loving a subject.” This passion does not hinder scholarship but rather “constitutes an initial and enduring interpretive key” even through the process of more distanced critical reflection and re-engagement.³⁷

The transformative aim—a dimension of all practical theology—is present here from the beginning. Indeed, practical theologians and many spirituality scholars share a concern with transformation. Don Browning defines practical theology as “critical reflection on the church’s dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation.”³⁸ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat write, “The focus of the practical theological task is the quest for truth and the development and maintenance of faithful and transformative practice in the world.”³⁹ Other practical theologians similarly understand transformation as a critical aim of practical theology and even its distinguishing characteristic in the academy.

So too, spirituality scholars point to the transformative nature of the study and teaching of spirituality. Sandra Schneider’s “hermeneutical approach” to the study of spirituality includes three movements (though she notes that any given project may focus more or even exclusively on one of these): thick description, critical analysis, and constructive interpretation. She writes: “Understanding involves not only intellectual deciphering of a phenomenon but appropriation that is transformative of the subject, what Ricoeur calls expansion of the being of the subject.”⁴⁰ Downey’s “appropriative method” similarly aims not only for a contribution to knowledge about the Christian spiritual life, but also personal transformation and the transformation of others through appropriation of this knowledge.⁴¹ Thus, there is a resonance here between practical theology and spirituality in their understandings of transformation as an aim and as a constitutive part of their disciplines. Further conversation would help to clarify the meaning and complexity of the discourse of “transformation” as a dimension of an academic discipline.

37 Douglas Burton-Christie, “The Cost of Interpretation: Sacred Texts and Ascetic Practice in Desert Spirituality,” in *Minding the Spirit*, ed. Dreyer and Burrows, 103.

38 Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology* 36.

39 John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 25.

40 Sandra Schneiders, “A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality,” in *Minding the Spirit*, ed. Dreyer and Burrows, 56–57.

41 Downey, “Appropriative Method,” 122.

For example, it could be illuminating to consider transformation in terms of what Burton-Christie calls the “cost of interpretation.” As he reflects on an important source of wisdom in the Christian tradition, the sayings of the early desert *abbas* and *ammias*, Burton-Christie writes, “monastic teaching arose not out of a systematic rendering of accumulated wisdom but out of the back-and-forth conversation between two persons.... To interpret a word meant striving to realize it in one’s life and to be transformed by that realization.” He is speaking here of the practice of many who went out into the desert to seek a “word” from the elders: “Abba, speak to me a word” and “Amma, what shall I do?”⁴²

Burton-Christie’s reflections on the “desert hermeneutic” provide food for thought more broadly for practical theologians: How do we identify, uncover, receive, interpret, and carry sources of wisdom from our own diverse traditions in our own diverse contemporary contexts? How are we as hearers, conveyors, translators of those “words” implicated in the process, and if we are honest, implicated in ways that require great and costly change? This is not a romantic view of transformation but one that signals the loss and pain and conflict, the cost that can accompany even good change. Burton-Christie argues for a “critical-participative” approach. I think this means that study of spirituality cannot be wholly distanced or dissociated, but that risking transformation is part of what it means to truly interpret and understand our subject. Such an understanding of transformation and our own self-implication might well resonate among practical theologians as well. What kind of transformation are we risking, for example, when we immerse ourselves in the study of congregations or communities different from our own? How does our engagement with spirituality in diverse contexts open up new understandings, new possibilities for dialogue, new attention to ethical imperatives? How might our practical theological work speak a word back to us, challenging our well-worn understandings of God, the church, political or economic justice, or the family? How do the structures and systems of the academy impede or facilitate the transformative impact of our work?

Practical Theological Approach to the Study of Spirituality

In noting points of resonance with practical theology, I wish to be careful not to overstate the point. Some spirituality scholars understand themselves primarily as historians, for example. They may not identify transformation as a goal of their scholarship; indeed they may carefully separate their work from concerns with contemporary appropriation or effect. I would not want to subsume all spirituality scholars under the heading of practical the-

42 Burton-Christie, “Cost of Interpretation,” 100.

ology, nor insist that all practical theologians focus exclusively on spirituality. I am arguing, however, that practical theologians cannot neglect spirituality due to its integral relationship to theology, that the study of spirituality should constitute an important set of research and teaching foci within practical theology, and that further dialogue between the two academic disciplines would be enriching to both.

I propose a practical theological approach to the study of spirituality. This approach draws upon the anthropological, the historical-contextual, and the theological approaches, integrating them with an eye toward critical reflection on and guidance of spiritual practice and communities today. Don Browning's four movements of a fundamental practical theology provide a point of reference here. His first three movements of descriptive theology, historical theology, and systematic theology bear a (rough) resemblance to the anthropological, historical-contextual, and theological approaches within the discipline of spirituality. These three approaches would be seen not as complementary alternatives but rather each as a necessary step in a full exploration of spiritual phenomena, practices, beliefs, and contexts, exploration that culminates in strategic practical reflection towards formation and transformation.⁴³ Practical theologians would take responsibility for the full circle, even if it means working in teams of scholars on a practical issue in spirituality.

Practical theologians have an important role to play in providing thick descriptions of the enormous variety of contemporary spiritual practices. These practices are theory-laden. They carry implicit worldviews and theological understandings. Deep, multi-layered understanding of contemporary spiritual questions, issues, and practices would constitute an important first step of practical theological reflection in churches as well as in the academy. This work should help to guide individuals on their spiritual quests and inform the ministries of faith communities as they engage the spiritualities of their members and of others in their contexts. Second, practical theologians can assist faith communities in drawing upon the richness of their own traditions as they address contemporary spiritual questions, respond to contemporary spiritual hungers, and form pastors and other spiritual leaders. This will involve historical study in order to understand spiritual traditions, practices, and the contexts out of which they arose. For example, one might explore the ancient Christian monastic practice of *lectio divina*, medieval mystical understandings of creation, Ignatian practices of discernment, or Wesleyan teachings on social holiness. Third, practical theologians reflect critically upon both contemporary spiritual practices and the traditions of spirituality explored in historical study, bringing past and present into dialogue. The purpose of this step of inquiry is to take seriously contemporary spiritual questions and practices and to reflect

43 Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*.

critically upon them in light of the rich and complex traditions of Christian spirituality. As the literature in practical theology makes clear, there is a range of methods of correlation, some privileging the tradition, some giving equal normative voice to contemporary experience and to tradition. Within this step, then, there is room for contemporary practice and spirituality to question or bring fresh perspective to the tradition. Reflecting what in practical theology would be called a mutually critical correlation, Darragh writes, “When confronted with new cultural or global issues traditional spiritualities have to be researched for as yet unrealized resources as well as for only just noticed inadequacies.”⁴⁴ Fourth, in and through the aforementioned steps, practical theologians inform, reflect upon, and facilitate the processes of spiritual formation, spiritual renewal, and spiritual direction in a variety of contexts, including those of theological education, congregational life, hospital and college chaplaincy, retreat and other spirituality centers, the monastery, home, and workplace. This formation does not happen in a vacuum but rather unfolds imbedded in social, ecclesial, economic, political, and environmental contexts.

Teaching Practice: Insights from Practical Theology and Spirituality

In a recent article, Bonnie Miller-McLemore laments the dearth of attention to pedagogy in practical theological writing: “In the otherwise vigorous academic revival of practical theology of the past few decades, little attention has been given to pedagogy.... Teaching largely remains secondary to scholarship.”⁴⁵ This is beginning to change, as evidenced by books such as *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (of which Miller-McLemore’s article is a part), and the Carnegie Foundation study, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*.⁴⁶ Still, there remains much to explore as we consider the implications of practical theology for the way that we teach. Is it possible to fully understand a tradition unless one engages in its practices? What would it mean to incorporate practice as integral to the learning objectives of a course in a pluralistic context? How can practice be evaluated in the classroom, and how can it be brought to research in a way that meets standards of scholarship in the academy? How is the teacher’s practice integral to student learning?

44 Darragh, *At Home in the Earth*, 2.

45 Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “Practical Theology and Pedagogy: Embodying Theological Know-How,” in *For Life Abundant*, ed. Bass and Dykstra, 170.

46 Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2006).

Recent literature in practical theology picks up some of these questions as concerns the teaching of worship, religious education, and preaching, for example.⁴⁷ Yet practical theologians have barely engaged literature related to the teaching of spirituality, particularly in the sense of spirituality as academic discipline rather than a program of spiritual formation. Here is a place where the two disciplines stand to benefit greatly from dialogue. Spirituality scholars have much to contribute to reflection on these sorts of questions. First, traditions of Christian spirituality bring centuries of wisdom about the teaching of practices, including practices of prayer, *lectio divina*, silence, humility, discernment, and spiritual friendship. Second, spirituality scholars are themselves engaged in lively debates about how to translate this deep wisdom about practices to contemporary contexts of teaching and formation, including the university context. While they assert the transformative and self-implicating nature of the study of spirituality, they do not agree about the implications for pedagogy. Their questions and alternative visions would make rich conversation partners for practical theologians.

For example, Schneiders raises concerns about the role of practice in spirituality scholarship. Noting that the self-implicating nature of spirituality studies can draw critique upon the discipline within the academy (e.g., claims that it is not “academic” or “scientific” enough), and can lead students to give undue weight in research to their personal practice and experience, she allows for the practice of spiritual disciplines in the “formative” level (e.g., Master of Divinity programs or settings where people share a denominational tradition). However, regarding the doctoral level of study, she expresses “very serious reservations about the inclusion of any kind of mandatory practice or the direct use of such personal practice in the construction or prosecution of research projects.”⁴⁸ On the other hand, Liebert actually defines “practice” as precisely the “intentional and repeated bringing of one’s lived spirituality into the various theaters of one’s scholarly work and attending to what happens when one does.” This practice, this doing, is “not merely something useful, but is a constitutive dimension of the discipline.”⁴⁹ Clearly, their different positions also bear implications for how one teaches spirituality. How is the practice of both teacher and student integral to the teaching of spirituality? And if it

47 John Witvliet, “Teaching Worship as a Christian Practice,” in *For Life Abundant*, ed. Bass and Dykstra, 117–148; James R. Nieman, “Liturgy and Life: An Account of Teaching Ritual Practices,” in: *For Life Abundant*, ed. Bass and Dykstra, 150–167; and Katherine Turpin, “Distinctive Pedagogies in Religious Education,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 12/1 (2008): 37–44.

48 Schneiders, “Hermeneutical Approach,” 57–58.

49 Elizabeth Liebert, “The Role of Practice in the Study of Christian Spirituality,” in *Minding the Spirit*, ed. Dreyer and Burrows, 86, 79.

is integral, then by what logic must it be removed from higher-level scholarship and teaching in the field?

Spirituality scholars also raise some interesting questions about whether “practice” or “experience” is actually the more fitting terminology for our subject matter. Schneiders asserts that the “material object” of the study of spirituality is “spiritual life as experience.” McGinn refers to Christian spirituality as “the lived experience of Christian belief” and has continued to probe the “language of inner experience” in his extensive studies of Christian mysticism. Sheldrake, on the other hand, gravitates to the discussion of practice. He writes, “Christian discipleship may be described as practicing in the here and now, and in hope and faith, the world that we believe is being brought into being.” Elizabeth Liebert notes that while an emphasis on experience is important to both pastoral theology and to spirituality studies, she finds the term practice to be particularly helpful in fleshing out the interrelationship of lived spirituality and scholarship.⁵⁰ We may find it useful to discuss how our work in practical theology (and specifically how our other related disciplines such as pastoral counseling, liturgical studies, homiletics, evangelism, and religious education) attends to experience or practice, and what difference the terminology makes in defining our subject matter and method.

Bonnie Miller-McLemore notes that in many ways practical theological pedagogy challenges the assumptions of the modern academy which, “shaped by Western views of rationality, often assumes (or at least is dominated by teaching methods that seem to assume) that one thinks one’s way into acting.” Practical theologians instead teach practices such as worship, preaching, religious education, and pastoral care, and in so doing engage student in a phronetic knowing: “Intrinsic to the practice of teaching in this field is a particular way of theological knowing that has important implications not only for the teaching of practical theology but also for the definition of the field and for the larger enterprise of theology itself. This way of knowing is a form of phronesis that, in this context, might be called ‘pastoral wisdom’ or ‘theological know-how.’”⁵¹

This insight into the significance of practice as way of knowing carries important implications for theology and for teaching in a variety of contexts. I argue that practical knowing should be called not only or even primarily “pastoral wisdom,” but most fundamentally spiritual wisdom or *habitus*, an orientation of the soul that desires to know the Spirit of

50 Schneiders, “Hermeneutical Approach,” 49–60. See also Bernard McGinn, “Introduction,” in *Christian Spirituality I*, ed. McGinn, Meyerdorff, and Leclercq, xv; Bernard McGinn, “The Language of Inner Experience in Christian Mysticism,” in *Minding the Spirit*, ed. Dreyer and Burrows, 135–151; Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 64–65; and Elizabeth, “Role of Practice,” 79–99.

51 Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “Practical Theology and Pedagogy,” 171.

God. The life of faith is the ground of any ministry, and so the aims of practical theological teaching or research should include the cultivation of spiritual wisdom, an embodied life of faith that humbly seeks to live in relationship to God and God's creation. In and through right practice, persons grow into ways of knowing and connect to a larger faith community/communion that sustains those practices. To enter into the fullness of phronesis and to learn how to invite students into that wisdom, practical theologians would do well to keep their center in the animating life of the Spirit. They also may find interesting companions in those who make it their life work to study spirituality.

Conclusion

While spirituality may be seen as a subdiscipline of practical theology, it is better positioned as a lively dialogue partner and integrally related field of study that may breathe life into the work of practical theology. Indeed, I argue that spirituality is the heart of all theology. This does not amount to an uncritical appreciation of spirituality—just the opposite. It impels us to take the spiritual searches, questions, practices, and insights of contemporary and historic persons very seriously, and to study them with all the powers of description, interpretation, critical appraisal, and strategic reflection that practical theology has the ability to bring. Practical theology brings its own expertise in the critical and transformative study of contemporary contexts to the study of spirituality. At the same time, spirituality contributes much to practical theology's understanding of itself, as theology, as pedagogy, and as transformative discipline. In the mutually informing dialogue between these two disciplines, we stand to learn much about what it means to practice theology.

Abstract

In the academy, dialogue between the disciplines of practical theology and spirituality is slowly emerging. This article seeks to advance that conversation by outlining the current shape of the academic discipline of spirituality, highlighting points of resonance and areas for further discussion among practical theologians and scholars of spirituality, identifying several key topics for research, drawing upon the author's own research in international contexts, and sketching a practical theological approach to research in spirituality. The author argues that spirituality should not be understood simply as a subdiscipline of practical theology but instead as a disciplinary partner whose subject matter, aims, and methodologies overlap with those of practical theology in rich and mutually fruitful ways. Moreover, the study of spirituality raises questions (for example, questions about the pneumatology grounding our scholarship) that impinge on the work of all practical theologians.

Zusammenfassung

Im Rahmen der wissenschaftlichen Beschäftigung intensiviert sich langsam der Dialog zwischen den Disziplinen der Praktischen Theologie und der Spiritualitätsforschung. Dieser Beitrag möchte dieses Gespräch fördern, indem er die aktuelle Verfasstheit der akademischen Spiritualitätsforschung umschreibt, Aspekte der gegenseitigen Resonanz und Felder für weitere Diskussionen zwischen Praktischen Theologen und Spiritualitätsforschern hervorhebt, einige zentrale Themen der Forschung identifiziert – ausgehend von eigenen Arbeiten der Autorin im internationalen Kontext – und schließlich einen praktisch-theologischen Ansatz zur Spiritualitätsforschung skizziert. Die Autorin argumentiert dafür, Spiritualitätsforschung nicht einfach als Subdisziplin der Praktischen Theologie zu verstehen, sondern als disziplinäre Partnerin, deren Themenfelder, Ziele und Methodologien sich mit denen der Praktischen Theologie in reicher und fruchtbarer Weise überschneiden. Darüber hinausgehend analysiert sie, dass Spiritualitätsforschung Fragen in den Mittelpunkt rückt (z. B. Fragen nach der Pneumatologie, die dem eigenen wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten zugrunde liegt), die die Arbeit aller Praktischen Theologen betreffen.

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