Chapter 6

The tradition of Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria

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■ Introduction

The liturgical theologian Geoffrey Wainwright employs the beautiful image of rowers to illustrate the concept and process of tradition. In an article entitled 'Back to the future', Wainwright (1997) describes the image of the sport of rowing in which a team races forward while looking backward. The team sits together as one, facing to the back, and in trust and dependence on the person who steers from the back of the boat and who directs both the tempo and the direction, they move forward (cf. also Smit 2007, 2008; Wepener 2008). The word 'tradition' comes from the Latin *tradere*, which literally means 'to hand down' or 'to hand over' (cf. Odendal 1991:1163). *Tradition* includes both a process of handing down (tradition) and the content of what is handed down (*traditum*) and can furthermore be described as '… a transgenerational process by which society reproduces itself' (Gassmann 2008:517). In both Afrikaans and English, the word tradition [tradisie] is used in several ways, for example, depicting a movement such as the 'Reformed or the Charismatic tradition', for a custom such as the 'tradition of observing Lent' or for a collection or set of practices such as 'Pentecost traditions'. On a more general and basic level, the word 'tradition' refers to a general 'handing over' of knowledge and practices 'from generation to generation' (cf. Odendal 1991:1163). In this regard, Geoffrey Wainwright (1997:45–64) calls tradition both a gift and a charge.

The Department of PT at the UP embodies an academic tradition that has grown and developed over 64 years between 1953 and 2017. In many respects, it is similar to other Departments of PT, but it is also unique or at least somewhat different in quite a number of ways. Since its inception as a department at the FT at the UP in 1953 (Büchner & Müller 2009:1–2), the Department of PT has grown from its humble beginnings as a very small department to, by the time of writing this contribution, being the largest of six departments in the FT and making a huge contribution with regard to teaching, research outputs and postgraduate-student

supervision (cf. Wepener 2013a).[43] As such, the Department is what it is today because of many factors, including its historical theological background and also, and importantly, its geographical context.

In this chapter, the 'rowboat' of the Department of PT and its concomitant tradition will be described and traced within its multiple contexts. However, we shall also consider the river on which this boat is rowing, including the unknown parts of the river towards which this boat is heading. Firstly, we shall sketch some global trends with regard to the field of PT. These current-day trends can only be understood if the history of the discipline is also touched upon, a point to which we also attended in this first section. Thereafter, we elaborate on some South African trends and take a brief look at the discipline of PT on the continent of Africa with a special emphasis on West Africa as this is the part of the rest of Africa with which the Department has very good contact and cooperation, especially Ghana. In a third move, we describe the history of the Department which is important for a centenary publication such as this volume of *Verbum et ecclesia*. Thereafter, we make some observations regarding the future of the discipline in the Department at the UP, especially in the light of its unique history and geographical rootedness in the Gauteng Province of SA and simultaneous connectedness to a global context (cf. Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener 2014).

■ Global trends in Practical Theology

Modern-day PT is the study of faith practices within their multi-layered cultural contexts. Internationally, there is huge interest and activity in this theological domain (cf. Miller-McLemore 2012) in which the Department of PT at the UP participates and

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43. The fact that the Department was officially established only in 1953 does not mean that practicaltheological reflection was absent before that time. On the contrary, the teaching of and reflection on subjects such as preaching and pastoral care would have been present since the establishment of the Faculty of Theology in 1917.

contributes from our unique South African context. The aim of practical theological research is a better understanding of faith practices, also sometimes referred to as lived religion, as well as the continuing renewal of a theory for praxis. Ultimately, PT wants to make a contribution regarding the healing of individuals, society and creation which for us includes issues such as justice, reconciliation, inclusivity, equality and poverty alleviation – in essence, the meaningful reconnection of individuals and communities to themselves, each other, creation and God. This was, however, not always how PT was thought of.

The Dutch practical theologian Dingemans (1996) concurs with Schleiermacher when he points out that the praxis of PT is traditionally viewed as '*Kirchenleitung*', which existed as a collection of '*Kunstregelen, a techne, an abgeleitete und angewandte Wissenschaft*' [a science, or rather applied science, which is deduced from philosophical and historical theory]. These rules of art were traditionally aimed at the priest's duties regarding sermons, catechises and pastoral work. For certain Protestant theologians, catechises and pastoral work were even viewed as derivatives of the sermon. Thus PT is applied where the truth is brought to the fore by other theological fields. The result of this was one-way traffic (Dingemans 1996; cf. also Wepener 2009:16–17):

> [*D*]e kerk en de theologie stelden vast wat de waarheid is en de ambtsdragers gaven dat door in – in die situatie aangepaste – 'pasmunt', waarbij de praktische theologie werd geacht hulpdiensten aan te reiken. (pp. 18–19)

The Zeitgeist of the Enlightenment and thereafter was increasingly one of individualism and choice, also with regard to religion. Participation in church life was seen as a voluntary matter. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1958:155–156, 157; see Gerkin 1997:47–48, 107), often seen as the father of modern Protestant theology, was in favour of a separation between the public and private spheres and located religion in the private sphere. In Europe and North America, churches became voluntary organisations and lost

their position of dominance. Religion gradually lost its definitive influence on the formation of social values.

According to James Poling (2011:149–150), modern PT begins with Schleiermacher's work, *Brief outline of the study of theology*, published in 1811, in which he organises theology into philosophical, historical and practical theology. PT was understood as theological reflection on church practices, and the focus was on the work of the clergy. This changed in the 20th century when the emphasis moved away from what Edward Farley calls 'clericalism', and PT developed into a fully-fledged academic discipline which investigates faith practice in all its manifestations.

According to Schreiter (1998:25), a new area of study in the field of PT has come to the fore in recent years. This new field has as its point of departure the life of the congregation; it moves into theory and then back to life (practice to theory to practice). The first step is therefore to describe the situation of the congregation. After that, the description is correlated with the theory and then moves to the life of the congregation for a refocused praxis. Thus we find here a spiralling movement between theory and practice with a focus on the improvement of the praxis. 'For both Groome and Browning, the final move in doing practical theology is action, a renewed practice of the faith' (Schreiter 1998:27).

Dingemans's view on the purpose of PT is linked to that of Schreiter. For Dingemans (1996:13), PT is not positioned in contrast to theoretical theology but rather points towards a theological reflection on practice. Didactic terminology has been applied here to describe the process, namely the starting situation (as factually encountered) and the desired situation (as envisaged). This mutual relationship between theory and practice within PT is taken as the research object by PT and is described as an 'inseparable reciprocal relationship' by Dreyer (1999:48). She says that it is this relationship, this research process, which not only tests the situation but also makes recommendations regarding the situation in which believers find themselves (cf. also Wepener 2009).

In order to accommodate this shift in mindset away from an exclusive focus on texts and towards the study of active persons as part and parcel of the research process, it was necessary to introduce the methods of the social sciences. Traditionally, only the methods of the human sciences have been used in theological faculties, and to this day, there is a measure of suspicion attached to the use of other methods in theology. Be that as it may, today there is global consensus on the view that PT is an interdisciplinary science which applies the methods of the social sciences and the human sciences.

Like Schreiter, Dingemans (1996:60) distinguishes between three steps, namely an analysis of the practical theological situation, a search for the normative aspects and finally, the development of a strategy for change. Each step has a different scientific method, namely that of the social sciences (step 1), theology (step 2) and the agogical sciences (step 3), respectively. By the year 2017, Richard Osmer's 2008 book *Practical theology: An introduction* has become popular and is used at different departments all over SA, also at the Department of PT at the UP. Osmer works with the so-called four tasks of practical-theological interpretation, namely a descriptive-empirical task, an interpretative task, a normative task as well as a pragmatic task. A book by Mikoski and Osmer (2012) that traced the history of the Department of PT at Princeton Theological Seminary, written at the bicentenary of that Seminary, also traces the history of the discipline, specifically in relationship to their institution which is an interesting work for comparison with our own department. With this broad historical overview with regard to PT the focus will now shift to developments regarding this discipline on the continent of Africa and in SA in particular.

■ (South) African trends in Practical Theology

In this section, we look at developments in the field of PT on the continent of Africa. We look at Sub-Saharan Africa in general (De Klerk 2012:v–x; Wepener 2013b) and at West Africa and SA in

particular. In both cases, the development of the field can only be understood and appreciated against the backdrop of historical developments in the particular areas on the continent where the disciplines are practised. Against this background and in terms of personal experience from working closely with colleagues in African countries other than SA as well as from visiting these countries to teach or engage in research, we know that, apart from SA, there is not a strong tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa to use the name PT there are, however, many scholars whose aims and objectives for both research and teaching are similar to how practical theologians from, for example, SA or the Netherlands will describe their aims and objectives (cf. Wepener 2006). We shall now firstly look at developments in West Africa.

■ West Africa

In order to comprehend current trends in PT in West Africa, it is imperative to firstly paint a somewhat bigger picture regarding the recent history of this part of the world. Large parts of Africa have been colonised by Western countries (Nwachuku 2012) since the 15th century. This created a context in which the West did a large amount of missionary work in Africa in a particular way. By means of the missionary movement, which was characterised by 'the ethnocentric presuppositions of European theology' (Nwachuku 2012:518), a certain kind of theology was introduced from Europe into Africa. This meant that the existing religious traditions of precolonial Africa were not appreciated, and missionaries in general had a very negative attitude towards these beliefs. Building on the work of scholars such as Idowu, Mbiti and Pobee, Nwachuku (2012:517) concludes that most of these scholars agree on two characteristics of Africa's pre-missionary religious understandings, namely convictions about a supreme being and an emphasis on actions such as rituals in daily life rather than abstract beliefs (see also Olupona 2000). Mbiti ([1969] 2008:3) also writes that many practices are to be found in Africa that were not 'formulated into a systematic set of dogmas which a person

is expected to accept' and adds that '[*r*]eligion in Africa is written not on paper but in people's hearts, minds, oral history, rituals and religious personages like rain makers, officiating elders and even kings'. The attitude towards these pre-existing religious practises drastically changed in the postcolonial context which Nwachuku (2012:520) describes as 'an outburst of theological consciousness' in post-independent West Africa.

On the one hand, many members of the traditional churches left these denominations and joined newer independent mega-churches. Christian universities were established, and the media, for example Nigeria's Nollywood, had a huge impact on religion (Nwachuku 2012:520–521). This means that the religious expressions or faith practises as researched and taught in PT have undergone large-scale changes over the past decades – since these countries became independent. On the other hand, there is also a reappreciation of precolonial religious traditions and attempts to incorporate them in practical theological reflection. In this regard, the Ghanaian scholar Emmanuel Lartey's book *Postcolonializing God: An African Practical Theology* is a good example (cf. Lartey 2013).

The developments regarding faith practices on grass roots level mean that more attention in practica theological reflection is given to developments in traditions such as AICs and Pentecostal churches. The developments regarding the re-appreciation of precolonial religious traditions open up spaces to work on postcolonial issues in the field but also to develop newer and exciting approaches such as intercultural and interreligious approaches in PT (cf. Lartey 2003). Developments in SA with regard to the discipline are similar but also in significant ways very different to what we have described here.

■ South Africa

In a discussion regarding the current state of PT in SA, Dreyer (2012:505–513) refers to four factors that played and still play a role in this regard. Firstly, the political, social, cultural, economic

and religious realities of the country are important factors. The statistics that were provided in this chapter reflect much of these realities that impact our discipline. However, there are also factors that are not reflected in the numbers. In this regard, the apartheid legacy as well as many challenges that SA is currently facing should also be taken into consideration such as poverty (cf. Pieterse 2001), people living with HIV or AIDS, unemployment and widespread anger (cf. Wepener 2015d; Wepener & Pieterse 2016). Dreyer (2012:507) also refers to church-state relations where, in pre-1994 SA, the state was in typically reformed manner seen as an extension of the church. This situation changed when the country became a secular democracy and churches had to reposition themselves.

The second factor that Dreyer discusses is institutional infrastructure and the impact of huge-scale downsizing at institutions of higher education on the discipline. Post-1994 SA has fewer departments of PT. However, 'it is well established in theological faculties at four of the traditional white universities connected to reformed churches' as well as at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and at the University of South Africa (Dreyer 2012:509).

With regard to the third factor, namely academic societies and publications, Dreyer (2012:509) mentions the establishment in 1969 of the Practical Theological Society of South Africa (PTSA) which organises annual conferences. One of the staff members of our Department, Yolanda Dreyer, currently serves as president of the PTSA. Furthermore, a journal, *Practical Theology in South Africa*, is part of the journal HTS.

The last area that Dreyer (2012:510–513) discusses is fields of study, models and research methods. As elsewhere in the world, SA also bears witness to a movement to expand the object of study in the discipline to include lived religion. However, the accent is still strongly on pastoral actions and church life which

reflects the continuing importance of churches and religious communities in SA as the statistics also confirms. Regarding models in PT, Dreyer (2012:512–513) identifies a confessional and also an empirical approach, resulting in especially an intra-disciplinary model.

With this brief description of PT in West Africa and SA, the focus now shifts to the history of the Department of PT at the UP.

■ A concise history of the Department at the University of Pretoria

Recent years saw two articles that focus on the history of the Department of PT at the UP (cf. Büchner & Müller 2009; Wepener 2013a).[44] This subsection will not attempt another rendition of this history but rather just a brief summary of existing work. The history of the Department can be read against the backdrop of the South African trends discussed above. In SA, PT was initiated more than a century ago with the introduction of a fourth chair in Theology at the Seminary in Stellenbosch in 1899 (Dreyer 2012:505) although the FT at the UP was only established in 1917.

We focus here on a set beginning with the appointment of a lecturer in this particular discipline as well as the establishment of the Department of PT. It is, however, important to look closely at the decades preceding these events because chances are that some of the other theological subjects might have been approached in a way that, at the time, would have been defined as PT. Subdisciplines in the field such as Homiletics were indeed part of the curriculum even before the establishment of a

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44. Both articles focus more on the Dutch Reformed Church's Department before the year 2000 and on the amalgamated Department after 2000. As can be seen in this section, there are also several other articles that focus (indirectly) on the history of PT in the Faculty of Theology at the UP.

department as was the case elsewhere in the world (cf. Mikoski & Osmer 2012).

The Department originated from a Reformed background just like the Faculty, and its setting was and still remains important, namely being in the north of the country. Büchner and Müller (2009) discuss the impact of the process of urbanisation in the first decade of the 20th century, especially in the northern parts of SA:

> With the strong emphasis on the context in the north and the importance of the faculty within these industrialised surroundings, practical subjects became increasingly important and necessarily had to receive more attention. (p. 1)

In these early years, the content of the subject focussed mainly on church ministry although Büchner and Müller (2009) point to the fact that someone like H.D.A. du Toit also made students aware of the demands within the community:

> For example, besides the books that he prescribed, he took the initiative to encourage a group of students to attend the first National Congress on Church and Industry in Johannesburg in 1970. (p. 2)

On 21 December 1916, the Council of the Transvaal University College accepted the nomination of one lecturer each by the NRCA and the Presbyterian Church (PC). They were J.H.J.A. Greyvenstein (NRCA) and the Rev. E. Mcmillan (Presbyterian), respectively. The FT was established shortly thereafter in 1917. During the early years, Greyvenstein was responsible for 'church specific' lectures in three fields, namely systematic theology, the confessions and what is called 'practical theology' in the historical literature (see Oberholzer 2010:31). This referred not to the academic discipline we know today but rather to the practical formation of students for ministry. By 1934, this PT was not part of the official curriculum for the degree BD, and there were no examinations (see Oberholzer 2010:37).

A new contract specifying different sections of the FT for the different churches was signed on 11 October 1937 when the DRC

joined the Faculty. The theological training of the NHKA was called Section A and that of the NRC Section B. In 1947 after his retirement, Greyvensteyn was offered a part-time position as 'professor in PT Section A, funded by the NRCA (Oberholzer 2010:47–48, 52). Later, preaching exercises were shared by all lecturers of Section A, and 'Praktika' was the responsibility of Greyvensteyn's successor, NT professor Albert Geyser (Oberholzer 2010:53). This remained the status quo until J.I. de Wet was appointed as temporary part-time lecturer in PT on 01 February 1963. He was responsible for preaching theory, Christian education and pastoral care. Preaching practice, liturgical studies and pastoral psychology were taught by other lecturers (Oberholzer 2010:78–80). In 1967, a doctorate in PT was conferred on D.J. Booysen, and S.J. Prins received a doctorate in Pastoral Psychology. A chair in PT was established with J.I. de Wet as first professor in the FT, Section A, at which had by then become the the UP. He was succeeded in 1983 by T.J.F. Dreyer, who was succeeded by Yolanda Dreyer in 2000. She was the first female student at the faculty, Section A, the first female minister ordained in the NRCA and the first female professor at the FT.

With this brief history regarding PT at the FT of the UP in mind, we now turn to the current Department in the year 2017, the various lecturers and their fields of specialisation and research interests.

■ The Department in the year 2017: Teaching and research

Faith practices that are investigated and taught in the Department include pastoral care, liturgical rituals, church music, congregational studies, preaching, youth work as well as diaconal studies.

Yolanda Dreyer lectures Introduction to PT and is also responsible for modules in Pastoral Care and Youth Work. She

furthermore lectures Hermeneutics and Trauma Counselling to Master students. Dreyer's research field is Pastoral Care, and she is involved in an international research team, 'New directions in Practical Theology', that meets annually in Princeton and publishes in the *Journal of Pastoral Psychology*. She also has various national and international research associates that are involved in a research project entitled 'Gender, power, sexuality and pastoral involvement'.

Johann Meylahn's research focuses on the conversation between context, philosophy and theology, and in his teaching, he attempts to encourage this conversation in the context of Congregational Pastoral Care and also Congregational Studies. The journey with these ideas was also part of a recent book entitled *Church emerging from the cracks* (Meylahn 2012). The relevance of this conversation can be seen in various contexts and themes such as lived religion, which is also a focus area of many of his postgraduate students.

Moganetsi Makulubele's teaching interest is on exploring ideas about Diakonia and Community Development. Furthermore, he is currently working on his PhD thesis, looking specifically from a postfoundational narrative perspective at the challenges of adolescent pregnancy for individuals, families and communities. The context of this research is the Limpopo Province, specifically in Mahwelereng Township.

Stephan de Beer's research and teaching focus is on urban ministry and congregational diaconate with a focus on homelessness and spatial justice as well as methodologies in doing child theology. Students working under his supervision focus especially on issues of inequality in society, specifically in cities.

Cas Wepener lectures Liturgy and Homiletics with a specialisation in Ritual-Liturgical Studies. His research focuses on liturgy and ritual and the ongoing process of national reconciliation in SA. He is also interested in creative writing and is a published author of fiction.

Apart from the research and teaching themes of the full-time staff, all other members of the department are also engaged in exciting research and work. Maake Masango specialises in Pastoral Care and Trauma Counselling. Julian Müller focuses on postfoundational narrative pastoral care and is also intimately involved in the University's ubuntu project. Malan Nel is an expert in Congregational Studies and Youth Work. Cas Vos is a renowned Afrikaans poet with a rich theological oeuvre and a special emphasis on Homiletics. Daléne Flynn has just joined the Department and is continuing her research on sport as ritual (see Flynn & Wepener 2015). In the year 2017, the Department of PT is a large and active department in the FT, proud of its rich past and excited about the future. In what follows, we explore the (South) African context in which we do PT and the possible implication that this context should have on how we conduct our work.

◼ The future of a department of Practical Theology in (South) Africa

In order to explore the theme of the future of our discipline on the continent of Africa, it is imperative to have a closer look at the context in which we do PT According to Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi (2009:110; see also Dreyer 2012:506–507), Christianity grew at a rate of 3.82% in Africa between 1910 and 2010. In SA, 40.7% of the population belonged to Christian churches in 1910 compared to roughly 82% in 2010. Johnson and Ross (2009:112) indicate that, in 1910, there were roughly 19 700 adherents of AICs in Southern Africa compared to about 20 814 000 in the year 2010. Among the six major Christian traditions listed by Johnson and Ross, AICs showed the fastest growth rate over the past century in Southern Africa, and neo-Pentecostal churches are also growing strongly. The remaining Christians broadly belong to traditional churches as Ghanaian theologian Abamfo Atiemo (2015) calls them. This is still in itself a very large group. In the

past, these churches were referred to as mainline churches, but they are, as Atiemo points out, definitely no longer mainline in Africa.

The members of these churches, of course, participate in various faith practices. Somewhat older data from CASE (Community Agency for Social Enquiry) show that as many as 91% of persons between the ages of 18 and 35 in SA indicated that they attend worship services. In addition, the World Values Survey (1999–2002) indicates that the most conservative figure for persons attending religious services in SA at least once a month is 71.77%. We can also mention that, in general, religion in Africa is not so much about beliefs, dogmas and creeds as it is about the performance of faith practices (cf. Lartey 2013:28).

Thus, in Africa and also in the greater Tshwane area, people are indeed still engaged in faith practices in churches. It is important to note that this is where the Department of Faith Practices of the UP is situated, and this is also where our students come from. They are mainly from traditional churches, to a lesser degree from AICs and also from (neo-)Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Although we are all globally connected in the network society, our Department is rooted in Tshwane. We are not located in Toronto, Tilburg or Tübingen where PT is also practised but in Tshwane where the landscape pertaining to faith practices is completely different from similar landscapes in the West or other parts of the world.

In light of our unique origins as a Department and of this contextual description, it is important for us to ask where all of this leave us at the Department of Faith Practices at the UP in the year 2017. Firstly, we must continue to practise the virtue of scholarly hospitality and remain, as a Department, a spacious house accommodating what exists, but we also need more. It is indeed a time in which we are rowing on the river, looking back at where we come from, but also moving forward on our river which is flowing in Africa. Our spacious Department should be ever expanding, making room for what is needed. In order to develop our vision in this regard, we take our cue

from Andy Root's (2014) book *Christopraxis: A practical theology of the cross* to prophesy about matters that we deem necessary for us to be able to position ourselves for the future of our discipline in sub-Saharan Africa. We also build on this in the conclusion to this chapter.

Root (2014) argues for an approach within the field of PT where the emphasis on human action is augmented with a greater emphasis on the actions of God, and he does so by means of critical realism and the theology of justification as developed by Jüngel. Root's work and his whole approach within the field can be very helpful to us. This kind of approach asks for more and new interdisciplinary alliances and a continuation of the already established transversal rationality. We would like to add here that a spirituality of liminality opens up greater possibilities together with the methodological hospitality for a renewed transversal rationality. Root critiques existing approaches and argues for a so-called 'ministerial transversal rationality'. He uses the concept 'ministerial' because the event of God's being in coming to humanity is an ontological encounter between the divine and human in which time is infused with eternity, where God gives Godself for humanity (Root 2014:94). Various epistemological conceptions witness to parts of reality, and '[*r*]eality itself pushes us into and out of such interdisciplinary conversations' (Root 2014:n.p.).

This is also true in Africa and is a challenge that we are facing. Actually, it will become more and more difficult to call theological endeavours 'PT' without these methodological and epistemological commitments. From experience, we know that the people with whom we do research in local communities do not take off their theological hats when we arrive, and accordingly, we should also keep them on during all the tasks of PT (cf. Wepener 2015a, 2105b). One can, for example, here recall Browning, who says the following (in Ammerman et al. 1998):

[*I*]f we believe that God is actively working in the world, and is not only an afterthought to explain what is happening in the world, then

the description of what is happening in the world is a theological task. (p. 16)

African spirituality, such as is found in AICs and theological traditions such as the Reformed tradition, can find each other in SA within what we would like to call – following Root but with reference to Africa and not North America – a pneumapraxis. Here we believe that Van Ruler's (1973:9–40; Wepener 2009:21) theonomic reciprocity can be helpful again as it has so often been in practical theological reflection in SA in the past but now with a specific eye for the divine and human encounter in Africa as such and not only in preaching or worship. We believe that we should also embrace a PT of the Spirit that is ontologically rooted in the active working of the Spirit of God and where the faithful experience this dynamic in their daily lives and epistemologically in the signs of the Spirit as lived faith practices.

From an African perspective, Lartey (2013:xiii) argues that God is viewed as active, involved and in interaction with humans who, in keeping with God's divine nature, act to decolonise, diversify and promote counter-hegemonic social conditions. What we are developing here is certainly not an argument for a so-called Prosperity Gospel but an argument for practical theologians to approach the faith practices that they are researching in a way that suits the continent where these practises occur (cf. also Smith 2012).

Not taking into consideration the role of the Spirit and the spirits in religion and theology in sub-Saharan Africa will result in a reductionist approach. John Mbiti ([1969] 2008:4) rightly states, '[n]o line is drawn between the spiritual and the physical'. A pneumapraxis will not exclude a Christopraxis, but we believe that there is a crucial contextual difference in the two approaches. This difference relates to Root's Western context which allows him to wrestle almost exclusively with the cross and what he calls nothingness. In our view, a view which was formed in the process of conducting numerous interviews and focus groups and which is supported by the work of scholars

such as the Ghanaian scholar Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu and the Cameroonian scholar David Ngong (2014), a typical experience of Christians – including AICs, neo-Pentecostal Churches and Traditional churches – in Africa already includes the cross and nothingness in the harsh conditions of many people's daily lives and that is one reason why the Spirit and the power of the Spirit are so important (cf. Anderson 2003).

We would like to present the example of a mother who was a member of the Reformed church in Mbekweni in the Western Cape when we were doing research on the theme of worship and poverty. She told one of the authors of this chapter that poverty is her reality from Monday to Saturday. On Sunday, she needs to experience the power of God's Spirit, not more of the lamenting that she experiences during the rest of her week. Here, we could also introduce the concept of 'spiritual capital' as a subset of social capital as it is becoming more and more part of the vocabulary of scholars such as Nigerian theologian Afe Adogame (2013:106). In this chapter, however, we would like to stay with the theological concept of pneumapraxis.

Such a pneumapraxis approach will even further open up an academic space within our Department in which the experience of 'life in the Spirit' can be embraced by means of a methodology that refrains from a reductionist world view and dares to enter the holistic African world view of the Spirit and the spirits. What we present here is not the answer or the direction for our Department but rather a first indication from our side to point towards an area where we can become even more hospitable, where our Department can become more spacious. Hopefully, these very preliminary thoughts can also assist in leading us to where we can gain some wisdom for proceeding in this regard.

Exactly one year ago, a paper entitled 'Bliksem' (cf. Wepener 2015c) was delivered at an 'Ecodomy' conference in the FT at the UP. In this paper, an argument was developed, following mainly Nigerian liturgist Elochukwu Uzukwu (1997) but also Ted Jennings (1996), for a greater appreciation of a bodily based epistemology

when conducting practical theological research on African soil. In the current chapter, we want to augment Wepener's argument with a pneumatological ontology for researching faith practices in sub-Saharan Africa, the continent of the Spirit and the spirits. As the Ghanaian practical theologian Lartey (2013:26) describes our continent, '[*a*]ll of life pulsates with the rhythms of the spiritual realm'.

While keeping in mind the history of our Faculty and Department as well as the contextual realities in which we are doing PT we now build on the previous section and think out loud about the part of the river that we are entering as we continue the tradition of doing PT in Pretoria.

◼ A way forward for a Practical Theology Department in Africa?

We do not think that there is *a* or *the* way forward but at best, maybe, possible *ways* forward. We also do not think that such a way can be clearly formulated at this stage. We would suggest that *sites for thinking* such possible ways could perhaps be indicated, together with identifying some possible challenges. Yet it would need to be a matter of creatively engaging with these challenges in these sites of thinking, thereby opening up a space for changing the ways of thinking. These sites of thinking, as well as the concomitant challenges, have already been indicated in the previous paragraphs.

Andrew Root's Christopraxis proposes a way forward for PT with his shift in focus from human practices – hermeneutically, linguistically and culturally understood – towards God's action. When taking into consideration the specific African context, it was argued above that it might be more useful to refer to a pneumapraxis, thereby creating space for the diversity of experiences of divine action or experiences of the actions of the Spirit or spirits.

Root's Christopraxis is based on critical realism, specifically in the context of ministry. The focus is on realism as the experiences

of divine action are seen as being real and should therefore be taken seriously. However, one should also engage with these experiences critically as they should be interpreted within a specific transversal hermeneutic paradigm. The critical point for Root is to interpret divine action as Christ's action, Christopraxis, which then serves as the hermeneutical key to interpret the experienced action. Christopraxis is for Root essentially the movement from death to life, interpreted in the light of both a Theology of the Cross and a Theology of Justification.

These theologies (of Justification or of the Cross) are not interpreted as dogmas but serve as hermeneutical keys with which to interpret Christopraxis. They thereby offer a paradigm for critical engagement and the interpretation of divine action.

To interpret divine action within the paradigm of Christopraxis and the hermeneutical keys of a Theology of the Cross and a Theology of Justification make sense in a North American context where these theologies have played a dominant role in the self-understanding of Protestant and Evangelical faith communities. The question, however, is: Would such a hermeneutical key make sense in an African context?

The African context offers its own challenges. We would like to highlight only three challenges:

- How do we *respond* to the specific African context?
- How do we *think* such a response to the context?
- How does the response influence possible *practices*?

■ How do we respond to the context?

Root's context was North America, but our context is Africa where the tradition of a Theology of the Cross and/or a Theology of Justification by faith and grace alone might certainly have influenced those Christian traditions that have their roots in Europe and North America but will not necessarily be part of the tradition of Pentecostal and African Initiated Churches. The context could be described as a multi-world context where there

are different worlds, and in these worlds, the divine acts are experienced very differently as they are interpreted within very diverse worlds. Within a modern world influenced by the West, it would make sense to interpret divine action by using metaphors from the Protestant Christian narratives as these narratives have played an important part in the creation of the modern and postmodern Western worlds.

The question is whether these same metaphors can serve as paradigms (epistemology) of critical engagement with regards to the interpretation of divine actions in multiple-world contexts where many of these worlds do not share the history or tradition of the Western world? Would those worlds be expected to convert to modernity or postmodernity first before one could engage them in critical (transversal) conversation? Alternatively, would these multi-worlds challenge the basic epistemological assumptions of Western modern and/or postmodern worlds? What kind of epistemology would be needed to respond to a multiple-world context?

■ How do we think such a response?

Alain Badiou (2009) argues in his book *Logics of worlds* that true change happens when epistemology changes. Otherwise, it would make more sense to talk about modification (Badiou 2009:259). He argues that, for change to happen, an exception is required, '... an exception to the laws of ontology as well as to the regulation of logical consequences' (Badiou 2009:360).

The African context with its multiple worlds is such an exception to the laws of Western ontology. Things appear that do not make sense in Western ontology, and yet they appear, and they appear within their own ontology, that is, within their own worlds of meaning. These appearances challenge the dominant Western ontologies and thereby question them.

The idea of the West being confronted with an Other is not new. On the contrary, it has always been part of the Western

history, specifically the colonial history. Yet, in the past, the Other was assimilated into the Same even if it was assimilated by calling the other *the Other*, the Other of the Same. In identifying the differences, the Other was assimilated into the Same as that which is different. To really listen to the context and thereby take the context seriously, that which *is* needs to be taken together with how it shows itself, that is, within its own ontology even if that ontology is an exception to the dominant ontologies and their epistemologies.

What is required is a new epistemology that can think various epistemologies together without creating a multicultural mix or resign to the idea of relativism. Critical engagement remains necessary in engaging in a multiple-world context, but what needs to be creatively sought is a paradigm from which one critically engages the different worlds. Bruno Latour argues that '[*n*]either Nature nor the Others will become modern. It is up to us to change our ways of changing' (Latour 1993:145).

■ How does the response influence possible *practices*?

Such an emerging epistemology will certainly affect how PT is done in all four of Miller-McLemore's (2012:4) related but distinctive locales:

- scholarly discipline
- activity of faith
- method of study
- curricular area.

In each of these locales, the question will be twofold. Firstly, is there room for different voices coming from different ontologies, and secondly, are the different epistemologies respected, that is, is there a democracy of epistemologies?

These two questions arising from the specific African context will shape the path into the future, determining how we reflect

about faith practices in these contexts while remaining open to critically engaging in global conversations.

■ Conclusion

In this chapter we looked back, we looked at the context around us, and we also looked forward. What we shared with you is part of the ongoing story of PT at the UP at the time of celebrating the centenary of its FT. In the words of Wainwright, we see this tradition that we are part of, the tradition that was handed over to us and that we are busy handing over again, as both a gift and a charge.

■ Summary: Chapter 6

The focus of this chapter is the tradition of PT at the UP. We consider it as practiced in the Department of PT at the UP at the time of celebrating the centenary of the FT by looking at it from different angles in order to focus on its unique position and especially its future in its particular context. By looking at the history of the subject and the Department as well as the global and local context within which the discipline is practiced in Pretoria, the possible direction is sketched in which this discipline can move at the Department of PT at the UP after 2017 (the year of the centenary of the FT).

The chapter challenges the discipline of PT to embrace the continent of Africa where the department is situated, assuming that such an embracing will impact both ontology and epistemology. In this regard, we suggest a pneumapraxis to be part of the future of this discipline in SA. The chapter promotes both an intra and interdisciplinary approach.

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