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EMBODIMENT, IDENTITY FORMATION AND MISSIONAL LEADERSHIP: ROOTS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The relationship between theory and practice refracts differently in my journey in practical theology, during which I moved from deductive to inductive approaches, and from New Testament studies to practical ecclesiology and religious leadership. This article offers a conceptual analysis of the theory/practice relationship through the lens of three major concepts that have marked my academic journey. Embodiment focuses on our bodies as the empirical and spiritual locus of human experience and knowledge. Practices and theories emerge in our bodily engagements with the world and one another. Identity formation is the focus of learning processes that shape selves to create personal, social and religious identities that enable us to engage our social and religious worlds. Missional leadership is intent on discerning divine involvement in embodied faith practices in neighbourhoods, communities and contexts. The argument culminates in an agenda for theological education for the next decade.

1. INTRODUCTION

Very recently, I completed my tenth year of teaching a first-year course in Practical Theology to our Bachelor students. I still remember my struggle to master Heitink's encyclopaedic textbook on practical theology (Heitink 1993). How different was my reading of Richard Osmer's (2008) now widely used textbook, *Practical theology: An introduction*. It enabled me to reflect on my pastoral ministry where I had wrestled intensely with my normative, evangelical theology and how to make it work in pastoral practice. Osmer pointed a way ahead for doing this. How I wished I had read that book twenty years earlier. Reading Osmer converted me to practical theology.

As with all conversions, the initial transformation was followed by many changes in due course. For instance, when I first taught our orientation course in practical theology, it contained a substantial reading list and only one essay assignment, in which the student was to outline his/her personal position within the field of practical theology. I had inherited this assignment from my predecessor, who used in-class case studies as a catalyst for student papers. I improved on this, by letting the students do one interview of their own to enrich the position paper with a case study. Still, the assignment was mostly oriented towards literature and theory, with a particular case by way of interview to sharpen theoretical reflection. In addition, most of the class sessions worked deductively from theory to the principles to be learned. I used case studies where I could, but most of these were mainly illustrations of the theory to be taught.

After ten years of teaching this orientation course and helping students wrestle with making meaningful connections between interviews and case studies, on the one hand, and theoretical and theological concepts, on the other, I reordered the course to a more inductive approach, based on the growing conviction that theology arises from faith praxis. I now start with three case studies of faith practices and develop practical theological reflection as we go. The exploration of the subdisciplines in practical theology (homiletics, pastoral care, leadership, and so on) will not wait until the end of the course to illustrate the practical fields with which practical theology engages, but it will be taken up from the beginning of the course, as these case studies become the basic object, the specific practice, that exemplify the focus of practical theology. Theoretical reflections follow from that. My reason for this change is partly my growing uneasiness with student performance in the course as I taught it, and partly my growth towards empirical research as a key method for finding and generating theological insight (Bennett *et al.* 2018; Graham 2002; Scharen 2015; Ward 2017).

The story of my conversion to practical theology illustrates how the relationship between theory and practice refracts differently throughout my journey in the field of practical theology. I was trained in, and ministered from the paradigm that theological truth (theological theory) directs practice. I then taught practical theology where I lectured on the theory that practice is much more important than only an illustration of theory. I now move towards the perspective that faith praxis (prayer, worship, discipleship) is the root of practical theological theory.¹ Gradually, I moved from deductive to inductive approaches in my research methodology, my theological orientation, and my didactic approach to practical theology.

This article offers a conceptual analysis of the theory/practice relationship through the lens of three major concepts that have marked my academic journey.

Several elements in my academic development provide the narrative that accounts for my conversion, in both teaching and research, as well as in pastoral practice and personal spirituality. I moved from a study of emerging church and missional theology to the study of church leadership and social identity (Barentsen 2011), to a further study of missional and entrepreneurial church leadership (Barentsen 2015; 2016; 2019a; 2019b). This move was precipitated by my discoveries of social identity theory and the centrality of embodiment for being human. I will take up these topics in the remainder of this article to provide a philosophical and practical theological account of how my understanding of the relationship between theory and practice developed, and what it might entail for the continuing practice of theological education in which I am involved. Not only the arguments in themselves are interesting and relevant, but also how I was shaped in this trajectory and how this, in turn, shaped my arguments. This is perhaps fitting in a discipline where reflective research and auto-ethnographic approaches are now an accepted part of published academic work.

2. EMBODIMENT

With “embodiment”, I refer to the idea that human beings do not merely *have* bodies, for instance as a place of residence for the soul (seemingly suggested by Paul’s metaphor of “the tent” in 2 Cor. 5.1-4), or as vehicles

1 Some recent approaches to practical theology point out these connections (see Cartledge 2003; Root 2014; Ward 2017). These proposals do not revert to a “theory-to-practice” model of practical theology, but highlight that exegesis and dogmatics not only address, but also arise from faith practices.

for communication. This conception would identify our humanity with something else than our bodies, presumably our reason or spirit, with our bodies merely a “*pied-à-terre*” for one’s self (Smith 2009:46, 57). Rather, being human is essentially to be embodied in our presence in, and engagement with the world (Bass *et al.* 2016; Brown & Strawn 2012). It is only through our body and its senses that we know of a world “out there”; it is through our bodies that we handle and manipulate material objects; it is through our bodies, most of all our faces, that we engage in communication and communion (or sometimes violence) with other human beings. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that our entire system of perception and knowledge is developed through this embodied engagement; even our most abstract language such as philosophy is based on the metaphorical development of our physical, embodied participation in the world. This is not to deny that human beings are *more* than bodies, but to insist that the human body is the principal means of engagement with the world and with others; these engagements are the basis of human communication and human epistemological systems.

This implies that such an idea as “theory” does not exist as some kind of universal truth “out there”, but that it arises in personal and communal interaction with one’s environment, as continual social interaction and negotiation develop perspectives and theories of what is the case. Academic work is a way of broadening both the reservoir of worldly engagements and the pool of communal interactions, in order to develop theories with a broader and more plausible basis than only local and sometimes idiosyncratic theories that develop spontaneously in various communities. Academic work is *not* a way of directly accessing the truth of things, nor a better guarantee that we perceive and theorise things as they *really* are; rather, it is simply a more reflective, more accountable, and more plausible way – with its own culture and practices – to engage with others as we engage the world.² However, since academic work is principally a human effort, with all its potential but also its limitations, it can never achieve what Rorty called the “God’s eye perspective”, where human beings arise above *all* of humanity to observe reality for what it is. Not even our relationship with God brings us to such a place of omniscience. We can only and ever observe reality through our bodily engagement with the world, with one another and, indeed, with God himself (Rorty 2009, in Smith 2014).

2 There is, of course, a substantial debate on the nature and purposes of academic scholarship. This article touches on some of the major themes in this debate. See Alvesson *et al.* 2017; Huse 2020; Moosa 2018.

I call this perspective “embodied realism”, following Lakoff and Johnson (1999:74). Although their proposal has received substantial criticism (for example, Rakova 2002), Kövecses (2005; 2008) has responded to these criticisms and shown their model of embodiment with its universal tendencies to be compatible with contextual and cultural variation. He proposes that embodied responses, for instance with an emotion such as anger, have universal characteristics based on the fact of embodiment, while they are culturally appropriated in differential ways. Hence, cultural metaphors of anger overlap, but are not necessarily universal in its metaphorical mappings.

Embodied realism is a particular variety of critical realism (Schilbrack 2014). Its critical appraisal of realism rests on the realisation that we can only know reality through our embodied engagement with it. Our theories about this reality are always dependent upon our embodied engagement with the world and our communication with one another. This is not to deny that reality exists independently of our observations and engagements with it, but to insist that even our best academic efforts can only be proximate descriptions of reality as it really is, since we are not able to rise completely above all human limitations of perception and knowledge.³

Hence, embodied realism implies forms of dialogue and communal interaction to describe reality, since no one individual can perceive enough of the world to grasp its fullness. Individuals need to communicate about their bodily engagements, listening to other people’s experiences and evaluating them against their own. In fact, as infants grow up, it is by their bodily engagement as well as their communication that they gradually learn the habits of engaging the world, of sharing their experiences by communicating them to others, and of theorising in such a way that significant numbers of people are able to share the same perspective. We always search for others, for groups, with whom to share and to which to belong. Hence, embodied realism aligns with Rorty’s (2009:176, cited by Smith 2014:28) claim that “truth is what our peers will let us get away with saying”. Although this sounds terribly relativistic, it simply acknowledges the communicative aspect of how we engage with, and theorise about reality, without ever being able to step outside of our humanity and embodiment to check whether we are really right or not (Smith 2014). We *can* and *do* step out of ourselves, so to speak, by communicating about our embodied handling of the world with others, checking our own experiences against those of others, and consequently adjusting our theories to incorporate a wider range of experiences than only our own.

3 For further discussion, see Schilbrack 2014.

This framework of embodied realism means that the human body is the locus where practice and theory meet, from which they both spring.⁴ In our embodied participation in the world and in its communities, there is as yet no distinction between practice and theory. Groups and communities, as communities of practice, develop certain habits or practices as they interact with, and communicate about the world.⁵ Reflections – what one might call informal theories – are formed about these habits and practices, which might change those practices. Yet, these practices, in turn, might generate new insights, changing or correcting those reflections.

Then, at some point, an academic might come along and describe a particular set of practices, while simultaneously recording the reflections about these practices that are current within the group. This academic might point out the lack of consistency between the group's practices and their theory (or reflections). She might then investigate how to better account for certain practices and experiences by developing a better theory. She might argue, on the basis of a better theory, that certain practices should be adapted or revised, while another researcher might conclude at another stage that the actual practices indicate that the theory needs to be changed. This is a matter of debate, disagreement, negotiation and seeking consensus in such a way that most of the community members recognise their own encounter with reality as well as their reflections about it in this discourse.

Granted, our theorising about the world is sometimes exceedingly complex, such that only specialists, say a nuclear physicist or an organisational merger specialist, are able to fully grasp both practical and theoretical complications. Yet, even foundational scientific research is rooted in particular research communities that operate on the basis of specific scientific paradigms that represent the state-of-the-art-theories current within this community, which may or may not be accepted by outsiders as “ultimate truth” (Kuhn 2012).

My argument to this point is that both practices and theories emerge from our embodied participation in the world as well as from our embodied

4 This is similar to Heidegger's notion that the primary mode of the existence of things is not their status as object to be grasped by language and presented over against a subject, but that a human being is being a person-in-the-world before all else, *Dasein*, “being there” alongside various things and other persons dwelling together. The primary mode of existence is one in which the subject-object relationship does not obtain; it arises from it by a particular mode of scientific reflection. See the discussion of Heidegger in relation to the concept of place in Inge (2003:18-19).

5 See Reckwitz's (2002) contention that the locus of the social is neither the mind nor human interaction, but human practices.

interaction with others. This not only applies to experiences such as building a house or investigating group interactions during riots, but also applies to the religious experiences of worship and listening to God's voice. Even where extraordinary experiences are reported, they are connected with embodied religious engagements (Luhmann 2007). One might even argue that the incarnation of Christ as God the Son taking on human flesh with all the frailties of human existence supports these reflections on human embodiment: we are to be redeemed not *from* our bodies, but *for* a resurrected body with a restored humanity (John 1:14; Rom. 8:23). This fascinating line of reflection merits further attention, but it exceeds what this article can contribute.

3. IDENTITY FORMATION

I referred earlier to the learning processes of infants and to the tendency for learners to function in groups, in order to communicate about the world and our interactions with it. I want to extend these notions, in order to gain further insights into these learning processes.

The learning process of infants is intimately connected to the development of the self. Gerkin (1984) offers a fascinating description of object-relations theory. This theory concerns the relationship between an infant and its closest caregivers, usually the mother and father. Within this subfield of depth psychology, perspectives are developed about the rise of the self. The self develops not so much as an innate capacity for self-awareness, but by the contact between the mother and her child. It is, as it were, in the face of the other that the infant begins to recognise its own self, that a sense of selfhood develops (see also Levinas 1999). The quality of this relationship has tremendous influence on this developing selfhood. Simultaneously, the infant explores the world and indeed its own body in increasingly complex forms of interaction, learning from, and developing with others. This conception of the self does not portray the self as a reified nucleus of the person within, a kind of essence of the person; rather, the self is always an embodied self-in-relationship.

As this self develops, the variety of relationships and worldly engagements increases, which in Western culture reaches such complexity that scholars speak of multiple selves. For instance, dialogical self-theory proposes that persons adopt several self-positions in relationship with particular people and contexts. These self-positions are often part of an internal dialogue to maintain a sense of consistency and identity that connects these selves together (Hermans & Gieser 2012). Others have developed multiple self-theory to study how different cultures understand

the self in context (Yeh & Hunter 2004). Overall, multiple self-theory has been presented as a sophisticated way to account for human interaction in different cultural and social contexts (Lester 2017). These theories also emphasise that the self is not simply the unchanging core of one's personhood or personality, but a self-in-relation with the world and with others.

Although the dimension of embodiment is not always acknowledged or theorised, the emphasis of these theories on context, culture and relationship presupposes the human self in its embodied participation in material reality within the contexts of various groups and communities. Such groups are not merely coincidental factors of human interaction and the development of the self; instead, they *constitute* these habits of interaction and the development of the self. Patterns of material and human interaction are developed, maintained and adapted in groups or communities of practice (Reckwitz 2002). These patterns are woven together in complex repertoires of interaction, which then become the focus of transmission to newcomers in a particular community (Wenger 1998), whether an infant in the family, a new employee in a company, or a first-year student in a school of theology.

I would argue that these theories about the human self are rooted, implicitly or explicitly, in embodied realism. This basic epistemological philosophy enfolds within itself the notion of interaction and negotiation to arrive at theories or reflections that are broadly acceptable. Thus, this philosophy is the basis for conceptualising the development of personal, role, group and social identities. The complexity of postmodern societies provides individuals with a large variety of different communities and contexts within which they participate. Digital revolutions and the rise of social media have exponentially multiplied the number of these communities and contexts. Each community has its own particular patterns of worldly interaction and its own repertoire of dialogue and negotiation about these patterns. Development of the self and socialisation into various groups – including those of social media – are thus components of patterns of identity formation. This implies not so much the process of adopting one or more particular, stable or static identities, but processes of moving into and out of groups that themselves are moving more slowly relative to other groups within their social and cultural contexts – although digital communities appear to have lost much of the inertia of non-digital social groups.

If the close link between theory and practice is, at least philosophically, established with the frame of embodied realism, identity formation can then be viewed as a way in which theory-practice relationships work out in life.

It is within the context of social and cultural groups that habits of material interaction and repertoires of dialogue and negotiation are ordered into particular patterns and levels of normativity. When joining a new group, socialising into its forms of worldly engagement and social interaction is usually not voluntary, nor based on individual preference. Rather, those who adapt best into the group, and those who are most influential in the group are those who most intimately and unreservedly adopt group habits and repertoires (Haslam & Platow 2001). Thus, groups transmit particular practices about what to do and how to do it, particular views, reflections, and theories about this repertoire, and beliefs about the importance of learning, maintaining and developing this repertoire. Individual group members who adopt and embody these practices and reflections most become, as it were, normative group members: they become ingroup prototypes (Hogg 2001).

An interesting illustration of the various normative voices that make up group repertoires of practices and reflections is the proposal developed by a group of UK practical theologians in action research. They discern four theological voices in any particular faith practice: operant theology, espoused theology, normative theology and formal theology (Cameron *et al.* 2010). Their approach reflects that various practices, beliefs and discourses within a particular context of lived faith are woven together with various theological discourses, which may be more or less consistent with one another, and which exercise formative and normative influence in their context. These layers shape the group's repertoire of activities and reflections and are the focus of transmission to newcomers, even if these newcomers add new and sometimes unexpected elements in group repertoires.

4. MISSIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

This process of identity formation sheds new light on developments within the missional movement and missional leadership. The missional movement focuses on the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God in this world, in which the church participates (Franke 2017; Guder 2015; Van Gelder 2007). The church is not the central focus in these theologies, as if the primary mission were to incorporate new people into God's church and its normative practices through conversion. This, of course, remains vital, but God's mission is larger. God is active in the world to bring reconciliation, peace and justice in various ways, which is a witness to Jesus Christ who will ultimately complete this at His return (Col. 1:19-20). Hence, the missional movement focuses on discerning communal needs and

establishing small communities as signposts of this reconciliation, peace and justice. What such communities should look like can only partially be determined by theological considerations and traditions, the other part arising from observing and influencing local people and their needs. This is not merely contextualisation, which seems to presuppose a universal understanding of the gospel that individual workers can then adapt to their local contexts (Ward 2017). Rather, the unique shape of each community arises in its own context as it opens itself to, and wrestles with the impact and demands of the gospel.

Missional literature offers fascinating reflections on this process. For instance, Roxburgh writes about discerning “what God is up to in the neighborhood” (2010a:187), and “joining God in the neighborhood” (2015:86), by which he means not the traditional establishment of new churches as “franchises” of already existing communities and their repertoires of faith practices, but a strategy of close listening to needs and movements in a particular neighbourhood or geographical area. Similarly, Ruddick (2020) conducted research in the UK on how urban mission with local engagement often is at tension with pre-existing (denominational) narratives and practices that do not necessarily fit the mission work in a particular locale. She argues that theological ideals should be more attuned to the reality of missional work: “Chapter 1: Reality is good enough”. Others have collected stories of such missional initiatives as a testimony to how God is at work (Branson & Warnes 2014), which also testify to new ways of religious identity formation and missional leadership.

Missional leadership is as difficult to define as the term “leadership” itself. Roxburgh (2010b) offers the metaphors of journeying into uncharted territory, with the missional leader as map-maker instead of as simple guide. Map-makers are, of course, especially attuned to their environment, attempting to create a map that matches reality as closely as possible. This reflects the strategy of close listening mentioned earlier. Stating this in more theological terms, Niemandt (2019:73) argues that the

the core function of missional leaders is to discern what the Spirit is up to and then to lead the congregation in joining in God’s mission.

This involves a missional type of spirituality that enables the leader to listen closely and discern how to follow God in a particular context. Given the rate of change and complexity of our societies, this leadership involves imagination and innovation, in order to bring about the needed transformation (Niemandt 2019).

Missional leadership does not create an all-encompassing vision with appropriate strategy and goals for realising the vision – as if the leader sees and knows – but is based on a “kenotic spirituality” (Niemandt 2019:93) that leads others in listening closely, and in developing Christian imagination, to meet the challenges of a particular situation as *the whole community* senses God’s movement and initiative. Hence, missional leadership, embedded within the missional movement, fuses together perspectives on theology and tradition with close observation of practice and interaction in context, to discern how the community can participate in the *Missio Dei*.

This (embodied) engagement with the social and religious context is a growing focus in practical theology. For instance, Osmer (2008) proposes that the first task of practical theology is the descriptive-empirical task that requires a spirituality of faithful listening. Scharen (2015) argues that fieldwork in theology is itself a spiritual discipline of discernment and participation in God’s active work in the world. Or again, the approach of discerning four theological voices in the praxis of lived faith testifies to the complex interweaving of practice and theology in actual cases under investigation (Cameron *et al.* 2010). Although these approaches do not offer in-depth reflections on embodied realism, they generally fit well within this framework, since they increasingly emphasise the personal participation of the researcher in the practices under investigation and the subsequent need for reflexivity to account for the effect of that personal participation (Bennett *et al.* 2018).

I conclude that missional leaders, as part of the missional movement, are engaged in various strategies of identity formation because of the emphasis on embodied participation in and with particular communities and their needs. One might say that the missional movement and its leaders offer a particular approach or methodology for fusing practice and theory in a desire to foster faithful participation in God’s mission in this world. Hence, it draws together the lines of argumentation in this article, with a resultant focus on missional leadership development.

5. SHAPING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR INNOVATIVE FUTURES

How does this affect theological education, the key concern of this article? It is widely acknowledged that a missional approach changes the leadership practices and styles that are necessary for contemporary communities of faith (Franklin 2020; Niemandt 2019; Reimer 2016). This is not only an observed need for pastoral leadership in churches; indeed,

leadership, in general, is much different nowadays than it was even a decade ago, moving from more hierarchical, directive leadership to more participatory and shared leadership (Barentsen *et al.* 2017). Significant research is being conducted on the potential for theological education to rise to this challenge of missional leadership (Doornenbal 2012; Kreminski & Frost 2018; Naidoo 2012; Nell 2015; Van Gelder 2009). There is a general sense that seminaries and faculties of theology can no longer focus only on training well-equipped interpreters of particular traditions of faith in the supposition that the work of clergy focuses mostly on maintaining and perhaps adapting their traditions to the needs of parishioners and church members. Entrepreneurial and innovative capacities are direly needed in many segments of the global church. In fact, they have always been necessary, as can easily be demonstrated already in New Testament patterns of church identity and leadership development (Barentsen 2011; Ehrensperger & Tucker 2010).

Theological education should, therefore, be directed to nurturing not only faithful interpreters of Scripture, but also faithful interpreters of human and divine action nowadays, in the church and in society. This will better prepare students, graduates, and ordinands to provide the type of contextual and adaptive leadership that is necessary to watch over the vitality of churches in their contexts.

The above arguments have several implications for theological education. First, the above consideration seems to indicate a focus on case studies in various theological disciplines. Such case studies can be presented in classroom settings, but some of this type of education is better done on location in actual practice situations (such as in practice-oriented assignments and internships). This is not so much a focus on practice to apply the theory of the classroom (theological concepts, dogmas, norms, and so on). Rather, a comprehensive form of case study develops perspectives on both theories and practices as they are observable in the case study. It recognises that theory and practice interact together in multidirectional patterns, not only from theory to practice or vice versa. Such a strategy also seems to fit well with the characteristics of adult education (Merriam & Bierema 2014).

Secondly, the emphasis on embodied realism and identity formation implies that hermeneutical competence is not simply directed towards (ancient) texts, their wording, grammar and meaning, nor should it be simply refocused to include human beings as if they are also texts (see Gerkin 1984). Rather, hermeneutics should focus on understanding habits and practices (whether ancient or modern), and on the ability to “read” practices and their discourses (texts) as forms of theological expression,

constantly in dialogue, negotiating and competing with other forms of theological practice, discourse and normativity.

Thirdly, case studies are always embedded in a specific context. Participation in this context, even as researcher, implies socialisation and participation in the patterns of layered normativity that are adopted by, and relevant for the particular people and context being studied. This phenomenon both enables and obscures the discernment of theological voices in the case study. Thus, studying theology through case study requires awareness of one's own participation in, and social identification (or not) with the people being investigated. Thus, reflexivity needs to be developed as a key theological value and research practice. Awareness of the psychology of social identification adds substance to reflexivity in practice and analysis, since one's social identification impacts on one's reading of this process in others.

Fourthly, case studies highlight the social, cultural and theological fit of specific theological expressions in that particular situation, while they might also demonstrate various tensions. The goal of theological study is not to apply a particular set of theological norms to conform the case to what is deemed to be ideal or normative, but to discern how God might be at work in that particular context, as witnessed by the harmonies and tensions between the theological voices at play. Students of theology need to develop awareness of how social and religious identities influence perceptions of reality and truth, and how to determine what they, as spiritual leaders, can get away with saying in that particular community.

Finally, such an approach shows the relevance of religious and social identification, not only as subject of investigation, but also for the theological student him-/herself (Illeris 2013). Without such identification, religious leadership is not possible. However, an academic theological education often means broad exposure to various theological norms, so that a non-reflective (naïve) religious identification with a particular tradition is not always easy or even possible. Yet, participation in a particular community of faith implies an open and committed participation in its practices and reflections, even if a measure of distance is often beneficial and necessary for self-reflection and change. Thus, participation in, and identification with particular faith communities during one's theological education is needful to foster the development of a flexible leader identity that is able to identify with, and lead in a number of different faith communities, even as academic training instils a habitus of reflection and distance. Multiple self theory can enable students to handle different self-positions in practice, allowing them to develop the desired flexibility in identification, while yet maintaining their personal and theological integrity.

These are general recommendations for theological education. They do not yet take into account that the field of theological education is covered by institutions of various sizes, orientations and goals. Each is responsible for, and accountable to various constituencies, their aspirations and their funding opportunities. Moreover, each institution, however formally or informally shaped, has its own call and its own history. Thus, such institutions move with a certain amount of inertia, which is necessary to prevent the institution from drifting too much in the wind, but which is sometimes a hindrance when the weight of history prevents forward movement. The above recommendations (and many other forms of change and innovation) are already being practised, whether formally incorporated into a curriculum or informally adopted by various instructors based on their experience and wisdom. Yet, these recommendations may also be a stimulus for further development in theological education, ironically in an age where embodied interaction seems to take second place to virtual interaction.

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