Collaborative Practical Theology

Engaging Practitioners in Research on Christian Practices

Henk de Roest

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Collaborative Practical Theology

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For Sjoerd Hendrik de Roest,
born August 19, 2019

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Introduction

Collaborative Practical Theology documents and analyses research on Christian practices conducted by academic practical theologians in *collaboration with* practitioners of different kinds all around the world. These practitioners may be professional practitioners or practitioners in unpaid positions who work in churches, hospitals, schools, armed forces, penitentiary institutions or religious organisations. This includes ministers, chaplains or spiritual caregivers, professional pastoral workers, teachers, deacons, youth ministers, parish evangelists, and all sorts of volunteers – in fact, anyone who is addressed by the research. This can also include practitioners-to-be such as experienced ministry students, graduate, post-graduate and doctoral students in theological education who learn to do empirical research. The book is also about involving everyday believers in the research process, be it as collectors of data or as co-researchers. It may serve as a useful tool for experienced academic practical theologians and researchers who are seeking new perspectives and methodologies. It can help them to revisit and revise their usual research approaches. The book has a distinct focus on valorisation and collaborative work, but is also an introduction to some instructive curriculum revisions in theology as well as to the discipline of academic practical theology. From the perspective of valorisation, we will narrate the origins of practical theology, its early history, and in particular its scope (the range of practices that constitute its research domain). We will also describe the relationship of practical theology to theology and its relationship, and that of its subdisciplines, to the social sciences.

If you read this book, you will experience participating in *a global research community*. As a student taking steps towards conducting empirical research in your Bachelor, Master, PhD, DMin, professional doctorate or MDIV-program, you will become part of that community. As a practical theologian, you will already have experienced this community with colleagues in seminars, conferences, journals and both offline and online gatherings. As a practitioner, participating in a research project or conducting it in collaboration with other practitioners in a community of practice, you may come to consider yourself a stakeholder or even a co-researcher. As an everyday believer, you may hope to be invited to contribute to a research project, for example, by taking pictures or by interviewing people who participate in Christian practices. In terms of researching the practices of world-wide Christianity in an extensive range of contexts and settings, a team of stakeholders of all kinds of practitioners can be invited to collaborate by academic practical theologians and students in

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practical theology. Alternatively, *vice versa*, practitioners can invite practical theologians or students to conduct research with them, thus turning research into a truly *communal* enterprise. I envisage a 'communal' or 'relational' turn in the process of collaborative research on Christian practices. The book will offer six rationales for setting up joint investigation groups with different 'communities of practice'.

I believe that the outcomes of the research ought to have an added value beyond the academic domain. To put it another way, the valorisation of research in and on behalf of Christian practices, leading to better understood, valuable, improved and new practices should be in the minds and hearts of researchers, practitioners, students and everyday believers from the outset of research projects. Knowledge needs to be useful for understanding and solving problems and for addressing societal, ecclesial and institutional concerns. Knowledge also needs to be contextual. For this purpose, and for the purpose of facilitating research as a communal enterprise, this book will introduce you to relational approaches and a wide range of collaborative, relational research strategies such as: action research (AR), participatory action research (PAR), appreciative inquiry (AI), collaborative ethnography (CE), research communities consisting of researchers and practitioners and forms of what is currently called citizen science (CS). These research strategies, along with collaborative methods such as focus groups, performative action and expert panels that we will introduce to you, hold the potential for considering the experiences, beliefs, norms and values, spirituality, theological reflections, practitioner theories, vernacular knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing that are embedded in Christian practices. These approaches also have a clear eye for the promise that God may be acting and speaking in and through these practices. It is in these practices that the Christian faith is mediated, enacted and nurtured.

Relational, collaborative approaches were not invented today. They have a history in the social sciences and humanities with all kinds of communities in different countries all over the world. However, throughout this book you will see that I often take examples from my own Western-European, or even Dutch context. This may cause you to wonder whether, if I conceive practical theology in its Northern, largely Protestant context, this "might be another instance of the imposition of colonialist ideology on the southern hemisphere?"[1] If this is the case, I may be enforcing 'my' favoured and advocated participatory methodology on the South. I take this question seriously, for, as we learn from

1 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "'A tale of two cities': The evolution of the International Academy of Practical Theology," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017): 7. DOI: 10.4102/hts.v73i4.4718.

Pierre Bourdieu (as quoted by practical theologian Jaco Dreyer in a reflection on reflexivity), there are three types of inevitable biases: my social location (masculinity, whiteness, age, etc.), but also my position in the academic field and my intellectualist bias.[2] These biases are all likely to play a role. In particular, the fact that I have access to financial, educational and cultural resources may lead me to overlook the fact that many people in this world, including both colleagues and practitioners in Latin America, Asia and Africa do not have the same kind of access to resources that I have. I may also overlook the perspectives of people of colour, people of other ethnicities, women, young people, Christians of other than Protestant denominations and people living in the southern hemisphere. My intellectualist bias may imply that I am favouring scientific epistemologies and the search for understanding (i.e. a convincing interpretation) over other epistemologies and the search for practical solutions to concrete problems. Still, and perhaps also in response to the three biases, I believe that relational, collaborative research approaches are promising for practical theology in all sorts of communities, including those with a shortage of resources. Collaborative practical theology does not and should not simply *extract* information from people, but rather should *learn from and collaborate with* people in order to be *relevant for* people. The value of this type of research has been demonstrated over the last few decades in the wide application of action research and participatory action research (actually invented in the southern hemisphere!). In fact, other collaborative research approaches, such as collaborative ethnography, appreciative inquiry and citizen science, are also promising and their true potential is yet to be discovered. I also hold high expectations regarding collaborative methods, such as expert panels (including experience-based expertise), focus groups and performative action. In the fields of agriculture, health care, education and organisation development in Latin America, Africa and Asia these approaches and methods are becoming increasingly common because it turns out that participatory approaches significantly strengthen a practitioner's capacities.[3]

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2 Jaco S. Dreyer, "Knowledge, Subjectivity, (De)Coloniality, and the Conundrum of Reflexivity," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, eds. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 99.

3 Examples abound, for example see Moses Tetui et al., "A participatory action research approach to strengthening health managers' capacity at district level in Eastern Uganda," *Health Research Policy and Systems* (2017): 15 (Suppl. 2): 40, 52. DOI: 10.1186/s12961-017-0273. The use of a PAR approach strengthened local health managers' capacities, which then led to better resource utilisation and enhanced chances regarding the continuity of the health improvements.

I present six different rationales for the use of collaborative research approaches and methods. Yet, it is not that these research approaches and methods are advocated for uncritically. There are still convincing reasons for 'moments in the ivory tower', or even for a phase in which practitioners should not interfere in the analytical labour of the researcher. Researchers want to acquire understanding, knowledge, concepts, theories, and, if possible, even explanations. In my view, stakeholders should play a role in this process; not in all phases, but in different phases of the research. We will dig into this idea extensively in Chapter 8. I should also say that additional information on how to conduct a specific research project with a particular collaborative strategy or method can be found in methodological handbooks and journal articles. Some of the footnotes provided in this text and the bibliography may be of use to you.

In the subtitle of this book, it states that collaborative practical theology is concerned with Christian practices. As I will describe in the chapter on the history and current state of the art in practical theology, I know of other practices, secular and religious, that are examined by practical theologians. However, in my approach, I follow the Norwegian philosopher of religion, Jan-Olav Henriksen, in his description of Christian practices. In line with his argument, I focus on practices that are in part defined by, and provided with orientation from, the story of Jesus Christ. The Jesus story is "most likely the best candidate for helping us to define the distinct character of Christianity."[4]

> Christianity is constituted by a chain of memory that links back to and uses the Jesus story, as this story is mediated to individuals via the Christian community. [...] Practices that mediate the memory of the past simultaneously articulate the implications of the Jesus story for the future. Memory is, in Christian practice, thus not a nostalgic return to the past. It is used actively in different practices to open up the present and the future in a constant negotiation process that expresses its orientation towards the future. The Jesus story thereby is the semiotic reservoir that enables Christians to understand their own lives and practices as distinctly Christian.[5]

Henriksen calls Christianity a "cluster of practices that taken together manifests a distinct historically and contextually shaped mode of being in the

4 Johan-Olav Henriksen, *Christianity as Distinct Practices. A Complicated Relationship* (London, UK / New Delhi, India / New York, NY / Sydney, Australia: Bloomsbury, 2019): 92.

5 Henriksen, *Christianity as Distinct Practices*, 92ff.

world."[6] In line with this, I expect that the book you are reading – and of course the research that is hopefully enabled by it – is not only relevant for Christian practices that occur within ecclesial institutions, but also for those which occur on the margins of those institutions, in para-church settings or in issue-focused organizations, in which Christian identity is invoked. Furthermore, Christian practices cannot and should not be separated from everyday practices. Rather there is an interplay between Christian practices and what John Swinton and Harriet Mowat call, 'the practices of the world'. As Christian theologians, we consider ourselves competent enough to reflect theologically on God, human beings and the world. We can apply and explicate *concepts* from the Christian tradition to interpret and understand what is going on in the world.

In line with Mary McClintock Fulkerson, the research that I envision in this book does not seek to arrive at an unattainable idealised practice, or even an 'objective' analysis.[7] Rather, an inquiry should be able to display ambiguities and should be attentive to the worldly, messy and situational character of Christian practices. This implies an openness to the richness of lived experience, lived faith and lived spirituality. Research approaches such as those described in this book privilege the verbal and non-verbal expressions of concerns and troubles, the telling of life stories, and are thereby committed to the agency and empowerment of all who are involved in or the research.

What makes research on Christian practices 'practical theology'? We see how psychologists, social psychologists, cultural anthropologists and sociologists analyse Christian practices using their own concepts and theories, and these theories are also used in practical theology. However, in practical theology also *theological concepts* are used in data gathering, description, interpretation, normative evaluation, strategy development and implementation. Drawing on Immink,[8] practical theology in collaborative research, and perhaps most outspokenly in these approaches, intends to do justice to lived faith and lived spirituality in terms of the God-experiences, 'God-knowledge', 'God-talk' and 'God-walk', values, beliefs, ideals and commitments that are involved in these practices. In my view, practical theology intends to do justice to what I would call the *responsive* character of these practices. Christian spirituality is part and parcel of these practices or, as Elisabeth Hense writes:

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6 Henriksen, *Christianity as Distinct Practices*, 1.

7 Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption. Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 7.

8 F. Gerrit Immink, "Theological Analysis of Religious Practices," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 18, no. 1 (2014): 129.

> Christians believe that the power that brings us fullness, richness and depth lies beyond us in external sources. They do not reach fullness through their own human strength but through the grace of God. This does not mean, however, that Christians passively accept their fate. They believe they can cooperate with divine grace by opening themselves up to God's presence and preparing themselves for receiving divine gifts. What is more, they immerse themselves in divine nearness.[9]

In these practices, practitioners and everyday believers feel *addressed* by God in Jesus Christ, who chooses them, speaks to them, inspires them, calls upon them to act, makes demands on them, promises to be with them, enables them to cross boundaries and build bridges, sends them into the world and evokes and renews their faith, love and hope. These practices nurture, mediate and actualise what Johann Baptist Metz called the 'dangerous memory' of Jesus.[10] It is a 'dangerous memory' of freedom in the 'systems' of our society, and it is also a 'memory for the future'.

In its concern for the understanding, improvement and renewal of Christian practices, I consider collaborative practical theology – as a conglomerate of research approaches – to be a distinct way of participating in the *Missio Dei*; participating in the dance of the Triune God. The writer of the Narnia novels, C. S. Lewis, wrote: "The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way around) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his [or her] place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made."[11] In line with that approach, this book that you are about to read and use, offers a foundation for a field in which research is not viewed as a solo-activity conducted *on behalf* of the people of God, but rather *with* the people of God regardless of colour, gender-diversity or age. In providing this foundation for collaborative practical theology, I hope to serve the people of God and invite them into the dance of research… for the benefit of the world.

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9 Elisabeth Hense, "Current Forms of Christian Spirituality," in *Present-day Spiritualities. Contrasts and Overlaps*, eds. Elisabeth Hense, Frans Jespers and Peter Nissen (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 43. Hense distinguishes six categories of Christian spiritual practices: devotional, creative, physical, reflective, guidance practices and the practice of virtues. Hense, "Current Forms," 45–55.

10 For an introduction to Metz, see cf. J. Matthew Ashley, "Johann Baptist Metz," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004): 241–255.

11 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, in *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2002): 95.

In line with postcolonial and feminist methodologists, self-reflexive transparency is a necessary predicament of the researcher, and so this introduction is not complete without some biographical information. I have always loved studying in groups. Perhaps my first experience of learning from the knowledge, skills and attitudes of others, and of being able to contribute to the development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of others, came from my mathematics class while at secondary school in the town of Drachten, in the province of Friesland. In this class, when I was thirteen years old, our teacher formed teams of students who had to study chapters in the math book together. To our surprise, these teams were allowed to work at their own pace. We decided which sums and assignments we needed to complete, we discussed the homework together and we set the dates of our examinations. The teacher would walk around and could be called upon for help at any time. If needed, he would sit down with a team, explain what was necessary and then would move on to another team. Within each team, the students that understood a specific calculation or concept had to teach the others that did not yet understand it. I still remember how, through explaining concepts, the 'teaching students' learned as well and came to an even better understanding than before. At my young age, that proved to be a formative experience.

Twelve years later, I was working on my internship during the final two years of my theology studies in Leiden. It was conducted along with four other students in a new housing area, with lots of sand and dozens of houses being built. There would be no minister for the emerging congregation in this area. As a team of ministers-to-be, we did everything that a minister does: preaching, pastoral care, catechesis, bible-study groups etc. One of the primary challenges was: how do we edify a community? What can we do to create bonds? At the time, our professor in practical theology was Frederik Onslow (Ted) van Gennep. He had come up with the idea of the team of students and was also our supervisor. In response to the challenge of community formation I can still hear him say: "As soon as possible we have to go on the lake with a rickety boat." That was not a metaphor of the church, but rather he literally meant that it is by going on fieldtrips together, that bonds are forged. I learned a lot from the collaborative internship.

In 1987, I became minister in an amazingly beautiful remote countryside, in two small villages, Ransdorp and Holysloot just north of Amsterdam. From the start, I participated in the so-called 'circle' (Dutch: *ring*), regular gatherings of the ministers in the area. In 1991, we decided to hold monthly meetings on Mondays, and always started our meetings with the Scriptural texts of the upcoming Sunday worship service in order to stir our creativity and shape our thoughts. It was not that we conducted empirical research together, but I did learn from the research literacy of my colleagues. All of them did thorough research for their sermons and there was always a colleague who informed us about the research content of his or her sabbatical. Over the years, I came to experience the 'circle' as a learning community. We shared our knowledge and skills regarding our practices, including our failures. We learned a lot from our respective practice theories. In 1995, when I left the two villages and became fulltime minister in a small town in the same area called Monnickendam, I was pleased that I could continue to be a member of this wonderful group of colleagues. The membership lasted until the spring of 1999, when I became lecturer at Utrecht University.

My dissertation was defended in public at Leiden University in April 1998 and was supervised by philosopher of religion Han Adriaanse and practical theologian Gijsbert Dingemans. In it I tried to analyse the entire oeuvre of the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas, in order to ground practical theology as research conducted on behalf of, and in partnership with, faith communities. I wrote:

> In its normative phase, practical theology empirically and hermeneutically analyses norms and values in order to apply them in cooperation with the participants to their previously mapped situation. Far too often practical theology has formulated directives for action that have been imposed without direct contact with those who demanded the directives in the first place or with those for whom they were intended. Yet, one cannot decide for others what is right for them. Practical theology has to become an entirely *communal* enterprise, otherwise the participants will not learn to solve their problems. As Habermas states in his famous sentence: "In Enlightenment processes there can only be participants." Their participation will be both necessary and, I presume, realisable when indeed *they* are the ones who have been asking for a clarification or an improvement of their own praxis.[12]

A few years later, in the year 2000, I was working as lecturer in one of the sub-disciplines of practical theology, namely practical ecclesiology, at what was at that time called the Theological Academic Institute (a forerunner of the Protestant Theological University and part of the Faculty of Theology of

12 Henk de Roest, *Communicative Identity. Habermas' Perspectives of Discourse as a Support for Practical Theology* (Kampen: Kok, 1998): 39. The quote from Habermas is from: Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971): 45. In German: "*In Aufklärungsprozesse gibt es nur Beteiligte*."

the University of Utrecht). It was then that I read in an alumni-report of the University that a large majority of alumni from all the disciplines considered the competence to collaborate to be the least developed during their studies. I therefore decided to change the assignments of the course I was teaching in order to include teamwork while doing empirical research. I asked my students to form small teams in which, after sessions presenting a theoretical conceptual framework and after a thorough briefing, they had to conduct interviewing and some participant observation. We hoped to get a picture of what was going on in evangelical parish development and the possible tensions caused by this in mainline congregations. After the research, different team-presentations filled class sessions, and one of the other teams was asked to give feedback on the presentation. Afterwards, team-reports were written in order to prevent a vaporisation of the experience. Each report was to be a consensus of the team and students discovered that ample discussion was necessary to reach a consensus. The report was also presented to and discussed with the local church councils and the leadership of an evangelical alliance, within the PCN, that wanted to promote evangelical parish development. The aims of this meeting were to make the research experience conscious by explaining the research to others and by enabling the leadership to also learn from it. In 2001, I wrote my first academic article on the new design of the course.[13]

It was also in 2001, that I became professor of practical theology at Leiden University. In my inaugural lecture,[14] I focused on how the communication of the gospel, in a performative way, has led – and still leads (!) – to both new emerging Christian communities, that is *ecclesiogenesis*, and to the renewal of faith communities. In the following years, community formation has been my main research area. I became a member of the *Ecclesiological Investigations Research Network* and the *International Consortium for the Study of Congregations*, the latter with colleagues from the USA, Norway, Great Brittain, Sweden, Denmark and South Africa. In 2007, the Protestant Theological University (PThU) was founded with initially three locations, but with an understanding that from 2012 there would be two locations. In 2012, the PThU moved from Leiden, Utrecht and Kampen to Amsterdam and Groningen, and I started to teach practical theology in Groningen. Since 2016, we

13 Henk de Roest, "Theorie en praktijk in de praktische ecclesiologie," *Praktische Theologie. Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Pastorale Wetenschappen*, 28, no. 2 (2001): 144–153.

14 Henk de Roest, *Van de aanspraak naar de anderen. Over geloofscommunicatie en gemeenschapsvorming* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2002). See: https://openaccess.leidenuiv.nl/handle/1887/5284.

have organised a practical theology seminar including both the lecturers and PhD-students (currently on a weekly basis), in which empirical or conceptual research is presented, shared and critically evaluated. Every year with our PhD-students, we participate in a PhD-research meeting (German: *Doktorand*innenkolloquium*) that is organised with colleagues Uta Pohl-Patalong, from the Christian Albrecht Universität in Kiel, Germany, and Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag from the University of Zürich, Switzerland, and their respective PhD-students. Since 2011, I have participated in the *Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network*, with annual conferences in Durham (UK). Also, in 2011, I contacted colleagues worldwide, and started an extensive inquiry into the possibility of a new, peer-reviewed, internationally acclaimed journal in the field of practical ecclesiology and congregational studies, with a focus on qualitative and ethnographic methodology. In 2012, I visited Pete Ward, at the time teaching at King's College London, and Paul Fiddes, teaching at Regent's Park College, Oxford. At a meeting in Oxford, we decided to connect the journal that I proposed with the E&E Network and together we wrote an extensive rationale and 'recruited' members of the editorial and advisory boards. In 2013, Brill publishing house decided to publish the journal *Ecclesial Practices. Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography* of which the first issue was published in 2014.

Throughout this book you will find references to the research community collaborating in the research program 'Practices' of the PThU in Amsterdam and Groningen. I would like to thank the Board of the PThU, which enabled me to take a three-month research leave in the spring of 2017. It was then that I wrote the first texts for this book. I am grateful to our student-assistants of the past years, Arie-Pieter Schep, Bregje Anna Faasse and Manoah Dangremond, the first two for collecting some articles on citizen science and action research and the third for composing the bibliography, based upon all the references in the footnotes. I extend my gratitude to Joyce Rondaij for helping me finalise the title and sub-title of this book. The original title was 'Doing Practical Theology in Community'. Thank you also to my colleagues at the Protestant Theological University in Groningen, namely Theo Pleizier, Anne-Claire Mulder, Marten van der Meulen, Erica Meijers and Martin Walton, and the PhD-students of our practical theology seminar, namely Jacobine Gelderloos-Commandeur, Marinka Verburg, Rosaliene Israel, Matthias Kaljouw, Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker, Youngsub Won, Jan Minnema, Pieter van Winden, Karen Zwijze-Koning and Niels den Toom, for reading and providing feedback on two chapters and for giving me encouragement. I also want to express my gratitude to two of my earlier PhD-students: Christiane van den Berg-Seifert and Veerle Rooze. Thanks to them I got to know about Pranee Liamputting's healing methodology. I saw it in practice in Christiane's research on sexual abuse in pastoral care and realised the value of relational approaches that I became acquainted with through supervising Veerle's research on emerging religious communities in new housing areas. In addition, I am grateful to our former dean, Gerrit Immink, who, perhaps without knowing it, contributed to this book by pushing me to write a foundational book for practical theology. For years I refused, finding it far more interesting to supervise and conduct empirical, practical theological research, with congregations. I have finally done it. Another person to name and give thanks to is Sam Bussey, who, along with his brother Peter, read and corrected the book as native speakers. They did not just make corrections, but also audaciously gave me advice regarding some alterations to the text. As for the funding of the correction process, I am grateful to the Dutch fund, *Fonds Aanpakken*, that has supported many ministers in the past and continues to do so in the present. A word of gratitude also to Ingrid Heijckers-Velt, acquisitions editor at Royal Brill publishing house for her instructions, guidance and her work during the review and printing process. I want to thank the editors and reviewers of the Brill-series *Theology in Practice*, in particular the editors-in-chief Bonnie Miller-McLemore and Elaine Graham, for their encouraging feedback at the beginning of and during the writing process. Finally, I express my thanks to my children, Douwe, Aafje and Anna and their partners, Eveline, Bowi and Jos, for regularly inquiring as to how I was getting along with my book. I am grateful to my wonderful wife, Renske Zandstra, for her loving support and for calling me to take my sabbath moments.

I pray that this book will be a helpful guide for you in your research on Christian practices, together with the people of God, for the benefit of the world.

PART 1

The Valorisation of Practical Theology

CHAPTER 1

Valorising Practical Theology

Enhancing the Practical Relevance of Research

1 We... All... Benefit![1]

1 May, 2017, a colleague and I are having a conversation with two experts from the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN) at the service centre of the PCN in Utrecht.[2] They are responsible for the strategic development of 200 'fresh expressions of church', or, as we call them in The Netherlands, 'pioneering places' (Dutch: *pioniersplekken*), from 2013 to 2021. Pioneering places are characterised by innovative forms of being church, starting from scratch, focused on people who are not, or no longer, involved in an existing church.[3] Now the experts express their interest in doing research with us. We connect their questions and concerns with our plan to begin a new PThU-one-year-research master at our Groningen location, that will be called 'Missional Communities'. We are in the process of designing two new courses for this program. One is labelled 'practices of mission-shaped congregations', while the other is 'new emerging communities in ecclesial and societal contexts'. In this research master, practice-oriented research and teaching will go hand in hand. During the conversation, my colleague Marten van der Meulen and I propose that students who are competent to perform empirical research do small-scale research projects in pairs on selected topics, in collaboration with the PCN-experts and leaders of the pioneering places. In addition, I plan to organise a course on 'pioneering' for ministers as part of their continuing ministerial education program.

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1 I would like to express my gratitude to prof. Martin Walton, dr. Theo Pleizier, dr. Anne-Claire Mulder, dr. Marten van der Meulen, dr. Erica Meijers, Rosaliene Israel (MA), Marinka Verburg (MA), Matthias Kaljouw (MA) Berdine van den Toren (MA) and drs. Jan Minnema for their feedback on an earlier version of this chapter.

2 These PCN-experts are Martijn Vellekoop and Nynke Dijkstra.

3 See Eleonora D. Hof, "Reimagining Mission in the Postcolonial Condition: A Theology of Vulnerability and Vocation at the Margins" (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University; Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2016): 22. See also Sabrina Müller, *Fresh Expressions of Church: Ekklesiologische Beobachtungen und Interpretationen einer neuen kirchlicher Bewegung* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2016). For an analysis of fresh expressions in Germany and Switzerland, see the journal *Praktische Theologie. Zeitschrift für Praxis in Kirche, Gesellschaft und Kultur* (2018, Heft 1).

1 November 2018, a similar conversation takes place at a Dutch para-church organisation called the Society for Mission in The Netherlands, the IZB (Dutch: *Bond voor Inwendige Zending*). This time my colleague, Theo Pleizier, and I are both attending the meeting. In the 'practices of the mission-shaped congregation' course, we will collaborate with the IZB in order to improve a missionary trajectory called IZB-focus, that was initiated by the IZB and is implemented by some twenty local churches.[4] The purpose of the trajectory, which has traits of action-research, is congregational innovation in regard to equipping members for being authentic witnesses of the gospel. Along with experts from the IZB[5] and an employee of the Impact Centre Erasmus we plan to engage students on the course in a critical assessment of a scan, that is to be used by local churches at the beginning and at the end of the trajectory. In the participating congregations, this scan will serve as a baseline measurement. Over the following weeks, we teach the course in which we also include a focus group with members from a congregation in Groningen that participates in the trajectory. Students read literature, have conversations with the IZB-experts and revise the scan. March 25, 2019, we evaluate the collaboration. Students have graded the course at 9.3 out of 10 points. Based upon the student input, the IZB has developed an entirely new scan. We have learned that it is highly motivating and rewarding to develop a course together with an ecclesial partner that explicitly considers its mission to be engagement in the *Missio Dei*. My colleague, Theo Pleizier, will write an article about the process.

Early spring 2019, instigated by our experiences with the PCN, IZB and some other projects, my colleagues Martin Walton, Anne-Claire Mulder, Erica Meijers, Marten van der Meulen, Theo Pleizier, our PhD-students, a student-assistant Mariëlle Splint and myself, as chairholder, make an inventory of all the ecclesial and societal partners that we are collaborating with. In a meeting, March 28, we share our surprise. It turns out that we can identify twenty-nine different stakeholders who finance our research, including the church councils of eighteen 'iconic churches' who are financing a four-year PhD project. In different projects a further ten partners also 'provide' us with input for our research. For example, in a research project with chaplains we collaborate with researchers from other universities and with over fifty chaplains.[6] Some of us also collaborate with collectives in other countries.[7] We also notice how over

4 See below, Chapter 7.

5 These experts were the director of the IZB, Jan-Maarten Goedhart, together with Henri Wijnne and Martijn van den Boogaart. The employee of the Impact Centre Erasmus was Carly Relou.

6 See below, Chapter 7.

7 Anne-Claire Mulder collaborates with a collective of German-speaking female authors in a collaborative research project on the good life. See Ursula Knecht, Caroline Krüger, Dorothee

the last three years focus groups have increasingly been facilitated in courses on practical theology, and we have conducted fieldtrips and instructed students to do small research projects in the city of Groningen. As a result of our meeting we decide to start an education-related research project: Protestant Practices in Groningen, to be called #PP050. In the courses conducted by (teachers of) our disciplinary group 'Practices', we will develop a research program in collaboration with our partners in the field. It will be specifically designed as a collaborative research project for, and with, students in the context of academic teaching and learning ('research driven education'). The basic framework of the project aims for a descriptive study on how protestant churches, or Christian groups, churches and organisations associated with the protestant branch of Christianity (including chaplaincy contexts and pioneering places) in Groningen express the Christian faith in their formal and informal, ecclesial and public practices. The project aims to understand what the impacts of these expressions are on protestant believers and on a wider circle of participants in these practices, and how these practices interact with wider society. The specific research questions and problems will be developed in September 2019, in close collaboration with the practitioners within this field. The research agenda on these practices is thus fuelled by conversations with the practitioners. Looking at #PP050 and at the various forms of collaboration with stakeholders, we express our common wonder: We… all… benefit! It is a slogan from a Dutch television commercial…

What is happening here? Let us look at it from the perspective of the valorisation of knowledge. The different activities involved in practical theological education, practical theological research and protestant practices are being connected. Knowledge will be *transformed* in ways that enable it to become useful, via a process involving scholars (having expertise as senior researchers), students and practitioners. By publishing the research, discussing it with experts, and discussing it in sessions with practitioners, knowledge will be codified and *enabled to circulate* in a wider collection of networks, creating a series of beneficiaries.[8] Finally, knowledge will be *consolidated*, leading to improved skills. According to Benneworth, drawing on Corea, there is "an upscaling in these transformation-circulation-consolidation processes because

Markert, Micheala Moser, Anne-Claire Mulder, Ina Praetorius, Cornelia Roth, Antje Schrupp and Andrea Trenwalder-Egger, *ABC des guten Lebens* (Rüsselsheim Christel Göttert Verlag, 2012). See: https://abcdesgutenlebens.wordpress.com.

8 Paul Benneworth, "Tracing How Arts and Humanities Research Translates, Circulates and Consolidates in Society: How Have Scholars Been Reacting to Diverse Impact and Public Value Agendas?" *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 14, no. 1 (2015): 52.

they allow (i.e. contingently and uncertainly) the outputs from a process at one scale to act as an input at a higher level."[9] In this case, the output will also act as an input at other levels, since those who are currently active in the ministry, future students, congregations and possibly also consultants will benefit from the knowledge acquired. Practitioners can be invited to join continuing education courses on fresh expressions and mission-shaped local churches. Teaching, training, research and the implementation of knowledge and skills in new and existing practices will be intertwined: "Stakeholders are no longer mere recipients, but get a specific role and a more active voice in the university's research to improve the value of their share and their benefits."[10]

In this chapter in paragraph 2, we describe the current interest in the academic world on: knowledge valorisation, collaborative forms of research, the involvement of stakeholders, the focus on lifelong learning, and the insistence of scholars and practitioners in Africa, Asia and Latin America that collaborative research is needed to tap into local knowledge; in paragraph 3, how collaborative forms of research are becoming more important in practical theology; in paragraph 4, how the turn to empirical theology at the end of the 1980s was motivated by a need to be relevant to the needs of practitioners; in paragraph 5, how, acknowledging Bonnie Miller McLemore's criticism, the fourfold structuring of research into observation, description, evaluation and strategy-development can turn application into an afterthought and, in paragraph 6, we will distinguish some knowledge transfer activities in practical theology; Finally, in the last paragraphs, we ask three questions that will be dealt with extensively in Chapter 8, but need to be briefly addressed in this introductory chapter: are university autonomy and academic freedom influenced and possibly even threatened by a stakeholder approach; how should we think about the relationship between the researcher and the researched; and what are some initial insights on 'two-way knowledge flows'?

2 Knowledge Valorisation, Collaborative Research, Stakeholder Orientation and Lifelong Learning in a Global Context

Nowadays research assessment panels put a strong emphasis on *knowledge valorisation*, the transfer of and circulation of knowledge resulting from research to other parties. A reappraisal of research that contributes to wider society is

9 Benneworth, "Tracing How Arts and Humanities Research," 52.

10 Paul Benneworth and Ben W. Jongbloed, "Who Matters to Universities? A Stakeholder Perspective on Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Valorisation," *Higher Education* 59, no. 5 (2010): 567–588.

visible. Research should have 'impact' and universities are called to play a role in contributing to innovation, economic growth, wealth creation and people's welfare. Tjerk Wardenaar writes that "researchers are encouraged to strive for societal relevance by science policymakers and research funders who include relevance requirements in their mechanisms for agenda-setting and funding."[11] The EU research policy links research agendas with societal challenges, and emphasises the need for exchange of knowledge between the academy and societal actors in order to enhance the quality, relevance and legitimacy of research and its impact.[12] Valorisation can be seen as an interactive process in which knowledge is made available, and in which cooperation between knowledge institutes and practitioners is crucial. Paul Benneworth and Ben Jongbloed define valorisation as "all activities that contribute to ensuring that the outcomes of scientific knowledge add value beyond the scientific domain."[13] Changes in society are taking place with ever-increasing speed and the need for innovative but also reflective and applicable knowledge production is urgent.[14] In today's society, the flourishing of individuals, companies, communities and even regions derives more than ever from the ability to develop and exploit knowledge.

In the wider academic world, another development runs parallel to the growing emphasis on valorisation and the stakeholder orientation. Already in the 1970s, *transdisciplinarity* was used to underline the necessity of research with societal purposes. In the 1990s, German philosopher Jürgen Mittelstraß, in a classic editorial to the environmental science journal GAIA, reintroduced the term, calling for a collaboration of disciplines across disciplinary boundaries and relating to problems in the lifeworld (German: *Lebensweltliche Problemlagen*).[15] Mittelstraß criticised the academy sharply for its narrowing specialisms and expert cultures, in which the expert knows ever more about ever less. Interdisciplinary research, he wrote, is not enough; that is often no

11 Tjerk Wardenaar, "Organizing Collaborative Research: The Dynamics and Long-Term Effects of Multi-Actor Research Programs" (PhD diss., VU University; The Hague: Rathenau Institute, 2014): 11.

12 Catherine Jolibert and Anna Wesselink, "Research Impacts and Impact on Research in Biodiversity Conservation: The Influence of Stakeholder Engagement," *Environmental Science & Policy* 22 (2012): 100–111.

13 Benneworth and Jongbloed, "Who Matters to Universities?" 568.

14 Patricia van Hemert, Peter Nijkamp, and Jolanda Verbraak, "Evaluating Social Science and Humanities Knowledge Production: An Exploratory Analysis of Dynamics in Science Systems," *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 22, no. 4 (2009): 443–464.

15 Jürgen Mittelstraß, "Auf dem Weg zur Transdisziplinarität," *GAIA* 1, no. 5 (1992): 250. See also Christian Pohl, "From Science to Policy through Transdisciplinary Research," *Environmental Science and Policy* 1, no. 1 (2007): 46–53.

more than academic rhetoric. Transdisciplinary research stands for research that transcends the boundaries of a discipline and that both defines and solves problems independent from a discipline. Recurring elements of what is considered transdisciplinarity include collaboration between academics and societal actors, integrating knowledge and an approach that is "real world problem oriented."[16] Later in the 1990s, the discussion of knowledge production centred around the concept of 'science mode 2', which was coined by Michael Gibbons and others.[17] Mode 1 knowledge production is that which refers to a disciplinary approach, i.e. the production of traditional knowledge. *Mode 2 knowledge* is transdisciplinary, focuses on problem solving and considers the context in which it will be applied. It includes a heterogeneous set of practitioners collaborating on a problem identified in a specific, localised context. Looking at the past two decades, we can see that many researchers are not convinced by Mode 2 knowledge and even argue that it "rings alarm bells about a shift from pure to applied science."[18] We also often find claims about the need for the two modes to coexist. However, despite these factors, bibliometrics demonstrates that this new mode of knowledge production is increasingly practiced.[19] In this approach, practitioners, and also ordinary people are no longer held at arm's length, and its use does not necessarily compromise the rigor of the research. The 'grand challenges of our time' or the so-called 'wicked problems' – issues that are too complex for one disciplinary perspective alone – can only be addressed in a successful way when relevant actors, researchers, consultants and practitioners work on them together.[20] Funding organisations, therefore, often require that research be *collaborative* – although, we must add, there is still research to be done on the development of strategies to help researchers understand how to collaborate effectively and how to involve practitioners and other stakeholders so that their interests can inform

16 Stephan P. L. de Jong, Tjerk Wardenaar and Edwin Horlings, "Exploring the Promises of Transdisciplinary Research: A Quantitative Study of Two Climate Research Programmes," in Stephen P. L. de Jong, "Engaging Scientists: Organising Valorisation in the Netherlands" (PhD diss., Leiden University; The Hague: Rathenau Institute, 2015): 73.

17 See Michael Gibbons, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott and Martin Trow, *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1994).

18 Michael Gibbons, Camille Limoges and Peter Scott, "Revisiting Mode 2 at Noors Slott," *Prometheus* 29, no. 4 (2011): 365. We will return to the distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' science below, and further in Chapter 8. An overemphasis on 'problem relevance' may displace academics' concern for rigor, independence, and quality.

19 Gibbons, Limoges and Scott, "Revisiting Mode 2 at Noors Slott," 362.

20 Catherine Lyall and Isabel Fletcher, "Experiments in Interdisciplinary Capacity-Building: The Successes and Challenges of Large-Scale Interdisciplinary Investments," *Science and Public Policy* 40, no. 1 (2013): 1–7.

the research process.[21] Over the past fifteen years one has frequently heard buzzwords like 'action learning', 'action research', 'collaborative inquiry', 'community based research', 'co-operative inquiry', 'citizen science', 'participatory research', 'engaged research' and the like. The agenda for collaborative research with practitioners, 'research in community' as we often call it in this book, is embraced by the EU[22] and by national academic agencies worldwide. For example, the Irish Research Council and Irish Universities Association state that "to avoid misalignment of expectations regarding the kind of research outputs that society expects, and the nature of the research outputs that researchers deliver, better engagement between researchers and the community of stakeholders is essential."[23] The active involvement of the public, product and service users in the research process is strongly promoted. Engaged research is advanced *with* community partners rather than for them. According to Louise Phillips et al., collaborative research can be understood as part of a 'dialogic turn' across diverse fields of social practice:

> In the dialogic turn, communication is conceived as a dialogue among participants in which knowledge is co-produced collaboratively. [...] Common to all the fields of social practice in the dialogic turn is a retreat, at least rhetorically, from the idea of communication as one-way flow – that is, knowledge transmission, diffusion, dissemination or transfer – from experts to less knowledgeable target groups. Instead, a conception of communication as processes of dialogue is embraced in which the different participants co-produce knowledge collaboratively on the basis of the different knowledge forms that they bring into play when they meet and collaborate.[24]

21 Lyall and Fletcher, "Experiments in Interdisciplinary Capacity-Building," 2.

22 At EU level, the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation includes the Science with and for Society programme, that seeks to develop ways of connecting science to society across all disciplines. Its aim is to allow all societal actors including researchers, citizens, policy makers, business, civic and civil society organisations to work together during the research process. The approach is called Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI).

23 *Engaged Research: Society & Higher Education; Addressing Grand Societal Challenges Together*, (IRC and IUA, 2017): 1, accessed 25 August 2017, https://www4.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/research_support/pdfs/er_report_2016_web_final.pdf.

24 Louise Phillips, Marianne Kristiansen, Marja Vehviläinen and Ewa Gunnarson, "Tackling the Tensions of Dialogue and Participation: Reflexive Strategies for Collaborative Research," in *Knowledge and Power in Collaborative Research: A Reflexive Approach*, ed. Louise Phillips, Marianne Kristiansen, Marja Vehviläinen and Ewa Gunnarson (London: Routledge, 2012): 1–2.

In particular, the changed perspective on practitioners is remarkable. They are to be seen as research participants who have "much to contribute to shaping the right research questions and methodologies and assisting in the analysis and interpretation of results."[25] In a linear model of the research process, according to the IRC and IUA, the researcher(s) and practitioners should identify the areas for research, formulate the research questions and draw up the research design in dialogue with each other.[26] They should collect and analyse data collaboratively. Finally, they should work on proposals for research output and knowledge transfer together.[27]

In the last decade, valorisation has been popular in university policy, but labels such as 'knowledge transfer', 'knowledge dissemination' and 'research use' can easily imply that "research is complete before the impact process starts."[28] Stakeholder orientation goes one step further. Today, within the policy of valorisation, *stakeholder orientation* is a frequently used buzzword, stakeholder commonly being defined as "a person or group who influences or is influenced by the research."[29] On the one hand, stakeholder orientation can be seen as part of the increasing managerialism in higher education.[30] Empirical research demonstrates that universities with a stronger stakeholder orientation than others achieve better organisational performance in terms of beneficiary satisfaction, resource acquisition, and reputation, particularly when they also focus on latent needs, a so-called proactive stakeholder orientation.[31] On the other hand, stakeholder orientation is considered by some researchers to be the pathway *par excellence* for reinventing the social sciences.[32] If social sciences matter, they should be reformed as "loci for the formation of citizens," they should analyse difficult social and ethical issues and help to

25 IRC and IUA, *Engaged Research*, 2.

26 IRC and IUA, *Engaged Research*, 6.

27 IRC and IUA, *Engaged Research*, 18.

28 Jolibert and Wesselink, "Research Impacts," 101.

29 Marleen van de Kerkhof, "Making a Difference: On the Constraints of Consensus Building and the Relevance of Deliberation in Stakeholder Dialogues," *Policy Sciences* 39, no. 3 (2006): 279–299.

30 Peter Maassen, "The Changing Roles of Stakeholders in Dutch University Governance," *European Journal of Education* 35, no. 4 (2000): 449.

31 María-del-Carmen Alarcón-del-Amo, Carmen Casablancas-Segura and Joan Llonch, "Responsive and Proactive Stakeholder Orientation in Public Universities: Antecedents and Consequences," *Higher Education* 72, no. 2 (2016): 131–151.

32 Morten Levin and Davydd Greenwood, "Revitalizing Universities by Reinventing the Social Sciences," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011): 27–42.

solve society's, and ordinary people's pressing problems.[33] The non-academic world is the source of their legitimacy. For this reason, but also for methodological reasons, social science research should include non-university stakeholders. Therefore, social science teaching should introduce students to social research practices with multiple stakeholders. Learning should be based on real-life problems that challenge both theory and method. As I understand it, for example, doctoral or master students who are doing research on community development should be enabled to learn from vernacular or 'place-based knowledge', the local knowledge that is restricted to the people living in a specific geographical place. Students also learn from being trained in a collaborative research setting, gaining skills that allow them to interact closely with knowledge users. If they learn about collaborative research, they will be more likely to be involved in such practices later in their careers.[34]

There are different levels of participation by stakeholders. Research by the European University Association (EUA)[35] demonstrated that collaboration between European universities on the one hand and external non-university partners, such as industries, public agencies, NGOs, charities, civil society and professional bodies on the other hand, takes place at a *project* level, "a specific short-term collaboration of several parties with joint objectives limited to the timeframe of the collaboration," a *programme* level in which "specific longer-term collaborations are inscribed within an agreed common framework of objectives and timeframe" and an *institutional* level, which includes "programmes, projects and alliances as part of an overall university strategy concerning high-level collaborative research involving long-term jointly-developed partnership agreements."[36] It turns out that today EU agencies, national academic research bodies, universities and external non-university partners consider it highly necessary to create collaborative relationships at an institutional level, in order to deal with societal challenges and to increase opportunities for innovation.

As I see it, another development converges with the aforementioned ones. In today's world, in one's work but also in retirement, *lifelong learning*, or

33 Levin and Greenwood, "Revitalizing Universities," 27.

34 Wardenaar, "Organizing Collaborative Research," 14.

35 EUA plays an important role in the Bologna process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation.

36 Lidia Borrell-Damian, Rita Marais and John H. Smith, *University-Business Collaborative Research: Goals, Outcomes and New Assessment Tools* (Brussel: European University Association, 2014): 14.

learning throughout life regarding the continuing development of competence, consisting of skills, attitude and knowledge, has become a necessity.[37] Individuals have to regularly update their abilities so as to enhance their employability, but lifelong learning is also considered necessary for the strengthening of the cultural and social capital of societies.

While as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, the first "comprehensive educational conception of education across the lifespan" emerged in the field of adult education, promoting lifelong learning really became an integral part of education policy after the Second World War through appropriation and affirmation by international organisations such as UNESCO,[38] OECD (since 1969), the Council of Europe (since 1967) and, at a later stage, the European Union (since the 1990s).[39] Since the 1960s, the concepts of permanent education and recurrent education have been embraced by NGOs all over the world.[40] Today, in EU-policy, lifelong learning foresees the implementation of a learning/knowledgeable society, in which personal fulfilment and development throughout life is promoted in order to enable people to pursue their individual objectives in life. This active citizenship and inclusion should allow everybody to participate in society and should strengthen the capacity of each and every person to obtain a decent job in the labour market.[41] In this context, valorisation of research is necessary for both research and educational purposes. Research insights and methods need to become accessible for individual self-exploration and self-improvement. The growing numbers of online subscriptions to journals, the 'popular science' books, which also deal with socially pressing matters, the open access policy in more and more countries, and the huge number of books on competences and leadership, demonstrates a worldwide interest in both knowledge as such and the transfer and circulation of knowledge in different contexts. Indeed, terms like 'knowledge

37 Frances Ward writes: "Tap the words on an internet search engine and you will gain access to over four million sites," Frances Ward, *Lifelong Learning: Theological Education and Supervision* (London: SCM, 2005): 1.

38 The first International Conference on Adult Education (the Elsinore Conference), organised by unesco in 1949, can be considered the "first international step towards the concept of education throughout life." There were 25 countries represented. In 1960, at the second World Conference in Montreal, 51 countries were represented. Vera Centeno, "Lifelong learning: a policy concept with a long past but a short history," *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 30, no. 2 (2011): 136. See DOI: 10.1080/02601370.2010.547616, 136.

39 Centeno, "Lifelong learning," 136.

40 Centeno, "Lifelong learning," 137.

41 Centeno, "Lifelong learning," 143.

economy' and 'knowledge society' have become common.[42] In the aforementioned report, the director of the Irish Research Council states:

> We have set a target for Ireland to have the most engaged and scientifically informed public. This is important not just to enable informed debate around societal challenges but to ensure that Ireland has a research system that allows the public to inform solutions to these challenges. Facilitating the public to become catalysts for change by including them in the research process in turn increases the probability for greater long-term impact.[43]

Does the emphasis on valorisation, lifelong learning, societal challenges, stakeholder orientation, and the need to learn from *vernacular knowledge* and *indigenous epistemologies*, perhaps fit a first-world context better than a developing context? Here it is important to state that we see this emphasis all around the globe and not only in Western countries. Teachers and researchers discover that a primary resource which is easily 'at hand' is precisely the local knowledge. And also, when it comes to skills, citizen science (such as archaeologists working with local villagers, for example) is applied to a wide range of geographical contexts. In Africa, until recently, outdated American textbooks were dumped in university libraries, or textbooks written abroad were translated into the local language. Today, in more and more African universities, *knowledge creation* is said to be best realised through *mutual cooperation* between local people and researchers. Researchers and students need to learn from an "indigenised perspective to the knowledge available."[44] They should build on the knowledge in their immediate surroundings. According to Birgit Brock-Utne, a professor of education, who has been teaching and doing research for many years in Africa, and especially Tanzania, "this type of research is needed all over Africa, not only in South Africa." She adds: "There is a need to rewrite the content of textbooks, change curricula and restore the languages Africans speak."[45] African researchers aver the same. Ramoupi and Ntongwe state that "it is becoming an increasingly popular opinion that solutions to local problems must originate from within the locale; for Africa this means drawing from within African systems of knowing instead of grafting African

42 See Chapter 5.
43 IRC and IUA, *Engaged Research*, 16.
44 Birgit Brock-Utne, "Decolonisation of Knowledge in the African University," in *Knowledge and Change in African Universities*, eds. Michael Cross and Amanda Ndofirepi (Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2017): 168.
45 Brock-Utne, "Decolonisation," 168.

knowledge onto western implanted epistemes."[46] Researchers speak about the necessity of the 'Africanisation' of curriculum and complain that in the last decades this has scarcely happened. As for research, Paulin Hountondji calls for "an Africa-based tradition of knowledge in all disciplines, a tradition where questions are initiated and research agendas set out directly or indirectly by African societies themselves."[47]

3 Collaborative Research in Practical Theology

The 'dialogic turn' is good news for practical theology in different geographical contexts and is promising for both research and teaching as well as for the practitioners and communities it serves. Over the centuries, the research questions in practical theology have been related to the challenges, concerns and experiences of practitioners, for example, pastors, pastoral workers,[48] parish evangelists, pastoral counsellors and ministers.[49] Although the rest of society was never out of sight, practical theology reflected on their practices, offered knowledge, and provided instruction as to 'know-why', 'know-what' and 'know-how'. Today, research is not only performed *on behalf of* or for the sake of practitioners, but projects are increasingly designed through explicit conversation *with* practitioners. Questions emerge from shared challenges formulated by church congregations, mission agencies, schools, church councils or chaplaincy teams. Ministers want to learn from practical theological research, for example, on listeners' experiences during sermons, on new ways of being church, or on ministerial role expectations held by congregants or church councils. Local churches, searching for renewal, ask practical theologians to do local audit research finding out from local people, community centres and other agencies what provisions are missing and what needs are unmet.[50]

46 Neo Lekgotla Laga Ramoupi and Roland Ndille Ntongwe, "Africanisation of humanities knowledge in the universities in Africa. A critique of the Cameroon and South African experiences," in *Knowledge and Change in African Universities*, eds. Michael Cross and Amanda Ndofirepi (Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2017): 198.

47 Paulin J. Hountondji, "Knowledge of Africa, knowledge by Africans: Two perspectives on African studies," *RCCS Annual Review* 1 (2009): 129.

48 The term 'pastoral worker' is used in this book to denote the professional, paid pastoral worker.

49 The terms 'clergy', 'pastors', 'ministers' and 'priests' are used synonymously in this book to denote professional religious workers serving in local churches. The terms reflect preferences in denominational nomenclature rather than substantive functional differences.

50 See Maggie Durran, *Regenerating the Local Church: Mission-Based Strategies for Transformation and Growth* (Canterbury: Canterbury Press, 2006): 56.

Spiritual caregivers, such as chaplains[51] in health institutes, the armed forces and prisons want to improve their competences and call for practical theological research to help them, for example, on how they can carry out and conceptualise their interventions. Professional learning communities of pioneers want to learn from research on fresh expressions of church. In the past ten years or so, we have also seen that practitioners can do research themselves, particularly when they have been trained to do so in their formal education. Also, in order to meet their needs and the needs of other practitioners, some practitioners combine a vocation as a minister with conducting practical theological research, sometimes for a postgraduate qualification. Teachers of religious education and chaplains are increasingly involved in doing research, and this often takes place in teams.

In the last decade, new methods of collaborative research have emerged in the field of practical theology and in all of its sub-disciplines. Action research, participatory action research, and other methodologies have been identified as having potential to generate a renewed focus on practice.[52] Both action research and practical theology are seen to converge in their aim of facilitating wisdom (*phronèsis*) that can be used to change or even transform a problematic practice. The convergences between action research and practical theology have led a leading scholar in the field, Elaine Graham, to examine and confirm (!) the claim that practical theology can be designated as a form of action research.[53] Graham even describes action research, while acknowledging its humanistic stance, as a 'spiritual practice' in which attending and attentiveness are core imperatives, just as they should be in practical theology. According to Graham, referring to the work of Barbara McClure, paying attention to people in their needs and impediments not only leads to understanding, but can "create a space in which divine revelation and transformation may appear."[54] Action research methods, in which collaboration stands at the forefront, enable practical theologians to instruct people "in the well-springs of tradition from which practical wisdom flows."[55] I would add that action research and other collaborative approaches also tap into the epistemologies and axiologies of the practitioners. There is, however, still a whole world to learn about community-academic research partnerships, about the effects, the

51 In this book we will refer to chaplains, where, in other contexts, the term 'spiritual caregiver' is used.

52 Elaine Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, no. 1 (2013): 170.

53 Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" 148–178.

54 Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" 176.

55 Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" 178.

different types of engaged research, and different roles of practitioners, stakeholders, etc. The present book is intended as a contribution and resource in this area.

4 Empirical Theology

In the past decades, particularily in the European context of research in practical theology, empirical research conducted by practical theologians has become common in all the sub-disciplines of practical theology, which include pastoral theology, homiletics, liturgical studies, pastoral care, practical ecclesiology/congregational studies/ecclesial ethnography, diaconal studies, religious education and chaplaincy studies.[56] With its empirical methodology and openness to methods and theoretical underpinnings derived from the social sciences, practical theology enables practitioners to understand their practices better and to be more effective in their interventions.[57] In the words of Hans-Günter Heimbrock, "The increasing use of various social science methods and strategies has enlarged theological knowledge considerably, especially regarding the social dynamics, conditions and contexts of religious life. These methods have also helped develop more effective strategies for pastoral work."[58] Notwithstanding the need to meet academic standards and criteria, and to enlarge theological knowledge, the *concerns of practitioners* were paramount in the move towards empirical methods.

The term 'empirical theology' was already used in connection with the psychology of religion in Canada and the United States[59] in the 1910s and in

56 Recently, psychologists of religion and researchers in the field of nursing and medicine have come to regard chaplaincy research as "a relatively new discipline *in medicine* (italics HdR), that provides for care of the human spirit in healthcare contexts for people of all worldviews." See Linda Emanuel et al., "Workings of the Human Spirit in Palliative Care Situations: A Consensus Model from the Chaplaincy Research Consortium," *BioMed Central Palliative Care* 14, no. 29 (2015): 1–13. DOI: 10.1186/s12904-015-0005-3.

57 For example, in health care chaplaincy, interventions may include active listening, prayer, facilitating story-telling, facilitating communication between patient and/or family member and care team, blessings, etc. Heather Walton states that "speaking in signs, communicating in the language of silence, preserving the gestures of pain" are also interventions. See Heather Walton, "Speaking in Signs: Narrative and Trauma in Pastoral Theology," *Scottish Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 5, no. 2 (2002): 4.

58 Hans-Günter Heimbrock, "From Data to Theory: Elements of Methodology in Empirical Phenomenological Research in Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 9, no. 2 (2005): 273.

59 Douglas Clyde Macintosh, *Theology as an Empirical Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1919). According to an 'empirical theologian', Bernard Meland, working in the 1950s in Chicago,

Germany[60] in the 1930s. In the 1970s, the call to perform empirical-critical research, to examine 'the real church', was widely heard.[61] By the 1980s, academic practical theologians at first in The Netherlands, Germany and Great Britain, wanted to learn from social scientists (particularly experts in methodology such as Anton Dingeman de Groot, for example) about how to perform empirical research themselves. They criticised and distanced themselves from the earlier concept of practical theology as 'applied theology', which in their view entailed a deductive approach, a model for applying theological norms in practice. What practical theology needed, was an inductive approach. Practical theologians needed to use qualitative or quantitative research methods, or both. Practical theologians realised that they could not be satisfied with applying research results generated by the social sciences. Thirty years ago, in 1988, in a seminal article, Hans van der Ven wrote:

> In the same way as exegetes use literary methods, and church historians use historical methods, practical theologians implement empirical methods. The criterion is employing methods in correspondence with the object and the question under investigation. Because the object of practical theology is not biblical or historical, but present religious praxis, empirical methods and techniques are at stake.[62]

In this article, Van der Ven asserts that the object and the desired knowledge or improvement determine the methods. According to Van der Ven, practical theologians observe, reflect on, interpret and, if possible, even try to explain current religious praxis. They may research causal relations between faith in God and human behaviour.[63] Yet, it is one thing to know what is going on; what *should happen* is another question entirely. In line with a very long tradition of practical theologians, Van der Ven avers that practical theology cannot do

Douglas Macintosh' hope was to "create a clinical theology that could be as explicit in guiding the work of the minister among his parishioners as medical science had been able to inform and discipline the work of physicians in their communities." See Bernard E. Meland, C. Peden and J. N. Gaston, *Bernard Eugene Meland's Unpublished Papers* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013): 368.

60 Werner Gruehn, "Empirische Theologie (Zur Einführung)," *Archiv für Religionspsychologie und Seelenführung* 6 (1936): 9–18. Heimbrock, "From Data to Theory," 274.

61 Norbert Mette, *Theorie und Praxis. Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche und methodologische Untersuchungen zur Theorie-Praxis-Problematik innerhalb der praktischen Theologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1978): 215. See below, Chapter 4.

62 Johannes A. van der Ven, "Practical Theology: From Applied to Empirical Theology," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 1, no. 1 (1988): 14.

63 Johannes A. van der Ven, "An Empirical or a Normative Approach to Practical-Theological Research: A False Dilemma," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 15, no. 2 (2002): 21.

without the normative question about what religious praxis ought to be. Empirical theologians not only want to describe and understand. They want to 'improve', 'advance', 'strengthen', 'enhance', in short, practical theologians apply normative, evaluative criteria. They find the motivation for their research in both their descriptive work and in the normative dimension. Van der Ven describes how researchers can be "called in by the practitioners."[64] Practitioners may have tried to enact their new ideas and plans and failed in doing so and then practical theologians may be called in for help. When they complete their research, practical theologians have the task of giving feedback to the practitioners, so that they can advance and develop the religious practices in which they are involved. Cooperation with practitioners is therefore necessary, albeit that, according to Van der Ven, practical theologians, practitioners and developers have different roles, tasks and responsibilities. Practical theologians try to develop theories about and offer critical evaluations of religious practices, practitioners are responsible for the manifest and latent processes in these practices, and developers try to guide, change, transform and innovate religious praxis. The last two do not belong to the academy. The practitioner works in the context of the parish, the developer at the pastoral service institution, and the practical theologian at the university. Any confusion between the three is "fatal for all three parties."[65] In a later article, in 2002, Van der Ven states that practical theology "is about general rather than singular practical processes."[66] Still, according to Van der Ven, the practitioner's concerns form both the starting point from which the research questions emerge and the field where the results of the research are implemented. Practical concerns form the context of discovery as well as the context of application.

The first large-scale research project in which practical theologians used social scientific tools provides a helpful illustration. In the 1980s and 1990s, very specific and well described concerns of different types of practitioners in religious practices motivated Van der Ven, several doctoral students and some colleagues, to do empirical research on theodicy, a "*crux pastoralis*."[67] Van der Ven described the relevance of the theodicy project by referring to the speechlessness of many pastors when attempting to find comforting language in situations of suffering, but he also thought it would give insights for homiletic, educational, liturgical and diaconal practices in parishes and, later, for religious education. The first result, a dissertation by Eric Vossen published in

64 Van der Ven, "Practical Theology," 20.
65 Van der Ven, "Practical Theology," 15.
66 Van der Ven, "An Empirical or a Normative Approach," 21.
67 See: Johannes A. van der Ven, H. (Eric) J. M. Vossen and Christiaan (Chris) A. M. Hermans, *Suffering: Why for God's Sake? Pastoral Research in Theodicy* (Kampen: Kok, 1995).

1985, sought to address the concerns of pastoral care volunteers who wanted to develop new competences and improve their existing skills in communicating with people in mourning.[68] How could pastoral care volunteers aid people in mourning more adequately, particularly when questions arose in the conversations that called for an evaluation of images of God in relationship to suffering? How could volunteers break deadlocks in religious-communicative action? Vossen's research aimed to improve the quality of pastoral communication in the parish. The method that he chose was highly creative. He investigated the education of volunteers in pastoral care in general, in order to design and develop a curriculum for volunteers. It was this curriculum that was empirically tested. Fieldwork was carried out by putting the curriculum into practice, by taking measurements in an experimental group and in a comparable control group. The results indicated that the volunteers had learned a lot and Vossen, therefore, decided to publish the curriculum and a manual alongside his dissertation. He had a clear eye for valorisation.

Later studies in empirical theology have often been instigated by concerns of practitioners, in Nijmegen, around the chair of Van der Ven and later, Chris Hermans and Hans Schilderman, but also in Germany and Great Britain. The practitioners that may benefit from the research not only include clergy, but also religious leaders in general, chaplains, teachers of religious education, youth leaders, etc. For example, the researchers around Leslie Francis focus on measuring religious values, and on the influence of different learning environments (such as church schools), but also on cathedral visitors, clergy psychology, diocesan performance, Christian responses to rural issues and on assessing the impact of learning strategies within faith communities, to name but a few of the impressive range of empirical research topics they address.[69]

5 The Structure of Practical Theological Research and the Problem of Implementation

During the last decades, it has been common practice to design a threefold or even fourfold structure for conducting empirical theological research in an academic setting: after observation, i.e. data gathering and description of a specific practice, and after understanding this practice through the application of theories, most practical theologians ultimately wish to *improve* or

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68 H. (Eric) J. M. Vossen, "Vrijwilligerseducatie en pastoraat aan rouwenden: een pastoraaltheologisch onderzoek naar een curriculum voor vrijwilligers in het pastoraat over het bijstaan van rouwenden" (PhD diss., KU-Nijmegen; Kampen: Kok, 1985).

69 See https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/staff/leslie_francis/.

enhance a practice.[70] How this should be done is often a matter of dispute, but they often formulate the relevance of their research along these lines. Finally, they also wish to give advice as to how to speak or act. A threefold structure, developed before World War II in the workers movement by Belgian priest Jos Cardijn, entails 'seeing', 'evaluating/judging' and 'acting'. Dutch practical theologian Gerben Heitink structured his practical theological manual accordingly,[71] and we also find it in the Dutch-Flemish introduction to practical theology as offered by Stefan Gärtner and Annemie Dillen.[72] In 2008, in a seminal work, Princeton professor Richard Osmer proposed an influential fourfold model for practical theological interpretation. According to Hennie Pieterse, "Osmer's hermeneutical approach has a great influence on the work of contemporary practical theologians in South Africa. The important contribution of his approach is that he includes in his hermeneutical approach an empirical component."[73]

Using Rick Osmer's research questions, a fourfold research-structure is designed. Practical theologians wish to find answers to *what* is going on, *why* this is going on, what *ought* to be going on, and *how* practitioners can respond.[74] Following Osmer's questions, however, it becomes clear that the practitioners are located at the end of the academic research trajectory, although, as we saw earlier, their questions, problems and concerns may have given rise to a research project. During the research itself they can participate in a curriculum or a test thereof, be interviewed, join a focus group, or take a survey, but after the research is completed, they are out of sight or, at best, 'waiting for the results'. Therefore, certain practitioners may be wary of academic practical theologians. Practitioners often experience a gap between how things should be done, with accompanying descriptions of best practices, and strategies for

70 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Joyce Ann Mercer, "Introduction," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 1. See also Tone Stangeland Kaufman, "From the Outside, Within, or In Between? Normativity at Work in Empirical Practical Theological Research," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 134–162; Gerardo Marti, "Found Theologies versus Imposed Theologies: Remarks on Theology and Ethnography from a Sociological Perspective," *Ecclesial Practices: Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography* 3, no. 2 (2016): 157–172.

71 Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains. Manual for Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

72 Stefan Gärtner and Annemie Dillen, *Praktische Theologie. Verkenningen aan de grens* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2015).

73 Hennie J. C. Pieterse, "Scientific-Theoretical Research Approach to Practical Theology in South Africa: A Contemporary Overview," *HTS Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017): 3. Accessed March 5, 2018, https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/4483.

74 See Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

implementation, and how things actually happen in practice. They may even have come to favour some theoretical insights and some strategies in their studies, whether in continuing education or in personal reading, until they discover that a practice is much more difficult, less neat, coherent and transparent, often erratic, capricious and full of surprises. Osmer himself is fully aware of this, giving ample space for the contemplative practitioner's structured reflection on what is going on or what should be happening in a specific situation or episode in a congregation.[75] He shows the unavoidable necessity of listening thoroughly. The leader of a congregation is an 'interpretative guide' for their communities and he or she needs to conceive his or her role as researcher-practitioner.

Yet again, what is the problem behind the three- or fourfold structure of much practical theological research? Bonnie Miller-McLemore considers 'understanding' and 'interpretation' to be the key terms of much contemporary practical theological research, but alleges that action, application and implementation are turned into afterthoughts.[76] While application has historically been one of practical theology's main strengths, in contemporary practical theology it has become a weakness. Miller-McLemore urges practical theology to learn more about "the connections between knowledge, practice, action, application, and transformation."[77] She calls for curriculum reforms in teaching practical theology, with a strong theory-gained-in-practice component: "We need to explore the shape and practice of a pedagogy of know-how not only within seminary programs, but also in doctoral institutions that shape teachers of ministry students, as well as in congregations from which many of us come and go."[78] In her article she does not ask what the implications might be for research. As we will see, this has been picked up in the last decade and the present book seeks to address precisely this topic. Again, the question to be asked is: who benefits from research?

6 Knowledge Transfer Activities in Practical Theology

Today, knowledge transfer activities in practical theology may involve the activities of consultations, contract research, joint research, training (profes-

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75 See below, Chapter 9.

76 Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "The 'Clerical Paradigm': A Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11, no. 3 (2007): 28.

77 Miller-McLemore, "The 'Clerical Paradigm'," 36.

78 Miller-McLemore, "The 'Clerical Paradigm'," 36.

sional development courses), personnel mobility, teaching, reading, seminars and conferences, informal collaborations and online communities.

Consultants are sought and commissioned, for example, by health-care institutions, denominations, ecclesial institutions or even local churches. Some have been at it for years, evolving along with the field. They are likely to be able to clearly articulate the demands of practitioners and apply practical theological research in their responses. Consulting and scholarly research in practical theology should complement each other and each activity is important for the advancement of the other.

In *contract research*, practical theological research projects are commissioned by non-academic stakeholders like the aforementioned, an example being the projects that we started with the experts of the PCN, involving students in research practices with fresh expressions and with the IZB on mission-shaped congregations. In *joint research*, collaborative arrangements are made for practical theologians and stakeholders to conduct research together. This is the main interest of Part 2 of this book. Knowledge transfer activities in practical theology may also involve *training*, for example, courses in continuing education tailored to the educational needs of practitioners, but also *professional development courses* as they take place in seminaries, church conferences, retreat centres, etc. We will elaborate this in Chapter 3. Also, *personnel mobility* can be necessary, in which practical theological researchers are seconded (part-time) to non-academic organisations.[79] In 2016, at the national service desk of the PCN, a number of practical theologians were appointed in a part-time position, the other employer being the university.

With regard to knowledge transfer, we could also mention *theological education*. Often knowledge transfer is situated in *between* research and teaching, but some authors include transferring new knowledge through teaching in their definition of knowledge transfer.[80] In this case, the use of the term 'transfer' might get us off on the wrong foot, because it might imply an overly didactic, limited transmission model of teaching. Students, however, are not passive receivers, but – following Paolo Freire – embody a history of knowledge, which provides the context in which questions emerge. According to Gordon Lynch and Stephen Pattison, in one of the first inquiries into what students learn and value from their training in practical theology, students only

79 Julia Olmos-Peñuela, Elena Castro-Martinez, Pablo d'Este, "Knowledge Transfer Activities in Social Sciences and Humanities: Explaining the Interactions of Research Groups with Non-academic Agents," *Research Policy* 43, no. 3 (2014): 696–706.

80 See Sheryl Buckley and Maria Jakovljevic, eds., *Knowledge Management Innovations for Interdisciplinary Education: Organisational Applications* (Hershey, PA, IGI Global, 2012): 89.

place a high value on theoretical knowledge if it is relevant to their personal and professional experience.[81] So a key factor affecting knowledge transfer in practical theological teaching is being able to relate knowledge to one's own context, one's own experiences and the practices in which one is engaged. Then, knowledge transfer becomes knowledge construction. In many universities around the world, students who prepare for the ministry or for chaplaincy learn from academics who disseminate practical theological knowledge that has been acquired through research and who guide students in their own inquiries, often related to the context in which they are located. In previous decades, the sub-disciplines were more concerned with providing norms and strategies for the ministry, but today practical theologians often refer to descriptive and interpretative studies in their classes. But even if there is indeed a transmission of research-based insights, acquired by the teachers themselves or by others, students need to become involved in the inquiry process.[82] Teaching should be seen as a creative process of inquiry for both students and teachers. Practical theologians, of course, are not only researchers but also teachers, and as teachers they learn from their students. Teaching methods in practical theology often also include apprenticeships and research assignments. Miller-McLemore writes,

> We send students to the field to interview, observe, and otherwise encounter the 'real', as well as to witness, report on, and learn from actual practitioners. They counsel each other, interview someone in crisis, question someone who is an expert in a practice, compose case studies, assess each other's efforts to embody a practice, observe a congregation's practices of care, or work together on a community project.[83]

Having been sent, students return with new insights and experiences, from which their teachers can also learn. Active learning methods can stimulate mutual critical reflection and dialogue between teachers and students. According to Steve de Gruchy, the practices that students engage in are an

81 Gordon Lynch and Stephen Pattison, "Exploring Positive Learning Experiences in the Context of Practical Theological Education," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 8, no. 3 (2005): 148ff.

82 Graham Badley, "A Really Useful Link between Teaching and Research," *Teaching in Higher Education* 7, no. 4 (2002): 443–455.

83 Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Practical Theology and Pedagogy: Embodying Theological Know-How," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008): 179.

"incredible laboratory of theological reflection."[84] What is learnt in the laboratory must be shared in the lecture room and, I add, could also be shared in research articles.

Related to teaching and continuing education, I would like to add *reading groups* as a knowledge transfer activity. George Fitchett strongly advises chaplains, for example, in a hospital setting, to seize opportunities to occasionally invite a researcher from other fields to such a club, but regular participation can also help chaplains who are themselves developing research literacy, i.e. the competence to do research themselves, to gain a better understanding of methodological details. Fitchett makes this knowledge transfer very practical: "Taking turns summarizing an article or leading the critical discussion of an article are excellent ways for chaplains to develop the ability to read research critically."[85] Reading groups may stimulate more interest and questions but can also cause practitioners to consider trying their own hand at research.

Knowledge transfer in practical theology can also occur in *one-day seminars and conferences*. An example of this can be seen in the highly positive evaluations of the first global research conference on spiritual care in healthcare, organised in the early spring of 2014.[86] One of the 325 participants calls it a "transformative experience."[87] Another participant notes that the collaboration between researchers and practitioners is in itself remarkable: "Witnessing researchers, physicians, other clinicians, and chaplains teaming together to improve the patient experience and outcomes was remarkable, encouraging, and inspiring."[88] A third participant adds that while it is one thing to reflect on and practice spirituality, because of the tendency to dwell on personal development, it is quite another thing to act as a professional expert. Developing one's expertise requires knowledge, knowing, for example, that specific interventions are likely to have specific effects:

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84 Steve de Gruchy, "Theological Education and Missional Practice: A Vital Dialogue," in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical Trends, Regional Surveys*, ed. Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang and Joshva Raja (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010): 44.

85 George Fitchett, "Pursuing Additional Research Education," in *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, ed. Gary Myers and Stephen Roberts (John Templeton Foundation, 2014): 121.

86 Participants were from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Belgium, India, Ireland, Canada, Kenya, and Namibia.

87 Jim Siegel, "This Was Not Just a Conference. This Was a Transformative Experience," *PlainViews* 11, no. 6 (2014): 8–15, accessed 25 August 2017, http://plainviews.healthcarechaplaincy.org. The following quotes and figures are from this article.

88 Siegel, "This Was Not Just a Conference," 9.

> We owe it to patients to not only deepen our spirituality as chaplains but to develop our professionalism. To do that we must know what people expect of us. We have to know what we offer. We have to be able to express and communicate it what we offer. The research findings presented at this conference have made a huge difference in starting to accomplish all that.[89]

The range of knowledge transfer activities in practical theology can include *informal collaborations*.[90] We may think of sending reports to practitioners outside the scholarly milieu, giving presentations or lectures, for example, in congregations. Informal collaborations are difficult to track, but professors and lecturers in practical theology are often invited to lecture about their research. Research on informal knowledge transfer activities in the humanities and social sciences with non-academic partners shows that "researchers were not able to fully appreciate the impact of their contributions,"[91] while partners were very clear about it. They "draw on the help and assistance of the researchers as needs emerged."[92] The requests for help were often underpinned by long-term personal acquaintance and bonds of trust. In relation to practical theology, academics can be asked to share their knowledge, for example, with schools, with teachers of religious education, with deacons, with church councils having a retreat or with congregations, each specific request having a small–scale impact.

Recent research also demonstrates the importance of *online communities* as a source for the transfer and sharing of knowledge: "They are the scene of novel forms of organising for innovation and knowledge creation."[93] Online communities are becoming increasingly important for their participants "by embedding them in the process of establishing, nurturing, and shaping spaces for knowledge flows."[94] Faraj et al. emphasise that these communities can be virtual spaces for sharing explicit knowledge, but particularly for

89 Siegel, "This Was Not Just a Conference," 9.

90 See Julia Olmos-Peñuela, Jordi Molas-Gallart and Elena Castro-Martínez, "Informal Collaborations between Social Sciences and Humanities Researchers and Non-academic Partners," *Science and Public Policy* 41, no. 4 (2014): 493–506.

91 Olmos-Peñuela, Molas-Gallart and Castro-Martinez, "Informal Collaborations," 501.

92 Olmos-Peñuela, Molas-Gallart and Castro-Martinez, "Informal Collaborations," 501.

93 Samer Faraj, Georg von Krogh, Eric Monteiro, Karim R. Lakhani, "Special Section Introduction – Online Community as Space for Knowledge Flows," *Information Systems Research* 27, no. 4 (2016): 668.

94 Faraj et al., "Special Section Introduction," 669.

sharing tacit knowledge, like competences and experience.[95] Know-how may be learned in an online setting. Online advice is often provided in the form of stories that carry rich meanings.[96] When someone starts telling a story, others offer comments, supplementary stories, additional contextualisation and clarifying questions and new members can access these emerging knowledge flows. Practical theological insights, for example, on preaching, pastoral care, congregational and/or religious leadership, guiding congregations in a process of missional change or on religious education, are increasingly shared in online communities of students and practitioners. Seminaries may use distance learning and online courses in practical theology can also develop into learning communities. A sense of community can also be helpful for those practitioners who feel isolated. Erna Oliver, drawing on Littlejohn and Pegler, describes how in the African context (but of course not only there) blended learning enables students to study at times that suit them best, how they may interact with other students and educators despite their different locations, how a variety of media can be used and how teaching, learning and assessment activities can be enhanced and adjusted to individual needs.[97] New media also enable oral and aural instruction and this opens up new opportunities for theology:

> The renewed focus on orality and acoustic means of learning brings a fresh perspective and multiple opportunities for incorporating music, song, dance, art, culture, storytelling, customs and tradition, speech (e.g. discussions, debates, sermons) and rituals in addition to text as primary tools for teaching, learning and assessment. Awarding space to interaction and dialogue in contrast to the passiveness of texts can open new pathways to bring theology back to the public domain.[98]

Oliver also emphasises how indigenous knowledge can be shared through blended learning. I would add that this toolbox of education and training can also include instruction in, and sharing of, the methods and results of empirical research of Christian practices.

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95 Faraj et al., "Special Section Introduction," 673ff.

96 Faraj et al., "Special Section Introduction," 676.

97 Erna Oliver, "Blended learning for teaching Theology," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39, no. 1 (2018): 3f. See: https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1894.

98 Oliver, "Blended learning," 6.

7 Independent Academic Practical Theological Research?

This chapter began with our shared surprise regarding our inventory of the ecclesial and societal partners of the PThU in Groningen. We then stated: We … all … benefit! There are, however, some critical questions that need to be addressed. We will deal with these questions extensively in Chapter 8, but here we already ask: Does the emphasis on valorisation and knowledge dissemination in academic research, and the quest for knowledge by practitioners, not potentially lead to biased research? Are university autonomy and academic freedom threatened by a stakeholder approach? If stakeholders, such as churches, leaders of congregations, chaplains, and parachurch organisations, are interested in knowledge (as they increasingly are) does not that influence practical theological research?

First, we all benefit, but the benefits of academic research, also in empirical practical theology, are still to a large extent to be enjoyed *after* it is accomplished.[99]

Second, if research at an institute of higher education is to be credible, it must take place irrespective of *immediate* utility and applicability, political convenience or economic benefit. An advisory role of a scientist or demand for strategies can easily interfere with the need for research to be "unattached." In a research project on knowledge transfer in the humanities, in which professors were interviewed, all the interviewees made critical comments about several aspects related to knowledge transfer, the first being the possible threat to academic freedom.[100] As one interviewee stated, "Knowledge transfer as exchange among theory and practical experience is necessary. But we also need the ivory tower – we need areas, which are not irritated by permanent engagement."[101] In a critical review of the connection between environmental policy on the one hand and research in environmental science on the other hand, Eva Lövbrand warns scientists to be cautious. She quotes Robert Merton who

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99 Johan P. Olsen, *The Institutional Dynamics of the (European) University* (ARENA Centre for European Studies, University of Oslo, March 2005): 5, accessed 18 May 2017. http://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/publications/arena-working-papers/2001-2010/2005/wp05_15.pdf.

100 Christian Schneijderberg, "Explorative Study of Knowledge Production and Transfer in Humanities and Social Sciences at a German University" (paper presented at the 24th annual conference of the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER), Reykjavik, Iceland, 23–25 June 2011), accessed August 22, 2017. https://www.uni-kassel.de/einrichtungen/fileadmin/datas/einrichtungen/incher/Veranstaltungen/Schneijderberg_2011_knowledge-transfer-humanities-social-sciences.pdf.

101 Schneijderberg, "Explorative Study of Knowledge Production," 5.

in the 1940s stated that problems arise when 'intellectuals' are asked to provide information for policies that have already been formulated by policy-makers. In order to make knowledge useful, the scientist may refrain from fully exercising their freedom of choice and instead think in technical and instrumental terms of ways of implementing a policy within a given situation.[102]

Third, there is the pervasive influence of 'market requirements', competition and what has been labelled *New Public Management*, a neoliberal policy model. The use of this approach in universities led some critical researchers, already in 1995, to speak of *McUniversity*.[103] Indeed, over the last three decades, market mechanisms have put increasing pressure on researchers to produce as much material as fast and as efficiently as possible. Thou shalt publish and (more recently) thou shalt valorise immediately – or thou shalt perish! Such an emphasis on valorisation can adversely affect academic scrutiny.

Fourth, epistemic virtues such as free inquiry, honesty, due diligence and transparency are *universal principles* independent of the context of application, be it political, cultural, economic or religious.[104] In the *European Code for Research Integrity*, integrity is considered essential for science to function well, for its public credibility and also for creating mutual trust among researchers.[105] The code distinguishes several principles:

> Reliability in ensuring the quality of research, reflected in the design, the methodology, the analysis and the use of resources; honesty in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting and communicating research in a transparent, fair, full and unbiased way; respect for colleagues, research participants, society, ecosystems, cultural heritage and the environment and accountability for the research from idea to publication, for its management and organisation, for training, supervision and mentoring, and for its wider impacts.[106]

According to Levin and Greenwood, "creating mutual learning opportunities between universities and non-academic stakeholders increases the demands

102 Robert K. Merton, "Role of the Intellectual in Public Bureaucracy," *Social Forces* 23, no. 4 (1945): 412, quoted in Eva Lövbrand, "Co-producing European Climate Science and Policy: A Cautionary Note on the Making of Useful Knowledge," *Science and Public Policy* 38, no. 3 (2011): 226.

103 Martin Parker and David Jary, "The McUniversity: Organisation, Management and Academic Subjectivity," *Organisation* 2, no. 2 (1995): 319–338.

104 Olsen, *The Institutional Dynamics*, 8.

105 *European Code for Research Integrity* (Berlin: ALLEA, All European Academies, 2017).

106 *European Code for Research Integrity*, 4.

for theoretical and methodological rigor."[107] If research principles do not govern academic research it will be to its detriment. In addition, academic norms are in play. Fidelity to data (which in the social sciences and humanities means fidelity to each and every interviewee or observed participant in a practice), openness to critical counter-evidence, conceptual elegance and logical coherence are all part of good research practices. Results are to be assessed by the internal norms of the community of researchers (peer review) and there are external accreditation and mechanisms to oversee and evaluate the quality and quantity of university performance. Research can also be repeated, possibly leading to other results, which is particularly advisable for research that at the time of publication is considered ground-breaking. In any case, research should be independent. As for collaborative research, researchers, practitioners and stakeholders need to take responsibility for the integrity of the research; they should agree at the outset on the goals of the research and also formally agree on expectations and standards concerning research integrity.[108]

The *fifth* point requires a somewhat longer discussion. As an antidote to biased research, following South-African practical theologian Jaco Dreyer, truth cannot be established only "from participating in the lifeworlds of our research participants."[109] I agree that the vernacular knowledge of practitioners, no matter how theoretically informed it may be, may not be epistemologically privileged. Practices can be informed by factors other than the motives and objectives suggested by the practitioners or than their own practice-theories. Research can make normally invisible patterns, processes, relations, and configurations visible. Statistics can clarify, for example, what is taking place in the life of a congregation. Additionally, there are systemic mechanisms at work, behind the backs of the practitioners, so to speak, that are difficult to observe from a lifeworld perspective only. For example, power structures and financial mechanisms, to name just two, can influence practitioners pervasively. Applied to Christian practices, research methods derived from psychology, sociology and social anthropology (ethnography), data modelling strategies that build on techniques developed by statisticians, surveys using congregational questionnaires, scale constructions, but also concepts and theories from

107 Levin and Greenwood, "Revitalizing Universities," 28.

108 *European Code for Research Integrity*, 6.

109 Jaco S. Dreyer, "Establishing Truth from Participation and Distanciation in Empirical Theology," in *Empirical Theology in Texts and Tables: Qualitative, Quantitative and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins and Jeff Astley (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 23.

theology, sociology, psychology, social geography or social psychology (for example, on group dynamics) may help to understand what is going on in a specific practice and enlighten practitioners, albeit with the restriction that these theories constitute 'maps', they are not the 'territory'. Within a quantitative framework, questions such as 'how much?' or 'how strong?' are relevant and surveys and statistical analysis based upon them also allow for correlational explanations, by enabling the affirmation or rejection of assumptions that are formulated as hypotheses.[110] Thus, quantitative studies are valuable for congregational research. Nevertheless, this value is limited if these studies distance themselves from qualitative studies. They enable researchers to understand lived faith. A drive to produce overarching theories may distance empirical research from the reality of the situation 'on the ground', especially if it only favours insights from the quantitative family. Today, congregations are examined holistically using mixed and multiple research methods. Practices are looked at in a detailed, fine-grained way. Research by academic outsiders can disclose more and different perspectives than insiders may have.

Sixth, research questions are different from the questions of practitioners. Inquiry questions asked by practitioners differ from questions that researchers pose, and they also differ from the questions that will ultimately be presented to study participants. While the research needs of practitioners can be identified in conversation and while placing the user in different phases of the research process is necessary and while co-creating research questions and co-creative forms of implementation are vital, the formulation of research questions is the specific competence of the practical theologian. Research questions are likely to reflect a connection to theory and to past research. Quantitative research questions commonly begin with 'how', 'what', or 'why',

110 An example of a relevant survey is a research project on divorce and its effects upon participation in organised religion. Elizabeth Marquardt demonstrated, first, that young adults from divorced families are less likely than their peers to become involved in organised religion and, second, that two-thirds of people who were involved in a church at the time of their parents' divorce report that no one from their faith community reached out to them. Based upon this research, Osmer argues that there are compelling grounds, empirical and also theological, for congregations to view both intact and divorced families as a central part of their mission, with programs targeting the needs of families over the course of the life cycle and with counselling centres offering healing and support to members of divorced families. Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005). See also Richard Osmer, "The Church 'Taking Form' in Mission: Reimagining Family Ministries within the *Missio Dei*," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): 237.

and they specify independent and dependent variables.[111] Quantitative words such as relate, influence, effect and cause can be used. Qualitative research questions avoid 'why' and often start with 'what' or 'how'; they list the central phenomenon to explore and identify the participants and research site. A qualitative research question tells what is going to be described, explored, generated, discovered, and understood, but then the use of quantitative words such as relate, influence, effect, and cause needs to be avoided.

8 The Researcher and the Researched

A second set of questions concerns the relation between the researcher and the researched. Practitioners may rightly fear that researchers "elide context, overlook constraints, take the wrong things for granted, overestimate control, presume unattainable ideals, underestimate dynamism, or translate comprehensible events into incomprehensible variables."[112] First, there is the problem of representation as it presents itself in qualitative research, and a primary example is ethnography. Carl Herndl states, drawing on Clifford Geertz, that there is the "experience of penetrating an 'other world' and making it known through written description."[113] In the phase of the fieldwork, fieldnotes are written and then later the text is written. Passing events are turned into an account. Herndl writes that the 'data' is not an experience, but is rather the "already textual representation of fieldnotes."[114] This not only raises questions concerning the validity of the research, but it also causes the relationship with the researched to become an asymmetrical power-relation. There is the suspicion of what Gayatri Spivak, Thomas Teo and others have called 'epistemological violence'. While interpretations may be presented in a transparent way and while interpretations of data look binding, the act of interpretation is not neutral:

> Interpretations, as most often expressed in the discussion section of empirical articles, are a form of action, and if concrete interpretations have

111 For these distinctions, see Ronald Kern, "Developing Your Research Questions," The Fischler School Faculty Toolbox, accessed September 19, 2017. http://apps.fischlerschool.nova.edu/toolbox/Dissertation/Handouts/Developing%20Your%20Research%20Questions.pdf.

112 Weick, "Theory and Practices in the Real World," 453.

113 Carl G. Herndl, "Writing Ethnography: Representation, Rhetoric, and Institutional Practices," *College English* 53, no. 3 (1991): 320.

114 Herndl, "Writing Ethnography," 321.

> negative consequences for groups – even though alternative, equally plausible interpretations of the data are available – then a form of violence is committed. Because the interpretations are presented as knowledge, or because they emerge from science, they represent epistemological violence.[115]

The usefulness of cross-contextual knowledge as such can also be contested. Katherine Turpin, while acknowledging the complexity of local knowledge at play in any given religious practice, states that practical theologians seem to be required to reduce this complexity in order to speak across different contexts. Practical theologians can hardly avoid such reduction, moving from the level of concreteness to the level of "the most salient and compelling features."[116] This impulse should, she warns, not be trusted, since we may be inclined to "say more than we know about certain things."[117] Some levels of local knowledge will be overlooked in the data collection, others in the description and the decisions that practical theologians must make about what matters in a practice are value-laden.[118] Turpin describes how peer-reviewers are likely to miss elements in articles and books because different elements of the local complexity matter to them.[119] An audience may therefore also consider practical theological work unhelpful to them and giving an account of a practice suspect, since it does not deal with the contextual realities in their practices. Concomitant with this is the unavoidable fact that analysing all the different layers of a practice is "beyond the capacity of a single scholar."[120]

Is there a way out of the dilemma? Turpin opts for the following. First, while grasping all of the complexity of local knowledge is impossible, careful attention to the detail and nuance of the local knowledge embedded in practices, is for Turpin a "hallmark of practical theology," acknowledging that

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115 Thomas Teo, "What is Epistemological Violence in the Empirical Social Sciences?" *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 4, no. 5 (2010): 296. See below, Chapter 6, "Postcolonial Rationale."

116 Katherine Turpin, "The Complexity of Local Knowledge," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 265.

117 Turpin, "The Complexity of Local Knowledge," 265.

118 According to Turpin, there is a "performance of authoritative knowing that the academic voice of expertise demands" and there is a "stance of control of all the details characteristic of the modernist task of description." Turpin, "The Complexity of Local Knowledge," 268.

119 Turpin, "The Complexity of Local Knowledge," 266ff.

120 Turpin, "The Complexity of Local Knowledge," 268.

any given project will be "incomplete, partial and in need of revision."[121] There is always something unknowable and "wrestling with the full complexity of local knowledge without reducing it to what we can control for the sake of appearing an expert" is necessary to hone the skills of a practical theologian.[122] A thick, sound description, she writes, often suffices and if there is any normative reflection or if there are recommendations for practice they should be "provisional at best."[123] Second, Turpin advocates changing the lenses through which practical theologians frame the situation because of their partial nature. Finally, she advises practical theologians to ask what is at stake for the community that is described, thus "honing the responsibility for the communities"[124] that are affected by their work. This plea strongly resonates with the topic of this book. Where she speaks about 'comportment', and rightly so, we will speak about 'doing research in community' and including the stakeholders addressed by the research as much as possible in any given project in order to avoid a mismatch, albeit it, as we will see in Chapter 8, possibly in different phases. Furthermore, where Turpin writes about how impossible it is for a single scholar to be attentive to all the different layers of practices, and although we are fully aware of the constraints, we will write about the inevitability of collaborative work. For, while practical theologians may engage in contextual description, they may fail to address contextual regularities experienced by practitioners, and so their involvement may reduce the risk of missing key factors. An example of a mismatch is a project in Iceland between large-scale institutional renewal-policies and congregational development.[125] The wrong type of knowledge was brought to the churches, and the pastors, as gatekeepers of change, did not apply the insights that were transferred to them. The pastors, many of whom were working in rural areas, were supposed to implement knowledge acquired in the business domain, which they perceived as being utterly irrelevant to their specific situation.

In our view, this example affirms that valorisation, and policy development, calls for the involvement of the potential users of the knowledge. Valorisation

121 Turpin, "The Complexity of Local Knowledge," 271. See Christian Scharen, "Ecclesiology 'From the Body': Ethnographic Notes toward a Carnal Theology," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): 52.

122 Turpin, "The Complexity of Local Knowledge," 272.

123 Turpin, "The Complexity of Local Knowledge," 271.

124 Turpin, "The Complexity of Local Knowledge," 273.

125 Steinun A. Björnsdottir, "The Gatekeepers of Change: Strategic Planning in the ELCI and the Role of Pastors," in *Ecclesial Practices: Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography* 3, no. 1 (2016): 5–29.

is strengthened if academic research is triggered by questions from practitioners, making the development of knowledge and skills increasingly a two-way process. In any case, the nature of a problem should dictate the choice of a research approach and, as we will see in Chapter 8, the role of the stakeholders in different phases of the project. Clarity about the purpose of a project will also inform the decision about research strategy and plan.[126] In the present book I focus on approaches and methods that have proven useful when addressing problems or concerns in communities of practice and that are as open as possible to the language of faith and the theological reflection that is part and parcel of practices of faith. Some strategies, methods and rules of investigation for understanding and improving Christian practices are more appropriate to this field of inquiry than others.

In a research project on church closure I asked active churchgoers to select photos from a collection depicting the life of the congregation and provide comments about them, the question being what they would miss most when the church closed down.[127] The method that I used is called photo-elicitation. The photos, in addition to both the personal oral and written comments by informants and the nine different focus group discussions in which these comments were exchanged, led to moving experiences and the discovery of the values attached to the building and its community. The practitioners really felt helped by the knowledge that was transferred to them. The pastor and the church council designed the leave-taking worship service in a new way, paying much attention to and giving a voice to what the churchgoers would miss and to their emotions. The research enabled me, as a researcher, to learn from the particularities of this situation and acknowledge that practical theological knowledge gathering always starts with attentiveness to the local, the contextual, and the situational. It enabled me to write an extensive manual, together with two ecclesial consultants, one Roman Catholic and the other Protestant, on how to guide church closures, with close attention to the emotional side of these processes.[128] It included a clear eye for the language of faith, which was also used by the research-participants: "This was the place where we experienced the connection with God. . . "

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126 Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 48.

127 See Henk de Roest, "'Losing a Common Space to Connect': An Inquiry into Inside Perspectives on Church Closure Using Visual Methods," in *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, no. 2 (2013): 295–312.

128 Harry Bisseling, Henk de Roest and Peet Valstar, *Meer dan hout en steen. Handboek voor sluiting en herbestemming van kerkgebouwen* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2011).

9 Two-Way Flows of Knowledge

According to Helen Cameron and Clare Watkins in their study *Talking about God in Practice*, research with congregations requires a conversational approach right from the start.[129] In my evaluation, their plea for methods that belong to a view of a congregation as 'emergent' in relational processes, resonates with what has been labelled the relational constructionist approach in organisational psychology as advocated by Dian Marie Hosking and others. In this approach, actors are considered part of – rather than apart from – reality constructions and language is seen to construct social realities.[130] What are some initial insights on 'two-way knowledge flows'? In a choice for conversational or relational approaches, we need to be aware, that conducting research on Christian practices and interacting with the potential users of that research are different activities. Earlier in this chapter, we referred to the distinction between Mode 1 and Mode 2 research and here we add that Mode 2 is not consultancy for practitioners. In practical theological research, practical problems are embedded in a broader theoretical project. Following Geir Afdal and with the help of Yrjö Engeström's Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), Tone Stangeland Kaufman is able to make a helpful distinction between the activity system of the field, as she calls the context of application, and the activity system of the *research*.[131] Here I add some of my own thoughts to her reflections. According to Stangeland Kaufman, the subjects, the objects (motives and purposes), tools, etc., of the two activity systems differ. The activity system of the research may contribute to the activity system of the field. This can occur, for example, by the system of the research providing practitioners with new concepts, corroborated hypotheses and new theories to better understand a practice, or new insights regarding the effect of specific interventions. As I would state this, the *knowledge agendas* are different. Academics attempt to develop understanding and general knowledge about certain aspects of reality, whereas practitioners aim to develop knowledge about how to act when they cannot rely on routines and tacit knowledge. Academics aim to develop theory, they want to gain knowledge about how phenomena are related in

129 Helen Cameron and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

130 Dian Marie Hosking, "Constructing Changes: A Social Constructionist Approach to Change Work (and Beetles and Witches)" (Inaugural lecture at the Katholieke Universiteit Brabant, 21 June 2002).

131 Stangeland Kaufman, "From the Outside, Within, or In Between?" 147.

certain situations, whereas practitioners want to develop professional knowledge, they want to gain knowledge about how to act and what to say.[132] Again, as persons, academics are characterised by their epistemic virtues,[133] whereas in Christian practices, professional practitioners and the entire community of practice are characterised by the specific profession-related values they adhere to, and by their spiritual actions.[134]

Still, in order to acquire insights that are applicable and valuable to the context, interaction with users and two-way flows of knowledge are extremely useful.[135] Practical theologians may need to work in a radically collaborative way with the practitioners, both professionals and everyday believers, providing them with the conceptual resources to change and improve their practices and by following up in the implementation. This could very well be at the core of research. The flow of knowledge can also come from the practices. With Afdal, and based on her own research with Norwegian pastors,[136] Tone Stangeland emphasises how new knowledge can be constituted in new practices, triggered by theory.[137] I would add that this knowledge can be re-applied in new practices and these can be re-examined by practical theologians together with the practitioners. In order to influence strategic planning, for example, in churches that shape ecclesial practices, it is important that the knowledge that is generated in practices, triggered by theory or by experiences, is made explicit. Practical theologians can explicate what was tacit knowledge before the research started and they can explicate how the research produced new knowledge for the practitioners. An example of such a two-way flow of knowledge is the case study research project led by Walton and Körver, to which we

132 Allan R. Tom and Linda Valli, "Professional Knowledge for Teachers," in *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: A Project of the Association of Teacher Educators*, ed. W. Robert Houston (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1990): 380.

133 Conceptually, epistemic virtues "find their place in what we might call the epistemic enterprise – that is, within activities and practices that involve the acquisition of knowledge or understanding." Roger Crisp, "Virtue Ethics and Virtue Epistemology," in *Virtue and Vice, Moral and Epistemic*, ed. Heather Battely (Malden, MA, Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): 29. See also Heather Battaly, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology* (London: Routledge, 2019).

134 Elisabeth Hense, Frans Jespers and Peter Nissen, eds., *Present-day Spiritualities. Contrasts and Overlaps* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

135 Olmos-Peñuela, Castro-Martinez, d'Este, "Knowledge Transfer Activities," 704.

136 See Tone Stangeland Kaufman, *A New Old Spirituality: A Qualitative Study of Clergy Spirituality in the Church of Norway* (Oslo: MF School of Theology, 2011).

137 Stangeland Kaufman, "From the Outside, Within, or In Between?" 147.

will return in Chapter 7.[138] In this study, questions asked by both researchers and peers help to make explicit the tacit knowledge that chaplains apply in their interventions, for example, in designing a ritual in a case of moral injury. At first, chaplains state that they have acted 'intuitively', but during the discussion of the case they realise that they have been using certain newly acquired knowledge and learned skills. The insights generated by the collaborative research can be applied by the chaplains in subsequent practices and in turn these can be analysed collaboratively.

10 Conclusion

Government agencies and academic institutions all over the world underscore the importance of valorisation. Research, including practical theological research, must be relevant to current societal issues and for a wide range of practitioners. As we will see in Part 2, the best way to ensure this is to engage a variety of stakeholders from the very beginning of a research project. Collaborative research approaches and methods, network development, and combinations of practice-based and science-based knowledge in various types of research in practical theology, need to become common.

138 Martin Walton and Jacques Körver, "Dutch Case Studies Project in Chaplaincy Care: A Description and Theoretical Explanation of the Format and Procedures," *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy* 5, no. 2 (2017): 257–280.

CHAPTER 2

Knowledge Transfer in Practical Theological Education

Seven Instructive Curriculum Reforms

1 Introduction

How can theological education be more relevant for students who will become ministers, chaplains or theologians working in different societal organisations? How is the gap bridged between formal theological education (the explicit knowledge, skills and attitudes that are learned in a four, five, or six-year period) and the practices that professionals will be performing? In this chapter, I focus on a number of curriculum reforms that have occurred in theological education at different times in the last four centuries and in a variety of geographical contexts. One of the aims of the curriculum reforms is 'knowledge transfer', which seeks to provide theology students with knowledge and skills for their future practices. The frame of knowledge transfer helps us to understand the frequent phenomenon of a revision or reform to the curriculum of theological faculties, divinity schools and seminaries in at least two ways. First, the transfer of knowledge via teaching is a primary task in any institute of theological education. Second, curriculum reforms are often initiated in order to improve the transfer of knowledge, acquired in educational situations, to the practices one will be working in as a professional. Concepts, theories, skills and strategies learned at university need to be transferred to the work environment. Indeed, we will see, practical theology should shape the curriculum as a whole.[1]

The curriculum reforms addressed in this chapter may, at first sight, seem to be randomly selected, but they serve to illustrate seven perspectives that are woven throughout the fabric of this book and without which collaborative practical theology would be inconceivable. Each of the curriculum reforms is inspired by the desire to make theology, including practical theology, more relevant for students, for the ministries and congregations that they will serve, and for society as a whole. Practical theology is thus a way to transform society,

1 Kathleen Cahalan, Carol Lakey Hess, and Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Teaching Practical Theology: Introducing Six Perspectives," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 35.

just as theology, in turn, is also influenced by societal developments. The seven perspectives are:
- *first*, the emergence of practical theology as a distinct field in theology, that focuses on practices of faith;
- *second*, the necessity of practical theology for preventing the routinisation of ecclesial practices;
- *third*, the necessity of practical theology for shaping an academic spirit and forming researchers-for-life;
- *fourth*, the role of theology in transforming culture and society;
- *fifth*, the discovery of a communal method of theologising and of case-study research;
- *sixth*, the necessity of practical theology for a radical cultural and societal contextualisation of Christian practices;
- *seventh*, somewhat different from the other reforms, the necessity of a dual learning trajectory, including ample time for internships, in order to stimulate a two-way flow, a pendulum motion between practical theological theory and instruction on the one hand and concrete, real practices on the other and, in addition, the necessity to introduce students in collaborative research approaches and methods.

We will go back in time and move from the sixteenth-century in Leiden, via the eighteenth-century in Vienna, the early nineteenth-century in Berlin, the late nineteenth-century in Cambridge, MA and some other American cities, to the 1920s in Chicago. From there we take a leap to the early twenty-first century in Southern Africa and then describe a recent curriculum reform in Groningen, The Netherlands.

2 University of Leiden: an Attempt to Establish a Chair in Practical Theology[2]

We travel back four-hundred years to visit the *first* curriculum reform that we focus on, which, although unsuccessful, was unsuccessful in a highly instructive way. In 1619, at the national Synod of Dordt in The Netherlands, curriculum discussions took place in the margins of the debate on the doctrine

2 In this section I draw on Donald Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair in Practical Theology at Leiden University (1618–1626)," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition*, eds. Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 415–442. I also draw on the inaugural lecture of my predecessor at Leiden University: Maarten den Dulk, *De geboorte van de praktische theologie* (Leiden: Rijks Universiteit Leiden, 1992).

of election. At that time there were no chairs in practical theology, despite the fact that, as Andreas Hyperius wrote in 1554, more attention was being paid to the "practical activities of the church."[3] In 1607, Wilhelm Zepper became the first Reformed scholar to call for the appointment of a practical theologian. He stated that "the purpose of all theory is practice," and argued that theoretical professors of theology should be supplemented with one *professor practicum* in theological faculties.[4] In those years, the distinction between theoretical and practical theology became common. Theologians often referred to Thomas of Aquinas's distinction (which in turn went back to Aristotle) between 'contemplation' and 'action'.

In 1618, the classis of Middelburg (Zeeland), concerned about what it called "the practice of piety," sent a letter to the provincial synod, which was then forwarded to the national Synod of Dordt. The letter is very likely to have been written in pietist circles, thus the demand for practical theology emerged with the wave of pietism.[5] The letter states that an important aim of the ministry is to offer spiritual guidance to people and to shape their conduct in Christian virtues. In order to realise this, it is important in theological faculties "to give attention to necessary exercises (Dutch: *oeffeninghen*) for students to prepare them for the ministry of the Word, so that they not only understand doctrine, but may practice (Dutch: *practiseren*) the same gradually for members of the church and be better known."[6] In another passage of the letter we read a sentence that could have been written at other times and in other contexts:

> Because one finds by experience that when students of theology come out of the academies they are in general very poorly trained in the practice of piety (Dutch: *practijcke der godsalicheijt*) as well as in church polity, it is decided to present this matter to the national synod and urge it as absolutely necessary for the edifying of the congregations of Christ.[7]

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3 Andreas Hyperius, *De Recte Formando Theologiae Studio* (Basel, 1556): a5, 17, 528. See: Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 417. The Roman Catholic Louvain theologian Johannes Molanus (1533–1585) was the first to use the term practical theology to describe the main subject of a book. His work, *Theologiae practicae compendium*, which came out in 1585, was published at least four times. See: Aza Goudriaan, "Theologia Practica: The Diverse Meanings of a Subject of Early Modern Academic Writing," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition*, eds. Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 444.

4 Wilhelm Zepper, *Politia Ecclesiastica* (Herborn, 1607): 11–14. See: Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 417.

5 Den Dulk, *De geboorte van de praktische theologie*, 6.

6 Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 419.

7 Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 420.

Interestingly, the classis of Middelburg's proposals includes fieldtrips. The letter recommends a standardised five or six-year study of philosophy, languages, and especially theology, followed by a *study tour* of foreign universities and churches.[8] In addition, apprenticeship-learning is also considered invaluable since students need to learn from pastors. The letter states:

> It would be useful for them often to be with pastors to discuss with them the various cases of conscience (Latin: *conscientiae casibus*), and to accompany them in visiting the sick and comforting the distressed, and to learn from them how to speak to such people, how to encourage the distressed, and also to learn what sort of prayers should sometimes be said in these circumstances. For even though they ought to come to the churches from the schools trained in speaking, yet what they have learned must be put into practice (Latin: *ad praxin*). This they need to learn from pastors.[9]

Despite the urgency to establish a field called 'practical theology', and despite the support of foreign delegates, the matter was not decided at the Synod of Dordt. Although the Synod did agree to set up private lectures by theology professors on topics such as preaching, the delegates did not return to the matter of 'practical theology'.

After the Synod of Dordt, the provincial synod of the province of South Holland installed a commission to reform the curriculum of Leiden University. In its synodical meeting of August 1619, a chair of practical theology was even proposed. In the minutes, we read:

> Would it not be beneficial to call a theological professor to Leiden University to teach the students of theology Christian Ethics (Latin: *Ethicam Christianam*), by which is meant Practical Theology (Latin: *Theologiam Practicam*)? The answer is that this is necessary.[10]

Unfortunately, the establishment of a chair did not take place. According to Sinnema's reconstruction, the matter was delicate since William Ames, the proposed professor, had fled the United Kingdom and was highly critical of the Anglican hierarchy. In 1619 there was political pressure from the UK.[11] After some professors from Leiden unsuccessfully attempted to mediate on behalf

8 Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 421. Emphasis mine.
9 Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 421.
10 Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 425.
11 Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 429.

of Ames in January 1620, the same professors addressed the topic of a chair in February. This time, in the so-called *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, theology is described as being both theoretical and practical, thereby effectively excluding the possibility of practical theology as a separate theological discipline. In 1622, the provincial synod wrote again to the custodians of Leiden University, but this time with an extensive rationale justifying the chair which the synod considered necessary for the consolation of consciences and for the edification of the congregation. In line with the *Synopsis*, none of the four professors agreed with the plea. According to Sinnema, they "rejected the idea of separate instruction in practical theology, contending that they incorporated the practical application of theology throughout their teaching."[12] Theology is practical. In his paraphrase of this letter, Maarten den Dulk reconstructs their argument:

> We share your concern for an all-round theological education [...] As for practical theology, we agree that it is necessary. To put it even stronger, we state that theology as a whole is practical, not only because it has practical implications, but it is practical in its essence, content and subject. Theology is related to practices, both of faith and of morals. It determines the entire structure of theology. But, whether practical theology can be separated from theoretical theology and therefore should be treated as a distinct discipline, this we severely doubt. [...] We want to connect practical implications with doctrine. In line with your request, we want to do this more often in an explicit way in the courses on exegesis and in dogmatics. This is our answer.[13]

Den Dulk interprets the response of the faculty as a typical reformed-theological conviction. If practical theology becomes a separate field, the faculty fears that it may lose contact with what theology is all about: "They fear that the emphasis will shift from God, his word and work to the autonomous man and his ambivalent world of experiences."[14] On a creative whim, Den Dulk adds that this answer prevented the provincial synod's real question from being heard.[15] In his interpretation, the synod not only asked what the aim of theological education is, but also how a theologian can function in a fruitful

12 Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 437.
13 Den Dulk, *De geboorte van de praktische theologie*, 5.
14 Den Dulk, *De geboorte van de praktische theologie*, 6.
15 Den Dulk, *De geboorte van de praktische theologie*, 10.

way in his congregation. How does a theologian ensure that the practical implications of theology become a matter of importance for the congregation? What are the implications of theology for ecclesial practices and for the lives of the members of the congregation? How does the congregation 'learn to live' the narrative of Scripture in its own way? Den Dulk considers this last question to be the fundamental question of practical theology, up to the present day. Although the academic weight of practical theology was not recognised at the time, theology became more conscious of it. In 1626, after some years of grumbling, the provincial synod resigned itself to the situation. In 1644, at the nearby Utrecht Academy, in the writings of Gijsbertus Voetius, who had been present at the Synod of Dordt, practical theology emerged as a separate field encompassing moral and casuistic theology, particularly involving reflection on the everyday application of the Decalogue, homiletics (on preaching), ascetics (which studies devotional practice), and church polity.[16] Nevertheless, there was not yet a separate chair of practical theology, so this discipline was taught by a regular professor.[17] As Aza Goudriaan points out, in the decades after Voetius, *theologia practica* "had not yet gathered a definitive consensus for being the name of choice for a theological sub-discipline concerned with Christian practices."[18]

3 Franz Stephan Rautenstrauch, University of Vienna: Preventing Routines

The *second* curriculum reform has been called the cradle of academic practical theology. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the need for a better knowledge and practice orientation for future pastors led to a curriculum reform at the Catholic theological faculty of the University of Vienna. What was going on in the Roman Catholic Church and in the wider culture? It was not only the time of the Enlightenment, but also of what has been labelled the Catholic Enlightenment. As Ulrich Lehner writes, the "fervent antireligious sentiment of the Radical Enlightenment helped the Church to create

16 Gisbertus Voetius, *Exercitia et bibliotheca studiosi theologiae* (Utrecht: J. A. Waesberge, 1651). Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectae disputationes theologicae* (Utrecht: J. A. Waesberge, 1659), 3: 1–11. Selections from these disputations have been translated into English in *Reformed Dogmatics: J. Wollebius, G. Voetius, F. Turretin*, ed. John W. Beardslee (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965): 265–316. See: Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 441; Goudriaan, "Theologia Practica," 448.

17 Sinnema, "The Attempt to Establish a Chair," 441.

18 Goudriaan, "Theologia Practica," 455.

its own Enlightenment."[19] Many of the leading figures of the Enlightenment were confessing Catholics. These Catholic Enlighteners built on the tradition of faith seeking understanding (Anselm), but their faith was also open to new ways of understanding. Their intention was apologetic. They sought to "defend the essential dogmas of Catholic Christianity by explaining their rationality in modern terminology,"[20] and thus making faith intelligible. However, they also sought to implement the core values of the Enlightenment in order to renew and reform society. Theological and moral doctrines were considered impractical if they were incomprehensible. In order to be applied, these doctrines had to be understood. The 'practicability' of the Catholic faith, its 'usefulness' and transformative power regarding the lifestyle of the members of the parish gained interest because of its potential to contribute to the moral welfare of society. The usefulness of religion for society had to be proved. Priests were considered servants of society and, thus, educated and committed clergymen were required.

The Enlightenment also entered the monasteries. Ulrich Lehner writes that already in the early eighteenth century, despite many monks wanting to "remain a medieval thorn in the flesh of a changing world," a growing group of reformers became influential. "Enlightened individuals" can be detected in practically all the orders (Franciscans, Carmelites, Capuchins, Jesuits, etc. . .), but one order in particular stands out: the Benedictines.[21] Benedictine abbeys were "relatively independent," they were "well endowed" and they could "foster scholarship."[22] Furthermore, there is also a surprising element that contributed to Enlightenment thought entering these abbeys: their communication network. Benedictine abbeys, in their own way, truly collaborated with each other. Lehner writes: "It seems to have been primarily the Benedictine houses that communicated with each other on a regular basis about theological, philosophical, scientific, and educational matters."[23] Lehner speaks of a "Benedictine *transfer of knowledge* (sic!)" that was created through exchanges between scholars and students from the different abbeys. Monks

19 Ulrich L. Lehner, "The Many Faces of the Catholic Enlightenment," in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, eds. Ulrich L. Lehner and Michael Printy (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 26.

20 Ulrich L. Lehner, "What is 'Catholic Enlightenment'?" *History Compass* 8, no. 2 (2010): 166–178.

21 Ulrich L. Lehner, "How Enlightened Can a Monk Be? The Efforts of Eighteenth-Century German Benedictines to Reform Monastery and Church," *Journal of Religious History* 37, no. 1 (2013): 67.

22 Lehner, "How Enlightened Can a Monk Be?" 67f.

23 Lehner, "How Enlightened Can a Monk Be?" 68.

went on grand tours, which also contributed to the creation of scholarly networks.[24] There was "receptivity to the needs of research."[25] Books were also exchanged in an innovative way. Letters were sent from cloister to cloister, and occasionally letters to Protestant peers were smuggled out of cloisters by reform-minded monks. Many ideas were exchanged, and through all these media the scholarly endeavours of the monks were connected. They conducted research together despite the distances between abbeys. Thus, the ideas of tolerance and individual freedom entered the Benedictine monasteries.[26] According to the monks, books and articles were needed to inform the emerging enlightened reading public. Zackaria Purvis mentions Placidius Sprenger, a Benedictine monk who founded an important journal to function as a general library for Catholic Germany. This was in response to Protestant Germany, which was "almost suffocated by the number of its leading journals and newspapers."[27] In the 1770s, after some earlier reforms in the 1750s and 1760s, the enlightened Benedictines aspired to reform philosophy and theology. They hoped to reform the church through theological education.

In 1774, Franz Stephan Rautenstrauch, a Benedictine abbot who was director of the faculty of theology in Vienna, designed a "better structure" for theological studies by introducing a new field of practical theology into its 'encyclopaedia' (German: *Fächerkanon*).[28] Empress Maria Theresa established a committee for the curriculum reform.[29] Rautenstrauch favoured both a thoroughly scholarly-academic and a practical-personal approach. He writes that the purpose of theology is to provide knowledge for future religious leaders (German: *Religionsdiener*). Religious leaders should no longer perform their practices in a *routine* matter – Rautenstrauch even uses the phrase 'automat-

24 Lehner, "How Enlightened Can a Monk Be?" 71. On the development of academic networks among the Benedictines, see: Hanspeter Marti, "Interkonfessioneller Wissenstransfer in der Zeit der Spataufklärung: Zur Aufnahme der Historia literaria in deutschsprachigen katholischen Ländern," in *Historia Literaria: Neuordnungen des Wissens im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Frank Grunert and Friedrich Vollhardt (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2007): 161–190.

25 Lehner, "How Enlightened Can a Monk Be?" 68.

26 Lehner, "How Enlightened Can a Monk Be?" 76. In the 1780s, a considerable number of Benedictines learned to appreciate the "critical philosophy" of Immanuel Kant.

27 Zackaria Purvis, *Theology and the University in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 36.

28 Alois Schwarz, "Pastoraltheologie und Kerygmatik," in *Die Kath.-Theologische Fakultät der Universität Wien*, 1884–1984, ed. Barbara Toillié (Berlin: Dunker und Humblot. 1984): 247.

29 Franz Stephan Rautenstrauch, *Entwurf zur Einrichtung der theologischen Schulen in den k. k. Erblanden* (Wien: Bey Sonnleithner und Hörling, 1784).

ically' (German: *Maschinenmäßig*) – but with attention and knowledge.[30] According to Rautenstrauch, the primary teaching method of theology should be the Socratic method, in which concepts are not "crammed into the heads of the students (German: *hineingeproppt*)," but rather seem to be "pulled from the heads of the students" by presenting the content, discussing it, and elaborating on it.[31] Rautenstrauch makes an important step in his proposals when he compares theology with medicine and law, in which the knowledge gained in practices is brought into the academy, particularly through reflection on case study material. In particular, he holds that pastoral theology is very much needed to prevent routinisation: "Routines are very difficult to eradicate."[32]

In the first semester of the academic year in 1775 the very first classes in pastoral theology were taught. The first manual used was Jean Opstraet's ominously titled *Pastor bonus*, which had first been published in 1689, almost one hundred years earlier. Ulrich Lehner describes this manual as "one of the best-sellers of this new practical theology."[33] The book focuses on both the spirituality and the practices of the pastor. In 1777, just a few years after the first pastoral theology classes were taught, Franz Giftschütz became the first chair holder at the faculty.[34]

4 Friedrich Schleiermacher, Humboldt University: Shaping an Academic Spirit

The *third* curriculum reform occurred almost forty years later, following the founding of the modern, scientific Humboldt University in Berlin in 1810. This university became the model for German universities, as well as those in other countries, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[35] According to a short text written by Wilhelm von Humboldt, it was the first university to hail three principles of the modern research university: *first*, academic freedom, ("a new creation"), which meant that its research and teaching would be independent from both the state ("the state must understand that intellectual work will

30 Rautenstrauch, *Entwurf zur Einrichtung der theologischen Schulen*, 8.
31 Rautenstrauch, *Entwurf zur Einrichtung der theologischen Schulen*, 31.
32 Rautenstrauch, *Entwurf zur Einrichtung der theologischen Schulen*, 127.
33 Lehner, "The Many Faces," 28.
34 Claus Arnold, "Internal Church Reform in Catholic Germany," in *The Dynamics of Religious Reform in Northern Europe, 1780–1920: The Churches*, ed. Joris van Eijnatten and Paula Yates (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010): 160.
35 Louis Menand, Paul Reitter, and Chad Wellmon, "General Introduction," in *The Rise of the Research University: A Sourcebook*, ed. Louis Menand, Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017): 6.

go on infinitely better without it") and the church, *second*, the integration of teaching and research, and, *third*, the "unending nature of academic inquiry."[36] These ideals are still valid today as governing principles for research. The three principles safeguarded the academy from being *instrumentalised* by the state, which, even in those days, urged the academy to do relevant research for the sake of the state and society. The principles also provided a buffer against being instrumentalised by the church. Humboldt acknowledged the need to produce relevant (i.e. applicable) research, but not in the service of, or in obedience to, the state or the church. In their introduction to a textbook on the university, Menand, Reitter and Wellmon write:

> For Humboldt, universities should be of use to the state and the broader public, but never immediately so. Scholars need time and space to pursue knowledge that might one day be of use beyond the university. As loud and as popular as the calls for a focus on vocational training and applied research have been, at times, over the past 150 years, it remains difficult to identify what is distinctive about research universities without bringing up the features to which Humboldt gave such effective expression.[37]

Which disciplines should be taught at the new university? There were several voices who wanted to exclude or diminish theology, with the latter delegating the practical instruction of ministers to ecclesial seminaries. Fichte proposed that the 'scientific art' and the 'practical art' of all the disciplines be separated. He argued that the art of 'application in life', i.e. educating professionals practically, did not belong to the academy.[38] Schleiermacher, however, vigorously defended the right of theology to exist in the university. He saw the university, explicitly including its practical disciplines, as an institution that combined teaching and research, and that enabled students to *learn how to learn* in their studies (German: *das Lernen des Lernens*).[39] Schleiermacher thought that this would serve them in their vocations and would indirectly contribute greatly to state and society.[40] He believed that in one's profession the relationship to science and the academic spirit (German: *wissenschaftliche Geist*) should be

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36 Menand, Reitter, and Wellmon, "General Introduction," 3.

37 Menand, Reitter, and Wellmon, "General Introduction," 3ff.

38 Thomas A. Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 162.

39 Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 167. Howard refers here to Schleiermacher's *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGA) I, vi. 35.

40 Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 167. Howard refers to Schleiermacher's seminal work, *Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten in Deutschem Sinn* as it is collected, with other treatises by Fichte, Humboldt and others, in *Die Idee der deutschen Universität. Die*

cherished. Herein lies the essence of the university. Schleiermacher envisioned a university as a point of transition (German: *Übergangspunkt*), "between the time when the young are first influenced for science through a grounding in basic information (through the schools) and the time when as adults in the mature power and fullness of the scientific life they seek out on their own how to expand and improve the domain of knowledge."[41]

We elaborate on Schleiermacher's thinking a little longer. In his work, *Gelegentliche Gedanken*, he argues that the shaping of an academic attitude, i.e. the motivation to do research, is both formative and essential for one's profession. Professionals need to keep learning. Life-long learning is not something that is additional to one's education; rather it belongs to one's education. What Schleiermacher calls "the idea of knowledge," is awakened in people during their time at university as a "guiding principle."[42] As I understand it, *Bildung* implies a life-long positive attitude towards conducting research. As regards the question of what knowledge is needed, Schleiermacher proposes a broad encyclopaedic knowledge for every discipline. The graduate should be a generalist and only as such can he become a specialist.[43]

How does Schleiermacher view practical theology? He is commonly seen as its 'founding father', which I consider correct in the sense that he saved it from being transferred to seminaries. In several works, Schleiermacher refers to practical theology as a circulation-method (German: *Umlauf-methode*), which is an interestingly communal way of describing the discipline. What does he mean by this phrase? He considers practical theology necessary in order to stimulate the "circulation of religious interest," that is religious life within a congregation. In my words, the heartbeat of a congregation, the inner core of its life, needs stimuli. According to Schleiermacher, the church leadership are especially responsible for stimulating the heart of the congregation. As Gerrit Immink puts it, "a circulation of religious interests… only happens when someone takes the lead."[44] Practical theologians have to develop forms and "technical rules" for what Schleiermacher calls "the art of church leadership,"

fünf Grundschriften aus der Zeit ihrer Neubegründung durch klassischen Idealismus und romantischen Realismus, ed. Ernst Anrich (Darmstadt: H. Gentner, 1956). For the original German text, see Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten in Deutschem Sinn* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhanlung, 1808): 34.

41 Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 168. For the original German text, see Schleiermacher, *Gelegentliche Gedanken*, 32 and 49.

42 Schleiermacher, *Gelegentliche Gedanken*, 34.

43 Schleiermacher, *Gelegentliche Gedanken*, 50.

44 F. Gerrit Immink, "Inquiry into the Practice of Faith: A Reformed Perspective," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 139.

with the specific aim of ensuring that Christianity will be more purely represented within the Church.[45] Related to this organic concept of church, practical theology is seen as a set of rules to maintain the church, to stimulate its communication processes and to make it more perfect (German: *Vervollkommnung der Kirche*). In Schleiermacher's view this perfection is not a goal in itself but it does enable the church to contribute to the well-being of society. The discipline of practical theology can thus be compared to studies such as pedagogy and political science, because it also deals with the art of shaping a societal domain.[46] Still, it is not only practical theology (the crown of the tree of theology) but theology as a whole that is constituted by its relationship to the practices of the church and church leadership. Like Rautenstrauch before him, Schleiermacher compares theology, as a positive science, with medicine and law. He holds that the purpose of theology lies in the practices that it reflects upon, or, even stronger in the original German text, in the practices it solves (German: *erlöst*).[47] As a result of his *Bildung*, the academic theologian helps the practices of a church to have depth and be "less superficial."

For the analysis of Christian practices, Schleiermacher advocates the field of "ecclesiastical statistics" (German: *kirchliche Statistik*, at that time meaning something like "knowledge of the ecclesial state, the current situation or state of affairs"), albeit not as a part of practical theology, but as a branch of historical theology. In his lectures from 1827 and 1833, Schleiermacher wants to inform theology students about the differences between churches as regards their cultures, their histories and their relations with states and governments.[48] He tells his students:

> You need to know more about churches, you should learn about their teachings, their worship services, the religious condition of the individuals that belong to the communities of faith, the saliency of the religiosity of the individuals and the vitality of their spiritual development.[49]

Schleiermacher sees great risks for the spiritual and cultic life of a church if it isolates itself, because the church lives through a lively exchange between all

45 Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Beruf einleitender Vorlesungen* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1811): 102, § 265.
46 Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung*, 53, § 132.
47 Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung*, 1, 3ff, § 1.
48 Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung*, 17. See Simon Gerber, "Schleiermacher und die Kirchenkunde des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 17, no. 1 (2004): 34–55.
49 Gerber, "Schleiermacher und die Kirchenkunde," 185.

its members.[50] Furthermore, the focus on the theologian, both at a regional and at a local level, should not exclude the laity from decision-making. Wilhelm Gräb points out that Schleiermacher wanted to strengthen the participation of laity and involve them in theological learning by providing them with an opportunity to exercise influence upon the congregation.[51] Schleiermacher's curriculum proposals were effectuated in Berlin and other universities and remained foundational throughout the nineteenth century.

5 William Harper, University of Chicago: Shaping the Culture of the Nation

A *fourth*, radical curriculum reform took place at the end of the nineteenth century in the USA. Despite being in a completely different context, it was inspired by the same type of educational vision as that of Franz Rautenstrauch in Vienna: churches are to *transform society*. During the nineteenth century in the USA, every Protestant denomination had founded its own seminaries. These competed for the allegiance of the population as immigrants desired to preserve their identity.[52] Then, in 1880, Harvard president Charles Eliot turned a Unitarian seminary on the margins of Harvard University into a nondenominational divinity school organically connected to the larger university.[53] By the end of the nineteenth century, more and more American universities made non- or inter-denominational divinity schools organic members of their educational programs. All the divinity schools pursued the training of ministers as their chief purpose. In the early twentieth century, leaders of American Protestantism "envisioned the university divinity school as the vanguard of a Christian movement destined to shape the culture of the nation."[54] Educating the uneducated was in the air. According to Cherry, "the years 1880 to 1925, the period of the rise of modern American universities and the development of Protestant university divinity schools, stand out as a robust, visionary phase

50 See Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, 2 Bände (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1830/1831) = Kritische Gesamtausgabe 1/13.1–2, hg. v. Rolf Schäfer (Berlin/New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), §§ 6.4; 121; 123.3.

51 Wilhelm Gräb, "Practical Theology as Theology of Religion: Schleiermacher's Understanding of Practical Theology as a Discipline," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 9, no. 2 (2005): 183.

52 Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995): 13.

53 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 14.

54 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, ix.

in the history of higher education."[55] The development of the divinity schools was influenced by four powerful social and cultural forces: specialisation, professionalisation, social reform, and pluralism.[56]

An example is the curriculum reform at the University of Chicago, which followed a similar pattern to what had happened at Harvard.[57] In 1890, the Baptist Union Theological Seminary was transferred to the new university, laying the foundation for a divinity school. This divinity school became the first professional program at the University of Chicago and the professional divinity program was made ecumenical. Inspired by president William Harper's grand educational vision, the divinity school was to serve the university internally, by "bringing religion into connection with the various branches of learning," and was to aid society at large by "dispatching a legion of well-educated ministers to Christianize and civilize the globe."[58] Its aim was to send students into a pluralist modern society. Therefore, the curriculum was reformed in a radical way to ensure that students were in touch with both society and culture. According to Harper, only a university environment could prepare a minister suitable for the modern age and the new curriculum would have to offer a broad-ranging social vision, "secured by mingling with men who have other points of view" in the university.[59] During their first three years, divinity school students were permitted to take a third of their elective courses in other departments of the University.[60] In Chicago, the divinity school was to prepare ministers with the diversity of skills they would need in a modern, pluralist culture: skills in psychology, social analysis, money management

55 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 24.

56 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, ix.

57 Cherry follows Robert L. Kelly in his comprehensive study of American theological education, *Theological Education in America: A Study of One Hundred Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924). In particular, Cherry mentions Chicago, Yale, Harvard and Union as the Big Four: "Each in its own way exemplified the components of Harper's educational proposal. Each understood its task to be sustained by an interconnected system of religious education, sought to combine professional training with graduate education, embraced the aims of both high culture and social reform, and built upon the conviction that religion belongs to the core of the university task." Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 14. Later, the Methodist theological schools at Boston, Drew, Vanderbilt, Emory, Southern Methodist, USC-Claremont, and Duke adopted the same basic aims and strategies articulated so forcefully by Harper at the University of Chicago. Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 23.

58 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 4.

59 William Rainey Harper, "Shall the Theological Curriculum Be Modified, and How?" *American Journal of Theology* 3 (January 1899): 66. Quoted in Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 5.

60 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 5.

(!), educational methods and general administration. Remarkably, the divinity school "should devote no more than 10 percent of their time to training ministers how to preach, since no higher percentage of a minister's time would be consumed by that task."[61]

According to Cherry, Harper wanted both a professional school and a graduate school of theology within the same walls.[62] Both were necessary to prepare ministers to carry the gospel of education to the modern world. Since education in the modern world meant the acquisition of specialised academic knowledge, as in law and medicine, specialised, graduate-level education was an essential ingredient in the education of the modern minister.[63] In the following years, in divinity schools throughout the USA, Cherry observes that a continuous and "bedevilled" tension emerged between the demands of a graduate education, that is, detached scholarship, and the demands of professional training.[64] Many deans of divinity schools struggled with it. Nevertheless, all the divinity schools retained the vision of transforming society and therefore emphasised the necessity of getting to know society. For example, in the early twentieth century, the Methodist divinity schools offered courses in the social analysis of urban and rural problems, and even sent their students to do fieldwork in the urban ghettos and poor farming communities.[65]

6 Anton Boisen, Clinical Pastoral Education: Co-operative Inquiry

A *fifth* instructive curriculum reform, or addition, also took place in Chicago, although more than two decades after Harper, in the early 1920s. As I see it, the origins of doing collaborative research in pastoral theology can be traced back to the beginnings of clinical pastoral education (CPE). The history of CPE as an integral part of theological education, and as a form of continuing chaplain and ministry education, was extensively described in the 1970s by Seward Hiltner.[66] Later research into its history highlighted another important element, which was noted by Hiltner, but deserves more attention in this book.

61 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 6; see also 16.

62 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 6.

63 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 7.

64 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 8.

65 Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 23.

66 Seward Hiltner, "Fifty Years of CPE," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 29, no. 2 (1975): 90–98. See also Cor Arends, *If Billy Sunday Comes to Town – Delusion as a Religious Experience? The Biography of Anton T. Boisen from the Perspective of Foundational Theology* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2014).

According to Glen Asquith, Anton Boisen, the founding father of CPE, "did not design this program simply to introduce a new form of theological education. He was also – and perhaps primarily – looking for colleagues in research."[67] In this research, studying case-records, or "theologs" as he called them, would form the content.[68] In 1923, Boisen designed the main objective of a training course, which was to be organised at Chicago Theological Seminary. Together with students, he wanted to study mental disorder and religious experience, where "the one is studied in the light of the other." Only then, "will it be possible to understand and to deal intelligently with either one."[69] Boisen compared personality disruption to a Ford breaking down: "Even those who are not physicians know that it is when our Ford gets out of order that we are most apt to learn something about the machinery that runs it. The same principle applies to disorders of the personality."[70] According to Seward Hiltner, one of Boisen's later students, at the time Boisen was "primarily concerned to help the students learn theology itself by deepening their insights into what he called 'the problem of sin and salvation' through the study of 'living human documents' as well as through books, journals, sermons and reflective thought."[71] Hiltner also remarks that the research was fully theological: "They were studying theology, because they brought theological questions to these deep crisis experiences of life, and should return with deeper understanding of theological answers."[72]

In later years, Boisen listed four objectives for the case study method of CPE. Here I want to highlight the second, which was "To train the student in those methods of *co-operative inquiry*, which are essential to the building up of a body of organised and tested knowledge pertaining to the experiences of the

67 Glen H. Asquith, "The Case Study Method of Anton T. Boisen," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 34, no. 2 (1980): 84. See also Daniel S. Schipani, "Case Study Method," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011): 93 and Eileen Campbell-Reed, "The Power and Danger of a Single Case Study in Practical Theological Research," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 41.

68 Arends, *If Billy Sunday Comes to Town*, 101.

69 Anton T. Boisen, "Concerning the Relationship between Religious Experience and Mental Disorder," in *Vision from a Little Known Country: A Boisen Reader*, ed. Glenn H. Asquith (Decatur, GA: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1992): 15.

70 Quoted in Arends, *If Billy Sunday Comes to Town*, 101. The quote is originally from Anton Boisen, "The Psychiatric Approach to the Study of Religion," *Religious Education* 23, no. 3 (1928): 202.

71 Hiltner, "Fifty Years of CPE," 90.

72 Hiltner, "Fifty Years of CPE," 91.

mentally ill and the means of helping them."[73] We see here how for Boisen the core acts of research, namely observation, interpretation, evaluation and strategy development ("the means of helping them") cannot be performed in a solitary way. Despite Boisen being an expert on mental illness, this objective demonstrates the need for the expert to be open to, and possibly even rely on, the observations and interpretations of the students. A second element also stands out from the objective: students are to be trained in methods of doing research in community. Engaging (future) practitioners and researchers starts at the academy, not simply through solitary research assignments, but through cooperative observation and interpretation. Third, this type of collaborative research can, cumulatively, lead to a body of knowledge. Therefore, knowledge transfer is not something to realise *after* the research, but rather takes place *during* the research.

In 1925, Anton Boisen recruited four theological students for the very first program of clinical training. It was organised at Worcester State Hospital, a state-run mental hospital located in Worcester, Massachusetts, where Boisen had been appointed as hospital chaplain in 1924. One of the four students, Helen Flanders Dunbar, subsequently a psychiatrist and early leader in the field of psychosomatic medicine, joined as a research assistant.[74] Thus, within this small research team, someone was deliberately appointed (!) with the task of making notes, or of providing the other participants with texts to read. That same year, Richard C. Cabot, the father of medical social work, wrote a plea for "A Clinical Year for Theological Students" at Harvard, which entailed an internship for theology students similar to those in medical schools, as first proposed in 1910.[75] Until participating in a CPE training, theology students had experienced a theology that was rather alienated from life, as Cabot put it. The aim of CPE was to make theology relevant to normal life again. In 1975, celebrating 50 years CPE, Seward Hiltner writes: "Since [the students] had associated theology only with the abstract and theoretical, sometimes they did not return to basic theological questions after they had 'come alive' through the functional contributions of CPE."[76]

73 Anton T. Boisen, "Types of Mental Illness: A Beginning Course for Use in the Training Centres of the Council for Clinical Training of Theological Students," vol. 1, unpublished mimeographed book, 1946, 2. Quoted in Asquith, "The Case Study Method of Anton T. Boisen," 87. Emphasis mine.

74 Robert D. Leas, "A Brief History," Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, accessed October 5, 2017, https://www.acpe.edu/pdf/History/ACPE%20Brief%20History.pdf.

75 Leas, "A Brief History."

76 Hiltner, "Fifty Years of CPE," 91.

In 1931, after six years, this form of collaborative research at Worcester State Hospital came to an end. That year Anton Boisen was succeeded at the institution by Rev. Carroll Wise. While Boisen had primarily been a researcher of religious experience connected to mental illness, Carroll Wise was interested in a pastoral emphasis. Wise later commented on this shift: "He (Boisen) finally forgave me for changing the Worcester program from a research to a pastoral emphasis."[77] Boisen himself remained convinced of the value of doing research together. He described his book, *Problems in Religion and Life*, as "a manual for pastors with outlines for the co-operative study of personal experience in social situations."[78] Again, note the term 'co-operative study', this time advocated for clergy. Interestingly, in his article on Boisen's case study method that I refer to above, Asquith does not make any remarks about this collaborative aspect. In the decades after 1931, CPE, as a relevant, experience-based education with an intense focus on pastoral role identity, became part of the theological education of chaplains.[79]

7 The Network for African Congregational Theology: Radical Contextualisation

It is a giant leap to move from discussing CPE in the USA to radical contextualisation in Africa. Viewed from the perspective of valorisation, the *sixth* instructive curriculum reform is currently taking place in the Network for African Congregational Theology (NetACT). The perceived difficulty was – and often still is – that the curricula of many theological seminaries in Africa reflect Western theological programs. Seminary representatives often indicate that they "simply took over the curricula from other European-orientated theological institutions."[80] A dissertation on colleges in Kenya confirms these

77 Leas, "A Brief History."

78 Anton T. Boisen, *Problems in Religion and Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946): 3. Quoted in Asquith, "The Case Study Method of Anton T. Boisen," 88.

79 See Stephen D. W. King, *Trust the Process: A History of Clinical Pastoral Education as Theological Education* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007); Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Revisiting the Living Human Web: Theological Education and the Role of Clinical Pastoral Education," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling* 62, no. 1–2 (2008): 5–10. See also below, Chapter 9.

80 Kruger P. Du Preez, "A Framework for Curriculum Development in Theological Institutions of the Network for African Congregational Theology" (PhD diss., Stellenbosch University, 2012): 22, accessed January 3, 2018, http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/80047. Dickson N. Kagema, "Leadership Training for Mission in the Anglican Church of Kenya" (PhD diss.,

observations. Dickson N. Kagema demonstrates that the curricula used in the Provincial Colleges of the Anglican Church of Kenya, which followed the curriculum of St. Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, are not contextualised and, therefore, irrelevant. These curricula look more Western than African and, as such, fail to address the main issues affecting Kenyan society today. Kagema uses terms such as 'westernised' and 'un-indigenised' to qualify the curricula.[81] It calls for a thorough re-thinking of theological education, including practical-theological education. Christianity is expanding rapidly in Africa and valorising *relevant* theological knowledge is of vital importance for its future. The former Dean of the University of Stellenbosch, Denise Ackermann makes it very clear:

> Theological education should contribute to the self-understanding of faith communities that can inform and transform people's lives. At its best, it becomes a dialogue between the academy and people of faith. For this to happen it has to be accessible, contextual and situated.[82]

Following an exploratory tour by Jurgens Hendriks and others in 1997[83] and a consultation in Nairobi in the year 2000, NetACT was formed in April 2001 at a meeting in Lusaka. The network originally consisted of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University and four sister theological institutions in Southern Africa but today comprises thirty-eight members and fifteen associate members.[84] Its aims include "the promotion of contextually-relevant training of congregational leadership," "upgrading of academic standards," "developing continuous education programmes," "promoting and facilitating lecturer-exchange" and "addressing specific concerns in African contexts, especially by

University of South Africa, 2008): 142, 148, accessed January 3, 2018, http://hdl.handle.net/10500/3252.

81 Dickson N. Kagema, "Leadership Training for Mission in the Anglican Church of Kenya" (PhD diss., University of South Africa, 2008): 142, 148, accessed January 3, 2018, http://hdl.handle.net/10500/3252.

82 Denise Ackermann, "Foreword," in *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), xxv.

83 See Ernst M. Conradie, "An ABC in Theological Education?" *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 38, no. 4 (1997): 349–361.

84 "Members," NetACT, accessed May 26, 2018, http://netact.christians.co.za/members/. See also: H. Jurgens Hendriks, "Introduction: A Journey," in *Men in the Pulpit, Women in The Pew? Addressing Gender Inequality in Africa*, ed. H. Jurgens Hendriks, Elna Mouton, Len Hansen and Elisabet le Roux (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2012): 13–24.

providing joint theological, moral and spiritual reflection."[85] In his dissertation, Kruger du Preez adds that NetACT was also created because it was established that there was a "need for more knowledge on the science of curriculum development."[86] In 2002, a meeting of the so-called curriculum committee of NetACT was organised in Stellenbosch. Minutes of the meeting, described by Du Preez, state that lecturers need to be empowered and that their training will sensitise and motivate them, which will eventually lead to curriculum development.[87] Importantly for the topic of the present book, practically from the start, the network's development and the major content of its workshops ran parallel to doing empirical research on the curricula of theological colleges and seminaries. Several doctoral dissertations, by Kagema, Du Preez and others, and several articles were written on the matter. The preliminary and final results of the research were presented during workshops and then published online. The research served as input for the meetings. Research was also performed during the meetings. Both in general meetings and in workshops, questionnaires were distributed and collected.[88] Practitioners (in this case lecturers and board members of theological institutions) met with practical theologians who were committed to making their research relevant for the future of both the congregations and the societies in which they were embedded. From the start, the NetACT network emphasised the importance of theological curricula that focused on the development and empowerment of congregations in order to "keep society intact, peaceful and just."[89]

In 2006, NetACT hosted a conference in Windhoek on theological education and the necessity of reform, and again there was research input. Remarkably, the rationale for reforming the curriculum was very similar to the other curriculum reforms that we have considered. In the words of Jurgens Hendriks, one of NetACT's major spokesmen, "Can we train pastors and empower the laity to be the proverbial salt and light *to make a difference* in society?"[90] As

85 "Mission & Values," NetACT, accessed May 26, 2018, http://netact.christians.co.za/mission-values/. See also: H. Jurgens Hendriks, "Reliable Leadership, Sustainable Seminaries: The NetACT story 2000–2012," in *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, 1009.

86 Du Preez, *A Framework for Curriculum Development*, iii.

87 Du Preez, *A Framework for Curriculum Development*, 4.

88 Kruger P. Du Preez, H. Jurgens Hendriks and Arend E. Carl, "Research into Curriculum Development at Ten Theological Institutions of Reformed Tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa Linked to NetACT," in *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 54, no. 3–4 (2013): 6, http://doi.org/10.5952/54-3-4-374.

89 Hendriks, "Reliable Leadership," 1010.

90 H. Jurgens Hendriks, "Theological Education in Africa: Messages from the Fringes," in *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 55, no. 1–2 (2014): 75, http://doi.org/10.5952/55-1-2-516.

with Rautenstrauch's, Schleiermacher's and Harper's educational visions, the conviction here is that the church, through its members, *shapes* society by the norms and values that guide the everyday practices of its members. On the other hand, the proposals of the NetACT conference also differ from the other curriculum reforms because, in order to be relevant, the network members call for a radical contextualisation of theological education. According to this perspective, challenges relevant to the African context, such as HIV-Aids,[91] poverty, patriarchy and gender issues, issues of human dignity, ethnic animosity, theological reflection on true (reliable) Christian leadership, issues of conflict resolution, spiritual formation and learning how to listen to the Word in liminal phases,[92] should shape the entire curriculum and not just be taught in one or two modules.[93] On HIV-Aids, Hendriks writes: "In order to effectively and faithfully address the contextual reality of this terrible pandemic, everybody teaching in an institution should deal with it purposefully in every sub-discipline of theology with the type of input unique to that sub-discipline."[94]

The NetACT workshops on curriculum development have had considerable effects. A very constructive conference was held in 2009. Members of the network, including lecturers in disciplines other than practical theology, realised the value of curriculum development. Namibian Evangelical Theological Seminary and Murray Theological College started to revise every aspect of their curricula in a highly communicative process.[95] Remarkably, the researchers who are part of NetACT also see possibilities for extending the research that is needed for a revision of the curriculum to the congregations themselves. They believe that students can play a role in this research within the faith communities. A suggestion is for students to distribute questionnaires during

91 Hendriks observes: "In 2000, no institution lectured on AIDS. The staff, students and local church leadership of all seminaries were introduced to the first basic AIDS curriculum at local three-day conferences. Seminary staff received additional training as trainers. However, they were soon "bought" by NGOs or government agencies. We lost our entire first team of trained lecturers! This aspect of our work needs continuous attention." Hendriks, "Reliable Leadership," 1011.

92 Hendriks, "Theological Education in Africa," 63.

93 Kagema, *Leadership Training for Mission*, 149.

94 Hendriks, "Reliable Leadership," 1014. Du Preez states that in Africa curriculum development was often "done on an ad hoc basis with the addition of certain disciplines." Du Preez, *A Framework for Curriculum Development*, 1.

95 H. Jurgens Hendriks, "Networking Theological Education in Africa: The NetACT Story," *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 53, no. 3–4 (2012): 125, http://doi.org/10.5952/53-3-4-255.

their practical work to church members to establish the real needs of which the curricula should take close notice.

Today NetACT embraces missional theology, missional spirituality and mission-shaped ecclesial practices. Simply put, the idea is that missional practices raise questions that provide the content for courses, and that, in turn, missional curricula lead to and strengthen missional congregations that are beneficial for society. Attempts to open faith communities to missional theology can only be effective if the formation of future congregational leaders enables them to become congregational reformers. Curriculum reforms in theology imply reform of the church and vice versa.[96]

8 Protestant Theological University (PThU): Internship, Learning Empirical Research

In 2005, the *seventh* and last instructive curriculum reform took place at the predecessor of my own university, at that time still in Kampen.[97] In 2012, at the Groningen location of the PThU, it was evaluated, refined, redesigned and thoroughly re-implemented. Over several decades there was a recurring criticism from both students and alumni that the connection between theology and the professional practices of the ministry was poorly established. Within the sub-disciplines of practical theology, such as homiletics, liturgical studies, and pastoral care, despite different kinds of experiential learning, for example, visiting parish settings, interviewing practitioners at the site, reflecting on case studies, etc., students still felt like they were doing a dry run. The board of the university therefore decided to reform the entire curriculum. First, an extensive phase of curriculum research took place. Second, during several workshops with all the lecturers, the program of studies, which comprises a large number of courses, was evaluated. Third, expert meetings were organised with both practitioners and educational advisors. As a result, during the two-year master's degree, a dual learning trajectory was put in place.

Today, the study program involves a one-and-a-half-year internship, in which all the students are to engage both constructively and reflectively in the practices of one particular faith community or – as students who study to become chaplains, in the practices of a healthcare institution, armed forces or

96 For an early formulation of this insight, see Mette, *Theorie und Praxis*, 220.

97 The PThU has come into being in 2007, after a merger of the official educations for the ministry of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions, which were formerly located in Leiden, Utrecht and Kampen.

penitentiary institution – conducted parallel to the courses and classes of the three semesters. The three semesters are divided into six 'practice-fields'. Each week, a student spends two days in a congregation or chaplaincy setting and is exposed to its practices; the other three days he or she is preparing for and taking classes. Every fortnight, students and a supervisor gather in a 'learning community'. In addition, students have to do a collaborative research project, conducted with both the church council or with everyday believers, in which they discuss and design a new practice in response to a problem that is defined by the church council. After recent refinements, this research project is now fully aligned with the principles of appreciative inquiry (AI).[98] In addition, at the bachelor's level, empirical methods like interviewing and participant observation are now taught in the very first course in theology: *Concepts and Methods of Theology* and in the first-year course *Practical Theology*. Later, at the master's level, the facilitation and moderation of focus groups is taught, including the writing of transcripts and the application of basic principles of coding. A master-thesis in the field of practical theology always has an empirical component in which the student must conduct empirical research

The transfer of theological and practical-theological knowledge is fivefold. First, during the study program, interns learn about theories and strategies, and explore the literature of the field, while engaging in different kinds of experiential learning, practicing skills, and applying what they learn in the practices of the faith community. This is all rather explicit knowledge. Secondly, as knowledge recipients, interns acquire practice-based knowledge from those who are highly experienced, such as ministers, pastoral workers, parish evangelists chaplains, elders, deacons and committed church members. This is all rather tacit knowledge and it includes the practice-theories applied by the practitioners. Here interns get to know the 'huddle-and-muddle' of the professional practitioners, but also of everyday believers. Third, which is also relevant for research, interns return every week to their classes, challenging theories and strategies with their practice-based questions. Internships allow students to connect their practical experiences in the congregation or institution with the theoretical constructs that they have explored in the classroom and bring them into discussion. Explicit knowledge is tested and can be questioned, thus enabling students to be more engaged in the classroom.[99] Fourth, interns receive ample time for their learning processes in order to enable these to become more meaningful. This process leads to critical thinking, flexible

98 See below, Chapter 7.

99 See Sue Campbell Clark, "Enhancing the Educational Value of Business Internships," *Journal of Management Education* 27, no. 4 (2003): 472–484.

problem solving and the transfer of skills and use of knowledge in new situations.[100] It creates future tacit and explicit knowledge. Finally, by conducting a collaborative research project, which often includes focus groups in the design, students see how collaborative research, in this case appreciative inquiry, contributes to the emergence of the community of faith. Students discover the miracle of the process of Christian community formation which can never be fully comprehended.

9 Conclusion

Seven curriculum reforms in the world of theological education demonstrate how, over the centuries and in different contexts, theological faculties, seminaries, divinity schools, etc., have tried to bridge the perceived (and often experienced) gap between theological education and the competences that students learn on the one hand, and religious practices, such as worship, preaching, pastoral care, congregational leadership, mission work, congregational and personal spirituality, etc., on the other hand. Over the centuries we have seen a growing acknowledgement of, first, the necessity of practical theology, second, the need to prevent routines, third, the necessity of shaping an academic spirit, enabling ministers to develop a life-long motivation to study Scripture, the Christian tradition and Christian practices, and to help the practices of a faith community to have depth, fourth, the need for Christian communities to have a distinctive positive societal impact, fifth, the discovery of co-operative inquiry, sixth, the need to understand contextual issues, enable these to provide the content of courses, and the need to instruct students in doing research with congregations, seventh, the necessity of exposure to Christian practices through apprenticeship learning, and utilising some basic skills of collaborative empirical research. Each succesive reform in theological education also underlines the necessity of academic, university or seminary, education. Ministers, and also chaplains, have a tremendous responsibility.

100 Linda Darling-Hammond, "Introduction: Teaching and Learning for Understanding," in *Powerful Learning: What We Know about Teaching for Understanding*, ed. Linda Darling-Hammond et al., 1–10 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

CHAPTER 3

Continuing Education in Community

Lifelong Learning in Communities of Practice

1 Introduction

In June 2018, Joyce Mercer and Charles Edward Atkins give an evening lecture on "substance abuse as offering false joy to youth."[1] It is the last of five lectures organised by the Yale Youth Ministry Institute as part of a week-long summer course with the title "Why Youth Ministry? A Beacon of Joy in the Midst of Suffering." This course is an example of formal continuing education opportunities for pastors, pastoral workers, leaders of other Christian institutions, lay leaders and, in this case, also youth ministers, that are organised by divinity schools, theological seminaries, theological faculties and colleges around the world. Furthermore, during their lecture, Mercer and Atkins share "a strengths-based model for working with incarcerated youth that can be engaged with young people in other settings, that supports their genuine quest for joy against the seductive false joy of substance abuse."[2] Their use of a model developed during their research in a lecture for practitioners suggests that continuing education is a site for the valorisation of theology, including practical theology, *par excellence*.

Nowadays, alumni often return to their alma mater or select a variety of courses from different theological institutions as they pursue continuing education. In recent years, and in more and more countries, an increasing number of denominations have opted to make continuing ministerial education courses obligatory.[3] In official policy decisions, denominations expect their ministers to continue learning and developing professionally. Apart from the commonly used term 'continuing education', such programmes are also labelled: 'post-academic training', 'refresher training', 'permanent education', 'continuing professional development' or, as in the Church of England, 'post ordination training' and 'continuing ministerial education and development'.

1 "Yale Youth Ministry Institute," Summer Study at Yale Divinity School, accessed June 9, 2018, https://summerstudy.yale.edu/YMI.

2 "Yale Youth Ministry Institute," Summer Study at Yale Divinity School.

3 For example, in 1978 the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa decided that continuing theological training should be compulsory for all its ministers. See Malan Nel, "Continuing Theological Training at the University of Pretoria," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30, no. 3 (2009): 26.

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The idea is that resourceful learners want to improve their practices, learn about new practices and engage with other professionals, and that continuing education is just as necessary in the ministry as it is in other professions, such as medicine, law or accountancy. In fact, in these professions one may even lose one's accreditation or license if one does not participate in continuing education. This approach is legitimised by the conviction that a professional cannot rely on his or her formal education because of increasing job complexity, and in order to prevent the routinisation of a profession, which may lead to mistakes.

In this chapter, we investigate the following question: Does continuing education for practitioners in various ecclesial or church-related practices have any shared characteristics? In particular, we highlight the increasing value of the communal dimension of continuing education. First, I explore the historical rootedness of continuing ministerial education. Indeed, over the last two centuries, if there is one profession in which studying has been an integral part of everyday professional practices it is the ministry. I focus on the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, not only because of my familiarity with the context, but also because, according to a leading historian in the field, during this period ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church resembled clergymen in other European countries and the United States, who were trying to establish closer contacts with their parishioners (and outsiders).[4] Second, I look at several developments in continuing ministerial education over the last few decades. Third, I discuss the continuing need for continuing education, including why it is essential and some of its key characteristics.

2 Continuing Ministerial Education in the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century

During the nineteenth century the position of 'parson' became professionalised in several countries.[5] Academic education alone was no longer considered

4 David J. Bos, "A Good Enough Parson: Early Nineteenth-Century, Dutch Discourse on Requirements for the Pastoral Ministry in the Reformed Church," in *The Pastor Bonus* [*DRCH/NAKG 83*], ed. Th. Clemens and Wim Janse (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004): 340.

5 Peter T. van Rooden, "Van geestelijke stand naar beroepsgroep. De professionalisering van de Nederlandse predikant," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 17 (1991): 361–393; reprinted in Peter T. van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes. Over godsdienst en maatschappij in Nederland, 1570–1990* (Amsterdam, 1996): 46–77; David J. Bos, *Servants of the Kingdom: Professionalisation among Ministers of the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands Reformed Church* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010) (Dutch text: David J. Bos, "In dienst van het Koninkrijk: Beroepsontwikkeling van hervormde predikanten in negentiende-eeuws Nederland" (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 1999): 243, http://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.393617. Bos, "A Good Enough Parson."

sufficient. We already saw what Schleiermacher wrote about the 'academic spirit', which leads professionals to "seek out on their own how to expand and improve the domain of knowledge."[6] Schleiermacher emphasised that the time a student spends at university is a period in which the student *learns to learn*, and he expected that this *Bildung* would enable the minister to cherish and develop a research attitude. In Germany, by the end of the eighteenth century, an encyclopaedic manual (German: *Anweisung*) had already been written for theology graduates by Johann August Nösselt to "instruct and initiate [students] into a professional appreciation of the ecclesiastical offices."[7] The aim was to enable pastors to acquire a "scientific sense" and learn to "strive after the highest in science" (German: *dem Höchsten in der Wissenschaft streben*).[8] Nösselt hoped to increase research literacy among ministers. In his manual, he discussed how to use books properly, and how keeping up with book fairs, catalogues from publishers and new periodicals benefited theologians, ministers and students.[9] In these instructions, we see that the focus was on the individual minister.

Ministers in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, similar to those in Germany, were expected to spend a significant amount of time studying. In fact, there was a wide-spread idea among Protestants that continuing education would favourably distinguish their ministers from Roman Catholic clerics.[10] A servant of the Word was expected to be in his study quite often, not only in order to prepare his sermon, but also to stay informed about developments in his profession. The parsonage or vicarage was even designed in such a way that there was an entire room dedicated to study. In 1854, the robe of the Dutch minister became the robe or gown of the academy. In today's language related to professionalisation, the practitioner was regarded as a scholar. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century, the number of ministers with a doctoral degree increased significantly from 1% to more than 5%. This can be regarded as evidence of both research and a formal kind of continuing education. Theological essay contests also contributed to greater research literacy.

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6 Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 167. For the original German text, see Schleiermacher, *Gelegentliche Gedanken*, 32 and 49.

7 Albrecht Beutel, *Kirchengeschichte im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009): 211. See Purvis, *Theology and University*, 70.

8 August Hermann Niemeyer, ed., *Leben, Charakter und Verdienste Johann August Nösselts. Königl. Preuß. Geheimraths, Doctors und Professors der Theologie, nebst einer Sammlung einiger zum Theil ungedruckten Aufsätz, Briefe und Fragmente* (Halle: Waisenhaus, 1806–9), i. 199ff. See Purvis, *Theology and University*, 70.

9 Johann August Nösselt, *Anweisung zur Kenntniß der besten allgemeinen Bücher in alle Theilen der Theologie* (Halle, 1779). See Purvis, *Theology and University*, 36.

10 Bos, *Servants of the Kingdom*, 263.

For example, in 1860, Abraham Kuyper received a gold medal from the Faculty of Theology at the State University of Groningen for an essay on the Polish reformer Johannes a Lasco.

The nineteenth century led to the rise of the ministry as a professionalised community of practice. Ministers also engaged with other communities of practice. From 1815 onwards, divinity students in the Netherlands had to discuss their opinions with students from other faculties, including students of law, medicine, and the natural sciences. In the first phase of their studies, divinity students had eight out of ten subjects in common with students of other faculties. At the University of Groningen, courses on agriculture, including knowledge of insects, crops and seeds, was considered necessary for future ministers to be able to offer professional advice to farmers in the countryside. Indeed, there was no one else in the villages who could transfer new knowledge and new skills to them.[11] Being rooted in a civilised, learned, culture was also considered essential for divinity students because it led to their inclusion in an "educated social class."[12] After completing their studies, the members of this educated class had regular meetings with each other in the various local settings where they practiced their professions. A village or city minister would often communicate with the doctor, the solicitor and the school teacher. The government encouraged this structure through its view on society. In the nineteenth century, we find small groups of people in both rural and urban settings, in which members held similar beliefs and value systems, used one another as sounding boards and learned from each other. Both ministers and school teachers were considered 'teachers' and 'bringers of civilisation' in an enlightened, Protestant drive to educate the Dutch population.[13] Ministers became involved in both Sunday schools and Christian schools.[14] They also

11 Klaas van Berkel, *De oude Universiteit*, vol. 1 of *Universiteit van het Noorden. Vier eeuwen academisch leven in Groningen* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014), 520. The professor who taught rural economics (Dutch: *Landhuishoudkunde*) at the Faculty of Theology of the State University Groningen, Jacobus Albertus Uilkens, was also a distinguished physician and theologian. Among many other books, Uilkens wrote about 'prejudices about thunderstorms', 'the advantages of insects' and on 'knowing the Creator by his creatures'. Uilkens, and others, also believed that ministers should shape a garden around the parsonage.

12 Bos, *Servants of the Kingdom*, 184.

13 John Exalto and Gert van Klinken, "De protestantse onderwijzer en het juk der dienstbaarheid," in *De protestantse onderwijzer. Geschiedenis van een dienstbaar beroep 1800–1920*. Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme na 1800; No. 23, eds. John Exalto and Gert van Klinken (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2015): 9.

14 Exalto and Van Klinken, "De protestantse onderwijzer," 8. Before 1830, school councils were often presided over by a minister. However, after 1830, by Royal Decree religious education was no longer taught in public schools, but rather by the minister during catechism.

became active in rehabilitation homes, hospitals and young men's or young women's clubs. In some villages, groups of ministers founded a department of the 'Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen' (Society for the Common Good). They also opened libraries in village schools,[15] and were generally considered to be culture bearers and culture mediators. They were very much involved in the cultural edification of the population, although for decades this happened in a rather patronising way.[16] As Peter van Rooden writes, "Protestant churches considered the Netherlands a moral community of individuals, and saw their own churches as means to further the welfare of this nation by morally informing its citizens."[17]

Apart from collaboration in these 'communities of practice', the General Regulations for the Reformed Church of 1816 already proposed a formal structure of permanent education: circles (Dutch: *ringen*) of local pastors. At these meetings ministers gathered for the purpose of "considering and discussing the topics of religion, the flourishing of Christianity, [and] the promotion of biblical knowledge."[18] Doing theology in community was in the air. In the church, new practices were introduced like catechising, performing funeral rites, preaching in funeral services and visiting parishioners, which usually occurred around major life-events and preferably took the form of private, confidential conversations.[19] Ministers became active in schools and a range of cultural practices. The new set of clerical tasks and duties needed to be discussed in community.[20] According to David Bos, the selection of reading material differed between circles; one might mostly study books on practical topics, while another might focus on academic works. There was a growing conviction that ministers should devote more attention to their congregations, which contributed to the perceived necessity of gathering as ministers.

In one of the handbooks written in the nineteenth century, the author, Klaas van Oosterzee, since 1863 professor of biblical and practical theology at Utrecht University, is very aware of the difficulties facing the young professional: "Not seldom, heavy burdens are laid upon feeble shoulders, and everything is required of a single person, even where perhaps he can excel

15 Kornelis ter Laan and Martin Hillenga, *Geschiedenis van Slochteren* (Groningen: Oppenheim, 1962; Reprint Regio-Projekt, 2000): 188.

16 Peter van Rooden, "Long-Term Religious Developments in the Netherlands, *c.* 1750–2000," in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000*, ed. Hugh MacLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 117.

17 Van Rooden, "Long-Term Religious Developments in the Netherlands," 116.

18 Bos, *Servants of the Kingdom*, 263.

19 Bos, "A Good Enough Parson," 340.

20 Bos, "A Good Enough Parson," 338.

only in a single respect."[21] He adds that the Protestant congregational leader, "almost necessarily moves constantly in the sphere of conflict and discussion."[22] Criticism not only comes from the congregation; in addition there is "the strain, sometimes too great, upon one's relations with colleagues not always likeminded and friendly."[23] In the face of these and other difficulties, Van Oosterzee emphasises the importance of reading together, not always books of an exclusively devotional nature.[24] The minister should not only care for the moral and spiritual development of the members of the congregation entrusted to him, but also for their intellectual development.[25] However, reading scholarly works with colleagues in a circle, or other association of ministers, is also important for sharing the burden of ministry and exchanging knowledge and encouragement.

Towards the end of the 1830s, theological associations of ministers, based on foreign models, began to pop up all over the country.[26] These associations were not always created to "assist each other in practical matters."[27] The goal of the Frisian Theological Association, for example, was to discuss as academic theologians, who were not directly 'disturbed' by ecclesial interests. In the spirit of Humboldt University, theological research had to be free and could become relevant for the ministry, the church and society in an indirect way. In the 1840s, provincial associations of ministers comparable to the German minister-conferences (German: *Pfarrerkonferenzen*) were created and organised by the ministers themselves. Here the focus was explicitly on ecclesial practices and on practical theology.[28] In 1862, the first national conference of ministers was organised. David Bos describes the circles, the theological associations and the provincial associations of ministers as a sign of professionalisation: "The establishment of such organisations expressed a wish to look at the ministry not only as an office, but also as a profession."[29] Also according to Heitink the professionalisation of the minister can be demonstrated

21 Johannes Jacobus van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology. A Manual for Theological Students* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1878): 30.

22 Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, 32.

23 Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, 32.

24 Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, 530.

25 Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, 529.

26 Bos, *Servants of the Kingdom*, 235.

27 The Frisian Theological Association was established in 1838. See Jippe Visser, "Symfonie der duizend. Herdenkingsrede gehouden op de 1000ste vergadering van het Fries Godgeleerd Gezelschap. Historisch overzicht van het F.G.G. sinds de oprichting in 1838," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 16, no. 4 (1961/1962): 179–195.

28 Gerben Heitink, *Biografie van de dominee* (Baarn: Ten Have, 2001): 126.

29 Bos, *Servants of the Kingdom*, 264.

by referring to the academic access of the profession and the associations of ministers.[30]

Reviewing the history of continuing ministerial education in the nineteenth century, I distinguish formal continuing education activities, such as theological essay competitions or PhDs – those hosted or accredited by the church or other institutions – from informal activities, such as reading in one's study. I also distinguish between individual activities and communal activities (be they in a small group, a circle of colleagues, theological associations, conferences, training courses, etc.). It is clear that communal approaches to doing practical theology were becoming increasingly common. The picture of an isolated minister, reading alone in his study for days, which often emerges from the biographies of ministers in the eighteenth century, was becoming a relic of the past.

3 Continuing Education in Recent Decades

In some countries, programs for continuing ministerial education have been running for decades. In 1960, Connolly Gamble wrote a book on continuing theological education in the USA, in which he reported that centres and programs for continuing ministerial education were mushrooming all over the country.[31] Gamble underlined the necessity of such programs because of the gap between formal seminary education and the minister's responsibility to train the laity for their ministry in the world. Gamble's book was lively discussed among church leaders and sparked a significant movement.[32] According to Mark Rouch, this development was inconceivable without the adult education movement that had been progressing since the second half of the nineteenth century, paving the way for continuing education in many different professions. He refers to it as "fertile soil."[33] Fifteen years after the publication of his book, Gamble lectured at the annual gathering of the Society for

30 Heitink, *Biografie van de dominee*, 127.

31 Connolly C. Gamble, *Continuing Theological Education of the American Minister: Report of a Survey* (Richmond: Union Theological Seminary, 1960). Gamble sent a questionnaire to 500 agencies and, to his surprise, found that 95 seminaries, 30 colleges and universities, 15 conference centres and 10 pastoral institutes offered programs for clergy.

32 Mark Rouch, "From Yesterday to Today in Continuing Education," in *A Lifelong Call to Learn: Approaches to Continuing Education for Church Leaders*, ed. Robert E. Reber and D. Bruce Roberts (Abingdon, Nashville, 2000): 4.

33 Rouch, "From Yesterday to Today in Continuing Education," 11.

the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry.[34] He made a remarkable plea, which is relevant to the topic of our book. He emphasises the urgent necessity of "establishing stable links" between "producers" of theological knowledge, applicable in the practices of the ministry, and "consumers" of this knowledge. "Stable links" implies that practitioners need to meet researchers on a regular basis. Furthermore, it is remarkable that while in 1960 Gamble defined continuing education as "a lifelong program of systematic sustainable study," in 1975 he defined it as: "an individual's personally designed learning program *developed with the help of colleagues* (*laity and fellow-clergy*) to improve vocational competencies, which begins when formal education ends and continues throughout one's career and beyond."[35] The group dimension, that is doing continuing education in community with other practitioners, has evolved into an important feature: "An unfolding process, it links together personal study and reflection, and participation in organised group events in a related series of more-or-less organised events."[36]

Unfortunately, we are unable to offer extensive descriptions here of the historical development of continuing ministerial education in other countries due to space limitations. We do, however, describe some key insights. *First*, the need for continuing education is influenced by one's time in the ministry and by societal changes. In 1983, an extensive survey on the knowledge needs of ministers in South Africa demonstrated that the needs expressed by ministers were specifically related to the length of time they had been in ministry.[37] The survey demonstrated that the knowledge needs of ministers who had been in ministry for fifteen years were primarily in the domain of leadership and church development, while the needs of ministers who had been in ministry for four to fifteen years were more in the area of pastoral care. Newly ordained ministers in their first three years of ministry were most concerned about learning how to preach. How can we understand this need for know-what and know-how about preaching? It aligns with our understanding of the transition from university, or seminary, to ministry, which despite curriculum reforms continues to be a considerable step. Nevertheless, Thomas Long warns that the disjunction should not be exaggerated, since today "most theological

34 Connolly C. Gamble, "Continuing Education for Ministry: Perspectives and Prospects" (address to the 8th Annual Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry, June 16, 1975), accessed May 6, 2018, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED113550.pdf.

35 Gamble, "Continuing Education for Ministry," 3. Emphasis his.

36 Gamble, "Continuing Education for Ministry," 3.

37 Nel, "Continuing Theological Training," 27.

school faculty are quite involved in and aware of the local church, and they incorporate this experience into their teaching."[38] Still, in these first years, ministers may experience a kind of anxiety. According to Long, one of the factors that contributes to the disjunction that ministers experience is the "change of velocity" that the ministry demands and, remarkably, "weekly preaching is a superb case in this point."[39] When students participate in a homiletics course, they have ample time for exegesis, considering their imagined or real listeners, working on structure, reflecting on focus and function statements and crafting their sermon. Such a process is also often a communal one, involving work in small groups and feedback from peers. However, as newly ordained ministers, they are amazed by the pace of the week and the demands of weekly sermon writing.

> If they become solo pastors, they are suddenly thrust into the routine of weekly preaching where, to use the famous image, 'Sundays fly by like telephone poles on a highway'. One has barely uttered the 'amen' for one sermon when the next one screams for attention, and the pulpit is a hungry place.[40]

Long writes that seminary education helps to create a "habit of mind," and he compares the process to learning how to dance a waltz or become a cook, and then having to dance or cook at breathtaking speed.[41] I add that in later years, the minister and the congregation can also experience routinisation, which can be deadly for both spirited preaching and attentive listening. Routines, tacit knowledge and relying on one's intuition based upon a thorough formal education is one thing, but having to be creative, authentic, credible and imaginative on a weekly basis can cause serious stress or can even become annoying ('another Christmas, another Easter, another funeral, another home-visit. . . '). In addition, there is the changing societal context in which ministers find themselves. The knowledge that clergy need today differs completely from the knowledge clergy needed before the 1970s. A research project in The Netherlands, conducted by Bert de Leede and Ciska Stark, established a link between the marginalisation of the church in society, the plurality of contexts of the listeners, and ministers' uncertainty regarding the expectations

38 Thomas Long, "The Essential Untidiness of Ministry," in *From Midterms to Ministry: Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings*, ed. Allan Hugh Cole (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008): 4.

39 Long, "The Essential Untidiness of Ministry," 8.

40 Long, "The Essential Untidiness of Ministry," 8.

41 Long, "The Essential Untidiness of Ministry," 9.

about the sermon on the part of the listeners, and sermons that lack theological clarity with respect to their function and content.[42] Continuing ministerial education can help to address such needs and make the transition from study to ministry an easier one. In Chapter 5, we will see that in other than the West-European context, the knowledge needed is completely different, and, by consequence, courses in continuing education need to be adapted to those needs.

Second, as Mark Rouch observed in 2000, towards the end of the twentieth century in different countries in the world, "a new emphasis on spirituality in ministry began to emerge."[43] In the 1990s in South Africa, retreats on spirituality were organised by a university-based centre for continuing education.[44] Spiritual formation, along with a strong focus on leadership and leadership skills, has remained a central area of continuing ministerial training in this country ever since. In the Netherlands, Herman Andriessen observed in 1992, that in the 1980s 'the soul' had returned to theological discourse.[45] Ministers encountered renewed attention on the soul in Clinical Pastoral Education, which was evident when, for example, they were asked to write a spiritual biography. We may see this attention on the soul as an attempt to ground the profession, establishing it on a firm foundation. Jurjen Beumer, who wrote his dissertation on Dag Hammarskjold, used a creative metaphor in which he called for the necessity of a "sacred stop" (Dutch: *heilig halt*), or times when ministers should "take off their shoes."[46] In 2001, after an extensive historical description of developments in the ministry, Gerben Heitink emphasised that the ministry needed a 'core' in which the three dimensions of ministry – profession, office and person – could be held together. In his view, this core could

42 Bert de Leede, and Ciska Stark. "Overcoming the Harmless Sermon: Strengths & Weaknesses of Protestant Preaching," in *Viva Vox Evangelii – Reforming Preaching. Studia Homiletica 9*, ed. Jan Hermelink and Alexander Deeg (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2013): 232.

43 Rouch, "From Yesterday to Today in Continuing Education," 35.

44 The Centre for Continuing Theological Training (Afrikaans: *Sentrum vir Voortgesette Teologiese Opleiding: SEVTO*) was established in 1983. Twenty years later the Centre became 'church-owned' and was renamed the Centre for Ministry Development (Afrikaans: *Sentrum vir Bedieningsontwikkeling: Excelsus*). It collaborates with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. See Nel, "Continuing Theological Training," 28.

45 Herman Andriessen, *De weg van het verlangen* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1992): 38.

46 Jurjen Beumer, "Mijmeringen op de drempel – Een essay over godsdienstig-theologische trends," in *Zo de ouden zongen… Leraar en leerling zijn in de theologie-beoefening* (*tussen 1945 en 2000*), ed. Jurjen Beumer (Baarn: Ten Have, 1996): 226. See also A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff, *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2000).

be found in the hermeneutic role that the minister plays, describing him as "a ferryman, going back and forth from the river bank of the Christian tradition to the river bank of modern experience."[47] This practice of "going back and forth" calls for spiritual depth, which is even more necessary since the ministry in the early twenty-first century is an impugned profession. Competences and efficiency do not suffice; continuing spiritual grounding is necessary.

Third, the same rationale for spiritual grounding can also be found in the rationale for supervision and coaching, which is increasingly being recognised as a form of continuing ministerial development. As an impugned profession, the feeling of a lack of support and the experience of being alone can both contribute to this 'structure of wanting' (Knorr Cetina). According to Jane Leach, the very first text on pastoral supervision in Britain was published in 1988 and was ominously called *Helping the Helpers*. The book, by John Foskett and David Lyall, advocated for the creation of "regular space" in which the integration of self, practice and beliefs could take place.[48] Today, according to Leach, supervision offers "a safe space to reflect theologically and constructively on pastoral experience."[49] Frances Ward states that supervision is likely to occur in training settings, but that practitioners "may be seeking to reflect throughout their learning life under the guidance of someone who can offer a sense of distance from the material under consideration."[50] It is not uncommon for supervision to be shaped in a communal way, in which several ministers receive supervision in a group, or provide a setting for intervision. Here one may speak of 'peer-group-supervision', or as in Germany 'team-supervision', in which the group has the resources to help themselves and to make sense of practice.[51] In the Netherlands, a foundation called Ruimzicht, which has the 'good ministerial practice' as one of its aims, funded a research project to investigate the effects of coaching and intervision among ministers.[52] The researchers discovered that coaching and intervision significantly reduced stress and chronic

47 Gerben Heitink, *Biografie van de dominee* (Baarn: Ten Have 2001): 284.

48 John Foskett and David Lyall, *Helping the Helpers: Supervision and Pastoral Care* (London: SPCK, 1988).

49 Jane Leach and Michael Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

50 Ward, *Lifelong Learning*, 16.

51 Richard Lakeman and Christine Glasgow, "Introducing Peer-Group Clinical Supervision: An Action Research Project," *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 18 (2009): 206.

52 Willem van Rhenen, Albert Jan Stam, Sake Stoppels, Elizabeth Post and Anne Weiland, *Coachen naar bevlogenheid. Een pilotstudy naar het effect van coaching voor gemeentepredikanten van de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland* (Rapport Stichting Ruimzicht, 2015).

exhaustion, thereby reducing the chance of burnout. Participants reported being more satisfied with their work and feeling supported by their colleagues through participation in the group. In this research, we find the same emphasis on the spiritual development and grounding of the minister's existence, this case in both coaching and peer-group-supervision.[53] Today, there is also a wealth of literature on the interplay between counselling and spiritual direction. Increasingly, ministers are interested in courses, or one or two-year trajectories in spiritual direction, both for themselves and for the parishioners that they serve.

4 The Continuing Need for Continuing Education

Today, there is a growing consensus that the ministerial profession and office calls for continuing education, be it individual, communal, informal or formal or a combination thereof. Another aspect that is becoming increasingly relevant today is the distinction between *online and offline* activities. In contrast to ten years ago, ministers seeking individual continuing education today can benefit from online courses, webinars, hybrid courses, podcasts, etc. At an expert meeting of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in Strasbourg in 2015, participants confirmed the consensus that close collaboration, also via the internet, between researchers and practitioners is necessary. Strengthening the mutual relationships between pastoral practices and academic theology is a common desire. Both academic theologians and ministers can profit from bringing the experiences of the ministry and the content of practical theology (but also systematic and biblical theology) into offline and online conversation. Not only can the ministers learn, but participating in continuing education offers the academic theologian an opportunity *par excellence* to develop their insights through practice-based experiences, the practice theories and the ministers' contributions.[54] As for the relevance and obligatory character of continuing education, the experts in Strasbourg emphasised that those who learn should be "subjects of their own learning process."[55] In this view, continuing education should concentrate on and intensify reflection on pastoral practices, and should acknowledge that learning takes place as 'appropriation', i.e. ministers need to be able to relate a theme to their

53 See Sjaak Körver and Willemine Regouin, eds., *Professionele begeleiding en spiritualiteit. Pastorale supervisie nader verkend* (Houten: Bohn Stafleu van Loghum, 2007).

54 "Training for the Ordained Ministry," 26.

55 "Training for the Ordained Ministry," 7.

own experiences and understandings. By implication, what is important for one minister does not necessarily have to be important for another minister.[56]

In several documents from the CPCE consultation we find that collegial co-operation is essential for continuing education. The exchange of experiences, learning and growing together and the collegial exchange of resources ('skills-sharing', German: *Talentbörse*) contribute to this. According to current pedagogical insights, the real learning experience takes place in discussions with others, in small groups and communal exercises, and in exchanging one's insights with supervisors and tutors. As regards knowledge transfer, academic lectures are considered less important than the quality of space for discussion in which a topic can be elaborated. In addition, going on a fieldtrip and learning together about ecclesial practices that are new or unknown, enables practitioners to tell others about and reflect on their own practices, thus making conscious and explicit what was formerly tacit knowledge. Informal moments with fellow pastors, around meals or in a bar after a course session, are considered just as important as formalised sessions.

Today, there is an impressive variety of spring, fall, and summer school ministerial programs on offer, be they residential, non-residential, study tours, or special courses, etc. These programs address a wide range of topics, for example, in the year 2018, from 'Formation and Discipleship' (Emory, USA), to 'Renewing the Sacred Centre' (Oxford, UK) to 'Stand for Your Theology!' (Protestant Theological University, NL).[57] During a summer school, the isolation of the minister is overcome and he or she experiences what it means to belong to a community of practice that meets face-to-face and enables mutual learning. Some research is often a prerequisite for receiving a certificate on these courses. In practical theology, this research can be some form of empirical research.

Theological institutes of higher education may also offer long-term accredited research programs. For example, a *Doctor of Ministry Degree* (DMin) may range from a three or four-year program to even a six-year program. In these programs, in the discipline of practical theology, pastors and leaders

56 "Training for the Ordained Ministry," 16.

57 "Emory Course of Study School: COS 123 – Formation & Discipleship," Candler School of Theology, accessed May 31, 2018, http://candler.emory.edu/programs-resources/_documents/cos/2017%20Materials/2018_Spring_123_Cordova.pdf; "Renewing the Sacred Centre," Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford, accessed May 31, 2018, https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/theology-summer-school; "Summerschool 2018: Staan voor je theologie!" Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, accessed May 31, 2018, https://www.pthu.nl/PAO_PThU/PAO1718/E-PAO-1718-30BSP/.

of church-related institutions learn to apply research methods through conducting empirical research on an intervention in their own practices or those of others. The nature of the research questions often determines the design of the research. Some questions call for surveys, others must be addressed through ethnographic research, and still others may require a mixed methods approach. Students may explore the appropriate use of a variety of quantitative and qualitative empirical research techniques. Ethnography, despite its time-consuming nature, is common. In fact, at Columbia International University we read: "Although few Doctor of Ministry dissertation-projects are purely ethnographic, ethnographic methods contribute to the design of many DMin research projects."[58] In this type of long-term continuing education and research, cohort models facilitate peer relationships and shared learning. Some DMin cohorts, such as at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, may have a distinctive focus, such as: 'missional leadership', 'the parish', 'Christian spirituality', 'urban Christianity', etc., and they can combine residential seminars with distance learning.[59] Sometimes the distinctive tradition of a seminary or institute shapes the DMin program. For example, at Hartford Seminary there is a focus on the reflective practice of ministry, which is: "ministry grounded in a practical theology that grows out of an understanding of the social context in which it occurs."[60] The program draws on the tradition of 'congregational studies' pioneered by the Institute for Religion Research. It is also common in DMin programs for faculty members to serve as mentors. Ultimately, enhancing skills and research knowledge is a primary aim of DMin programs.

Continuing education can also enable ministers to *specialise* or to identify a field, related to their experiences, in which they would like to specialise. Today, in several European countries, specialisation in continuing education for the ministry and for the chaplaincy is most advanced in the field of pastoral care. Topics include courses on spiritual and pastoral guidance for people in situations of mourning and crisis, and family- and marriage-counselling. In 2006, a much-debated 'impulse-paper' of the Evangelische Kirche in Germany, entitled *Kirche der Freiheit*, stated that the main aim of continuing education for ministers is the enhancement of competences in the light of new challenges.

58 See "Columbia Seminary and School of Ministries Doctor of Ministry Degree Dissertation-Project Manual," Columbia University, last revised September 28, 2011, accessed May 18, 2018, http://www.ciu.edu/sites/default/files/academics/Dissertation%20Manual%20Edited%20August%202011_0.pdf.

59 See "Doctor of Ministry Degree," Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, accessed May 18, 2018, https://www.pts.edu/doctor-of-ministry.

60 See "Doctor of Ministry," Hartford Seminary, accessed May 18, 2018, https://www.hartsem.edu/academics/degree.../doctor-of-ministry/.

The report, apart from theological, pastoral and other competences, explicitly mentioned the 'missional-innovational' competence and "the competence to motivate people to use their gifts and talents."[61]

In the Netherlands, since 2012, all the ministers of the PCN have been required to participate in a program of continuing education in which they can choose which courses to attend. The courses are divided into three domains that are related to the research programs of the Protestant Theological University: sources (biblical theology and church history), beliefs (systematic theology, intercultural theology, missiology and ethics) and practices (practical theology). In 2017, an extensive survey demonstrated that by June 2016, 94.6% of the PCN-ministers had been active in a large number of courses. A little more than 60% expected to be able to fulfil the obligation to participate in some form of continuing ministerial development in the first five years of their profession. Overall, the evaluation of the courses was positive. It turned out that the more intensively a minister participated, the more he or she appreciated the continuing education. An important criterion for evaluation was whether the courses had been 'stimulating for my professional practice', and it became apparent that they often were. The approval of new courses takes place in a committee with one practical theologian, one systematic theologian, one biblical theologian and representatives of the ministers, and professional pastoral workers to ensure that the content of the courses caters to the ministers' and professional pastoral workers' needs.

Finally, in 2010, a group of researchers in the USA reported on their research about the extent to which *chaplains* and pastoral counsellors, all members of the Spiritual Care Collaborative,[62] use different kinds of information modes for continuing education. The results demonstrated a "very strong interest in professional education."[63] We will return to this in Chapter 9, because I think ministers can learn a great deal from chaplains about becoming research-informed professionals.

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61 Rates des EKD, *Kirche der Freiheit. Perspektiven für die Evangelische Kirche im 21. Jahrhundert* (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 2006): 73. Last modified July 6, 2006. See: https://www.kirche-im-aufbruch.ekd.de/downloads/kirche-der-freiheit.pdf. Site accessed May 31, 2018.

62 SCC has a combined total membership of 10,000 and includes the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC), Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE), Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education (CAPPE), National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC), and National Association of Jewish Chaplains (NAJC).

63 Martin Montonye, Sue Wintz, William Scrivener, Katherine Jankowski, George Handzo, and Karen Pugliese, "2009 Spiritual Care Collaborative Survey Results on Continuing Education," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 64, no. 2 (2010): 2.

5 Conclusion

Almost sixty years since Gamble called upon theological institutes of higher education to offer courses in continuing education, in different geographical contexts, the professionalisation of the ministry and chaplaincy is becoming more and more self-evident. We often see a combination of individual and communal, informal and formal, continuing education. Increasingly, this is also the case in other domains of practice, such as youth ministry, diaconal work, and religious education. At the beginning of this chapter we asked whether continuing education for practitioners in various ecclesial or church-related practices has any shared characteristics. We have seen that studying, individually or in a communal setting, has been an integral part of the ministry for almost two hundred years. We have also observed a growing awareness of the necessity of continuing ministerial education, which in many countries is now obligatory. While the needs of practitioners differ, spiritual formation or taking care of the soul is now part and parcel of continuing education, and there is also convincing rationale for supervision and coaching. Furthermore, over the last few decades continuing ministerial education has become a space where practitioners and academics can engage and collaborate with each other. In particular, chaplaincy has developed in the direction of a research-based profession in which research literacy is emphasised and practitioners increasingly conduct empirical research themselves. Ministers can benefit from this new approach, either by conducting research with a practical theologian or together with other practitioners.

CHAPTER 4

The Scope of Practical Theology

Practices, Addressees, and Relation to Theology and the Social Sciences

1 Introduction

In the overviews in Chapters 2 and 3, one theme remained unaddressed: what about the practices that academic practical theology studied? Where, to put it briefly, did valorisation occur? In this chapter, we therefore investigate the scope of practical theology from a historical point of view. What are the practices that practical theology deals with or to which it is relevant? Who are the people that practical theology addresses? What about the relationship between practical theology and other disciplines, such as systematic theology and the social sciences? With this chapter, it is not my intention to write 'the history' of practical theology, since too many voices would be missing. Instead, I focus on the scope of the discipline and in the first paragraphs I also focus primarily on the European and, where appropriate, the American context of practical theology. Our investigation in this chapter is fivefold. First, I explore the scope of practical theology from the nineteenth century to the 1960s. There are a number of surprising gems to be found in the work of some European nineteenth century practical theologians, which help us to articulate a preliminary rationale for collaborative practical theology. Here we already find practical theologians who are aware of the benefits of collaboration. Second, as far as the addressees are concerned, the 1960s constitute a watershed. Before the 1960s, apart from diaconal science which addressed diaconal practitioners, and religious education which addressed teachers, practical theology primarily addressed ecclesial practitioners. After the 1960s, ministers, but also 'the church' and social and political institutions were addressed. Increasingly it was felt that there was a need for the critical analysis of contemporary societal developments. The domain of practices broadened significantly. There were several 'turns' too: one may speak of a 'societal turn', an 'epistemological turn', a 'turn to practices' and an 'empirical turn'. As the field developed, several practical theological branches matured into sub-disciplines with accompanying learned societies and conferences, and in each of these, the relationship with the social sciences became important. Third, I assess the state of the field today, again focusing on the examined practices. We find practical theologians who are conducting research on lived religion, practices in which people refer to what is sacred to them or cultural practices in which people use God-talk, but we also find practical theologians who are restricting the scope to Christian practices as they are related to practices of the world. In all of these practices, most practical theologians unveil a theological dimension. In fact, today some practical theologians even speak of a 'theological turn', although one may also find critics of this turn. Fourth, I make three observations regarding the interplay of the 'practices of the church' and the 'practices of the world'. Fifth, following up on the concepts of Christian practices and practices of faith, I analyze the relationship between practical theology and theology, the new interest of systematic theology in empirical research and finally, the relationship between practical theology and the social sciences.

2 Practical Theology from the 1800s to the 1960s: Church-Oriented Practical Theology

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, practical theologians mostly focused on describing, analysing, evaluating and providing strategies for practices related to the ministry. The purpose of knowledge transfer in teaching, training and research was to enable the minister to become a *pastor bonus* – a good shepherd, a good preacher and a good teacher. Illustrative of this are the great handbooks[1] written by leading scholars to enable students and practitioners to acquire the competences for performing both traditional and new practices. These handbooks are concerned about preventing routinisation. For example, in 1878, Van Oosterzee believes it is a temptation for a minister "to act mechanically," as a result of the routine nature of some sacred practices.[2] Throughout the book, the topic of routinisation turns out to be an important one. Writing a sermon is an artistic rather than an artisanal work: "As a work of art the sermon is not to be mechanically put together, but must form an organic whole, by which theme and scheme are fitly indicated for the benefit of the hearers."[3] With regard to the work of catechising Van Oosterzee writes, "Even a good method loses all its value the moment it is mechanically applied."[4] In pastoral care routines can be fatal: "What needs to be avoided

1 Walter Birnbaum, *Theologische Wandlungen von Schleiermacher bis Karl Barth. Eine enzyklopädische Studie zur Praktischen Theologie* (Tübingen: Katzmann Verlag, 1963): 108.
2 Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, 33.
3 Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, 291.
4 Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, 504.

is the mechanical way of household visitation, in connection with which the same questions are everywhere mechanically put, and the answers are sometimes hardly noticed; the hurried style, wherein no opportunity is given to the members for making known their doubts and difficulties."[5] Van Oosterzee distinguishes pastoral theology from practical theology. In his view, pastoral theology is a sort of "instruction in the wisdom and prudence of the preacher" that could easily "degenerate into frivolous casuistry." In contrast, practical theology not only offers lessons from practical wisdom but also provides "knowledge aiming at the self-edification of the church," and "a science of and for action."[6]

Reflecting on practical theology in the nineteenth and twentieth century, until the 1960s, Edward Farley has pejoratively labelled the dominant approach a "clerical paradigm" and has criticised practical theology for being overly centred on the skills that ministers needed in order to run congregations effectively.[7] Farley's critique of the first, extended phase of practical theology echoes earlier evaluations,[8] but is it justified? Viewed from the perspective of valorisation, this stage was beneficial for the target audience, enabling students and pastors to acquire the necessary know-why and know-how, and included the emergence and maturation of several sub-disciplines. As Bonnie Miller-McLemore states, there is nothing wrong with an academic focus on know-how.[9] Reflecting on two hundred years of practical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, Richard Osmer and Gordon Mikoski write that offering guidance for future pastors was always its aim, although over the years

5 Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, 522–523.

6 Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, 3. Remarkably, the motto of his handbook is a quotation from Gregory of Nazianzus: *praxis epibasis theorias* ("action leads to theory," "action is a stepping stone for theory").

7 Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Edward Farley, "Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm," in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983): 141. See also Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002): 58. For a critical assessment of the pejorative use of the term 'clerical paradigm', see Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The 'Clerical Paradigm': A Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11, no. 3 (2007): 19–38. Miller-McLemore criticises advocates of an 'academic paradigm' for their dismissal of clergy practice.

8 In his inaugural speech of 1964, Frans Haarsma, predecessor of Chris Hermans as the chair for practical theology at Radboud University Nijmegen, was critical about the restriction of practical theology to pastoral training and technology ("how to"). See Christiaan Hermans, "From Practical Theology to Practice-oriented Theology: The Study of Lived Spirituality and Lived Religion in Late Modernity," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 18, no. 1 (2014): 121.

9 Miller-McLemore, "The 'Clerical Paradigm'," 20, 21, 30.

they see the development of a greater consciousness of the need to analyse the context of the congregation, combined with a deep commitment to revelation and theological reflection. They write about "vigorous engagement with contexts and the complexities of human experience."[10] Context is present in the backgrounds and diverse ministry settings of students. They state that future plurality in practical theology is driven by the diverse contexts of practical theologians and the issues to which they give attention, but being relevant for the ministry is clearly not something that practical theology should be ashamed of. In fact, as Birgit Weyel observes, pastoral theology, with its focus on the minister, vocations, spirituality, roles, responsibilities and leadership in a changing religious landscape, continues to flourish as an important branch of practical theology.[11] Furthermore, as we have seen in Chapter 1, Richard Osmer's *Introduction to Practical Theology* (a book often used in seminaries, divinity schools and faculties of theology around the world) addresses the congregational leader. He argues that through attentive listening and applying theories to situations, episodes and contexts, congregational leaders can gain new perspectives on what is going on in a congregation, enabling them to develop more adequate strategies for what ought to be going on.[12]

In addition, as we saw in chapter two, from the time when the very first chair of practical theology was established in Vienna to the divinity school curricula in the United States, the practices that practical theology described, designed and provided strategies for were considered meaningful for society as a whole. They were not only understood as merely pastoral skills, but also as practices related to Christian congregations or, more broadly, as Christian practices. These practices were thought to shape a societal domain and were perceived as having the potential to influence and even transform society as a whole. As early as the nineteenth century, some practical theologians advocated for a broad notion of the practices to be studied. This specifically included the practices of the church and, again, these communal practices were considered to have an impact on society.

First, in 1841, the Roman Catholic theologian Anton Graf argued that the clerical pastoral theology of the time should be replaced by a church-oriented practical theology.[13] He conceived of practical theology as academic reflection

10 Gordon S. Mikoski and Richard R. Osmer, *With Piety and Learning: The History of Practical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, 1812–2102* (Münster: LIT, 2011): 208.

11 Birgit Weyel, "Ist die Dauerkrise Institutionalisierbar? Die Pastoraltheologie als Krisenwissenschaft im Spiegel von Zeitschriften," *Praktische Theologie* 50, no. 1 (2015): 11.

12 See below, Chapter 9.

13 Anton Graf, *Kritische Darstellung des gegenwärtigen Zustandes der praktischen Theologie* (Tübingen: H. Laup, 1841).

on the self-development and self-construction of the church. In his view, all of its members are part of and active in this self-construction (German: *da wirken Alle mit*).[14] Graf believed that reducing practical theology to the ministry neglected the collaboration and cooperative action of the church members.[15] The members "join each other on the way" (German: *Zusammengehen*) in a parish that is to be conceived as an organic whole. The parish is also linked to all kinds of other parishes, thereby shaping the entire church as an organism, the Body of Christ. According to Graf, a concentration on the practices of the ministry disregards the communal dimension. Graf also emphasises the connectedness and coherence of the different ecclesial practices. Moments in the life of a parish, such as sermons, prayers, and holy communion, etc., are not separated by iron bars (German: *eiserne Gitter*). Rather, these moments have a preparatory character for each other. They each have their own purpose, but they are also expressions of Christian life as it realises itself.[16] They complement each other.[17] The church as an organism is shaped by all of these different yet coherent practices that transcend the limits of the local parish and exert influence on society.[18] The goal of gaining practical theological knowledge is to portray and present (German: *zur Darstellung bringen*) the practices of building the church as a whole.[19] Therefore, practical theology also includes reflection on new missionary initiatives, not only by parishes but also by missionary societies, a topic that until that time was not considered to be part of practical theology.

Six years after Graf's book, in 1847, the Protestant theologian Carl-Immanuel Nitzsch describes practical theology as a general theory about "the life of the church."[20] He believes that theology as such makes the church self-conscious.[21] In my words, theology enables the church to reflect on its *raison d'être*, as well as rethink its relationship to its context and the content of its doctrines. Parishes need knowledge for their practices, in which the Christian religion is mediated, propagated, appropriated, nurtured and taught.[22] Nitzsch explicitly relates these practices to their origins, showing where parishes can find the answer to what they should look like, i.e. the norms for how they should act.

14 Graf, *Kritische Darstellung*, 5.
15 Graf, *Kritische Darstellung*, 20.
16 Graf, *Kritische Darstellung*, 43.
17 Graf, *Kritische Darstellung*, 59.
18 Graf, *Kritische Darstellung*, 59.
19 Graf, *Kritische Darstellung*, 192.
20 Carl-Immanuel Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie. Erster Band. Einleitung und erstes Buch. Allgemeine Theorie des kirchlichen Lebens* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1847), i.
21 Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, 1.
22 Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, 13.

Practical theology therefore reflects on the archetypical (German: *urbildliche*) and historic concepts of Christian life.[23] Furthermore, the picture of the early church given by these sources enables parishes to understand and appreciate (German: *würdigen*) themselves more. Such an 'appreciative inquiry' helps a community of faith to acknowledge its own unique form of existence and compare itself with other Christian communities.[24] In this view, the subjects of ecclesial practices are neither individual Christians nor leaders, but *parishes*, which are founded by Christ. As a Protestant theologian par excellence, Nitzsch relativises the offices. Knowledge is not the prerogative of the pastor or the church council. Depending on the circumstances, everyday believers can act as teachers, shepherds and even as distributors of the sacraments.[25] Reflection is necessary, both for the Christians that are called into an office (German: *Berufenen*) and for the Christians that call someone into an office (German: *Berufenden*). At the very least, the teaching elders have to be informed by systematic and practical theology.[26] Nitzsch describes the latter as a "theory of ecclesial processes."[27] Practical theology is a science of its own, in which insights from other sciences and knowledge from non-ecclesial experiences are necessary. Nitzsch favours empirically based knowledge, such as that gathered by paying close attention to statistical data and, surprisingly, by travelling to local churches – what we nowadays would call *fieldtrips* (German: *kirchliche Reise*).[28] Nitzsch thus provides us with an early glimpse of ethnography in practical theology. Foremost, however, practical theologians should acquaint themselves with the joys and sufferings of ordinary congregations, by immersing themselves in them. The vividness of this approach to perception and knowledge is indispensable for a practical theologian.[29] He or she should be extensively informed by observations.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries some new sub-disciplines of practical theology emerged, such as diaconal science (German: *Diakonik* or *Diakoniewissenschaft*) which was described in 1883 as the "youngest branch on the tree of theology"[30] and primarily dealt with diaconal institutions, and the sub-discipline of religious education directed at teachers of religion. In religious education, at least in the European context, educational and theological

23 Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, vi.
24 Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, 7.
25 Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, 16.
26 Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, 26.
27 Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, 29.
28 Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, 37.
29 Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, 37.
30 Theodor Schäfer quoted in Heinz Wagner, "Ein Versuch der Integration der Diakonie in die Praktische Theologie," *Pastoraltheologie* 72 (1983): 186.

perspectives were brought together. It gradually matured into a discipline of its own, albeit that academic religious education, was understood and defined in different ways.[31] In religious education in a broad sense, school-based religious education, didactics of religion as well as other learning contexts and environments such as family, day care facilities and schools, confirmation work, church youth work, adult education and education of the elderly, were included.[32]

3 Practical Theology since the 1960s: Broadening the Domain

Apart from the nineteenth-century examples of Graf and Nitzsch and the subdisciplines of diaconal science and religious education, it was not until the 1960s that practical theological research gradually began to *address* people other than ministers. Secularisation, detraditionalisation, the crisis of religious authority and the individualism of self-fulfilment (Charles Taylor) were becoming the hallmarks of the time. These were also the days of the post-Vatican Catholic Church, in which Karl Rahner emphasised the necessity of contemporary analysis: "The task of practical theology as an original science demands a theological analysis of the particular present situation in which the Church is to carry out the special self-realisation appropriate to it at any given moment."[33] Increasingly, the main question became: can the gospel be communicated at all to "modern man"?[34] Theology was supposed to become relevant for the whole church. Both theology and the social sciences were to inform practical theology and thereby the church in its practices, as performed by all of its members. During these years the call to use the results of social scientific

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31 Friedrich Schweitzer, "Religionspädagogik – Begriff und wissenschaftstheoretische Grundlagen," in *Neues Handbuch religionspädagogische Grundbegriffe*, eds. Gottfried Bitter, Rudolf Englert, Gabrielle Miller und Karl-Ernst Nipkow (München: Kösel Verlag, 1984): 46–49. See recently: Martin Rothgangel, "What is Religious Education? An Epistemological Guide," in *Basics of Religious Education*, eds. Martin Rothgangel, Thomas Schlag and Friedrich Schweitzer, in cooperation with Gottfried Adam and Rainer Lachmann (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2014): 13–28.

32 Rothgangel, "What is Religious Education?" 14.

33 Karl Rahner, "Practical Theology within the Totality of Theological Disciplines," *Writings of 1965–67*, trans. Graham Harrison, vol. 9 of *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972): 104–105. See also Karl Kardinal Lehmann, "Karl Rahner und die Praktische Theologie," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 126, no. 1/2 (2004): 3–15.

34 Bernhard Ott, *Handbuch Theologische Ausbildung. Grundlagen – Programmentwicklung – Leitungsfragen* (Wuppertal: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2007).

empirical research, in a "sober and competent way" (German: *nüchtern und sachkundig*),[35] became increasingly loud.

In Germany, there were a number of important moments in this development: first, the publication of the *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* (Handbook for Pastoral Theology) in 1964, second, a proposal for a curriculum reform[36] and, third, the establishment of a new journal, *Theologia Practica*, in 1966 to provide a forum for practical theological research. The *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* sought to combine, first, an elaboration of theological, normative criteria or 'principles' for the sub-disciplines, second, a description of historical developments in the sub-disciplines and, third, thorough analysis of the contemporary situation of the church and the world. According to Norbert Mette, Rahner's notion of the "self-realisation of the church" was the basic principle of the *Handbuch* and provided the diverging sub-disciplines of practical theology with a unifying perspective.[37] Practical theology was to be relevant for the self-realisation of the church in all its practices, not only on the parish-level, but also on the level of the diocese. As an academic discipline *sui generis*, it could now also criticise systematic and biblical theology for being too distant from this cause. In addition, the notion of the self-realisation of the church in the world pointed practical theology beyond clerical or ecclesial limits: its domain became the entire world. Contemporary trends and philosophical spirits were considered to be God's call to the church,[38] which implied that secular practices could become a *locus* for theological knowledge. However, critics found fault with what they would call the self-referential interest of the *Handbuch*, in particular, its focus on the church as the centre of the world and the accompanying tendency to view the world and its problems from a narrow, ecclesial perspective.[39]

In later years, the call to broaden the domain of practical theology was heard not only in the North Atlantic world, but also in South Africa and

35 Ferdinand Klostermann, "Pastoraltheologie heute," in *Dienst an der Lehre. Studien zur heutigen Philosophie und Theologie, herausgegeben von der Katholisch-theologische Fakultät der Universität Wien als Festschrift für Kardinal König zur Vollendung seines 60. Lebensjahres* (Vienna: Herder, 1965): 84.

36 Wolfgang Hermann and Gerd Lautner, *Theologiestudium: Entwurf einer Reform* (München: Christian Kaiser, 1965). See Gerhard Krause, "Zur Standortbestimmung einer Zeitschrift für praktische Theologie," *Theologica Practica* 1, no. 1 (1966): 1–10.

37 Mette, *Theorie und Praxis*, 134.

38 Both contemporary and later critics stated that the consequences of this 'turn to society' were not well thought-out. They call the *Handbuch* a "dogmatics with practical intent." Klostermann, "Pastoraltheologie heute," 74. See Mette, *Theorie und Praxis*, 130.

39 Günter Biemer and Hermann Pius Siller, *Grundfragen der Praktischen Theologie* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1971): 136. See Mette, *Theorie und Praxis*, 138ff.

around the globe. In the USA, Seward Hiltner called for theological reflection in the field of chaplaincy and pastoral counselling, since counsellors in pastoral counselling centres represent 'the church'.[40] In Germany, scholars described the domain as "practices of the gospel" (Manfred Josuttis),[41] or as "religiously mediated practices in society" (Gert Otto).[42] Many practical theologians wanted to overcome the dichotomy between church and society. They also sought to do more justice to alternative social formations of Christianity. In 1975, Rudolf Bohren wrote that the church "is swimming in a wider world of Christianity, which is difficult to define in a theological way."[43] He observed that in Berlin at that time there were many volunteers participating in the church who were not members of the church. Thus, the question of what constitutes a church became urgent: "Theology, the church and lived faith are no longer a unified whole."[44]

Practical theologians in the 1970s and 1980s criticised what they labelled 'ecclesiocentrism'. In this respect they were influenced by the critical theory of the Frankfurter Schule (Max Horkheimer, Jürgen Habermas), political theology (Johann-Baptist Metz) and liberation theology. From a liberation perspective, the primary task of practical theology is not to serve the church, but to serve society, and specifically to liberate oppressed communities. The one step that precedes theology is, according to Guttierez, "real charity, action, and commitment to the service of men."[45] Therefore, practical theology should not 'promote the church', but should focus on, and be committed to, emancipation, social criticism and liberation from oppression. One can only know who God is and gain authentic knowledge of the gospel message and its demands if one participates in a struggle for liberation. These views were not only expressed in Latin America, but in Europe too. In a discussion with liberation theologians, Jürgen Moltmann stated: "When and if Christians do take a stand in the political struggle, will they not be setting aside God's universal love for human beings? That is the fundamental question. I think the

40 Seward Hiltner, "Pastoral Counseling and the Church," *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2017): 194–209.

41 Manfred Josuttis, *Praxis des Evangeliums zwischen Politik und Religion. Grundprobleme der praktischen Theologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1974).

42 Gert Otto, "Praktische Theologie als kritische Theorie religiös vermittelter Praxis in der Gesellschaft. Thesen zur Verständnis einer Formel," in *Praktische Theologie Heute*, hrsg. Ferdinand Klostermann und Rolf Zerfass (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1974): 195–204.

43 Rudolf Bohren, *Daß Gott schön werde: Praktische Theologie als theologische Ästhetik* (München: Kaiser, 1975): 24.

44 Bohren, *Daß Gott schön werde*, 25.

45 Gustavo Guttiérez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973): 11.

answer is 'no'. The goal of Christian universalism can only be won through the dialectical process of opting for the oppressed."[46] This epistemological turn, connected with the hermeneutic principle of the simultaneous presence of past and present in biblical interpretation, implied that specific experiences, (namely experiences of oppression and suffering) can and should be a source for theology. This turn was indeed a dramatic change because it inverted the classical approach in theology, which starts with the knowledge of God.

In the early 1970s, practical theologians increasingly agreed to take practices as the point of departure for their research.[47] In the USA, what was later called the 'turn to practices' was prepared by the work of Anton Boisen, Seward Hiltner, Howard Clinebell and Matthew Lamb. The philosophical traditions of both the empiricism of John Dewey and the pragmatism of Charles Peirce had ploughed the soil for fertile practical theological seed. In this approach one starts with a practice, constructs a theory, and then returns to the practice once again. In 1974, Rolf Zerfaß stated that this scheme is fundamental to practical theology, but it took another ten years before it became recognised worldwide as the new paradigm. Hennie Pieterse, describing the developments in South Africa, speaks of a "turn" in 1974, that introduced practical theology as "an academic discipline with an own object of study, theoretical base and an own methodology, in which the praxis could be researched with research tools of the social sciences in mostly qualitative projects."[48]

In the 1970s and 1980s, practical theologians often specialised in one or two sub-disciplines. Via the subdisciplines, social scientific insights and the use thereof gradually became an integral part of practical theology. Psychological insights and conversation techniques exercised tremendous influence on pastoral care. Anthropological studies were used in studies on ritual, and research on ritual and processes of initiation was used in liturgical studies and didactical reflections. Psychologies of moral and cognitive development provided a theoretical framework for examining religious development. Rhetorical methods and communication theory were applied in homiletics and management theories were used in pastoral theology to reflect on leadership. In the 1990s and over the following decades, new sub-disciplines of

46 "Dieu dans la revolution," in *Discussion sur 'la theologie de la révolution'*, J. Moltmann, Dom Helder Camara, D. A. Seeber, M. Lotz, H. Gollwitzer, R. Weth, A. Rich, W. Dirks, H. Assmann, A. Bezerra de Melo, French trans. (Paris: Cerf-Mame, 1972): 70–71.

47 In Germany, one can mention authors like Hans Dieter Bastian, Klaus Wegenast (primarily in the field of religious education), Henning Schröer, Rolf Zerfass, Karl-Fritz Daiber and others. In the Netherlands, the shift to the analysis of practices was prepared by Jaap Firet (Amsterdam) and Frans Haarsma (Nijmegen).

48 Pieterse, "Scientific-Theoretical Research Approach to Practical Theology in South Africa," 1.

practical theology emerged and matured: congregational studies which addresses faith communities, often used models of church development[49] and which was influenced by sociology, organisational science and, later, ethnography; chaplaincy studies, which focuses on chaplains in correctional facilities, the armed forces, hospitals and psychiatric hospitals and which seeks to stimulate research-based chaplaincy; and youth ministry which seeks to address youth workers. Today, each of the sub-disciplines of practical theology has its own peer-reviewed academic journals, distinguished researchers, annual, bi-annual or tri-annual conferences, book series, national and international societies and wider networks of senior and junior researchers. Each sub-discipline also has its antagonisms as regards to methods, models, concepts and teaching pedagogies. Each sub-discipline can be described in terms of its place in the curriculum, its importance for continuing education and the practices to which it seeks to transfer its knowledge.

4 Practical Theology since the 1980s: the Empirical Turn

A pivotal moment in the field of practical theology was the move in the mid-1980s towards empirical research. This was an empirical turn that was inaugurated by Johannes van der Ven, Hans-Günther Heimbrock, Don Browning, Hans-Georg Ziebertz, Leslie Francis and others. In Chapter 1 we already described how empirical theology came into being. An important step in this process was that practical theologians had started to read and apply practical philosophers that had rediscovered the tradition of practical wisdom (*phronesis*), such as articulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard Rorty. In 1986, Don Browning wrote a seminal study, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, stating that Christian theology as a whole should be viewed as a practical discipline through and through. He writes, that with the rebirth of the practical philosophies, "practical theology itself has been reborn."[50] The implications of the primacy of practices for the practitioners are that their profession receives higher esteem:

> The English word *practical* and the Greek word *praxis* are no longer words of disparagement. Ministers, social workers, and dentists take

49 See for example Sake Stoppels, "Models of Church Development in the Netherlands," in *Die Zukunft der Kirche in Europa*, eds. Christiane Moldenhauer and Jens Monsees (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Theologie, 2016), 33–47.

50 Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993): 3.

> heart! The world may soon envy you. This is especially true if you can both act and think about or reflect on your action. If you can do both of these, you are a 'reflective practitioner.' Since the time Donald Schön wrote a well-received book by that name, you have become far more appreciated and even admired.[51]

Browning states that theology needs to be practical, and that this will occur "if we bring practical concerns to it from the beginning."[52] The proposed view is, as with Zerfass twelve years earlier, from practice to theory and back to practice; even though, Browning adds "it goes from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory laden-practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices."[53] I note however, that Browning tries to avoid ecclesiocentrism here, and even a restriction to specific Christian practices or practices defined as such in advance: "We come to the theological task with questions shaped by the secular and religious practices in which we are implicated – sometimes uncomfortably."[54] Still, the *subject* that asks these questions, the 'we' that Browning refers to, are Christian communities. Throughout his book, Browning focuses on Christian congregations, conceived as being both "communities of tradition" and, again using the Aristotelian concept of *phronèsis*, as "communities of practical reason and practical wisdom."[55] Browning advocates a thick description of the practices of these congregations, with a preference for ethnographic methods from which the questions arise that are to be addressed by historical and systematic theology, and which will then lead to the development of strategies for new practices.

A second step was taken in Western Europe. In the Netherlands, Eric Vossen and Johannes van der Ven coined the concept and methodology of 'empirical theology'. In 1985, Vossen's theodicy research, in which he clarified the religious definition of one's own situation of suffering by using a model of coping strategies, was inspired by the hope that "pastoral practice can make good use of these insights in its aid to sufferers, in their quest for the traces of God's actions in their lives."[56] The seminal article, in which Van der argued for the necessity of applying quantitative and qualitative empirical research methods,

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51 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 3.
52 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 5.
53 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 7f.
54 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 6.
55 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 2.
56 H. (Eric) J. M. Vossen, *Vrijwilligerseducatie en pastoraat*, 1; The quotation is taken from: H. (Eric) J. M. Vossen, "Images of God and coping with suffering. The psychological and theological dynamics of the coping process," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 6, no. 1 (1993): 38.

and the need for understanding and improving religious practices, was the first article in issue 1 of a new journal, *Journal of Empirical Theology* (JET).[57] A German-Dutch publishing house also started a book series for empirical theology. A few years later, in 1993, the *International Academy of Practical Theology* (IAPT) was founded and, remarkably, in the debates that took place in the preparation of the IAPT, Van der Ven insisted, although unsuccessfully, that the term 'empirical', rather than 'practical' needed to be featured, mainly because of the scientific character of the discipline.[58] Miller-McLemore writes that Dutch colleagues and others in Germany, South Africa, Scandinavia and North America "pressed the same agenda."[59]

Along with the empirical turn, the research domain broadened. For example, the first issues of JET in the early 1990s contained articles on: religious education, religion and politics, praying practices and the functions of the 'Kirchentag'. In the following years, on the one hand empirical theology was said to depart "from an interest in people's perceptions, cognitions and attitudes with respect to theological concepts,"[60] and on the other hand practical theology was said to be a theory of action, that was concerned with processes that influence and optimise *religious practice*.[61] The range of examined practices expanded to religious practice and lived religious experience.[62] Hans-Günter Heimbrock related the concept of lived religion or 'living religion' to a phenomenological approach, focusing on explicit, but also on implicit religious utterances as "given phenomena" in "everyday cultural praxis."[63] Research could focus on questions such as "how and where people feel deeply at home; how and where they experience fascination; when and in what ways they experience deep yearnings to belong to something."[64] The phenomenological approach forbids a reduction of practices to 'actions', but instead tries

57 Van der Ven "Practical Theology," 15. For an extensive description of the 'empirical turn', see above, Chapter 1. See also Johannes van der Ven, *Entwurf einer Empirischen Theologie* (Weinheim/Kampen, Deutscher Studiën Verlag/Kok, 1990, English transl. Johannes A. van der Ven (1993), *Practical Theology. An Empirical Approach* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1993).

58 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "'A tale of two cities': The evolution of the International Academy of Practical Theology," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017): 3, DOI: 10.4102/hts.v73i4.4718.

59 Miller-McLemore, "A tale of two cities," 3.

60 H. (Eric) J. M. Vossen, "Family Religious Socialization. A View from Practical Theology," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 3, no. 1 (1990): 79.

61 Vossen, "Family Religious Socialization," 80.

62 Wolf-Eckhart Failing and Hans-Günter Heimbrock, *Gelebte Religion Wahrnehmen. Lebenswelt – Alltagskultur – Religionspraxis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998).

63 Heimbrock, "From Data to Theory," 288.

64 Heimbrock, "From Data to Theory," 287.

to unfold "essential, sometimes hidden meanings"[65] of experiences, such as being touched by a specific atmosphere, being opened to a disclosure experience, and other religious or cultural phenomena.[66] Just before the turn of the twenty-first century, in the *Handbuch der Praktischen Theologie*, edited by Herbert Haslinger,[67] contemporary existential problems were considered to provide practical theology with research questions. The focus became human beings who shape and interpret their lives "within the horizon of the transcendent."[68]

In 2002, due to the efforts of Van der Ven and others, another society came into being: the *International Society for Empirical Research in Theology* (ISERT). Miller-McLemore does not hesitate to speak of a schism.[69] There was now a new learned society of empirical researchers in practical theology. The IAPT continued, as one of its presidents Ruard Ganzevoort described it, as a society for three types of researchers, that is, empirical researchers, researchers in the field of ministry formation and ecclesial practices, and theologians engaged with liberating practices. According to Ganzevoort, there were still brackets that held the discipline together. In his presidential address to the IAPT in 2009, he defined the common ground of practical theology as "the hermeneutics of lived religion,"[70] whereby religion was defined as "the transcending patterns of action and meaning embedded in and contributing to the relation with the sacred."[71] Miller-McLemore, in a fascinating description of the history of the IAPT, holds that Ganzevoort's distinction of three categories "did not last long." Members resisted Ganzevoort's restriction of empirical to quantitative and qualitative methods: "They saw their own efforts to offer 'thick description' through a variety of means as essentially an empirical first step in a larger practical theological programme of analysis and constructive and pragmatic response."[72] In the same year, Elaine Graham, spoke of a rejuvenated academic discipline of practical theology conceived as a "theology of practice,

65 Heimbrock, "From Data to Theory," 291.

66 Heimbrock, "From Data to Theory," 290.

67 Herbert Haslinger, ed., *Handbuch Praktische Theologie. Band 1: Grundlegungen* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1999); Herbert Haslinger, ed., *Handbuch Praktische Theologie. Band 2: Durchführungen* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 2000).

68 Haslinger, *Handbuch Praktische Theologie*, 120.

69 Miller-McLemore, "A tale of two cities," 3.

70 R. Ruard Ganzevoort, "Forks in the Road when Tracing the Sacred: Practical Theology as Hermeneutics of Lived Religion," (Presidential address at the Ninth conference of the International Academy of Practical Theology, Chicago, IL, August 3, 2009): 1, accessed Jan. 16, 2018, www.ruardganzevoort.nl/pdf/2009_Presidential.pdf.

71 Ganzevoort, "Forks in the Road," 3.

72 Miller-McLemore, "A tale of two cities," 4.

in which contemporary experience is placed in a dialectical relationship with the sources and norms of tradition in order to generate practical wisdom."[73] She added that this practical wisdom can direct "the life of the whole Church," but also broadens the field by saying that "the words of our 'God-talk' take shape in the practices of human fellowship."[74] God-talk takes place in words, but also in the arts, hymns, popular songs, story, films, music and even architecture.[75] Popular culture is "conceived theologically [...] as a vital medium through which ultimate reality itself is mediated and revealed."[76] These forms of cultural practice are, therefore, resources for theological analysis. Similarly, in a contribution on a wide range of expressions of popular culture, Graham observed that culture "generates the questions and challenges from which the process of theological reflection stems."[77] They elicit questions of meaning.[78] Today, several practical theologians follow this pathway in their research. For example, one of Rein Brouwer's current research projects is the relationship between postmodern theology, religion and arts.[79]

In the past two decades, practical theological texts from Europe, South Africa, Australia, etc., not only address churches as their intended audience, but other publics as well. Who is to benefit from practical theology? Today, a wide range of addressees is considered, including societal institutions, faith-based schools, former faith-based schools, secular schools, institutions of care, media, governmental institutions, NGOs, FBOs, Community Development Organisers, social worker organisations, etc. Again, researchers emphasise that practical theological research should be relevant for the wider society. In a volume of papers presented at the 2006 ISERT conference in Bangor,[80] showcasing empirical theologians at work, Leslie Francis considered research into the behavioural consequences of religiosity and religious traditions, and into

73 Elaine Graham, *Words Made Flesh: Writings in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2009), xiii.

74 Graham, *Words Made Flesh*, xiii.

75 Graham, *Words Made Flesh*, 183.

76 Graham, *Words Made Flesh*, 174.

77 Elaine Graham, "What We Make of the World," in *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. Gordon Lynch (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007): 78.

78 Graham, *Words Made Flesh*, 182.

79 Rein Brouwer, "God as burden: A theological reflection on art, death and God in the work of Joost Zwagerman," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 4, a4338, 2017. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4338; Rein Brouwer, "'Where I become you'. A practical theological reading of Antjie Krog's concept of interconnectedness," in Gerrit Brand (ed.), *NGTT* vol. 52, suppl. 1 (2011): 8–16. Brouwer's other research project is on religious leadership.

80 ISERT conferences have been organised biannually since 2002, when the first conference was held in Nijmegen.

the relationship between spiritual and social capital, not only of interest for religious leaders, but also explicitly for "those who are concerned with the stability of the social order and with the well-being of individuals."[81] Practical theological inquiries can inform society in detail about the contemporary dynamics of religiosity. The contributions to this ISERT conference ranged from research about religious identity, religious socialisation and religious ritual, to xenophobia and religious pluralism among young people in Germany, the latter demonstrating that "xenophobic attitudes are positively correlated with *exclusivistic* religious claims."[82] Two years later, in Würzburg, the ISERT conference focused on religion in and for the public domain, and the title of the proceedings, *The Public Significance of Religion*, demonstrated how empirical theology aimed to address society at large.[83] In the introduction we read: "This question is on the agenda of academic research programmes, it is present in political debates and it is part of controversies in societies around the globe."[84] ISERT views itself as a significant international forum working "at the cutting edge of theology and the empirical social sciences."[85] At this conference, contributors from nine European countries, the USA and Australia discussed empirical research on, to name just a few topics, how religious forms appear in non-religious media (Ganzevoort), how important it is to give explicit attention to the religious backgrounds of pre-school children (Schweitzer), and how people between 17–25 years in age with diverse religious backgrounds in Tamil Nadu think about religiously legitimised violence, demonstrating how some beliefs (and corroded or weak self-esteem) encourage religious conflicts and other beliefs discourage religious conflicts (Hermans, Anthony, Sterkens and Van der Veld). As to the question of who is addressed by this last research project, the answer is revealing. The church is not out of sight, but the primary public consists of 'schools of higher education'.[86]

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81 Leslie Francis, "Comparative Empirical Research in Religion: Conceptual and Operational Challenges within Empirical Theology," in *Empirical Theology in Texts and Tables: Qualitative, Quantitative and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins, and Jeff Astley (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 128.

82 Hans-Georg Ziebertz and Ulrich Riegel, "Xenophobia and Religious Pluralism: An Empirical Study Among Youth in Germany," in *Empirical Theology in Texts and Tables*, 361.

83 Leslie Francis and Hans-Georg Ziebertz, eds., *The Public Significance of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

84 Hans-Georg Ziebertz, "Dispute About the Public Significance of Religion: An Opening Reflection," in *The Public Significance of Religion*, ed. Leslie Francis and Hans-Georg Ziebertz, 1.

85 Leslie Francis and Hans-Georg Ziebertz, "Preface," in *The Public Significance of Religion*, vii.

86 Christiaan Hermans, Francis-Vincent Anthony, Carl Sterkens, and William van der Veld, "How Christian Students in Tamil Nadu Think about Power-Driven Religious Conflicts: A

The last decade, apart from a wide range of topics, also new domains are opened up by empirical practical theological research. A domain that has emerged in recent years, can be labelled as digital mediation of religion and spirituality. Today, people's sensory relationships to their environments are shaped through an interplay between digital devices, places, and practices.[87] The opening sentence of a book by Heidi Campbell and Stephen Warner reads: "We live in a world where our digital technologies are increasingly intersecting with our spiritual lives."[88]

In closure, over two centuries of academic practical theology, its domain has broadened from the practices of the ministry to the practices of the church (albeit with a clear eye for their influence on society), from the practices of the church to Christian practices, from Christian practices to religious practices and lived religion, from religious practices and lived religion to lived experiences, lived faith and lived spirituality, and from lived spirituality to cultural practices somehow related to the divine or the sacred. Today, for a number of practical theologians the domain of practical theology are the *experiences, beliefs, values and practices* that belong to fields such as church, healthcare, education and politics, but also to fields such as media, leisure and sport – that is, if they have existential, spiritual and/or religious dimensions, or relate to notions of sacredness or transcendence in some way.[89] However, others stick to the word 'faith', in formulations such as 'lived faith' and 'faith practices', with a clear eye for the historical situatedness, the cultural and the contextual dimensions of Christian faith practices.

5 Practices of the Church and Practices of the World

We may ask: has practical theology, in particular, in its use of an empirical methodology, become 'practical religious studies' as our description of the broadening of the fields of practice suggests? Can we speak of a consensus

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Meaning-System Approach," in *The Public Significance of Religion*, ed. Leslie Francis and Hans-Georg Ziebertz (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 373.

87 Heidi Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology. Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2016); Currently, my colleague Thomas Schlag (University of Zurich) is writing a research proposal, applying for a major grant, on digital religion.

88 Campbell and Garner, *Networked Theology*, 1. Campbell and Warner write: "We argue that theology can and must engage technology and new media to offer a holistic theological response to new media culture." Campbell and Garner, *Networked Theology*, 11.

89 R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Johan Roeland, "Lived Religion: The Praxis of Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 18, no. 1 (2014): 95.

among practical theologians about the religious practices and processes of religious transformation that they examine? I would say that the answer is no. Today, one can still find many practical theologians who advocate focusing practical theology, again also by applying a range of empirical research methods, on the practices of the church or, more broadly, on Christian practices, albeit with an awareness that these are intertwined with everyday practices and are embedded in, and exert influence on, societal contexts. According to Bonnie Miller-McLemore, practical theology should enrich the "life of faith for the sake of the world."[90] Studies are considered important for insights into the dynamics of practices of faith in societal contexts and into faith experiences, and thus for an embodied Christian faith[91] and the transformation thereof.[92] Elaine Graham notes a change in the audience that practical theology seeks to address "towards a more broadly-based focus on adult lay theological formation, influenced by traditions of orthopraxis and virtue ethics which locate theological discourse as quintessentially practical. Theology, as 'talk about God' is always already oriented towards the *cultivation of faithful discipleship*."[93] In *Christian Theology in Practice*, Miller-McLemore writes that the addressees of practical theology are not only practitioners, but also *everyday believers*.[94] Furthermore, in a well-known book on qualitative research in practical theology, John Swinton and Harriet Mowat hold that practical theology studies the *interplay* of two sets of practices: the practices of the church and the practices of the world.[95] Immink and others describe the domain of practical theology as '*lived faith*', thereby avoiding a focus on the institutional and the communal dimension of the Christian faith. According to Vhumani Magezi, practical theology in Africa is a "theological approach that seeks to understand, communicate and live out the *life of faith*."[96] In South Africa, according to Jaco Dreyer, as field of study, "moving beyond the Christian religion

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90 Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): 104.

91 Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "The Contributions of Practical Theology," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 5.

92 Miller-McLemore, "The Contributions of Practical Theology," 10.

93 Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 17, no. 1 (2013): 158. Emphasis mine.

94 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids, MA: Eerdmans, 2012): 109.

95 John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London UK: SCM Press, 2016): 8.

96 Vhumani Magezi, "Practical Theology in Africa: Situation, Approaches, Framework and Agenda Proposition," in *International Journal of Practical Theology* 23, no. 1 (2019): 131.

[…] is virtually nonexistent."[97] Now, the relation between 'life of faith', 'lived faith', 'church' and 'world' is important in practical theological discourse. In what follows I make three observations regarding the 'practices of the church' and the 'practices of the world'.

5.1 *Internationalization*

The *first* observation is that universities are increasingly dominated by the need for internationalisation. Within theology, this process has been occurring for several years. More education is provided in English and more publishing is done in English peer-reviewed journals, and large numbers of foreign theology students are making their way to Western European and American theology programs. Exchange programs also stimulate students to study in Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, and Latin America. The presence of new migrant churches, with or without denominational structures, some with many resources at its disposal, others still having to great lengths to acquire resources,[98] the awareness of new ecclesial configurations and the experiences of growing Christianity in Africa, China and in other geographical contexts, gives rise to a stronger awareness of the connectedness of the academy to global Christianity. In this regard, apart from society and the academy, the *first forum*, or public, of practical theology today is *global Christianity*. This is true both in terms of its historic form and content, and in its contemporary, contextual, highly varied, strongly culturally determined and increasingly post-denominational appearances. A description of practical theology as a "model of reflective activity in which the theologian interrogates the connections between the theory and practice of Christianity in a diverse range of contexts and settings,"[99] covers this field very well.

97 Jaco S. Dreyer, "South Africa," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 511.

98 Marten van der Meulen, "The Importance of Denomination for the Civic Engagement of Migrant Congregations in Amsterdam and Beyond," *Ecclesial Practices. Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography* 5, no. 1 (2018): 5ff. See also: Michael W. Foley and Dean R. Hoge, *Religion and the New Immigrants: How Faith Communities Form Our Newest Citizens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mechteld M. Jansen and Hijme C. Stoffels, eds., *A Moving God. Immigrant Churches in the Netherlands* (Münster/ Berlin/ Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2008); Marten van der Meulen, "The Continuing Importance of the Local. African Churches and the Search for Worship Space in Amsterdam," *African Diaspora* 2, no. 2 (2009): 150–181. Currently, with Dorottya Nagy, I am supervising a PhD project of Pieter van Winden on processes of cooperation between migrant and non-migrant churches. The dissertation is expected to be completed in 2020.

99 Anthony G. Reddie, "Teaching for Racial Justice: A Participative Approach," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 13, no. 2 (2010): 102ff.

5.2 *The Big Four Dimensions of Religious Commitment Are Falling Apart*

The *second* observation takes somewhat more space to unpack. In my own context, the post-secular world, the definition of what constitutes 'practices of the church' and, in particular, who *belongs* to a church is no longer self-evident. Fresh expressions of church, pioneering, emerging ecclesial groups, migrant churches, new intentional communities, small groups that carve out a space that they label 'church', new forms of youth worship, ecclesial festivals and church-related events, all challenge traditional ecclesiological notions and definitions. Michael Moynagh states that "founding contextual communities" should be understood as a church practice.[100] Pete Ward has coined the concepts 'liquid church' and 'liquid ecclesiology'[101] and empirical studies focus on 'emerging Christianity'.[102] Ward refers to "an extraordinary creativity," "an explosion of discussion, debate, and ecclesial experimentation."[103] He observes how "the Church is being reshaped and reimagined as a myriad of new ecclesial forms bursts onto the scene."[104]

One factor is that belonging to a church has become dynamic and changes over time depending on people's life circumstances and stories.[105] Commitment to Christian beliefs and practices *fluctuates*, as many religious biographies demonstrate. Christian identities are not fixed. In terms of religious identity development, with Paul Vermeer, we cannot ignore the family and its importance for the intergenerational transmission of Christian practices, beliefs, values, norms and ideals.[106] The future of Christianity is in part dependent upon the family. This strengthens the importance of research with regard to the Christian socialization of children, for example, by examining worship

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100 Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context. An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2013): 198.

101 Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology. The Gospel and The Church* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2017).

102 Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church. Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

103 Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 5.

104 Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 5.

105 Jan Hermelink, *Praktische Theologie der Kirchenmitgliedschaft, Interdisziplinäre Untersuchungen zur Gestaltung kirchlicher Beteiliging* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000): 347, 354.

106 Paul Vermeer adds that "compared to the influence of parents, the influence of the religious school or the religious community is weak.... Parents are crucial for the intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs and practices and thus, for the persistence and continuation of religious traditions and communities." Paul Vermeer, "Religion and Family Life: An Overview of Current Research and Suggestions for Future Research," *Religions* 5, no. 2 (2014): 403, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel5020402.

with children.[107] Yet, during and after adolescence, commitment to Christian beliefs and practices can fade away, if the plausibility of these early beliefs and practices is less, or even not at all, supported by the individual's wider social context. Adolescence is a time when Christian beliefs and practices are explored, there are times of crisis and of losing one's faith, but renewed commitment is also possible and the way in which this commitment is expressed can change again in the future.[108] An example of a PhD project on the fluctuating commitment of adolescents can be found in Ronelle Sonnenberg's research examining youth worship in a network society, in which concepts such as 'recharging faith', 'participation', 'recreation' and 'being together' turned out to be important.[109]

Vassilis Saroglou distinguishes the three external manifestations of religiosity (adherence to beliefs, affiliation and behaviour) from the internal dynamics (experiences).[110] If we zoom out, we see that in the Western world, these *big four dimensions*[111] for measuring religious commitment – believing, belonging, behaving and bonding – are falling apart in terms of 'the church'. Christian involvement might consist of approval and active participation in all four dimensions, but there is, as Grace Davie puts it referring to post-secular societies, an "evident mismatch between different measurements of religiousness."[112] This mismatch can, for example, be observed in the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging, referring to individuals who combine elements, such as beliefs and practices from one religious tradition like Christianity with some practices of another religious tradition, like Buddhism or Judaism.[113] Personal,

107 See Lydia Van Leersum-Bekebrede, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos De Kock and Marcel Barnard, "Deconstructing Ideals of Worship with Children," *Studia Liturgica* 49, no. 1 (2019): 71–88, https://doi.org/10.1177/0039320718808945.

108 At the Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands, Anne-Marije de Bruin-Wassinkmaat is currently doing her empirical research on these fluctuations of belief and commitment to Christian practices among adolescents.

109 Ronelle Sonnenberg, "Youth Worship in Protestant Contexts. A Practical Theological Theory of Participation of Adolescents" (PhD diss. Protestant Theological University, 2015).

110 Vassilis Saroglou, "Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging: The Big Four Religious Dimensions and Cultural Variation," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 42, no. 8 (2011): 1323.

111 Saroglou, "Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging," 1320–1340.

112 Grace Davie, "Religion in Europe in the 21st Century: The Factors to Take into Account," *European Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 2 (2006): 276.

113 Joantine Berghuys, Hans Schilderman, André van der Braak and Manuela Kalsky, "Exploring Single and Multiple Religious Belonging," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 31, no. 1 (2018): 18–48.

individual appropriation of religious beliefs, ideals, norms and values and personal choice in degrees of participation in religious practices has become common. It has also become difficult to uphold a clear distinction between belief and non-belief in a post-secular society.[114] Let us zoom in on each of these four dimensions.

First, with regard to Christian *beliefs*, research demonstrates that in post-secular societies not only do people find it difficult to put their beliefs into words, but also that it is incorrect to assume that all who belong to a church are Christian believers.[115] Conversely, Christian beliefs also exist outside the church and many people endorse the statement that in order to believe (also in a Christian way) one need not necessarily belong to a church or attend Christian worship services. As the title of a book on adolescents and religiosity in the United States puts it, today many people have a "faith of their own."[116] Remarkably, in her research on theological conversations in the classroom at secondary schools in Germany, Saskia Eisenhardt found that young adults, without any Christian or religious upbringing or background, are surprisingly capable of theologising, that is, not only asking questions, but also offering reflections.[117]

Second, in terms of *Christian practices*, at the level of say, a village, practices in which the Christian tradition or the Jesus story are addressed also exist outside the local church.[118] Christian identity is invoked in settings outside the local congregation. According to a study by Nancy Ammerman, for Christians, their religion is more than a belief system, it is about what people do and how they orient themselves, that is, how they live their lives. Accordingly, Christian

114 Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Postsecular Age* (London: SCM Press, 2013): 53.

115 Gerard Dekker, "Belonging without Believing. Het belang van ongelovige kerkelijken voor de godsdienstsociologie," *Religie & Samenleving* 4, no. 1 (2009): 5–15.

116 Lisa Pearce and Melinda Denton, *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America's Adolescents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

117 See Saskia Eisenhardt, "Gute Lehre Lehramt," Kiel University, accessed June 22, 2018, https://www.gute-lehre-lehramt.uni-kiel.de/lib-projekte/religion/. Eisenhardt focuses on how young adults theologise. Her supervisor, Uta Pohl-Patalong, has elaborated a method called "Bibliolog," which enables a group, congregation or school class, whether socialised in a Christian environment or not, to discover biblical stories from within and interpret them by identifying with biblical characters and answering questions left unanswered by the text. Bibliolog has spread across the German-speaking area and is now practiced in many different countries. See Uta Pohl-Patalong, *Bibliolog. A Creative Access to the Bible* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015).

118 Jacobine Gelderloos-Commandeur, "Meaningful in the Margins. Churches and Quality of Life in the Dutch Countryside" (PhD diss. Protestant Theological University, 2018).

practices cannot be confined to clearly delineated ecclesial practices within specific boundaries.[119] In an extensive ethnographic inquiry into church life in Dutch villages, Jacobine Gelderloos-Commandeur found that there is liturgy in non-ecclesial settings, that stories of Scripture are referred to in unexpected places, and that in a time of a deinstitutionalised church people can relate to the Christian tradition in various ways, including during events in village life.[120] Cultural settings can be carriers of the Christian tradition: primary and secondary schools, media (including social media), and peer groups. Mirella Klomp writes, that Christian music practices move through ecclesial and extra-ecclesial settings and people engage with them depending on their own liking.[121] Concepts such as 'flow', 'transgression', 'liminality', and 'fluidity'[122] have become common in recent practical theological research projects.

Third, several European practical theological research projects demonstrate that non-church affiliates may report religious *experiences* ('bonding') while they are participating in Christian practices. These experiences can occur through attending a Choral Evensong,[123] through being moved by a multimedia event like *The Passion*[124] or by visiting a meditative worship service during the Long Night of the Churches.[125] The latter is a major ecumenical festival which, spreading in Germany around the turn of the century, has come into being in several European countries, offering a varied programme of singing, midnight prayers, meditative services, (lay) sermons, guided tours, dancing,

119 Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 2.

120 Gelderloos-Commandeur, "Meaningful in the Margins," 140ff.; 218ff.

121 Mirella Klomp and Marcel Barnard, "Sacro-Soundscapes: Interpreting Contemporary Ritual Performances of Sacred Music through the Case of The Passion in the Netherlands," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 258.

122 See Rima Nasrallah, *Moving and Mixing: The Fluid Lives of Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite Women within the Protestant Churches in Lebanon* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Academic, 2015).

123 Hanna Rijken, "My Soul Doth Magnify. The Appropriation of the Anglican Choral Evensong in the Netherlands" (PhD diss. Protestant Theological University; Utrecht: Boekencentrum Academic, 2017). Based upon her empirical research, Hanna Rijken writes: "People describe a connection between believers of the entire church (from strictly reformed to Roman Catholic) and a connection between believers, ex-believers and non-believers." Rijken, *My Soul Doth Magnify*, 141.

124 Mirella Klomp and Marten van der Meulen, "The Passion as Ludic Practice. Understanding Public Ritual Performances in Late-modern Society. A Case Study from the Netherlands," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 32, no. 3 (2017): 387–401.

125 Elpine de Boer and Henk de Roest, "Bonding During the Night of the Churches: Converging and Differing Experiences of Churchgoers and Non-churchgoers," *Archive for the Psychology Of Religion*, 38, no. 1 (2016): 47–71.

theatre, debates, lectures, meetings and music. In a quantitative research on this festival, that I conducted with psychologist of religion Elpine de Boer, the data suggest that for both churchgoers and non-churchgoers shared bonding experiences are what makes a Night of the Churches unique.[126]

Fourth, Christian *norms and ideals*, as they are embedded in the Christian tradition, can also be espoused by non-Christians.[127] They can be the norms that people like to pass on to their children, the values that they find important, but also the key criteria that influence them when they make existential decisions. These ideals can guide people's behaviour. In fact, many people who grew up with the church but no longer attend report that they still find the Christian tradition and the commandments and the stories in which the norms and values are embedded to be important.

In conclusion, when practical theologians examine the *practices* in which the *beliefs*, *experiences*, *norms and ideals* of the Christian tradition are embedded, mediated and nurtured, these practices do not coincide with 'the church'.

5.3 *Theological Reflection*

The *third* observation is that the narratives, teachings, and concepts of the Christian tradition, i.e. the Jesus-story, the Christian tradition, doctrines and theological language, are of paramount importance for practical theology. Practical theologians need to pay attention to the specific language of Christian communities of practice, which contains 'God-talk' and 'ordinary theology', the sort of God-talk that occurs when everyday believers reflect on their faith. Jeff Astley, who coined the concept 'ordinary theology', writes that ordinary theology "in some sense 'works' for those who own it. It fits their life experience and gives meaning to, and expresses the meaning they find within, their own lives."[128] With Helen Cameron et al., Astley views practice as the "bearer of embodied theology"[129] and with Swinton and Mowat as "the acting out of the 'text' of a person or group's beliefs, values, theories and theologies."[130] Nevertheless, Astley warns that it is difficult to *infer* people's beliefs from their

126 De Boer and De Roest, "Bonding During the Night of the Churches," 47–71.

127 Doret J. de Ruyter, "Religieuze idealen en morele opvoeding," in *Levensbeschouwelijk leren samenleven. Opvoeding, identiteit en ontmoeting*, ed. Siebren Miedema en Gerdi Bertram-Troost (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2006): 27–38.

128 Jeff Astley, "The Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology," in *Exploring Ordinary Theology*, ed. Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013): 2.

129 Astley, "The Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology," 4. Astley quotes from Helen Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press): 51.

130 Astley, "The Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology," 4. Astley quotes from Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 19–20.

practices and that different theologies may undergird the same practice. He adds that "in taking their practices seriously, we must include in this category the speaking (or writing) of their reflective God-talk."[131] Astley summons practical theology to *literally hear* (Astley's emphasis) the theological voice of the practitioners. But then again, the concept of practice in practical theology is neither separated from theory, nor from theological reflection. As we will see in Chapter 5, according to Reckwitz and Schatzski, theories are operative in practices, and the maintenance of practices depends on shared embodied know-how.[132] Furthermore, according to Graham, Immink and others, theological reflection or dialogue with theological understandings, is embedded in practices.[133] Indeed, theological reflection is integral to all practices that refer in some way to the Jesus-story and the Christian tradition. In turn, practices make theology relevant. Now, Pattison and Thompson define theological reflection as an "activity valued or undertaken formally or informally in pastoral practice."[134] However, in their work with practitioners, they discovered that the *concept* of 'theological reflection' (labelled TR in education and connected with specific methods) met with considerable antipathy ("an irritating and inhibiting pebble in the ministerial shoe").[135] Nevertheless, practitioners were open to talking about the question "how do I think about what I do?"[136] For many practitioners, Scripture, prayer, and reading and analysing texts with other practitioners were important as part of the reflective process, and this reflection was often an occasional process prompted by particular problems or events. Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward therefore rightly call for an "integrated and dialogical relationship between the practice of ministry and the resources of theological understanding."[137] In the last twenty-five years, not only the North-Atlantic strand of practical theology, but also practical theology in Central Europe, South Africa, 'wider' Africa, Asia and Australia, has increasingly included theological reflection in its understandings of

131 Astley, "The Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology," 5.

132 See below, Chapter 5.

133 Chris Hermans makes a plea for a "practice-oriented theology," examining the problems of practitioners. However, a thorough analysis of the concept of Christian practice, including its theological dimension, is lacking here. This leads his concept of practical theology away from the field of theology in the strict sense. Hermans, "From Practical Theology to Practice-oriented Theology," 113–126.

134 Stephen Pattison, Judith Thompson and John Green, "Theological Reflection for the Real World: Time to Think Again," *British Journal of Theological Education* 13, no. 2 (2003): 120.

135 Pattison, Thompson and Green, "Theological Reflection for the Real World," 127.

136 Pattison, Thompson and Green, "Theological Reflection for the Real World," 124.

137 Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (Londen, SCM Press, 2005): 3.

Christian practices in both education and research. Theological reflection is "exalted as a vital core for practical theology."[138]

In my view, the communal dimension needs to receive more emphasis here. Individual practitioners, both lay and professional, not only think about what they do by referring to Christian beliefs, values and theological meanings, but also *share* their reflections with others in communities of practice and, as we saw in the history of permanent education, they have done so for centuries. Their spirituality, but also their reflections have been nurtured by these communities and they have been theologising together.[139] This includes practical moral reasoning, which according to Don Browning, can be viewed as a "communally oriented interpretive process."[140] Practical theology, through conversation with practitioners, can help to clarify the norms of the practitioners. Practical theological theory can serve as a conceptual screen for assessing a situation and understanding behaviour, but also for evaluating and intervening in practices on the basis of norms and values, whether gospel-inspired or otherwise. Thus, tradition becomes regarded, not as a 'heritage' or a 'static' reservoir, but as an ongoing, living, process.

Tradition, however, is not only communicated verbally. Theology, in the form of doctrine, is also operative in the objects that are used in practices. Jonas Ideström uses the term 'mediators' to describe "material embodiments of theological doctrines," indicating that there is an interplay between theological doctrines, artefacts and meaning-making interpretations.[141] Ideström focuses on theological doctrines that are part of the Eucharistic liturgy. Christian doctrines materialise in words, actions, and artefacts.[142] I would add that material embodiments of the Christian tradition abound in Christian life, and also in people's memories. Concepts, norms, values, foundational stories and metaphors, derived from Scripture, doctrine or the theological reflection of the past, play a formative role. They shape Christian practices, also when they are embodied materially.

Following Elaine Graham, we must take care to ensure that congregational life is not only viewed as "the expression of ethical principles" and that Chris-

138 Pattison, Thompson and Green, "Theological Reflection for the Real World," 120.

139 See also Chapter 9, on the knowledge of the community.

140 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical* Theology, 50.

141 Jonas Ideström, "Mediators of Tradition – Embodiments of Doctrine in Rural Swedish Parish Life," *Ecclesial Practices. Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography* 3, no. 1 (2016): 54. Ideström creatively uses the so-called Actor-Network-Theory of Bruno Latour to analyse his data.

142 Ideström, "Mediators of Tradition," 61.

tian practices are not only "the outworking of moral reasoning."[143] Rather, practitioners in all kinds of Christian practices participate in what Graham creatively calls a "value- and vision-directed tradition."[144] Furthermore, their engagement in these practices may give rise to new knowledge, including theological knowledge, and to the discovery of new norms and values, including norms and values of the Christian tradition. A dynamic theological dimension is inextricably linked with and 'woven into' Christian practices. Thus, in communities of Christian practice, theological reflection is not something 'spiritual' or 'free-floating', it is not a *separate* realm next to 'policy', 'organising', or even 'finance', and it is not the privileged domain or the specific expertise of the professionals alone. Theology is not 'only' operative in sermons, pastoral care or worship, or for that matter in a spiritual opening of a meeting. Rather, theology potentially determines *all* of the meetings, the entire *life* of the community. The theological dimension is shaped in practices and influenced by practices.[145] Again, this demonstrates the relevance of theology. This will call our attention in the next paragraph too.

6 Practical Theology and Theology

The relationship between practical theology and biblical and systematic theology has been conceptualised in a variety of ways over the centuries. In its early stages, the approach was to apply theology to practice. Today, several practical theologians argue for practices, be they ecclesial, religious practices or broader, cultural practices, as *theological loci*. Tom Beaudoin holds that for many practical theologians, practices become significant for practical theology if there is an indirect or direct relationship to the divine, and that a practical theologian has the "capacity to show how practice constitutes theological material,"[146] but he is also critical with regard to the temptation for theologians to narrow the religious focus, shutting out the religious and nonreligious 'others' within Christian communities and in the Christian tradition.[147] According to Beaudoin, practice is not "self-evidently" theologically significant.[148] Practical

143 Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 110.
144 Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 110.
145 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 253.
146 Beaudoin, "Why Does Practice Matter Theologically?" in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 9.
147 Beaudoin, "Why does Practice Matter Theologically," 12.
148 Beaudoin, "Why does Practice Matter Theologically," 15.

theologians should be aware that they often assign theological significance to practice: "Practice is marked by practical theologians as they bring theological frameworks that generate what counts as practice and that grant that practice a theological voice."[149] There are other voices too. Natalie Wigg-Stevenson writes on the relationship between ethnographic research and theology by stating that "ethnography offers theology an opportunity to reflexively discipline the very nature of its discourse as specifically *religious* discourse, while re-inventing what ethnography is in a theological context from the ground up."[150] In her dissertation she examines how theological knowledge is produced in community, for example, in a theology class open to church members.[151]

Hanneke Schaap-Jonker and Theo Pleizier hold that theology does not come at the very end of research but "governs the methodological design of a research project."[152] In their view, theology is not only about beliefs and how people refer to God, but it wants to find out how the relationship with God is experienced and how faith in God is lived out in everyday life. The data that practical theology seeks can be found in the practices of believers.[153] Schaap-Jonker and Pleizier add that the openness of the practical theologian to what emerges in the data as revelation implies that experiences of grace, for example, cannot be reduced to the framework of human reality. In his dissertation, Pleizier argues in the same direction: "Objects of practical theological research need a theological articulation."[154] Gerrit Immink states that practical theology deals with the practice of faith, and faith is to be understood from the dynamics of an encounter between God and humankind. God is acting and speaking, and, thereby, in practices such as preaching, singing, praying and blessing, the human subject is regenerated and activated. Human speech-acts mediate the divine-human encounter. By naming God's salvific acts from the past, the effects of these acts are present: "When we speak about God's love and justice, we become aware of that love and justice – not simply as human awareness but even stronger: That named love surrounds us and changes us. Words are not merely words; they also disclose the realities expressed by

149 Beaudoin, "Why does Practice Matter Theologically," 25.

150 Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, "What's Really Going on: Ethnographic Theology and the Production of Theological Knowledge," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* (2017): 1. DOI: 10/1177/153270861774576.

151 Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, *Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry into the Production of Theological Knowledge* (New York, NY: Palgrave Press, 2014).

152 Theo T. J. Pleizier and Hanneke Schaap-Jonker, "Gereformeerde praktische theologie, een methodologische aanzet," *Theologia Reformata* 52, no. 4 (2009): 345.

153 Pleizier en Schaap-Jonker, "Gereformeerde praktische theologie," 350.

154 Pleizier, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons*, 22.

the words."[155] In his book *Faith: A Practical-Theological Reconstruction*, Immink emphasises that, notwithstanding its use of social scientific methods and theories, theology must be at the forefront in the description, analysis and theory building of practical theology. Its research needs theological concepts that fit these practices. In order to be relevant, practical theology has to do justice to the lived faith, that is, the beliefs, values, norms, truth-claims, spirituality and commitments embedded in these practices.[156] This also distinguishes practical theology from a social-scientific approach to religious practices.

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, in their study on qualitative research, even affirm the "real possibility" of revelation, although they have a clear eye for the limitations of qualitative research in this respect.[157] At most, research can describe the contexts, episodes and traditions in which revelation is interpreted and perceived to determine life. Research offers insight into practices that have emerged through revelation. Practical theology can enable a more adequate articulation of God's self-communication (read: revelation) and Christian practices. Swinton and Mowat hold that knowledge about experiences and practices acquired by qualitative research can, and does, challenge theology.[158] Remarkably though, they envision a critical conversation between human experiences and the lived experiences of practitioners on the one hand, and revelation on the other hand (or, in line with this, social sciences and theology) as problematic: "How can a system of knowledge created by human beings challenge a system of knowledge that claims to be given by God?"[159] With Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, they emphasise that these are "specific forms of knowledge that should not be confused with one another,"[160] and that the voice of theology has logical precedence over the voice of social science. The conversation is asymmetrical: "Qualitative research tells us nothing about the meaning of life, the nature of God, cross, resurrection, or the purpose of the universe."[161] Elaine Graham takes a different perspective. She is highly critical towards Swinton and Mowat about the 'logical priority' of revelation over experiences.[162]

155 Immink, "Inquiry into the Practice of Faith," 144.
156 F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).
157 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 85.
158 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 85.
159 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 79.
160 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 81.
161 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 85.
162 Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" 160ff.

> This allows no possibility for those who have experienced violence at the hands of another reaching a new apprehension of Christ's Passion; for those who have accompanied someone in the final stages of their lives discovering new insights into death and dying; for those who struggle for human dignity in the face of oppression to embody a powerful testimony to the reality of the resurrection.[163]

Graham views practices as having the potential to disclose new knowledge about God, and is open to counting experiences as revelation because they can at least give a new, hitherto unknown, understanding of complex matters such as the cross and the resurrection. Practice is a *locus theologicus*, or "a source of encounter with and apprehension of God."[164] We take sides with Graham in this matter. Practices are also often the *locus* of theological questions.

A different way to integrate a theological perspective can be found in the writings of Pete Ward, who connects cultural studies with the doctrine of the Trinity in order to demonstrate how the gospel is mediated in a wide range of Christian practices in different cultural contexts.[165] The church, in all its liquid forms, seeks to extend the 'life in God' outside institutional frameworks.[166] The church itself is also sketched as a 'cultural field'. Cultural analysis offers practical theology new opportunities to see how the Spirit of God pours into cultural expressions.[167] Ward writes about how the *'perichoresis of God'* determines the life of the community of faith, which lives in community with God. In this perspective, practical theology, missiology, systematic theology and cultural studies are brought together.

In all these practical theological voices, we see that practical theology is conceived as a distinct *theological* discipline in which theology is a first order discourse, i.e. it is a 'spiritual discipline' (Ward) and speech about God. It is not *only* an analysis of the religious and non-religious language that individual believers or communities of faith use, but like biblical and systematic theology has God's relation to the world as its object of study. God is referred to indirectly through both the language that believers use and the practices that they

163 Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" 160.

164 Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" 170.

165 Pete Ward, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London: SCM Press, 2008): 24ff., 102ff. In 2015, Ward critically assesses the relationship of the Trinity with the church in 'blueprint ecclesiologies'. See: Pete Ward, "Blueprint Ecclesiology and the Lived. Normativity as a Perilous Faithfulness," *Ecclesial Practices. Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 2, no. 2 (2015): 74–90.

166 Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 17.

167 Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 95.

perform. Even when practical theology is conceived as research about religious practices, or practices somehow related to the sacred, it is still centred on God. It is, with Ganzevoort, "interested in the relation with the divine itself."[168]

Nevertheless, these views on practical theology as a *theological* discipline are contested. According to Chris Hermans, if practical theology were first order discourse, then "practical theology would essentially be 'religion in the making',"[169] and it would strive for, or would be said to have, some "privileged knowledge" of God that cannot be methodologically tested or pass academic criteria. It would thereby position itself outside the academy. Hermans states that practical theology should be second order discourse about practical reasoning on human agency seen as spiritual and/or religious.

In this book, I side with Immink, Ward, Swinton, Graham and others, in affirming that Christian practices may disclose knowledge of God, that collaborative research does not rule out the possibility of revelatory or epiphanic moments and that, also in the references to the 'Jesus story', there is an in-depth theological dimension at play. Practical theologians need to be open to detect this dimension that is 'woven into' Christian practices and that legitimizes, nurtures, provides orientation for and transforms these practices.

7 Systematic Theology in Need of Practical Theology

My discussion of the relation between practical theology and theology may appear a bit one-sided because until now I have only included the voices of practical theologians. Are there any systematic theologians that we could engage with or, from the perspective of systematic theology, are there systematic theologians advocating doing interdisciplinary research with practical theologians? In the last two decades, in the field of systematic theology, I observe a growing interest in making use of empirical, primarily qualitative methods of inquiry. In the year 2000, Nick Adams and Charles Elliot stated: "Dogmatic theology is best practiced through description of the world."[170] In the final part of their article, they write that systematic theology is a "larger category than description," since it also reflects on poetry, paintings, music and dance, but in order to see God's action in practices – and be surprised by God – Christians need dogmatics, or better still, dogmatic ethnography. They add that systematic theology is not only about vision, but also about transformation:

168 Ganzevoort, *Forks in the Road*, 5.
169 Hermans, "From Practical Theology to Practice-oriented Theology," 116.
170 Nicholas Adams and Charles Elliott, "Ethnography is Dogmatics. Making Description Central to Systematic Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53, no. 3 (2000): 339–364.

> Precisely because God liberates the world to be the world, dogmatic ethnography is forbidden to be description of the world merely 'as it is'. It also describes the world in the light of 'as it shall be'. Dogmatic ethnography pays attention to detail, but it does so eschatologically [...]. Thus, to develop our slogan, dogmatics is for teaching Christians to see with an eye on transformation.[171]

The same year, Nicholas Healy, in a seminal monograph, stimulated a turn to ethnography in ecclesiology. He stated that by applying theological concepts, some form of ecclesiological ethnography is both necessary and realizable.[172] Healy criticises systematic theology, and systematic ecclesiology in particular, for providing 'blue-prints', models and idealised designs. However, the sinfulness of the concrete church does not fit the blueprint, and therefore Christian life and practices are spiritualised. Useful reflection needs to be concrete. Healy recommends using historical, sociological, and, with a strong emphasis, ethnographic methods.

In 2012, Paul Fiddes stated that, doing "theology properly" calls for collaboration with practical theologians, and he named theologians conducting ethnographic research in particular. The two worlds need to be connected.[173] Together with practical theologian Pete Ward, Fiddes studied a service of adult baptism and renewal of baptismal vows in water. After an extensive, thick description of what is going on in this service and why this is going on, the two researchers ask whether the observed eclectic mingling of different strands of theology and culture, Anglican, conservative-evangelical, charismatic and revivalist, may perhaps *hinder* participation in the triune God, "that is at the heart of true worship."[174] Informed by some "clues from Augustine and Aquinas" on the relational character of the Trinity, they ask: "How well does the mingling of four elements in this service of baptism enable us to share in the relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?"[175] They conclude that in the observed service this sharing and participating is indeed hindered, for example, due to the liturgical words that are missing, "that can comment on the act, and being addressed to God in prayer, can help to draw those baptized

171 Adams and Elliott, "Ethnography is Dogmatics," 364.

172 Nicholas Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

173 Paul S. Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Disciplines, Two Worlds?" in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): 13.

174 Paul S. Fiddes and Pete Ward, "Affirming Faith at a Service of Baptism in St. Aldates Church, Oxford," in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Christian B. Scharen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2012): 58.

175 Fiddes and Ward, "Affirming Faith at a Service of Baptism," 59.

into God's own activity for human renewal."[176] Another example is missing texts from Scripture. Despite a conservative-evangelical stress on Scripture, "no Scripture is attached to the act of baptism, to interpret it and to be a means of God's own speaking and summoning the candidates and congregation more deeply into God's life."[177] In the service, baptism turns into a profession of faith, but there is little attention to God's activity in baptism and this is also strengthened by the style of the performance. Fiddes and Ward write: "We will not be properly enabled to participate unless we *notice* (italics HdR) the movements of God that are calling and drawing us into deeper engagement with the fellowship of God's own life, in sending, glorifying, and suffering."[178] It is not that this deeper engagement is impossible – the service does provide this opportunity – "but this opportunity could have been *more effectively* (italics HdR) presented."[179]

At the PThU my colleagues in systematic theology, Benno van den Toren, Klaas Bom and Heleen Zorgdrager, discovered the potential of action research[180] (Van den Toren and Bom) and ethnography (Zorgdrager). Zorgdrager uses practical theological concepts, such as 'sacred space' and 'liminal space', derived from liturgical ritual studies, to analyse the civic uprising in the Ukraine, with the Maidan square as its focal point: a 'symbolic landscape'. She found that "religious symbols were present everywhere on the square," but also that "people described the special atmosphere of the place with words like 'energy', 'spirit', 'aura'."[181] She uses the concept of 'domestic place', in order to describe the "feeling of closeness and safety that people usually associate with home."[182] In this practice of uprising, a new system of values was created, in which, in a certain sense, the churches were invited to participate. She adds: "In the self-perception of the churches, they felt to be called to the Maidan, 'because the Church must be there where the people are', and because the churches recognized the values that were defended on Maidan as Christian values."[183] As a result, the church and its worship "decentered and became

176 Fiddes and Ward, "Affirming Faith at a Service of Baptism," 59.
177 Fiddes and Ward, "Affirming Faith at a Service of Baptism," 60.
178 Fiddes and Ward, "Affirming Faith at a Service of Baptism," 59.
179 Fiddes and Ward, "Affirming Faith at a Service of Baptism," 60.
180 Benno van den Toren and Klaas Bom, "On the Value of Action and Participatory Research for Intercultural Theology: Reflections in the Light of a Research Project on 'Science and Religion in French-Speaking Africa'," *Mission Studies* 35, no. 1 (2018): 84–100. See below, Chapter 7, paragraph 5.
181 Heleen Zorgdrager, "Epiphany between the Barricades. The Ukrainian Maidan as a Sacred Space," *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies*, vol. 32 (2016): 172.
182 Zorgdrager, "Epiphany between the Barricades," 173.
183 Zorgdrager, "Epiphany between the Barricades," 175.

mobile."[184] It was a "movement of kenosis."[185] As a theologian, Zorgdrager not only has a specific sensitivity for the use and meanings of religious language, but she acknowledges how participants "came to witness the historic moment, the 'here and now' character of Maidan, as an epiphany, a manifestation of the divine presence in history,"[186] and, following Mary McClintock Fulkerson, she describes Maidan as a "place of redemption."[187] We see here how systematic theology converges with practical theology that has a clear eye for the theological dimension of practices.

8 Practical Theology and the Social Sciences

Finally, the relationship between practical theology and the social sciences demands our attention. When practical theologians entered the field of the social sciences in the 1960s, they could not see the wood for the trees. They were faced with a vast number of conflicting approaches. Since then, things have changed rapidly. While practical theologians initially warned that the introduction of sociological and psychological theoretical concepts and research methods might lead to a 'foreign' domination of theology, nowadays the integration of social-scientific concepts and methods is taken for granted, although, in making sense of the data, practical theologians do not always provide a clear rationale for why some theories or theoretical concepts are considered useful, while others sit on the shelf.

Practical theology presents its analysis of what is going on in the practices it examines with reference to the social sciences and humanities, but the analyses of practical theologians can also be of interest to social scientists. As Leslie Francis puts it:

> Talk about personal and individual experience of God necessarily raises issues of primary concern to the psychologist. Talk about social and community experience of God necessarily raises issues of primary concern to the sociologist. Intra-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary perspectives on these issues, drawing on tools fashioned in the social sciences, can be of immense value both to the theologian studying the experience of God and also to the social scientist whose study of human experience would

184 Zorgdrager, "Epiphany between the Barricades," 181.
185 Zorgdrager, "Epiphany between the Barricades," 181.
186 Zorgdrager, "Epiphany between the Barricades," 180.
187 Zorgdrager, "Epiphany between the Barricades," 180.

> be inadequate and incomplete without reference to the subject matter taken seriously by the theologian.[188]

Francis compares a social scientific approach to an empirical theological approach concerning the different dimensions of religiosity (such as self-identification and affiliation, beliefs, practices and attitudes) in religions and denominations and concludes that empirical theologians have something to add to social-scientific research. Regarding affiliation, they have a sharp eye for theological differences within the Christian tradition. Regarding beliefs, they are more aware of the difficulties of conceptualisation and how to measure compliance with these beliefs. Regarding religious practices, they understand the subtleties, complexity and theological differences better than social scientists. Finally, an empirical theologian can better understand the affective response to religious practices, for example, to preaching, singing or praying, because of their knowledge of the spiritual aspects of the Christian tradition.[189] Nevertheless, despite the popularity of the interdisciplinary approach, it is hard to find sociologists in Europe with an interest in practical theological research. In a recent publication by German sociologists of religion Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta, all practical theologians engaged in empirical research are absent.[190] Thus, although a bilateral relationship between social scientists and practical theologians remains the ideal, in practice that relationship generally has a unilateral direction. As a result, advocacy for interdisciplinary methods is often more programmatic than a description of existent practical theological investigations. In Europe this accounts for the move toward 'empirical theology'.

Some theologians, like John Milbank, have been highly critical towards the use of social theory in theology.[191] Milbank defends Christian theology as the

188 Leslie J. Francis, "Empirical Theology: Defining the Task and Selecting the Tools," in *Religion Inside and Outside Traditional Institutions*, ed. Heinz Streib (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 40.

189 Leslie J. Francis, "Comparative Empirical Research in Religion: Conceptual and Operational Challenges within Empirical Theology," in *Empirical Theology in Texts and Tables: Qualitative, Quantitative and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins and Jeff Astley (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 129f.

190 Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne. Ein internationaler Vergleich* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2015).

191 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991, 2006, 2nd ed.); John Webster, "In the Society of God: Some Principles of Ecclesiology," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012): 200–222.

queen of the sciences against the claims and methodologies of a supposedly neutral secular reason. Theology cannot be aligned with secular reason's assumptions about the world and its authority in offering explanations. Sociological explanations are not legitimate. In ecclesial practices, or the praxis of the church, as Milbank puts it, the sociological is always already theological and the theological is always already sociological. There simply is no neutral position outside of this praxis. Sociologies are "theologies or anti-theologies in disguise."[192] Similarly, John Webster views the church as the product of God's redemptive action and, as such, the origin, identity and practices of the church are not within reach of a social-scientific analysis. The social sciences can only understand and explain naturalistic and historical properties of Christian communities.[193] In an assessment of Webster's view, Christopher Craig Brittain elaborates the potential truth in Webster's position: "Even those inclined to view Webster's dogmatic approach to ecclesiology as an example of 'dogmatism' or abstract idealism would do well to linger on the critical concerns he raises about the dangers inherent to an over-emphasis on the empirical church."[194] According to Brittain, the results of empirical research do not represent the full reality of the church.[195] On the other hand, Brittain is also critical towards Webster's position because it leads to "a propensity towards a firm marginalisation of visible historical churches, in defence of the pure invisible church."[196]

In my view, we must still heed the warning, originally formulated by James Fowler, that practical theologians should be wary of the fading boundaries between their own field and the social sciences. In a dissertation on religious leadership by Saxegaard, due to the social-scientific CHAT framework, the pastoral theologian does not have a clear eye for the minister as a religious leader (i.e. a theologian in a leadership role) or when the minister refers to religious language (i.e. religious norms, values and beliefs) and uses her theological expertise.[197] Fowler urged practical theology to keep the use of methods, concepts and perspectives from the social sciences under *theological* control. I consider it still valid, especially when practical theology is tempted to

192 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 3.

193 Webster, "In the Society of God," 200–201. See: Christopher Craig Brittain, "Why Ecclesiology Cannot Live by Doctrine Alone. A Reply to John Webster's 'In the Society of God'," *Ecclesial Practices. Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography* 1, no. 1 (2014): 6–30.

194 Brittain, "Why Ecclesiology Cannot Live by Doctrine Alone," 12.

195 Brittain, "Why Ecclesiology Cannot Live by Doctrine Alone," 12.

196 Brittain, "Why Ecclesiology Cannot Live by Doctrine Alone," 19.

197 Fredrik Saxegaard, "Realizing Church: Parish Pastors as Contributors to Leadership in Congregations" (PhD diss., MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2017).

employ concepts or frameworks that are inextricably bound to a reductionist view of religion. There is a risk in the methodological restraint that social scientists impose on the examination of their subject. They may reduce their analysis to the social, psychological or ethical *functions* of religious practices. They are less interested in the concepts of religious language for the construction of a meaningful personal or social world. Christian practices, however, such as diaconal activities, are informed by distinct theological convictions (i.e. beliefs, norms and values), for example by a distinct theological anthropology. I would argue that distinct, sharply defined and inspiring theological convictions have consequences for the practices of local faith communities and gain societal relevance through their embeddedness in these practices. Take for example, the actions and experiences of megachurches. The participants of these churches are involved in relationships and engaged in social activities, both within their communities and with groups who are quite different. Sarah Dunlop and Heather Buckingham demonstrate that the social-scientific concept of social capital could be, and indeed often is, used to analyse these relationships and their impact, but their findings "highlight the limitations of giving primacy to concepts that do not correspond well with the ways in which those being studied interpret and understand their own actions and experiences."[198] The distinct beliefs and values of the participants play a decisive role in their involvement in relationships that are described in terms of 'love', 'friendship' and 'family', and for which the notion of 'Christian witnessing' turns out to be important, the latter in particular to understanding their motivation.[199] In The Netherlands, Rein Brouwer conducted a thorough ethnographic study in a congregation that wants to be an 'open door, an open house and an open heart to the neighbourhood', and a 'place where people can meet and bridge their differences'.[200] This policy is, according to a congregational leader, explicitly informed by the belief that "God builds a bridge to the earth through Jesus Christ, the Pontifex, the pontiff, the builder of bridges."[201] Describing how the practices and the identity of this particular congregation

198 Sarah Dunlop and Heather Buckingham, "De-centring social capital: exploring the implications of empirical research for conceptualising Christian faith-based social engagement," in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 34, no. 1 (2019): 149.

199 Dunlop and Buckingham, "De-centring social capital," 145.

200 Rein Brouwer, *Geloven in gemeenschap. Het verhaal van een protestantse geloofsgemeenschap* (Kok: Kampen, 2009). Brouwer summarised his research in: Rein Brouwer, "Hybrid Identity: Exploring a Dutch Protestant Community of Faith," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29, no. 1 (2008): 45–61. See also Chapter 9.

201 Rein Brouwer, "Missional Church and Local Constraints: A Dutch Perspective," in *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30, no. 2 (2009): 2.

are intertwined with the practices of the world, as Brouwer has done in his study, includes, recounting the beliefs they hold. These beliefs, including the 'ecclesiological beliefs', about what the church is called to be, provide orientation and legitimation to the practices and identity of this congregation. They also, in a partial manner, enable an understanding and critical evaluation of the congregation's societal impact or, in some cases, its lack thereof. We use the term 'partial' since contextual changes on both a macro- and a meso-level also influence this societal impact. The beliefs of a congregation, including the articulation of its identity, form a resource for the critical assessment of its practices, not only by outsiders such as academic practical theologians, but also by the participants. In their practices and identity, convictions and beliefs, as well as values and norms, are brought to the fore and questioned. These critical conversations also belong to the practices themselves.

Faith can be also be explicitly part of practical theological research questions. For example, in a research project conducted by Danielle van de Koot-Dees on the upbringing of young children, the research question was: "What is the role of faith in the upbringing of young children (in the home situation) according to the experiences, opinions and convictions of their Protestant parents?"[202] Gerrit Immink argues that when the social sciences reflect on religious practices, "they do so from the perspective of their own disciplines and their own theoretical and conceptual insights."[203]

As we have seen, practical theologians often use insights and methods from the social sciences, including an increasing number of collaborative approaches. The social sciences are necessary in order to better observe, understand, evaluate, intervene in and design practices. Nevertheless, practical theologians should also use "theological concepts that fit these practices."[204] A helpful understanding of the relationship between practical theology and the social sciences has been offered by Julian Müller,[205] who, drawing from Wenzel van Huyssteen, states that a 'tangent point' is needed between the disciplines. Müller sees this tangent point as transversal, which means lying across, extending over, intersecting, meeting, and conveying without becoming identical. As I understand it, the disciplines, in particular, when practical

202 Danielle Van de Koot-Dees, *Prille geloofsopvoeding. Een kwalitatief onderzoek naar de rol van geloven in jonge protestants-christelijke gezinnen in Amsterdam* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Academic, 2013): 18–20.

203 Immink, "Theological Analysis of Religious Practices," 129.

204 Immink, "Theological Analysis of Religious Practices," 129.

205 Julian Müller, "Practical Theology as part of the landscape of Social Sciences and Humanities: A transversal perspective," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* vol. 69, no. 2 (2012): 8.

theology is also conducted as empirical theology, are said here to relate to each other as Mikado… In a specific approach there will be overlap and convergence, while in another there will be distinct differences. There are no fixed boundaries in advance.

Finally, there is the question of participation or, to be more specific, do practical theologians themselves need to participate in the practices that they examine? Or can they be the proverbial 'fly on the wall', – just a researcher conducting interviews? Reflecting on a number of case studies on religious and ecclesial ritual, sociologists of religion, Kim Knibbe, Marten van der Meulen and Peter Versteeg, argue that the move from being a spectator to participation in a ritual enhances the understanding of the significance that the ritual has for the researched.[206] The researcher experiences the meanings that the ritual conveys, how it creates intersubjective understandings and how it has performative effects, even creating a sense of community, which enhances his or her understanding of what is beyond the verbal. Remarkably, the authors observe that the very act of participation triggers interpretations of the practice by the other participants, setting a communal process of interpretation in motion.[207] This is instructive for practical theologians. There is a clear convergence of interest between social scientists who are willing to participate in practices in order to better understand them and practical theologians. Notwithstanding their extensive use of social-scientific concepts and methods of data collection, practical theologians are *at home* in contexts where theological understandings abound. They should be aware of keeping a critical distance, but there is a sense of familiarity.

9 Conclusion

First, to conclude this chapter, connecting back to our main questions in the introduction, we have seen how over the last two centuries the field of practices that academic practical theology deals with has expanded. Within the scope of practical theology, a distinction between addressees or publics on the one hand and practices on the other hand is helpful. Even in the nineteenth century, the 'practices of the world' were not out of sight. Furthermore, in some sub-disciplines people other than ecclesial practitioners were

206 Kim Knibbe, Marten van der Meulen and Peter Versteeg, "Why Participation Matters to Understand Religious Ritual," *Fieldwork in Religion* 6, no. 2 (2011): 116.

207 Knibbe, Van der Meulen and Versteeg, *Why Participation Matters*, 117.

being addressed. Since the 1960s practical theologians have increasingly criticised an 'ecclesiocentric' practical theology. The domain has broadened from the practices of the ministry and of the church, as embedded in society, to practices in which people refer to what they perceive and evaluate as sacred to them. Topics such as 'religious identity', 'religious pluralism' and 'religious ritual' have become central to conferences and journals in the field. Today, academic practical theologians use a toolbox of empirical methods to analyse *experiences*, *beliefs, values and practices* in a wide range of cultural settings. They use social scientific methodology, and often refer to social scientific theories to understand, and sometimes even to explain, what is going on in these practices. The question is: is practical theology today to be conceived as practical religious studies? Some practical theologians, primarily in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, German-speaking countries and the United Kingdom, will agree. Others still focus on an ever-expanding range of faith practices, both with an orientation to global Christianity and with a clear eye for the theological dimension in these practices. The last point led us to reflect extensively on both the relationship between practical theology and theology as a whole, and with the social sciences, which led to the conclusion that practical theology needs to steer a middle course to avoid the pitfalls of mystification, idealisation and prescriptive models on the one hand and surrender to social scientific understandings on the other hand. Here Julian Müller's concept of 'transversality', following Van Huyssteen, turns out to be helpful.

Second, to wrap up the first part of this book, four different pathways have helped us to describe the origins, history and foundations of practical theology and the current state of the art. We have explored the current interest in and emphasis on valorisation, curriculum reforms in theological education (which were inspired by the desire to integrate theory and practices), the development of continuing education and its increasingly obligatory character in relation to professionalisation, and the broadening of the domain of practices and addressees. This *tour d'horizon* has shown the relevance and utility of practical theology, but has also demonstrated that while there are some traces of integrative, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, until now it has not been a common practice to engage academic practical theologians, professional practitioners, everyday believers, advisors and students in research. At present, the direction of valorisation is still primarily from the academy to ecclesial and religious practices. To put it even more strongly, this part of the book has revealed a serious deficiency that I seek to present a remedy to in the second part: namely to connect theological education, practitioners and everyday believers and to point out the strong prospects for collaborative practice-orientated research. Therefore, in Chapter 5, we will first analyse the question: what are the current information needs of practitioners in Christian practices? Then, in Chapter 6, we will ask: what are the rationales for doing research together? After that, in Chapter 7, the longest chapter of the book, I will offer an inventory of collaborative approaches, including, among others, action research, participatory action research and collaborative ethnography. In Chapter 8, I take a step backwards and ask: what about academic freedom, power-mechanisms and different roles of stakeholders? What about the constraints to collaboration? Finally, in Chapter 9, we will dig a little deeper into a question that can be raised regarding the situation that is common to many practitioners and everyday believers around the world: what are the conditions that need to be fulfilled for practitioners and everyday believers to conduct research themselves?

PART 2

Collaborative Research Approaches and Methods in Practical Theology

CHAPTER 5

Know-Why, Know-How and Know-What

The Crisis of Routines and the Practitioner's Needs for Knowledge and Skills

1 Introduction

In the first session of a training course on homiletics in the Netherlands, when participants are asked what their expectations are, a pastor says: "I hardly know how to preach anymore. I cannot count on my routine any longer. I feel time and again, that my sermons do not reach people. In this training, I would like to learn from experts in homiletics, in particular, from empirical homiletical research on listeners."[1] This pastor wants to learn from a research project conducted by Theo Pleizier.[2] Another pastor asks his colleagues if they know of research on prophetic preaching. He thinks that prophetic sermons might empower the congregation to be resilient in the face of a crisis in their societal context. He wants to improve his preaching in this respect and asks, "How can prophetic preaching edify the congregation?" In response, one of the pastors mentions a dissertation by Kees van Ekris.[3] In a reading group in Korea, a senior pastor poses the question: "Where can I find a bible-didactical theory that helps me and our junior pastors in setting up bible study groups in our congregation which aim at helping women reflect on their relationship with their mother-in-law? How can bible study groups empower women in their Christian identity-formation?" In response, the qualitative research conducted by Mi-Rang Kang is suggested.[4]

Comparable questions are brought to the fore not only by pastors, but also by all kinds of other practitioners in Christian practices all over the world. In a training course for pastors in Africa, one of the participants says that she is

1 Oral information provided by Theo Pleizier.

2 Theo Pleizier, "Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons. A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics" (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University; Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2010).

3 Kees van Ekris, "Making See: A Grounded Theory on the Prophetic Dimension in Preaching" (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University; Münster: LIT, 2018).

4 Mi-Rang Kang, "Interpretative Identity and Hermeneutical Community: A Bible-didactical Theory Aiming at Women's Narrative Identity Formation in the Korean Context" (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University; Münster: LIT, 2010).

longing to do some research in local churches in order to see how environmental education and awareness are being introduced. In the USA, members of a reading group on missional church and the emerging church conversation, read a book on salvation together and stumble on a passage where the author writes that salvation means saving people out of trouble. One of the participants asks: "Do we in our church really know the trouble of our people in our neighbourhood? How can we get in touch with these people? And how can we engage the entire congregation in a transformation to be more mission-shaped?" A final example comes from a non-ecclesial setting. In a hospital, a chaplain asks herself: "What about my own interventions? Are they salutary? What constitutes good practice in my work? Where can I find peers and researchers that I can do research with?"

Questions like these arise regularly among practitioners in ecclesial and societal contexts. There is an almost constantly felt need for information, for knowledge on Christian practices and for the development of skills. Knowing what, knowing that, and knowing how, are topical concerns of practitioners. Of course, practitioners share what Polanyi in his book *Personal Knowledge* called 'tacit knowledge'.[5] This concept refers to the often very personal judgements on how to act, what to say in a specific situation or how to assess it, and they often emerge from intuitions, clues, the results of experimenting, etc. Nevertheless, when tacit knowledge falls short, practitioners need explicit knowledge. In this chapter, I examine some definitions of the concept of 'practice', the idea of the 'professional' and how they act when there is a 'crisis of routines'. In contemporary societies development occurs at a high pace and there are frequently 'crises of routines'. Often these crises of routines, the improvement of interventions or the design of new interventions, are discussed in communities of practice. Therefore, we also examine what constitutes a professional community of practice. Second, we apply our newfound understanding of the concept of 'practice', including the notion of 'crisis', to 'churchly practices'. Third, we explore some examples of how the need for explicit knowledge and skills is felt in the knowledge-transfer activities of practical theology. Fourth, if this need for explicit knowledge and skills has been a given in ecclesial practices since the Enlightenment and the rise of modern society, and if practical theological research is called in for help, for new remedies and strategies, should we not speak of practical theology as a 'science of crisis'? Although some well-respected researchers in practical theology do propose

5 Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge. Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1958, 1st ed.): 96ff.

using this label, I question its appropriateness. Fifth, we focus on some empirical research on the information needs of ministers.

2 The Concept of Practice, Crises of Routines and Professional Communities of Practice

From the domain of Christian practices, we zoom out to the wider society. In Chapter 1 we described the growing interest in, and emphasis on, valorisation and collaboration, not only in Western societies, but around the world. In order to understand this interest, we look at the concept of 'practice', as it has been defined in recent decades. In 2002, Andreas Reckwitz defined practice as:

> A routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.[6]

In this definition, I wish to highlight the terms 'knowledge' and 'routinized'. Practices consist of routines: of moving the body, of understanding and wanting, of using things, all linked together.[7] Practices also embody different kinds of knowledge, including understanding, skills and motivational knowledge. 'Understanding' refers to knowing how to explain or interpret an activity, for example, by using concepts and theories ('know-why'). 'Skills' refers to knowing what to do and how to do it, for example, by applying methods and tools ('know-how'). Lastly, 'motivational knowledge' refers to knowing what one wants to do or longs for ('know-what'), which is used in order to act, to engage in bodily and mental activities, in using things. Practices also have a performative power: they actualise by doing. Ted Schatzki writes that the maintenance of practices depends on "the successful inculcation of *shared* embodied know-how."[8] Nevertheless, when something is not working, not understood, fails or is questioned, the shared knowledge with which agents carry

6 Andreas Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 2 (2002): 249.

7 Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practices," 255.

8 Ted R. Schatzki, "Introduction: Practice Theory," in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, ed. Ted R. Schatzki, Karen Knorr Cetina and E. von Savigny (London: Routledge 2001): 12.

out a practice is inadequate or insufficient. Reckwitz calls such occurrences "everyday crises of routines" and these crises are labelled "constellations of interpretative indeterminacy."[9] In other words, in everyday crises of routines, not knowing what to do, being insecure, being puzzled and not having tacit knowledge, results in activities being postponed, shelved or deferred to the distant future. A decision is undetermined. In business companies, NGOs, and educational and cultural institutions today, explicit knowledge in order to understand and knowledge in order to act – indeed shared understandings – are in high demand due to the speed of societal change. In an environment devoid of certainty, where the pace of societal change is unprecedented and intensifying, many members of organisations and institutions feel confused. Again, their tacit knowledge does not suffice. Consequently, there is an incredible demand for consultants, coaches and advisors and, indeed, academic – sound and valid – insights. For many organisations, there are urgent policy and strategy concerns. Explicit knowledge is also necessary on a national and supranational level. The EU emphasises the necessity of knowledge transfer in the social sciences and humanities even within the contours of the future of European research (Horizon 2020), stating that the "grand societal challenges" demand new ways of exploiting academic competences. The concern about having enough knowledge to solve complex problems, but especially in order to be competitive, is emphasised by expressions like 'learning organisations', 'organisational learning', 'co-creation', 'learning by doing', 'knowledge creation' and 'knowledge management'. Carolina Machado writes: "In order to survive, all organisations ought to develop continuous processes of learning, otherwise they can disappear."[10]

Professionals in organisations today are highly agentive worker-learners: resourceful practitioners.[11] Initial preparation can only offer them the preliminary competences for a lifetime of effective practices. Anne Edwards writes that practitioners need to be able to "recognise, draw on and contribute to the funds of expertise available; and demonstrate a strong sense of their own identities as practitioners whose actions can make a difference in the world."[12] Referring to the notion of 'routines', Edwards asserts that the practices in which the expertise of a professional practitioner is needed and enacted are "the

9 Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practices," 255.

10 Carolina Machado, "Organisational Learning, Learning Organisation and Knowledge Creation and Transmission: Some Reflections," in *Transfer and Management of Knowledge*, ed. Carolina Machado and J. Paulo Davim (London: ISTE-Wiley, 2014).

11 See Anne Edwards, *Being an Expert Professional Practitioner: The Relational Turn in Expertise* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010).

12 Edwards, *Being an Expert Professional Practitioner*, 1.

kinds of practices where problems and responses to them are not routine. They therefore need to involve practitioners in overt engagement with knowledge."[13] The professional practitioner operates in practices in which knowledge is crucial, but in order to be an expert, he or she must be open to growing in knowledge and understanding better. Change is a normal element of the work they do. The task for professionals is not only to adapt to changes, but to become experts on these changes.[14] If problems are not routine, then there is a 'sense of lacking' that pulls one forward to know more. 'Structures of wanting', as Knorr Cetina calls them, are prerequisites to an engagement with knowledge.[15] In short, practitioners in today's knowledge-oriented practices desire knowledge. We add, with Eileen Campbell-Reed, following Bent Flyvbjerg, that this knowledge is not "decontextualised knowledge, that is universally applicable," but context-dependent knowledge.[16] Deliberation, which takes place in moments when one interrupts one's activities, improves intuition, it does not replace it. Campbell-Reed quotes Stuart Dreyfus and Hubert Dreyfus in this respect, emphasising that "emotional, relational and embodied involvement in learning" makes someone an expert because it increases their "practical wisdom" (Greek, with Aristotle: *phronèsis*).[17]

Remarkably, there is also a communal dimension to deliberation and learning to act phronetically. In 1991, in a seminal book *Situated Learning*, Etienne Wenger and his teacher, Jean Lave, centring on the interactions between novices and experts, coined the concept of *communities of practice* (CoP), a notion that requires, and is partly defined by, shared knowledge of specific groups of social actors regularly engaged in specific, joint interaction, and whose members share overall goals.[18] They may also share a concern or a passion about a topic.[19] Lave and Wenger used the concept in their exploration

13 Edwards, *Being an Expert Professional Practitioner*, 9.

14 Leif Christian Lahn, "Professional Learning as Epistemic Trajectories," in *Learning across Sites: New Tools, Infrastructures and Practices*, ed. R. Ludvigsen, Andreas Lund, Ingvill Rasmussen, Roger Säljö (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011): 53–68.

15 Karin Knorr Cetina, "Sociality with Objects: Social Relations in Post-Social Knowledge Societies," *Theory Culture Society* 14, no. 1 (1997): 14.

16 Campbell-Reed, "The Power and Danger of a Single Case study," 44.

17 Campbell-Reed, "The Power and Danger of a Single Case study," 44.

18 Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 7ff. See also: Linda C. Li, Jeremy M. Grimshaw, Camilla Nielsen, Maria Judd, Peter C. Coyte and Ian D. Graham, "Evolution of Wenger's concept of community of practice," *Implementation Science* 4, no. 11 (2009): 4–11.

19 Etienne Wenger, Richard A. McDermott, and William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002): 4.

of groups of non-drinking alcoholics, quartermasters, butchers, tailors in Goa and midwives. We could also mention teams, university departments, small and medium-sized companies, among many others. In Chapter 3, we identified communities of practice of ministers. If professionals are becoming engaged in sharing knowledge, advice, and overall goals, they are often described as a community of practice.[20] While members of these communities do not always think of their profession as a practice of learning, this is what they are doing in their interactions. Wenger writes: "What they learn is not a static subject matter, but the very process of being engaged in, and participating in developing, an ongoing practice."[21] Wenger states how novices, students or practitioners at the periphery[22] learn and become members, by engaging them in meaningful practices, by receiving access to resources that enhance their participation, by opening their horizons so they can put themselves on learning trajectories they can identify with, and by involving them in actions, discussions, and reflecting that make a difference to the communities that they value.[23] I would argue that communities of practice that are, with Immink, characterised by lived faith, will be also defined by their God-talk, shared performances of spiritual practices like singing, praying, meditation, listening, worshiping, etc. With regard to their knowledge, norms, values and beliefs, there are likely to be references to the resources, such as Scripture, the Jesus story and the Christian tradition, that inspire and guide them. In all, this also implies, that anyone at the periphery, can only become member by engaging in these meaningful, spiritual practices.

There is more to add to the concept of a community of practice and in what follows, we may have communities of practice in Christianity in different settings and contexts in our mind. As we will also see in the paragraph

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20 Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

21 Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 95.

22 In 2018, four theology students, almost graduated, were interviewed on their future practice as minister. All of them consider the first step in the ministry exciting. Douwe de Roest states: "Looking at the near future, taking the first step is exciting. I get this feeling, am I capable of doing it? I am glad that I have this feeling once in a while, in general I am very much looking forward to it. [...] I think it is good to be a 'good enough' minister." See Rein Brouwer and Jasja Nottelman, "'Ik zal de kerk niet vol preken', in *Preektijgers, pastores, pioniers. Predikantschap in de 21ste eeuw* (Utrecht: Boekencentrum, 2018): 26. Remarkably, the four students all know of the risk of burn out. They state that in their practices, they will need support, moments of rest and time and, in particular, space to tap on their spirituality. As we saw in Chapter 3 on continuing ministerial education, the spiritual formation of the minister is essential.

23 Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 10.

in Chapter 7 on professional learning communities (PLC), communities of practice, while they may grow spontaneously, can be intentionally promoted, built, developed and cultivated. In 2002, Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott and William Snyder distinguished stages of development, starting with identifying community potential, that is common concerns, motivation and competences, establishing connections, inviting participants, and in the next stage, making the move from a loosely connected group of people into a tighter group where a sense of membership and belonging is being developed.[24] Wenger et al. emphasise that, since a community of practice is organic, designing them is "more a matter of shepherding their evolution, than creating them from scratch."[25] Following Wenger,[26] learning in practice includes, *first*, discovering what helps and what hinders, who is good at what, who knows what; in short learning includes a process of "evolving forms of mutual engagement." *Second*, members of a community of practice decide and fine-tune the purpose of their practices, they align their engagement with it, and they may find it difficult to define what they are up to or to reconcile conflicting interpretations of "what the enterprise is about." *Third*, "repertoires are developed, styles and discourses": new terms are tried out, old concepts are abandoned, stories are told and retold, mistakes are reflected upon and routines are both created and broken.

Teun van Dijk has repeatedly emphasised that knowledge in society is distributed through the discourse of professional communities of practice.[27] In these communities specialised knowledge is transferred, that is acquired and validated, through conversations; by meeting each other face-to-face and by calling, emailing, texting or *apping* each other, and asking others for help. Professionals acquire *specialised* knowledge in specific institutions, like academies, institutes of higher education or intermediary vocational education, in specific forms of interaction, like apprenticeships, and this acquisition is controlled by specific exams. Their know-why, know-how and know-what are, as Teun van Dijk adds, "validated by competent participation in forms of

24 Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, 55ff.

25 Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, 51. I would add that creating a community (of practice) out of nothing is a miracle. There is, with David Cooperrider, a mystery in the phenomenon of organising. See Chapter 7, on Appreciative Inquiry. See also: Andrew Dunlop, *Out of Nothing. A Cross-Shaped Approach to Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2018). Dunlop proposes a theological foundation which goes to the heart of God's redemptive practices.

26 For the following, see Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 95.

27 Teun van Dijk, *Discourse and Knowledge: A Sociocognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 148.

practice, as is the case for doctors, engineers, lawyers, sociologists and many other professionals."[28] Nevertheless, even if one has sufficient knowledge or is actively participating in professional discourse or following courses in continuing education, it is not necessarily the case that new or improved practices will just 'follow'. It is more complex than this. Yrjö Engeström rightly comments:

> Learning needs themselves are increasingly opaque. It is not at all clear just what needs to be learned to cope with the demands of complex activities and global networks in constant turmoil. Humans – practitioners, teachers, students – are intentional and interactive beings who keep interpreting and reinterpreting the challenges and tasks they face in their own, multiple, changing, and often unpredictable ways. They do not neatly obey the laws of linear causality.[29]

There is another problem too. We should not expect specialised knowledge to be close at hand when practitioners are operating in practices. Even experts often have to act without sufficient information. Not only do they often have to rely on tacit knowledge and intuitions, but they also make mistakes and can learn from making these mistakes. Karl Weick writes: "Practitioners… tend to mix together false starts, routines, automatic thinking, unanticipated consequences, recoveries, trade-offs, improvisations, and trial and error. Their living is both less orderly and of a different order than it appears in hindsight."[30]

This is not to say that research is superfluous. Following David Olson, if there are research results available that can be applied, this research cannot be "designed to dictate what one does." Rather, it is to "provide information that agents, both teachers and students, can use in making informed decisions about what to do in the multiple and varied contexts in which they work."[31] According to Weick, the practitioner is "forced to detach from the flow of events."[32] In these *moments of interruption*, a practitioner needs a wider perspective. One may reflect upon what one does intuitively. One may see elements of one's practice that were previously hidden from view. The

28 Van Dijk, *Discourse and Knowledge*, 152.

29 Yrjö Engeström, "From Design Experiments to Formative Interventions," *Theory & Psychology* 21, no. 5 (2011): 599.

30 Karl E. Weick, "Theory and Practice in the Real World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Organisation Theory: Meta-Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Haridimos Tsoukas and Christian Knudsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 453.

31 David R. Olson, "The Triumph of Hope over Experience in the Search for 'what works': A Response to Slavin," *Educational Researcher* 33, no. 1 (2004): 25.

32 Weick, "Theory and Practice in the Real World," 454.

interruption or a chain of recurring interruptions may provide a hermeneutical lens through which to capture what is asked for. In short, as I see it, they try to understand their practice ('why is this going on?'), to re-align it to what they consider its purposes, and to discuss it with peers. It is at this point that they need 'fresh' knowledge or may discover or re-discover 'old' knowledge that can be surprisingly applicable to a new practice. Indeed, they keep interpreting and reinterpreting the challenges and tasks they face, often in unpredictable ways.

3 Crises of Routines in Churchly Practices

Professionals in churches and other faith-based institutions today are resourceful practitioners. They often form local communities of practice. These are the communities in which they discuss their practices, and which overlap with other communities of practice. In their practices, they learn and discover what works, but they also fine-tune ideas, such as what church and faith-based institutions are all about or what they should be like, and they develop repertoires, styles and discourses. As we saw in Chapter 3, the gap between formal theological education and ministerial practices has often been jolting. However, successive curriculum reforms, the structures of mentoring, obligatory continuing education, voluntary continuing education, research sabbaticals, and, starting in the nineteenth century, memberships in theological associations and associations of local pastors and the engagement in practices itself, all help the newly ordained minister to become a competent practitioner.

In late modern times, however, routines do not suffice for professionals, and this is also the case in church practices. In several European countries, the church, a formerly stable institution, is in decline and is gradually giving way to a more fluid network.[33] The religious landscape is transformed, partly due to migration patterns (the influx of Muslims and African and Asian Christians), but also because of a new interest in spirituality and the creation of new places and imaginal spaces where people can perform spiritual practices.[34] Churchgoing constituencies are also changing and churches are operating more on a model of choice, like churches in the USA. The indices of

33 Grace Davie, "Religion in Europe in the 21st Century: The Factors to Take into Account," *European Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 2 (2006).

34 Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 13–18. Claire Wolfteich considers everyday spiritual practices to be an important focus of study for practical theology. See Claire E. Wolfteich, "Spirituality," in *The Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2011): 328–336. Wolfteich argues that practical theology can learn much from spirituality studies.

religious activity in the historic churches continue to fall. Large parts of the population 'believe without belonging'. Grace Davie asks, will the rest of the world become more like Europe?[35] In Chapter 4 we already described how the 'big four' dimensions of religious commitment are falling apart. Pastors, but also church councils, committed members of congregations and church consultants grapple with questions of how to respond, speak up and act. Both reflection on practices and specialisation should be intensified. Grace Davie holds that "working out appropriate theological and ministerial strategies" for the continually shifting context is the central and very demanding task of the religious professional.[36] Isolde Karle writes that, due to both societal changes and the response of both theology and the church to these changes, the profession of the pastor has become highly insecure. The general demands of the profession and the particular demands on a pastor have become so intense that there is hardly any hope of fulfilling them (German: *hoffnungslose Überforderung*).[37] According to Karle, pastors can no longer rely on general rules, insights, social forms and structures that are typical for the profession (with Reckwitz and Schatski we would add 'routines'), but are instead forced into a mode of a continuous and very straining self-reflection.[38] Hans-Günter Heimbrock and a Frankfurt research team in empirical theology write that academic theology only makes sense when it contributes to a better understanding of religious professions and when it clarifies their practices. For an empirical theological orientation, the concrete professional practices form a test case.[39]

Explicit, specialised knowledge and skills, also with regard to spiritual practices, are needed for professionals who are active in Christian practices, both in countries where churches are in decline and in other contexts. In current day Africa there is the context of proliferating emerging churches, that is, there are many fast-growing independent churches, many of which combine elements of African traditions with the Bible, while others have a charismatic or Pentecostal profile (*'les églises de réveil'*).[40] How can mainline congregations respond? Topics such as African spirituality, African chieftaincy, ancestor veneration, holistic healing practices that challenge Western healing practices,

35 Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2002).

36 Davie, "Religion in Europe in the 21st Century," 6.

37 Isolde Karle, *Der Pfarrberuf als Profession. Eine Berufstheorie im Kontext der modernen Gesellschaft* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001): 13.

38 Karle, *Der Pfarrberuf als Profession*, 13.

39 Hans-Günter Heimbrock, Silke Leonhard, Peter Meyer and Achim Plagentz, eds., *Religiöse Berufe – kirchlicher Wandel: Empirisch-theologische Fallstudien* (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2013): 5 and 15.

40 Magezi, "Practical Theology in Africa," 135.

gender based violence, lasting effects of colonialism, and practices of deliverance continue to influence Christian practices.[41] The impact of globalisation on churches, the training of a number of pastoral leaders in Western countries, instant communication through the media, including social media, and the fast pace of development have significantly influenced the way pastoral leaders engage with ecclesial and societal issues.[42] Theological educators strive to develop indigenous Christian theologies and their worldview has also been impacted by the way topical issues such as gender, multiculturalism, HIV/AIDS, ecumenism, human rights and so on are dealt with in other countries and in other denominations. James Amanze calls for a reformulation of the curriculum of theology and religious studies so that theologians are able to interact with society. In this new agenda, hands-on-learning is emphasised to enable students to learn through practical experience.[43] Matemba even speaks of a 'paradigm shift' in Christian theological education, holding that 'new', contextual, indeed practical, theologies have to be developed in relation to societal issues. For example, according to Matemba HIV/AIDS now receives significant attention in theological education in Malawi.[44] However, the other issues that we mentioned, to which we add intra-religious tensions, denominational differences, poverty, justice and environmental degradation, also demand attention. But where and how do clergy find information? According to Jacob Dankasa, often in Africa, public libraries are not common, high-speed internet broadband is still at the developmental phase.[45] Can approaches and methods of collaborative practical theology be an answer?

4 Consequences for Knowledge Transfer in Contemporary Practical Theology

Today, the consequences of the increasing need for explicit knowledge in the various communities of practice that practical theology serves are felt in all

41 Tapiwa N. Mucherera and Emmanuel Y. Lartey (eds.), *Pastoral Care, Health, Healing, and Wholeness in African Contexts: Methodology, Context, and Issues. African Practical Theology, Vol. 1* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

42 Yonah Hisbon Matemba, "Perspectives on Theological Education in Malawi," *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 10, no. 3 (2011): 338ff.

43 James Amanze, "The Voicelessness of Theology and Religious Studies in Contemporary Africa: Who is to Blame and What has to be Done? Setting a New Agenda," *Missionalia* 40, no. 3 (2012): 199.

44 Matemba, "Perspectives on Theological Education in Malawi," 339.

45 Jacob Dankasa, "Mapping the Everyday Life Information Needs of Catholic Clergy: Savolainen's ELIS Model Revisited," *Journal of Documentation* 72, no. 3 (2016): 550.

of its knowledge transfer activities. In Western countries, with regard to *teaching*, for example, students ask to be prepared for a 'different kind of church', in which fulltime leadership positions are gradually being replaced by part-time positions, degrees of participation in ecclesial practices differ highly, and where the 'model of choice' has become dominant. On a global level, we see how theological education, if it has to do with the church, must also be relevant for the church of the future and therefore must be engaged in missional practices.[46] According to De Gruchy, these practices "give theological education an outward orientation, one that gives a focus to the world rather than to the church or the academy."[47] Consequently, when theological education is detached from a missiological orientation, it may turn inwards. Students ask to be prepared for the ministry or the chaplaincy to face problematic practices with a spiritual resilience. They also expect to be prepared for dealing with societal issues.

As regards *training* (continuing education), more and more chaplains want to become research-informed,[48] for example, in order to acquire knowledge and skills on interdisciplinary work, while pastors may ask for explicit knowledge and skills about bridge-building with possible non-ecclesial, non-governmental and governmental organisations in their village or city. Ministers may want to learn about new ways of being church. They may want to improve their leadership and, increasingly, their research competences.[49] In some countries, training programmes that focus on building missional leadership capacity have been developed in which research conducted in congregations shapes the content of the modules.[50]

In relation to *consultancy* we see an increasing demand in local congregations for an outside perspective, particularly when making tough decisions like whether to close down a church building or whether to invest in a fresh

46 De Gruchy, "Theological Education and Missional Practice," 42.

47 De Gruchy, "Theological Education and Missional Practice," 44.

48 For the following, see below, Chapter 9.

49 In 2017 we started a *Societas Doctorum Ecclesiae* at the Protestant Theological University in Groningen, in which twenty ministers and chaplains currently participate and collaborate with professors and lecturers. These practitioners have defended a doctoral dissertation but, as practitioners, they often lack the time to pursue this path further, or to do a new research project. Our aim is to co-author academic articles with them based on their research. The *Societas* meets twice a year for two days and members give feedback on each other's work. We have been surprised by the practitioners' strong desire to participate.

50 Ian A. Nell, "Building Missional Leadership and Spiritual Formation: Practical Theological Perspectives on a Master's Programme," *Missionalia* 43, no. 1 (2015): 82–104. See above, Chapter 1.

expression of church. Pastors may have enough on their plates. Congregations may want specialised skills on demand and an unbiased eye. Consultants may act as intermediaries, serving as brokers, translators and advisors. For example, they can connect local church councils and the ministers who are part of them to the results of academic research. They can also convey experiential knowledge.[51]

Concerning *contract research*, an example is a project in which a team of researchers was contracted by the Church of Norway to do research on the realisation of a Christian education reform, a new "comprehensive catechumenal programme," aiming at each and every member of the church in the 0–18 age group.[52] Another example of contract research is the longitudinal empirical inquiry in the Evangelische Kirche in Germany. This inquiry is repeated every ten years, on the expectations of church members concerning the church.[53] In 2014, the data demonstrated that Christian socialisation is eroding, with each consecutive age cohort.

With regard to *joint research*, the narrative which introduced Chapter 1 ('We all benefit') can serve as an example. The national service institute of a denomination has a strong interest in gaining insights from practitioners who are working in pioneering places. The interest is indeed strong: a church wants to survive, considering its salvific message, its basics, and to be important for individual and communal life. Planting new congregations is imperative.

As regards *personnel mobility*, there are practical theologians with doctoral degrees who are offered jobs, for example, at the national service centre of a denomination. Practical theologians are also increasingly asked to do research on behalf of – and with – health institutions, NGOS, political institutes and schools.

In relation to the knowledge transfer practice of *reading*, in the last fifteen years we have observed the emergence of reading clubs, not only of chaplains, but also of ministers. A short web search soon reveals that in a number of countries there are reading groups of pastors gathering to discuss systematic theological texts, for example, books by Karl Barth, Augustine, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Cornelis Heiko Miskotte, Tom Wright or Peter Rollins, to name but a

51 See David Dadswell, *Consultancy Skills for Mission and Ministry* (London: SCM Press, 2011).

52 Elisabet Haakedal, "Spiritual Nurture for Each and Every Member Aged 0 to 18 Years: Two Children's Voices from the Religious Education Reform of the Church of Norway in the Second Decade of the 21st Century," in *Children's Voices: Theological, Philosophical and Spiritual Perspectives*, eds. Petra Freudenberger-Lötz and Gerhard Büttner (Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2015): 45–64.

53 EKD, *Engagement und Indifferenz Kirchenmitgliedschaft als soziale Praxis. V. EKD-Erhebung über Kirchenmitgliedschaft* (2015).

few. A reading group of theologians, of which I am a member, has been reading one book, *The Star of Redemption*, by the Jewish-German philosopher Franz Rosenzweig for 18 (!) years now on a monthly basis. Reading groups also read books on practical theology, in particular, on issues like ageing, church leadership, the missional church movement and missional practices. The last two topics illustrate the urge to read about new ecclesial practices. Thus, texts do not need to be recently written to be considered relevant for today's practices.

Concerning *informal* knowledge transfer activities, we see how, for example, both congregations and their leaders increasingly invite practical theologians to lecture. One may even speak of a cry for survival, in which practical theologians are asked to lecture about 'recipes' to enable the congregation to grow or to be attractive for younger generations.

Finally, with regard to *internet information resources*, these have become "indispensable tools in the sharing and dissemination of knowledge without discrimination, employed to give users quick access to knowledge from a wide range of people, communities, and cultures."[54] The information is available on demand, allowing individuals to access the information they want, when they want it. Users can specify their needs dynamically.[55] Research over the years has shown that among practitioners like clergy, computer literacy is very high.

5 Practical Theology: a Science of Crisis?

If there is an increased need for explicit know-why, know-how and know-what, would not it be helpful to speak of 'practices in crisis'? Should we not conceive of practical theology as a science of crisis? According to several practical theologians, the concept of 'crisis' has been the key notion of the discipline from its very inception. They hold that practical theologians indeed reflect on practices in crisis. Birgit Weyel states that from the start significant "crisis discourses" (German: *Krisendiskurse*) emerged in practical theology due to its "theological turn to the sociocultural lifeworld."[56] Due to this turn, the discrepancies, the lack of congruency between theology and ideals on the one hand

54 Samuel Olu Adeyoyin, Taiwo A. Idowu and Adeniyi O. Sowole, "Awareness, Access, and Use of Electronic Information Resources among the Seminarians in Nigeria," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 15, no. 1–2 (2015): 1–18.

55 Jacob Dankasa, "Information-Seeking Behavior of Clergy: The Research, the Results, and the Future," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 14, no. 1–2 (2014): 13–29.

56 Birgit Weyel, "Ist die Dauerkrise institutionalisierbar? Die Pastoraltheologie als Krisenwissenschaft im Spiegel von Zeitschriften," *Praktische Theologie* 50, no. 1 (2015): 11.

and empirical reality on the other hand, had to be understood and analysed. Gerben Heitink takes the notion of practical theology as a "theory or science of crisis" as his point of departure.[57] In his view it is a common characterisation of the discipline in modernity (i.e. since the Enlightenment) but it can also be used to characterise practical theology since the 1960s, a period when Western society went through a deep authority crisis. In the mid-1960s, new chairs of practical theology were established in several Western countries and the new chair holders referred in their inaugural lectures to the 'crisis of faith'. They stated explicitly that churches could no longer rely on routinised practices. Heitink localises the crisis primarily in the issue of authority: "In the churches, the authority of the Scriptures, the authority of the clergy, and spiritual authority in general were topics of intense discussion. This new 'emancipation' greatly influenced the participation of the people in the life of the church. Church attendance dropped."[58]

Christian Grethlein holds that in modernity, the practices that practical theology examines, i.e. the modern church practices in which the gospel is communicated, have become highly problematic. There is a constant need for innovation.[59] Again, Grethlein is not alone. The cultural context in which practical theology originated is diagnosed by many as 'critical' for church, Christianity and religion. Chris Hermans writes that the origin of practical theology "mirrors the profound crisis of the church and religion in modern society."[60] For Hermans, modernity as such no longer challenges church and religion. He speaks of a "deep crisis of faith" in an individualising society, characterised by cultural pluralism, by an emphasis on individual choice, with a decline in successive generations' ecclesial involvement, and by a dwindling influence of traditions.

According to some practical theologians, the crisis of faith affects the ministry. Pastoral theology, dealing with the office and functions of the pastor, is a flourishing discipline, given the number of publications in recent years. Many books focus on clergy wellbeing, clergy identity clergy spirituality and distinctive features or core characteristics of church leadership.[61] Birgit Weyel holds

57 Gerben Heitink, *Practical* Theology, 2 and 4ff.

58 Heitink, *Practical Theology*, 2ff.

59 Christian Grethlein, *Praktische Theologie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012): 21.

60 Chris A. M. Hermans, "When Theology Goes 'Practical': From Applied to Empirical Theology," in *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology: The Contribution of Empirical Theology by Johannes A. Van der Ven*, ed. Chris A. M. Hermans and Mary Elisabeth Moore (Leiden: Brill, 2004): 28.

61 Tone Stangeland Kaufman, *A New Old Spirituality? A Qualitative Study of Clergy Spirituality in the Nordic Context* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017). Jackson W. Car-

that the flourishing of pastoral theology itself suffices to show that the ministerial profession is in crisis.[62] Isolde Karle speaks about the "crisis of the profession of the pastor" and she asserts that this crisis has been characteristic of the profession over the last two centuries.[63] The Frankfurt research team mentioned above adds that many professionals in the context of religion, including ministers, youth workers, deacons, chaplains, teachers of religion, church musicians and counsellors are under pressure because of structural societal changes, demographic changes and transformations in the ecclesial and religious landscape. Routines are constantly challenged, motivations reassessed. If transformations are thematised in a direct manner or sensed in a latent way, they are likely to manifest themselves as 'crises'.[64] Still, zooming in on specific practices, case studies demonstrate that practical theology should not be too quick to state that 'the church is in crisis', but ask how professionals perceive this crisis or, even better, what they experience as critical for their practices.[65] For example, the breaking off from tradition, which is said to be very problematic for the church, is seen by teachers of religion as a resource[66] The Frankfurt team calls upon practical theology to see how what is experienced as a crisis in practices becomes manifest in "the surprise of a new perspective, the shock to the familiar, the disruption of the obvious."[67]

While the characterisation of practices – and of communities of practice – as 'in crisis' could suffice to demonstrate the relevance of practical theology, not every practical theologian is adamant about this. First of all, with Thomas Frank, the label 'crisis' can be a rhetorical concept, used in order to provide legitimacy to strategies, downplaying the necessity for thorough contextual and situational analysis: "The rhetoric of crisis is a power play. It draws attention

oll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006). Pastoral leadership is the topic of several dissertations that have been defended at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo. See Ingrid Christine Reite, "Between Settling and Unsettling in a Changing Knowledge Society: The Professional Learning Trajectories of Pastors" (PhD diss., MF Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo, 2014); Fredrik Saxegaard, "Realizing Church: Parish Pastors as Contributors to Leadership in Congregations" (PhD diss., MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2017).

62 Weyel, "Ist die Dauerkrise institutionalisierbar?" 11.

63 Karle, *Der Pfarrberuf als Profession*, 15.

64 Heimbrock et al., *Religiöse Berufe – kirchlicher Wandel*, 9.

65 Heimbrock et al., *Religiöse Berufe – kirchlicher Wandel*, 214ff.

66 Felix Kerntke, "'Es ist nochmal eine andere Instanz' – Gelebte Kirche in der Schule," in *Religiöse Berufe – kirchlicher Wandel*, 111.

67 Achim Plagentz, "Krise und Reform kirchlicher Praxis," in *Religiöse Berufe – kirchlicher Wandel*, 220.

to the speaker, but more precisely it lends credibility and force to the speaker's proposals for reform and action."[68]

Second, Gerrit Immink strongly criticises the notion that practical theology is a science of crisis, particularly in relation to the context of modernity. He considers it positive that our modern society, "in which we live and breathe," receives full attention, but he criticises modern practical theologians for not questioning secular presuppositions, including those tacitly assumed in social scientific insights and methods.[69] Practical theologians who view practical theology as a 'science of crisis' are particularly likely to accept secular a priori assumptions as self-evident: "They seem to think that the modern mind has completely lost its sensibility for God, and, further, they seem to hold that a theistic frame of reference is completely outdated."[70] Immink notes that modern theology is characterised by a "human-centred way of thinking," in which the "human consciousness is emphasised as the centre of all human reasoning, knowledge, and morality."[71] Immink acknowledges the difficulties in finding adequate language to communicate the Christian faith. There are increasing impediments to the communication of faith in the post-secular world and the transfer of faith to new generations is stagnating. According to Immink, the roots of these problems go deep: "Our human consciousness and mind lost their receptivity for things divine."[72] Consequently, in Immink's view, faith itself is a key concept for practical theology. The discipline should reflect on how there is no faith without revelation, how it emerges in the dynamic relationship between God and the human being and should be conceived as a divine act in the human consciousness, how it is experienced as a gift of God, how the human subject becomes an important participant in the divine-human encounter, how faith is enacted, for example, in the act of prayer or in listening to sermons, how it is celebrated, how it is mediated by human speech, how it sustains people, how it is nurtured, how it mingles with personal biographies, in short, how faith is lived.[73] And so, despite being critical towards the suffix 'in crisis', Immink believes that practical theological research with regard to practices of faith is highly necessary, both for professional practitioners and for everyday believers. Those who perform leadership roles in a given practice,

68 Thomas E. Frank, "Leadership and Administration: An Emerging Field in Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 10, no. 1 (2006): 113–136.
69 F. Gerrit Immink, "Inquiry into the Practice of Faith: A Reformed Perspective," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38, no. 1 (2003): 139.
70 Immink, "Inquiry into the Practice of Faith," 141.
71 Immink, "Inquiry into the Practice of Faith," 146.
72 Immink, "Inquiry into the Practice of Faith," 141.
73 Immink, "Inquiry into the Practice of Faith," 142ff.

he writes, must have some theoretical insight into that practice. Why is it done this way and not another? What are the reasons for this specific performance? Whoever has a leading role in the practice of faith must act with a reflective competence,[74] which, I add, is shaped in theological education, continuing education and collaborative research.

Third, I would argue, the characterisation of practical theology as a sci- ence of crisis' may reduce the scope of the practices to be researched. Also, as we will see in Chapter 7, we can learn from David Cooperrider that a research project, and even an action-research project, should not necessarily start with a concern or problem. I emphasise that Reckwitz refers to *everyday* crises of routines, implying that time and again when practitioners perform practices, 'know-why', 'know-how' and 'know-what' are needed, but they can often also rely on tacit knowledge and, I add, tacit spirituality. Consequently, I do not hold that religious practices are permanently in crisis or that professions connected to these practices are permanently in crisis, but, with Heimbrock et al., that there are often surprises, difficulties, new problems, disturbing events, and reoccurring problems. Pete Ward writes: "Practical theology is one of the ways that practitioners can look up from where their professional ministry has taken them and find ways to reorient themselves."[75] With Weick, Christian practices have moments of interruption. Practical theological research should – and often does – cater to the needs and experiences of practitioners related to situations in which one pauses and, following Osmer, wonders what is going on, why this is going on, what ought to be going on, how one can respond and then also, how these strategies are implemented, experienced and evaluated.

6 The Information Needs of Professional Practitioners

In the last thirty years, it was an open question as to whether professional practitioners were actually aware of empirical practical theological research in their domains, whether they were applying it via forms of knowledge transfer, such as training or reading, or whether the world of the researchers and the world of the practitioners were very separate. Many questions were unanswered. Did practitioners stay abreast of developments, for example, in

74 Immink, "Inquiry into the Practice of Faith," 139.

75 Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology. Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017): 23. Ward also states that a sense of a gap in knowledge is common, and it is "one of the main reasons ministers and others who are professionally engaged in different kinds of ministry want to return to academic institutions to study theology, and practical theology in particular." Ward, *Introduction*, 22f.

pastoral theology, practical ecclesiology (like the ethnographic turn), homiletics or liturgical studies? How did they handle the information they were exposed to? Did they read theological and/or religious studies journals and, if so, did they read them regularly? How much time did they spend on conferences, meetings and courses? Did they find the internet valuable, since they no longer needed to physically go to a library in order to use its resources? The same kinds of questions could also have been asked about non-professional practitioners, such as lay leaders, elders, deacons, church treasurers, ecclesial volunteers, churchgoers, members of congregations, etc. Were they applying practical theological research? Our knowledge about practitioners' information needs, how these were met and what the limitations were, is limited and the same can be said about our knowledge of the effects of practical theological research in the context of application. Today we still need to know more about the implementation and application of research results by practitioners. For example, a doctoral research project by Harmen van Wijnen, explicitly recommends including informal peer groups in youth ministry.[76] The research questions emerged in youth ministry practices, youth workers played a role in selecting three of the five small groups of adolescents and they were then involved in the three selected groups. Regarding application, we know that the results of the study were valorised in a symposium preceding the public defence, in newspaper articles and interviews, in some articles in journals and in two continuous education workshops for ministers of the PCN. Nevertheless, we do not know if youth workers are actually applying the information or insights from this study. As we observed in Chapter 1, the fourfold structure of practical theological research 'ends' with strategies and leaves implementation by practitioners out of sight.

What we do know is that people working for organisations are likely to operate in 'scanning mode' if their organisation follows a particular strategy or policy. Scanning, looking at information and looking for information, is called an "engine for organisational learning."[77] Scanning mode can serve to provide information required to support a strategy. In 1995, Chun Wei Choo demonstrated that if the environment is perceived as uncertain, managers will tend to scan more often and with greater intensity. The perceived uncertainty of the

76 Harmen van Wijnen, *Faith in Small Groups of Adolescents: Being Together as a Basic Given* (Delft: Eburon, 2016).

77 Chun Wei Choo, "The Art of Scanning the Environment," *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science* 25, no. 3 (1999): 24. This article is based on Choo's monograph: Chun Wei Choo, *Information Management for the Intelligent Organisation: The Art of Scanning the Environment* (Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc., 1995).

environment as such is related to its complexity and to the pace of the developments that take place in the environment. "Several studies have found that perceived environmental uncertainty is a good predictor of the amount and intensity of scanning. Perceived environmental uncertainty is a function of the perceived complexity (number of factors, opacity of causal relationships) and perceived dynamism (rate of change) of the external environment."[78] According to Choo, there is also evidence that "source selection for scanning is influenced by the perceived quality of the source and not just its perceived accessibility."[79] Applying Choo's study to practitioners in Christian practices today, we may expect that they too are increasing their scanning activity.

Regarding the information needs and scanning mode of ministers, there are a number of studies that describe how ministers go about seeking the information that they use in their practices.[80] The information needs of ministers differ according to the tasks or work roles that they perform.[81] According to Don Wicks, it makes a difference whether a minister needs information in relation to his or her role as a preacher (including teaching obligations), caregiver or administrator (leading the congregation).[82] In 1999, before the internet became extensively used, Wicks demonstrated that for preaching and theological information, pastors relied on books, but they turned to colleagues and members of the church council when it came to their administrative and leadership

78 Choo, "The Art of Scanning the Environment," 22.

79 Choo, "The Art of Scanning the Environment," 23.

80 Thomas M. Tanner, *The Pastor as Information Professional: An Exploratory Study of How the Ministers of One Midwestern Community Gather and Disseminate Information* (MA thesis, University of Illinois, 1992). Tanner found that ministers often searched for information in response to the questions of congregants. Nowadays, ministers are often bypassed by congregants. Congregants are likely to find the information they need on the internet by themselves. Other articles about the information needs of ministers include Don A. Wicks, "The Information-Seeking Behavior of Pastoral Clergy: A Study of the Interaction of Their Work Worlds and Work Roles," *Library & Information Science Research* 21, no. 2 (1999): 205–226; Joshua D. Lambert, "The Information-Seeking Habits of Baptist Ministers," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 9, no. 1–2 (2010): 1–19; William B. Harris and Daniel Roland, "Information Needs of Church Worship Leaders," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information*, 13, no. 1–2 (2014): 35–52; Jacob Dankasa, "Information-Seeking Behavior of Clergy: The Research, the Results, and the Future," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information*, 14, no. 1–2 (2015): 13–29; Jacob Dankasa, "Mapping the Everyday Life Information Needs of Catholic Clergy: Savolainen's ELIS Model Revisited," *Journal of Documentation* 72, no. 3 (2016): 549–568.

81 Already in 1992, Phillips established this connection in his dissertation. Robert L. Phillips, "The Relationship between Work Roles and Information Seeking Behaviors among Selected Protestant Ministers in Tarrant County" (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 1992).

82 Wicks, "The Information-Seeking Behavior of Pastoral Clergy," 215ff.

roles. In his research on Baptist ministers, Joshua Lambert found that both preaching and leading the congregation were mentioned most when information was needed.[83] Preaching/teaching was mentioned first or mentioned as the most time-consuming task for which they needed information, while guiding the congregation in their practices or developing new practices was mentioned second. A young minister said he searched for information particularly when he was about to perform new tasks.[84] For Lambert, the respondents were exemplified by the answer of one minister, who I quote here: "I spend a pretty good deal of every week doing background research on passages… time wise that would be the area that I do the most research in. The second would be the ministries of our church. Finding new ways to do things that we are already doing or starting new ministries… that we feel like we need to be doing."[85] The effort that they put into seeking information was primarily determined by 'importance', the most cited criterion of which was "that something follow the mission or goal of the church."[86] Remarkably, considering what we wrote earlier about the theological dimension in Christian practices, 'mission' in this context is not the 'mission statement', but rather the calling and purpose of both the local church and the church in general, its *raison d'être*. Ministers are interested in missional ecclesiology, specifically knowledge about missional practices.

Ministers also have what are called, 'circumstantial needs'. This category emerged from everyday life information needs that participants described as needs resulting from contemporary circumstances, "prompted by events happening around the participants."[87] In her empirical research on the learning trajectories of pastors in Norway, Ingrid Christine Reite found that, while there are a number of tasks in which pastors rely on routines, "many pastors had tasks with very few standards. The pastors I followed needed to relate to an extensive and changing group of actors. Many situations demanded the handling of chaos, improvisation, creativity and imagination."[88] She adds that the fast pace of changes, both in society and in religious practices, lead to insecurity: "It seems like the knowledge taught in professional education does not fit the professional reality. Is also seems that the knowledge required for professionals' work is in flux."[89] In research on the information needs of Nigerian

83 Lambert, "The Information-Seeking Habits of Baptist Ministers," 8.
84 Lambert, "The Information-Seeking Habits of Baptist Ministers," 10.
85 Lambert, "The Information-Seeking Habits of Baptist Ministers," 8.
86 Lambert, "The Information-Seeking Habits of Baptist Ministers," 12.
87 Dankasa, "Mapping the Information Needs of Catholic Clergy," 559.
88 Reite, "Between Settling and Unsettling," 58.
89 Reite, "Between Settling and Unsettling," 115.

clergy, Jacob Dankasa found that apart from information on sermons/homilies, information on the teachings of the church, and information on education, these pastors search for information on health (diseases like HIV, Ebola), security, politics and public affairs.[90] The research remains restricted to the task. They seek very specific information and stop searching when their need for information is met, often due to time constraints.[91] As for the type of information, ministers mention formal information channels such as books and the internet more than personal contacts, while in relation to administrative and leadership tasks they use both informal and formal channels. We know that the rapid advances in electronic information resources have increased access to research results. Ministers now use the internet extensively.

A poll by the Barna group in 2013 found that 92 percent of pastors in the USA buy at least one book per month and on average purchase more than three: "Christian leaders are avid readers."[92] When asked what kinds of books they had read recently the three topics most frequently mentioned were spirituality, theology and leadership. In the Pulpit and Pews survey conducted by Jackson Caroll, the most read journal by conservative protestants was *Leadership*, being second most read by mainline protestant clergy. One third of pastors are consuming business books. Caroll states: "The journal lists [...] reflect a strong focus on the practical concerns of preaching, church leadership and church growth. These areas not only occupy much of the clergy's time; they are also the areas in which many say they feel ill prepared. Also important are authors who write about spirituality, especially pastoral spirituality, and who can help clergy reflect on their vocations."[93] Here we find similar concerns as in our chapter on continuing education.

7 Conclusion

In churchly practices, but also in chaplaincy, youth ministry, missionary work, etc., practitioners often rely on tacit knowledge and tacit spirituality. Their

90 Dankasa, "Mapping the Information Needs of Catholic Clergy," 560. The article is based upon Jacob Dankasa, "Information Use Environment of Religious Professionals: A Case Study of the Everyday Life Information Seeking Behavior of Catholic Clergy in Northern Nigeria" (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2013).

91 Lambert, "The Information-Seeking Habits of Baptist Ministers," 14.

92 "Reading Habits of Today's Pastors," Barna, June 3, 2013, accessed July 3, 2018, https://www.barna.com/research/reading-habits-of-todays-pastors/.

93 Jackson Caroll, "Pastor's Picks: What Pastors Are Reading," *Pulpit & Pew. Research on Pastoral Leadership*. See https://www.pulpitandpew.org/pastors-picks-what-preachers-are-reading.

formal education and continuing education provide them with the specialised knowledge, skills and attitudes, in short, the competences that they need. Still, improving research literacy would help practitioners in their communities of practice by providing them with research-based knowledge that they could then turn into context-dependent knowledge in order to increase their practical wisdom. Furthermore, they would also be helped by either initiating or participating in academic practical theological collaborative research. Are there additional rationales for this particularly promising kind of research? We will attempt to answer this question in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Collaborative Research in Practical Theology

Rationales for Collaborative Approaches

1 Introduction

In 2013, following a report by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*; KNAW),[1] the Dutch Sociological Association (*Nederlandse Sociologische Vereniging*; NSV) stated that "sociology has become alienated from Dutch society."[2] In their view, this state of affairs is caused by the pressure from the assessment regime to publish in English peer-reviewed journals and the predominance of quantitative social research, the results of which are only partially transferrable to local contexts. The scores for Dutch sociologists in quality assessments are excellent, but academic quality and societal relevance are completely out of balance. There is a widespread complaint that, using a distinction coined by Michael Burawoy, *professional sociology* (sociology for peers) has become dominant, while *policy* sociology (sociology for policy makers, advisors and practitioners), *public* sociology (sociology for citizens) and *critical* sociology (critique of society and science) are undervalued.[3] In 2005, in his plea for public sociology, Burawoy stated: "The very existence of a vast swath of public sociology does suggest there is no shortage of publics if we but care to seek them out. But we do have a lot to learn about engaging them. We are still at a primitive stage in our project."[4] In order to remedy this situation, the NSV proposed revising the criteria for judging academic output and encouraging output diversity. Surprisingly, the NSV did not consider transdisciplinarity or collaborative research with societal actors as one of the main solutions.

1 KNAW, *Naar een raamwerk voor de kwaliteitsbeoordeling van sociaalwetenschappelijk onderzoek. Adviesrapport voorbereid door de Commissie Kwaliteitsindicatoren sociale wetenschappen*, 2013.

2 NSV, *Naar een evenwichtige kwaliteitsbeoordeling van sociologisch onderzoek. Advies van de Nederlandse Sociologische Vereniging*, 2013. See also Caroline Dewilde and Peter Achterberg, "Sociologie in Nederland: graag minder van hetzelfde! Debat: Rethink Sociology," *Sociologie* 11, no. 2 (2015): 268–273.

3 Michael Burawoy, "For Public Sociology," *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 1 (2005): 5.

4 Burawoy, "For Public Sociology," 8.

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In the ensuing debate some leading Dutch sociologists agreed with the NSV's proposals and also suggested that doctoral students become more acquainted with the theoretical foundations of the discipline.[5] Furthermore, they observed that since many courses at the university have 'and society' in their titles, it should be 'a piece of cake' (Dutch: *een koud kunstje*) for sociologists to demonstrate the relevance of their research. Interestingly, Jan Willem Duyvendak, the Chair of the NSV, made a plea for sociology to explore practices. He stated that "practical knowledge is knowledge that is used in everyday life by policy makers, citizens, practitioners of all sorts."[6] It is this knowledge that often needs to be improved or replaced by new insights. If an academic discipline matters – and sociology should always have that ambition – it will need to transfer its academic knowledge into everyday practices. The report of the NSV remarks that application belongs to the essence of empirical social sciences and that "working with societal partners deserves a place among the indicators of quality."[7]

In practical theology, as in sociology, the merits of collaborative research for reconnecting the academy to society are yet to be discovered. In the past twenty-five years, empirical theology has mainly been performed by solo researchers. Of course, they have often been part of research groups, but they have collected and extracted their data *from* practitioners as *individual* researchers instead of doing research *with* practitioners. The valorisation of academic practical theology through the dissemination and implementation of research findings into practices has often been one-directional. Today this is no longer enough because it leaves the implementation to the practitioners. As we observed in Chapter 1, Osmer's fourfold structure, which is designed to help ministers acquire practical wisdom, is highly useful for them if they do small-scale empirical research themselves,[8] but as a structure for academic practical theological research it falls short because it neglects the task of putting theory, norms and strategies into practice. Remarkably, in the fourfold structure as a whole, doing research *together with* practitioners is not in view. Even the most recent introductions to practical theology concentrate on the solo researcher when they present an outline for doing empirical theology.

In order to be relevant or enhance the utility of their research, academic practical theologians need to engage their publics or their addressees right from the start. This does not rule out fundamental or more theoretical research. We still need research that explicates concepts and the academic

5 Dewilde and Achterberg, "Sociologie in Nederland," 268–273.
6 Dirk Vlasblom, "Losgezongen van het eigen land," *NRC*, May 18, 2013.
7 NSV, *Naar een evenwichtige kwaliteitsbeoordeling*, 10.
8 See below, Chapter 9.

practical theologian needs to stay at a distance. Furthermore, this does not rule out solo research, which has been conducted for decades and is very valuable. Nevertheless, it is imperative to respond to the information needs of practitioners, to enable their voices and practice-theories to be heard, and to encourage stakeholders to use practical theological research. As I see it, doing practical theology today calls for relational approaches and collaborative partnerships. We need, I suggest, a 'turn to the community'.

In this chapter I suggest six sets of reasons to encourage practitioners, everyday believers, and possibly other societal actors, to not only use the products of practical theology, but to also get involved with the research *process* itself. First, I suggest, what I call, the '*Missio Dei rationale*' of collaborative research as participating in God's mission, which has its basis in the relational movement in the Trinity and human participation in this movement. Second, the '*emerging community rationale*', demands our attention. In collaborative research, the process is as important as the product because it has performative effects. One such effect that I observe is that people are bound together, in short, communities are formed. Third, I suggest that there is an epistemic dependence between scientists and an epistemic dependence on practitioner-knowledge. I call this the '*epistemological rationale*'. Fourth, I suggest that collaborative research can be justified on the basis of its contribution to the innovation of practices and overcoming routines. It improves the professionalisation of the practitioner. I shall call this the '*innovation and professionalisation rationale*'. In this paragraph, we will become acquainted with action research, as it has already turned out to be promising in the domain of education. Fifth, in what I suggest calling the '*postcolonial rationale*' I will argue that relational approaches align with postcolonial methodologies, that emphasise the need for those being researched to own the researcher's description of them and the need to invoke indigenous knowledge. Similarly, relational, collaborative approaches seek to mitigate and are a possible remedy against power mechanisms in research, such as expressed by the gaze of the researcher, who describes and understands the 'Other' without the 'Other'. Sixth, also summarising the first part of this book, I suggest reflecting on the goals of practical theological research and their consequences for research strategies, particularly if valorisation is deemed necessary, as it increasingly is today. The *utility-rationale* is thus an important rationale for collaborative research practices.

2 The *Missio Dei* Rationale

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat explicitly connect practical theological research with mission. Practical theology is critical, theological reflection, in order to ensure "faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God."[9] The aim of practical theology is "to enable the Church to perform faithfully as it participates in God's ongoing mission in, to and for the world."[10] In another definition, they equate the mission of the triune God with God's redemptive practices,[11] and because we live in God's creation all human beings, participating in the practices of the world, participate in this redemptive movement. There is "significant similarity and continuity" between the practices of the Church and the practices of the world.[12] It is, however, the Church that recognizes who Jesus is and seeks to live its life in the light of this revelation and this is what makes the practices of the Church distinct from the practices of the world. Related to concepts, such as friendship, compassion, peace, etc., practical theology 'reminds' the Church of "the subtle ways it differs from the world."[13] However, Swinton and Mowat do not explicitly state that practical theology itself and doing empirical research, solo, in a team, or in a collaboration with practitioners, is part of God's mission in, to and for the world.

Clare Watkins, Helen Cameron and others view their research with faith communities as a "conversational practice" to "renew both theology and practice in the service of God's mission."[14] As I understand it, if practical theologians try to obtain a better understanding of practices of faith, they need to acknowledge that mission is part of the identity and the raison d'être of the church.[15] The church considers itself part of the mission of Jesus, which is focused on the Kingdom of God.[16] Therefore, understanding and renewing missional practices is part of practical theology,[17] and thus, I would suggest, the practice of practical theology itself has a place in the *missio Dei*. As an academic discipline, practical theology tries to understand, evaluate and

9 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 24.
10 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 24.
11 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 7.
12 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 8.
13 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 9.
14 Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney, Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice. Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010): 63.
15 Schleiermacher already mentions "theory of missions" as part of the discipline of practical theology in the second edition of the *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*, published in 1830. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Behuf einleitender Vorlesungen* (1811/1830), ed. Dirk Schmid (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002). We agree with Schleiermacher, but here we position the discipline of practical theology as being part of the mission of God-in-Christ.
16 See Jürgen Moltmann, *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes. Ein Beitrag zur messianischen Ekklesiologie* (Gütersloh 1975): 23.
17 See Jan Jongeneel, "Christelijke theologie als missionaire theologie," *Kerk en Theologie* 55, no. 1 (2004): 42–53.

stimulate, and is part of the life of the Christian community and, according to Pete Ward, "it is fundamentally ecclesial and theological in nature."[18] Therefore, practical theology is grounded in God's liberating and redemptive practices, and is consequently connected to the world; not only the wellbeing of Christians, but the wellbeing of all, the *bonum commune*. The mission of the church, in the words of Jürgen Moltmann, has a qualitative character. It includes *all* practices that serve the liberation of man, both from economic distress and from godlessness.[19] Part of the mission of the church consists of combatting oppression, poverty, isolation or any kind of danger or evil, of strengthening resilience, promoting human flourishing and creating a climate for shared life through dialogue, mutual care, friendship, and compassion for others. The church seeks to develop reciprocal relationships, love and care. The church wants to enable faithful discipleship, share the gospel, save people out of trouble, encourage people to listen to, support and learn from one another, it wants to cherish diversity, affirm the infinite value of each individual human being and proclaim that there is not one area of life without hope since God is with us in Christ. Yet, this is not only the task of the church. With Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun in *For the Life of the World*, the purpose of theology too is to articulate, discern and commend compelling visions of and paths to flourishing life "in light of the self-revelation of God in the life, death, resurrection, exaltation, and coming in glory of Jesus Christ, with this entire story, its lows and its highs, bearing witness to a truly flourishing life."[20] This positions theology again in the service of the mission of Jesus: "Theology has a contribution to make, and theology must make that contribution if it is to remain true to its purpose, which is the same as the goal of Jesus's mission."[21] Theology matters to everyday believers and to the world, "it matters because it is about what matters the most for human life."[22] Academic practical theology contributes to flourishing life, the wellbeing of all and the future of the world, on the one hand through its service to a church that knows itself to be caught up in this movement of Jesus, and on the other hand through its service to communities of practice in schools, hospitals, the armed forces, penitentiary institutions, etc., that are committed to this mission. Practical theologians that help individual faith communities reflect on their reason for being, what they do and to what end, do not make a faith community look inward, but outward. One

18 Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 3.

19 Moltmann, *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes*, 24.

20 Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos by Baker Publishing House, 2019): 61.

21 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 33.

22 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 6.

example would be Anthony Reddie's research with black faith communities, assisting them to "reframe their sense of mission."[23] Another example would be a PhD project conducted by Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker at the PThU, examining the experience of community in a worldwide organisation, the Church Mission Society (CMS), with a view to *shaping* such experiences and renewing its impact on the world.

The *Missio Dei*-rationale can be related to the Trinity. Here I could mention a wide range of authors, such as John Zizoulas, Colin Gunton and Miroslav Volf, but I am indebted to Paul Fiddes' reflections on the Trinity, since Fiddes has a high regard for ethnography. Fiddes states that, while remaining in the craft of a theologian, he does not think "it is possible to do theology properly without taking at least an amateur interest in the methods and results of ethnographers."[24] According to Fiddes, the church is engaged in the communion of the triune God.[25] The relational movement in God shapes the relational dynamics in ecclesial practices, like worship, preaching and mission, but then also in ecclesial groups, in how they emerge, develop, are sustained and how they end. The relational movement in God, which is like a Spirit of love and hope, like a Son responding to a Father, shapes "all movements of openness in the church to others."[26] Fiddes emphasises that we participate in the deep, rich and life-enhancing relationships of Father, Son and Spirit.[27] The triune God, he adds, can only be known, not by observation, but by participation.[28] The church, he adds, will signify its own way by "deliberately living in the relations of God."[29] I would argue that this supports the use of relational approaches in practical theological research as being part of God's mission, and as alternative ways of participating in the relational movement of God.

3 The Emerging Community Rationale

The arguments for and against collaboration are often grounded in assumptions about the purpose of research and to what extent research should be

23 Anthony G. Reddie, *Working Against the Grain: Re-Imagining Black Theology in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2008): 121. See below, Chapter 7, "Performative Action and Participative Exercise."
24 Paul Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Disciplines, Two Worlds?" in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): 13.
25 Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography," 16.
26 Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography," 17.
27 Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography," 26.
28 Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography," 26.
29 Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography," 32.

used to develop, improve or change practice.[30] In order to formulate a rationale for these linkages in the *process* of the research, we follow Tania Zittoun et al., who apply the concept of *emergence* to collaborative research. Emergence means that something qualitatively new grows out of something existing. As they argue, "Two sorts of knowledge can emerge through collaborative work: the scientific knowledge for which the collaboration has been set up; and collaborative knowledge, a reflective knowledge about collaboration, acquired through experiences of collaborative research."[31] At the end of Chapter 1, we wrote that practitioners may gain new understandings and insights, and that this emerging understanding may itself become part of the research, changing the original design thereof. But knowledge is not the only emergent property of collaborative research. New practices, new relationships, new perspectives and new discourses can be qualified as emergent.[32] Focus groups, for example, create something new that was not there before. Following Austin's well-known phrase, 'doing things with words', verbal interaction has *performative* effects. After the 'performance turn' in qualitative research,[33] we see how the results of the research, the 'product', 'article', 'dissertation' or 'report' are still considered important, but the research process and the way in which this process transforms the practices under scrutiny receives more attention.

In her PhD research project on processes of Christian community formation in a new housing quarter in Rotterdam, Veerle Rooze took a relational approach and in the course of the project the moments of research collaboration set things in motion. For example, when she presented the stories that she had collected from people in the congregation and from residents in the estate to the church council and the sounding board group, the very process of reading these stories together acted as a catalyst. A church council member said: "Reading the reports had a tremendous influence on me. I read the report of [x] and I thought: I will call her, because we could very well brainstorm together."[34] The research also supported and stimulated network formation.

30 Larike H. Bronkhorst, Paulien C. Meijer, Bob Koster, Sanne F. Akkerman and Jan D. Vermunt, "Consequential Research Designs in Research on Teacher Education," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 33 (2013): 91.

31 Tania Zittoun, Aleksandar Baucal, Flora Cornish and Alex Gillespie, "Collaborative Research, Knowledge and Emergence," *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 41, no. 2 (2007): 209.

32 Zittoun et al., "Collaborative Research, Knowledge and Emergence," 211.

33 Norman K. Denzin, *Qualitative Inquiry under Fire: Toward a New Paradigm Dialogue* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009): 7.

34 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 243f.

As a result of reading the reports together, church members contacted one of the social workers from a local welfare body, and together they decided to set up a foodbank. One year after completing her research, Rooze called one of the initiators of the project, who told her that the foodbank had brought the congregation into contact with people from the estate that were previously unknown to them. In her research log, Rooze wrote: "I think my research has started. A pity that I am no longer part of it. . . "[35]

In 1998, Iris Saltiel found that collaboration in continuing education can create synergy, an experience of flow, in which the participants "fuel one another, creating an energised dynamic, electric in its feel."[36] As she writes, "We can tell when we see a successful partnership in practice. We instinctively know that collaborative partners in learning help each other to achieve what they never could have done on their own."[37] According to Parker and Hackett, in collaboration emotions and the process of knowing are inseparable: "Epistemically, emotions lubricate creative processes, speeding imagination and recombination of ideas."[38] Emotions can ignite and fuel creative collaboration.

In collaborative learning partnerships, the distinguishing feature is that the relationship as such becomes important. Interaction becomes valued if both participants feel that the mixed goals can only be realised through conversation and working together, tapping into each other's talents, skills and knowledge. A sense of belonging together and becoming committed to each other may also be noticed. Stephen Ritchie and Donna Rigano found that "solidarity emerged from successful interactions between interdependent members,"[39] which were both professionally and personally rewarding for individuals and the teams. A crucial factor that contributed to the success was a combination of formal and informal gatherings. The research teams that were studied by Ritchie and Rigano met informally for coffee or drinks and this "appears to have been an important factor in successful research alliances."[40] Now this may all be understood as the performative effect of collaborative research in general, but the interaction that emerges in specific relational approaches, such as focus groups, has also been examined in this regard. Recent research

35 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 246.

36 Iris Saltiel, "Defining Collaborative Partnerships," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 79 (1998): 8.

37 Saltiel, "Defining Collaborative Partnerships," 5.

38 John N. Parker and Edward J. Hackett, "Hot Spots and Hot Moments in Scientific Collaborations and Social Movements," *American Sociological Review* 77, no. 1 (2012): 24.

39 Stephen M. Ritchie and Donna L. Rigano, "Solidarity through Collaborative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 20, no. 2 (2007): 129–150.

40 Ritchie and Rigano, "Solidarity through Collaborative Research," 138.

has a clearer eye for the performative effects of a focus group. The goal is certainly to collect data, but there is more depth to the process of running a focus group. According to James Kneale, they also “allow for supportive encounters.”[41]

In the church, groups are formed in time and space for common tasks, mutual care and sustainable memberships. In this way, the practice of collaborative research groups is likely to support the idiosyncrasies, the inherent characteristics of ecclesial community formation. As part of ecclesial practices, groups and particularly in-depth groups have an effect on ecclesial learning, but they also set things in motion. Ecclesial practices are highly conversational and constantly in-the-making. In church groups, background consensuses that inform people about how to act, believe, or live, what they can rely upon and what they can hope for, are confirmed, criticised, and thereby renewed.[42] The flow of actions is interrupted, and people come to terms with each other. Theologising is always done in community as people exchange beliefs, norms and values, but also stories and experiences. For Stephen Bevans, doing theology is faith seeking understanding *together*.[43] Theology in this view is not a prerogative of the academy. Groups of committed everyday believers use ‘ordinary theology’, to use Jeff Astley’s concept, or ‘espoused theology’, to use Claire Watkins’ term, to understand faith or to design practices in villages in China, in the slums in Latin America, or in megacities in Africa. Community is the source of theologising.[44] Sometimes these conversations take place with a professional practitioner but often they occur without one:

> Theology is best done in the context of a community – when a group of Christians, conscious of their communal nature as human beings and as members of God’s people share with one another, or work at writing together, or reflect on their faith or a Bible passage with one another. This might be in small groups in a base ecclesial community (or a small Christian community as these are called in Africa), or by pastors and their entire pastoral team reflecting on their ministry together in weekly staff meetings, or by professional theologians writing or teaching together.[45]

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41 James Kneale, “Working with Groups,” in *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers: Issues and Debates*, ed. M. Limb and C. Dwyer (London: Hodder Arnold, 2001): 136–150.

42 Henk de Roest, *Communicative Identity: Habermas’ Perspectives of Discourse as a Support for Practical Theology* (Kampen: Kok, 1998): 358ff.

43 Stephen Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (New York: Maryknoll, 2012): 61.

44 Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 81.

45 Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 81.

The process is just as or even more important than the result, which, as we will see, is also characteristic of relational approaches to research. Bevans was often amazed at the results that came from participating in groups in which people expressed their concerns and where a particular solution or expression was perceived as helpful: "Ideas developed that no one of us could have come up with had we worked only by ourselves."[46] Bevans refers to an image used by Rebecca Chopp, reflecting on feminist practices of theological education, in which she compares the process of theologising together with the practice of quilting, making a product together from different pieces of cloth.[47]

Finally, there is also an 'in-depth' dimension to theologising together. Participants may sense God's presence in group conversations, in particular, when they feel listened to, acknowledged, valued, and when emotions are expressed and people console one another, when there are silences in between utterances, and when these silences are listened to. God's presence can also be sensed when a creative communal spirit is felt, when people feel inspired and 'the wind starts to blow'. If, as John Pobee frequently emphasises, God's mission should be understood as building a community of communities,[48] then collaborative practical theology contributes to God's mission because the research process helps to form an emerging community.

4 The Epistemological Rationale

In this section, we focus on knowing reality, on insight. First, there is a very basic epistemological reason for collaboration between researchers and practitioners. Practitioners – and also consultants – often know of certain phenomena long before academics do. Practitioner and consultant knowledge often precede academic knowledge.[49] In addition, the knowledge of the latter can be challenged by the knowledge of the former. Therefore, it does not come as

46 Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 83.

47 Rebecca Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995): 84. Quoted by Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 84.

48 John Pobee, "Good News Turned by Native Hands, Turned by Native Hatchet and Tended with Native Earth – A History of Theological Education in Africa," in *Handbook for Theological Education in Africa*, ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2015): 21.

49 Jean M. Bartunek, "Academic-Practitioner Collaboration Need Not Require Joint or Relevant Research: Towards a Relational Scholarship of Integration," *The Academy of Management Journal* 50, no. 6 (2007): 1328.

a surprise that a report on knowledge exchange activities, based on a research project carried out by the Centre for Business Research (CBR) at the University of Cambridge, demonstrated that for academics in the Arts and Humanities the highest rated motivation for connecting with practitioners is to *gain knowledge* into their research area. Looking at the effects, the impacts on research and teaching, more than two thirds of academics from the Arts and Humanities who engage with societal organisations believe that it has given them *new insights* into their research work. This is similar to other researchers.[50]

Second, and related to the first, there are fundamental questions with regard to the gathering of knowledge. How do we know reality? What does 'knowledge about reality' mean? Collaborative research fits with an epistemological assumption, formulated by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, that reality is "open to a variety of different interpretations"[51] and has a "polyvalent and interpretive nature."[52] There is a real world ("*an-sich* reality") that exists independently of our perceptions – and therefore ontology precedes epistemology – but every experience recorded reveals a different perspective on a particular reality. Our understandings, including understandings based upon empirically confirmed theories, are always constructions. Science provides reliable information on reality but is always relative to a particular framework. Human beings are "tied to their cognitive limits and to an imperfect and conceptual-based knowledge of the world."[53] As I see it, although the distinction between the factual and the conceptual is fuzzy, metaphors, understandings, concepts, models, representations, etc., are maps, not the territory.[54] If we confuse the map with the territory reification takes place: the representation is made more concrete than what is being represented. This resonates with Zoe Bennett's and Chris Rowland's book *In a Glass Darkly*, in which they write that reflection is not mirroring nature but, with 1 Corinthians 13, a matter of seeing 'through a glass darkly', since we are bound to have hidden biases: "We are bound to see and understand partially; it matters to know what the 'parts'

50 Alan Hughes, Michael Kitson, Jocelyn Probert, Anna Bullock and Isobel Milner, *Hidden Connections: Knowledge Exchange between the Arts and Humanities and the Private, Public and Third Sectors* (Swindon, Arts and Humanities Research Council and Centre for Business Research, 2011): 9.

51 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 35.

52 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 36.

53 For all the epistemological complexities see Michelle Marsonet, "On the Ontology/Epistemology Distinction," in *The Map and the Territory: Exploring the Foundations of Science, Thought and Reality*, ed. Shyam Wuppuluri and Francisco Antonio Doria (Springer 2018): 15ff.

54 The expression was first used in 1933 by Alfred Korzybski, a mathematician.

are that we are seeing, and how our way of seeing both reveals and distorts."[55] Clare Watkins states how a focus on conversational practices (we would say 'relational approaches') offers us the insight that "a plurality of particularities is the thing that most adequately describes reality as it is lived and experienced."[56]

In the long run, I would argue that, with regard to truth, we should strive for consensus after consensus. Taken together or taken over time, the cumulative reflections, interpretations, and maps, lead to an approximation of reality, because they are, in a sense, evoked by reality, which continually presents itself. In our view, human beings, the world and God are real, and this 'realness' is taken to exist independently of human experience and human language, both of which make up interpretations of this reality. Therefore, multiple interpretations and conversations between these understandings are both inevitable and legitimate. This includes the way a situation is interpreted by those performing within it.[57] For example, if we speak of revelation, we imply that God's Spirit can touch people's lives. With Andrew Root, "people do have distinct experiences with God that they believe are concrete, lived and real,"[58] and with Gerrit Immink, "the relationship with the divine is constitutive for practices."[59] As we stated earlier, they experience to be addressed.[60] Consequently, the character of the conversation about divine action, the work of the Spirit, demands, first, that in principle no one can be excluded by others from this conversation (!) and second, that it is a *continuing* conversation, as indeed it has been throughout the ages and in different contexts. Everyone who is or has been involved in the practices that may serve as research domains for practical theology can be a possible participant in the conversation about the divine reality that people experience in these practices.

I propose to align this view on reality with the views of American philosophers Charles Peirce and Joshua Royce, as well as with the communication-

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55 Zoe Bennet and Chris Rowland, *In a Glass Darkly: The Bible, Reflection and Everyday Life*, London: SCM, 2016): 3ff.

56 Clare Watkins, "Practicing Ecclesiology: From Product to Process. Developing Ecclesiology as a Non-Correlative Process and Practice through the Theological Action Research Framework of Theology in Four Voices," *Ecclesial Practices* 2, no. 1 (2015): 24.

57 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 35.

58 Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolos: Fortress, 2014), x.

59 Immink, "Theological Analysis of Religious Practices," 127.

60 For the concept of being addressed, one could refer to Bultmann's concept '*Anrede*'. In my inaugural lecture, I focused on this notion of 'being addressed by God', that precedes human action. We could also use the concepts of 'vocation' and 'calling'. Also see above, Elisabeth Hense on Christian spirituality, in the Introduction.

theoretical view of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in the early 1970s. These views question the idea of an all-knowing, all-seeing researcher. In the work of Peirce, we find his famous dictum, written in 1867, that "the real is that which... information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you."[61] The real *presents* itself to me and you in the very moment it offers resistance against or questions an interpretation. If this reality is open, in principle, to an infinite number of interpretations, the process of knowing reality demands a community: "The very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a community without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge."[62] The idea that knowing reality is an open process has in my view a number of implications. First, researchers need to communicate in public with other researchers. Second, the individual researcher needs to submit his or her interpretations to the community of peers. Third, research is preferably conducted in collaboration with stakeholders and by an interdisciplinary team. Fourth, the researcher should at all times be open to new research on the same topic by a new team of researchers. Research should be reproducible to prevent strategies, policies and therapies from being based on research results that have not been substantiated by later research. Non-reproducible research obstructs academic progress.[63] As I see it, the first requirement can be met if researchers cite other researchers in their scientific papers. They build their arguments by referring to the research community. The second requirement can be met through peer reviews, in journals and in academic committees. The third requirement is increasingly being met in many disciplines, but not often in practical theology, hence the present book. The fourth requirement calls for extensive information about the different steps of the research method and well-argued choices from the researchers. If these conditions are met, research may be replicable.

Peirce's conception of the process of knowing as infinite in character is striking from a theological perspective and reminiscent of Christian eschatology in the sense that we can only know in the long run. After Peirce, others have also seen connections between the scientific community and biblical notions of community. Harvard scholar Josiah Royce, for example, explains in his 1913 Oxford lectures how the scientific community should be conceptualised

61 Charles Peirce, *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition, vol. 2, 1867–1871* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984): 239.

62 Charles S. Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," in *The Essential Peirce, vol. 1* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992): 52.

63 KNAW, *Replication Studies: Advisory Report*, 2018.

as a "community of interpretation,"[64] how humanity needs such communities of interpretation and how the "will to interpret" should inspire every student of the humanities. Royce compares the community of interpretation with the Pauline community, in part because this community demands a certain loyalty, but also because the members of this community are "truth-loving."[65] Like the Pauline community, the community of interpretation is edified by its members through "the charity of mutual interpretation."[66] I would add that both the scientific and the Pauline community are aware that our current knowledge is fragmentary, while in the end we will know as we are known… (1 Corinthians 13, 12).

In the late 1960s, German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas switched from epistemology to communication theory, but he did not leave the epistemological questions behind. In 1971, he states that a theory of society that is meant to describe, understand and criticise certain practices ("a theory with a practical intention")[67] should not only be tested in social-scientific discourses but also by the subjects of these practices. He writes that "a theory cannot be withdrawn from confirmation by the agreement of those whom it is to aid."[68] Theory is never an unassailable objective authority on a specific reality. In 'enlightenment processes' (in which people are told that this is a description of what is going on in their practices, why they act this way and why they should act in another way), all who are potentially involved should have the opportunity to either accept or reject the descriptions, explanations, and prescriptions that are offered. As Habermas famously puts it in the introduction to a later edition of his book, *Theory and Practice*, "In a process of enlightenment there can only be participants."[69]

We conclude this section by asking whether the professional's competence and scientific analysis of a problem, presented to the community of peer-researchers, gives her an epistemological advantage? Van der Ven refers to Karl Popper, by stating that an "ideology-critical social analysis" can only be accomplished by a community of scientists, not by an individual intellectual: "Only collectively, through their method of mutual criticism and public testing of research findings, can they reveal, step by step, the ideological aspects of

64 Josiah Royce, *The Real World and the Christian Ideas, vol. 2 of The Problem of Christianity* (New York: MacMillan 1913): 329.
65 Royce, *The Real World and the Christian Ideas*, 253.
66 Royce, *The Real World and the Christian Ideas*, 253.
67 Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973): 1.
68 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 34.
69 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 40.

knowledge in the scientific forum on the basis of 'friendly-hostile cooperation'. This scientific forum consists in institutions such as the laboratory, workshops, scientific periodicals, seminars, conferences and congresses."[70] Does this not make it even more probable that the practitioners and the researcher will differ in their descriptions and explanations of the problem? Here we encounter an interesting situation. Earlier we stated, with Jaco Dreyer, that truth cannot be established only "from participating in the lifeworlds of the research participants"[71] and that behind practitioners' backs systemic mechanisms can operate that are difficult to see from a lifeworld perspective. By searching for correlations, researchers can disclose patterns, influences and may even suggest causal explanations. They refer to social-scientific theories and, as practical theologians, also to theology. My preliminary response to this question is that it will be the researcher's responsibility to understand, and if possible to provide a convincing explanation for, a possible dissensus between the researcher and the practitioners in their observations and interpretations. Both this understanding and explanation have to be discussed with the practitioners. In the end, they will have to say 'yes' or 'no', both to the concepts, understandings and explanations of the research and to the understanding and explanation of possible disagreements. The research should serve them in their practices. We will return to this issue and relate it to asymmetry and power, but also to trust and authority, in Chapter 8.

5 The Innovation and Professionalisation Rationale

Measuring the effects of collaborative research and whether or not it is satisfactory is still in its infancy, particularly in relation to participatory research in *transdisciplinary* teams in different sciences. Still, there is already a lot that can be learned. As regards practitioners, in general, empirical research highlights that when professionals are actively engaged in a network it provides them with new knowledge. For example, case studies of farmers show that participation in farmers' networks gives them knowledge about new marketing outlets and how to reduce the use of inputs, "which reduces dependence

70 Van der Ven, "An Empirical or a Normative Approach," 9. Also see below, Chapter 8, "Good Reasons for the Ivory Tower."

71 Jaco S. Dreyer, "Establishing Truth from Participation and Distanciation in Empirical Theology," in *Empirical Theology in Texts and Tables: Qualitative, Quantitative and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins and Jeff Astley (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 23.

and increases autonomy and resilience."[72] If farmers map out alternative development pathways, for example, by diversifying their production instead of intensifying and specialising it, relying on informal farmers' knowledge networks benefits them extremely. Collaborative networks are a pre-condition for innovation transfer and success.[73] Indeed, collaboration among farmers, sharing knowledge and creating alliances, can alter the modernisation paradigm based on specialisation and intensification, with its negative consequences for the environment.

Apart from innovation, collaborative research also meets the demand for professionalisation. Based on research in the field of education we know that when teachers are enrolled in professional development courses, they learn best from other teachers.[74] In fact, many examples of collaborative research come from the practice of teachers. Teacher communities or professional learning communities (PLC) help teachers to develop a vision for their practice and understand their teaching methods better, and provide them with opportunities and tools to apply this knowledge.[75] In an action research project in the Netherlands that involved 35 teachers, collaborating in the research group was perceived as a strategy to "make their work more professional."[76] The project was geared to their teaching practice and they gathered the information themselves.[77] During the research period, teachers were asked to write down their experiences in a logbook, in order to be able to assess their

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72 Kees de Roest, Paolo Ferrari and Karlheinz Knickel, "Specialisation and Economies of Scale or Diversification and Economies of Scope? Assessing Different Agricultural Development Pathways," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 59 (2018): 230.

73 De Roest, Ferrari and Knickel, "Specialisation and Economies of Scale or Diversification and Economies of Scope?" 222.

74 Already in 1994, based upon his research, Mike McHargue argued in favour of networks of teachers. See Mike McHargue, "Enhancing Academic Leadership through Local & Regional Retreat: Adapting the "Great Teachers" Model for Chairs and Deans" (ERIC Document Reproduction ED 394562), quoted by Sidney N. Mitchell, Rosemary C. Reilly and Mary Ellin Logue, "Benefits of Collaborative Action Research for the Beginning Teacher," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 25, no. 2 (2009): 345.

75 Karen Hammerness, Linda Darling-Hammond and John Bransford, with David Berliner, Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Morva McDonald, Kenneth Zeichner, "How Teachers Learn and Develop," in *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do*, ed. Linda Darling-Hammond and John Bransford (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005): 358–389. On Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Professional Research Communities (PRC) see below, Chapter 7.

76 Petra Ponte, Jan Ax, Douwe Bijaard and Theo Wubbels, "Teachers' Development of Professional Knowledge through Action Research and the Facilitation of This by Teacher Educators," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 20, no. 6 (2004): 571.

77 Ponte et al., "Teachers' Development of Professional Knowledge," 572.

progress. The logbooks proved to be a useful instrument. In each logbook the teachers answered questions such as: What did I contribute to this meeting? What did I hope to achieve for myself and what did I actually achieve? The researchers functioned as critical friends. Importantly for future collaborative research, the teachers who took part in the program had little or no previous experience of action research. The idea was that teachers would master action research through being part of it, discussing their practice as they carried out the research.[78] At a later stage, teachers explored what their underlying assumptions were and how these assumptions 'function' in their relationship with school leadership, students and their parents. They learned to assess their assumptions about a situation or their actions and to find out if their actions had the outcome they intended. Teachers were able to interpret the facts that they gathered about a situation that needed to be changed and to understand and explain why they needed to make changes in their behaviour towards their students, colleagues or others, as well as if and why changing this behaviour would be an improvement and for whom the change would be an improvement. They also learned dialogical skills for involving students, colleagues and others in planning and evaluating their activities.

Interestingly, in this project the research practices proved to be effective when they were supported by a facilitator. He or she helped and guided the discussion and provided information about the research process. The facilitators also had little or no experience. They learned action research in practice and also by discussing their experiences with other facilitators. Their role in the meetings was to encourage the teachers to develop their own interpretations and solutions. They stimulated the mutual interaction and feedback and were "continually translating the teachers' questions and comments about content into questions as to how action research can be used to tackle these issues."[79] As a result of the project, the researchers state that collaborative research groups should always be accompanied, preferably by a practitioner from the same profession as the practitioners in the research groups.

Now the question is whether teachers can be likened to religious professionals? Does a theology of ministry, or the focus on spirituality, perhaps impose constraints to professionalisation? In his research on the professionalisation of the ministry in the Catholic church, Hans Schilderman points out that professionalisation as such does not consist in promoting expertise.[80] Rein Brouwer demonstrated that Protestant pastors see professionalisation as a process by

78 Ponte et al., "Teachers' Development of Professional Knowledge," 577.
79 Ponte et al., "Teachers' Development of Professional Knowledge," 578.
80 Hans Schilderman, *Religion as a Profession* (Leiden: Brill, 2005): 13.

which the ministry is beginning to look more and more like other helping professions, and that pastors evaluate this development with ambivalence.[81] Schilderman defines professionalisation as a "strategic policy adopted by an occupational group to look after diverse professional interests."[82] In this definition I highlight the notion of an 'occupational group', that is, there is a collective dimension involved. We are referring to a process involving a group of professionals. In addition, while enhancing expertise may not coincide with professionalisation, it is one of the goals connected with it. In line with his definition of professionalisation, Schilderman lists the following five goals: enhancement of expertise, utility value orientation, exchange value orientation, interest protection, and collective empowerment. The last goal, as I apply it here, could underline the importance of collaboration, collective learning and, as we will see, the formation of professional learning and research communities. It is in line with what Schilderman calls a communitarian theology of ministry: "Communitarian theology of ministry legitimises all professionalisation goals. The legitimacy of developing professional pastoral work lies in the religious service rendered to the community."[83] Diverse professional interests, I suggest, are promoted by doing research in and with a community of practice that discusses and shares specific norms and values and that shares a common spirituality.

6 The Postcolonial Rationale

Following decolonisation, Frantz Fanon coined the well-known concept of the 'colonised mind'. The psychological hegemony of the former coloniser continues to exert what Ghivatri Spivak calls 'epistemic violence' on those formerly colonised.[84] Western researchers find that trust is difficult to gain. It could even be a problem for this book if it is used in Africa, Latin America or Asia. Suspicion of Western researchers and their research methods is not only common among 'subaltern' people but also in Western societies. This suspicion is even more understandable if a researcher takes a non-relational approach.

81 Rein Brouwer, *Pastor tussen macht en onmacht. Een studie naar de professionalisering van het hervormde predikantschap* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1995).

82 Schilderman, *Religion as a Profession*, 27f.

83 Schilderman, *Religion as a Profession*, 247.

84 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271–313.

In the judgement of some qualitative methodologists, this would be a "neo-colonial proposition,"[85] leading to deficient theorising. In this respect, one's choice of methodology is seen as a political act. Involving the voices of the researched or, even better, enabling them in one or more phases of the research to be co-researcher, may reduce suspicion on the one hand, and honour the knowledge and skills of the co-researchers on the other hand.

Although establishing trust may already be a convincing rationale, another important aspect of a postcolonial methodology is, with Pranee Liamputtong following Cynthia Dillard, its potential to be a 'healing methodology'. Liamputtong unpacks the methodological implications of the "principle of *primum non nocere* (first do not harm)" as an accepted ethical standard in all research disciplines.[86] The concept of 'healing methodology' was coined by Cynthia Dillard, who used this methodology in her work with indigenous and African women.[87] It characterised such principles as love ("looking and listening deeply"), embracing compassion, and reciprocity.

> We must fundamentally transform what research is and whose knowledge and methodologies we privilege and engage.… . In this spirit, there must be a 'letting go' of knowledge, beliefs, and practices that dishonor the indigenous spiritual understandings that are present in African ascendant scholars, given our preparation and training in predominately Western, male, patriarchal, capitalist knowledge spaces and the manner in which our spiritual understandings are negated, marginalized, and degraded.[88]

According to pastoral theologian Melinda McGarrah Sharp, reflecting on postcolonial methodology, the researcher should not "merely attend" the marginal – or for that matter people who are wounded, abused,[89] or damaged –

85 Margaret Kovach, "Doing Indigenous Methodologies: A Letter to a Research Class," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2017): 215.

86 Pranee Liamputtong, *Performing Qualitative Cross-Cultural Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 37ff.

87 Cynthia B. Dillard, "When the Ground is Black, the Ground is Fertile: Exploring Endarkened Feminist Epistemology and Healing Methodologies in the Spirit," in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, ed. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln and L. T. Smith (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008): 286.

88 Dillard, "When the Ground is Black," 286.

89 See Chapter 8 on the methodology of Christiane van den Berg-Seifert's PhD project on sexual boundary trespassing in pastoral care and the relational dynamics in the congregation in the aftermath.

since "even this kind of attention is lodged in colonizing hierarchies," but *de-centre* the traditional research position from the centre to a more participatory position.[90] Here we learn from Christian Scharen who, following Pierre Bourdieu, considers the act of interviewing as offering someone a platform, or a public voice, with which he or she can receive or reclaim dignity.

> Bourdieu begins by setting side-by-side the unwillingness to abide social injustice and violence and – because of our formation in the very same social structures of inequality and violence – the difficulty of understanding the suffering of others without repeating the indignity and harm they have suffered, but rather opening space for potential change, of amelioration of the suffering. Therefore, the struggle to find a way forward practically, on the ground, with a diversity of social situations, means to practice interviewing for the sake of understanding, yes, but also respecting the dignity of, and making space in which to give voice to, the experience of the suffering one.[91]

Research on the experience of vulnerable participants such as recently bereaved parents, parents caring for sick children, people who are dying, or women experiencing posttraumatic stress syndrome after child-birth, demonstrates that participation turns out to be painful but also "beneficially cathartic and empowering, giving participants an opportunity to feel cared for, make sense of their experiences, and affirm their identities."[92]

A postcolonial rationale should colour the process of the research. Today, the counter-colonial voices of indigenous peoples are well-articulated in

90 Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp, "Globalization, Colonialism, and Postcolonialism," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2012): 428. See also Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Pastoral Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013); Erica Meijers, "The End of The Colonial Mindset: Apartheid as Challenge for the Protestant Churches in the Netherlands," in *Globalisierung der Kirchen. Der Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen und die Entdeckung der Dritten Welt in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, ed. Annegreth Schilling and Katarina Kunter (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014): 313–333.

91 Christian Scharen, "Interviewing Interpreted as Spiritual Exercise and Social Protest," *Ecclesial Practices* 4, no. 2 (2017): 235f.

92 Stacy M. Carter, Christopher F. C. Jordens, Catherine McGrath, Miles Little, "You Have to Make Something of All That Rubbish, Do You? An Empirical Investigation of the Social Process of Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Health Research* 18, no. 9 (2008): 1265. On healing methodology and the experience of being interviewed, see also Chapter 8, with an extensive description of the research by Christiane van den Berg-Seifert on boundary transgression in pastoral relationships.

methods literature.[93] Relational approaches, however, take a significant step forward. According to Ruth Nichols, doing research with Aboriginal communities, the knowledge and the values of indigenous communities need to be acknowledged. She writes how "indigenous epistemologies and axiologies can inform the undertaking of participatory and collaborative research."[94] Nichols reminds the research community that "the genesis of collaborative, participatory research was to destabilize the control of professionals and experts in their creation of knowledge about 'Others'."[95] She adds that research should not have the aim of empowering the researched, but that a relational approach articulates a self-determined epistemology, rather than one which is controlled by an outsider. Empowerment cannot be stimulated from outside, "it must be subjective and emergent from within 'a participatory mode of consciousness'."[96] This last term stems from an article by Lous Heshusius on educational research. Heshusius writes: "An inner desire to let go of perceived boundaries that constitute 'self' – and that construct the perception of distance between self and other – must be present before a participatory mode of consciousness can be present."[97]

Often, solo researchers extract information from indigenous communities, operating with what Russel Bishop calls a non-interrogated Western gaze. Margaret Kovach insists that interrogating the Western gaze is imperative if there is to be any hope for decolonising research.[98] In one way, this interrogation can take the form of self-interrogation. *Self-reflexivity* asks the researchers to identify what hidden assumptions underpin the research, what their identity and location is and how this may lead to biases in observations and descriptions. Nichols writes that "the researcher must be aware of the context of power and privilege in the research process, of what ideas were included and what ideas were excluded according to pre-determined elements brought by the skills or strengths of the researcher."[99] Self-reflexivity in collaborative research may, however, obscure the fact that the researcher still wants to be

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93 According to Ruth Nicholls, this is due to the influence of the seminal work by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999). Ruth Nicholls, "Research and Indigenous Participation: Critical Reflexive Methods," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 12, no. 2 (2009): 117.

94 Nicholls, "Research and Indigenous Participation," 120.

95 Nicholls, "Research and Indigenous Participation," 120.

96 Nicholls, "Research and Indigenous Participation," 119.

97 Lous Heshusius, "Freeing Ourselves from Objectivity: Managing Subjectivity or Turning Toward a Participatory Mode of Consciousness?" *Educational Researcher* 23, no. 3 (1994): 16.

98 Margaret Kovach, "Doing Indigenous Methodologies," 216ff.

99 Nicholls, "Research and Indigenous Participation," 122.

in charge and is possibly not enough to decolonise research. Nichols adds that *inter-personal reflexivity* is also needed.[100] This demands that the development of interpersonal encounters during the research process is evaluated collaboratively. Is the researcher, not only in her own perception but also in the perception of the co-researchers, able to collaborate (as opposed to lead, delegate or control)? With a postcolonial perspective in mind, in the third layer of reflexivity, *collective reflexivity*, the character of the participation is examined.[101] Who participated and when did they participate and why did others refrain from participation? Why did someone disengage from the research process?[102] How did collaboration determine the different phases of the inquiry? How did participants experience the interviews? Interviews can be a moment in which someone's suffering is witnessed and as such, the interview can turn out to be helpful. In this case, someone may want to stay involved in the research process. Nichols writes that "this layer of reflexivity calls for discussion amongst collaborating participants about the effects of taking part in research, to reflect together about whether participating was transformative, affirming, cathartic or empowering."[103] I would also ask whether they felt that their knowledge system received recognition and was valued.

An excellent example of the importance of reflexivity in practical theology can be found in a research project on refugees in a Danish urban congregation, as conducted by Gitte Buch-Hansen, Kirsten Donskov Felter and Marlene Ringgaard-Lorensen. They found, to their astonishment, how their cultural situatedness made them biased, but also that "a triangulated ethnographic approach (…) facilitates the scholarly reflexivity." The refugees, with their own understandings, revealed the biased perspectives of the scholars, but due to their use of different methods and due to their expertise in the Christian faith and tradition, the three scholars were not "completely blind."[104]

7 The Utility Rationale

What are the goals of academic practical theological research and what does this imply for the research strategy one should choose? Following Theo

100 Nicholls, "Research and Indigenous Participation," 122.
101 Nicholls, "Research and Indigenous Participation," 123.
102 We will return to the freedom of exiting the research in Chapter 8.
103 Nichols, "Research and Indigenous Participation," 123.
104 Gitte Buch-Hansen, Kirsten Donskov Felter, Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, "Ethnographic Ecclesiology and the Challenges of Scholarly Situatedness," *Open Theology*, no. 1 (2015): 223, 227. DOI: 10.1515/opth-2015-0009.

Kuipers, a philosopher of science, Chris Hermans and Kobus Schoeman helpfully distinguish between four goals of practical theological research programs, focusing on different types of knowledge, namely *descriptions*, *explanations*, *designs* and *concepts*.[105] If we take the first two together, in one specific research project one may need to observe, conduct interviews, etc., in order to describe specific practices, for example, “the practices of rural churches and their meaning for the liveability of the countryside,”[106] or “the practice of preaching in the time of lent,”[107] or “the role of small groups of adolescents in the practice of youth ministry.”[108] These descriptions can also be understood or even explained by different theories. According to Hermans and Schoeman, the third possible goal of a research program, intervention or design, involves “the development of knowledge on interventions (in terms of the improvement of a certain practice) or from interventions (in terms of the construction of a certain practice).”[109] Hermans and Schoeman observe that in the social sciences there are currently more research projects that focus on description and explanation than on intervention and design. Finally, with Kuipers, Hermans and Schoeman name the explication of concepts as a possible goal of a practical theological research program. In this case, the research aims at the construction of simple, precise and useful concepts or, if necessary, the explication of judgments.

The authors challenge the supposed consensus in practical theology, formulated by Rick Osmer, Don Browning, and many others, that all practical theological research contributes to solving practical problems. In my view this consensus entails that both the context of discovery and the context of application are practices. Practical theology therefore moves from practices to theory construction and back to practices again. Hermans and Schoeman propose to broaden the perspective and the scope of practical theological research strategies.

But what is a research strategy? Here Hermans and Schoeman follow Piet Verschuren.[110] A research strategy includes the methods of research (how

105 Christiaan A. M. (Chris) Hermans and Willem Jakobus (Kobus) Schoeman, “The Utility of Practical Theology: Mapping the Domain, Goals, Strategies and Criteria of Practical Theological Research,” *Acta Theologica* 35, suppl. 22 (2015): 15.

106 Gelderloos-Commandeur, *Meaningful in the Margins*.

107 André Verweij, *Positioning Jesus’ Suffering: A Grounded Theory of Lenten Preaching in Local Parishes* (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University; Delft: Eburon, 2014).

108 Van Wijnen, *Faith in Small Groups of Adolescents*, 104ff.

109 Hermans and Schoeman, “The Utility of Practical Theology,” 16.

110 J. M. (Piet) Verschuren, “Why a Methodology for Practice-oriented Research is a Necessary Heresy” (Farewell speech, Radboud University, Nijmegen, 4 September, 2009): 30, accessed April 27, 2018, http://repository.ubn.ru.nl/bitstream/2066/74868/1/74868.pdf.

the data will be collected and analysed), but also decisions as to whether the research is more theory oriented or more practice oriented, about the depth or width of the research, the number of research units, etc. A research strategy can involve gathering quantitative or qualitative data,[111] or a combination thereof. Within quantitative research, for example, by using surveys, one may focus on establishing correlations, associations between phenomena, or one may want to conduct an experiment, to see if an independent variable influences another dependent variable. Within qualitative research, following Verschuren, Hermans and Schoeman distinguish three types of research. The first type is driven by empirical data rather than by assumptions derived from theory, examples of which are grounded-theory, ethnographic research and narrative research. The second type follows a theory-driven approach, examples of which are comparative case-study and qualitative survey. The third type is practice-oriented or design research, in which the start of the research is an intervention (or action) problem.[112] With Verschuren, the authors also distinguish two research strategies that are *not* data-driven: knowledge-based research, in which the input is knowledge that exists in literature and/or in the heads of experts, and reflective research, in which knowledge is produced by the reflective capacity of the researcher.[113] An example of knowledge-based research is a PhD project being conducted by Joyce Rondaij at the PThU, in which she examines the artistic literary works of Italian author Primo Levi, an Auschwitz survivor. The aim of her research is to both question concepts and search for new images to speak about humanity and God.[114] Another example is PhD project being conducted by Gerrit van Meijeren at the PThU on the life and work of the practical theologian Ted van Gennep, focusing on the concept of practical theology as 'strolling around' in culture, particularly in artistic literature, to get to know the world of the listener, the receiver of the gospel. In this project hermeneutical questions and dilemmas in communicating the gospel in modern culture are at the forefront.

In light of these different types of research, what strategy should be chosen for practical theological research? Hermans' and Schoeman's answer is both relatively simple and helpful: research strategies are often "related to the preferences of the researcher" and "should be chosen in view of the goal of the

111 Hermans and Schoeman, "The Utility of Practical Theology," 17.

112 Hermans and Schoeman, "The Utility of Practical Theology," 19.

113 Hermans and Schoeman, "The Utility of Practical Theology," 19.

114 See Joyce Rondaij, "Reading Primo Levi on 'hybridity' in the Context of South Africa: Moving towards Humanizing Descriptions of the Other," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, forthcoming.

research question."[115] For example, a research strategy that seeks to establish correlations produces descriptive and explanatory knowledge, while grounded theory or ethnographic research are strong in offering descriptions and weak in explanation. The authors write that practical theological research strategies may serve different goals.[116] Their analysis demonstrates that "not every type of research strategy meets the demands of practical relevance or utility."[117] Some are "weak in fulfilling demands of utility,"[118] in particular, because they do not "involve practitioners in a learning process that helps them change."[119] Surprisingly, however, in their answer, as in the aforementioned debate in sociology, collaborative research strategies are conspicuous by their absence. While involving practitioners in a learning process is mentioned as an important criterion of utility, Hermans and Schoeman do not elaborate this further. In the present book, we advocate the use of collaborative research strategies, not only if the goal of a research program is providing designs and interventions, but also if the goal is description and/or explanation. Although we agree that *not all* practical theological research is directly practice-oriented, I argue that collaboration with practitioners *always* enhances the utility of practical theology. In addition, even theory-driven research or concept-explicating (and concept-questioning) research can be "use-inspired,"[120] to borrow Donald Stokes' phrase.

Hermans' and Schoeman's elaboration of the goals of practical theological research is helpful, but remains rather formal, that is, applicable to empirical research in other disciplines as well. As mentioned in Part 1, we follow Anthony Reddie, John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, the latter following Denise Ackermann and Riet Bons-Storm, in describing the goal of academic practical theology as *enabling faithful living and authentic Christian practice* or, in theological terms, "enabling faithful and authentic participation in God's redemptive, liberating and empowering practices," in short, participation in the mission of God's kingdom, the mission of the triune God.[121] The *domain* of reflection is distinct Christian practices as they interact with everyday practices, but the *goal* articulates the relationship with the gospel as a 'given' and as a 'continuing' story. These are practices in which, with Christian Grethlein, the

115 Hermans and Schoeman, "The Utility of Practical Theology," 16.
116 Hermans and Schoeman, "The Utility of Practical Theology," 19.
117 Hermans and Schoeman, "The Utility of Practical Theology," 12.
118 Hermans and Schoeman, "The Utility of Practical Theology," 21.
119 Hermans and Schoeman, "The Utility of Practical Theology," 21.
120 Donald Stokes, *Pasteur's Quadrant: Basic Science and Technological Innovation* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997).
121 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 9.

gospel is communicated and mediated. As we observed in Chapter 4, these practices cannot be conceived without a theological dimension. Swinton and Mowat even write that Christian practices "emerge from reflection on and interpretations of the nature and purposes of the practices of God in history."[122] In these practices, the participants are participating, with Duncan Forrester, in the "communicative practices of Jesus,"[123] or, in a wider sense, in God's redemptive actions: "The discipline of Practical Theology emerges as a response to and recognition of the redemptive actions of God-in-the-world and the human experience that emerges in response to those actions."[124] Jan-Olav Henriksen speaks about the Jesus story as a reservoir of meanings that helps Christians to understand what they are doing, and inspires and motivates them in their actions. The story of Jesus has an *orientating* function and may, as the history of Christianity demonstrates, also lead to a *transformation* of practices: "The Jesus story is the semiotic reservoir that enables Christians to understand their own lives and practices as distinctly Christian."[125]

The goals of practical theological research strategies are *both practice-oriented* and *theory-driven* since they seek to describe, understand or even explain these clusters of Christian practices. Being practice-oriented, practical theology is, with John Reader, "committed to engaging with real problems, often from a grass-roots perspective."[126] Reader also writes that practical theology may "examine theories and assumptions that underlie current forms of practice as well as contribute to the development and reshaping of new theories."[127] Nevertheless, in this formulation practical theology does not have to be *directly* practice-oriented, because examining theories and assumptions can also mean examining *doctrines* and *theologies*. These doctrines and theologies ground a specific practice, examples being a homiletic practice that can be inspired by a soteriological belief, missional practices that may be grounded by missional theology, a diaconal practice by a Christological belief, and the practices of a 'green church' by a theology of creation. Examining these doctrines and theologies, comparing them to other beliefs, and evaluating them, also in the light of practices, can contribute to a revision of these theologies. The analysis of experiences and practices can lead to revision too. An example

122 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 22.
123 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 22.
124 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 11.
125 Henriksen, *Christianity as Distinct Practices*, 92f.
126 John Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology: The Impact of Globalization* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008): 7.
127 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 25.

is a PhD project by Fokke Wouda at Tilburg University on eucharistic hospitality.[128] Wouda re-thinks this much-debated and emotionally charged theological topic from surprising openings in eucharistic theology and canonical law, but also by analysing some specific ecclesial practices and experiences, particularly in some ecumenical monastic communities (namely Communauté de Taizé in France and Monastero di Bose in Italy). In this practical theological project, the goal is explicitly stated as being to *revise* theology, but this revised theology can be *utilised* to ground a renewal of practices. Another example of reviewing theology in order to transform practices is the research by Reijer de Vries at the PThU who examines the semantic potential of the views of Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, Jacob Spener and Diettrich Bonhoeffer on mutual pastoral care, in which pastoral care is understood as a task of the faith community.[129] De Vries argues that "clarifying of the historical background of mutual pastoral care in its diverse forms can help congregations and caregivers to develop their own contemporary and dynamic concept."[130] Academic practical theological research strategies may also question, criticise and explicate God-talk, images of God and humanity as they are used in Christian practices and in the theologies that ground them. So, the goal of revising, renewing or transforming Christian practices does not always have to be explicitly stated in each research project for it to have utility. Some strategies serve a specific goal better than others, but all these goals, I argue, are better realised and will be easier to disseminate or implement *in collaboration with* practitioners than without them. If enabling faithful and authentic participation in the mission of God's kingdom, is the goal of practical theology, then its utility is enhanced if professional practitioners and everyday believers are engaged *in* practical theology – either conducting it themselves or together with researchers and/or students. The "scholarship of integration,"[131] as I envision it in the approaches

128 Fokke Wouda, "Eucharistische gastvrijheid: (on)mogelijk voor de Rooms-katholieke kerk?" in *Rond de tafel. Maaltijd vieren in liturgische context*, ed. Mirella Klomp, Peter-Ben Smit and Iris Speckmann (Heeswijk: Berne Media/Uitgeverij, 2018): 175ff. See also: Fokke Wouda, "Eucharistic Hospitality: From Pastoral Question to Ecumenical Quest. A response to the German Kommuniondebatte," Catholica. Vierteljahresschrift für Ökumenische Theologie 72, no. 4 (2018): 246–262.

129 Reijer de Vries, "Models of Mutual Pastoral Care in the Footsteps of Martin Luther," *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion*, 72, no. 1 (2018): 41ff.

130 De Vries, "Models of Mutual Pastoral Care," 43.

131 Bartunek, "Academic-Practitioner Collaboration," 1323ff. The expression 'scholarship of integration' was first coined by Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities at the Professorate* (Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).

described in the next chapter, can be sketched as a cyclical dynamic. Through this dynamic the knowledge and the skills of practitioners (both professionals and everyday believers) in religious practices are improved, the knowledge and skills of the community of consultants are improved and the knowledge of academic practical theologians is improved. Practitioners learn from each other, from consultants and from the theoretical insights developed by researchers. Consultants learn from each other, from practitioners and from academic practical theologians. Finally, researchers learn from each other, from consultants and from practitioners.

Yet there is also a fourth 'party', because, looking at the utility rationale and the goal of practical theology we also propose for *theological education* to be informed by and benefit from research. Academic practical theologians may be reporting back on their findings to students at all levels. In a more general sense, as Reva Berman Brown writes, the linkage between research and teaching in a university or seminary is already there to some extent: "Almost everything that is taught in the undergraduate curriculum is a product of somebody's prior research and its publication."[132] But she also states that over the past sixty to seventy years this link has become stronger and today many would agree that research, including one's personal research, should underpin one's teaching. Often proponents of the linkage state that research enhances the quality of the teaching, although this effect turns out to be very difficult to measure.[133] In addition, good teaching does *not necessarily* presuppose good research. Still, in practical theological education, teacher-researchers may learn from the feedback given by their students and vice versa if they introduce research projects into their teaching. Furthermore, I would suggest that there are also possibilities for actually *conducting research in a class setting*, by interviewing practitioners, holding focus groups, having an expert panel, etc. In a session of two hours, I learned that it is relatively easy to invite practitioners and facilitate a focus group, with an inner circle of practitioners and an outer circle of observing students. Next, both graduate and undergraduate students in a theological seminary, faculty or divinity school can learn to conduct empirical research with professional practitioners and with everyday believers. Supervising a student can in this case be defined as both teaching (if we regard teaching, as in Chapter 2, as a form of knowledge transfer) and research (it involves knowledge acquisition). Today, in master's courses and even bachelor's courses in theology, it is becoming increasingly

132 Reva Berman Brown, "Why Link Personal Research and Teaching?" *Education and Training* 47, no. 6 (2005): 394, https://doi.org/10.1108/00400910510617024.
133 Berman Brown, "Why Link Personal Research and Teaching," 400.

common for students to do empirical research. This will encourage them to conduct research in their later profession, preferrably with colleagues in professional research communities.

8 Conclusion

A 'relational turn' or 'turn to the community' will enable the valorisation of academic practical theology right from the start of a research project. In the following chapter, after an introduction, I will provide an example of collaborative research, a description of some characteristic features of relational approaches and an inventory of a wide range of relational, collaborative approaches. In this chapter, putting the six rationales in reverse order, we have seen how by such research strategies, the utility of practical theology for practitioners and everyday believers can be improved. We have described how, from a postcolonial perspective, a relational methodology can be a 'healing methodology' and how it can provide an incentive for three layers of reflexivity: self-reflexivity, relational reflexivity and the 'reflexivity of participation'. I have elaborated, with Peirce, Royce and Habermas, on the epistemological rationale, which entails that we need the others for knowing reality. The professionalisation rationale, focusing on teacher communities, can be seen as a prelude to what I will describe in the next chapter, when I discuss the creation of long-term professional learning communities and research communities, in which different forms of collaborative research strategies can be used. Finally, I reflected on both the emerging community rationale and the *Missio Dei* rationale by referring to the Trinity and the mission of God. Ultimately, all forms of collaborative practical theology, including its academic manifestations, are part of the communion of the triune God.

CHAPTER 7

Doing Research in Community

A Multiplicity of Collaborative Research Practices

1 Introduction

In 1998, a survey in cancer research found that patients and carers felt that research "often supported the interests of clinicians and academics more than the communities being researched."[1] Twenty years later, significant progress has been made in this area. Patients are increasingly involved in the process of setting research agendas and their perspectives are valued. If someone were to ask the same questions of practical theological research today, then the need to include the communities being researched would be urgent. Over the last ten years these communities have been included more and more in practical theological research, but this is not the rule. Today we can observe a wide variety of collaborative research practices mushrooming across a broad range of academic disciplines. In this chapter, we provide an inventory of these research approaches and methods.

The nature of a problem should dictate the choice of a strategy.[2] We should choose the strategy that our questions require. Clarity about the purpose of a project thus informs the decision about the research strategy and the methods.[3] Yet, what guides the decision will also be informed by the amount of time available to the researcher, their personal preferences and acquired competences, and of course by the needs and agendas of the practitioners. Then a key aim to bring about critical awareness and change in a practice differs from exploring a naturally occurring situation in order to understand what is going on. Methodological frameworks provide reflections on and justifications for strategies and methods,[4] but the aforementioned agendas and aims are not

1 See Susan Jenks, "The Public Applauds Cancer Research but Not How Research Priorities Are Set," *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 89, no. 5 (1997): 350–351.

2 Jerry Wellington and Marcin Szczerbinski, *Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (London: Continuum, 2007): 20.

3 Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008): 48.

4 Heimbrock helpfully defines *method* as "a process of concrete steps to do research, to collect data, and to draw conclusions from that data. Methods are standardised ways to do research, independent of the research objects themselves, and they involve skills and procedures that

always explicitly named. One should not only ask what is being done when one method or approach or another is adopted, but also what is governing the research underneath the surface. One should also be aware that practical difficulties and intractable conflicts can emerge and that what is found can call for new and different methods.

Following Martyn Denscombe, it is important to distinguish between a research strategy (i.e. a plan of action designed to achieve a specific goal) and a research method (i.e. a tool for data collection).[5] Denscombe writes that "social researchers can use a range of methods with any given strategy."[6] Common qualitative *research strategies* in practical theology, in which the researcher operates on his or her own or in a team, have included, to name some examples, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry and case study research.[7] Common *methods* for data collection in practical theology, in which a researcher may operate on his or her own too, have included, to name some examples, semi-structured interviewing, in-depth interviewing and participant observation. Now, the rationales for collaborative research are quite convincing, as we have seen, and over the past two decades there has been increasing support for community-academy research partnerships. Although traditional methods of research driven by researchers, and widely supported by institutions of higher education and mainstream funding mechanisms, continue to be the norm in the social sciences and the humanities,[8] new collaborative research practices emerge every year.

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can be learned." Heimbrock defines *methodology* as "the inquiry that explains research interests, the relation of methods with research objects, the meaning of basic concepts, and the implicit norms and expectations of a research design," Heimbrock, "From Data to Theory," 275.

5 Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide. For Small-Scale Social Research Projects* (Maidenhead: McGraw Hill, Open University Press, 4th ed.): 4.

6 Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, 4.

7 See Eileen Campbell-Reed, "The Power and Danger of a Single Case Study in Practical Theological Research," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, ed. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 33–59. Based upon a thorough review of merits and misunderstandings of case study research, Campbell-Reed writes: "Practical theological scholarship can and should take the risk of using single case studies for their power as instances of practical wisdom, while taking care to mitigate dangers such as personal bias, overgeneralising, and lack of attention to power dynamics, including a researcher's own role in the situation." She has a clear eye for collaboration too: "The audiences of practical theological scholarship, anyone in a study and those who may learn from it, need a place in the construction of case studies." For both quotations, see: Campbell-Reed, "The Power and Danger of a Single Case Study," 55.

8 Syed M. Ahmed and Ann-Gel S. Palermo, "Community Engagement in Research," *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 8 (2010): 1380–1387.

In this chapter, first, I give an example of collaborative research in my own context, where a human made disaster, namely earthquakes caused by gas extraction, has led to 'cracks in the walls, cracks in the people'. How can local churches, in a wide range of practices, strengthen resilience? Second, I provide some characteristics of relational approaches. Third, I describe the most relevant relational approaches and methods for collaborative practical theology. I start with nine research strategies and then I will describe three collaborative methods.

Collaborative research strategies/approaches:
– action research (AR);
– participatory action research (PAR) and participatory research (PR);
– theological action research (TAR);
– collaborative ethnography (CE);
– change laboratory (CL);
– appreciative inquiry (AI);
– narrative inquiry (NI);
– professional learning community (PLC), research community (RC), knowledge workplace (KW) and action research community (ARC);
– citizen science (CS).

Collaborative research methods:
– expert meeting, expert panel, expert consultation, thematic expert group (TEG), and thematic expert assembly (TEA);
– dialogue method: focus groups;
– performative action (PA) and participative exercise (PE).

2 Collaborative Research: an Example

Since 2012, minor earthquakes have been occurring in an area around 15–30 kilometres from our university in Groningen, causing material damage to thousands of houses, churches, farms and public buildings. In the summer of 2013, a strong earthquake took place with a magnitude of 3.9 on the Richter scale. Since then minor earthquakes have been occurring almost on a weekly basis and causing what could be described as a 'human-made disaster'. The earthquakes are caused by soil subsidence, which in turn is the result of more than forty years of gas extraction. The psychological effects of the earthquakes are feelings of anxiety, stress, insecurity, and anger. These effects are rightly blamed on the authorities, who have belittled the problem and failed to act adequately. People lose their houses and have to be relocated, financial compensation is difficult to obtain, and some people receive a better claim settlement than others. There is a sense of being neglected, added to a feeling of being marginalised, far from the seat of government in the centre of the country. Local churches have responded, addressing the consequences of the earthquakes in preaching, worship services, pastoral care and diaconal practices. In the winter of 2013–2014 we asked ourselves what we as practical theologians of the PThU could do concerning this 'long-term catastrophe'.

In May 2014, we organised an expert meeting in the form of a one-day-conference. We invited ministers, elders and deacons for an afternoon filled with lectures and discussions, primarily offering reflections on pastoral care, with Riet Bons-Storm as the expert, and on diaconal care, with Herman Noordegraaf as the expert. Bons-Storm focused on practices of spiritual, social and emotional care where there is fear and anger. Noordegraaf focused on practices of advocacy, based on his knowledge about how in the 1990s, specific social problems, like poverty, were put – and kept – on the government's agenda by deacons in cooperation with the poor themselves.[9] In another lecture, the head of the Public Health Service in the province of Groningen, Sipke Benus, told the participants about the consequences and what the authorities were doing and what they should do. In response, participants told about their experiences, their fear and anger and how local churches were responding. A fourth lecture, by Trinus Hoekstra, an expert on *diaconia* from the national service centre of the PCN, addressed the topic from a neo-colonial perspective, stating that the periphery of the country is suffering from the exploitative colonialism of the government and multinationals from the centre. The ministers, deacons and elders were 'experts-by-experience' and responded by tapping into their practice-based knowledge on how the earthquakes were affecting the lives of the members of the congregations and on the ecclesial response to date. The expert meeting turned into an inspirational moment. It was clearly evident how people were learning from each other. In the flow of the conversation the question emerged: How can we follow up on this meeting? As a visible result, a 'platform', labelled 'Church and Earthquakes' was created, receiving some attention in the press. The platform has a deliberately and explicitly ecumenical character. Local church leaders, primarily ministers of different denominations, cooperate in order to learn about, discuss and critically evaluate the practices of their respective congregations. Jacobine Gelderloos-Commandeur, doing ethnographic fieldwork in the provinces of Brabant and Groningen, decided to become member of the platform.[10] As her

9 Herman Noordegraaf, "Aid Under Protest. Churches in the Netherlands and Material Aid to the Poor," in *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 1, no. 1, (2010): 46–61.

10 Gelderloos-Commandeur, *Meaningful in the Margins*.

supervisor and as the chair holder in Practical Theology at the PThU, I received the minutes of every session.

In 2015, my colleague Martin Walton and I decided to turn the whole matter into a research topic so that students would also benefit from it. Following Osmer's fourfold model, the research questions were: what is going on in the practices of local churches in the province of Groningen responding to the consequences of (minor) earthquakes, how can we understand these responses, what should be going on in these practices and what are the strategies that local churches can employ? We decided to start a three-year empirical research project, together with the platform members, and made the research part of a bachelor's course in practical theology. Each academic year, we offered instruction and a short training to the bachelor's students enrolled in the course on how to interview people about their perceptions and evaluation of the responses of local churches (i.e. the different practices in which the consequences of the earthquakes are addressed, be they sermons, prayers, pastoral care, small groups, meetings, etc.). Students also asked interviewees about the expectations they had from their local church. In class we analysed the transcripts together with the students and started an initial phase of coding. Early in June 2016 and again in 2017, we organised a class, attended by fifteen third-year bachelor students, in which we conducted a focus group session with ministers as participants. We wanted to create an opportunity for students to observe research-in-practice or, as some would say, research as a practice.

During the three years, Jacobine Gelderloos shared her knowledge about rural churches and the quality of life and the data from the empirical project, 'Church on Shaky Ground', with the platform members. On several occasions, the platform was invited to share its insights and suggestions with the authorities. In September 2017, platform members had a meeting with Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister, and a few weeks later, Jacobine Gelderloos was invited to visit the prime minister in his office in the 'Turret' (Dutch: *Torentje*) in The Hague. The new coalition agreement, signed in the fall of 2017, explicitly mentioned the need to appoint chaplains in the area affected by the earthquake, which had been mentioned by the platform.

In the spring of 2018, the platform requested that Martin Walton write an analysis of the 'dimension of meaning-making' concerning the problem of the earthquakes and focusing on the importance of spiritual care and chaplaincy. The note was sent to some members of the House of Representatives, and subsequently Martin Walton was invited to a conversation at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and for a roundtable conference with a committee of the House of Representatives. The note became part of a project plan for chaplaincy in the area, which led to finances for the appointment of three chaplains starting December 1, 2018. As for my own research on this topic, I first presented some initial results of the research at the *Ecclesiology and Ethnography* Network in Durham, UK and at the *International Academy of Practical Theology* (IAPT). Second, I invited platform members to tell me all about their theological beliefs regarding the ecclesial response to the earthquakes and decided to publish my findings in a German book on the practice of prophetic preaching, focusing on promoting resilience.[11] Third, Jacobine Gelderloos, Martin Walton and I are writing an article titled 'Churches on Shaky Ground', which we will submit to a peer-reviewed journal. Martin Walton now also collaborates with the three chaplains, and a psychologist of religion from the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen, Hanneke Muthert. The topic of their research is chaplaincy pastoral care in the event of catastrophes.

3 Relational Approaches: Some General Characteristics

What are the distinctive characteristics of relational, collaborative approaches? Relational approaches value *the experiences, values and knowledge of practitioners*.[12] In the last decades, there has been more attention for the experiences, skills and practice-knowledge of both individual practitioners and communities of practitioners. In 1991, in a seminal article, John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid wrote that "through their constant adapting to changing membership and changing circumstances, evolving communities of practice are significant sites of innovating."[13] In conventional research, the experiences of practitioners can easily be subordinated to the conceptual framework of outsider 'experts'. Furthermore, best practices are often used as models that should be followed or even 'obeyed' by practitioners in other contexts; certain practitioners are turned into examples for others. Instead, relational

11 Henk de Roest, "'Cracks in the Walls, Cracks in the People': Promoting Resilience in Congregational Practices," in *Parteiische Predigt. Politik, Gesellschaft und Öffentlichkeit als Horizonte der Predigt*, ed. Sonja Keller (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017): 63–80.

12 For the characteristics of relational approaches in this paragraph, I am indebted to my doctoral student Veerle Rooze, who wrote her dissertation on religious community formation in new housing quarters in the Netherlands, using a relational approach. The dissertation is called *Nieuwe Grond. Religieuze gemeenschapsvorming in nieuwe wijken. Een exploratie naar een relationele benadering voor vernieuwing en ontwikkeling* [New Ground. Religious Community-formation in New Housing Estates: An Exploration of a Relational Approach for Renewal and Development] (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University, 2019), forthcoming.

13 John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, "Organisational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation," *Organisation Science* 2, no. 1 (1991): 41.

approaches value practitioners and their 'practice-theories' by listening to their everyday reality, including what they may perceive as failures or mistakes. The obstacles and unruliness, the moments when people learn by trial and error, and the moments in which people experiment with a new approach or use a different understanding can lead to important insights.[14] In doing research with a community of practice, the researcher needs to listen to the practitioners and learn from them. What have they learned in their practices? How have they developed their own 'practice-theories'? What are the concepts that have turned out to be helpful for them?

Next, in relational approaches to conducting research with a given community, there is not a fixed research question that might frame possible answers beforehand.[15] This affects the relationship between theory and practice. The use of 'existing theory' is questioned, since the assumptions that are used can easily cause a researcher to overlook what is actually going on in a given practice. The theory may act as a frame, making it hard to see a phenomenon in a different way.[16] What is intended to be a lens, or spotlight, can actually obscure what can be seen with a different lens. In other words, the map can become the territory. Theories may also carry the false promise that when they are used in practices, they will pave the way for new practices.[17] The main problem with concepts that are coined in advance is that they are considered to represent what 'really' is the case, in a better and clearer way than the concepts of practitioners.[18] Instead, the experiences and perceptions of practitioners ground the development of concepts and perhaps also of a theory, that in turn can support – not dominate – a renewed understanding of what is happening in these practices. Therefore, in relational approaches, the relationship between practice-knowledge and theoretical reflection shifts.[19]

Nevertheless, relational approaches must take care not to create an unfruitful dichotomy or even a new one-sidedness, in which the desire for better understanding through the creation of a theory is set aside. Concepts, theories and strategies do not lose validity. In a so-called recursive formulation

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14 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 66.

15 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 12. James Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005): 73.

16 James Maxwell refers to Howard Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*, 55.

17 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 61.

18 Stanley Deetz, "Conceptual Foundations," in *The New Handbook of Organisational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*, ed. Fredric M. Jablin and Linda L. Putnam (Londen, Sage, 2001): 3–46.

19 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 60.

of practice-theories, knowledge is not a "static entity," but "an ongoing and dynamic production that is *recurrently enacted* as actors engage the world in practice."[20] If this process of enacting knowledge, or idea of what is going on in practices, can be labelled 'cognition in practice', the same can be said of theoretical understandings or, for that matter, theoretical generalisations. Indeed, Martha Feldman and Wanda Orlikowski describe a distinct feature of theories using a creative metaphor: theories travel.[21] They can be developed in conversation with and applied in communities of practice. In the actual research practice, however, one may not necessarily need to recognise explicitly articulated theories. A relational approach seeks to find out how practitioners learn, how they find their ways in practice, what frameworks of reference they apply, how they are influenced by their practices, and this leads to new ways of looking at and reflecting on the practices.[22] With Reckwitz, crises in everyday routines are a major area of interest. The research focuses on *theory-development in everyday practices*, in the plodding and muddling along of practitioners, in 'well, this did not work' or 'this is how we can do it'. Relational approaches do not exclude theory development, understanding practices or providing strategies for improvement or designing new practices, as goals of research. Representationalism is not at odds with this performative view of research, but both the researcher and the researched are involved in the mapping.

The character of *learning* by practitioners is important too. Brown and Duguid, referring to Pierre Bourdieu and Julian Orr, point out the difference between describing a finished task or activity in hindsight and the process of actually *performing* the task or activity, with all the ad hoc decisions that a practitioner has to make, often drawing on intuition and improvisational skills.[23] With Orr, who did extensive ethnographic research on the workplace, i.e. a community of photocopier repair technicians, Brown and Duguid also emphasise how among practitioners the practice of creating, telling and listening to stories, and the practice of circulating these stories, helps them to interpret "each new situation in the light of accumulated wisdom."[24] Stories "act as repositories of this wisdom."[25] Practitioners circumvent the manuals.

20 Martha S. Feldman, Wanda J. Orlikowski, "Theorizing Practice and Practicing Theory," *Organisation Science* 22, no. 5 (2011): 1243. Emphasis mine.

21 Feldman and Orlikowski, "Theorizing Practice and Practicing Theory," 1249.

22 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 111.

23 John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, "Organisational Learning and Communities of Practice. Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation," *Organisation Science* 2, no. 1 (1991): 42.

24 Brown and Duguid, "Organisational Learning," 45.

25 Brown and Duguid, "Organisational Learning," 45.

An important consequence of this is that learning in practices, in essence, involves not merely learning *about* practices, but *becoming* a practitioner.[26] Learning is moving from peripheral participation to becoming an insider. It is this insider knowledge and the various ways of obtaining it that interests relational researchers.

Relational approaches also entail a shift in perspective on *organisations*. They are no longer referred to as 'entities', but as networks and these networks are not to be viewed as 'units'. The focus is on the relationships. Attention is given to the processes and practices of organising: "Organisations change as a result of the 'co-ordination' of people's language and actions in relation to each other at all levels."[27] Social orders are seen as *emerging* rather than static. In a relational approach, group processes are seen as ongoing interaction patterns. In this approach, groups constitute the building blocks of all organisations,[28] and therefore, interconnecting processes demand special attention.

In line with this, *leadership* is not viewed as a quality or a role that is possessed by an individual or a group, but leadership is seen as "occurring in relational dynamics throughout the organisation."[29] Views of leadership as relational recognise leadership wherever it occurs. Leadership is generated in social dynamics; it is constantly in the making. The focus is on the communication processes through which relational realities are "made."[30] It is not that notions of 'influence', 'persuasion', 'power' and 'competences' are absent from this concept of leadership, but these are process concepts. With Hosking, Dachler, Uhl-Bien and others, relational approaches on leadership focus on "the influential acts of organising that contribute to the structuring of interactions and relationships."[31] Leadership is seen in processes of persuading people "to adopt new values, attitudes and goals, and to exert effort on behalf of those values, attitudes, and goals."[32]

When it comes to *change*, renewal or even innovation, relational approaches differ from the conventional view on how change is realised. It is

26 Brown and Duguid, "Organisational Learning," 48.

27 Mary Uhl-Bien, "Relational Leadership Theory: Exploring the Social Processes of Leadership and Organizing," *The Leadership Quarterly* 17, no. 6 (2006): 662.

28 René Bouwen and J. Hovelynck, "The Group in the Making: From 'Group Dynamics' to 'Relational Practices'," in *The Social Construction of Organisation*, ed. Dian Marie Hosking and Sheila McNamee (Copenhagen: Liber and Copenhagen Business School Press, 2006): 128.

29 Uhl-Bien, "Relational Leadership Theory," 655.

30 Uhl-Bien, "Relational Leadership Theory," 664.

31 Uhl-Bien, "Relational Leadership Theory," 662.

32 Michael A. Hogg, "Social Identity and Leadership," in *The Psychology of Leadership: New Perspectives and Research*, ed. D. M. Messick and R. M. Kramer (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005): 53.

not the individual who is seen as the great change agent, but change is localised, "in the social fabric," that is in interactions and dialogue.[33] Change is not conceptualised as a rational process, with a plan that is to be implemented and in which the consecutive steps or phases can be controlled. Rather, change is set in motion by interacting, by responding to and engaging with people. Change can hardly be intentionally designed, but depends on the contributions of many people, both inside and outside the organisation, including those who do not consider themselves to be important. The interactions and dialogue, even multi-logue, cannot be instrumentalised.

With regard to the outcomes or *what is 'produced' by the research*, according to Dian Marie Hosking, a relational approach "invites researchers to regard their inquiry process as, itself, the product."[34] This implies joining with organisational or community participants to perform some sort of participative or collaborative inquiry and when these inquiries are intended to improve ways of thinking and living, this 'promoting' is viewed as 'ongoing'.[35] Relational approaches are characterised by dialogues and so they seek to "open the possibility of becoming more multi-logical of opening multiple local rationalities."[36] With regard to power, they aim to open up 'power to' or 'influence to', creating a space for actors to act and they are critical towards 'power over', what is imposed upon the participants, be it concepts, values, meanings, theories or strategies for action.[37]

Connecting the view on leadership with the concept of change, it is important to highlight that in relational approaches, leadership (i.e. actors with specific roles and responsibilities) can and often does set the relational fabric in motion. Furthermore, in line with recent developments in research on transitions, *values* play an important role in the initiatives that practitioners take. We may connect this with what Fjalar de Haan and Jan Rotmans write, "We consider transformative change the consequence of deliberate, or even strategic actions of specific types of value-driven actors."[38] These values are of course not invented by these actors. They are not personal, according to De Haan and Rotmans, but part of so-called 'streams', that is 'sets of values'. They are shared with other actors and embodied in the social fabric of networks,

33 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 220.
34 Dian Marie Hosking, "Telling Tales of Relations: Appreciating Relational Constructionism," Organisation Studies 32, no. 1 (2011): 57.
35 Dian Marie Hosking, "Telling Tales of Relations," 57.
36 Dian Marie Hosking, "Telling Tales of Relations," 58.
37 Dian Marie Hosking, "Telling Tales of Relations," 60. See Chapter 8.
38 Fjalar J. de Haan and Jan Rotmans, "A Proposed Theoretical Framework for Actors in Transformative Change," *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 128 (2018): 276.

movements, organisations, institutions, in short what are often labelled as societal systems. Streams can 'rise' and they can also 'run dry. Furthermore, "When a stream has not (yet) risen or when a stream has dried up, its values may nevertheless be held in that society."[39] As I understand it, in order to gain momentum for transformative change, different individual actors can *connect* themselves to streams, allowing them to form alliances, that is aligning their actions and finding strength in numbers[40] and it is when actors, streams and social systems are bundled that a *stage* for transformation is created. For collaborative practical theology, I think these insights are important for if, as De Haan and Rotmans write, streams are value sets "enabled by the state of knowledge,"[41] then, in the clusters of practices that practical theologians examine, streams are enabled both by cultural traditions and by, following Johan-Olav Henriksen would say, the Jesus story, but also by new knowledge resulting from participating in the process of research.[42] Consequently, for the practical theologian, being himself or herself a practitioner in this tradition, and thereby having insider knowledge of the theological and christological dimension of these practices, is helpful for both understanding these practices and seeing how they can change. With regard to the ministry, practical theologians such as Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Francis Ward underline the "more integrated and dialogical relationship between the practice of ministry and the resources of theological understanding."[43] In acting in these practices, in dialogue with these resources, both professional practitioners and everyday believers use practical wisdom (Greek: *phronèsis*) or, in Graham's words,

> Rather than congregational life being the expression of ethical principles and pastoral actions the outworking of moral reasoning [...] the practical wisdom of the faithful and purposeful practice springs from participation in a value- and vision-directed tradition.[44]

Therefore, reflections on value-driven transitions, as in De Haan's and Rotmans' work, make the hearts of practical theologians, doing collaborative research with practitioners, burn. Tradition is not something of the past, but it is shaping Christian practices as they are intertwined with everyday practices in

39 De Haan and Rotmans, "A Proposed Theoretical Framework," 277.
40 De Haan and Rotmans, "A Proposed Theoretical Framework," 276.
41 De Haan and Rotmans, "A Proposed Theoretical Framework," 276.
42 Henriksen, *Christianity as Distinct Practices*, 89.
43 Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Francis Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (Londen, SCM Press, 2005): 3.
44 Elaine Graham, *Transforming* Practice, 140.

a process-driven way. Tradition has a dynamic quality and, with Graham, practitioners, both professional and everyday believers, contribute to the dynamics of the tradition in a creative way by their conversations and by their actions. We now turn to our inventory of 'relational, collaborative, conversational, dialogical, communal' research approaches… What's in a name?

4 Action Research (AR)

Of all the collaborative research approaches, action research is probably the most promising strategy. I therefore describe its characteristics more extensively. Although one finds references to Moreno, Bateson and Dewey, it was Kurt Lewin who discovered action research. One year before he died in 1947, Lewin published a seminal article 'Action research and minority problems'[45] and elaborated the idea further in an article in *Human Relations*, a journal that he had founded.[46] It all started with practitioners from schools, minority organisations and government institutions ("eager people," according to Lewin) who approached Lewin to do research on such topics as improving inter-group relations and how to fight economic and social discrimination. Also, in order to be able to learn, they longed for objective standards of achievement, that is, criteria to evaluate the relation between effort and achievement.[47] In the article in *Human Relations* he writes about "signposts of exactly where we are and in what direction we are moving with what velocity."[48] Practitioners stated that a research report was likely to only mirror the surface and would not be helpful. Lewin agrees: "Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice."[49] Lewin is also critical with regard to quantitative methods for research on intergroup relations: "Mere diagnosis – and surveys are a type of diagnosis – does not suffice."[50] Already in this article, a core principle of action research comes to the surface, that is, research at the academy produces insights, but research on the effects and evaluation of specific interventions or, as Lewin calls them, 'techniques of action', should be conducted in close collaboration with practitioners: "It will be necessary to install fact-finding procedures, social

45 Kurt Lewin, "Action Research and Minority Problems," *Journal of Social Issues* 2, no. 4 (1946): 34–46.

46 Kurt Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics. II. Channels of Group Life: Social Planning and Action Research," *Human Relations*, 1, no. 2 (1947): 143–153.

47 Lewin, "Action Research and Minority Problems," 35.

48 Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics," 150.

49 Lewin, "Action Research and Minority Problems," 35.

50 Lewin, "Action Research and Minority Problems," 37.

eyes and ears, right into social action bodies."[51] Elsewhere Lewin speaks about how realistic 'fact-finding' and evaluation are both essential for any learning. If these goals are not realised, practitioners will feel highly insecure and unclear about what they should do.[52] 'Service organisations', with trained personnel, can help them to conduct this research. In concrete action research projects, Lewin advocates the *workshop* setting as a powerful tool, with a diagnosis before the workshop, a meticulous recording of the happenings within the workshop and an evaluation session after each day. Next, there is a follow-up in teams that keep up their team relationship after the workshop, again with a re-diagnosis after some time. Finally, there is expert help provided after the practitioners return to their practices.[53] In the workshops, doing research in community becomes a tangible experience. Lewin reports:

> I have been deeply impressed with the tremendous pedagogical effect which these evaluation meetings, designed for the purpose of scientific recording, had on the training process. The atmosphere of objectivity, the readiness by the faculty to discuss openly their mistakes, far from endangering their position, seemed to lead to an enhancement of appreciation and to bring about a mood of relaxed objectivity. . . . This and similar experiences have convinced me that we should consider action, research and training as a triangle that should be kept together for the sake of any of its corners.[54]

According to Lewin, research that is to be relevant for practitioners in all kinds of communities, institutions and organisations "must be guided closely by the needs of that organisation."[55] Again, workshops are the preferred setting for discovering these needs together with the practitioners. They also need help to articulate the character of these needs, be they for information or evaluation or planning. First, they can be of an urgent nature, requiring immediate action. Here, questions for the practitioners arise like: 'What are the methods that we can use?' and 'How will we measure if we are successful or fail with our actions?' Second, the needs may require some kind of pre-testing, trying out several options. Third, they may require long-term policies and action programs.

51 Lewin, "Action Research and Minority Problems," 38.
52 Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics," 150.
53 Lewin, "Action Research and Minority Problems," 41.
54 Lewin, "Action Research and Minority Problems," 42.
55 Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics," 152.

Today, more than seventy years (!) since Lewin, action research focuses on needs and on the identification and communal definition of concerns.[56] Action research creates an opportunity to address a real community problem or a problem of a 'community of practice'. Action research investigates issues related to these concerns and addresses them by planning and implementing a change, but at its heart are reflective practitioners trying to assess the impact of their interventions. Reflection and action are held in tension, each informing the other. It has been used in women's movements, in environmental activism and also, increasingly, in faith communities. It has been practiced in professional fields, such as community development, health care, agriculture, education[57] and nursing.

Although action researchers have a common interest in participative and change oriented initiatives, some researchers distinguish two alternative approaches, or tendencies in action research today, that do not fully agree with each other.[58] The first, *pragmatic* orientation, in line with Lewin, focuses on improving workability or practical knowledge development, seeking collaboration between researchers and practitioners. This orientation emphasises "adaptation to the situation and incremental change based on the experiential learning of participants."[59] Workshops and so-called dialogue conferences are favoured instruments. The second, *critical* orientation, in line with Freire, Foucault and others, focuses on emancipation, empowerment and giving underprivileged people a voice in contexts of coercion, exclusion and conflict: "The emphasis is on human values and far-reaching transformation, on unveiling suppressing power structures and, through reflective efforts, developing a consciousness of the group's situation and finding ways to struggle against and liberate from these powers."[60] The first orientation is primarily found in the global North, the second in the global South. Other researchers even distinguish a third '*technical* orientation'. Already in 1986, Carr and Kemmis in their

56 For introductions to action research, see Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, eds., *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (London: SAGE, 2001); Jean McNiff, *Action Research: Principles and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1988, 1st ed., 2002, 2nd ed., 2013, 3rd ed.).

57 In 2006, in an overview of all the articles published, Bob Dick wrote that educational action research is "the busiest area of action research publication," Bob Dick, "Action research literature 2004–2006," *Action Research* 4, no. 4 (2006): 441.

58 Anders W. Johansson and Erik Lindhult, "Emancipation or Workability? Critical Versus Pragmatic Scientific Orientation in Action Research," *Action Research* 6, no. 1 (2008): 95–115.

59 Johansson and Lindhult, "Emancipation or Workability," 99.

60 Johansson and Lindhult, "Emancipation or Workability," 99.

influential book *Becoming Critical*, used a typology identifying technical, practical and emancipatory forms of action research, drawing on Jürgen Habermas' three knowledge interests. Technical action research aims to improve the effectivity and efficiency of practices according to criteria set not by the practitioners but by others.[61] In practical action research, the concerns to be addressed by the research are identified together with the practitioners ("helping them to articulate their own concerns")[62] and the improvements or changed interventions in practices, including the criteria are also defined and evaluated together with the practitioners. In emancipatory action research, communities of practitioners take joint responsibility for the development of practices, based on mutually shared and articulated values. What is our raison d'être? What do we want to achieve? What are our habits and customs, and can we revise them? What are the control structures and bureaucratic routines that prevent us from being change agents in our own professional practices?[63] Carr and Kemmis view this form of action research as a collaborative context in the strict sense, thereby acknowledging that social pressures, practices and policies outside practitioner control can form constraints on this collaboration and on maintaining and renewing practices.[64] In emancipatory action research, one is likely to meet resistance. According to later critics, Carr and Kemmis downplayed the value of the first two forms of action research and favoured the third. The first two forms of action research are deemed "partial, incomplete or flawed."[65] Carr and Kemmis' typology turned out to be a hierarchy, indeed, action researchers needed to 'become critical', the ideal form of action research being emancipatory, implying collaboration right from the start. This type of action research offers maximum support to practitioners' interpretations and critical evaluations of their actions, and it reveals to practitioners how their practices are influenced by external factors. Nevertheless, John Elliot and, later, action researcher Mark Hadfield, demonstrate that "forms of self-reflective critique that focus upon technical and practical matters" do have an

61 Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research* (London: Routledge, 2004): 202. First published by Deakin University Press in 1986.

62 Carr and Kemmis, *Becoming Critical*, 203.

63 Carr and Kemmis, *Becoming Critical*, 204.

64 Carr and Kemmis, *Becoming Critical*, 206.

65 Mark Hadfield, "Becoming Critical Again: Reconnecting Critical Social Theory with the Practice of Action Research," *Educational Action Research* 20, no. 12 (2012): 572ff. This criticism was first voiced by Elliott. See John Elliott, "Becoming Critical: The Failure to Connect," *Educational Action Research* 13, no. 4 (2005): 359–373.

"ability to identify improvements in practice."[66] Looking back on his own action research practice, Hadfield prefers to speak of three different 'moments'.[67] He discovered how in professional practices, different "logics" or forms of professional reasoning "dominated, butted against or contradicted each other."[68] Each type of reasoning – technical, practical and emancipatory – is present within a practitioner's professional reasoning and certain forms are favoured over others at different times. Action research can help communities of practice "recognize their own 'moments' and deconstruct the 'logic' behind a particular practice."[69] Although these internal discussions about action research may seem a bit off track for the present book, debates like these take place in a global action research community. The fact that there is such a community is promising and instructive for practical theologians that want to do action research with practitioners in faith practices, whether technical, practical or critical-emancipatory.

The description of action research so far raises a major question: is it science? Can it be used by academic practical theologians or will it reduce their reputation? Although action research is deliberate in its pursuit of understanding, it may seem as if action research is little more than consultancy. If action researchers are more interested in the practical outcomes of their research it will be irrelevant to academic audiences. As Judy Mckay and Peter Marshall observe, even if "interventions are deemed successful, some would argue that causal connections and explanations cannot be safely made."[70] Therefore, in the past, academic circles with a high esteem for rigid scientific criteria did not favour action research.

I see four responses to deal with this criticism. *First*, an important distinction is helpful. Action research should not be conceptualised as consisting of *a single cycle*,[71] no matter how often this cycle is repeated. With McKay and Marshall, there is an imperative in action research for *two interlinked cycles*: a problem-solving cycle, which includes a problem-solving strategy, and a research cycle. These two cycles are not conducted independently of one another but are interlinked and somewhat contingent on one another.[72] As I understand it, the agendas for both cycles need to be clearly articulated at the

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66 Hadfield, "Becoming Critical Again," 574.

67 Hadfield, "Becoming Critical Again," 576.

68 Hadfield, "Becoming Critical Again," 577.

69 Hadfield, "Becoming Critical Again," 578.

70 Judy McKay and Peter Marshall, "The Dual Imperatives of Action Research," *Information Technology and People* 14, no. 1 (2001): 48, https://doi.org/10.1108/09593840110384771.

71 For the four stages of this cycle, see also Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 240.

72 McKay and Marshall, "The Dual Imperatives of Action Research," 52.

start of the project and therefore also at the start of the intervention. MacKay and Marshall write:

> The action researcher has dual aims: the researcher must aim to bring about improvements through making changes in a problematic situation and must also aim to generate new knowledge and new insights as a result of his/her activities. So, conceptually at the very least, there appears to be two AR cycles, one overlaid on the other, and operating in tandem with one another. The first cycle relates to the researcher's problem-solving interests and responsibilities, the second to the researcher's research interests and responsibilities.[73]

Second, the triangulation of data is imperative. Based upon a consensus among qualitative methodologists, the triangulation of data increases qualitative rigor.[74] In mathematics, triangulation refers to the use of three distances or values to establish a position, for example, in navigation. In action research, in order to establish a trend in the data, develop a theory or use theories to explore experiences during the research cycle, it refers to the use of three sources of data, for example, policy documents, expert interviews and focus groups. In this way, data from several sources can be checked for themes or patterns. According to Richard Winter, "Each method partly transcends its limitations, by functioning as a point of comparison for the others. Several different methods may thus seem to converge on one interpretation, thereby giving grounds for preferring it to other interpretations which are suggested by only one method of investigation. Normally at least three methods are needed for comparison."[75]

Third, both the aforementioned points presuppose that the researcher is perceived as an outsider in collaboration with insiders. Kathryn Herr and Gary Anderson refer to a "continuum of positionality" and distinguish six positions:[76]

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73 McKay and Marshall, "The Dual Imperatives of Action Research," 50.

74 Mary J. Melrose, "Maximizing the Rigor of Action Research: Why Would You Want To? How Could You?" *Field Methods* 13, no. 2 (2001): 169. See also Uwe Flick, "Triangulation in Data Collection," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, ed. Uwe Flick (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2017): 527–544. For an example of the necessity of triangulation in ethnographic research with congregations, see: Buch-Hansen, Donskov Felter and Ringgaard Lorensen, "Ethnographic Ecclesiology," 223. Also see: Swinton and Mowat, "Practical Theology and Qualitative Research," 50, 70f., 170, 178, 215f.

75 Richard Winter, "Some Principles and Procedures for the Conduct of Action Research," in *New Directions in Action Research*, ed. Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt (London: Falmer, 1996): 16.

76 Kathryn G. Herr and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation. A Guide for Students and Faculty* (Thousand Oaks, 2005): 31.

(1) the lone insider,
(2) insider collaborating with other insiders,
(3) insider(s) collaborating with outsider(s),
(4) reciprocal collaboration of insider/outsider teams,
(5) outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s) and
(6) outsider(s) studies insider(s).

Herr and Anderson state that novices in research may not have time for full partnership, as in position 4, and they add that one's positionality may shift during the study. The first three positionalities refer to insiders studying their own practices. In the case of the lone insider one may think of self-study or auto-ethnography. While insider-knowledge is valuable in its own right, Herr and Anderson warn that insiders, "because they are often true believers in their particular practices, are too often tempted to put a positive spin on their data."[77] Given the complexities of positionality and the notion of inside/outside, according to Herr and Anderson, it is an obligation for researchers "to interrogate our multiple positionalities in relationship to the question under study"[78] and by "making explicit the tensions we experience as researchers in our varying roles and statuses, we have the possibility of crafting uniquely complex understandings of the research question."[79]

Fourth, it will be necessary in an action research project to demonstrate that the changes to the practices are indeed a result of the research. The research calls for an assessment of its impact. Mary Melrose writes: "If AR is about improvement, collecting evidence of the changes and improvements is important. Collecting evidence that others perceive that changes are caused by the AR project and not by other factors may also *strengthen the rigor of the research* italics HdR)."[80] In this respect, it is also necessary to seek participant confirmation and agreement with interpretations of the changes and improvements before reporting information.

The potential of action research is still being discovered in practical theology. Until quite recently, action research was rare in ecclesial contexts. In 1993, Michael West, a vicar in the Ipswich diocese, designed a training course for local non-stipendiary ministry and decided to build theory, using a grounded theory methodology, from the personal experiences of the participants

77 Herr and Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation*, 35.
78 Herr and Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation*, 44.
79 Herr and Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation*, 55.
80 Melrose, "Maximizing the Rigor of Action Research," 170.

of the course, focusing on concepts such as identity, authority and collaboration.[81] In 1997, David Fetterman, a United Methodist minister in charge of religious education at a large suburban church, found that his church had a "recruitment and participation problem" in its adult education program. The church, particularly its education commission, wanted to address this concern using action research, asking whether they could increase adult participation in religious education through innovative programming.[82] In 2000, Bruce Martin implemented action research in the life of his own church.[83] After 2001, more action research projects were commissioned. In 2004, John Swinton and Elaine Powrie used a participatory research methodology to explore the spiritual lives of people with learning disabilities. In each phase of the research, it was considered necessary to enable participation by people with learning disabilities.[84] In 2006, Swinton and Mowat stated that practical theology is "fundamentally action research" and described the latter as "a method of enquiry and practice which encourages controlled and focused change using the knowledge and expertise of those involved in the research setting."[85] They connect "focused change" with practical theology's focus on transformation and "new modes of faithfulness."[86] Some years later, Elaine Graham saw "many affinities" between practical theology and action research.[87] Both share an inductive approach, focusing on "real life situations" and both are committed to "human flourishing and liberation."[88] In Graham's view both strive to realise change by focusing on the development of *phrónēsis* or practical wisdom, the Aristotelian notion of knowledge and capacity that guides action and can alter practices.[89] The potential of action research has especially been discovered in

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81 Michael West, "'Second-class Priests with Second-class Training?' A Study of Local Non-Stipendiary Ministry within the Church of England," *Educational Action Research* 1, no. 3 (1993): 361–373.

82 Gary W. Kuhne, Drucie Weirauch, David J. Fetterman, Raiana M. Mearns, Kathy Kalinosky, Kathleen A. Cegles and Linda Ritchey, "Case Studies of Action Research in Various Adult Education Settings," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 73 (1997): 48.

83 Bruce Martin, "Transforming a Local Church Congregation through Action Research," *Educational Action Research*, 9, no. 2 (2001): 261–278.

84 John Swinton and Elaine Powrie, *Why Are We Here: Understanding the Spiritual Lives of People with Learning Disabilities* (London: Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2004).

85 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, xvi.

86 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, xvi.

87 Elaine Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, no. 1 (2013): 149.

88 Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" 149.

89 Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" 150.

research on diaconal practices. For example, in 2015 in The Netherlands, the Protestant Church (PCN) started a project on local churches involved in care ('a caring church', Dutch: *Zorgzame Kerk*). In contemporary Dutch society, the field of care has been in transition due to the Social Support Act and since the government planned to increase municipalities home care responsibilities. It is also government policy to put more emphasis on the relatives and wider network of care-receivers. In the PCN-project, with the assistance of congregational advisors and one scholar, practical theologian Herman Noordegraaf, deacons of local churches developed a repertoire in order to provide support to people. The diaconal interventions were conducted in pilots and evaluated in a collaborative manner. Local churches turned out to be very important, due to high numbers of volunteers.[90] In 2018, my colleague Ralph Kunz, University of Zürich, started an action research project on church-based volunteers in Community Care, who are offering support to informal caregivers.[91] In a context characterised by an ageing population, people suffering from chronic conditions (dementia, frailty), a health workforce crisis (especially at community level), reduced family size and increasing distance between family members, Community Care is becoming increasingly important. In this project, church-based volunteers support informal caregivers and strengthen their resilience. Spirituality is also seen as dimension of care. After an exploratory phase, with an assessment of spiritual care needs among informal caregivers, a training curriculum is developed and implemented as intervention and, as part of the research, this curriculum is evaluated together with the practitioners. In another example, City Mission Oslo stimulates the initiation of *tripartite* research collaboration, focusing on situations of inequality, their consequences and advocacy against their causes.[92] The organisation funds a tripartite diaconal action research project connecting diaconal practitioners, researchers and migrants in the Oslo area. The project gives priority to the perspectives, interests, aims and also the agency of those primarily concerned and affected by inequality, for example, in a health centre for undocumented migrants where action research is conducted with them on their mental health in order to improve the centre's services. This type of tripartite, emancipatory research is also conducted in *Eurodiaconia*, the wider community of researchers

90 Herman Noordegraaf, "Zorgzame Kerk. Kerk zijn in de participatiesamenleving. Ervaringen met pilotprojecten van de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland," *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid*, 8, no. 1 (2017): 77–85.

91 Ralph Kunz, "Pflegende Angehörige. Community Care als Gelegenheit für Kirchgemeinden," *Pastoraltheologie* vol. 107 (2018), 517–528.

92 "The Church City Mission," Kirkens Bymisjon, accessed February 28, 2018, https://kirkensbymisjon.no/about-us/.

in the field of diaconal practices because user-centred services and practices involving vulnerable and marginalised people are a central research theme.[93]

In the field of religious education action research is also promising.[94] Here we shortly describe an example of action research conducted by Erik Renkema in a research project with teachers at a Dutch cooperation school, with students from non-affiliated and from Christian backgrounds.[95] In a case study at this school, Renkema found that the core values espoused in school policy documents were child-centredness, respect and encounter, the latter understood as a practice of dialogue and interaction, but that there was a limited occurrence of dialogue in religious education. In the consecutive study, after a planning phase which consisted of three sessions that were recorded, coded and analysed, the researcher and the teachers designed the acting phase: an experimental form of 'celebration' in which dialogue was to be implemented. This new practice was monitored and evaluated afterwards with the teachers. We see here, referring to Herr and Anderson, how the researcher in his position acted as an outsider who collaborated with insiders (position 5).

We started our book by describing our collaboration with a missionary organisation, called IZB.[96] Recently in the Netherlands, this project, inspired by Neil Hudson's book, *Imagine Church*, has begun on 'mission-shaped congregations'. It is conducted by congregational consultants in a close collaboration with ministers, church councils, churchgoers and we add, students of the PThU participating in the courses of the one-year Master 'Missional Communities'. The project, 'IZB-Focus', seeks to initiate a two-year trajectory of reflection, learning and change in a missional community, starting from the (spiritual) heart of the faith community and taking place with the community as a whole. IZB-Focus seeks to assist the members of the faith community in being credible witnesses and enable them to connect faith with everyday life. Although consultants do not deliberately use action research principles, they do act as action-researchers in this trajectory, although we see that there

93 Meeting Report Research and Practice Working Group Meeting, 17–18 March 2015, Hosted by the Diakoniewissenschaftliche Institut (DWI) of the University Of Heidelberg, Germany. See: https://eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/RP_MEETING_REPORT_2015.pdf. Site visited July 15, 2018.

94 As in education in general, religious education is one of the fields in which action research is used increasingly. See Heid Leganger-Krogstad, *The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education. Contributions to a Contextual Understanding* (Münster: LIT, 2011).

95 Erik Renkema, "Two of a Kind. The Identity of Cooperation Schools in the Netherlands and the Correlation with Religious Education" (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University, 2019).

96 See above, Chapter 1.

is a thin line between action research and consultancy here. As researchers, however, together with our students, we offer our research competence in assessing the impact of the trajectory. Currently, nineteen congregations are participating.

5 Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Research (PR)

In action research projects, the role of the academic researcher in partnerships with practitioners can differ.[97] They may facilitate and support practitioners who perform action research themselves; they may participate in a research project as a 'critical friend' to sharpen the focus on the problem at hand; or they may take part as consultants in practice. In Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Research (PR) their role differs once again. There is an explicit intention to involve the practitioners in conducting action research on a fully participatory basis. The subjects or interlocutors involved are often called *co-researchers*. In the late 1980s, this term was first concocted by David Epston, in doing ethnography with patients, suffering from a painful, very rare genetic disorder variably affecting around 70 individuals in New Zealand.[98] Epston writes:

> I chose to orient myself around the co-research metaphor both because of its beguiling familiarity and because it radically departed from conventional clinical practice. It brought together the very respectable notion of research with the rather odd idea of the co-production of knowledge by sufferers and therapist.[99]

Influenced by Foucault, Epston began to conceive his practice as "facilitating the 're-emergence' of 'disqualified' or 'subjugated' knowledges."[100] In 1995, Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda used the term in his address to an audience of sociologists:

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97 Tamara Platteel, "Knowledge Development of Secondary School L1 Teachers on Concept-Context Rich Education in an Action-Research Setting" (PhD diss., Leiden: Leiden University, 2010): 50.

98 David Epston, "Co-research: The Making of an Alternative Knowledge, in *Narrative Therapy & Community Work: A Conference Collection*, ed. Dulwich Centre Publications (Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications, 1999): 141.

99 Epston, "Co-Research: The Making of an Alternative Knowledge," 141f.

100 David Epston, "Ethnography, Co-research and Insider Knowledges," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* no. 35 (2014): 107, doi: 10.1002/anzf.1048.

> Do not monopolize your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques, but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers. . . . Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals.[101]

Research is not only conducted to acquire better understanding, but also to raise and develop consciousness, enable people to learn new skills and mobilise people. As Mark Chesler writes in his research report on self-help groups, "action objectives are built into the research design from the beginning, with the initiative and participation of the co-researchers."[102] Researchers often quote from Paolo Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that participation in knowledge creation is empowering. PAR has often dealt with people in the margins, with grass-roots organisations and with issues of exclusion, institutional control and conflict.[103] Chesler emphasises how vulnerable people in these situations often approach researchers with an attitude of mistrust: "Since many self-help groups develop explicitly to fill gaps or create change in the service delivery system, they are not likely to trust establishment-based researchers, even applied or action researchers, and especially not researchers embedded in the professional bureaucracy delivering services people feel are inadequate."[104]

PAR was developed in the early 1970s, around the same time as PR, which was developed by Budd Hall and others in Tanzania in the field of adult education.[105] The two streams of research came together in April 1977, at the Cartagena conference in Colombia when Hall met Fals Borda:

101 Orlando Fals Borda, "Research for Social Justice: North-South Convergences," (plenary address, Southern Sociology Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, April 8, 1995), accessed May 8, 2018, comm-org.wisc.edu/si/falsborda.htm. See also Orlando Fals Borda, "Participatory Research and Rural Social Change," *Journal of Rural Cooperation* 10, no. 1 (1982): 25–39.

102 Mark Chesler, "Participatory Action Research with Self-Help Groups: An Alternative Paradigm for Inquiry and Action," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 19, no. 5 (1991): 760.

103 Chesler, "Participatory Action Research with Self-Help Groups," 761.

104 Chesler, "Participatory Action Research with Self-Help Groups," 765.

105 For an extensive description of the expanding world-wide community of PR researchers, see Budd L. Hall, "In from the Cold? Reflections on Participatory Research from 1970–2005," *Convergence* 38, no. 1 (2005): 5–24.

> I sat with Orlando Fals Borda on a chair in one of the large halls and asked him for his support for a network which would respect the values and energies which had brought so many to Cartagena. He was gracious and generous in his support but wanted to make sure that the countries of the majority world would be given the dominant role in driving the network we were going to call 'participatory research'. Orlando preferred the use of the term 'action research' at the time, but sometime later, perhaps through interaction with the Latin American network of PR, he began to refer to this kind of work as 'participatory action research'. He was the first person, to my knowledge, to ever use that precise combination of words.[106]

PAR's background in adult education in Africa and the Latin American contexts of oppression, make its insistence on emancipation and liberation understandable. In several contexts, notably more in the South than the North, PAR is described as a trajectory in which members of an oppressed group or community identify a common problem. Assisted by the researcher, they are the ones who collect information, analyse it and act upon the problem.[107] PAR can be used to build a group's capacity for self-advocacy. The background in Freire's thought helps to understand the focus on social change by the marginalised people themselves, who seize the opportunities to act as agents. Like in action research, their concerns are the starting point.

In PAR a survey called the Concerns Report Method (CRM), is often used as a reliable strategy to define the concerns and to involve a community of practice in decision-making. Community members are invited to help create the survey.[108] What does this look like concretely? An example is a PAR project conducted in a small town in Mexico. A team of 12 community leaders and community representatives participated in the development of a preliminary list of survey items.[109] A draft survey was pilot tested with the help of community volunteers. This pilot helped to find and fine-tune adequate vernacular

106 Hall, "In from the Cold?" 11. In 1997, twenty years after the first conference, the twentieth anniversary conference on Participatory Research (PR) was held in Cartagena. Instead of 70 to 80 participants, there were 1851 persons from 61 countries. Hall, "In from the Cold?" 17.

107 Daniel Selener, *Participatory Action Research and Social Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1997): 17.

108 Rubi Arellano, Fabrizio Balcazar, Francisco Alvarado and Sergio Suárez, "A Participatory Action Research Method in a Rural Community of Mexico," *Universitas Psychologica* 14, no. 4 (2015): 1199.

109 Arellano et al., "A Participatory Action Research Method in a Rural Community of Mexico," 1201.

terms. The final survey had a total of 53 items, with a Likert-scale that made it possible to define strengths (highly important and high satisfaction) and concerns (highly important and low satisfaction).[110] How was the survey delivered to and collected from the members of the community? Here a form of citizen science (see below), was used. Volunteers were recruited from schools, where community service was part of the education.[111] In this project, a total of 1,228 people responded. In meetings of community members, ('data sharing at public forum') the results were discussed, causes were analysed and ideas were suggested to address the main concerns and increase the strengths that were identified. Among a number of concerns, apart from good quality employment, the pollution in the river was a main concern. In the meetings, participants suggested that the first step was to provide the population of the town with information on the river's condition and the health risks involved. The second was to get support from the state and federal governments, and national water commission, to build an industrial waste water treatment plant to clean the water. Both actually happened. The PAR study, by addressing community concerns and exposing their urgency, created a large support base and momentum for advocacy. The process set things in motion, even on the governmental level. Performative effects of the process were that "an ideology of collaboration and citizen responsibility" was introduced in the community.[112]

Practical theology and PAR are a natural fit, that is if the goal of practical theological research is to contribute to change in practices and if it wants to address the concerns of practitioners. The first to call attention of the potential of PAR in practical theology were Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, John Swinton and Harriet Mowat.[113] In Conde-Frazier's article, we find references to Paolo Freire, but also to Cornell West, who advocated that researchers should cooperate with people, in particular, the 'wretched of the earth' in order to stimulate participation in activities that affect their daily lives and better their living conditions. Conde-Frazier sketches a promising perspective for practical theology, guided by a knowledge interest aiming at empowerment that converges with PAR's interest in social justice. In her view, PAR turns practical theology into "an educational configuration that includes the faith community, the larger community context, and the theological institution."[114] This aligns with the goal

110 Arellano et al., "A Participatory Action Research Method," 1201.
111 Arellano et al., "A Participatory Action Research Method," 1201.
112 Arellano et al., "A Participatory Action Research Method," 1205.
113 Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," *Religious Education* 101, no. 3 (2006): 321–329.
114 Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," 323.

of this book… Research starts with the interests of a particular community and the researcher stands alongside the community.[115] Interestingly enough, Conde-Frazier calls this type of research "incarnational research," deliberately using a theological term. She also speaks frankly about the meaning of the word *kairos*, as "the place where the spirit of God is mediating and intervening in life and we participate in this action."[116] It is a decisive moment for a community when researchers commit themselves to their cause. In the evaluation of this research, what counts is the impact that it has had on the daily lives of people. In Conde-Frazier's account, the notion of co-researchers is absent. One could say that this is more about action research, than about PAR in a strict sense. Furthermore, it is unclear what the detailed consequences are for practical theological methodology. What is clear, however, is that these forms of research take place in and with communities, in their everyday life, and seek for ways to improve their way of living. And, in a later text, referring to Fals Borda, Conde Frazier adds that "people who were previously *objects* of study, become active *subjects* and *participants*."[117] Applying it to a faith community, she envisages how such a community, in which there is a problem, may "collect and analyse information in collaboration with trained researchers."[118] The role of the latter is to act as "catalysts," "to consider actions that will improve or solve the problem."[119] Furthermore, she writes how, referring to Terry Veling, the task of interpretation is a task that requires partnering with the social sciences and how "the resources and energy to sustain such a process of reflection, analysis and action also calls for a network of institutions to unite."[120] As I see it, the role of the members of the community is downplayed here. In a later example, however, on a Latina Pentecostal congregation she corrects this impression. She describes how the church wanted to address the problem of access to medicine and services for patients with AIDS, how the church consulted a theologian, how theology students acted as researchers, "training the community and their neighbours to do the research rather than do it themselves,"[121] and how they (that is the students) used focus groups. As a result, a conversation emerged "between the congregation, the

115 Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," 325.
116 Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," 328.
117 Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 236.
118 Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research," 237.
119 Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research," 237.
120 Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research," 237.
121 Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research," 237.

neighbours, other churches, service agencies and the hospital community."[122] The conversation generated themes and these were reflected upon (presumably together with the community members) in both a theological and a social analytical manner. The latter refers to what has shaped the problematic situation, such as political decisions, historical developments, cultural influences etc., while the first refers to their beliefs and their ethical parameters, seeking collaboration and positive, creative steps. Next, a "plan of action began to take shape,"[123] with a strategy to convince "key players" to collaborate with the congregation. I have described Conde-Frazier's view on PAR as a preferred method in practical theology extensively, because in order to be successful and mitigate power mechanisms, the role of the community in all the phases of the research should be crystal clear. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat clarify that the goals of participatory action research are "to empower practitioners to improve their practice by recognizing how they can make a contribution to their own learning and development."[124] Importantly, they add that PAR enables "the voice of 'the silenced' to be heard."[125]

Perhaps because of the difficulties involved, which we will discuss in Chapter 8, in the global research community of practical theologians, the potential of PAR is described and acknowledged by Swinton and others, but yet to be really discovered. For example, in Hennie Pieterse's recent tour d' horizon of practical theology in South Africa it is virtually absent. Practical theologians are working with grounded theory strategies or, like Julian Müller and Maake Masongo, with a narrative strategy. Revealingly, Pieterse writes that in the narrative research projects supervised by Masongo, "the problems and themes at grass roots level in black communities are for the first time academically researched."[126] In a narrative strategy it is still the students that listen to and interpret the stories of the respondents. Still, in the last five years, here and there in the world we see participatory approaches emerging, for example, in the form of research that takes a couple of years. In a PhD project in New Zealand, the principles of co-researching are carefully applied. Parishioners are given an unmediated voice in the final text: "As a further reflection of the co-researcher status extended to members of the participating parishes, I undertook to include in my final report an appendix where

122 Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research," 238.
123 Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research," 238.
124 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 236.
125 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 236.
126 Pieterse, "Scientific-Theoretical Research Approach to Practical Theology in South Africa," 4.

members of the working groups would be invited to respond to the interpretations generated by the research... which grants the reader an inside voice to achieve greater understanding of the congregations under study."[127] Having completed the project, involving five different parishes, Edward Prebble assessed the effect of his research. In several working groups, parishioners acted as co-researchers. The findings of the research, namely that missional viability should be the main organising principle for local parishes and that a missional spirituality is an integral part of this viability, gave the parishioners a sense of direction for change: "The findings become material for their members to use in discerning their own sense of vision and direction, thereby assisting them in finding strength to take the necessary risks involved in bringing about change."[128] Prebble further gives some strong theological reasons for choosing an action research strategy and its methods. He does not hesitate to speak about research having a salvific power: "The methods associated with Action Research are particularly compatible with theological foundations of religious orientations to 'being in the world'. The project draws on the emancipatory or salvific power of research as organisations are regarded as partners in the inquiry."[129] Other action research reports can be found in the field of building community[130] and religious education. Interestingly, the methodological potential of action and participatory action research is being discovered in intercultural theology, leading to the discovery that these research methods move beyond traditional boundaries between systematic and practical theology. The postcolonial rationale, implying a counter-colonial research methodology, interrogating academic voices trained in the West, can also be applied here. An example is a research project conducted by Benno van den Toren and Klaas Bom at the PThU on science and religion in French-speaking Africa. They state that both AR and PAR, "allow for intercultural encounters which approach 'the other' as partners in rather than objects of research."[131] These methods help intercultural theology in enabling Christian communities in other parts of the world to become conversation partners, rather than objects of research and they can spark off a "conversation between more academic theology and the

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127 Edward Prebble, "Invigorating the Church for Mission Action Research with Local Parishes" (PhD diss., University of Waikato, 2012): 143.

128 Prebble, *Invigorating the Church for Mission Action Research*, iv.

129 Prebble, *Invigorating the Church for Mission Action Research*, iv.

130 Cameron Harder, *Discovering the Other: Asset-Based Approaches for Building Community Together* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013).

131 Van den Toren and Bom, "On the Value of Action and Participatory Research in Intercultural Theology," 84.

espoused and lived theology of the people of God."[132] This leads us to the following section, on theological action research.

6 Theological Action Research (TAR)

In the past decade, Theological Action Research (TAR) has become popular as a practical-theological method. The origins of the method can be traced back to the early 1990s. In 1993, Clare Watkins writes how change in an ecclesial setting will be more "coherent and consistent" if it is examined from a theological perspective. We need to offer "reflection and articulation alongside the action, to support it and give it direction."[133] Theological traditions can and do inform practitioners, but the reverse is also true. Practitioners, in particular, the "elite laity," (increasing numbers of lay women and men who participate in pastoral ministry, diocesan and parish work of one kind or another), challenge theology in general and understandings of the church, of the ministry and of Christian life in particular: "It is a group that repeatedly raises the question: This is what theology says; what difference does it make?… These lay people are working to ensure that we cannot get away with a 'pure' or theoretical ecclesiology that makes theological claims that cannot be cashed."[134] Lay people "employ new terms" and "dust off old ones,"[135] and their activity as lay workers contributes to a "widespread feeling that our categories of 'clergy' and 'laity' are outmoded."[136]

In the last part of her article Watkins writes that even greater articulation of "lived questioning" by the laity is necessary. Yet, according to Watkins, there is also still a lot to learn from ecclesiologies that persist with the laity-clergy distinction and this differentiation "must continue to pattern our talk of Church and ministry."[137] She adds that it is legitimate to have some kind of hierarchy and official leadership for any large social group. In a footnote on the documents of Vatican II, she writes: "Theologically the authoritative nature of the texts has a unified claim on us."[138] Thus, while she avers that ecclesiology needs

132 Van den Toren and Bom, "On the Value of Action and Participatory Research in Intercultural Theology," 85.
133 Clare Watkins, "Collaborators, Informers and Secret Service," *New Blackfriars* 74, no. 871 (1993): 264.
134 Watkins, "Collaborators, Informers and Secret Service," 265.
135 Watkins, "Collaborators, Informers and Secret Service," 265.
136 Watkins, "Collaborators, Informers and Secret service," 273.
137 Watkins, "Collaborators, Informers and Secret service," 274.
138 Watkins, "Collaborators, Informers and Secret service," 278n8.

to be rewritten "through very concrete encounters,"[139] the theological voices of tradition in the end have greater weight ("a unified claim") than the voices of the laity. Watkins' goal is to set up a mutually enriching conversation and this desire has characterised her work ever since, to such an extent that she has even labelled it a 'conversational approach'.

In TAR this approach receives its full expression.[140] It takes the form of position 4 in the continuum of positionality offered by Herr and Anderson.[141] Insider-practitioners in ecclesial practices, congregations or para-church settings interpret their reality (i.e. places and moments where God is expected to be present) in their espoused theological terms, together with an outsider-team of researchers, that choose to become part of the community for a set period of time. The act of interpretation is considered to be more important than the result. In the meetings, the voices of Scripture and the Christian tradition, as well as the voices of theologians from different contexts are to be brought into conversation with the espoused theological views, and possibly the theology that is implicitly operative in the practices of the congregation. The first voice, normative theology, comes from the Bible, creeds, teachings of the church, like encyclicals. The second voice, formal theology, is the voice of academic theological reflection throughout the ages and from different contexts, for example, the voice of Augustine, Luther, or Bediako, also in dialogue with other disciplines. The third voice, espoused theology, is the theological reflection of everyday believers or local professional theologians on their beliefs, in particular, on God-in-action. The fourth voice, operant theology, is the theological dimension in the actual practices of the congregation or the para-church organisation. Theology, or better, theologising, becomes the constant in the action research cycle. Again, the process of conversation and communal interpretation counts more than the product and this process is regarded as a service or as a sign of friendship. Practical theological work is regarded as a spiritually informed practice, since 'epiphanic moments' or 'epiphanic surprises' may also occur in the very process of theologising.[142] Furthermore,

139 Watkins, "Collaborators, Informers and Secret service," 276.

140 Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeny and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010); Clare Watkins (with Deborah Bhatti, Helen Cameron, Catherine Duce, and James Sweeney), "Practical Ecclesiology: What Counts as Theology in Studying the Church?" in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): 167–181. See also https://theologyandactionresearch.net/about/.

141 See above, paragraph 'Action Research'.

142 Clare Watkins and Helen Cameron (with Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, and James Sweeney), "Epiphanic Sacramentality: An Example of Practical Ecclesiology Revisioning Theological Understanding," in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Christian Scharen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): 71–89.

it is the community that develops the agenda and research tasks. Since insiders are invited to think and act like the researchers, effectively becoming co-researchers, and since they are trained to code the data, we see how the researcher-researched paradigm is broken. As with action research, the concerns of the faith community are the starting point. Insiders and outsiders co-author the research report or an academic publication. A fine example is an article written by Clare Watkins and Bridget Sheperd, the latter being part of the insider-team, on an instance of the 'Fresh Expressions' movement, called 'Messy Church'.[143]

7 Collaborative Ethnography (CE)

Conducting research on ecclesial and 'extra-ecclesial' practices has turned to ethnography over the last decade. Mary Clark Moschella writes that ethnography is used "in order to ascertain and analyse the faith practices of ordinary people, congregations, and diverse organisations of people."[144] As we saw earlier, systematic theologians have also discovered the potential of ethnography to interpret the reciprocal relationship between theology and practice. Ethnography involves "immersing one's self in the communal and ritual life of a group."[145]

The focus on the daily life of concrete churches, their 'everyday flesh-and blood reality' and on lived faith was instigated by the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu,[146] William Sewell,[147] and Ann Swidler,[148] and, on everyday

143 Clare Watkins and Bridget Sheperd, "The Challenge of 'Fresh Expressions' to Ecclesiology: Reflections from the Practice of Messy Church," *Ecclesial Practices* 1, no. 1 (2014): 92–110.

144 Mary Clark Moschella, "Ethnography," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie Miller McLemore (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 224.

145 Moschella, "Ethnography," 225.

146 Pierre Bourdieu published some ethnographic monographs on farmers in Béarn, Southern France and Kabylia, Northern Algeria. Bourdieu also did empirical research, with Monique de Saint-Martin on the French episcopacy. Pierre Bourdieu and Monique de Saint-Martin, "La Sainte Famille. L'Épiscopat Français dans le Champ du Pouvoir," *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 44–45 (1982): 1–53; See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, French original publ. 1972)). Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, transl. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, French original publ. 1980); Pierre Bourdieu, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field," *Comparative Social Research* 13 (1991): 1–44.

147 William Sewell, "The Concept(s) of Culture," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 35–61.

148 Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273–286.

religion, Nancy Ammerman,[149] as well as the writings of Robert Schreiter,[150] Don Browning,[151] Elaine Graham[152] and Nicholas Healy.[153] These authors inspired Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Christian Scharen, Jerome Baggett, Harald Hegstad, Pete Ward, Natalie Wigg-Stevenson and, in due time, an emerging community of researchers on both sides of the Atlantic, to study the culture of a local congregation with "disciplined attention to the real."[154] Harald Hegstad describes the task of theological ecclesiology, using empirical research, as "not primarily to interpret the ideal church, but the concrete church in all its messiness," understanding the data as a source for theological reflection.[155] An impressive example is an ethnographic project, in which McClintock Fulkerson studied one faith community for two and a half years, taking its complexity as a "situation of faith" and searching to read this situation theologically.[156] God's redemptive presence is among us, she writes, in a worldly way.

Today, ethnographic research with faith communities is discussed in research communities like the *Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network* and the *Ecclesial Practices Group* of the American Academy of Religion. Both networks are connected to the journal *Ecclesial Practices*, published by Brill. Ecclesial ethnography is always collaborative, but the relationship between the researcher and the communities in which they study differs. There is always a conversation going on between an ecclesial ethnographer and his or her interlocutors. In his ethnographic study of everyday believers, in particular, active parishioners, in American Catholic parishes, Jerome Baggett writes:

149 Nancy Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

150 Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

151 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 15ff.

152 Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 3, 7, 10, 140. While Graham acknowledges and honours Browning's work, she critically asks if Browning "is truly listening" to the practical wisdom (*phronèsis*) of the congregations that he studies. Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 90.

153 Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See Harald Hegstad, "Ecclesiology and the Empirical Research on the Church," *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Christian Scharen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012): 34–47.

154 Christian B. Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015): 86.

155 Hegstad, "Ecclesiology and the Empirical Research on the Church," 47. See also Harald Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2013).

156 Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 8.

> This book is based on a strategy not always undertaken in other investigations – engaging Catholics in thoughtful, honest conversation. Doing this is the best way to let insights emerge *from* people's accounts of their religious lives and to avoid the simplistic labels often used *about* their religious lives. With this in mind, I selected six very different parishes located throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and spoke with forty to fifty self-described 'active' parishioners at each.[157]

In gathering data, one cannot merely observe what is going on, especially since ethnographers have to negotiate their way through (or may try to bypass) diverse gatekeepers[158] and need to build trust with the community. 'Collaborative ethnography', however, goes a fundamental step further. In this approach collaboration takes place in the phase of the description, but also in the phase of interpretation and even in the creation of the final ethnographic text.[159] Texts are written together, combining what have been traditionally called 'emic' and 'etic' or insider and outsider perspectives:

> Collaborative ethnography invites commentary from our consultants and seeks to make that commentary overtly part of the ethnographic text as it develops. In turn, this negotiation is reintegrated back into the fieldwork process itself. Importantly, the process yields texts that are co-conceived or co-written with local communities of collaborators and consider multiple audiences outside the confines of academic discourse, including local constituencies.[160]

Today, the question 'who are we writing for?' is more than ever before on the ethnographic agenda and there is a greater awareness of the necessity to include different voices.[161]

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157 Jerome P. Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live Their Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 24ff. Emphasis his.

158 Jerome Baggett first talked with Catholic leaders in the area where the parishes he was about to examine were located, as well as with staff people of the offices of the Diocese. He and his team of research assistants, comprised of graduate students, also asked for permission from the pastor and, sometimes, from the parish council. Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful*, 25 and 27.

159 Luke E. Lassiter, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 16.

160 Lassiter, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, 16.

161 Natalie Wigg-Stevenson warns practical theologians: "Given the shared complicity of anthropologists, theologians, and Christian missionaries in colonial projects, an ahistorical adoption of ethnographic practices leaves theologians perilously pursuing

According to Lassiter, the origins of collaborative ethnography can already be found in the work of Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas and, in particular, French missionary and anthropologist Maurice Leenhardt, who, unlike the first two, not only asked his field informants to transcribe their traditions as text, but also had extensive discussions with them on how to interpret them.[162] Lassiter adds that in early American anthropology, for example, in Lewis Morgan's book on the Iroquois, written in 1851, American Indian collaborators, also acting as gatekeepers, contributed actively to the earliest descriptions of Native America.[163] Interestingly, this kind of collaboration between researchers and Native Americans, together with "deep personal commitment, developed while systematically encountering, living among, and talking to Indian people" contributed strongly to political activism on behalf of the people who served as objects of study.[164] Remarkably, in exceptional cases, researchers were already starting to experiment with writing together with Native Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century.[165]

In the 1960s and 1970s, a critical ethnography emerged, characterised by a critically conscious approach to power relations. The ethnographic process – from fieldwork to writing – was criticised, since it was seen as epistemologically violent, to use Spivak's later phrase.[166] The 'Other' and his or her world was seen as represented or constructed in the terminology of the colonial 'Self'. George Stocking writes,

> In the once-upon-a time of the colonial era, anthropologists and their informants could be seen as participants in a single moral/epistemological community, dedicated to the preservation of traditional cultural forms in the face of encroaching European civilization. In the here-and-now of postcolonialism, the terms of access to the field were redefined, the process of inquiry began to be reconceptualised in 'self-reflexive' and 'dialogic' terms, and the ethics and politics of fieldwork became gnawing preoccupations.[167]

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forms of knowledge production that all too easily reproduce our colonial past." Wigg-Stevenson, "What's Really Going On?" 6. See also my paragraph 'Postcolonial Rationale', in Chapter 6.

162 Lassiter, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, 29.

163 Lassiter, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, 30. The book by Lewis Henry Morgan is called *League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois*.

164 Lassiter, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, 33.

165 Lassiter refers to Alice Cunningham Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, authors of *The Omaha Tribe* in 1911. Lassiter, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, 35.

166 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 271–313.

167 George W. Stocking, *Delimiting Anthropology: Occasional Essays and Reflections* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001): 323.

In 1975, women anthropologists like Rayna Reiter and Sally Slocum pointed out that many ethnographies were written by male anthropologists and that their findings were often extrapolated to represent the presumed whole of a particular group.[168] The discipline was said to be characterised by an androcentric view.

Since the 1970s, researchers in what was called 'ethnoscience' started to use the term consultants, meaning people to consult and they were viewed as "co-intellectuals who, together with the ethnographer, undertook the elaboration of native categories."[169] In the same decade, similar developments in collaborative research practices occurred in what we now call 'ethnolinguistics'. In 1972, in order to conduct research among Black youth in Harlem (New York, USA) in Black English vernacular linguistic scholar William Labov asked young Black field workers to conduct the linguistic investigation themselves.[170] In earlier research, Labov and his team became fully aware of the social constraints that hampered Black children from speaking freely, so he invited some young Black field workers to become members of the research team.[171] In his methodological reflections, Labov writes that insiders are necessary for a linguistic inquiry, especially when the goal is to enter peer groups in order to listen to them in their everyday conversations, in their natural setting.[172] The quality of the interaction and the type of information obtained, being more fragmentary and less well-formed, will differ from what can be obtained through professional interviews done by outsiders, but insiders can "cut deeper."[173] Their familiarity with the peer group enables them to enter into an interaction that would be impossible for an outsider to enter. On the other hand, precisely because of their familiarity with the peer group, some members may feel inhibited from speaking freely with an insider and would be more open towards an outsider. Nevertheless, an outsider should not be endowed with mistrust by the interviewee from the outset, like, for example, a white interviewer behind a table in a classroom as Labov's empirical work demonstrates. Therefore, in linguistic investigations such as this one, both outsiders and insiders complement each other in a team. In the research on the Black vernacular, Labov writes that "the definitive grammar will no doubt be

168 Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

169 Lassiter, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, 24.

170 William Labov, *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black Vernacular* (Philadelphia: University ofPennsylvania, 1972).

171 Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, xx.

172 William Labov, "Some Principles of Linguistic Methodology," *Language in Society* 1, no. 1 (1972): 115.

173 Labov, "Some Principles of Linguistic Methodology," 115.

written by black linguists who fully participate in the vernacular culture."[174] The results of Labov's research were devastating for some educational presumptions. At a time when educational psychologists were still promoting the theory of 'verbal deprivation' and even 'genetic inferiority' of young Black children, Labov and his team demonstrated that these psychologists "have very poor understanding of the nature of language" leading to "dangerous misunderstandings,"[175] such as the idea that a lack of verbal capacity explains poor performance in school. Teachers are caught by the same pitfall and standard tests like IQ tests or reading tests fail to measure verbal capacity. The research setting itself demonstrates that "the social situation is the most powerful determinant of verbal behaviour and that an adult must enter in the right social relation with a child if he wants to find out what a child can do. This is just what many teachers cannot do."[176] Thus, collaborative ethnography and collaborative research in general is not merely the latest fashion in social research, but a research strategy with the potential for great societal impact.

Used as a research strategy in practical theology, as we stated in Chapter 4, collaborative ethnography should not neglect the theological dimension. The everyday language (and God-talk and, as womanist theologians put it, God-walk) of believers, the artefacts that they use, the places in which they experience a sense of 'existential insideness' (making it very difficult to close down a church building),[177] the texts they read, the traditions and habits they convey and the songs they sing, are all theology-laden. This theological dimension is also present in the 'business-meetings' of congregations and parishes.[178] In practices of faith, an ethnographer with a theological background has easy access to collaborators with a theological sensibility. Professional practitioners and everyday believers can read the ethnographer's texts, respond to his or her descriptions, interpret their practices together and even co-author texts.

174 Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, xiv.

175 Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 202.

176 Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 212.

177 Henk de Roest, "Losing a Common Place to Connect," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, no. 2 (2013): 295–312.

178 McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 13. Currently, with our supervision, Herman van Well conducts ethnographic research in three different multicultural congregations in Rotterdam, International Christian Fellowship, Victory Outreach and Church4All, with a distinct focus on their social work, diaconal activities, etc. He finds that a distinct theological anthropology, emphasising human dignity and reciprocity, shapes the values of these congregations. Another ethnographic inquiry at the PThU-Groningen is conducted by Youngsub Won in three distinct congregations in Seoul, South Korea, on how the members of these congregations which are in the process of being transformed from traditional to missional and contextual congregations, understand this identity, as it is expressed in their practices.

8 Change Laboratory (CL)

Change Laboratory (CL) aims to and has been proven to expand and improve practices within a range of sectors, such as medicine, government, business, cultural institutes (for example, libraries), educational institutes, etc. It is a formative intervention method, a "living toolkit"[179] or "microcosm."[180] The strategy, developed by Finnish scholar Yrjö Engeström and his co-workers at the university of Helsink in the mid-1990s and analysed for almost twenty-five years now, resembles action research, but there are also differences.[181] The starting point is disturbances, conflicts and contradictions in the activities of a specific community, or community of practice. Contradictions are "historically accumulating structural tensions."[182] Contradictions act as a driving force for change, generating tensions, troubles, and problems that turn out to be constructive.[183] In a CL these disturbances, conflicts or contradictions are analysed, not only by the leadership, but by any member of the community of practice. A CL often starts with some form of ethnography:

> The Change Laboratory is built on ethnographic data from the activity setting in which it is conducted. Critical incidents, troubles, and problems in the work practice are recorded and brought into Change Laboratory sessions to serve as first stimuli. This 'mirror material' is used to stimulate involvement, analysis, and collaborative design efforts among the participants.[184]

In principle, every individual member can potentially contribute to change by bringing up an idea or suggestion. Every individual is a resource for innovation. The agency of all the members together is labelled 'transformative', breaking with the individualistic concept of agency and even with the focus on the expert or professional. Agency is also seen as happening over time. In a CL, leadership and members join together with an intervener in analysing what is going on in their practices and collaboratively reflect on and implement

179 See Jaakko Virkkunen and Denise Shelly Newnham, *The Change Laboratory: A Tool for Collaborative Development of Work and Education* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013).

180 Engeström, "From Design Experiments," 612.

181 Yrjö Engeström, Jaakko Virkkunen, Merje Helle, Juha Pihlaja and Ritva Poikela, "The Change Laboratory as a Tool for Transforming Work," *Lifelong Learning in Europe* 1, no. 2 (1996): 10–17.

182 Yrjö Engeström, "Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical conceptualization," *Journal of Education and Work* 14, no. 1 (2001): 137.

183 Engeström, "Expansive learning at work," 133.

184 Engeström, "From Design Experiments," 612.

new or improved practices. For example, in a congregation, the practice of preaching could be analysed together, reflected upon together and a new way of preaching could be collaboratively (!) implemented. Resistance to proposals by the leadership or to the intervener is considered to be a first step in change. Criticisms and questioning of change are seen as an indication of transformative agency. The combination of talking about the practice and taking action contributes to its effect; agency is expressed in discourse and action.[185] Often, a CL will lead to a turning point, after which participants begin to outline the purpose of the practice in a new way. In an article in 2016, Engeström and his co-workers speak about a turning point as "a qualitative change in the nature of the participants' discourse and a jump in the quantity and quality of their expressions of transformative agency."[186] After such a turning point, new possibilities are explicated and envisioned together ("modelling a new way of working"[187]). In a CL, participants express commitments to take concrete actions ('I promise that, I will...') and in later sessions they report on the action that they have taken.

In an organisation, a CL is typically organised during working hours, that is, it interrupts the flow of the workplace and consists of a set number of sessions, for example during lunch breaks. In a congregation, one could conduct a series of conversations, for example, seven sessions in the space of a few months, right after the worship service. Sessions can be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Actions by the minister, the church council and the members, could be taken in between sessions and after they are completed. Ethnographic data about the congregation need to be collected from the practices of the congregation both before the sessions and at the time of the sessions.[188] The mirrot-data can consist of interview fragments, historical timelines, narratives, photographs, etc. In a research project on a program of interdisciplinary curriculum development in pharmacy, the mirror-data consisted of a digital presentation of concrete examples of tensions or disturbances in the program's working practices drawn from focus group interviews with students and student module evaluations.[189] In addition to the mirror data, a second

185 Arja Haapasaari, Yrjö Engeström and Hannele Kerosuo, "The Emergence of Learners' Transformative Agency in a Change Laboratory Intervention," *Journal of Education and Work* 29, no. 2 (2016): 240. See https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2014.900168.

186 Haapassaari et al., "The Emergence of Learner's Transformative Agency," 243.

187 Englund, "Exploring Interdisciplinary Academic Development," 8.

188 Haapassaari et al., "The Emergence of Learner's Transformative Agency," 237.

189 Englund, "Exploring Interdisciplinary Academic Development," 6.

stimulus consists of some helpful analytical concepts, introduced by the participants themselves or by the researcher, such as "subject" and "object" of the activity system. A CL thus provides a "double stimulation."[190]

In practical theology, researchers at MF School of Theology have applied elements of the theoretic framework connected to CL in their analysis of the practices of pastors. For example, Frederick Saxegaard, in the analysis of his fieldwork, shows the richness of Engeström's concept of 'expansive learning', starting with "individual participants questioning how an activity is ordered, sensing there is a contradiction and, as more actors join in, how a collaborative analysis is initiated and carried out leading to the formation of a new pattern of activity oriented to the object."[191] Another example can be found in the research of Morten Holmqvist and Astrid Sandsmark, who applied an intervention design, derived from Engeström, in a working group of professionals in the Church of Norway involved in the reform of Christian education.[192]

9 Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

In 1975, a practical theological study with a surprising title is published: "That God Becomes Beautiful" (German: *Dass Gott schön werde*).[193] Rudolf Bohren, well-known for his voluminous and influential homiletic study *Predigtlehre*,[194] wants to reconnect reflection on the practices of (all kinds of) congregations to a horizon that provides them with criteria for judging whether they can be labelled 'beautiful', indeed whether God is becoming beautiful in faith communities. In his view, practical theology should not only be an empirical science or a science that provides practitioners with the know-how in order to act, but open up a perspective that enables both congregational leaders and parishioners to critically evaluate whether God is becoming practical, more specific, becoming beautiful in their congregation. A core task of a congreg-

190 Annalisa Sannino, "The Principle of Double Stimulation: A Path to Volitional Action," *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction* 6 (2015): 1–15. See https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2015.01.001.

191 Saxegaard, *Realizing Church*, 52.

192 Astrid Sandsmark and Morten Holmqvist, *Vår trosopplæring? Stab, samarbeid og trosopplæring* (Oslo MF-rapport, 2018).

193 Rudolf Bohren, *Daß Gott schön werde. Praktische Theologie als theologische Ästhetik* (München: Kaiser, 1975). See also Chapter 4.

194 Rudolf Bohren, *Predigtlehre* (München: Kaiser, 1969, 1st ed., 1972, 2nd ed., 1974, 3rd ed.). See Jantine Nierop, *Die Gestalt der Predigt im Kraftfeld des Geistes. Eine Studie zu Form und Sprache der Predigt nach Rudolf Bohrens Predigtlehre* (Berlin: LIT, 2008).

ation is to observe (German: *wahrnehmen*) and practical theology should enable congregations to see; for example, to see and help congregants to discover their gifts, their charismata. Practical theology should not primarily be interested in what is problematic, deficient or needs to be changed, achieved or accomplished, but in what has already been given and what has potential. It should help the congregation focus and sharpen its lens *to see grace and the charisms*. It is about leveraging strength, by seeing and appreciating how the congregation, and thereby a segment of the world, is slowly being transformed through the outpouring of the Spirit despite drawbacks. According to Bohren, ecclesial practices and the Spirit are closely knit together and practical theology can therefore be conceptualised as 'applied pneumatology'.[195] An introduction to practical theology should be an introduction to the presence of the Spirit.[196] Bohren's approach can be viewed as an early predecessor of what is today called appreciative inquiry (AI).

Ten years later, in 1985, David Loy Cooperrider defends his dissertation, *Appreciative Inquiry: Toward a Methodology for Understanding and Enhancing Organisational Innovation*.[197] The empirical research is conducted with the Cleveland Clinic, a "world-renowned professional-medical organisation that has made a commitment to an open participatory process as a central feature of organizing."[198] Cooperrider calls it an "action-oriented approach to organisational inquiry"[199] with a focus on generating theory. Data collection takes place over a four-year period, consisting of in-depth interviews, surveys and observations. The inquiry is based on "co-appreciative modes of questioning, valuing, knowing, choosing and enacting."[200] For Cooperrider organising is a miracle to be understood rather than a problem to be solved. One year later, in an article he and his supervisor observe that for decades, research in organisations has focused on increasing participation and commitment of organisational members, but perhaps, the assumption behind all this research is wrong. Organisations exist, they assert, precisely because people participate, in fact, participatory processes are a central feature of organising.[201] It is organising that is an enigma. Remarkably, in his dissertation he asserts that appreciative in-

195 Bohren, *Daß Gott schön werde*, 14.

196 Bohren, *Daß Gott schön werde*, 20.

197 David L. Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry: Toward a Methodology for Understanding and Enhancing Organisational Innovation" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University; Ann Arbor Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1986).

198 Suresh Srivastva and David Cooperrider, "The Emergence of the Egalitarian Organisation," *Human Relations* 39, no. 8 (1986): 686.

199 Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry," ii.

200 Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry," iv.

201 Srivastva and Cooperrider, "The Emergence of the Egalitarian Organisation," 685.

quiry – and here he may draw the attention of theologians – “has at its basis a *metaphysical concern* that posits that social existence is a *miracle* that can never be fully comprehended.”[202]

Cooperrider’s approach is reminiscent of that of Manfred Josuttis, a German practical theologian, who in 1974 writes that religious images and theological concepts may illuminate the mystery of and freedom of being, over and against all methodical capturing or seizing by human beings.[203] Things constantly happen that are beyond human understanding. Josuttis uses a similar line of reasoning to reflect on communication. Using methods, or being research-informed, can provide the practitioner with the certainty of the expert, which others can rely upon, but the improvement of communicative competence may be realised at the expense of a constant pressure to achieve *results*. The language of the Holy Spirit emphasises that a succeeding communication cannot be interpreted as result of the application of methods or, in this book, of know-what, know-why and know-how. If people truly understand each other, this is a gift and can be experienced as a miracle. The event of understanding, like the event of organising for Coopperrider, is not deductible from the use of methods. This does not mean that methods are relative and that intuition should be prioritised or that being a dilettante is an alternative. What it does mean is that practitioners may bear the limits of one’s knowledge and one’s capabilities. Practitioners may feel relieved from the pressure of methodical perfection. Referring to the power of the Holy Spirit is an encouragement that despite failures, people do understand each other, become hopeful again, become creative, become inspired or experience that they are being addressed.

Another assumption of appreciative inquiry also catches the imagination of theologians who are familiar with both pneumatology and the maxim *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. As Cooperrider writes, “Any pattern of social action is open to infinite revision.”[204] He begins his first chapter with a quote from Danish nineteenth-century theologian and philosopher Sören Kierkegaard, on the stunning character of *potential* and *possibility*, in other words, of something utterly new.[205]

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202 Cooperrider, “Appreciative Inquiry,” 18 and 24. Emphasis mine.

203 For the following, see Manfred Josuttis, *Praxis des Evangeliums zwischen Politik und Religion. Grundprobleme der Praktischen Theologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1974): 258–263.

204 Cooperrider, “Appreciative Inquiry,” 24.

205 “If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints, possibility never. And what wine is so foaming, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating, as possibility.”

In a critical assessment of the action research methods of the 1970s and early 1980s, Cooperrider identifies two major flaws in a practice-oriented approach. First, action research has often become so 'client-centred' that researchers equate research with problem-solving.[206] It does not question the clients' definition of their concerns,[207] thereby confusing the questions of practitioners with research questions. Second, action research neglects useful theory-building and in fact is becoming more and more 'a-theoretical'. Instead, Cooperrider asserts that his research illustrates the power and potential of 'appreciative theorizing'. He adds that what he calls 'catalytic theory' both helps to understand organisational practices and can act as a 'formative agent' in the process of social-organisational innovation.[208] Theorising has performative effects. The process of theorising is a "springboard for normative dialogue and experimentation, i.e., 'what kind of organisational world do we want to construct together?'."[209] In an interactive process, practitioners are asked to consensually validate and refine the emerging theory and, furthermore, apply it in collective experimentation. It opens vistas for revised and new practices, expanding the "realm of the possible."[210] Theories are perceptual and conceptual frames, that is, they are lenses, enabling one to "see the world in a way never before imagined."[211] A further effect is that theories can forge a group language, giving a way to dialogue with colleagues about a situation. As Cooperrider puts it, "As people talk, things change, they change."[212] Again, this insight, also articulated by Karl Weick, Kenneth Gergen and others, is promising for co-creative modes of practical theological research that acknowledge the dynamic role of tradition or more broadly, the theological dimension of Christian practices.

In later elaborations, AI is characterised by five principles: the *constructionist* principle, meaning that by talking people create realities ('words create worlds'), the *poetic* principle, meaning that organising is a story-in-the-becoming and never fixed, the *simultaneity* principle, meaning that the very process of starting research changes the practices, the *anticipatory* principle, meaning that an imagined future is an engine for change, since people start aligning their actions to this future, and, finally, the *positive* principle, meaning

206 Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry," 60.
207 Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry," 12.
208 Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry," 3 and 22.
209 Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry," 19.
210 Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry," 32 and 33.
211 Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry," 35.
212 Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry," 49.

that talking about what is appreciated or perceived positively ('When did you experience a flow in your work?' or 'What did you enjoy during that event?') encourages people to collaborate. It strengthens mutual commitment and releases energy. It is about finding a seed and helping it grow or fanning a spark into a flame. The research leverages strengths.

As I understand it, an inquiry that starts with appreciation in practices of faith in diverse settings and contexts can start with questions like: 'What is it, in this practice, that you are grateful for?' or 'When did we, in our meeting, worship service etc., experience a moment of grace?' or 'When did we experience or at what time were we participating, in our perception or evaluation in hindsight, in God's redemptive practices?' To appreciate in an ecclesial context, means to cherish, enjoy, honour or pay respect to moments and experiences, also with regard to the in-depth-dimension of these moments and experiences. AI is open for epiphanic moments. In general, in all kinds of contexts, AI asks what gives life to a system.[213] Here, as in Bohren's practical theology, theologians and everyday believers may detect a pneumatological dimension, that is, they may experience or refer to the Holy Spirit. In relation to the present book questions include: What gives life to a community of practice? What is the unique DNA of our community that enables us to grow and develop, even if not necessarily in size? What has brought us to where we are now? Or what are the experiences that have led to the emergence of this community? Often this will be the first step, which involves finding an affirmative topic and taking the time to discover. It is a 4D-process: after this common **d**iscovery, a **d**ream can be dreamt, a **d**esign can be sketched and one can start to move together towards a common **d**estiny. In an ecclesial context, this process is not intended as a 'planned-change' strategy, but is about finding life, discovering God's creative work, living in wonder about the miracle of a community as such. In the second step, a collaborative analysis is used to search for the factors or conditions that have helped to create the experiences and these elements are then used to create the dream. In each of these steps, trust is important. In the next steps, the design is created together and its consequences for the mutual relationships of the members of the community, the leadership of the community and the purposes of its practices are specified. In the final step, promises are made, responsibilities assigned, and tasks divided. AI can be used as a collaborative research strategy for any Christian practice.

213 Frank J. Barrett and Ronald E. Fry, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Approach to Building Cooperative Capacity* (Chagrin Falls: Taos Institute Publications, 2005).

10 Narrative Inquiry (NI) and Collaborative Narrative Inquiry (CNI)

Narrative inquiry is described as a research strategy to gain access to experiences in order to analyse them in the context of personal sense-making. Sometimes the term 'storytelling' is used, although the lines between story, life story, biography and narrative are blurred. A narrative is the "presentation in discourse of a sequence of past events,"[214] a sequence that is often referred to as the plot. The first steps in narrative analysis were taken by Joshua Waletzky and William Labov and were a by-product of the sociolinguistic field methods that we described earlier, which had been developed in a survey of the Lower East Side and in the ethno-linguistic study of African American Vernacular English in South Harlem.[215] In 1967, Waletzky and Labov studies the development of narrative technique from children to adults, and the range of narrative technique from lower class to middle class speakers, in order to find 'elements' or 'fundamental structures' of narrative.[216] Earlier, class differences in narrative technique had been studied by informal means. Waletzky and Labov, however, use a large number of tape-recorded interviews, respondents having different backgrounds, ranging in age from 10 to 72 years old. In their analysis of the "basic framework,"[217] they detect the importance of a stimulus from outside, various types of sequences ("sequence of events," "sequence of narrative elements," etc.), the inclusion of an orientation section, evaluation section and resolution section and sometimes the addition of a coda. They also reveal the functions of the narrative for the narrator, for example, sometimes placing oneself in a favourable light, which the authors label as 'self-aggrandizement'.[218] Later research distinguishes construction and reconstruction, episodes, plot and causality, techniques of polarisation and integration and the creation of a narrative self.[219]

First-person narratives contain much material for research, but the research, for example, narrative inquiry in healthcare, also offers the researched an opportunity to

214 William Labov, *The Language of Life and Death. The Transformation of Experience in Oral Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 14.

215 Joshua Waletzky and William Labov, "Narrative analysis," in *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*, ed. June Helm (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967): 12–44. Reprinted in the *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 7 (1997): 3–38.

216 Waletzky and Labove, "Narrative Analysis," 12.

217 Waletzky and Labove, "Narrative Analysis," 20ff.

218 Waletzky and Labove, "Narrative Analysis," 34.

219 Labov, *The Language of Life and Death*, 40.

> give meaning to experiences, in particular, suffering [. . .] to present a holistic view of experience and perspective [. . .] try to find adjustment when conditions are unalterable [. . .] attribute blame or responsibility to themselves or others and take more control over their own lives. Many authors have shown that telling stories also has healing functions.[220]

Eliciting a narrative can help getting access to people's experiences and thoughts. Often a researcher will use in-depth interviews which contain a couple of key questions to prompt the stories of the participants.[221] Also photo-elicitation can be used, which combined with personal comments, make it more capable of "mining deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews."[222]

Now, what makes narrative analysis a collaborative research strategy? According to Holloway and Galvin, "researchers interpret and edit the descriptions, thoughts and ideas of the participants. The latter give their individual and personal stories as understood from their own perspective; however, all research reports in narrative research entail collaboration between researcher and participant."[223] Since more than twenty years, in education, collaborative narrative inquiry is also becoming increasingly common:

> Simply inviting teachers to tell stories is no solution. Teachers must participate in the interpretive process and even in the reconstructing phase, which involves writing and rewriting. We place a high value on these processes that occur within a community of collaboration created with the teachers.[224]

In Chapter 8, we will extensively describe an example of practical theological research, in which collaborative narrative inquiry was used as a research strategy. In this project, the narratives of women on sexual abuse in pastoral relationships were elicited in in-depth interviews and in an evolving interview-

220 Immy Holloway and Kathleen Galvin, *Qualitative Research in Nursing and Healthcare* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, 4th ed.): 202.

221 Holloway and Galvin, *Qualitative Research in Nursing and Healthcare*, 209.

222 Douglas Harper, "Talking about Pictures: A Case for Photo-Elicitation," *Visual Studies* 17, no. 1 (2002): 23. See also below, paragraph on 'Citizen Science'.

223 Holloway and Galvin, *Qualitative Research in Nursing and Healthcare*, 215.

224 Renate Schulz, Debra Schroeder and Celeste M. Brody, "Collaborative Narrative Inquiry: Fidelity and the Ethics of Caring," *Teacher Research: International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 10, no. 4 (1997): 474.

relationship during the time of the research. In this research, informed consent at the outset was not sufficient. There needed to be an ongoing, continual negotiation in conversation, built on mutual trust and respect.

11 Professional Learning Community (PLC), Research Community (RC), Knowledge Workplace (KW) and Action Research Community (ARC)

Throughout this book, we have seen how a collaborative research approach can be beneficial insofar as it can generate practical recommendations for improving or designing practices, but it can also strengthen empirical research skills and increase the motivation of practitioners to use research results. In this regard, the development of long-term research communities, which may exist for a year or even a number of years, is a relatively new and promising phenomenon. In the field of education, communities of practitioners have been called *professional learning communities* (PLCs), but the focus can also be on doing research together and consequently learning together. In the field of educational policy and practice PLCs are in the ascendancy, as indicated by bestselling books and training programs. Remarkably, in the last fifteen years in the English-speaking world, schools have been converted into PLCs.[225] Here a professional learning community consists of a "group of teachers sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way."[226] In this definition, I highlight 'ongoing', since a PLC can exist over a long period of time, although sustaining a thriving PLC, with part-time teachers, new teachers joining and others leaving, is not easy. A PLC can also include all professional staff members, such as the technical assistants and support staff of a primary or secondary school. PLCs can call on outsiders with specific expert knowledge to join the PLC and to do reflective inquiry together.[227] Today the development of PLCs is also being critically evaluated by experts, since in some contexts PLCs

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225 Andy Hargreaves, "Sustainable Professional Learning Communities," in *Professional Learning Communities: Divergence, Depth and* Dilemmas, ed. Louise Stoll and Karen Seashore Louis (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007): 181.

226 Louise Stoll and Karen Seashore Louis, "Professional Learning Communities; elaborating new approaches," in *Professional Learning Communities: Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas*, ed. Louise Stoll and Karen seashore Louis (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007): 2.

227 Stoll and Louis, *Professional Learning Communities*, 4ff.

have become part of legislation and often have a narrower focus, for example, on mathematics or literacy. Also, the requirement that PLCs be data driven reduces the scope and possible depth of the PLC: "The result is a process that is not inspirational or stimulating for the teachers trying to develop their schools as learning communities, but a treadmill poised on a precipice of failure, inadequacy and unwanted intervention."[228] It may be a cause for people to retire early from teaching. According to Andy Hargreaves, professional learning communities appear to work best "when *evidence informed* change is incorporated into regular cycles of planning, implementation inquiry and review focused on learning."[229] These cycles are "reminiscent of the classic cycles of action research that are now becoming institutionalised as a part of school inspection and self-evaluation processes in the UK."[230]

A *research community* (RC) or *community of inquiry* (CI) differs from a PLC in its multi-purpose character. One of its purposes is improving practices, another is enabling reflection and a third is professionalisation, but related to these there is a distinct focus on research and improving research literacy. In a practical theological case study research project in the Netherlands, conducted by Sjaak Körver of Tilburg University and Martin Walton of the Protestant Theological University, knowledge is acquired about effective, good, interventions in the practice of chaplaincy.[231] The project, launched in 2016, combines a specialised with a comparative approach. In six paralleled research communities, each consisting of around ten people, researchers and chaplains collaborate in teams to discuss, describe, analyse and test the effectiveness of interventions and propose alternatives. The active engagement of practical theologians and chaplains, working in different institutional settings (general hospitals, psychiatry, elderly care, military or prisons), with one research group being mixed (rehabilitation, primary care, juvenile care, care for those with learning disabilities), is considered to increase the implementation of knowledge that prevents routinisation and helps to improve the effectiveness of interventions. Individual case studies are submitted for evaluation and consensus formation in a research community. The consensus formation

228 Hargreaves, "Sustainable Professional Learning Communities," 183.

229 Hargreaves, "Sustainable Professional Learning Communities," 187. Italics mine.

230 Hargreaves, "Sustainable Professional Learning Communities," 187.

231 Walton and Körver, "Dutch Case Studies Project in Chaplaincy Care," 257–280. See also Martin N. Walton and Sjaak Körver, "Introduction Format Case Studies Project on Chaplaincy Care. What Do Chaplains Do, Why and to What End?" See https://www.pthu.nl/Over_PThU/Organisatie/Medewerkers/m.walton/downloads/introduction-format-dutch-case-studies-project-180426-en.pdf. Site accessed July 17, 2018.

demands that, by using an extensive standardised set of analytic questions, the researcher stimulates and facilitates a discussion between the practitioners to reach a consensus or a shared understanding. The ethos of appreciative inquiry (see above) is characteristic of the analysis. The results that are gathered can be used in practice by the subjects of the research. Walton and Körver describe the teams as 'professional research communities', in which practitioners actively become researchers. A fascinating detail is that the case study is written, and later discussed, in the third person form. According to Walton and Körver, this is to ensure that the "primary focus is not on the learning process of the chaplain (submitter), but on the development of the profession."[232] Again, it is a research community.

A bridge between formal education and research can also be established by the creation of a '*knowledge workplace*' (KW) (Dutch: *Kenniswerkplaats*). Since 2017 at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle, the Netherlands, these communities, which consist of alumni, researchers, professionals, students, and lecturers, conduct research together, share knowledge via a website, social media, cloud-services and offline meetings, and discuss texts and practices. The knowledge workplaces collaborate with external stakeholders. For example, the knowledge workplace led by Angela Stoof brings together local churches, but also surprisingly monasteries and intentional communities, 'worldview-professionals' and chaplains for research purposes.[233] Another example is a knowledge workplace led by Erik Renkema on the role of religious and non-religious worldviews, traditions and their sources in primary and secondary education, in which hermeneutic communication forms the profile of schools and in which hermeneutic competence helps to bridge the differences between pupils in a situation of increasing diversity.[234]

Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer, working at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, describe the research projects of their 'Society for Organizational Learning', founded in 1997, as community action research.[235] The community

232 Walton and Körver, "Introduction Format Case Studies Project," 1.

233 Angela Stoof-Hermsen, "Inrichting van de kenniswerkplaats 'Vernieuwingen binnen het levensbeschouwelijke beroep': Een eerste schets op basis van 18 gesprekken met T&L studenten, docenten, alumni, professionals en onderzoekers" (Zwolle: Windesheim, 2018).

234 See "Kenniswerkplaats Levensbeschouwelijke Educatie en Diversiteit," Windesheim, accessed May 18, 2018. See https://www.windesheim.nl/onderzoek/onderzoeksthemas/theologie/kenniswerkplaats-levensbeschouwelijke-educatie-en-diversiteit/.

235 Peter Senge and Claus Otto Scharmer, "Community Action Research: Learning as a Community of Practitioners, Consultants and Researchers," in *Handbook of Action Research. Participatory Inquiry and Practice*, ed. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (London, Sage, 2001): 238–249.

consists of researchers, consultants and practitioners, resembling Bartunek's ideal of a 'scholarship of integration' that we described earlier. The researchers are not only conducting research, they are knowledge-brokers and they have the competences to stimulate action research, in which cases and questions submitted by practitioners are forming the content. An action research community (ARC) is a PLC where action research serves as the overarching focus. Simply put, an ARC is a merger between a PLC and action research. According to Craig Mertler, focusing on the field of education, action research communities "require that practitioners embrace reflective practice and an 'all day, every day' attitude toward professional growth, development and learning."[236] In order to participate in an ARC, you need to embrace your 'inner researcher', since you investigate your own practices.

Looking at the prospects for ministers and chaplains, creating research communities, preferably with an appreciative ethos, may indeed serve their knowledge needs. Since these communities may exist over a long period of time, job-embedded professional development may become a routine part of the job. Nevertheless, it is one thing to take the initiative to a research community, it something else to sustain it, since interest, passion and commitment may easily wane. As regards strategies for sustainability, Craig Mertler suggests that it is important to connect reforms of practices closely to existing practices and to maintain the focus on why a community comes together, which is more important than how it gathers.[237]

12 Citizen Science (CS)

In the year 1995, Alan Irwin is probably the first to use the term 'citizen science' in a programmatic sense, being critical of the modernist assumptions behind 'expert knowledge', particularly with regard to environmental issues.[238] In his book, Irwin is convinced that many citizens, particularly in hazardous situations, such as pollution, dangerous working conditions, or human-made

236 Craig A. Mertler, *Action Research Communities: Professional Learning, Empowerment, and Improvement through Collaborative Action Research* (London: Routledge, 2018): 78.

237 Mertler, "Action Research Communities," 80.

238 Alan Irwin, *Citizen Science: A Study of People, Expertise and Sustainable Development* (London: Routledge, 1995). In the summer of 2016, when my family visited the house of Charles Darwin, we found that he collected data with the help of amateur biologists and friends. He wrote hundreds and hundreds of letters per year. In this sense, citizen science is not new.

disasters, have discouraging experiences with scientists and scientific knowledge. Irwin argues that scientific knowledge must first 'make sense' to citizens in their particular situations in order to be considered relevant. Academic knowledge may be interpreted as completely meaningless or perhaps even worse, the public may feel muted by the authority of scientific evidence that contradicts local understandings. The author considers the title of his book 'rather odd'. Irwin's aim is to urge the scientific community to be more open towards vernacular, place-based knowledge, acquired by people confronted by problems in real life. Science should assist citizens with their needs and concerns and, according to Irwin, one major concern, sustainable development, can only be possible by paying extensive attention to citizens' knowledge. There is substantial contextual knowledge, generated outside formal scientific institutions.[239] Local knowledge "might enrich decision-making processes and the general knowledge of hazard and health issues."[240]

Today, buzzwords for engaging individuals in research are 'citizen science', 'community science' and 'crowd-sourcing'. The term 'citizen science' entered the Oxford English Dictionary in June 2014 as "scientific work undertaken by members of the general public, often in collaboration with or under the direction of professional scientists and scientific institutions."[241] In a document, co-authored by the European commission, citizen science is defined as "The general public engagement in scientific research activities when citizens actively contribute to science either with their intellectual effort or surrounding knowledge or with their tools and resources."[242] In 2016, when ornithologist Rick Bonney and bio-scientists Caren Cooper and Heidi Ballard launch a new journal on citizen science they write, "The field of citizen science is growing with breath-taking speed. Thousands of citizen science projects are now under way around the world."[243] Indeed, while volunteer participation in research is not new, there is a wide range of projects that can be labelled 'citizen science', from 'collection of data' by members of the public, i.e. counting birds, monitoring water quality, doing archaeology or making contributions to astronomy,

239 Irwin, *Citizen Science*, 11.

240 Irwin, *Citizen Science*, 131.

241 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2014, s.v. "Citizen Science."

242 SOCIENTIZE Consortium, *Green Paper on Citizen Science. Citizen Science for Europe. Towards a Better Society of Empowered Citizens and Enhanced Research* (Brussels: European Commission, 2013): 6.

243 Rick Bonney, Caren Cooper, and Heidi Ballard, "The Theory and Practice of Citizen Science: Launching a New Journal," *Citizen Science: Theory and Practice* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1. DOI: http://doi.org/10.5334/cstp.65. The authors write: "The largest research and innovation funding program in the European Union, Horizon 2020, is investing heavily in citizen science to tackle societal problems."

to projects in which individuals work with or without the collaboration of scientists and projects that emphasise issues raised by communities.[244] Citizen science can empower residents of a neighbourhood to prioritise areas of concern.

For example, from 2014 to 2015, Lea den Broeder conducted a case study in a neighbourhood named Amsterdam-Slotermeer, assisted by a large project team from a community work organisation. During the project citizen scientists interviewed fellow residents to gather knowledge about the community's views on health assets in their neighbourhood.[245] Lea den Broeder describes the neighbourhood as follows: "Slotermeer faces many health and other challenges, including obesity, mental health problems, loneliness, poverty and a poor liveability. Over 60% of the population is of non-western migrant origin. Residents are considered as 'hard to reach' for local (public health) policy makers."[246] Invited residents were called 'health ambassadors' and they were asked to collect the views and concerns of the people.[247] Similar to William Labov's research in ethnolinguistics, these residents were expected to be able to establish a connection with the hard-to-reach groups in the neighbourhood and they could provide 'insider' information.[248] The project started with a training session for the health ambassadors, then they collected the data and finally there was a phase of reporting and analysis.

Citizen science can also be used to make a plea for a change in government policy. King et al. mention the example of "a neighbourhood watch group that conducts a survey of their residents to identify the greatest needs for safety and then uses this information to communicate with local authorities to get those needs met."[249] Also, with regard to the increasingly multi-cultural character of neighbourhoods, involving volunteers in research may facilitate dialogue between residents from different cultures through a focus on a shared purpose.[250] Thus, on one end of the spectrum stands data collection, on the other end stands community science or participatory action research. With regard

244 Bonney, Cooper and Ballard, "The Theory and Practice of Citizen Science," 1. See also Rick Bonney, Tina B. Philips, Heidi L. Ballard and Jody W. Finck, "Can Citizen Science Enhance Public Understanding of Science?" in *Public Understanding of Science* 25, no. 1 (2016).

245 See Julia Maria (Lea) den Broeder, "Citizen Science for Health in All Policies: Engaging Communities in Knowledge Development" (PhD diss., VU-University, 2017).

246 Den Broeder, *Citizen Science for Health in All Policies*, 52.

247 Den Broeder, *Citizen Science for Health in All Policies*, 31.

248 Den Broeder, *Citizen Science for Health in All Policies*, 51.

249 Abby C. King et al., "Leveraging Citizen Science and Information Technology for Population Physical Activity Promotion," *Translational Journal of the American College of Sports Medicine* 1, no. 4 (2016): 33.

250 King et al., "Leveraging Citizen Science," 33.

to the former, benefits include volunteers adding data to long-term data sets and improved scientific literacy among the public. With regard to the latter, benefits include new knowledge of communal practices for dealing with communal needs and concerns. In citizen science projects volunteers also learn about the species or the stars they are observing, and they may experience what research processes are like. They may also gain an interest in research, that is, it will increase the relevance of scientific inquiry. In conservation, ecology, and geography, cutting edge technologies are applied. Citizens can be 'citizen sensors': "Mobile phone technologies and the emergence and uptake of high-speed smart phones with GPS and data upload capabilities can allow instant collection and transmission of data."[251] Information and communication technologies facilitate new types of relationships, practices and interactions.[252] Remarkably, some discoveries have been made by volunteers. By now the story of so-called 'Hanny's Voorwerp' is quite famous. In 2007, Hanny van Arkel, who was volunteering in an online Galaxy Zoo project, watched the sky and asked 'Hey, what's this then?' A little later, she found out that she had discovered a rare object, which was later even named after her. The discovery had a huge impact on her life.[253]

In my view, practical theologians engaged in empirical work need to discover the immense potential of everyday believers, who can be invited, motivated and trained to observe, listen, photograph objects, settings and places, keep a diary[254] and even interview people engaged in Christian practices. Can everyday believers be motivated to participate? As we stated in Chapter 5, Christian practices are not *always* in crisis, as some practical theologians put it, but in these practices, there is much at stake. In 2004, Bruno Latour distinguished between matters of fact, which are risk free, and matters of concern,

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251 Christina L. Catlin-Groves, "The Citizen Science Landscape: From Volunteers to Citizen Sensors and Beyond," *International Journal of Zoology*, vol. 2012.

252 In 2015, ocean research researchers distributed 'Sampling Kits' to interested citizens. These kits contain items for biodiversity measurements – from gloves to a thermometer and sample bottles. Environmental results of these measurements are then uploaded by means of the OSD App. See: www.citclops.eu.

253 See Hanny Van Arkel, "Voorwerp," Hanny's Voorwerp, accessed April 4, 2018, http://www.hannysvoorwerp.com/3-voorwerp/.

254 According to Nancy Ammerman, until her own research-project on everyday religion, conducted with a group of colleagues, diaries were rarely used in the study of religion. In this project, research participants received a digital recorder and were asked to record five to fifteen minutes of stories each day for a week. Ammerman writes: "As we analyzed the resulting data, we learned more about the work, household and leisure lives of these participants than interviews had revealed, seeing more clearly how and where spiritual dimensions of life were enacted (or not). Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 17.

which are associated with risk.[255] With regard to the latter "we talk about a crisis every time they emerge."[256] According to Latour, in our world, we are witnessing a "transformation of all matters of facts into disputed states of affair."[257] Today, Christian practices, embedded as they are in society and influenced by society, are associated with risk in numerous contexts. Precisely this can motivate volunteers to participate in research about these matters of concern, because they also concern them. If Christian practices are a matter of concern, an epistemic culture that includes forms of empirical research with transformative learning is needed. Practical theological research projects that relate to these matters can actively engage Christians. Citizen scientists have been labelled the 'world's largest research team' and everyday believers can also be an enormous team. Furthermore, new technologies can contribute to their task in hitherto unexpected ways. The active participation of everyday believers in practical theology may possibly yield crucial knowledge on Christian practices and increase research capacity.

An example of using citizen science in practical theology is a PhD project, conducted by Matthias Kaljouw, at the PThU on the impact of cathedral churches, city-churches or 'iconic churches', as we call them. Eighteen churches have agreed to participate, including a number of quite well-known ones, like the Westerkerk in Amsterdam, which Anne Frank described in her diary, and the Laurenskerk in Rotterdam, the only surviving building reminiscent of the city's medieval architecture. The research will involve collaboration between the PhD student and supervisors on the one hand, and eighteen congregations, their leaders and their members on the other hand. In this project, church members will be recruited through surveys to help collect data. We expect that the members of the faith communities that gather in these iconic churches will no longer be a public of academic research, waiting expectantly for the results to be disseminated in a research report or dissertation, but will be actively involved.

Research on the effect of participation in citizen science projects shows that contributing to research can be perceived as a positive experience. Research on volunteer involvement shows that money, some form of financial aid or another type of reward, for example, community recognition, can stimulate participation, but a shared interest in the research topic, which is an intrinsic

255 Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004): 22.

256 Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 24.

257 Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 25.

motivator, is the most important driver for participation.[258] Benefits include broader understanding of specific practices and may lead to changes with regard to the active and conscious participation in these practices. Being trained as a volunteer also improves social skills and expands the networks of the volunteers. In particular, if the volunteers hardly knew each other before hand, the links that are created through collaboration often cross cultural and social boundaries and can also be supportive to them later.

Finally, although we already mentioned them shortly, in both citizen science-like research projects and other collaborative approaches, *visual methods* can be used, if the participants are adequately trained in how to use the equipment. In the research project of Nancy Ammerman and her colleagues on everyday religion, participants were invited to photograph settings that they considered to be important and, after the period of taking pictures, a follow-up interview was scheduled.[259] Participants needed some guidance about what to include or exclude in their photographs, although their imagination and creativity should not be discouraged. In one of his most recent projects, Roman Williams asked everyday believers to use personal mobile devices or digital cameras to photograph congregational contexts and community concerns. These images were then used in in-depth interviews, in which they functioned as trigger or conversation starter. They were also used in small group discussions and displayed publicly to engage communities of faith in the process of self-evaluation, dialogue, and change.[260] In one of his blogs, Williams writes that, in preparation, it is helpful to think about what kinds of information one wants to collect:

> I find it helpful to have a theme or question to guide visual explorations. In what ways is God at work in your congregation, neighborhood, or city? What needs or opportunities are present near your congregation's place of worship? What is it like to walk, bike, or take public transportation to your congregation's place of meeting? What does it look like to live in this neighborhood? Who are our neighbors?[261]

In 2012, Nancy Ammerman and Roman Williams wrote: "It is curious that visual methods are not more prevalent in the sociology of religion and that

258 SOCIENTIZE Consortium, *Green Paper on Citizen Science*, 27.
259 Ammerman, *Sacred Stories*, 15.
260 See http://studyingcongregations.org. Site accessed May 10, 2018.
261 Roman R. Williams, "Walking with Cameras," Studying Congregations, last modified April 20, 2006, accessed July 9, 2018, http://studyingcongregations.org/ecology-frame.

the literature in the field does not approach the range of methodological possibilities currently available."[262] Three years later, Williams explicitly stated that visual methods encourage participatory and collaborative research methods.[263] In the last few years, Williams has extensively elaborated the methods in a collaborative direction, for example, describing congregational ethnographic walks with cameras or program evaluation using photographs.[264]

13 Some Collaborative Methods

Having described different research strategies, in this final paragraph the question is: What methods do we choose in these strategies? Here the answer may come as a surprise. Not *all* the research methods in a collaborative research strategy or relational approach need to be… relational. Within collaborative ethnography, ethnographic *methods*, group discussions, but also participant observation and, private, in-depth individual interviews, can be used, albeit it that the interpretation of data can be a matter of collaboration. Within PAR, or, as it is often called, community-based participatory research (CBPR), it is essential that the partnerships continually evaluate their progress toward achieving an effective collaborative process, but then one-to-one interviews and even questionnaires, albeit often developed in collaboration, are not ruled out. It is just that traditional research methods, perhaps a questionnaire alone, or a questionnaire and some interviews, will not demonstrate the way in which some deeply personal experiences are so profoundly part of people's lives, nor do they tap on the experience-based knowledge of practitioners. Also, in narrative inquiry (NI), a number of interviews in order to extract information from respondents is simply not enough, as we will see in the example of a research project on experiences of women with sexual abuse in pastoral care.

262 Nancy T. Ammerman and Roman R. Williams, "Speaking of Methods: Eliciting Religious Narratives through Interviews, Photos, and Oral Diaries," in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion, Vol. 3: New Methods in the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Enzo Pace, Luigi Berzano and Giuseppe Giordan (Leiden, Brill, 2012): 123.

263 Roman R. Williams, ed., *Seeing Religion: Toward a Visual Sociology of Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015). For using photographs in interviews, see Ammerman and Williams, "Speaking of Methods," 117–134.

264 Williams adds that there are important ethical concerns to address. See Roman R. Williams, "When a Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Visual Program Evaluation," *Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, last modified August 23, 2016*, accessed June 12, 2018, http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/when-a-picture-is-worth-a-thousand-words-visual-program-evaluation/.

In methodological literature, there is ample information on traditional methods. In this final paragraph I describe three collaborative methods, first, expert groups, in which not only expertise, but also experience-expertise can be bundled, second, focus groups, being an important dialogue method, and finally, performative action, a method that can be used when the possibilities for dialogue are limited. There are other collaborative methods too, an example being group model building (GMB), which "allows the local participants to formulate their own understanding of the problem they are addressing."[265] Unfortunately, I am unable to provide descriptions of all these methods due to space limitations. Also, in regard to the Jesus-story in Christian practices, there are numerous conversational methods, such as 'dwelling in the Word' or *Lectio Divina* which enable fruitful dialogues with biblical narratives. These methods could also be used in empirical research, but then practical theologians would be analysing what is going on in these conversations and what participants experience in these conversations. This would not make these methods 'collaborative methods' *per se*, but the use thereof can, as Swedish practical theologian Jonas Ideström demonstrates, yield fascinating field data that can be analysed, for example, with the help of Yrjö Engeström's theoretical framework.[266]

13.1 *Expert Meeting, Expert Panel, Expert Consultation, Thematic Expert Group (TEG) and Thematic Expert Assembly (TEA)*

In the example at the beginning of this chapter, what kicked off the collaborative research on the response of local churches to the earthquakes, was an expert meeting that included the perspectives of those who were affected, not only by the human-made disaster but also by the practices that had already been developed by churches in the area. Expert meetings, panels and consultations, thematic expert groups (TEG) or thematic expert assemblies (TEA) are often created by businesses, management committees, community groups, NGOs and governmental organisations. They can be also be used when there is not much money or time available for research. In practical theology they are rarely used. In the example, we used an expert meeting because we considered the matter to be urgent. Expert panels can enable assessments of specific practices and strategies, like policy-measures, or they can be used to make

265 Klaas Bom and Benno van den Toren, "A Contribution to the Debate on Science and Faith by Christian Students from Abidjan," *Zygon* 52, no. 3 (2017): 648; Van den Toren and Bom, "On the Value of Action and Participatory Research in Intercultural Theology," 92.

266 Jonas Ideström, "In Dialogue with the Gospel. Reflections on a Method for Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology," *Ecclesial Practices. Journal of Ecclesiology and Ethnography* 1, no. 1 (2014): 80, 90.

an inventory of problems and barriers that a specific group of people faces. In terms of outcomes, expert panels can sometimes build a consensus of opinion regarding possible scenarios or courses of action by using the so-called Delphi Method.[267] An example of a problem that was addressed using an expert panel is youth employment. The expert panel was launched by the Canadian government in 2016. In the panel's report, we read the following:

> Having accepted the challenge, we started our journey by learning. We combed through reports, tables and graphs, seeking the answers to some key questions: How many young people in Canada are unemployed? Which young people in Canada are most likely to struggle to find work? In what sectors are they working? What programs already exist for youth who need help? What programs exist to help youth elsewhere around the world from which we can learn? Having used this research to establish a basic understanding of the issues, we wanted to hear from youth, thought leaders and organisations.[268]

While experts can commission empirical research, they do not always conduct it themselves. In fact, they often operate in a field with limited empirical data. Nevertheless, in order to include the perspectives of people who are affected by certain measures, they can organise online surveys, arrange roundtables in an area or invite people to have conversations with them. The expert panel on youth employment writes:

> We have talked to young people, experts, employers, community organisations and service providers in our communities. We've organised more than 120 discussions with over 300 participants.… These conversations have linked faces and named faces to the data. We're learning about the lives that are impacted when young people face barriers to employment. We're also learning about the positive changes youth can make in their workplace when they are given the opportunity to do so.… We have also

267 The Delphi Method was developed in the early 1950s and has been used in different contexts. It is an iterative process, that is used to collect opinions of experts using a series of questionnaires. It was originally developed in the 1950s by the RAND corporation. See: www.rand.org. Also see Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer, "An Experimental Application of the Delphi Method to the Use of Experts," *Management Science* 9, no. 3 (1963): 458–467. In 2011, RAND developed a successor of the method, called ExpertLens.

268 *Understanding the Realities: Youth Employment in Canada – Interim Report of the Expert Panel on Youth Employment*, 2016, 7–8.

> reached out to young Canadians through our Facebook page and on Twitter, where our youth panel has reached almost 700,000 users. We're inviting these career carvers to complete our online survey and share their perspectives, and each week, we engage youth by asking them a different question about their employment experience on social media.[269]

An expert group is considered to pool the available expertise on a specific theme. The expertise can consist of work experience, task-solving experience, practice-based knowledge, experience with innovations, research experience, position, etc. Methodologists have distinguished 'narrow expert consultation' (NEC) from 'broad expert information processes' (BEIP), in which the first builds on the internal knowledge of the committee or panel appointed to execute a defined task, while the second widens the group of participating stakeholders, for example, by including interest groups.[270] In practical theology, depending on the nature of the issue being addressed, expert panels may bring together researchers, professional practitioners and other stakeholders, such as elders, deacons and everyday believers in novel ways.[271] Here, as in all practical theological studies, these stakeholders also need to have a clear eye for the theological dimension in the practices that are being examined or evaluated. What is going on or what ought to be going on is often inspired by Scripture and the Jesus-story. Thus, it is not that an expert group necessarily consists of a 'priestly cast' or a (theologically) educated few, since, depending on the theme, expert groups do well to include vernacular knowledge and insights, which are developed in language, sometimes ordinary theological language, that is grounded in local concerns.[272]

13.2 *Focus Groups*

Today a wide variety of fascinating and promising *dialogue methods* has been developed to help gain a composite understanding of a problem by building on the knowledge of relevant stakeholders.[273] They can also be used for honing in

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269 *Understanding the Realities: Youth Employment in Canada – Interim Report of the Expert Panel on Youth Employment*, 2016, 8.

270 Pasi Rikkonen, Jari Kaivo-oja and Jyrki Aakkula, "Delphi Expert Panels in the Scenario-based Strategic Planning of Agriculture," *Foresight* 8, no. 1 (2006): 67.

271 For different types of stakeholders, See Chapter 8.

272 Thomas McLaughlin, *Street Smarts and Critical Theory: Listening to the Vernacular* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996): 6.

273 David McDonald, Gabrielle Bammer and Peter Deane, *Research Integration Using Dialogue Methods* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2009).

on a particular aspect of a problem.[274] Here, 'relevant' refers to both the range of different stakeholders who are affected by the particular problem and those in a position to make decisions about it. Dialogue methods may also be used to include knowledge from diverse disciplines.[275] Following Alberto Franco, David McDonald, Gabrielle Bammer and Peter Deane define dialogue as to "jointly create meaning and shared understanding through conversation."[276] In their open access book, they provide descriptions of a diversity of such methods, which are used in research areas like natural resource management, public health, security, and technological innovation.[277] Due to space limitations, I cannot discuss them all here or reflect on their possible uses in the discipline of practical theology. Instead, based on my own research experience, I have chosen to focus on one dialogue method that is increasingly used in ecclesial research: the focus group.[278]

A focus group is a qualitative research method in which the researcher gathers a small group with certain common features or characteristics and focuses their discussion on a given issue or topic. The method is used to reduce the influence of the interviewer on an interviewee. In the words of Monique Hennink, an expert on the method, "The discussion element of the method gives participants greater control of the issues raised in the dialogue, because they are essentially discussing the issues among themselves rather than directly with an interviewer."[279] In the twenties, Emory Bogardus, a leading scholar in social psychology, discovered the potential of group interviewing. The method was demanded by the central theme of the discipline: "The quintessence of

274 McDonald, Bammer and Deane, *Research Integration*, 5.

275 McDonald, Bammer and Deane, *Research Integration*, 1.

276 L. Alberto Franco, "Forms of Conversation and Problem Structuring Methods: A Conceptual Development," *Journal of the Operational Research Society* 57, no. 7 (2006): 813–821.

277 In the category of dialogue methods that provide a broad understanding of a problem they include: group model building, citizens' jury, consensus conference, consensus development panel, Delphi technique, future search conference, most significant change technique, nominal group technique, open space technology, scenario planning and soft systems methodology. McDonald, Bammer and Deane, *Research Integration*. See: https://press.anu.edu.au/publications/research-integration-using-dialogue-methods.

278 Herman Noordegraaf and Henk de Roest, "'We Learned It at Our Mothers' Knees': Perspectives of Churchgoing Volunteers on their Voluntary Service," *Reformed World* 59, no. 3 (2009): 213–226.

279 Monique Hennink, *Understanding Focus Group Discussions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 5. An excellent guide for conducting focus group discussions is Monique Hennink, *International Focus Group Research: A Handbook for the Health and Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also Pranee Liamputtong, *Focus Group Methodology: Principles and Practice* (London: SAGE, 2011).

social psychology is found in personalities interacting within groups."[280] As he states:

> At nearly every group interview a question would elicit contradictory replies from two or more present. At once each would feel called upon to defend his position and in doing so would draw upon his store of reserve experiences in surprising ways. As a result of group discussion, certain persons present developed new points that had not previously occurred to them.[281]

In the late 1930s and early forties, Herta Herzog, Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton and Patricia Kendall used what they called "focused interviews" and found that they produced a wide diversity of responses. The paper that Merton and Kendall published about these interviews in 1946 became a landmark methodology paper.[282] In the 1950s, focus groups were discovered by marketing research. In the early 1960s, Paolo Freire organised and described the method of so-called 'culture circles', as a part of his literacy programs for engaging with vulnerable people in their own lifeworld.[283] Freire recorded how oppressed people, like peasants, tended to downplay their own knowledge, having high esteem for the knowledge of an expert.[284] In the culture circles, educators were able to enter into group conversations in which participants were invited to narrate and discuss their lived realities. Conversations could be started through photo-elicitation or news stories, for example, on the topic of alcoholism. According to Freire, dialogue in groups can produce critical consciousness (Portuguese: *conscientização*) and both criticize and renew specific practices, especially practices that are characterized by oppressive mechanisms. In the second and third wave of feminism and womanism, focus groups or so-called 'consciousness-raising groups', in which women can share their stories and

280 Emory S. Bogardus, "Chapter 1. The Field, Development and Literature of Social Psychology," in *Essentials of Social Psychology* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1920): 18.

281 Emory S. Bogardus, "The Group Interview," *Journal of Applied Sociology* 10 (1926): 380.

282 Robert K. Merton and Patricia L. Kendall, "The Focused Interview," *American Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 6 (1946): 541–557.

283 Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 63, 82, 97, 120. See George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis, *Focus Groups: From Structured Interviews to Collective Conversations* (London: Routledge, 2013): 22ff. See also Mariana Souto-Manning, *Freire, Teaching, and Learning: Culture Circles across Contexts. Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009).

284 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 63.

talk about their experiences in a safe space, have been used for empowerment agendas and to stimulate social change. Focus groups can also be connected to socialising. Pranee Liamputtong, drawing on several examples of research with Latina women, immigrants in Canada and Indian communities, states that "the sharing of food… is an essential part of conducting focus groups in cross-cultural settings."[285] Today, focus groups that consist of different people with a common denominator are still widely employed by businesses and are currently one of the most used methods in the health and social sciences. They are also used in many different geographical contexts. Norma Romm, reflecting on the use of focus group in Africa, writes how focus groups can inform the research in terms of an appreciation of indigenous ways of knowing, where knowing is understood as a relational exercise.[286] As a facilitator, she introduced her research to the focus group by creating a communal climate: "Hopefully we will all learn from one another today. You will hopefully learn by hearing each other and we will learn from hearing you and you may learn from hearing some of our questions and from our input that we make from time to time – so it will be like a learning experience for us all. So, we can consider that we are all re-searching together today."[287]

Nevertheless, whether or not focus groups are the most *effective* method depends on the purpose of the research. According to a study by Edward Fern, published in 1982, a single focus group discussion can generate about 70 percent of the same issues as a series of in-depth interviews with the same number of people.[288] But other questions should also be asked when comparing methods. Are focus groups suitable for answering the research question? Do they have a clear role in a mixed study design, preferably in combination with a number of in-depth-interviews or, in the quantitative direction, with a survey or questionnaire? While focus groups may seem 'handy', it is not self-evident to include them in a study. On the other hand, if practical theological research

285 Liamputtong, *Focus Group Methodology*, 139.

286 Norma R. A. Romm, "Conducting Focus Groups in Terms of an Appreciation of Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Some Examples from South Africa," *Forum Qualitative Social Research* 16, no. 1 (2015): 1.

287 Romm, "Conducting Focus Groups," 14.

288 "Nominal groups of eight individual interviews generated significantly more ideas than eight-member focus groups." Edward Fern, "The Use of Focus Groups for Idea Generation: The Effects of Group Size, Acquaintanceship and Moderator on Response Quantity and Quality," *Journal of Marketing Research* 19, no. 1 (1982): 6. The percentage is taken from figure 2. Later in his article, Fern writes that "From a market researcher's perspective, individual interviews may be a better alternative for exploratory research than focus groups. The sheer volume of ideas, as well as the quality of ideas, suggests using individual interviews." Fern, "The Use of Focus Groups," 12.

is to be collaborative, as the accumulation of our rationales suggest, at least one or two focus groups need to be included. Jenny Kitzinger's research on focus groups indicates that when group dynamics work well, the co-participants can act as co-researchers.[289] They can take the research in new directions. This presupposes that focus groups are not only to be used to 'extract information' or 'ideas' from the participants. The hallmark of the method is the explicit use of group interaction to produce insights and new questions that would be less accessible without the interaction. The synergy of the group interaction is important; group members can "spark each other off."[290] Focus groups turn out to have remarkable performative effects. The interaction stimulates people to tell about their experiences, to tell their stories or share their perspectives. Furthermore, as Fern writes in another article reviewing the experiential reports of moderators:

> In the course of group discussion, the less inhibited individuals 'ventilate' their experiences, which encourages others to ventilate theirs. If the 'self-starters' are rewarded or receive approval, norms will be established for the more inhibited members. Once the process is well under way it tends to be 'self-maintaining and self-reinforcing.' As other group members see the atmosphere becoming more permissive, they become less reluctant to discuss personal experiences and habits.[291]

In academic practical theology, focus groups can have an added value for the research.[292] As I see it, the interaction that takes place in focus groups means that they have great potential for collaborative knowledge formation. The social interaction dynamics in focus group data can offer new insights, not only for the scholar, but also for the participants themselves.[293] Therefore, when

289 Jenny Kitzinger, "The Methodology of Focus Groups: The Importance of Interaction between Research Participants," *Sociology of Health and Illness* 16, no. 1 (1994): 107.

290 Jerry Wellington and Marcin Szczerbinski, *Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (London / New York, NY: Continuum Publishers Group, 2007): 90.

291 Edward Fern, "Why Do Focus Groups Work? A Review and Integration of Small Group Process Theories," in *NA – Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 9, ed., Andrew Mitchell (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Consumer Research, 1982): 444.

292 Earlier I wrote about using focus groups in practical theology. See Henk de Roest, "The Focus Group Method in Practical Ecclesiology: Performative Effects and Ecclesiological Rationale," *Ecclesial Practices* 2, no. 2 (2015): 235–254.

293 Bente Halkier, "Focus Groups as Social Enactments: Integrating Interaction and Content in the Analysis of Focus Group Data," *Qualitative Research* 10, no. 1 (2010): 71–89; see also Mette Grønkjær, Tine Curtis, Charlotte de Crespigny and Charlotte Delmar, "Analysing Group Interaction in Focus Group Research: Impact on Content and the Role of the Moderator," *Qualitative Studies* 2, no. 1 (201): 16–30.

practical theologians invite practitioners to take part in focus groups, participants are likely to feel fuelled and enriched by the conversation and are likely to ask, ‘could not we have conversations like this more often?’ Or, listening to each other’s voices may influence, improve or even transform the practices of a community of practice. Therefore, focus groups should certainly be considered in a mixed method approach. Methodologists in the social sciences even affirm that it is “entirely appropriate to use focus groups as the sole research method rather than in combination with other research techniques.”[294] According to leading researchers, focus groups stimulate valorisation right from the outset, allowing the participating individuals and groups to be more involved in the research project. Therefore, it is likely that the research will meet their needs. For example, a research project conducted by Jos de Kock at the PThU explored the question, “how can religious learning processes, in the context of missionary youth work, be religiously and pedagogically understood?”[295] To address this question, he conducted fieldwork on two cases of Christian youth work outside the church, one of them being social work via youth centres in different cities in the Netherlands. In one of the sessions, De Kock facilitated a focus group of five youth workers from these different centres. Together, the youth workers discovered their values, but also the authority and charism that is attributed to them by youngsters, how they are, in a sense, seen as embodying the Bible, and how they, together with youngsters, create a new form of Christian community at street level.

When it comes to engaging researchers, practitioners and everyday believers in research, Monique Hennink points to an interesting option for practical theologians, namely to “involve those who will use the results of focus group research (typically community members or groups) in the design and conduct of the group and the dissemination of the study results.”[296] In this approach, the *purpose* of the focus group is partially determined by the practitioners and the community members, because they directly use the outcomes. The stakeholders may have certain longings, desired changes or improvements in their practices, and they can use focus groups to discuss experiences, expectations, barriers or strategies for evaluating, assessing or achieving these changes. In this regard, in their research on health issues with American Indian communities, Daley et al. involved community members in the formative phase

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294 Jenny Cameron, “Focusing on the Focus Group,” in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, ed. Iain Hay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 156.

295 Jos de Kock, “Being a Church through Religious Learning at the Street Level,” *Ecclesial Practices* 2, no. 2 (2015): 217–234.

296 Hennink, *Understanding Focus Group Discussions*, 15.

of the research, for example, by reviewing grants and providing feedback before research proposals are submitted, and in formal data analysis.[297] Why did the researchers choose focus groups with indigenous people? Primarily because they make community members feel safe. Therefore, the recruitment of focus group participants took place by word of mouth communication and in native-specific events, at pow-wows in the American Indian communities. Interestingly, all focus groups began with an informal meal for the same reason, "allowing for a relaxed atmosphere."[298] Daley writes: "We chose focus groups for talking with community members because our community partners believed that it would be a safer environment for community members; it was believed that no one would meet with researchers alone and that people could come to the focus groups together."[299]

13.3 *Performative Action (PA) and Participative Exercise (PE)*

One limitation of a dialogue method like the focus group is that not everyone feels at ease expressing themselves verbally. Participants may need something to elicit their response. This is what is done in performative action, a collaborative method primarily used in religious education, but also in working with lay people and leaders of congregations. In this method, performativity means "to enter into the performance of theological activity."[300] As I see it, performative action holds promise for research participants who find it difficult to discuss their opinions, views, operating primarily on a cognitive level. In this method, more modes of communication are used. Anthony Reddie describes it as follows:

> Performative action requires that we creatively engage with the 'other' in the socio-constructed space within the classroom, in which all participants promise to engage with the 'other' in a fashion that affirms mutuality, cooperation, and a shared commitment to the production of new knowledge.[301]

297 Christine M. Daley, Aimee S. James, Ezekiel Ulrey, Stephanie Joseph, Angelia Talawyma, Won S. Choi, K. Allen Greiner, and M. Kathryn Coe, "Using Focus Groups in Community-Based Participatory Research: Challenges and Resolutions," *Qualitative Health Research*, 20, no. 5 (2010): 698. See: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2947156/.

298 Daley et al., "Using Focus Groups," 700.

299 Daley et al., "Using Focus Groups," 699.

300 Reddie, *Working Against the Grain: Re-imagining Black Theology in the 21st Century* (London: Equinox, 2008): 58.

301 Reddie, "Teaching for Racial Justice," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 13, no. 2 (2010): 103.

Here I highlight the, “shared commitment to the production of new knowledge.” Reddie sees enactments, invitations to improvise and ‘serious games’ (Clarke Abt) as collaborative tools for learning from and gaining knowledge about the ‘other’ and about oneself. In his research with Black and White students, but also with Black faith communities, Reddie speaks of ‘workshops’, ‘participative encounters’, ‘dramatic exercises’, ‘pieces of drama’ or ‘participative exercises’.[302] These exercises, the force of which Reddie experienced himself at an earlier stage in his life, enable a form of communication that does not depend upon oral fluency.[303] Sometimes these exercises have names like ‘Are You in the Story?’ or ‘Grasping the Chaos’, in other cases crosses are charted on a map or photo-elicitation is used. One example from the many exercises scattered throughout Reddie’s writings is the exercise entitled ‘Get on the bus’. Members of two faith communities are asked to position themselves in relation to a bus, on a mythical journey to ‘the promised land’, exemplifying the community. Do they place themselves in the bus at all? Or in one of its four ‘compartments’, identifying themselves with a depicted person in that part of the bus? The position in or outside the bus reflects their experiences, expressions and also what they aspire for themselves and the community. The performative effect of this exercise can, as I see it, be described as ‘faith-community-formation-in-process’, an emerging community. Reddie writes:

> The journey towards the beloved community is one in which the process is as important as the destination that is reached. By this I mean that the challenge to engage with one another, across our tangled and complicated lines of class, ethnic and theological differences, is one that is essential if the arrival at the destination is to make any kind of sense.[304]

Reddie received the input from this exercise, an example of an ‘imaginative role-playing framework’, from three sources. First, he collected a number of individual responses to informal questions on what the faith community should be doing and how people relate to their faith community, second, he used scholarly literature on Black churches and third, he applied insights about drama and theatre. With regard to the latter, Reddie learned a lot from Augusto Boal’s ‘theatre of the oppressed’. These sources helped him to create the exercise, which in turn helped both the leadership and members to ‘conceptualise

302 Reddie, *Working Against the Grain*, 122. See also Anthony Reddie, *Dramatizing Theologies: A Participative Approach to Black God-Talk* (London: Equinox, 2006).

303 Reddie, *Dramatizing Theologies*, 5.

304 Reddie, *Working Against the Grain*, 129.

their missiological task', to re-frame their mission in a communal endeavour. Participants were challenged about their normative assumptions, for example, the idea that in a faith community everyone should be sitting in the first compartment of the bus… Performative actions or participative exercises like this one assist faith communities or, for that matter, students in classrooms, in the facilitation of conversations, in order to enable all the participants to learn: "The desire is to create new forms of knowing for the express purpose of changing and developing better praxis in terms of the experiential skills of engaging with the 'other'."[305]

Is this a form of valorising practical theology? Reddie seeks to enable a conversation between Black theology and ordinary Black people, so that by participating in a workshop or exercise they can relate both affirming and critical insights from Black theology to their self-definition, their everyday life, religious experiences and their involvement in ecclesial practices. Black theology serves as a source for orientation and transformation. Participants who are often marginalised and voiceless become engaged "in the very process of how theology is constructed."[306] Over the years, Reddie has seen how 'new theological knowledge' is created by the dialogue.[307] Drawing on Thomas Groome's participative approach to practical theology and his notion of 'shared praxis', the Christian story can be appropriated in these dramatic exercises.[308] Participants are empowered to dwell in and make the Christian story, or indeed a specific biblical narrative, their story.

14 Conclusion

The central question in this book is how should practical theological research be designed, conducted and valorised to achieve the goals of advancing theory, practice theories and practice? In this chapter, we addressed this question by providing a toolbox of collaborative research strategies and some collaborative methods, many of which are best learned gradually and through experience. Partnering with colleagues who are experienced at working in the field is a prerequisite in order to learn to operate in the field. Most importantly, all of these strategies and methods, to a lesser or greater extent include the communities being researched and, by creating temporary or long-term research

305 Reddie, "Teaching for Racial Justice," 103.
306 Reddie, *Dramatizing Theologies*, 128.
307 Reddie, *Working Against the Grain*, 208.
308 Reddie, *Working Against the Grain*, 216ff.

communities, bridge the gap between the academy and the communities of practice that the academy seeks to address. From the perspective of practitioners and everyday believers in Christian practices, embedded as they are in practices of the world, practical theology becomes relevant, not only for their concerns, needs and longings for improvement, but also for examining or even discovering the potential of their practices of faith. Researchers, practitioners and everyday believers can also come to realise the missiological, epistemological and community-shaping benefits of both collecting data and theorising together. Furthermore, the section on citizen science sketched a type of collaborative research in which the potential of the worldwide community of Christians can be tapped to observe, listen, photograph objects, make videos and blogs, and even interview people engaged in churchly or religious practices. In sum, the various collaborative approaches and methods described in this chapter constitute a goldmine for future practical theological research. Nevertheless, as promising as these approaches sound, are there not serious limitations to collaborative research? Are there not good reasons for the ivory tower? We will address these questions in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8

Collaborative Research in Practical Theology: Nuances and Limitations

Constraints to Participation

1 Introduction

The 'gap' between practical theologians and practitioners is likely to be bridged in theological institutions and the communities of practices associated with them, when teaching, training, research and practices are connected. The results of empirical research are shared with students in teaching, students are trained to do empirical research for their bachelor's and master's theses, the results of research form the content of training for practitioners, and practitioners are being trained to become researchers themselves. As for the content, in order to be relevant, practical theological research needs to address practitioners' latent or manifest needs by 'solving' problems in practice, as Schleiermacher put it.

Before proceeding with collaborative research practices, a couple of caveats must be emphasised. Collaborative research in the sciences, characterised by shared objectives and the creation of new foreground knowledge, is at the foreground of European research agendas.[1] Some researchers even speak of a "transdisciplinary university."[2] But what are the constraints, if any? Stakeholder involvement has itself attracted the interest of researchers. According to Jolibert and Wesselink, focusing on the domain of environmental science in which the concept of transdisciplinarity finds its origin, most research on science–society interactions has "focused on the 'user' side of the equation, i.e. how and when policy makers and practitioners may or may not use research outcomes."[3] They assert that there is a gap when it comes to the question of how and when scientists use stakeholders' input into their research, and to the related question of what barriers and enablers they experience. Furthermore,

1 EIRMA, EUA, EARTO & ProTon Europe, *Responsible Partnering Guidelines* (EIRMA, EUA, EARTO & ProTon Europe, 2009).

2 Leigh Caroll et al., "Envisioning a Transdisciplinary University," *The Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics* 42, no. 2 (suppl.) (2014): 17–25.

3 Jolibert and Wesselink, "Research Impacts," 101.

we add, stakeholders themselves may also experience barriers, for example, when it comes to their capacities, time and motivation.

In this chapter, I reflect on a number of questions. First, I pick up two basic questions that we touched upon in Chapter 1, discussing the need for research to be independent. Here we ask: does collaborative research not suffer from being unreliable? And, related to this, are there not very good reasons for the ivory tower? Second, we apply the aforementioned research on stakeholder involvement to practical theology, which will turn out to be helpful for nuancing our claim that academic practical theology should, at all times and in all the phases of the research, seek collaboration with practitioners and/or everyday believers. In order to increase the utility (!) of this stakeholder research in practical theology, we use the example of one particular research project on sexual boundary trespassing in pastoral care and its consequences for the relational dynamics in the congregation. Which different types of stakeholders can we distinguish and what roles can they play in the different parts of the research? Third, we approach relational approaches and collaborative research practices from a different angle. Despite the postcolonial rationale, is there not always power involved? Does the researcher not have the power to describe, understand, explain and offer, powerful, advice, which is hard to disagree with? Are there remedies that may serve to mitigate the effect of power mechanisms? Fourth, is collaborative research not an unpractical, unrealisable and therefore unattainable ideal? What, if any, are the constraints to participation of societal and/or ecclesial actors? Fifth, how do the practioners perceive the researchers? Sixth, we will address the topic of the dynamics in research groups. What are the merits – and costs – of collaboration in a team? When are research teams likely to be succesfull?

2 Reliability or 'Good Reasons for the Ivory Tower'

The idea of collaborative research and stakeholder engagement in research often meets with scepticism regarding its authority and credibility.[4] When I told the members of the reading club on Franz Rosenzweig that I was about to write a book on collaborative research, the first response I received was raised eyebrows. Is research with the people that are affected by it not self-contradictory? A colleague stated that we must not allow 'Rag, tag and bobtail'

4 See Anna Wesselink, Rob Hoppe, "If Post-Normal Science is the Solution, what is the Problem? The Politics of Activist Environmental Science," *Science Technology Human* Values 36, no. 3 (2011): 397.

or 'the common rabble' to interfere in what constitutes an academic project... There is a dissensus among academics about the importance of 'rigorous' research versus 'relevant' research. As Jean Bartunek observes, "Many academics insist on the importance of rigorous research judged solely by academic standards; others disdain it in favour of research that is directly relevant to practitioners and that may or may not be rigorous."[5] Indeed, in health research, according to Elberse et al., "patient involvement could create a dilemma regarding loss of scientific authority."[6] This is not only because of suspicion from the academic world, but also from the government, since "inputs from patients are often considered 'subjective'."[7] Environmental scientists point to another problem related to the implementation of the results of academic research. Eva Lövbrand states that, while the involvement of potential recipients of knowledge will increase the likelihood of usefulness of the research, a tight coupling between stakeholder needs and research may block more critical and reflexive research.[8] The latter becomes the more probable if the approach, as we saw in the 'emerging community rationale', leads to feelings of solidarity and community bonds. In the rationale we focused upon this as a positive element of collaboration and we even found theological support for it, but the flipside of emotional binding is that it entails risks, principally what James Jasper has called the "band of brother's dilemma,"[9] or, as I would put it, a 'we' is created, that can act against a presumed 'they'. John Parker and Edward Hackett, who quote Jasper on this, state that "in building the emotional capital necessary for creating and defending ideas, group bonds become more intense than bonds with the scientific community, causing intellectual conformity as members come to believe and trust one another's assessments and resist outside views."[10] A remedy to this could be that researchers in collaborative research groups might maintain their relationships better by intentionally

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5 Jean M. Bartunek, "Academic-Practitioner Collaboration," 1329.

6 Janneke E. Elberse, Carina A. C. M. Pittens, T. de Cock Buning, Jacqueline E. W. Broerse, "Patient Involvement in Health Research," *Health Policy* 107 (2012): 231.

7 Elberse et al., "Patient Involvement," 231. The research of Elberse et al., on needs-articulation in 15 different disease domains, included a high number of focus groups and revealed that "patient involvement in scientific advisory processes does not need to compromise scientific authority." The researchers "showed that a balance can be found whereby the advisory committees can predefine the focus, set criteria, and keep the mandate for decision-making, while patients are able to provide input from their own experiential knowledge." Elberse et al., "Patient Involvement," 240.

8 Lövbrand, "Co-producing European Climate Science and Policy," 226.

9 James M. Jasper, "A Strategic Approach to Collective Action: Looking for Agency in Social-Movement Choices," *Mobilization* 9 (2004): 1–16.

10 John N. Parker and Edward J. Hackett, "Hot Spots and Hot Moments in Scientific Collaborations and Social Movements," *American Sociological Review* 77, no. 1 (2012): 25.

collaborating with others concurrently.[11] When practitioner-scholar relationships are questioned, following Ranjay Gulati, one needs boundary-spanners. These are people who "do not identify themselves fully with either the academic or practitioner community and who have the courage and the interest to treat both groups as of value."[12]

Nevertheless, a more basic response to this scepticism is necessary. In Chapter 1, we quoted an academic researcher, who was not sceptical towards collaborative research and valorisation, but made a plea for fundamental research. Strikingly, she used the verb "irritated." I quote her again: "Knowledge transfer as exchange among theory and practical experience is necessary. But we also need the ivory tower – we need areas, which are not irritated by permanent engagement."[13] The freedom to write or say things, precisely by virtue of being a researcher, should also be safeguarded. A Scottish colleague, Doug Gay, in an attempt to redesign the structure, the systems architecture, of the Church of Scotland, decided to interview a variety of stakeholders and also to approach the reform agenda of the church in a systemic and holistic way, stating that "an individual academic has the freedom to do this, to say and think things which might not survive the rigours of a council or committee's drafting processes."[14]

At this point in the present book, we ask: Are there (still) good reasons for the ivory tower? We elaborate on this question extensively because in what follows we examine the use of some familiar arguments. The metaphor of the ivory tower carries the connotations of isolation, losing touch with the world, retreat and disengagement. Harvard scholar Steven Shapin, in an extensive overview of the history of this figure of speech, goes back to the Song of Songs, Mariology, the Odyssey and the Aeneid. He notes how in the 1850s, Gérard de Nerval wrote, "The sole refuge left to us was the poets' ivory tower – which we climbed higher and higher, in order to isolate ourselves from the crowd."[15] Here the ivory tower is a refuge, a place to escape, but over the years it became a pejorative description of disengagement. Shapin points out that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the metaphor was first used in the aesthetic, artistic realm and only since the 1930s became used in the world of

11 Ritchie and Rigano, "Solidarity through Collaborative Research," 141.

12 Ranjay Gulati, "Tent Poles, Tribalism, and Boundary Spanning: The Rigor-Relevance Debate in Management Research," *Academy of Management Journal* 50 (2007): 775–782.

13 See above, Chapter 1.

14 Doug Gay, *Reforming the Kirk. The Future of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 2017): 9.

15 Steven Shapin, "The Ivory Tower: The History of a Figure of Speech and Its Cultural Uses," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 45, no. 1 (2012): 5.

science.[16] In art criticism, the ivory tower trope had become a figure of speech in vigorous arguments, criticising artists for disengagement from the concerns of the wider community. Seclusion in the ivory tower, where the individual artist lived in a world of his own devising, was even considered immoral. In the years before the Second World War, on both sides, in fascist and anti-fascist circles artists were called upon to leave their ivory towers, to connect with the soul of the people, as a fascist minister wrote in 1927, or, as in 1937 in the United States, to fight fascism in their work, which was seen as a political, moral and artistic obligation.[17] But while the war and public opinion prompted artists to descend from the ivory tower, Shapin also finds defenders of the ivory tower during the war: "Artists were urged to abandon their Ivory Towers, but some said that that would be a mistake, ultimately bad for artists, for art, and for the society to which artists were said to have a moral obligation."[18]

In 1938, British novelist and essayist E. M. Forster, the author of *A Passage to India* and *A Room with a View*, stated that is simply wrong to urge statesmen, engineers and creative readers to take up a duty for the community as a whole. Shapin quotes Forster, who wrote that the person seeking an ivory tower

> may be getting a clearer view of the world, or thinking out a social problem, or developing his spirit, or creating a poem.... As far back as history stretches, we can see men trying to retire into their Ivory Towers and there to resist or to modify the instinct which they possess as members of the herd.[19]

Shapin adds that for Forster, disengagement in the Ivory Tower was a "necessary condition for getting perspective" and a means of "looking anew at the specific predicaments of the civic condition."[20] Both engagement and disengagement are necessary. In these years, the metaphor was increasingly being applied to the academy. Shapin quotes Roosevelt, who expressed his firm conviction that "this is no time for any man to withdraw into some ivory tower and proclaim the right to hold himself aloof from the problems, yes, and the agonies of his society."[21] Still, even in 1938, there were voices in the academic world that deemed a "degree of detachment necessary for the free mind to

16 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 6–8.
17 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 9.
18 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 11.
19 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 12.
20 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 13.
21 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 14.

do its proper work."[22] Here we note how freedom of inquiry was hailed as a core principle of research. In 1942, Robert Merton expressed his worries about the consequences for the integrity of science.[23] After the war, some scholars advocated a balance between engagement and disengagement, but this was a difficult position. Although there were some critical scientists who complained about and warned against the scientist's complacency and complicity,[24] academic research was increasingly instrumentalised for government purposes and turned into a "Cold War arsenal."[25] Remarkably, using the utility rationale, William H. Whyte wrote that a destruction of the ivory tower was self-defeating. In Shapin's paraphrase: "If a society wanted its scientists to be useful, then it had to learn to respect not just individual eccentricity but institutional disengagement."[26] By the end of the 1950s, however, as Steven Shapin writes in his book *The Scientific Life*, the free-acting individual was replaced by the government-funded organised research team.[27]

The trend away from individualism in science began as early as the 1920s in the United States. The link between the free-acting individual and the authenticity of knowledge needed to be broken and after the Second World War, more and more voices were in favour of coordinated teams. For example, there was a call for teamwork between scientists, engineers and manufacturers.[28] Nevertheless, there were also critics of this development. Shapin quotes nuclear physicist Alvin Weinberg, who wrote that "a single knowledgeable mind is in many ways a more efficient instrument than is a collection of minds that possess an equal total of knowledge. The act of scientific creation, no less than any intellectual creation, is largely an individual act."[29] In the 1950s and 1960s, critics of teamwork referred to the creative genius and independence of the individual, to innovation and freedom of spirit, and to great discoveries. For example, the Oxford zoologist John Baker, commented that "some degree of withdrawal from social life is recorded again and again in the biographies of great scientists."[30] Doing science in teams was considered detrimental to its flourishing. The call to distinguish genuine science from applied science

22 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 15.
23 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 23.
24 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 21.
25 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 16.
26 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 23.
27 Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Life: A Moral History of a Late Modern Vocation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008): 166.
28 Shapin, *The Scientific Life*, 169.
29 Shapin, *The Scientific Life*, 170.
30 Shapin, *The Scientific Life*, 171.

was widely heard, in which the first was connected to "the virtue of purposelessness" and "the free play of curiosity."[31] Shapin quotes Polanyi: "For science can advance only by essentially unpredictable steps, pursuing problems of its own, and the practical benefits of these advances will be incidental and hence doubly unpredictable."[32] Proponents of teams, on the other hand, especially referring to the experiences with teamwork in laboratories, stated that geniuses are rare and that a team with average researchers might constitute a substitute for a genius. Furthermore, they added that scientific virtues like integrity, courage, accuracy and honesty are also necessary for team research.[33] According to Shapin, the "core defense of the scientific team… was just that the whole should be, and often was, greater than the sum of its individual parts."[34]

We have elaborated on the development towards team research and the critical voices that accompanied this development extensively because the dichotomies of 'pure' and fundamental' versus 'applied' and 'individual' versus 'team' or 'with practitioners' present themselves right at the start of each academic practical theological research project too. With regard to the question of what research strategy serves the aim of a project best, we need to put the dichotomies into perspective. Shapin quotes British scientist Kenneth Mees, director of research and development for Kodak, who challenged the suggestion that freedom of science is incompatible with applied science, even in industrial research:

> I have been engaged in applied science for forty years, and in that period, I have come very definitely to the conclusion that the prosecution of applied science in its most efficient form is identical with that of pure science. I don't think for a moment that it is desirable that applied science should be directed except in times of emergency.… No director who is any good ever really directs any research. What he does is to protect the research men from the people who want to direct them and who don't know anything about it.[35]

Mees was also vehemently against the researcher being controlled by others. His remarks are also relevant for the university, where, the strong emphasis

31 Shapin, *The Scientific Life*, 177.
32 Shapin, *The Scientific Life*, 198.
33 Shapin, *The Scientific Life*, 184.
34 Shapin, *The Scientific Life*, 193.
35 C. E. Kenneth Mees, "Discussion of Midgley," in *Standard Oil Development Company, The Future of Industrial Research: Papers and Discussion* (New York: Standard Oil Development Company, 1945): 8. Quoted in Shapin, *The Scientific Life*, 199.

on research valorisation can lead to constraints upon the integrity – of the researcher, whether conducted in a team or individually:

> The best person to decide what research work shall be done is the man who is doing the research. The next best is the head of the department. After that you leave the field of best persons and meet increasingly worse groups. The first of these is the research director, who is probably wrong more than half the time. Then comes a committee, which is wrong most of the time. Finally, there is the committee of company vice presidents, which is wrong all the time.[36]

Mees' view does not provide scientists with good reasons for an ivory tower but, together with Shapin's overviews of both the use of the metaphor of the ivory tower and of scientific life, it teaches us that as an academic discipline, practical theology should be protected from both control and interference by, for example, a research director of a university, a supervising board, policy makers, and indeed, also from interference by the church or ecclesial or societal partners at the wrong moment.

Shapin states that in the last decades of the twentieth century, the ivory tower was a figure of speech that was used "to bash your backward colleagues or to devalue tendencies to bound, distinguish or disengage academic practices from those of external patrons, clients or critics."[37] Rather ominously, he adds that "the advocates of diversity and community engagement took the lead."[38] Shapin states that "today, almost no one has anything good to say about the Ivory Tower and specifically about the university in its supposed Ivory Tower mode."[39] We also remind the reader about the funding policies of governmental research agencies and the growing emphasis on stakeholder orientation. More than ever, valorisation is in the air. As in a quotation of the secretary of the British department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which has universities in its care, "universities are not islands, they are not ivory towers, they have to respond to the world around them."[40]

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36 C. E. Kenneth Mees, "Research and Business with Some Observations on Color Photography," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 2 (November 1935): 768–769; also C. E. Kenneth Mees, "Scope of Research Management," *Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 24 (1932): 65–66. Quoted in Shapin, *The Scientific Life*, 199. According to Steven Shapin, this text by Kenneth Mees is among the most widely quoted pronouncements about research organisation.

37 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 23.

38 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 23.

39 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 25.

40 Shapin, "The Ivory Tower," 24.

Nevertheless, the history of scientific life in both the pre-war and post-war period shows that *some form of disengagement* with regard to the partners one collaborates with is a necessity in order to ensure free, independent and, what's more, trustworthy, reliable research. Researchers, including academic practical theologians, can and should be allowed to temporarily retreat into an ivory tower. In the previous chapters we have already made some progress in this respect. With regard to relational approaches, we recall the strategy in action research to map out *two distinct but related cycles*: an iterative intervention cycle and a research cycle. We also saw, with Jaco Dreyer, that truth cannot be established from a lifeworld perspective alone, since both engagement and disengagement are necessary in the making of knowledge, and that the questions and concerns of practitioners do not necessarily lead to a research question that is articulated with the same concepts. In addition, we noted that the agenda of the researcher differs from the agenda of the practitioner and that practitioner and researcher are part of *different communities of practice* or, with Engeström, different activity systems. Collaborative practical theology does not imply that stakeholders must be granted equality over the control of the research process. Both researchers and practitioners need to write down their expectations regarding their different roles, responsibilities, and activities and how they can prevent boundary transgressions. A phase in which the stakeholder refrains from interruption is essential to enhance the rigor of data analysis and theoretical relevance. Also, if the research seeks to explicate concepts, there is no *necessity* to involve practitioners. In the field of liturgical ritual studies, Marcel Barnard's, Johan Cilliers' and Cas Wepener's research on worship in the network culture was not written *with* practitioners, and yet the book has a high potential for utility *by* practitioners.[41] In chaplaincy research, Martin Walton wrote a research article on the concept of spirituality in health care settings, in an attempt to discover its distinctness.[42] In the previous chapters, we followed Reddie, Swinton and Mowat and others, in defining the content of the goal of academic practical theology as enabling faithful living and authentic Christian practice or, to phrase it differently, in its emphasis on the sources and origins of this faithful living, the goal of academic practical theology is enabling faithful participation in the gospel narrative. Explicating

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41 Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers and Cas Wepener, *Worship in a Network Culture. Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors* (= Liturgia Condenda 28) (Leuven, Peeters Publishers, 2014).

42 Martin N. Walton, "Assessing the Construction of Spirituality. Conceptualizing Spirituality in Health Care Settings," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling* 66, no. 3–4 (2012): 1–16.

concepts and theoretical frameworks can be an important research task in this respect. In qualitative, empirical research, these goals, we suggested, are best realised in collaboration with both professional practitioners and everyday believers. Looking back at the history of scientific life, however, is stakeholder involvement necessary in *every phase* of the research? And with every stakeholder? Or are there phases in which stakeholders should not interfere? This the question to which we now turn.

3 Nuancing Collaboration

In the following sections, we nuance collaborative research, that is, in different phases of an academic practical theological research project there can be different stakeholders. For example, in one part of a study, stakeholders can be asked to participate in focus groups and the analysis of the data is later presented to the same or to a different set of stakeholders. As an example of the involvement of different stakeholders, in the following paragraphs, I zoom in on a specific research project to illustrate the roles of stakeholders in practical theology. Therefore, I first give a brief summary of this project.

Christiane van den Berg-Seifert did a four-year fulltime PhD research project on the consequences of sexual abuse in pastoral relationships. She focused on how the primary victims related to the parish in which they were members, in the aftermath of the abuse.[43] Although in the last decade, churches have been dealing better with abuse, by having protocols and specialised advisors, this does not mean that people who have experienced sexual boundary transgression in a pastoral relationship are now able to keep their place in the congregation. In order to better understand the processes in the religious congregations and also to improve the response of the congregation and develop strategies for action, after extensive literature analysis, Van den Berg-Seifert asked primary victims of clergy sexual misconduct about how they experienced their relationship to their congregation through time. Did they receive support and, if so, how? Had they been enabled to raise their voice? Did they retain their position in the congregation? The aim of the study was to describe

43 The research of Van den Berg-Seifert is published in Dutch, with a summary in English. See Christiane van den Berg-Seifert, "Ik sta erbuiten – maar ik sta wel te kijken. De relationele dynamiek in geloofsgemeenschappen na seksuele grensoverschrijding in een pastorale relatie vanuit het perspectief van primaire slachtoffers" (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University, Boekencentrum, 2015).

the relational dynamics from the victims' perspective and to evaluate its implications for congregational life.

The results of her research were, in short, that survivors do not want the boundary transgression to be seen exclusively at an individual level, as if it were not a problem for the congregation as a whole. Survivors sought to regain control over their own lives by actively positioning themselves. An outcome of the research was that all of the participants in the study ultimately left the congregation in which the boundary transgression had taken place. In their narratives, there is a clearly negative correlation between the positions of the transgressing pastor and the affected congregation member. Where the one is, the other can no longer be. Safety turns out to be a central factor when it comes to the question of whether abused people can remain in their congregation. The clearer the sexual or sexualised contact is understood as abuse, the more favourable the congregational dynamic is for the primary victims. Van den Berg-Seifert also observed that what has an excluding effect need not have been meant to be excluding. The congregation members' wish to move forward and leave the unpleasant abuse story behind has an excluding effect. But what is meant as help can also be excluding. Some of the participants in the study have experienced that help from outside the congregation which was not complemented by help from the congregation itself contributed to their isolation, because people from the congregation no longer felt responsible for the victims. People who experienced misconduct need people from within the congregation who support them and stand up for them.

The methodology that Van den Berg-Seifert applied in the study can be labelled a collaborative narrative-dialogical approach.[44] The study was a narrative approach because of its focus on the story character of the empirical material and the way the analysis and presentation was done. It was dialogical in particular because of the important role conversations played in it. Now, in the entire period of the research, Van den Berg-Seifert was very much aware of her power as a researcher, knowing that some voices or perspectives could easily be downplayed in favour of others and also because the act of knowledge gathering is not without power. She knew that the researcher has the power to turn the lives of the primary victims into text, considering some aspects of data more relevant than others. Therefore, she gave primary victims who wanted to actively take part in carrying out the study the opportunity to do so. As the most important group of stakeholders, they were not only to be interviewed, but also involved in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

44 See Chapter 6.

The participatory analysis proved important for the research for three reasons. First, stakeholders who experienced a harmful objectification in the past now to a certain degree could themselves determine which role they wanted to play, either as informants and/or as active co-producers of theory. They felt valued, included and empowered by this opportunity. Second, the participants' interpretations turned out to contribute to the content of the analysis in a significant manner. Third, the primary victims, as stakeholders, were offered the opportunity to say 'no' to the interpretations of the researcher or offer alternative interpretations. By having a voice, they were able to exert more control, albeit that in the end it was the researcher that wrote the text of the dissertation.

I describe this example as a project that includes different stakeholders in different phases. In the phase of the analysis and in pondering on what should be going on and how congregations could respond, Van den Berg-Seifert decided to include a different group of stakeholders: congregational advisors with special expertise in guiding congregations when sexual boundary transgression in pastoral relationships occurs. Here the participatory analysis turned out to be essential for the research too. The advisors not only contributed with their wisdom embodied in practice, but also introduced a perspective that was lacking in the project, namely the perspective of the congregation. Their feedback increased the reliability and relevance of the research. The conversation also enabled them to reflect on their practice together. It turned out to be a contribution to their training and competence development.

4 Different Types and Roles of Stakeholders

Not everyone who is influenced by the research, even in the context of application, can be part of the research. Carr and Kemmis, who we quoted earlier, state that in action research

> only a particular group of persons actually participates in a study, reads its reports, or acts on its findings, and this group is only a subset of the larger group of persons which actually has an opportunity to participate, read or act on the research and its findings.… It is therefore both legitimate and wise for anyone approached about the possibility of participating in a research study to ask whose interests are in fact likely to be served by the study.[45]

45 Carr and Kemmis, *Becoming Critical*, 217.

Therefore, from the outset "a researcher should be clear as to whom they view the stakeholders of their project to be, and why."[46] Stakeholder engagement not only differs with regard to the phases of the research, but also with regard to the extent of the involvement required. Modes of interaction will differ according to the perceived value of the interaction.[47] In Van den Berg-Seifert's project, in compliance with the methodology of victimology, the primary victims were key stakeholders, while the interaction with the congregational advisors remained limited. When she invited them, she was clear about this structure. Their engagement was influenced by the type of contribution that they were perceived to be able to make to the research.[48] Van den Berg-Seifert also noticed that some stakeholders, both primary victims and advisors, had a limited amount of time to spend on the engagement, in particular, when they were asked to read large amounts of text. In the entire period of the research, she found that regular short emailed updates were a good form of engagement.[49] We look at the topic of how to communicate with stakeholders below. In this section, we first extensively consider the different roles stakeholders can play related to the flow of information, the time frame and the type of contribution. Where possible, we connect the insights with Van den Berg-Seifert's practical theological research and some other projects.

In 2008, Carney et al. differentiated eight categories of stakeholders according to their role and phase in the research[50] and in 2014, Tjerk Wardenaar took the differentiated typology of Carney et al. as the starting point for an empirical inquiry, embedding the roles of stakeholders deeper, redefining them according to the direction of the flow of information, the phase of the research project and the nature of the contribution of the stakeholders.[51] Wardenaar and other researchers in his field speak about "multi-actor research." In his research on climate adaptation programs in the USA, Germany and the Netherlands he showed that the roles actually occur and can be identified as such. The empirical test also confirms that the typology is analytically useful.[52]

First, as *initiators*, before the research starts, stakeholders can be involved in instigating a research project, for example, by contacting the academy, asking a research group to do the research. According to Carney et al., initiators can articulate the need for research to inform policy and improve practice.[53] In

46 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 4.
47 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 8.
48 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 13.
49 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 12.
50 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 22.
51 Wardenaar, *Organizing Collaborative Research*, 63.
52 Wardenaar, *Organizing Collaborative Research*, 78.
53 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 22.

Van den Berg-Seifert's project an ecumenical helpdesk for sexual abuse in pastoral care contacted my colleague and lecturer in practical theology, Hanneke Meulink-Korf, asking her to reflect on and write a proposal for a doctoral project, based on the need to know more about what happens to the primary victims in the congregational dynamics in the aftermath of the boundary transgression. Hanneke had co-authored a protocol and had earlier participated in training programs for congregational advisors. She contacted me as a possible supervisor and together with Christiane we designed the outline of the study. The initiators discussed the proposal with Hanneke, enabled Christiane van den Berg-Seifert to participate in a course for congregational advisors in order to become acquainted with the field and, most importantly, they facilitated finding possible interviewees. It turned out that their assistance was indispensable.

Carney et al. also include *funders* in the category of initiators.[54] From our experience, while they can coincide with initiators, they have to be distinguished from them because their role is often different before, during and after the research. Wardenaar refers to funders as *sponsors*, their contribution often having a one-way direction (from stakeholder to scientists) and before the research process starts.[55] Charity funds and foundations can organise a call for research proposals, they can commission research or they can be approached to donate money for a specific project. Government agencies can also fund research. A PhD project conducted at the PThU by Jacobine Gelderloos-Commandeur, which involved doing comparative ethnographic research in local churches in rural areas in the provinces of Groningen and Brabant, was sponsored by a charity fund that was originally dedicated to supporting Protestantism in Brabant, but today finances all kinds of projects related to Protestantism in the Netherlands.[56] The PhD project on the future of city-churches in monumental iconic churches is sponsored by the eighteen participating churches themselves, i.e. a form of crowd-funding, two funds giving small donations and by the university. An example of a practical theological research institute that is funded by sponsors is National Church Life Survey (NCLS) Research in Australia, a joint venture sponsored by the Catholic Bishop Conference, two other denominations and one university and by hundreds of congregations that commission NCLS research.[57]

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54 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 22.

55 Wardenaar, *Organizing Collaborative Research*, 66.

56 Gelderloos-Commandeur, *Meaningful in the Margins*.

57 NCLS Research is a joint project of Uniting Mission and Education (NSW & the ACT), ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Australian Catholic University. These agencies provide the core staffing for a project that

Many funders operate 'response mode funding' where researchers submit a funding application based on their own research ideas. In that case the initiator is the researcher or is a stakeholder without money. In this case, sometimes matching constructions between the academy and funders outside academia are created. The PhD project conducted by Marinka Verburg at the PThU on fresh expressions or pioneering places, is funded for a small part by the university and for a large part by the Protestant Church of Amsterdam, the aforementioned charity foundation and a foundation called 'Church and World' (Dutch: *Kerk en Wereld*). These funds, however, were not only acting before the research started. During the research, the funders asked to be more involved and a soundboard group was created. Recently, it turned out to be necessary to explicitly name the limitations of the influence of this group on the research. The soundboard group could monitor progress of the research and be informed about the results. They could also give advice. Yet, they could not insist on the direction that the research should take. Processes like these in which tensions may arise are instructive for future collaborative research.

Other funders direct researchers to a very specific question and provide a clear description of the work that they would like to be carried out. This is often called *commissioned research*.[58] In this case it's the funder who is the 'customer' and decides what specific topic or question it would like to be answered. In research projects, the funding agency may have a strong constraining role in setting the goal and agenda for a project. Paul Chapin, addressing topics with regard to funding research projects, sees an ongoing debate among scientists about the trade-offs between freedom of inquiry and effective research.[59] Again, as we saw in our discussion on the ivory tower, it is important to watch for undue influence over sponsored science. The risk of the influence of funders is that science is 'bent', where research projects are manipulated to produce economic or funder-beneficial outcomes. Public health research, for example, can be corrupted by special interests, but similar types

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involves a partnership across denominations. See "Resources," National Church Life Survey, accessed 21 June, 2018, http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=91. In 2018, my colleague Marten van der Meulen received a grant to enable a pilot project using NCLS with 30 congregations in the Netherlands. NCLS is also used in South Africa.

58 There is a growing trend toward commissioning research. For the distinction between funded and commissioned research, see "Commissioned Research," The Association of Medical Research Charities, accessed June 16, 2017. See https://www.amrc.org.uk/commissioned-research.

59 Paul G. Chapin, *Research Projects and Research Proposals: A Guide for Scientists Seeking Funding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

of bending occur in areas of public policy.[60] The result is skewed objectivity and dubious accuracy. According to Thomas McGarity and Wendy Wagner an elaborate and extensive way to distort science is to commission research in order to produce a desired outcome at the end of the pipeline.[61] Interestingly enough, they use the metaphor of "shaping science" to indicate what is happening in this case, a term used by Carney et al. to describe the following role of stakeholders.

Carney et al. describe *shapers* as "stakeholders who have a role in consolidating a research plan, supporting it or directing it at an early stage."[62] Knowledge-users can be prominent during the agenda-setting phase.[63] They may seek to modify the design. According to Wardenaar, shapers are involved in the exchange of information, the discussion before the project starts, and they can co-define the scope and focus of the research project, based upon their interest.[64] Shapers can express their concerns about certain topics. They have specific experiences, manifest needs or are aware of their latent needs or the latent needs of those on whose behalf the research is done. They may encounter specific problems in the practices in which they are engaged. An example that Wardenaar mentions, is a scientific advisory project in which patients were enabled to take the lead in setting the research agenda on medical products.[65] In 2010, a Dutch advisory committee for the government deemed the involvement of patients in different disease domains to be essential for establishing a research agenda responsive to the needs of end-users. The committee commissioned the research to a research institute. Patients were consulted in interviews and a large number of focus groups. With regard to prioritising in the development of medical products, patients discussed pros and cons, one of the criteria being a balance between short- and long-term effects. The report was presented to the advisory committee for them to use the input in their advice to the government. In the end they decided that the prioritising by the patients was correct.[66] Wardenaar mentions the input of patients as an example of stakeholders in the role of shapers of research agendas. in the project itself, they were also extensively consulted. In our own research

60 Thomas O. McGarity and Wendy E. Wagner, *Bending Science: How Special Interests Corrupt Public Health Research* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008): 37.

61 McGarity and Wagner, *Bending Science*, 38.

62 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 22.

63 Wardenaar, *Organizing Collaborative Research*, 86.

64 Wardenaar, *Organizing Collaborative Research*, 67.

65 Janneke E. Elberse et al., "Patient Involvement in a Scientific Advisory Process: Setting the Research Agenda for Medical Products," *Health Policy* 107, no. 2–3 (2012): 231–242.

66 Elberse et al., "Patient Involvement," 238.

with Christian congregations, when we created a research platform in Groningen, cooperating with 160 congregations in the North-Eastern provinces of the Netherlands, we began in a similar way. We started the platform with a one-day meeting with some 15 congregational consultants who were asked to prioritise research topics for our platform. In several focus group sessions during the day, the advisors discussed the knowledge that they needed. As practitioners, they had been coaching dozens of congregations and we considered their place-based knowledge, their knowledge of the local conditions, essential as our starting point. The advisors shaped our research agenda.

Carney et al. distinguish the shapers from the *informants*, "stakeholders who directly inform a research study, e.g. secondary data providers, interviewees, focus groups, etc."[67] *Informants* are involved during the research process, that is they provide information. According to Wardenaar, this information is on needs or on know-how. I would like to add that in practical theological research they can, and often do, also provide information about experiences (such as 'the experience of being addressed'), values, norms, beliefs, 'vision language', 'spiritual packages', 'motivations', reported relationships between beliefs and action, etc.[68] In the example of Van den Berg-Seifert's research the informants would be the primary victims narrating their experiences. In her research they played a central role. They were involved intrinsically and in the long term. The dissertation starts with a 100-page narrative in which the stories of the primary victims are told. In each contact, it turned out that one interview was not enough and that the relationship researcheri-researched needed to become a long-term relationship, at least during the time of the project.

Carney et al. see the informants as distinct from the *reviewers*, whose response may be elicited in workshops, but also in interviews, focus groups or questionnaires. *Reviewers* exchange information with the researchers and provide both an audience and reflect on the results. In the research on the consequences of sexual boundary transgression for the position of the primary victims in the congregation, the findings of the research were released to the congregational advisors in a two-day workshop. They formed a panel of experts for consultation. Some of them perceived that aspects considered important in their practices had been overlooked.[69] Not only, however, did congregational advisors co-produce knowledge in Van den Berg-Seifert's project,

67 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 22.

68 See Gerardo Marti, "Found Theologies versus Imposed Theologies," *Ecclesial Practices* 3, no. 2 (2016): 157–172.

69 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 24.

she also decided to include a group of primary victims as reviewers too. Five of the seventeen interviewees took up this role of interpreting the data.

Carney et al. mention three more roles of stakeholders: recipients, reflectors and in-directs. *Recipients* are people who are not directly involved with the research but who are "deemed to have a specific interest in its findings."[70] Wardenaar adds that recipients are involved at the end of the research process as an audience for research outputs.[71] Like the informant, the recipient is a 'traditional' stakeholder role in scientific knowledge production. Examples range from readers of (popularised) research findings to users of models, software, and other research outputs. In Van den Berg-Seifert's research, the recipients were congregations that are confronted with a case of boundary transgression in their midst. Also, the moderator and secretary general of the general synod of the PCN were recipients. The moderator attended the public defence of the dissertation, was interviewed about the outcomes of the dissertation and wrote about it in the newsletter of the church. Carney et al. distinguish recipients from *reflectors*, stakeholders that reflect on the research findings and provide feedback on the process. Wardenaar sees reflectors as being involved at the end of the research process. They exchange information with scientists on the results of the project. In this way, reflectors can be the starting point of a new research cycle. Reflectors in Van den Berg-Seifert's project were the peers, reviewing the research project, pushing the researcher to popularise her findings. Finally, Carney et al. label stakeholders as *in-directs*, people who are "unknowingly or unconsciously contributing to the research – or affected by it."[72] The in-directs in Van den Berg-Seifert's research were future primary victims, pastors, church councils, congregations and congregational advisors since they can and hopefully will learn from the results of the research.

In all the different phases of a research project some stakeholders may be or may become *centrals*. According to Carney et al. centrals have an input throughout the research process, they play a focal role.[73] They can act as shapers, informants, reviewers, reflectors, etc. Carney describes them as members of advisory panels or soundboard groups, in which agencies take part, for example, to maintain the policy relevance of a project. Wardenaar, however, differs from Carney here, holding that centrals are essential for knowledge co-production projects. He quotes Boon et al., seeing centrals more in a participatory role. These stakeholder participants can become full members of

70 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 22.

71 Wardenaar, *Organizing Collaborative Research*, 67.

72 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 22.

73 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 23f.

the research team.[74] In a transdisciplinary team Boon et al., while acknowledging that collaboration between actors with heterogeneous cognitive and normative backgrounds creates room for out-of-the-box learning, they call it "a balancing act" between diversity and alignment to nurture heterogeneity in terms of knowledge and at the same time to create a univocal end-product.[75]

Related to the point regarding whether or not stakeholders are centrals, in my view a basic distinction by Malin Mobjörk is helpful.[76] In research in which stakeholders have a role, she distinguishes two types: *consulting* and *participatory*. In consulting transdisciplinary research, societal actors provide input and feedback but they do not do research themselves. They give input, respond and react to the research. In participatory transdisciplinary research scientists and societal actors are partners. Societal actors are included as participants in the knowledge production process, engaging in a process of mutual learning, in which both scientific and non-scientific knowledge is valid. A participatory approach is attractive, but much more demanding and time-consuming than a consultative approach.[77] Applying this to the research on boundary transgression, we could say that Van den Berg-Seifert included different stakeholders in her project, but she designed the research, she wrote the dissertation and defended it. From this perspective, the stakeholders were merely consulted. On the other hand, both the primary victims and the congregational advisors played a role in the interpretation of the data. So, she is justified and has every reason to call them 'research-participants'. Still, that leads to some nagging questions. Was their knowledge equally valuable to her knowledge? Did she drop some of her own interpretations in favour of the interpretations of the research participants? Who convinced who on the basis of which data? Were data shared or was the researcher 'in control'? Mobjörk would say that if 'collaboration', 'participation' and particularly 'mutual learning' were keywords of Van den Berg-Seifert's research, she should have explicitly defined the meaning of these individual words in her project and reflected on their consequences for the research procedure, in particular, how decisions were to be made. Differences in roles and responsibilities between actors must be analysed in advance.[78] At this point I suggest that temporary

74 Wouter P. C. Boon, Maryse M. H. Chappin and Jaap Perenboom, "Balancing Divergence and Convergence in Transdisciplinary Research Teams," *Environmental Science and Policy* 40 (2014): 57–68. Wardenaar, *Organizing Collaborative Research*, 67.

75 Boon, Chappin and Perenboom, "Balancing Divergence and Convergence," 58.

76 See Malin Mobjörk, "Consulting versus Participatory Transdisciplinarity: A Refined Classification of Transdisciplinary Research," *Futures* 42 (2010): 866–873.

77 Mobjörk, "Consulting versus Participatory Transdisciplinarity," 872.

78 Mobjörk, "Consulting versus Participatory Transdisciplinarity," 871.

retreats into the ivory tower are necessary and justified in order to increase the rigor of the research. This is necessary because researchers and practitioners not only have different knowledge interests, but also, and importantly, a different body of knowledge that they can tap into. In regard to shapers and reviewers as centrals, in particular, we need to take Merle Jacob's warning seriously, that "user control could result in an overly conservative and too narrow research agenda since users would not be able to take risks on ideas coming from outside of the body of knowledge to which they are used."[79] Researchers should be aware of the risk when they are asked to respond to a restricted "community's interpretation of useful knowledge."[80] This risk entails the necessity of written agreements that guarantee the independence and freedom of the researcher.

5 Asymmetry and Power

When discussing the postcolonial rationale, I quoted Ruth Nichols who writes that the researcher must be aware of the context of power in the research process. The competences that a researcher brings to the field, in terms of their skills and body of knowledge, may lead both to imposing concepts and to the exclusion of practitioner interpretations.[81] The phrase *collaborative research* and also *doing research in community* may conceal power-relationships between practical theologians and practitioners. Co-producing knowledge raises issues relating to power. Frances Ward points out that in research, for example, within congregations, it may seem inevitable that some voices and perspectives are ignored in favour of others, because there are dominant members, dominant discourses and prevailing habits, even in the research domain itself.[82] Based upon empirical research on the tensions in collaborative research, Louise Phillips notes that "at some points in the interaction, dialogic moments occur in which the speaker opens up to the other, while, at other

79 Merle Jacob, "Re-norming the science–society relation," *Tertiary Education and Management*, 12, no. 1 (2006): 21–36.

80 Lövbrand, "Co-producing European Climate Science and Policy," 234.

81 Nicholls, "Research and Indigenous Participation," 122.

82 Frances Ward, "The Messiness of Studying Congregations Using Ethnographic Methods," in *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context. Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology*, ed. Matthew Guest, Karen Tusting, and Linda Woodhead (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 134.

points, a singular voice prevails without any opening up to other voices."[83] There will be dialogic and non-dialogic moments. In focus groups, for example, there are plenty of opportunities to influence each other, as to what is said. The group may seem like a hopelessly uncontrolled environment.[84] The risks of focus groups are: compliance, when respondents respond in a way that they think the facilitator expects; identification, when the responses are similar to those of someone the respondent likes; conformity, when a respondent may desire to conform to perceived, powerful group standards; censoring by group compositions.[85] A final risk is 'expert knowledge', due to the asymmetric relation between moderator and participants[86] or due to power relations within the group, resulting in other participants feeling intimidated and deciding to withdraw from the discussion.[87] In focus groups, as in all collaborative research practices, what has been called 'epistemic violence' cannot be completely ruled out.[88]

The problem is a fundamental one. The act of knowledge gathering itself is not without power both in solo research and in collaborative research. An ethnographer of a congregation, for example, has the power of representation. She turns the lives of others into text and in this process, some aspects of data will be considered more relevant than others, and comments will be omitted. Writing up notes can already be seen as an imposition. Ethnographic research entails not just giving descriptions of practices but also changing them intentionally or unintentionally. Research is a leverage tool. Interviewing or participating in an activity, alters people's lives. There is an existing asymmetry in intentions, competences and interests and researchers may feel as if they are 'betraying' the different stakeholders in some way. The asymmetry comes to the surface, for example, when negotiations of expertise occur, as researchers and practitioners position themselves as researcher-experts versus experiential experts, or, even more complicated, when practitioners have acquired research expertise themselves. Partners can also position themselves as experts by virtue of their experience-based knowledge, but then who is to decide

83 Louise J. Phillips, "Analyzing the Dialogic Turn in the Communication of Research-Based Knowledge: An Exploration of the Tensions in Collaborative Research," *Public Understanding of Science* 20, no. 1 (2011): 88.

84 Roger Gomm, *Social Research Methodology: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 171.

85 Jenny Kitzinger, "The Methodology of Focus Groups: The Importance of Interaction between Research Participants," in *Sociology of Health and Illness* 16, no. 1 (1994): 105.

86 Grønkjær et al., "Analyzing Group Interaction in Focus Group Research," 24.

87 Grønkjær et al., "Analyzing Group Interaction in Focus Group Research," 24.

88 Courtney Goto, "Experiencing Oppression: Ventriloquism and Epistemic Violence in Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 175–193.

on and acknowledge this expertise? Again, negotiations are likely to occur. In collaborative research, the asymmetry can also become visible when, as Phillips demonstrates "the framework for collaboration is not created together in bottom-up processes but is set by the researcher in a top-down process and is given authority through reference to its roots in research-based knowledge."[89]

Some researchers even go as far as to suggest, that the shift towards collaborative or engaged research, based on dialogue and practitioner engagement is purely rhetorical or, at best, partial.[90] Others go less far but note certain limitations. In a detailed empirical analysis of the complexity of the communication processes in collaborative research, Louise Phillips observes power-mechanisms at work.[91] She locates the complexity in the need to negotiate different knowledge forms and knowledge interests, which is inevitable for co-producing knowledge. According to Phillips a basic and, as far as she can see, often neglected condition of collaborative research is that the different collaborating actors bring different identities, knowledge forms and knowledge interests to the interaction.[92] On the one hand, she observes a "centripetal tendency" towards the unity of a research project 'we'. There can be moments of centripetal closure in the form of the dominance of a single voice and/or a 'common we'. On the other hand, she sees a "centrifugal tendency" towards differences and the opening up for a plurality of voices. It is, as we saw earlier, a process of diverging and converging descriptions and interpretations. As a result of this tension, particular voices are likely to become dominant, while others are marginalised or silenced.[93]

Asymmetry also comes to the surface due to the differences in the idiom that is used. Academic researchers may express their observations and interpretations in an idiom that is not directly comprehensible for practitioners and, by virtue of this, may seem to suggest that their knowledge is more superior. Research on knowledge diffusion by academics shows that when one has become accustomed to specific theoretical concepts in an academic context, it can be difficult for them to strip out in-group jargon. In collaborative research practices in medical research, involving researchers, doctors and patients, the

89 Phillips, "Analyzing the Dialogic Turn," 91.

90 For example: Brian Trench, "Towards an Analytical Framework of Science Communication Models," in *Communicating Science in Social Contexts: New Models, New Practices*, ed. D. Cheng et al. (New York: Springer Publishing, 2008): 119–135; B. Wynne, "Public Engagement as a Means of Restoring Public Trust in Science: Hitting the Notes but Missing the Music?" *Community Genetics* 9, no. 3 (2006): 211–220.

91 Phillips, "Analyzing the Dialogic Turn," 81.

92 Phillips, "Analyzing the Dialogic Turn," 83.

93 Phillips, "Analyzing the Dialogic Turn," 82.

position of the latter may be perceived by themselves (and by the researchers and doctors for that matter) as 'weaker' since they may continuously have to ask for translation.

6 Remedies against Power Mechanisms

There are several remedies that, when taken together, can help to mitigate the effect of power mechanisms. The *first* remedy to the asymmetry between researcher(s) and practitioners is simply to openly acknowledge this asymmetry or, to put it even more strongly, to see it as an advantage. Today practitioners often ask the researcher for his or her help in acquiring know-why, know-what and know-how. An outsider approach is considered necessary to complement, relativise or possibly even contradict insider approaches to practices. Quantitative research, for example, may reveal patterns or tendencies that are helpful for strategic planning. Qualitative research may help practitioners to get an in-depth understanding of specific practices. Researchers can bring a helpful theoretical understanding to a practice. Also, in ethnographic research, researchers can observe and describe patterns where practitioners or members of a certain community only see, or experience, chaos. Chris Scharen, referring to Pierre Bourdieu's account of William Labov's ethnolinguistic research project – the project that we described in Chapter 7 – reports how Bourdieu and his team, like Labov, sought to collaborate with interviewers who had 'familiar access' to the respondents, but also how, in my words, a distanced research attitude was necessary. Scharen states:

> Those with social familiarity but without social science background, they found, tended to miss 'that which goes without saying,' where often the embedded effects of social structure are found. The aim, difficult to achieve in practice, is to find the balance between 'total overlap between investigator and respondent, where nothing can be said because, since nothing can be questioned, everything goes without saying, and total divergence, where understanding and trust would be impossible.' So, in the best of circumstances, a distance, or better, a social asymmetry of power and position, remains.[94]

94 Christian B. Scharen, "Interviewing Interpreted as Spiritual Exercise and Social Protest," *Ecclesial Practices* 4, no. 2 (2017): 223.

Indeed, often in research projects in which stakeholders are involved, the stakeholders ‘cannot wait’ for the results. Related to this call for help from an outsider, we may also approach the asymmetry with a relational concept of authority. Here we may learn from Anne-Claire Mulder’s research on religious authority and the role of gender.[95] She considers “granting authority” as a dynamic process at work in a relation between two (or more) persons. One of the questions of her empirical research project is to clarify what motivates people to attribute authority to a person. She underlines that people often connect authority to an office, an assignment or mandate, in our case this would be to do the research, but, with Claudia Camp, authority can be understood as something “*freely* granted.”[96] One may, with Luce Irigaray and others, entrust oneself to someone, who can become guide, mentor or point of reference.[97] A relational approach states that authority helps the one who entrusts herself to (the judgement of) someone else to see new perspectives and possibilities, to start something new, to come to a new understanding and to grow in knowledge or skills. Again, with Irigaray, authority can help a person “to realise what she (or he) may be capable of being.”[98] Mulder emphasises that authority in this sense does not rob someone of her freedom or responsibility, but what the other says, writes or performs receives weight. She also warns that there is “a thin line” between authority and “undue influence or the exertion of power from the one in position of authority.”[99] In a debate with staff members at the PThU on this conceptualisation of authority, we found that in order to entrust authority to someone, the one with authority has to be competent and show integrity and he or she has to respect the autonomy of the other. Trust is also important, knowing that trust is hard to gain and easy to lose. This also makes sense for the researcher-practitioner relationship.

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95 Anne-Claire Mulder, “Religious Authority, Religious Leadership, or Leadership of a Religious Organisation – Same Difference? An Effort in Clarification,” *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 24 (2016): 133–154.

96 Mulder, “Religious Authority,” 135. Mulder quotes from Claudia V. Camp, “Female Voice, Written Word: Women and Authority in Hebrew Scripture,” in *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, ed. Paula M. Cooey, Sharon A. Farmer, and Mary Ellen Ross (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987): 98. Emphasis in the original.

97 Mulder, “Religious Authority,” 135. Mulder quotes from Luce Irigaray, *Zur Geschlechterdifferenz: Interviews und Vorträge*. *Frauenforschung, Band 5* (Wien: Wiener Frauenverlag, 1987): 124–130. See also The Milan’s Bookstore Collective, Teresa de Lauretis (ed.), *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 8 and 9.

98 Mulder, “Religious Authority,” 137. Mulder quotes from Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993): 61.

99 Mulder, “Religious Authority,” 138.

The *second* remedy to the asymmetry between researcher(s) and practitioners strengthens the last points about the freedom of the practitioners. This remedy is to inform the stakeholders from the start that they have a right to withdraw from participating in the research at any time. In the relationship of practitioner and researcher, the first have the freedom to submit themselves to or to walk out of a research practice. In addition, they are explicitly granted the freedom to discuss the process and results afterwards. We recall what Ruth Nichols wrote about three forms of reflexivity: self-reflexivity, inter-personal and collective reflexivity.[100]

The *third* remedy, which follows from the first two, can be to involve participants in the design and conduct of the research, but without giving them the final say, since in the end they are not trained as academic researchers and lack the necessary expertise. This does not mean that they cannot have a voice in framing and reframing the research question and they may also exert influence on the questions that are being asked. To count as a remedy against power mechanisms, however, the researcher promises to submit the observations, descriptions, explanations, evaluations and recommendations, to a test of criticism by the practitioners. All who are potentially involved should have the opportunity to either accept or reject, that is to say 'yes' or 'no' to the descriptions and interpretations that are offered, and together they need to discuss and explain dissensus. In the former paragraphs, I described the research of Christiane Van den Berg-Seifert on women's experiences with sexual abuse in which participants received ample opportunities to refute or verify both the descriptions and the interpretations. The "painted portraits," that is the narratives of the abuse, were discussed with the women again and again and the women's approval to publish them was paramount. Some portraits were not published. Some women were also asked to critically reflect on the interpretations and recommendations.

The *fourth* remedy is, again, to be fully aware of the consequences of asymmetry. This requires constant reflection on the methods, the consequences of the interventions, the position of the researcher, differing roles and responsibilities, the meaning of 'participation' and 'collaboration' in the project and the conceptual language that is used. According to Courtney Goto, epistemic violence, using another language than the one that is used by the co-researchers, is inevitable to a certain extent.[101] As we have seen, critical anthropologists and collaborative ethnographers have shown to be very sensitive with regard

100 See Chapter 6, 'Postcolonial Rationale'.

101 Goto, "Experiencing Oppression," 191.

to this issue, as well as to research involving vulnerable groups.[102] They know that all the remedies against power mechanisms in data and knowledge gathering, also in qualitative research, such as ensuring anonymity, storing tapes and transcripts in a safe place, providing informed consent (knowing exactly what you are consenting to), and critical reflexivity, are all necessary but ultimately insufficient if you are not explicit about differences between interests. In his reflection on interviewing as spiritual exercise and social protest, Chris Scharen, building heavily on Bourdieu, writes that it is the investigator who "starts the game and sets up its rules,"[103] but that being aware of the asymmetry of power, the researcher can take care to reduce its effects as much as possible. This can be done by an active and methodical listening,[104] characterised by situating oneself in the place of the interviewees, knowing their context, a "self-less posture of inquiry," creating a safe space and providing ample time for the interviewees and enabling them to provide a testimony.[105] For example, in a focus group, a facilitator needs to create ample 'air-time', enabling the participants to write answers down before they are read aloud, and he or she needs to ensure that all focus group participants are able to be heard, including those who may not be as eloquent or comfortable, yet have equally important messages to convey.

The *fifth* remedy takes somewhat more space to elaborate and comes again from the empirical research of Louise Phillips, focusing on the power dimension in research. While acknowledging that there is an inevitable tension between unity and plurality of voices, Phillips advocates applying the critical analysis of the tensions in collaborative research constructively to "refine those practices by providing the starting-point for a reflexive discussion among the participants in those practices."[106] With Foucault, she regards "a dominance-free space for dialogue among equals as an impossible ideal,"[107] yet this does not lead her to denounce collaborative research as a rhetorical trick. She advocates bringing the tensions to the surface. Drawing on Kim-

102 Robyn Dowling, "Power, Subjectivity and Ethics in Qualitative Research." in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, ed. Iain Hay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 27ff. See also Regina Scheyvens, Henry Scheyvens and Warwick E. Murray, "Working with Marginalised, Vulnerable or Priveliged Groups," in *Development Fieldwork: A Practical Guide*, ed. Regina Scheyvens and Donovan Storey (London: SAGE, 2003): 167–193. See the section on collaborative ethnography in Chapter 7.

103 Scharen, "Interviewing Interpreted as a Spiritual Exercise and Social Protest," 222.

104 Scharen, "Interviewing Interpreted as a Spiritual Exercise and Social Protest," 222.

105 Scharen, "Interviewing Interpreted as a Spiritual Exercise and Social Protest," 224–225.

106 Phillips, "Analyzing the Dialogic Turn," 82.

107 Phillips, "Analyzing the Dialogic Turn," 82.

berley Pearce and W. Barnett Pearce, Phillips proposes to treat difference and conflict as dynamic, necessary and positive forces in meaning-making. Differences and disagreements are "sites for further exploration."[108] We remember what we wrote about disagreements between researchers and practitioners. According to Louise Philips and Ksenija Napan, applying their reflections on co-learning to collaborative research, as facilitators of collaborative-research processes, researchers have to be sensitive to emergence. The researcher opens up for polyphony, seeing practitioners contribute new interpretations, while still managing the process in order to meet research goals.[109] Practical theologian Courtney Goto writes that researcher and researched "in taking seriously some of the problems and limits in their communication… are in a position to work, constructively, to bridge the chasm, to negotiate difference, to improve empathy and develop increased understanding."[110] Researchers should pay attention to their own emotions and observations and listen to and observe their own reactions in relation to practitioners and reflect on them in order to ensure that practitioners truly become co-researchers, who in turn are also invited to express their own emotions and reactions to the researchers. In collaborative research practices, there is a need for "critical, self-disclosive reflexivity."[111] We add, however, that extreme reflexivity should be avoided. The researcher has a mandate to do the research – in the end, he or she will make selections and retain, for example, editorial control of a final research report, if it is not written together. Nevertheless, a 'go' or 'no go' by the researched is needed. It is still for the co-researchers, the interviewees, the readers and, importantly, the peers in the wider research community to decide whether or not the interpretations, provided that they are phrased in understandable language, are valid and convincing or not. In addition, as we have seen in collaborative ethnography, action research, PAR and TAR, the researcher and co-researcher can also write research books and articles together, also by offering different observations and understandings, but then they need to clearly indicate who has written what part of the book or article.

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108 Kimberley Pearce and W. Barnett Pearce, "The Public Dialogue Consortium's School-wide Dialogue Process: A Communication Approach to Develop Citizenship Skills and Enhance School Climate," *Communication Theory* 1, no. 1 (2001): 111. Quoted in Phillips, "Analyzing the Dialogic Turn," 87.

109 Louise Phillips and Ksenija Napan, "What's in the 'Co'? Tending the Tensions in Co-creative Inquiry in Social Work Education," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 29, no. 6 (2016): 827–844, http://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1162869.

110 Goto, "Experiencing Oppression," 191.

111 Goto, "Experiencing Oppression," 192.

7 Limits and Constraints to Participation

In collaborative research, the interests of researchers and practitioners may be in opposition. Each party may be pursuing conflicting goals, and each party's ability to participate can differ. This may sometimes be caused by material barriers, such as time.[112] Bruce Horner warns, that "questions of time and commitment and pay and results need to be at the forefront in how research is planned and conducted."[113] Sebastian Carney et al., following Sally Baldwin, point to the fact that there exists "inevitable time and budgetary constraints, that govern which stakeholders the researchers choose to deliberately engage with and – equally importantly – which stakeholders the researchers decide to co-operate with in the research process."[114] The *time* that is available and the money to pay for travel or housing expenses are also important constraints for practical theological research. Kestenbaum and Dunn know from experience that "external constraints on chaplains include the numerous time and energy limitations we all face."[115] Time demands are one of the main barriers, especially the time required to keep updated. Practitioners may have numerous responsibilities in the work itself. They experience difficulties in taking time off and they often have family responsibilities. On the other hand, Kestenbaum and Dunn hold that one's perception of time constraints is not always identical to the constraints themselves:

> Is every minute of your day, every day really consumed by urgent and clinical or administrative responsibilities? Are there not particular hours in the week or days of the year that you know from experience offer more spaciousness, and would allow you to spend half an hour in your favourite café – or in your favourite armchair–jotting down your thoughts? Are you really prevented from recording your thoughts into a voice recorder or a smartphone (many with free transcription software installed) that could be organised later into written form?[116]

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112 Bruce Horner, "Critical Ethnography, Ethics and Work" in Ethnography Unbound: From Theory Shock to Critical Praxis, eds. Stephen G. Brown and Sidney I. Dobrin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004): 18.

113 Horner, "Critical Ethnography," 22. We will return to this in Chapter 8.

114 Carney et al., "A Dynamic Typology of Stakeholder Engagement," 4.

115 Allison Kestenbaum and Laura Dunn, "Disseminating Your Research," in *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, ed. Gary E. Myers and Stephen Roberts (Templeton Foundation, 2014): 109.

116 Kestenbaum and Dunn, "Disseminating Your Research," 109.

In her PhD research project on a newly emerging religious community in a new housing quarter in Rotterdam, Veerle Rooze was confronted with serious time problems that caused severe obstacles to participatory research.

> Although I really wanted to involve the members of the faith community and the leadership and wanted to participate in what was already going on, although I really longed for collaborative research, I entered an environment where people were very stretched, where every hour was scarce and who were already approached by the faith community to participate. In fact, the dominant narrative in Rotterdam-Nesselande was characterised by participation. In all kinds of ways, people were asked to commit themselves, to join, to contribute. And after a few weeks I got a nagging feeling, that my pressure on 'together' and 'collaborate', that was already determining the narrative to a large extent, was strengthening this narrative.… In a new housing area, with busy people, participatory research may seem like squaring the circle.[117]

Apart from time constraints on the part of the co-researchers, time can also be a limitation for the researcher. It takes time to get to know people, the ins and outs of an organisation, the narratives and traditions by which a community lives its life. For the practical theological researcher, it also takes time to discover the theological dimension in the practices. Collaborative researchers tell about the time constraints in their research log or afterwards in an evaluation of the project. Thus Larry Stillman, in a community-based study with community organisations, writing about his expectations, states:

> This kind of collaborative work is challenging and demands constant self-reflection because it takes time; organisations have their natural delays and other priorities, and these cannot be ignored. Thus, learnings which I got from this project were rich and deep because we were engaged in a long process through which we became attuned to an organisation's culture. It reinforced my view that getting 'inside' an organisation is a sensitive, and sensitising project.[118]

Is collaborative research realisable within a given time limit? For example, for participatory action research it is difficult to provide a detailed time sched-

117 Rooze, *Nieuwe Grond*, 244.

118 Reflections by Larry Stillman and other researchers can be found in Catherine Lang et al., "Collaborative Research Partnerships in the Community," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 7 (2012): 1081–1105. http://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.704061.

ule, since the practitioners will need to be involved in the exploration and definition of the concerns, the planning and the interventions. Not only the experiences, but also the practical wisdom of the practitioners will have to be tapped. In most collaborative research projects, one may already be satisfied when a researcher and the research-practitioners explore and demonstrate knowledge on what is going on and why this is going on. To plan an intervention takes time, which will often cause action research to stop at the end of the first iteration. In the words of Sylvia Kay and Geoff Harris:

> It is one thing to collect data from people in order to explore a problem, but quite another to involve them in using these data to plan, implement, and evaluate an intervention. Facilitating a genuine role for participants in shaping a project will inevitably be time-consuming and may take the project down unexpected and possibly undesired pathways, but action research asks researchers to be catalysts and facilitators rather than controllers.[119]

Another problem is being simultaneously involved in both the process of action research and the collection of data. Furthermore, regarding the latter, conventional data gathering methods, like surveys, focus groups and participant observation, still need to be carried out. Together with the practitioners one also needs to establish criteria in order to be able to measure improvements. In all, action research is demanding and this calls for a small soundboard group to assist the researcher. An alternative would be to create long-term professional learning communities (PLCs) or long-term research communities. An interesting suggestion by Jean Bartunek may help to overcome the time constraints related to regular meetings between practitioners and researchers. She borrows the concept of a 'scholarship of integration' that we used in Chapter 6 from Ernest Boyer but extends it to include the establishment of 'forums', in which researchers and practitioners meet each other. She distinguishes two types of forums that can foster collaborative relationships between researchers and practitioners, namely "forums that flesh out implications for practice," where academics explain the rationales for their recommendations and practitioners tell about their experiences and "forums to discuss topics where there is joint interest."[120]

In this book, we repeatedly used the concept of a 'learning network' or a 'research community'. This suggestion does not take away the serious hurdle

119 Sylvia Kaye and Geoff Harris, "Participatory Action Research for Peacebuilding," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 30, no. 1 (2018): 66ff.

120 Bartunek, "Academic-Practitioner Collaboration," 1330.

of time constraints in concrete research projects, but if research interventions are worth the effort, time constraints on meeting on a regular basis can be overcome. If research is conducted in between work-activities and is part of these activities, as for example, in a Change Laboratory, this is likely to decrease the time-limitation. Research communities of practitioners, however, can simply be *absent* or hard to find. A real barrier can be the absence of peer support networks, for example, a group of colleagues, with or without 'expert' input. Ministers often struggle with a sense of loneliness and isolation. Staley et al., referring to a number of research results, write that "in a profession that requires nearly constant contact with people, it is a distressing paradox that clergy frequently feel disconnected and alone."[121] Lacking colleagues for sharing ideas or doing some research together can be a key component of this burden of isolation. More than fifty years ago, in 1968, the first Dutch empirical inquiry into the job of the minister demonstrated that there was a discrepancy between the expectations of ministers, who want to spend more time on study and learning, and the expectations of the congregants who want more home visits.[122] One year later, in a collection of essays, one of the authors refers to the "nightmares of the minister." He writes, "They have to deal with everything, but they cannot keep up... they feel that they are inadequate, they miss the normal satisfaction of being an expert in their domain."[123] The position of the minister, this *homo universalis*, is called an anachronism in a time of specialisation and teamwork. Accordingly, working in a team with colleagues is passionately advocated. The research of Staley, fifty years later, makes exactly the same plea. Professional clergy need to become intentional about carving out time for meeting others, "not necessarily answering to the same denominational authorities."[124] "Making relationships a priority in terms of time and effort allocation is an essential part of being able to foster close relationships for clergy."[125] We add that they may also need to become increasingly motivated and intentional to do research with others, both peers and researchers, or read research articles in community. Illustrative of this is the experience of Loren Mead, an episcopal priest and later pioneer in congregational studies.

121 Ryan C. Staley et al., "Strategies Employed by Clergy to Prevent and Cope with Interpersonal Isolation," *Pastoral Psychology* 62 (2013): 843.

122 Willem J. Berger, C. Boekestijn, J. B. Fabery de Jonge and A. C. Lenkeek, *Zielzorger in Nederland. Een onderzoek naar positie, taak en ambt van de pastor* (Meppel: Boom): 1968.

123 Willem van der Zee, "Predikant in meervoud," in *Over de predikant*, eds. C. Aalders, H. Faber and R. Kaptein (Utrecht: Ambo, 1969): 239.

124 Staley et al., "Strategies Employed by Clergy," 851.

125 Staley et al., "Strategies Employed by Clergy," 851.

He writes how he had two options for community with peers, ecumenical connections or denominational colleagues.[126] The first was very difficult, since in the small town where he was working there were prejudices about each other and there was rivalry between congregations.[127] Therefore the second option was chosen, a group of pastors and spouses, and this was not something that was 'laid on' for them, they had to invent it.

Distance is also an issue. It is difficult for the researcher if stakeholders are geographically dispersed. In an ethnographic PhD project on the contribution of rural churches to the liveability and quality of life in the countryside, in which two different areas were analysed, the distance from the academy to the fields of research turned out to lead to different amounts of field notes. Jacobine Gelderloos-Commandeur writes:

> One of the problems during the fieldwork was the unevenness between the case studies. In Brabant I had to look at the role of the church in two villages, while in Groningen four church-village relations were explored. A more crucial factor was the difference in distance. From my home in Groningen, it is more than three hours' drive to Brabant, while I could join a church service or concert in the province of Groningen in half an hour. The result is that the number of participant observations and interviews is much higher in Groningen than in Brabant. Nevertheless, the long distance to Brabant had the advantage that I was usually forced to stay there for one or two nights, which meant that I got an impression of what it was like to live in Asten and Someren.[128]

Finally, the *diversity* of perspectives may cause a real challenge. We touched upon this, referring to Boon et al., and Phillips. The diversity can become too large, producing so many divergent views that it will be difficult to reach a consensus. Including as many voices as possible can also have the consequence that researchers *devalue* their own expertise and even silence themselves. In this case they want to de-emphasise their authority.[129] In action research, the researchers note that balancing democracy and authority is a delicate matter. A difficulty of collaborative research that we touched upon earlier is that conflicts may arise between the practitioners and the researchers from pressure to

126 Loren B. Mead, "Three Teachers," in *From Midterms to Ministry*. Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings, ed. Allan Hugh Cole Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008): 210.

127 Mead, "Three Teachers," 210.

128 Gelderloos-Commandeur, *Meaningful in the Margins*, 40.

129 Sonia Ospina et al., "From Consent to Mutual Inquiry: Balancing Democracy and Authority in Action Research," *Action Research* 2, no. 1 (2004): 62.

provide results that practitioners can directly apply to improve their practice. Not only do the questions of practitioners differ from the research questions, but practitioners may have different expectations with regard to the desired results, particularly when it comes to their applicability. Both researchers and practitioners can also have different assumptions. Collaboration with shared theoretical assumptions, for example, on the goal of an ecclesial practice, differs from collaboration when there are contrasting assumptions. Zittoun et al. write:

> Where the parties share assumptions, their work together is likely to be made easy by much implicit self-regulation in line with those assumptions. Where the parties have very different assumptions, they may need to work harder on making their assumptions and expectations explicit so that each understands why the other contributes as they do. In this case, the collaboration may need additional time and flexibility to develop a shared basis for working together.[130]

With regard to assumptions and expectations, exchanging knowledge is one thing; learning from each other in a common research project is something else. The development of knowledge needs a direction, it is not enough to 'just put people together'. Only a common research aim, nearby or at the horizon, binds people together.

8 Mutual Beneficial Collaboration?

Using an example of a research project on the perceptions of leaders of congregations regarding the possibility of collaborating with psychologists and rationales for why members of congregations might be interested in such collaboration, we can apply several of the aforementioned points on collaborative practical theology.[131]

First, the researchers emphasise that each possible collaborative setting needs to be considered individually in order to determine if the conditions are acceptable to both the researcher and the practitioners for pursuing col-

130 Zittoun et al., "Collaborative Research, Knowledge and Emergence," 213.

131 Bret Kloos, Karen Horneffer and Thom Moore, "Before the Beginning: Religious Leaders' Perceptions of the Possibility for Mutually Beneficial Collaboration with Psychologists," *Journal of Community Psychology* 23, no. 4 (1995): 275–291.

laborative research.[132] The initial step in any process of collaboration is to understand the perspectives of those with whom one intends to work.[133]

Second, when there is not a manifest emphasis on a service orientation with regard to the needs of members ('the church community', 'inreach') or situations or needs of people beyond the congregation ('the larger society', 'outreach'), congregational leaders are unlikely to be open to collaboration. Vice versa, the communities that are most open for collaborative research are those that emphasise outreach as part of their service to the community.[134] Applied to practical theological research with congregations, for example, if these congregations identify themselves as missional communities, or have comparable aspirations, we may expect them to be open for collaboration with the academy. We see this confirmed in the aforementioned research project of Matthias Kaljouw with 18 'iconic churches'.

Third, if there is no familiarity with a university, leaders tend to be less open to collaboration. Vice versa, collaboration is more likely to occur when the congregation already has some interaction with the university.[135] Applied to practical theology, if a theological institution engages in intensive relationships with its alumni, it will increase opportunities for doing research with these alumni at a later moment. Furthermore, if practical theologians are open to knowledge transfer, for example, in the form of lecturing in congregations, this relationship will make congregational leaders more open to doing research in community. According to Kloos et al., "trust can more easily be built when there is perceived commonality between collaborators."[136] A lack of trust is the largest obstacle of forming collaborative relationships. This point is already mentioned by Lewin in the seminal article on action research that we referred to in Chapter 7, in which he stated that a "very real anxiety on the part of practitioners" is the feeling that social scientists at the university will "sooner or later be in the position to tell the local community workers exactly what to do and what not to do."[137] Commonality is therefore established when the researcher still is or has been a practitioner in a similar setting.[138]

132 Kloos, Horneffer and Moore, "Before the Beginning," 278.
133 Kloos, Horneffer and Moore, "Before the Beginning," 278.
134 Kloos, Horneffer and Moore, "Before the Beginning," 284.
135 Kloos, Horneffer and Moore, "Before the Beginning," 287.
136 Kloos, Horneffer and Moore, "Before the Beginning," 287.
137 Lewin, "Action Research and Minority Problems," 44.
138 In a current PhD-Project at the PThU, a collaborative ethnographic research project on intentional Christian communities, conducted by Rosaliene Israel, she finds that a relationship of trust with the community is created by the fact that she is an active member

Fourth, leaders of congregations make a clear distinction between consultation on the one hand, perceived as a brief working relationship as long as a problem exists in which a psychologist is asked for advice and collaboration, and a research project in which one is working together on the other hand. Practical theologians, therefore, need to be clear about what they bring to the practitioners: advice or research or both.

Fifth, the perceptions that congregational leaders have of collaborators are important. Phrased in questions, will an outsider understand the uniqueness of our congregation's setting? Will he or she be able to understand our practices, our God-talk, references to Scripture, theological rationale, foundational stories, artefacts and history? Will he or she acknowledge that everyday believers and volunteers contribute to our practices with their spirituality? Are the interests of the researcher in line with the goals and mission of our congregation? Also, appreciating the uniqueness of this congregation, its history and its ecology, is essential. The consequence of this is that a secular researcher is likely to be met with suspicion.

In chaplaincy research, experiences with collaborative research practices demonstrate that it takes time to create a research community in which the chaplains actually perceive themselves as researchers. Initially, in the aforementioned case study project conducted by Walton and Körver, chaplains at first felt that they were 'taking part' in the research of (i.e. *owned by*) the researchers. The phase from seeing themselves as chaplains to 'becoming' researchers took at least a year and a half.[139] Here too, some chaplains initially regarded the project's goal, namely to contribute to the professionalisation of chaplaincy, with suspicion. Would their spirituality be acknowledged and, to make this same point more specific, would the research value their intuitive responses or their intuitive actions in certain situations? Niels den Toom, in

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of a Christian intentional community too. On the other hand, she is ambivalent about it too: "Back home in the city centre behind my laptop, I reflect on this growing confidence and understanding from both sides. And I have ambivalent thoughts about it. I am aware that it is part of the immersion in the life of this community and it is very helpful to be around in a non-disturbing way and to put my respondents at ease and enable them to behave as naturally as possible. On the other hand, I need a certain distance to consider what is happening, said, hold back and to keep asking questions that provide progressive insight." From a presentation by Rosaliene Israel at one of the weekly sessions of the Practical Theology Seminar, organised by the research group Practices of the PThU in Groningen in April 2018.

139 Martin Walton and Jacques (Sjaak), W. G. Körver, "Dutch Case Studies Project in Chaplaincy Care: Description and Theoretical Explanation of the Format and Procedures," *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy* 5, no. 2 (2017): 257–280.

his PhD project at the PThU in Groningen on Walton and Körver's case study project, tries to 'refine' the concept of professionalisation by including these hesitations.[140]

9 The Dynamics in Research Groups

On April 27, 2018, when King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands visited Groningen on his birthday, one of the highlights was the moment when Nobel Prize winner, professor Ben Feringa, was called out to present himself to the King and the royal family. When his name was mentioned, he came out of the Academy Building of the University of Groningen, but he was not alone. He was accompanied by an entire research team. The moment beautifully captured how every member of the team had contributed to the research.

In practical theology, team research is still in its infancy. According to Fallis, the "most obvious way to explain why there is so much collaboration in science is with a cost-benefit analysis."[141] If the benefits, in particular, the *epistemic* merits, outweigh the costs, scientists will seek to collaborate. Hanne Andersen sums up different benefits.[142] First, collaboration can speed up research by sharing the workload between researchers. Second, research that is resource intensive can be performed more efficiently by sharing resources. Third, research in which different people critically assess the analysis of the data leads to better error detection. Following Fallis, "it is more likely that any mistakes will be uncovered and corrected."[143] Fourth, it increases the possibilities for valorisation because there are more people available to disseminate the results, increasing the fecundity of academic research.[144] Fifth, following Brad Wray, who bases this assertion on empirical research, collaboration increases productivity.[145]

Wray also lists some of the costs of multi-authored articles, the first being the question of accountability or, to be more precise, the "diffusion of epistemic responsibility."[146] In simple terms, who is the author of specific parts

140 I quote this from a presentation by Niels den Toom at one of the weekly sessions of the Practical Theology Seminar, organised by the research group Practices of the PThU in Groningen in April 2018.

141 Don Fallis, "The Epistemic Costs and Benefits of Collaboration," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 44, no. S1 (2006): 199.

142 Hanne Andersen, "Collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and the epistemology of contemporary science," in *Studies in History of Philosophy and Science. Part A*, 56, no. 1 (2016), 6.

143 Fallis, "The Epistemic Costs and Benefits," 199.

144 Fallis, "The Epistemic Costs and Benefits," 201.

145 Wray, "The Epistemic Significance of Collaborative Research," 158.

146 Wray, "The Epistemic Significance of Collaborative Research," 164.

of the text? Who is responsible for the analysis of the data? The researchers do not establish each step individually. When a co-authored article is found to rely on questionable data or lacks a sound theoretical basis it is not clear whose credibility should be affected. The problem of accountability can also occur when a supervisor and a PhD student write an article together. In this case, it needs to be crystal clear who is accountable for the knowledge claims that are advanced. Second, there is the problem of motivation if your name as author "gets lost" in "the crowd of scientists putting their names to the paper."[147] Third, with Andersen, we add that collaboration in teams also costs time, in terms of communication and coordination.

In this final section, we briefly reflect on an issue that a collaborative research practice needs to be conscious about. In research communities, in each of the different phases both discussing the validity of the assertions, and decision-making are necessary. For example, in the phase of elaboration, of analysing together, group members listen to each other's theories, their line of reasoning, how they provide support for their conclusions, build on each other's ideas etc., while decision making involves coming to a consensus. On the one hand, elaboration is needed; on the other hand, one cannot go on discussing the interpretations for ever. Research by Marjolein Dobber on research groups in student teacher education demonstrated that little time spent on both elaboration and decision making, and the procedures involved, leads to long, undirected discussions and quick, ad hoc decisions: "The research process of this group was arduous and at the end of the process the group members had a negative image of doing research."[148] In a research group where group members were appointed as 'gatekeepers' for elaboration and a group member was appointed as gatekeeper for indicating that it was time to come to a decision, in the end the members were "proud of the research process" and the group attained good outcomes. The same research also showed that if students learn to collaborate, for example, in research groups during their studies, the research communities in which they participate as practitioners are likely to be successful: "It is important that teachers are professionally prepared for collaborating in teacher communities… during teacher education, by means of collaborating in similar types of communities."[149] Jean Bartunek, referring to Kahn, Davidson and others, points to the difficulties of creating

147 Wray, "The Epistemic Significance of Collaborative Research," 165.

148 Marjolein Dobber, "Collaboration in Groups During Teacher Education" (PhD diss., Leiden University; ICLON, 2011): 119.

149 Dobber, "Collaboration in Groups During Teacher Education," 117.

mutual positive relationships between practitioners and academics.[150] Both need to have relational skills, “such as the ability to avoid stereotypes about the other group that limit openness to its members’ actual behaviour.”[151] I add that both need to have, with Heshusius, “participatory consciousness.”[152] This is a problem common to many kinds of collaboration between groups.

10 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that, despite our insistent call for collaboration, there are challenges to deal with. First, it largely depends on the goals of the practical theological research project as to which collaborative research strategy is preferred. Thus, the question is: what do you want to know, what will this knowledge be used for, and why would it be important for this knowledge-interest to conduct the research in one or more phases with practitioners and/or everyday believers? Second, in every project there will be phases of disengagement and engagement, the former being a necessary precondition to safeguard the research from unwanted interference, the latter being a precondition for its relevance and for ensuring the valorisation of the results. Shorter or longer retreats in the ivory tower are necessary in order to formulate research questions, explicate or elaborate theoretical concepts, provide an analysis of relevant literature to the topic or write the final report, article or book. The goal of the engagement itself also needs to be examined and articulated. The research cycle and the intervention cycle need to be distinguished. On the one hand, establishing truth calls for the inclusion of all who are affected by the research, while on the other hand, truth cannot be established from within communities of practice alone. Third, we learned from stakeholder research that stakeholders can be involved in different phases of the research trajectory and can play different roles. Great care must be taken that one type of stakeholder, the funders, do not determine or even influence the results. Fourth, asymmetry and even power mechanisms cannot be avoided, but should be consciously reflected upon. This calls for intense reflexivity on the part of the researcher. With Phillips, one must use the differences in assumptions, perspectives and theories as sites for exploration. Fifth, collaborative research takes ample time and there are also a number of other constraints. A remedy to these constraints would be, in line with

150 Bartunek, “Academic-Practitioner Collaboration,” 1329.
151 Bartunek, “Academic-Practitioner Collaboration,” 1329.
152 See Chapter 6.

Bartunek, Lave and Wenger, the creation of long-term research communities. In religious education, one can think of communities of teachers together with practical theologians, in liturgical studies, homiletics, pastoral care, community building and diaconal science, one can think of ministers, but also of bishops, elders, deacons and everyday believers together with practical theologians, in chaplaincy studies, one could create teams of chaplains working in different institutional settings, etc. One could even imagine practitioners and everyday believers starting such research communities themselves… This will be my argument in the final chapter of our book, to which we now turn.

CHAPTER 9

Taking the Initiative: Practitioners Doing Collaborative Research

Communities of Practice Becoming Research Communities

1 Introduction

In 2009, Dutch practical theologian Rein Brouwer published an ethnographic study of a Protestant congregation in the city of Amersfoort.[1] Over a period of more than two years, Brouwer participated in small groups, special events and worship services and was present at a large number of church council meetings. He observed decision making processes and the role of the pastor. He interviewed a large number of members, including the pastor. Based on a huge pile of field notes, Brouwer told the story of this faith community in a voluminous book. By using four perspectives from the field of congregational studies, combined with a theological interpretation in which the concept of *koinonia* played a prominent role, he was not only able to describe and understand the processes of the congregation, or as Carl-Immanuel Nitzsch would have put it, its ecclesial life,[2] but also its contemporary, hybrid identity. In addition, the four perspectives, in particular, his description of the ecology or context of the congregation helped him to see that this congregation lacked knowledge of what was going on in the neighbourhood where the church building was located. Brouwer speaks of a “diaconal and missional captivity.”[3] Apart from this sharp criticism, he also proposes a research strategy. Quoting David Bosch, Brouwer writes that if a church wants to be incarnational, “we should be as concrete and specific as possible about the context of a local congregation,” also because urban and rural ecologies, in the sense of “geographical spaces where people live, work, meet and entertain themselves and each other,” are constantly changing.[4] Brouwer is critical towards a superficial macro-analysis of the cultural and societal context in which a congregation is embedded:

1 Brouwer, “Hybrid Identity,” 45–61; Rein Brouwer, “Missional Church and Local Constraints,” 56–60; Brouwer, *Geloven in gemeenschap*.
2 See Chapter 4.
3 Brouwer, “Missional Church and Local Constraints,” 58.
4 Brouwer, “Missional Church and Local Constraints,” 59.

> It is not very useful to confine an analysis of the culture of a local church to a philosophical interpretation of modernisation or to the modern way of life or to the post-modern definition of the self. It is equally not very interesting to reduce the cultural analysis to the macro level of society (rationalism, individualism, materialism, pluralism). In order to understand the local context in which a congregation intends to be a missional church, we should instead grasp the empirical situation in its complexity.[5]

I start this final chapter with a description of Brouwer's research, not only because the concept of a *missional church* is in the air, but primarily because a consequence of his research is that he encourages professional practitioners and everyday believers to perform empirical research in community, if possible, together with practical theologians. Communities of faith should grasp the empirical situation. Missional practices in a holistic sense – that is, practices of missionary outreach, but also pastoral, liturgical and diaconal practices that serve people in the geographical context or in the network context of a congregation (the network of people with which the members of a congregation are connected) – need to be accompanied by empirical inquiry. Thus, in order to improve their practices or design new ones, everyday believers, members of church councils, deacons and elders, but also professional practitioners, may need to do some practical theological research. For example, they may conduct ethnographic walks and interviews, they may use technological devices or visual methods, or they may conduct some form of action research. In short, they need to look and, above all, they need to listen, albeit in a *methodically structured* way. Brouwer's plea resonates with others. Elisabeth Jordan writes that the field of practical theology has need of researching professionals, people who are able to examine their own practice in the light of contemporary social theory and theology.[6] Jordan adds that "it is clearly desirable that insiders, that is ordained and lay leaders and those employed to provide training and resources, should be able to examine and reflect on the theological identity of the congregations with whom they work."[7]

Still, is conducting empirical practical theological research not an exclusively academic enterprise? One is inclined to agree. In Chapter 1, we wrote on how Yrjö Engeström distinguishes the activity system of research from the

5 Brouwer, "Missional Church and Local Constraints," 58.

6 Elisabeth Jordan, "Knowing as We are Known: Relational Epistemology in Practice," *Ecclesial Practices* 5, no. 2 (2018): 214–230.

7 Jordan, "Knowing as We are Known," 217.

activity system of the world. They have different subjects, different objects (in the sense of an often quite elusive entanglement of purposes and motives), different tools and rules and divisions of labour. A lack of skills is one thing, a lack of time another. These reasons are all convincing. Nevertheless, the crises in the routines of everyday practices of a congregation can demand the creation of new or renewed practices. For example, an activity is not experienced as meaningful or nobody shows up, the number of participants declines, or a pastor faces the uncertainty of how to act in a difficult situation. New situations in an everchanging society may also call for congregational response. They can be *kairos moments*. But the academy, with its books, journal articles and researchers, is not always nearby. What is considered an urgent topic for research may not coincide with what is considered urgent by a congregation or, for that matter, one of the other communities of practice that form the addressees of practical theology. Church councils, pastors, teachers in religious education or chaplains – may want to do research themselves. We cannot wait for the academy. Although this book deals extensively with practical theological researchers collaborating *with* communities of practitioners and is about enabling the latter (the stakeholders) to become research participants or co-researchers in different phases of the research process, practitioners doing research is a different thing. First, how can practitioner-researchers prevent that a personal bias will make the research invalid? Their participation in and lack of distance from the field is a significant problem since they are likely to have an interest in certain outcomes. In addition, do they have the necessary competences? Doing research in Christian practices requires skills and experience in one-to-one interviewing, participant observation, conducting focus groups, coding, analysing, theory-formation, etc. Furthermore, it demands an insider and an outsider perspective, engagement and disengagement. Nevertheless, not all research needs to be generalisable in a horizontal direction. As we will see, research on action research demonstrates that it can also have a vertical direction and be of direct relevance to one's own professional practices.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, we elaborate the notion of being 'research-informed', since I argue that we should encourage practitioners, lay and professional, to become research-informed if only to better understand and improve the *quality* of their practices and in order to experiment in a reflective way with new practices. Second, we reflect on the dispersed knowledge of individuals within a community. A relational approach, such as described in Chapter 7, seeks to acknowledge the knowledge and skills that a community – and its leadership – can tap into. Third, we address practitioners and everyday believers as researching professionals. We focus on the field of education, i.e. teachers. Fourth, we concentrate on a distinct community of professionals, from whom ministers and other professionals and laity in religious practices may learn a lot: chaplains. In the last 15 years, both the stimulation of research literacy and the practice of research have increasingly been turning chaplaincy into a research-informed profession. Fifth, we ask: under what conditions can ministers and professional pastoral workers do empirical research?

2 Practitioners Becoming Research-Informed

Do practitioners really need to cooperate with researchers or, when these are not around, do they really need to believe that theology or the results of empirical theological inquiries are necessary for their everyday practices? Why research for any practice profession? There are, of course, practitioners who do not feel this urge. They rely on subjective experience, their intuitions, tacit knowledge and on the routines that they have developed over the years. They have also developed their own practice theories. In addition, there are time pressures. As we stated in Chapter 8, time involvement is often the main obstacle to both individual and team research or, for that matter, to keeping updated with regard to theological research in general and practical theological research in one of the sub-disciplines. Increasingly, however, being trained in conducting empirical research in formal education and being involved in continuing education, practitioners in Christian practices in the near future may come to view their work as a research-informed or even research-based profession. Educators in theological faculties, departments and seminaries should teach theology students to become consumers of research and learn the basics of finding relevant literature or doing a systematic literature review, one-to-one interviewing, focus group research, action research, participatory action research or appreciative inquiry, and therefore the basics of collaborative research. A good researcher will also be a good congregational leader, chaplain, youth minister, teacher or theologian, albeit that these professions also require other competences. In my view, it is both necessary to introduce research to students, and to include students in research activities of the educators. With regard to the latter, for example, in a PhD project conducted at the PThU on the significance of diaconal learning processes for the beneficial, missionary presence of Protestant churches, Bert Roor intentionally invited students from the Christian University of Applied Science in

Ede, where Roor also lectures, to assist him.[8] Three students were involved in the field research. The topic of the research was the informal help and support given by congregational members of three different congregations, with a focus on if and how their learning experiences were communicated in the congregation and under what conditions diaconal learning can be stimulated. Students acquired experience in research skills. With regard to the content of the study, they became acquainted with the practice of diaconal acting and learning, as well as the theories and concepts to reflect on these experiences.

In the last five years, not only in theology, but also in the social sciences and humanities in general, in order to become a reflective practitioner, a tendency to instruct students to conduct practice-oriented research can be observed. In a document for the discipline of social studies of the University of Applied Sciences in Ede, we read:

> The final assignment has a strong orientation on practices.... Problems that arise in professional practices form the starting point of the assignment. Often the assignment will have the shape of a project, related to policy preparation or policy execution, in which there is a direct relationship with the practices of the social-pedagogical worker. There can also be a focus on the development of methods or on the quality of care for clients.... The project can also be interesting for the university, because it can generate impulses from practices for the development of education. Students benefit by integrating theory and practice and perhaps it will increase his or her chances to find a suitable employment.[9]

In an email, the coordinator wrote to me: "We want to educate our students to become enquiring professionals who can deploy their enquiring competences in order to improve their professional practices; not for large practice-aimed research, but for the everyday improvement of the quality of care and well-being and working in an organisation to develop themselves to a learning, reflexive, normative professional."[10] The thesis that has to be written will often be based upon commissioned research, "in which a societal stakeholder will

8 Bert Roor, "Heilzame presentie. Diaconale betrokkenheid als leeromgeving voor protestantse kerken" (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University; Utrecht: Boekencentrum Academic, 2018).

9 Afstudeernota 2016–2017, Social Studies, University of Applied Sciences Ede.

10 Bianca van Putten-Vos, Email message to author, June 23, 2017.

ask the student to do research on behalf of solving one of their problems."[11] The final assignment has to be conducted by two students together.

Developing the competences to do research in formal education will also increase the prospects of ministers, chaplains and professional pastoral workers acquiring and developing research competences in continuing education. In line with the history of the profession and honouring their *wissenschaftliche Bildung*, to use Schleiermacher's phrase, theology students must strive to become professional theologians who read books and articles, online and offline, and seek to become contributing members of communities of practice. As we saw in Chapter 5, following Wenger and McDermott, such communities of practice can be intentionally created and shepherded as professional learning or research communities. Schleiermacher considered practical theology necessary in order to stimulate religious communication and practices, in short, religious life within a congregation. Ministers play an essential role in this religious life, by virtue of being ordained and in office, but also by virtue of their profession because they are assigned to take the lead.[12] They have acquired expertise in interpreting Scripture, the Christian tradition and the God-talk and God-walk of the faith community. Without a professional, a community may easily fall apart. In this role, professional leaders need research-based knowledge and research-based skills to serve the community, and the least we may expect is that they are research-informed. This enables them to look at their practices, and the practices of the community that they are serving, from the perspective of an outsider and introduce insights that have been generated in other contexts. Of course, not every theology student becomes a minister or pastoral worker. If theology students become teachers in religious education, they still need to stay informed about the research in their field, in order to stimulate their practices. In a more general sense, teachers in Christian schools need to become responsive to the question of how the identity of their school relates to their task as teacher.[13] If they become chaplains, they need to be able to justify their interventions and increasingly to know the value and effect of their practices, if only to legitimise their appointment in the hospital, mental health care institution, school, workplace, armed forces or prison. The position, goal and related tasks of spiritual care are constantly debated.[14]

11 Bianca van Putten-Vos, Email message to author, June 23, 2017.

12 See above, Chapter 2.

13 I am grateful for this orally expressed view on this goal of her research by Hanna Markus, who is writing her PhD dissertation at the PThU, on teachers' views of and strategies about religious tolerance as an educational goal.

14 Wim Smeets, *Spiritual Care in a Hospital Setting: An Empirical-Theological Exploration* (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 12; Ruth Webber, "Catholic Prison Ministry: 'The Light at the End

Becoming research-*informed* or having 'science literacy',[15] as it also described, is about learning to understand, appraise and utilise research results, being able to apply theoretical understandings and, I add, being informed about the performative effects of relational research approaches. If the focus is on research information, practitioners or even whole communities of practice are stakeholders, primarily on the recipients-side of a mono-directional flow. Remarkably, in the past thirty years, significant progress has been made with regard to becoming research-informed in adjacent professions to religious education, ministry and chaplaincy. In *medicine*, in 1994, the term 'evidence-based' practice was coined. The conviction took root, that "statements on illness and health that derive from strict and monitored conditions are far more solid than the judgements of professionals, which are unintentionally but too often based on opinions. In this respect, 'evidence-based' is preferable to 'practice-based', 'experience-based', or 'opinion-based'."[16] In *teaching*, the practices of teaching, the development of education and research on education should ideally be connected in a 'knowledge-chain',[17] but in the Dutch context national agencies refer to an 'underutilisation of research' by practitioners, partly caused by a lack of interest in research among practitioners and partly caused by a mismatch of research and the needs of practitioners. This is not only a Dutch problem. In a literature review on research in many Western countries, Hein Broekkamp and Bernadette Wolters-Hout observe that there is an intensely debated gap between educational research and practice,[18] and further note that the debate itself is dominated by researchers.[19] One of the

of the Tunnel'," in *For Justice and Mercy: International Reflections on Prison Chaplaincy*, eds. Ryan van Eijk, Gerard Loman and Theo de Wit (Oisterwijk: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2016): 46ff.; Ryan van Eyk, "Human Dignity in Prison. Prison Chaplaincy's Core Business as Mission Impossible?" in *For Justice and Mercy*, eds. Van Eyk, Loman and De Wit, 298ff.

15 Catherine E. Snow and Kenne A. Dibner, eds., *Science Literacy: Concepts, Contexts and Consequences* (Dulles, VA: National Academies Press, 2016).

16 Giel Hutschemaekers and Bea Tiemens, "Evidence-Based Policy. From Answers to Question," in *Policy, People, and the New Professional: De-professionalisation and Re-professionalisation in Care and Welfare*, ed. Jan Willem Duyvendak, Trudie Knijn and Monique Kremer (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006): 34–47.

17 Wilfried Admiraal, Jos Beishuizen, Geert ten Dam and Monique Volman, "Wetenschappelijk praktijkonderzoek naar onderwijs: Zaak van docenten en onderzoekers," in *Theorie en praktijk van leren en de leraar. Liber Amicorum Theo Wubbels*, eds. Jan van Tartwijk, Mieke Brekelmans, Perry den Brok and Tim Mainhard (Amsterdam: SWP, 2014).

18 Hein Broekkamp and Bernadette van Hout-Wolters, "The Gap between Educational Research and Practice: A Literature Review, Symposium, and Questionnaire," *Educational Research and Evaluation* 13, no. 3 (2007): 203.

19 Broekkamp and Van Hout-Wolters, "The Gap between Educational Research and Practice," 204.

main causes of the gap is that, although there is much education research in schools and classrooms, researchers focus on themes and generalisable theories that are not considered relevant by teachers, schools and students. They are publishing more for an academic public than an educational public, with the aim of improving or renewing educational practices.[20] As Broekkamp and Van Hout write "educational research yields only few practical results."[21] There is also a lack of secondary research reports that summarise results in a practice-oriented way. Practitioners also believe that educational research is not practical ("they do not know what is going on in the classroom")[22] and they make little use of research. With regard to the latter, the conditions for using research need to be improved:

> Practitioners should receive support from their organisations for actively using research in the form of time, money, assistance, and, ultimately, collaboration. The limited fulfilment of these conditions may not only explain why the vast majority of practitioners do not actively use the results of research, it may also explain why some use research in sloppy and inappropriate ways.[23]

A remedy is the creation of 'research communities' or, as Broekmans and Van Hout put it, referring to Etienne Wenger, 'knowledge communities'.[24] Such new forms of collaborative research include communities of teachers conducting research in their own schools after having received training.[25] Writing on the professionalisation rationale,[26] we already saw that when teachers are enrolled in continuing education, they learn best from other teachers. Teachers should not only use knowledge products that have been developed elsewhere but inform each other, offline and online, about innovative, effective practices

20 Admiraal, Beishuizen, Ten Dam and Volman, "Wetenschappelijk praktijkonderzoek," 176. We came across a comparable evaluation when we described the debate in sociology in the introduction to Chapter 6.

21 Broekkamp and Van Hout-Wolters, "The Gap between Educational Research and Practice," 206.

22 Broekkamp and Van Hout-Wolters, "The Gap between Educational Research and Practice," 207.

23 Broekkamp and Van Hout-Wolters, "The Gap between Educational Research and Practice," 208.

24 Broekkamp and Van Hout-Wolters, "The Gap between Educational Research and Practice," 210.

25 Admiraal, Beishuizen, Ten Dam and Volman, "Wetenschappelijk praktijkonderzoek," 177ff.

26 See Chapter 6.

and create a process of 'knowledge-enrichment'. Practice-oriented research, such as the action research project by Petra Ponte et al. in Chapter 6, will often be context-dependent,[27] but then again, I would argue that this can also be seen as a stimulus to do research in one's own context or form an 'action research community'.

In *social work*, since the end of the 1980s, working groups of researchers made a collective effort to examine the role of research in the profession and the role that research could (and should) play in the underpinning and development of the individual social worker.[28] The goal was "capacity building in the profession."[29] As Betsy Vourlekis writes, based upon the research infrastructure that was built in the past three decades and included government funding structures, they hoped to create a knowledge base in order to improve professional practice, striving to introduce evidence-based interventions "into the complex service systems that provide services and support to our nation's most vulnerable individuals and families."[30] Today, interestingly enough, the same kind of collaborative research that I advocate in this book is a *desideratum* for social work. Here the integration of social work practice settings (and their practice concerns) with social work researchers and research resources is strongly demanded.[31] Social work researchers argue, however, that the notion of 'evidence-based interventions' needs to be put into perspective. To be research-informed is considered important, but then 'evidence' or theories that have been developed in other contexts need not necessarily be helpful for one's own practices. Giel Hutschemaekers and Bea Tiemens, following critics of an evidence-based paradigm, state that "independent decision-making is the core business of professionals and that any decisions those professionals make depend on much more than scientific knowledge alone."[32] For one thing, an intervention that has proved to be effective under ideal circumstances may not be considered suitable. Professionals can also rely on experience-based knowledge.[33] Nevertheless, Hutschemaerkers and Tiemens add that these cri-

27 Admiraal, Beishuizen, Ten Dam and Volman, "Wetenschappelijk praktijkonderzoek," 184.
28 Betsy S. Vourlekis, Joan Levy Zlotnik, Juan Ramos and Kathleen Ell, "Building the Profession's Research Infrastructure," *Advances in Social Work* 15, no. 1 (2014): 232.
29 Vourlekis et al., "Building the Profession's Research Infrastructure," 232.
30 Vourlekis et al., "Building the Profession's Research Infrastructure," 239.
31 Vourlekis et al., "Building the Profession's Research Infrastructure," 239.
32 Hutschemaekers and Tiemens, "Evidence-Based Policy," 35.
33 Hutschemaekers and Tiemens, "Evidence-Based Policy," 40.

ticisms are in some cases provoked by a "guidelines-policy," in which professionals should strictly adhere to protocols and guidelines derived from science.[34] In this model, the professional becomes "a competent implementer of procedures that have been developed by others and to which no individual clinical expertise can be added. The client is in exactly the same position because the ideal client is the one who is prepared to act according to the standard."[35] On the other hand, Hutschemaekers and Tiemens do not wish to downplay the importance of research. On the contrary, being informed by research, and even by evidence, need not be guided by protocols, but can also be used as a *heuristic* tool by a social worker. In other words, research information helps one to see, listen, understand, and act better, or to try out something new. Of course, it is still necessary to search for information with the proper question in mind, to evaluate the information found and to apply it to the original question, but then, based upon both research and experience, a professional can explicitly state his or her expertise, opinions and expectations.[36] In addition, it is not only the expertise of the professional that counts: a professional social worker should also know and learn to acknowledge the values of the people on whose behalf he or she is working.

I described the gap between educational research and the practices of teachers, and the ambivalences and promises of being research-informed in social work at some length, since there are parallels with professional practitioners in Christian practices. In these professions, a distance is needed from practices that are dominated by an attitude of "just carrying on."[37] In his empirical theological research on spiritual care in a hospital setting, Wim Smeets shows that chaplains, or spiritual caregivers as he calls them, are critical of 'proceduralisation' and protocolisation and are "keenly aware of the danger of bureaucratisation," but they are moderately positive towards the idea of maintaining a register of professionals, who have to meet certain requirements for training, refresher courses and professional practice to qualify for registration.[38] Communities of chaplains bounce back when it comes to efficiency and efficacy, but they do agree with quality of care at micro level. In different contexts, however, there are developments which indicate that in the future, if only for funding reasons, spiritual and pastoral care services that have "traditionally stayed away from standard outcome measures as they

34 Hutschemaekers and Tiemens, "Evidence-Based Policy," 35.
35 Hutschemaekers and Tiemens, "Evidence-Based Policy," 40.
36 Hutschemaekers and Tiemens, "Evidence-Based Policy," 44.
37 Hutschemaekers and Tiemens, "Evidence-Based Policy," 45.
38 Smeets, *Spiritual Care in a Hospital Setting*, 49ff., 212ff.

do not fit with the ethos of the service" will be confronted with significant changes. In the UK, "organisations have campaigned to have National Health Service funding removed from spiritual and pastoral care services and if (these services are) to survive and modernise, research and outcome measures are unavoidable. Developing suitable and reliable measurement within the field is vital."[39] Research in chaplaincy studies increasingly includes research on how patients and clients evaluate spiritual care or, importantly in relation to "measuring outcomes," how they perceive and interpret their experiences with spiritual caregivers.[40] Related to the needs of patients and clients, models are also provided for testing hypotheses[41] or for improving the bio-psycho-social model in mental health care by adding the spiritual dimension.[42] Spirituality, for example, can be a key for engaging with treatment.[43] Although the loss of government funding based on the efficiency of interventions is neither foreseen nor expected in many congregations and parishes, the turn towards empirical research in practical theology, for example, in Eric Vossen's theodicy project, aimed to improve the *quality* of professional pastoral communication.[44] Remarkably, Vossen also designed a curriculum for volunteers in pastoral communication, convinced that volunteers also needed to be research-informed. In order for practitioners in Christian practices – both professional and laity, employed or volunteers – to see practical theology in general and the research results of practical theological research projects in particular as relevant, we can learn from the aforementioned professions. Research needs to be applicable, utilisable, helpful for preventing routinisation, and helpful for better understanding and renewing religious practices. In professions in religious practices, there will also be an increasing pressure to be accountable, to be able to communicate the effects and value of one's interventions. Research-information can have a heuristic function, that is, at a distance one is able to see more, listen better and act in a more prudent way. Hutschemaekers

39 Julian Raffay, Emily Wood and Andrew Todd, "Service User Views of Spiritual and Pastoral Care (Chaplaincy) in NHS Mental Health Services: A Co-Produced Constructivist Grounded Theory Investigation," *BioMed Central Psychiatry* 16, no. 200 (2016): 1. See https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-016-0903-9.

40 Martin Walton, *Hoe waait de wind? Interpretatie van geestelijke verzorging door cliënten in de ggz*. Tilburg 2014.

41 Emanuel et al., "Working of the Human Spirit," 13.

42 Emanuel et al., "Working of the Human Spirit," 15. Daniel P. Sulmasy, "A Biopsychosocial-Spiritual Model for the Care of Patients at the End of Life," *The Gerontologist* 42, no. 3 (2002): 24–33.

43 Raffay, Wood and Todd, "Service User Views," 8.

44 See Chapter 1.

and Tiemans, referring to Donald Schön's seminal publication on the reflective practitioner, write:

> The quality of professional performance is not only better when new skills are learned and adopted, but also, and perhaps even more so, by reflection and awareness of one's own performance. According to Schön, the simple question 'Why am I doing this?' encourages explanation and a systematic approach to existing practices. The following question would be, 'Am I doing what is best?'… This individual activity is typical for each experience relating to 'sense of mastery'.[45]

3 The Knowledge of the Community

In the previous section, we focused on the value of being research-informed from the perspective of the single practitioner. Yet, there is also a communal dimension. In a wide range of communities of practice, such as study groups of farmers, or communities with an activist agenda in the field of social activism, health care or the environment, for example, in popular epidemiology or in environmental monitoring, research provides "support for the idea that communities can possess and use science literacy to achieve their goals."[46] For example, in the Netherlands, since the 1990s, study groups of farmers have significantly stimulated innovation through the implementation of innovative techniques and knowledge based upon research. First, they had to develop trust towards each other, which did not go without saying, because suspicion and competition were common. Today, Dutch agriculture is not conceivable without the study groups:

> These study groups are a vital part of the Dutch agricultural knowledge and information system. They act as a forum for farmers to exchange experiences on how to deal with issues related to the complex environment with which the farmer is confronted. Farmers use them as a means of generating and acquiring knowledge. Issues addressed in study groups are not only related to the technical part of farming, but also to the macroeconomic and political aspects that impact farming.[47]

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45 Hutschemaekers and Tiemens, "Evidence-Based Policy," 45.

46 Snow and Dibner, *Science Literacy*, 83.

47 Ron H. M. Bergevoet and Cees M. J. van Woerkum, "Improving the Entrepreneurial Competencies of Dutch Dairy Farmers through the Use of Study Groups," *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension* 12, no. 1 (2006): 26. See also Natasja Oerlemans and

In the end the development of the study groups led to a situation in which these communities of practice were not only research-informed, but by using both practice-based knowledge and science-based knowledge, they also developed research skills themselves. Furthermore, as research on study groups demonstrates, pooling farmers in study groups also leads to an easier spread of tacit knowledge.[48] The emergence of these study groups was often made possible by advisors, but later these groups developed some independence in order to proceed, although Bergevoet and Van Woerkum point out that the role of a facilitator, trained in agricultural science and communicative processes, is crucial.

Indeed, in general in communities, facilitators or strong individual leaders often aid in the coordination of knowledge and, fascinatingly, research literature points out that they aid in the coordination of resources scattered throughout the community:[49] Catherine Snow and Kenne Dibner write: "Science literacy can be expressed in a collective manner when the knowledge and skills possessed by particular individuals are leveraged alongside the knowledge and skills of others in a given community."[50] Thus, focusing on the valorisation of practical theological knowledge, which is applied by practitioners in Christian practices, formal leaders in practices are not the only ones who need to be science literate. Volunteers, laypeople of all sorts, can develop and possess impressive experiential wisdom and they can also have scientific competences, in natural sciences, medicine, nursing, psychology, sociology, organisational science, management theory, and also in theology.

Applying Snow and Dibner's insights to a parish or congregation, both its leaders and everyday believers can contribute to its science literacy. The varying abilities of the members of a faith community, their talents, skills and knowledge, or charisms, to use the theological term, may work in concert to contribute to its goals and its overall wellbeing. There is also communal knowledge that can be tapped into outside of congregational contexts. Applied to schools and educational settings, teachers, directors and administrative staff can supply each other with scientific knowledge. Applied to hospitals and mental health care institutions, health care chaplains, medical doctors, nurses, psychologists, lab analysts, social workers and also administrative staff can express science literacy. To be more specific, chaplains must be prepared to collaborate with other professionals in order to provide for the "holistic

Gérald Assouline, "Enhancing Farmers' Networking Strategies for Sustainable Development," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 12, no. 5 (2004): 475.

48 Bergevoet and Van Woerkum, "Improving the Entrepreneurial Competence," 37.

49 Snow and Dibner, *Science Literacy*, 77.

50 Snow and Dibner, *Science Literacy*, 84.

treatment of individuals that leads to improving the overall quality of life."[51] All the different professions in a community of practice have various theoretical foundations. Agreement on core values and common goals, which need to be reconsidered from time to time, helps to make this collaboration successful.[52] In collaborative relationships, members of communities of practice must demonstrate respect for the knowledge and experience of each team member and, therefore, express curiosity towards their science literacy. In other words, health care chaplains cannot afford to work with a limited understanding of the expertise of other professionals. Cynthia Harr, Linda Openshaw and Brenda Moore indicate that "if professionals are not knowledgeable about the roles of other team members, reject explanations that are inconsistent with their own professions, or have negative attitudes toward the work performed by others, then conflict can emerge and interactions among professionals are negatively affected."[53] In their empirical inquiry into interdisciplinary cooperation, they found that a large majority of chaplains are positive about their collaboration with social workers and that it is essential for a successful collaboration that social workers understand the importance of spirituality in treatment. Patients, care-recipients, prisoners, and clients have a wide range of needs:

> Team members must have an understanding of the important role that each play in meeting the varied physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of the patient. This will assist chaplains and social workers to avoid conflict, territorialism, or unnecessary repetition of services.[54]

Reading this the other way around, if social workers do not acknowledge or downplay the importance of spirituality, or, with regard to the topic of science literacy, are unaware of the extensive clinical training and years of education that chaplains undergo and do not appreciate the depth of what chaplaincy involves, this will be detrimental for the relationship.[55]

Chaplains can also benefit from the knowledge of midwives and vice versa. Ewan Kelly writes how he became aware of the significance of midwives acting

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51 Cynthia Harr, Linda Openshaw and Brenda Moore, "Interdisciplinary Relationships between Chaplains and Social Workers in Health Care Settings," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 16, no. 1–2 (2010): 14.

52 Harr, Openshaw and Moore, "Interdisciplinary Relationships," 14.

53 Harr, Openshaw and Moore, "Interdisciplinary Relationships," 14.

54 Harr, Openshaw and Moore, "Interdisciplinary Relationships," 20.

55 Harr, Openshaw and Moore, "Interdisciplinary Relationships," 19.

as gatekeepers to chaplaincy services in a very difficult situation related to the death of a baby:

> Without midwives proactively talking about the personal qualities and relational abilities of chaplains as well as their professional competence many parents would have refused the offer of their services. This highlighted the importance of chaplains being an integral part of labour ward and neo-natal unit teams and having the appropriate character and formation as well acquired knowledge and skills to enable their credibility to be established and trust developed within multi-disciplinary teams to then enable appropriate spiritual care to be provided to grieving parents.[56]

Science literacy and awareness of the expertise of others (their expert knowledge, skills and professional attitude), can be evident throughout a community of practice. Nevertheless, Snow and Dibner state that under-resourced communities can be constrained, economically, but also socially, or with regard to education, to simply act according to what they know.[57]

In addition, a religious community can be sceptical or even suspicious toward scientific insights, be they of a theological or social-scientific nature. The attitude of a community towards science may be affected by its religious convictions, which may override scientific knowledge as an influence on practices. The idea is that religious people may be opposed to science "because they have a distinct way of knowing about the world compared to scientists."[58] However, sociologist John Evans has demonstrated that this attitude, which he labels 'epistemological conflict narrative', is primarily related to the origins of the world and the age of the universe[59] – I would also expect the future of the universe – and that there is a growing opposition with regard to the authority of science and its influence on society with regard to moral issues involving the body, such as abortion, birth control, human genetic engineering, organ transplants and euthanasia.[60] He does not find support for an epistemological conflict of worldviews between science and religion in a more general sense.

56 Ewan Kelly, "Introduction Invitation and Rationale: Why Is It Necessary to Research Chaplaincy Care Practices?" in *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, ed. Gary E. Myers and Stephen Roberts (John Templeton Foundation, 2014), iii.

57 Snow and Dibner, *Science Literacy*, 83.

58 John H. Evans, "The Growing Social and Moral Conflict between Conservative Protestantism and Science," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013): 369.

59 Evans, "The Growing Social and Moral Conflict," 369.

60 Evans, "The Growing Social and Moral Conflict," 370, 375.

In their project on 'Science and Religion in French-speaking Africa', Klaas Bom and Benno van den Toren found that these domains are not "neatly separated" for Christian students and academics, but rather that they perceive their studies and academic calling as part of a more embracing religious or more specifically Christian calling."[61] They were open to reflection on science, including secular science, because they "wanted to explore new possibilities of Christian discipleship."[62] There was a broad consensus that the "knowledge of faith" and the "knowledge of the field of study," complemented each other as was demonstrated in the communal reflection on specific cases; although it must be said that for a number of students "knowledge of faith" comes first.

Communities, including religious communities, can harbour information literate individuals. Such an individual is able to "inhabit a culture wherein he or she can use the internet and mobile technology to engage with content and connect to others in the educational, social, professional, political and economic spheres of life."[63] Information literate individuals can question the norms and practices of a community, because today there is a potential for open engagement that transcends local identities, through television and the internet, but also through travelling and expanding networks of friends and family. In Chapter 1, I already indicated how today, around the world, there is a surge for 'life-long learning', also in order to keep pace with the developments in the 'knowledge-economy'. With regard to the accessibility of books and articles, the move to e-journals and the open access movement also has an impact.[64] All this is likely to deeply influence information literacy in communities around the world that until recently were dependent on a limited number of academic resources.

4 Teachers Doing Research in Community

In the previous sections, I have focused on becoming research-informed. But what about practitioners in Christian or religious practices doing research?

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61 Bom and Van den Toren, "A Contribution to the Debate on Science and Faith," 651ff.; Van den Toren and Bom. "On the Value of Action and Participatory Research for Intercultural Theology," 93.

62 Van den Toren and Bom. "On the Value of Action and Participatory Research for Intercultural Theology," 93.

63 Sheila Webber and Bill Johnston, "Transforming Information Literacy for Higher Education in the 21st Century: A Lifelong Learning Approach," in *Developing People's Information Capabilities: Fostering Information Literacy in Educational, Workplace and Community Contexts*, vol. 8 of *Library and Information Science*, ed. Mark Hepworth, Geoff Walton and Amanda Spink (United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2013): 20.

64 Webber and Johnston, "Transforming Information Literacy," 18.

Looking at the array of research strategies in Chapter 7, can they do research without professional researchers? Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart and Rhonda Nixon, experts in the methodology of action research, write how participants in social and educational life can indeed do action research *by themselves*.[65] Members of communities of practice, here the profession of teachers, have "special access" to their practices, "by virtue of being 'insiders'." Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon write:

> Some in the research literature think that being an insider involves a penalty – not being able to see things in a disinterested or 'objective' way. By contrast, we believe that insiders have special advantages when it comes to *doing research in their own sites* (italics HdR) and to investigating practices that hold their work and lives together in those sites – the practices that are enmeshed with those sites.[66]

As we stated, following Katherine Turpin, practitioners know the contextual realities related to their practices,[67] but can they do research in a proper sense? David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick regard the researching professional practitioner, despite the prevalence of action research within organisations, a "neglected subject" in action research methodology.[68] What they call 'insider action research' is being done in business, healthcare, nursing, education, social and community work, and the theory and practice of it is currently expanding. Members of a community, movement or organisation, increasingly wish to study their own practices in order to change or improve them, making action research akin to experiential learning and reflective practice. They can ask one member or a small group to take up an explicit research role.[69] Coghlan and Brannick wrote their book for people who have a role in an organisation and are undertaking an explicit, albeit it temporary, researcher role to carry out a research project. This person should maintain his or her role in tandem with the normal functional role that they have within the organisation and of course tensions may and probably will arise from this dual role. Insider action

65 Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart and Rhonda Nixon, *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research* (Singapore: Springer, 2014).

66 Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, *The Action Research Planner*, 5.

67 See Chapter 1.

68 David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2005), xi. A 3rd edition was published in 2010 and a 4th edition in 2014. The latter provides an overview of the steps in writing for academic accreditation, dissemination and publication. The book content is supported via a website offering additional video resources for each chapter and a separate resource for academic staff.

69 Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation*, xii.

researchers act in the setting of the organisation and as active intervenors they make and help things happen.[70] Thus, in action research, research can be conducted by outsider researchers together with insider practitioners, the topic of the previous eight chapters,[71] but it can also be moved away from the academy to a self-reflective community of practice. Peter Reason sees ample opportunities for such co-operative inquiry as a discipline of professional communities of practice.[72] All that is needed is a group of people working together who ask each other: What is the question we wish to explore? What do we want to know and why? What are the methods that we can apply for that exploration?[73] Zooming in on the action research cycle in detail,[74] first practitioners select a problem or concern that they experience in their practices. What is their concern? Next, they try to find out more about the context of this issue. They also seek to find an answer to what is at stake for them, what the risks are if they do nothing. After this, they try to diagnose the problem together, discussing the different viewpoints. Then they decide what intervention is called for, after which they plan an action. Finally, they ask what happened, that is, what was the effect or impact of the action? What did it set in motion? Together they evaluate the outcomes and then they repeat the cycle. In the process of action research, the practitioners experience "what it is like to engage in diagnosing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action,"[75] With Argyris and others, Coghlin and Brannick emphasise that when practitioners reflect on these experiences, try to understand what is happening in the process and shape what is going on, they are engaging in their own learning cycle.[76] They acquire "understanding in use."[77] With David Cooperrider, I would argue that action research can also be framed as appreciative inquiry, focusing on the treasures of this particular and unique community of practice, but then again, we need a competent research-practitioner within the community to take the lead and, of course, the same requirement has to be met in a change laboratory, in which the agency of all the members together is labelled 'transformative'.

70 Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation*, 33.

71 Herr and Anderson's positions 3, 4, 5 and 6. See Chapter 7.

72 Peter Reason, "Co-Operative Inquiry as a Discipline of Professional Practice," *Journal of Interprofessional Care* 12, no. 4 (1998): 419.

73 Reason, "Co-operative Inquiry," 429.

74 See Chapter 7.

75 Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation*, 33.

76 Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation*, 41.

77 Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation*, 47.

Within the field of education, research has been conducted by teachers since the work of Kurt Lewin the late forties. Teachers may examine their own classroom setting. In 1952, Stephen Corey wrote that action research is "undertaken *by practitioners* to improve their own decisions, and in the heat of combat, so to speak."[78] He described the action research cycle and added that action research by teachers confines the results to a specific year group, classroom or school. There is, however, a generalisation, but a vertical rather than a horizontal one, meaning that the results of the research, for example, of a third-grade teacher, in the future "may serve as guides for decisions and actions involving third-grade boys and girls he will teach but has not seen."[79] In a review of Corey's book, *Action Research to Improve School Practices*, published in 1953, the reviewer, C. Leslie Cushman, summarised Corey's advice that it is even better to conduct action research *without* a scholar, since it is a stronger catalyst for change than conventional research by those outside of the classroom. This is "partly due to the fact that the questions studied are not the same as those that trouble teachers, but a more important reason is that the researchers have not been school practitioners and, conversely, school practitioners have not been researchers."[80] Here we see how the currently perceived gap between the education research community on the one hand and the teaching community has a long history.

In 1967, Robert Schaefer delivered the John Dewey Society lecture, later published as *The School as a Centre of Inquiry*, in which he proposed that teachers could use action research to turn the school into a collegial research centre.[81] He stated that 'scholar-teachers' are required: "The art of teaching needs to be subjected to vigorous continuing inquiry."[82] Their pre-service training should equip teachers with the methods and skills to conduct research. Teacher research has increasingly been used in language education

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78 Stephen Corey, "Action Research by Teachers and the Population Sampling Problem," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 43, no. 6 (1952): 331. See also: Stephen Corey, *Action Research to Improve School Practices* (New York, NY: University of Columbia's Teachers College, 1953). Emphasis mine.

79 Corey, "Action Research by Teachers," 334.

80 Michelle Marie Madden, "An Analysis of Teacher Action Research Focused on Differentiated Instruction for Student Subgroups in One Florida School District in 2009–2010" (PhD diss., University of Central Florida, 2011): 128. The quote is from C. Leslie Cushman, "(Untitled)," *The School Review* 61, no. 8 (1953): 500. For practical theological research *with* practitioners this advice implies that researchers need to be or need to have been practitioners in the practices of Christianity in a diverse range of contexts and settings.

81 Robert Joseph Schaefer, *The School as Centre of Inquiry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

82 Schaefer, *The School as Centre of Inquiry*, 73.

since the 1980s[83] and in second and foreign language education,[84] as well as in a in a wide range of other educational settings since the 1990s. Research *by* teachers provided an alternative for collaborations *with* the academy, by constructing their own experiential knowledge bases.[85] In their book, *Studying Your Own School*, Gary Anderson, Ann Sigrid Nihlen and Kathryn Herr describe how professionals always informally question their own practices, but an inquiry by a professional can also be conducted in an intentional and systematic way. The very first step in this research may turn out to be instructive. Being research-informed and knowing where to find new knowledge, they may find that the research does not suit them in their own context: "As educators begin to research their own practices and sites, they often read academic research with new eyes. They not only gather ideas for their own practices and research but also find that their own research pushes back some on what is 'known', or expert knowledge."[86]

Today, teachers can engage colleagues and even administrative staff to conduct research together. Examples of projects abound, with different methods, not necessarily action research (!), being applied by a competent practitioner-researcher. Judith Durrant and Gary Holden extensively describe many examples, one of them being the research conducted by Ruth, the head teacher of a large urban primary school in South-East England. Ruth involved the entire staff and pupils in collaborative enquiry.[87] Using a survey, Ruth wanted to explore the experiences of the pupils about how they learn. Teachers of different age groups helped to adapt the items to the level of education, refining the questionnaires together, a process by which the teachers became highly motivated. The research had performative effects:

> Teachers felt a high degree of ownership of this 'messy' data and began to identify emerging issues, some authenticating their own experience and

83 Pip Osmont, "Teacher Inquiry in the Classroom. Reading and Gender Set," *Language Arts* 64, no. 7 (1987): 758–761.

84 Jill Sinclair Bell, "Introduction: Teacher Research in Second and Foreign Language Education," *The Canadian Modern Language Review* 54, no. 1 (1997): 3–10.

85 Gary L. Anderson, Ann Sigrid Nihlen, Kathryn Herr, *Studying Your Own School: An Educator's Guide to Practitioner Action Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2007). The book was originally published in 1994.

86 Anderson, Nihlen and Herr, *Studying Your Own School*, 45ff.

87 Judy Durrant and Gary Holden, *Teachers Leading Change: Doing Research for School Improvement* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005). See also Frank Crowther, Stephen Kaagan, Margaret Ferguson, and Leonne Hann, *Developing Teacher Leaders: How Teacher Leadership Enhances School Success* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2002).

> some presenting new questions and challenges, for example, the serious issue of decreasing confidence in learners between the ages of 4 and 11. Year teams discussed the issues raised for their respective groups, while Ruth constructed an overview of school-wide issues.[88]

In an unforeseen way, teachers began experimenting with new practices. The value and power of the process took the teachers by surprise. In the end, through discussions with children, based upon the questionnaire, the curriculum underwent significant changes.[89]

In other examples of teacher research, we see how teacher researchers use qualitative methods, such as audiotaped data from student-teacher conferences, ethnography, interviews, group interviews, diary studies, autobiographical studies, etc.[90] Indeed, encouraged by government policies, action research has become frequently used in classrooms around the world.[91] Often the type of action research will be first-person action research, but in different projects, while acknowledging the time constraints, collaboration is also considered necessary, since it leads to a greater level of dedication, to more detailed and thorough planning, and to "more insightful reflection as teachers engage in dialogue with one another."[92] Caroll Giles, Jennifer Wilson and Martille Elias studied teachers at an elementary school in Missouri, where collaboration became one of the elements that helped action research become a favoured research practice at this school for seven years: "Professional dialogue emerged as the glue of action research, giving life to inquiry, enhancing reflection, and deepening the professional community."[93]

In the field of *religious education*, not only have university-school collaborations become increasingly common, but also more and more teachers are conducting research, turning their classroom into a centre of inquiry. At the University of Warwick, researchers and teachers formed an action research com-

88 Durrant and Holden, "Teachers Leading Change," 64.

89 Durrant and Holden, "Teachers Leading Change," 64.

90 Bell, "Introduction: Teacher Research," 4.

91 For example, in a single Florida school district, 69 action research reports (!) were completed by the teachers in just one year. Madden, *An Analysis of Teacher Action Research*, ii. It was a result of the policy of the Florida Department of Education. The teachers attended workshops on differentiating instruction and were asked to do an extensive literature review. Madden, *An Analysis of Teacher Action Research*, 21. Extensive descriptions of examples can also be found in Anderson, Nihlen and Herr, *Studying Your Own School*, 45–61.

92 Madden, *An Analysis of Teacher Action Research*, 9.

93 Caroll Giles, Jennifer Wilson and Martille Elias, "Sustaining Teachers' Growth and Renewal through Action Research, Induction Programs, and Collaboration," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2010): 99.

munity and in their published set of studies[94] we find researcher-teacher action research projects, but also descriptions of exciting case studies by teachers. For example, Kevin O'Grady applied a relational, conversational approach in a secondary school classroom (12–13-year-old) to address the topic of interfaith relations.[95] Some of the principles of religious education pedagogy, as developed by Robert Jackson, could be empirically 'tested', such as dialogue with difference, ethical and existential interest and personal significance. O'Grady used questionnaires, participant observation and interviews, and in the teaching material he applied creative tools such as drama, storyboards, cartoons and diaries.[96] When drama was used, for example, to elicit and provoke a conversation with Islam, O'Grady's participant observation recorded high motivation.[97] Where did O'Grady learn to conduct research like this? He had become acquainted with action research methodology when he became head of religious education in a comprehensive school in Sheffield and started a master's in religious education at Warwick at the same time.

5 Chaplains Doing Research in Community

In the aforementioned research by teachers we see how researching professional practitioners are becoming research-informed, since they need to do literature reviews, and how after receiving instruction they conduct their research in community, be it with pupils and students or with colleagues, either from the same school or from other schools. In spiritual care and chaplaincy, we observe the same development. In 2002, in a seminal article, George Fitchett called upon chaplains to become researchers themselves and, if that was a bridge too far, at least to learn how to understand research papers, read several articles per year and reflect on the implications of the research for chap-

94 Julia Ipgrave, Robert Jackson and Kevin O'Grady, eds., *Religious Education Research through a Community of Practice: Action Research and the Interpretive Approach* (New York: Waxman, 2009).

95 Kevin O'Grady, "Action Research and Religious Education," in *Religious Education Research through a Community of Practice: Action Research and the Interpretive Approach*, 32–41.

96 Kevin O'Grady, "'There is a bit of peace in England': Dialogue and Conflict between Teenage Religious Education Pupils in Sheffield," in *Religious Education Research through a Community of Practice: Action Research and the Interpretive Approach*, 45–55.

97 O'Grady, "'There is a bit of peace in England'," 46. Also see the 'participative exercises', ('performative action') as developed and described by Anthony Reddie. See Chapter 7.

laincy.[98] Chaplaincy research, undertaken on behalf of, with, or indeed even *by chaplains*, can underpin and re-energise future practice as well as ongoing theological reflection.[99] Fitchett and others remind chaplains that they are always learning, being aware that research is only one way of gathering knowledge and evaluating one's practices. In the words of George Handzo, "Being a research-informed profession does not mean that intuition, training, and clinical judgment cease to influence our clinical practices. Research is only one more way of gathering data about what we do and how effective our interventions are."[100] Nevertheless, there is more to be said, because in hospitals, care institutions, prisons, schools, the university and the armed forces, often chaplains are members of a community of practice. In these communities of practice, being research-informed and informing each other is becoming a norm.[101] According to Fitchett and others, over the last decade, reading research is becoming common among chaplains, not only as a solitary activity but also in a research journal club, similar to colleagues in other fields. Today, Fitchett holds that it is impossible to "overstate the importance of reading research for chaplains at any level of competence."[102] From his own experience he adds that "reading has given me an in-depth familiarity with a wide body of chaplaincy-related research."[103] Chaplains themselves seek an evidence-based approach to their profession, especially in relation to the effects of their interventions.[104] A chaplain researcher, Betty Ferell, writes:

98 George Fitchett, "Health Care Chaplaincy as a Research-Informed Profession: How We Get There," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 12, no. 1–2 (2002): 69. See https://doi.org/10.1300/J080v12n01_07.

99 Ewan Kelly, "Introduction Invitation and Rationale: Why Is It Necessary to Research Chaplaincy Care Practices?" in *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, ed. Gary Myers and Stephen Roberts (John Templeton Foundation, 2014), viii.

100 George Handzo, "Strategies for Introducing the Role of the Chaplain Researcher to Administrators and Team Member Making the Case for Research," in *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, ed. Gary Myers and Stephen Roberts (John Templeton Foundation, 2014): 163.

101 Kevin J. Flannelly, Katherine R. B. Jankowski, Helen P. Tannenbaum, "Keys to Knowledge: Searching and Reviewing the Literature Relevant to Chaplaincy," *Chaplaincy Today* 27, no. 1 (2011): 10–15. Probably the most useful online database for health care chaplains is PubMed (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/).

102 George Fitchett, "Pursuing Additional Research Education," in *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, ed. Gary Myers and Stephen Roberts (John Templeton Foundation, 2014): 120.

103 Fitchett, "Pursuing Additional Research Education," 120.

104 An online survey completed by 2,092 chaplains from 23 countries demonstrated that 80% thought that research was important to the profession and 70% thought that chaplains

> My draw to a research career was based on my initial 3 years in clinical practice during which I became acutely aware of the need to improve the quality of care I observed in the clinical setting. I became increasing aware that in order to make change, I needed data. To convince administration of the services that patients needed, I needed data. And to 'prove' that the care I had advocated for was indeed successful, I needed data.[105]

Fitchett writes that "A study of 773 USA healthcare chaplains working in the military, in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and in civilian settings found that chaplains from all three contexts strongly endorsed an evidence-based approach to chaplaincy."[106] Reading and discussing a research article in a group adds further value to this approach. Fitchett refers to a personal report by Stephen King in this regard. King observes that when a group of chaplains discusses the strengths and weaknesses of a research project, its implications for chaplaincy and areas for further research, it can "generate energized conversation."[107] Amongst other articles, the chaplains in his reading journal club were interested in overviews of religion and health research. King writes that "the articles have informed us in our efforts to better screen patients for spirituality/religion issues, provided additional research-informed language for framing issues, and influenced our planning for multi-disciplinary staff education efforts."[108] There are performative effects too. The group's meetings, despite only taking place three times a year, increased team building through the time and discussions together.

Interestingly, the urge to include a research dimension in chaplaincy has now also entered the reflection on Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).[109] According to Judith Ragsdale, there is a need to "transform chaplaincy" by "transforming CPE."[110] Chaplains need to have a better understanding of how re-

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should be "research literate"; 40% of the chaplains regularly read research articles and 60% occasionally; 37% of the chaplains had in some way been involved in research, 17% were currently involved, and 11% were expecting to be involved. See Austyn Snowden et al., "International Study of Chaplains' Attitudes about Research," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 23, no. 1 (2017): 34–43.

105 Betty Ferrell, "Chaplain Research: What is it? How is it done?" in *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, 28.

106 George Fitchett, "Recent Progress in Chaplaincy-Related Research," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 71, no. 3 (2017): 169.

107 Stephen D. King, "Becoming Research-Informed Chaplains' Seminar," *PlainViews* 5, no. 19 (November, 2008): 1.

108 King, "Becoming Research-Informed," 1.

109 See my description of the origins of CPE, Chapter 2.

110 Judith R. Ragsdale, "Transforming Chaplaincy Requires Transforming Clinical Pastoral Education," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 72, no. 1 (2018): 58–62.

ligious and spiritual worldviews, but also humanistic worldviews, 'work' in people's lives and how they are embedded in different traditions:

> The heavy focus on self-understanding, while important, must expand to include a focus on demonstrated understanding of how religious/spiritual beliefs work in different faith traditions; how people use religion/spirituality in their experience of being hospitalized; and how faith strengthens/challenges patients and families in times of illness and death.[111]

Chaplains need to be the religious literates, the experts on how religious beliefs, norms and values, work and how they may impact care. They need to be able to interpret what people are saying, if only to be able to translate their worldviews to colleagues in the intradisciplinary team who may not have religious literacy. Ragsdale states that precisely this expertise will make chaplaincy invaluable, both now and in the future.[112] She proposes that CPE should become a research study group with a double aim, or two level-outcomes, in which chaplains learn to put their own judgements between brackets. They need to acquire both "an ability to see that people who practice faith traditions use their beliefs in very different ways" and "an ability to provide education for other members of the interdisciplinary team about different religious beliefs impacting the patient experience in health care."[113] This focus on assessing and supporting the use of religion/spirituality as an aspect of treatment should become the research-informed goal of CPE.[114] Ragsdale also proposes to tap on the potential for learning together that has been a dimension of CPE from the beginning: "Part of the wisdom of CPE is the ability to engage in community learning."[115] Ragsdale's proposals are in line with those of Fitchett and others who insist on improving research literacy in order to ultimately improve patient outcomes. Today, there is a website that contains a plethora of resources on the nature of chaplaincy and provides information for chaplains on conducting research.[116]

In 2014, Gary Meyers and Rabbi Stephen Roberts edited a ground-breaking handbook called *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*,

111 Ragsdale, "Transforming Chaplaincy," 58ff.
112 Ragsdale, "Transforming Chaplaincy," 59.
113 Ragsdale, "Transforming Chaplaincy," 59.
114 Ragsdale, "Transforming Chaplaincy," 60.
115 Ragsdale, "Transforming Chaplaincy," 59.
116 See www.transformchaplaincy.org.

with many examples written from a first-person perspective.[117] The authors clearly advocate that doing research will be part of the job description of chaplains, for one thing, in order to improve the quality of their work or prevent routinisation, as we call it in this book.[118] In a chapter that is clearly intended to motivate chaplains to conduct research, the authors also emphasise the necessity of training: "One of the biggest obstacles to research in chaplaincy is our lack of education: we just never acquired the skills to know where to begin."[119] Chaplains need help to design a study. They will often require a one-to-one mentorship.[120] Some chaplains have completed a doctorate. Also, they need support from the institution in which they are working. Is conducting research by chaplains obvious? No, there are serious hesitations and reservations ("time consuming,"[121] "anxiety-provoking," "the stress of an evaluation in a multidisciplinary group meeting"[122]) and there are objections that chaplains can have with regard to conducting research related to their principles: "For many, an important aspect of their work is their relationship with the divine or the sacred. There is some justifiable scepticism as to whether empirical studies will adequately capture this aspect of their work in an accurate, meaningful, or even minimally comprehensible way."[123]

Still, chaplains are increasingly willing to do research. In some projects, chaplains have been both collaborators with the researchers as well as study subjects in the research. In the first role chaplains can be chaplain-observers and discuss the research questions together or offer suggestions to improve the study design.[124] There can also be a first-person perspective, where chaplains

117 Gary E. Myers and Stephen Roberts, eds., *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process* (John Templeton Foundation, 2014), accessed July 18, 2018. See https://www.healthcarechaplaincy.org/docs/publications/templeton_research/hcc_research_handbook_final.pdf. See also Chapter 1.

118 See Chapter 5.

119 Dane Summers, and John Lantos, "Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles to Chaplaincy Research," in *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, 20.

120 Summers and Lantos, "Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles to Chaplaincy Research," 27.

121 In a response to a research proposal involving chaplains, a chaplain states: "We have a lot going on in our department right now and I think it just feels like another layer of, you know, how can we do all this and do all the other stuff." Summers and Lantos, "Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles to Chaplaincy Research," 22.

122 Summers and Lantos, "Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles to Chaplaincy Research," 23.

123 Summers and Lantos, "Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles to Chaplaincy Research," 21.

124 Summers and Lantos, "Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles to Chaplaincy Research," 22.

gather data with the intent of demonstrating the efficacy or values of their work with a particular patient group, or in order to compare two different approaches, for example, to making a spiritual assessment or conducting a life review.[125]

Chaplains conducting research often state that it gives them new energy, but also, not surprisingly perhaps, it makes them feel like a theologian again: “My practice deeply informed my research (it evolved out of it) and in turn my research underpinned and re-energised future practice as well as ongoing theological reflection. This was particularly exciting and life enhancing – I was able to perform such research within the context not only of healthcare but grounded in pastoral theology. In other words, being a chaplaincy practice-based researcher not only enlivened my vocational caring but the beliefs and values that informed such.”[126] In a research project with street chaplains, I found that the chaplains, although often hesitant, nevertheless speak about God in a candid, frank way. In their work, at times they act on behalf of God. Furthermore, they notice and respond to the implicit and explicit references to God that are being made by their conversation partners. Faith language is present in abundance. The chaplains long to express their hope; they want to listen to the longings and the free and audacious theological reflections of the homeless. They seek to facilitate real dialogue, in which there is space for voice and dissent. They listen but they also are sure to express a promise. They make full use of their theological knowledge and skills.[127]

6 Ministers Doing Research in Community

In the nineteenth century, we saw how two developments contributed to the professionalisation of the ministry. First, in the parish, ministers created time and space for studying – they even had a study room in the parsonage, often with a growing theological library. Second, they met with colleagues in the ‘circles’ and in provincial theological associations. In these communities of practice *avant la lettre*, continuing education took the shape of learning

125 Summers and Lantos, “Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles to Chaplaincy Research,” 24.

126 Ewan Kelly, “Introduction: Invitation and Rationale,” in *An Invitation to Chaplaincy Research: Entering the Process*, iv.

127 Henk de Roest, “God at Street Level: Digging Up the Theological Identity of Pastoral Care among the Homeless and Drug Addicts,” in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Christian B. Scharen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012): 168f.

together and doing some research together, mainly in the area of sermon preparation. After the description of teachers and chaplains becoming research-informed, researcher-practitioners, I hope it is but a small step to invite ministers to a generative research community of practice. Minister-researchers can serve a parish or congregation and at the same time be involved in carrying out practical theological research.[128] This might be a minister carrying out a study of a way of comforting bereaved people, or a research project on supporting children with HIV-Aids, or an enquiry with regard to 'green churches' and their commitment towards environmental issues, or a project on delivering some aspects of worship services for a congregation that wants to be open to seekers, or an enquiry into a proposed cooperation with local non-ecclesial organisations to improve social cohesion, or an enquiry on the experiences of listeners to his or her sermons. Looking at Chapter 3 on continuing education, Chapter 4 on practices, and Chapter 5 on the information needs of practitioners, it is not hard to imagine possible topics of enquiry. As we have seen in the chapter on citizen science, carrying out an enquiry can also be done with the assistance of congregants, even by a creative application of visual methods. Minister-researchers may have advantages compared to outside researchers. According to Colin Robson, "anyone carrying out a sequence of studies in a particular setting can build up a specialized expertise about that type of setting which may well be unrivalled."[129] Of course, ministers are busy, which decreases the amount of time available for research and many everyday believers are busy too. But then, a substantial practitioner workload should be connected with an economical approach to enquiry.[130] In the case of ministers, time allowance to do research as a part of the job description can be the content of negotiations with the church council. Members of the congregation can offer support to help with surveys, code questionnaires, take pictures, interview people, transcribe tapes, etc. Robson also suggests asking for support from other practitioner-researchers, ex-practitioners, advisors or consultants and he advocates working in a team.

What are the conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to enable ministers to conduct research? We already mentioned the job description. Yet, a "kind of passion" is needed too. Christian Scharen, quoting Pierre Bourdieu, writes how his social research in Algeria at the end of the 1950s, was rooted in a "kind of passion for everything about this country, its peoples and its landscapes, and

128 Colin Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, 2nd ed. (Blackwell Publishing, 2002): 534.

129 Robson, *Real World Research*, 535.

130 Robson, *Real World Research*, 536.

also in the dull but constant sensation of guilt and revolt in the face of so much suffering and injustice."[131] Here the motivation to conduct research consisted of moral indignation, but for ministers in general I wish to highlight that they need 'a kind of passion'. The six rationales ('Missio Dei', 'Emerging Community', etc.) that I provided in Chapter 6 can, I hope, lead to this 'kind of passion' for collaborative research. Regarding training, Christian Scharen, quoting Bourdieu, writes that social science fieldwork is a craft.[132] It is messy work. The one who teaches research resembles "a coach mimicking a move or correcting practices as they are executed."[133] According to Bourdieu one needs a "sociological 'feel' or 'eye', which can only be developed by apprenticeship in fieldwork.[134] As I see it, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's concept of "legitimate peripheral participation," is useful here, implying that one may gradually become involved in a peer-to-peer research network.[135] Master-students can become part of the workshops... Minister-researchers need to learn from interviewing 'on the spot', which also helps the researcher to understand the setting and practices in which an interviewee is situated. As with farmer study groups, facilitators can take the initiative to conduct research together.[136] The initiative can also come from a research centre created by practical theologians, working at a seminary, university or theological institute. A recent example comes from Cluj/Koloszvar in Transsylvania, Rumania, where at the Theological Institute, Jenö Kiss stimulates the formation of communities of ministers doing research. May 2019, together with some colleagues, Kiss launched the Laszlo Ravasz Research Centre for training ministers, but also teachers of religion, to conduct research in their parishes and schools. The aims are also to share research outcomes, promote research literacy and publish articles together. In theological education, the research of the ministers can become part of the content of the courses.

Of course, within such communities of practice, not all the ministers need to be minister-researchers. We already saw how in the 1960s several authors made a plea for a differentiated ministry, in which ministers can specialise and develop their own specific expertise.[137] Today, this plea is still convincing. By an analysis of empirical research, Jantine Nierop has also demonstrated that

131 Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology. Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015): 70.
132 Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology*, 72.
133 Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology*, 73.
134 Scharen, "Interviewing Interpreted as a Spiritual Exercise and Social Protest," 222.
135 Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, 7ff.
136 Martin, "Transforming a Local Church Congregation," 276.
137 See Chapter 8.

the work-experience of ministers who work in a community of practice, in particular, when several ministers serve one congregation, differs in many respects from the work of a solo pastor. For example, they tick the box 'I am very satisfied' with the support of colleagues significantly more often than ministers working alone. They experience learning from colleagues more, and helping each other more, than single pastors do from their colleagues.[138] In regard to their congregations, they experience more distance than ministers working alone in a congregation, a feature that helps communities of ministers to also conduct research.

According to Scharen, the practitioner needs to be fully aware of his or her own prejudices, preferences and norms, and, I add, particularly when ministers are doing research on Christian practices. Both the interviewees and the practitioner-researchers are engaged in these practices, not only with their minds, but also with their souls. At this point, Rick Osmer's fourfold structure and phasing of practical theological research is helpful; he includes observation/description, interpretation, normative evaluation and developing a strategy for action. Osmer wants to equip congregational leaders to engage in practical theological research. He instructs the wise practitioner to restrain from normative judgements that may come too soon. As *interpretive guides*, minister-researchers are called to a descriptive task that Osmer describes in terms of 'a spirituality of presence': "It is a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations."[139] Remarkably, I think, Osmer blends spirituality with a research attitude here. It is about practicing attentiveness in a methodical way. In addition, after Osmer's four phases, minister-researchers could also do research on the implementation of better and new practices, for example, by using action research. In a comparable way, Mary Clark Moschella has encouraged ministers to do what she calls, pastoral ethnography. It is the "intentional work of a pastor, rabbi, or other religious leader, who tries to 'read' or listen to the group, congregation or agency that he or she serves."[140] Moschella sees how the religious leader occupies a "kind of liminal space,"[141] which puts him or her at a certain distance while simultaneously being part of the group, congregation or agency – a perfect

138 Jantine Nierop, *Eine Gemeinde, mehrere PfarrerInnen. Reflexionen auf das mehrstellige Pfarramt au seiner historischen, empirischen und akteurtheoretischen Perspektive* (Habilitationsschrift; Universität Heidelberg, 2014); 107, 109, 156. The text was published by Kohlhammer in 2016.

139 Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 34.

140 Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH; Pilgrim Press, 2008). See also Moschella, "Ethnography," 229.

141 Moschella, "Ethnography," 229.

space for a participant-observer. He or she may start with theological reflection upon a practice, then study that practice, then analyse the findings "in the light of the faith tradition" and then share the findings and interpretations back with the congregation, group or agency.[142]

Training in one's formal education, as we saw in the example of O'Grady, is the best way to ensure that empirical research methods will be used also in one's professional life as minister. Bruce Martin reports that graduate education is indeed important and explains how he was introduced to action research during doctoral work in social science at the university.[143] When he became a pastor in a local Baptist church in Edmonton, he wanted to integrate action research into his work in collaboration with the gifted everyday believers in his community. Martin captured the essence of action research in a simple phrase:

> Let's study what's happening at our church, decide if we can make it a better place by changing what and how we do things and how we relate to one another and to the community. Let's study the effects. Then let's begin again.[144]

Today, there is a growing community of minister-researchers, being educated already in their bachelor's study in empirical work, which can stimulate a later shared interest in doctoral work. Increasingly ministers complete a PhD or doctoral project in practical theology, often in one of its sub-disciplines. An example is a research project of Wilbert van Iperen, about the presence, profiling and reception of the evangelical movement inside the PCN and the tensions that are caused by the goals of this movement in a denomination characterised by pluralism.[145]

There are everyday believers with research competences too. Contributors to a research community of everyday believers may have a scientific background, having received a degree in the social sciences, linguistics and languages – and therefore be able to conduct discourse analysis – communication science, business administration, visual arts, etc. In compliance with the

142 Moschella, "Ethnography," 229.

143 Martin, "Transforming a Local Church Congregation," 267.

144 Martin, "Transforming a Local Church Congregation," 262. Martin avoided the term 'action research', suspecting that the word 'research' would be threatening.

145 Wilbert van Iperen, "Balanceren in de kerk. Onderzoek naar presentie, profilering en receptie van het Evangelisch Werkverband binnen de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, 1995–2010." (PhD. diss., Protestant Theological University, Utrecht: Boekencentrum Academic, 2014).

research-ethical guidelines of their discipline, they can in their free time conduct empirical research in their own congregation or in congregations that ask them to do this. They may also have received a degree in theology or religious studies, working in another profession than ministry, chaplaincy or education. As everyday believers, they can be deeply committed to a faith community and, as such, they can conduct research on a shared concern or, for that matter, something that they consider unique. An example is a research project by Karen Zwijze-Koning, everyday believer and expert on the methodology of communication audits.[146] In 2017, she decided to use one of the instruments, the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire, in her own congregation. She initiated a research project, together with the minister, the church council and a group of research-volunteers, within a large Dutch Reformed congregation that aimed to uncover the likes and dislikes of all attached members between 30 and 50 years old and which aimed to develop a comprehensive research instrument that would be able to assess current ecclesial practices.[147] In the section on citizen science, we described how citizens can be asked to contribute to data gathering, after receiving instruction on the methods. Remarkably, on the internet today one may find toolkits for studying congregations, with collections of books and articles, but also empirical methods, ranging from surveys to visual methods.[148] With regard to the latter, Roman Williams informs everyday believers about a great way to explore a congregation's context: walking with cameras. He writes,

> This exercise can be conducted as an individual or with a group. It could employ camera-equipped cell phones or disposable film cameras, and everything in between. And the photos may be used in a variety of ways, including small group conversations, with leadership and ministry

146 Karen Zwijze-Koning, "Auditing Organisational Communication: Evaluating the Methodological Strengths and Weaknesses of the Critical Incident technique, Network Analysis, and the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire" (PhD diss., University of Twente, 2016).

147 Karen Zwijze-Koning and Henk de Roest, *Evaluating Congregational Life: Audit Research in the Church* (forthcoming).

148 See www.studyingcongregations.org, a website connected to Boston University. Other resources for becoming research-informed and conducting research can be found at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, www.hirr.hartsem.edu. In Australia, the Institute run by Ruth Powell, National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is very helpful for small-scale research in one's own congregation. See www.ncls.org.au. NCLS is now also being applied in other geographical contexts, such as South Africa and the Netherlands.

> teams, with youth or adults, as part of a self-study or study of one's community.[149]

We started this chapter with Rein Brouwer's call on congregations to conduct an empirical inquiry on their own neighbourhood, the local ecology where they are situated. This call resonates with Pat Keifert's and Pat Ellison's work with congregations throughout the United States. Keifert describes research by everyday believers as a "missional journey."[150] This journey may include, in my words, elements of spiritual discernment, action research, appreciative inquiry, and collaborative ethnography.

7 Conclusion

When I first reflected on the topic of the present book, I did not consider the option of practitioners and everyday believers doing research themselves and I still think it needs further reflection. Nevertheless, as study groups of farmers and communities of teachers demonstrate, it is a promising pathway for the creation of communities of ministers, chaplains pastoral workers, parish evangelists and teachers doing research together. Furthermore, there are possibilities of involving large numbers of Christians in research at the service of Christian practices in a wide range of settings and contexts. In this chapter, we have seen that being research-informed and being able to conduct research are different things, both demanding competences. Nevertheless, training during formal education and continuing education, which hopefully in the future will also be aimed at how to instruct volunteers, can enable congregations, parishes and newly emerging communities to become centres of practical theological inquiry. Following Swinton and Mowat, practical theology "pushes us towards the acknowledgement of the importance of discovery.… Research aids us in the process of renewing our minds and seeing the world differently… and this revised vision may create changes in the way that Christians and Christian communities perform the faith."[151] This research will in the end, need to be for the benefit of the world…

149 See Roman Williams, "Walking with Cameras," Studying Congregations, last modified April 20, 2016, accessed July 9, 2018, http://studyingcongregations.org/blog/walking-with-cameras.

150 Patrick Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (Eagle, Idaho: Allelon Publishing, 2006).

151 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 260ff.

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