



# Introduction and research justification

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## Introduction

This book is an academic book with theoretical contributions of staff members and research associates of the Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria (UP). The department represents an intellectual legacy that has evolved over 71 years from 1953 to 2024. It has similarities with other practical theology departments, but it also possesses distinct characteristics that set it apart. Established as a department at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria in 1953 (Büchner & Müller, 2009:1–2), the Department of Practical Theology has grown from its humble beginnings as a very small department to, by the time of writing this contribution, to being the largest of six departments in the Faculty of Theology. It makes a huge contribution with regard to teaching, research outputs and postgraduate-student supervision (cf. Wepener, 2013; Wepener et al., 2017:155). As such, the department is what it is today because of many factors, including its historical-theological background and also, importantly, its geographical context (cf. Wepener et al., 2017). In recent years, Practical Theology and Missiology combined to form a single department called Practical Theology and Mission Studies.

## Research justification and rationale for chapter outline

There are many and diverse definitions of practical theology. Cahalan and Mikoski (2014:1–10) synthesised ideas from practical theologians like Richard Osmer and Don Browning to identify three key parts of a comprehensive practical



theological approach. The process starts with practical application, transitions to theoretical contemplation, and concludes with practical implementation. A practical theological approach therefore has three elements –it begins with a base in practice, moves towards theoretical reflection, and returns to practice. Therefore, practical theologians generally agree that there is no direct path from theory to practice (cf. Magezi, 2019:119).

Practical theology emphasises the significance of the context or specific circumstances in which it operates, seeking to recognise the presence of the divine and understand its calling within the complexities of everyday life. Practical theology remains contextual, thus this book focuses on the South African context since epistemology from a South African viewpoint involves comprehending the lived experiences and knowledge systems of individuals from this side of the world. The present-day experience, known as the context, influences individuals' perspectives and the development of theological beliefs through the interplay of culture, social position, and societal transformation within a specific setting. Epistemology is often conveyed via underlying beliefs that shape connections and guide how people and groups create significance from lived experiences. Epistemology is influenced by historical events like apartheid, colonialism, slavery, etc. It is for this reason that Magezi (2019:120) poses the question, 'Since all African theologies are about lived religion, why and how are African theologies relevant to Practical Theology?' To answer this, he uses the insightful response by Wepener et al. as they argue that practical theology should be understood and appreciated against the backdrop of historical developments in the particular areas on the continent where the discipline is being practised, taking particular note of political and theological developments (cf. Wepener et al. 2017:139; Magezi, 2019:120), again ... contextual!

Furthermore, for Ward (2017:3), practical theology is focused on the church's mission and ministry in both its methods and content. The continual existence of the church is practical theology, making it methodological.

Christian believers and clergy possess advanced skills and expertise in practical theology when they engage in the subject. Individuals who engage with the church community have naturally assimilated and engaged in advanced and successful methods of practising theology before entering a classroom or reading [a] book. Practical theology should begin by prompting students to acknowledge how they currently use practical theology in their daily lives to carry out their ministry and Christian practices. Everyday practical theology is not substituted by formal study; rather, it is improved by it. Practical theology should focus on developing existing methods and practices in church settings rather than solely aiming to criticise them. Practical theologians must closely connect with various churches and understand how persons in these churches typically think theologically.

Miller-McLemore (2011:5) lists four meanings of the word practical theology which also justify the chapter layout of the book.<sup>1</sup> Practical theology is an academic field studied by academics and practised by believers as an expression of religion. Practical theology serves as both a cognitive approach and a specific field of study within an academic programme. These several 'enterprises,' as she refers to them, are separate. Although they cater to distinct audiences and operate differently, they are also interrelated. Practical theology involves Christians maintaining a reflective faith in their daily lives within the church, and it also serves as a particular approach to comprehending theology in action. This technique influences the teaching of practical theology in theological education curricula. Each approach to practical theology indicates a distinct setting, ranging from the church and local community to everyday experiences, and from academic research to hands-on labour and educational settings. Miller-McLemore states that these four understandings should

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1 For Miller-McLemore, each understanding points to different spatial locations, from *daily life* to *library* and *fieldwork* to *classroom*, *congregation*, and *community*, and, finally, to *academic guild* and *global context* (cf. (Miller-McLemore, 2011:5).

not be seen as mutually exclusive. They are interconnected and mutually dependent. Collectively, they demonstrate the breadth and intricacy of practical theology. Practical theology is multifaceted. It is present in a wide variety of locations and environments.

Having said that, Mangayi and Baron (2020:16) emphasise that there is a need to remain conscious that it is not in the nature of missiology to be idle or remain 'pie in the' sky. That even missiology or as in the case at the University of Pretoria, mission studies remains an applied practical theological discipline.

Therefore, we decided to collaborate on a publication from our respective fields of inquiry on South African issues and discourses. In this book, we approach the various issues as several academics who are engaged in teaching and research in our respective disciplines and who consequently view the pandemic through those lenses.

As a collective, the fields of inquiry that come into play are research methodology within practical theology, liturgy, homiletics, pastoral care and counselling, children's ministry, youth ministry, *diakonia*, community development, missional theology, missional diaconate, and missional leadership. In the various chapter contributions, different methodologies are discussed, which indicate the rich variety that exists within the field of practical theology and missiology. This variety constantly challenges us to look at each other's work with new appreciation, to learn from each other and to gain experience together.

This book not only aims to grapple with practical theological and missiological matters that come to the fore during lectures and with which students thus wrestle during classroom meetings, but it also relates to the South African context in general. The aim is, therefore, to inform the current practical theological and missiological curriculum, but the chapter contributions are not limited to only pedagogical settings. Teaching and research intentions are therefore combined in this edited volume.

Hence, the resultant literature possesses the potential to serve as a valuable resource in various educational environments, while simultaneously aiding in the pursuit of reforming religious communities outside of traditional academic settings. Also evident from the chapters in this volume is that the curriculum and research focus of the department relates to the transformation of society as well as the religious communities.

This book works on the methodology – practical theology – mission studies – rationale for this chapter outline.<sup>2</sup> In Chapter 1, Christo Lombaard discusses the true purpose of research (understanding) as it is placed in opposition to examples of misplaced expectations of research. In the second part of his chapter, he deals with methodology as it is considered the scholarly-controlled manner of attaining deeper understanding. The third part includes the contents of a (translated) debate on the purpose of the study.

In Chapter 2, Buhle Mpfu in a self-reflection manner draws on the notion of ‘locating regimes’ to discuss the complexities of learning spaces in theological education. He argues that disconnections deserve the same attention as connections which create networks for learning spaces and contends that paying attention to the power dynamics that shape the learning environment has the potential to configure dominant multiple forms of subordination and exclusion. He also draws on student experiences to reflect on a personal journey of theological studies and identifies opportunities for contextual engagement on challenges which present an epistemological crisis by creating disconnections.

Dieter de Bruin gives a brief overview in Chapter 3 of three ways of approaching liturgical research. The historical, ritual, and theological approaches are briefly outlined with

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2 The methodology – practical theology – mission studies – chapter outline rationale of this book is linked to Miller-McLemore’s four understandings of the term ‘practical theology’, namely (1) from daily life to library and fieldwork to classroom, (2) congregation, and (3) community, and, finally, (4) to the academic guild and global context.

the help of two influential liturgical scholars at the University of Pretoria for the historical and ritual approach, and David Fagerberg and Gordon Lathrop set the scene for integrating the historical and ritual approaches as liturgical theology.

In Chapter 4, Christo Lombaard and Jacques Beukes start with a brief review of the relationship between technology and theology. After indicating how this contribution methodologically unfolds, two Bible texts are given from which a homiletical experiment is conducted. The exegetical background and Reformed-homiletical expectations on these texts in two resulting sermons are given. The texts of these two sermons, one written by a human being and one written by ChatGPT, are reprinted. The sermons are then evaluated, in outline, by these two authors.

Annelie Botha in Chapter 5, from a pastoral care perspective, argues that health and being healthy is the source of strength for life. She reasons that being healthy is more than just the absence of physical illness. Being healthy includes mental, social and spiritual well-being. The task of pastoral care and counselling includes meeting people in the spaces and places where they struggle to cope with the adversities that are part of life and make it difficult for them to live a healthy and whole life. Such pastoral care will include addressing lifestyle issues and environmental factors that affect people's health and well-being in the broadest sense.

In Chapter 6, Annemarie E. Oberholzer investigates a critical question in pastoral care and counselling, namely 'How the church can assist in addressing the needs of sick and hospitalised children'. She follows this up with Chapter 7, where she pastorally addresses the issue of walking with children in the shadow of death.

In Chapter 8, Maake Masango, engages with the process of education in Africa, especially in rural as well as the African village, centred on storytelling, idioms, proverbs and songs. Masango's chapter seeks to address the issue of violence and abuse, caused by men in South Africa, which the current

president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, refers to as the 'second pandemic' (the first being Covid-19).

In Chapter 9, Jacques Beukes investigates the role and influence that social media and 4IR have had and might have on the youths' environmental knowledge, awareness, conscience, and activism on and within the environmental discourse. Staying on the topic of the youth, Beukes, in the next chapter (Chapter 10), critically examines Aspiration 6 of the African development agenda, Agenda 2063, which is titled 'The Africa We Want' which leverages the potential of its citizens, particularly women and youth, while prioritising the well-being of children. The chapter investigates the potential of Agenda 2063 as a means of addressing the marginalisation of youth in Africa, or to determine if it can be considered a missed opportunity.

In Chapter 11, Stephan de Beer discusses how African theologians have largely failed to engage urbanisation and related challenges in systematic, comprehensive and well-considered ways. De Beer's chapter considers the urgent necessity for liberating faith practices in responses to African cities, namely, faith practices that contribute to integral liberation and freedom of African cities and African urban dwellers, but that presupposes the liberation of faith practices, and the discipline of practical theology, themselves. Departing from the lived experience of doing theology in an evolving African megacity – the Gauteng City-Region – De Beer then proposes the expansion of the scope of African practical theologies, if we are to take African cities seriously, being shaped by a spiritual and theological method of liberation. He considers practical theology scholarship as engaged scholarship and a liberating faith practice itself, fusing the elements of incarnation, imagination, innovation, impact and collaboration; doing theology in transdisciplinary ways; and practising the dual task of research as transformation, as well as liberative pedagogies. This chapter concludes by asserting the city as a classroom and locale for doing engaged practical theological scholarship.

## Practical Theology and Mission Studies

In Chapter 12, Hannes Knoetze argues that when writing about missiology/mission studies within the African context, it is important to take cognisance of the fact that when Christian mission came to Africa at the beginning of the fifteenth century, 'there was no developed theology of mission'. He believes that we are currently writing and studying mission and missiology mainly from a post-Christendom perspective in the West, and in the global world with a mixed (syncretistic) perspective of traditional beliefs, Christendom, and post-Christendom societies. But mission is from everywhere to everywhere. In a post-Christendom society, mission and mission studies are scrutinised by society in general, and by many churches and academic institutions all over the world. In this chapter he attends to the following questions: Does mission studies still belong in theological education as one of the theological disciplines? How does the church in a post-Christendom society, and in an African society, relate to mission?

In Chapter 13, Attie van Niekerk reflects on the question: how can our theological curriculum equip future ministers to respond in a meaningful way to the large and complex problems of the country, such as poverty, joblessness, gender-based violence, crime, neglect and abuse of children, the consumer culture, ecological degradation? It suggests that theological students must get practical experience in learning to know themselves; seeing their community and context, and letting it touch them deeply; understanding the existential questions that hang over their cultures and the reasons why things are as they are; reflecting on what they have seen in the light of the Bible and theological tradition, and finding a meaningful response to what they have seen. Lastly, inspiration and dedication are needed. These steps are firstly taken by the student, as preparation for leading a congregation through the same procedure.

Jacques Beukes concludes with the final chapter of this book, Chapter 14, wherein he aims to define leadership, followed by a succinct analysis of the intersection between theological curricula and leadership, as well as practical

theology and leadership. The final section of this chapter delves into a comprehensive examination of diverse leadership styles that could potentially apply to the South African context.

### **Pedagogical approach of the University of Pretoria (Faculty of Theology and Religion)**

In the Faculty of Theology and Religion and Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies, staff embraced the University of Pretoria's hybrid teaching model. The university's online platforms such as the Blackboard Learn LMS (ClickUp), Blackboard Mobile, and Blackboard Collaborate technologies are used to enhance the student's learning experience. The hybrid teaching model has the potential to extend the classroom experience beyond the lecture period, both before, during and after class. It provides the opportunity for lecturers to mix the best of contact and online delivery to create a new learning environment for students. Hybrid learning makes teaching and learning more effective by shifting the instructional sequence. For modules, lecturers therefore, use the before-class, during/in-class and after-class approaches.

#### **Before class**

The 'before class' phase is also known as the 'preparation' phase. Lecturers make the reading material available on ClickUp (an online productivity platform) days or a week before the class. Lecturers provide students with activities and videos or alternative media and they are assessed by way of a small quiz on the pre-class reading material and or activities (also on ClickUp). By doing this lecturers make sure that students are therefore prepared for class.

#### **During/in class**

The 'during/in class' phase is also known as the 'engagement' phase. In class (mostly face-to-face but also sometimes online), lecturers use the first part of the lecture, to start with the lecture and module outcomes. Then lecturers lecture the

reading material in a summarised and understandable way. This is also done by way of questioning, listening, describing, answering, comparing and making examples. Sometimes lecturers use further illustrations (multimedia) and case studies for students to grasp the theory better in a practical way. As lecturers are aware of auditory learners, visual learners and kinaesthetic learners, lecturers try to use their time per class but also different periods/classes creatively. Because some learners prefer learning by listening, others by speaking, some by visual cues, and others by doing. Therefore, some lecturers have used teaching, seminary/lecturing mode, reverse classroom, group work, shifting the classroom to a practical place, student network portal, and linguistic, visual, and audio methods, such as using videos, music, drama, art, photography, debates, poems, role-playing, case studies and spiritual/formative exercises. Students are then encouraged to engage with the lecturer and other times engage with their peers, work in groups and give feedback to the class. During this time, students are encouraged to critically engage the current setting, understandings and or praxis after new information and understandings have developed. After the feedback and critical engagement, lecturers go back to the reading material of the week as well as the module and lecture outcomes and evaluate orally whether the outcomes were achieved.

### **After class**

The 'after class' phase is also known as the 'consolidation' phase. Students are encouraged to revise and apply what they have learned. They can also go back to the ClickUp online portal and start with blogs and wikis which other students can engage in, or lecturers give them quizzes, homework or assignments on the coursework.

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