Pluralizing Practical Theology: International and Multi-Traditional Challenges and Opportunities[1]

Katja Stuerzenhofecker, University of Manchester

Abstract

The entrance of international practical theologians of all faiths and none into the traditionally Western-centric, Christian-dominated field in the UK prompts the review of its scope and methodology. This paper argues for a shared conversation on how to achieve constructive and authentic participation for all. A recent survey of alumni from four UK-based Professional Doctorates in Practical Theology highlights omissions and opportunities, and points towards an agenda for intentional and effective pluralization. Evangelical principles and Christian liberation theology suggest internal strategies to counter possible resistance to undoing the Christian hegemony.

Introduction

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the British and Irish Association of Practical Theology (BIAPT) presents an opportunity to consider future developments in practical theology and their impact on BIAPT. A development under way is the participation of practical theologians who extend the membership beyond its traditional Christian, Western-centric[2] core. It is not a matter of allowing the newcomers access: through their presence alone, practical theology has already been pluralized. To use van den Berg and Ganzevoort's (2014) scheme of future-sensitive practical theology, it is too late to adopt the pro-active, prophetic "designing-

---

[1] Based on 'Widening participation in practical theology in the British Isles: international and multi-religious challenges and opportunities', BIAPT conference, Liverpool, 8 July 2019. My thanks to respondents, editors and anonymous reviewers for constructive comments.
[2] *Dominant* theological references are European and North American.

creative" (181) mode by preparing for and 'welcoming the stranger'. Addressing a perceived lack of openness towards 'strangers' by Christian practical theologians, Greider (2012, 4 and 8) suggests that "[t]he momentous question of whether practical theology is inherently a Christian concern or may have relevance for other religious traditions" should be tackled in a multi-religious discussion.[3] Its relevance is already apparent where non-Christians claim practical theology and its subdisciplines for themselves as Greider (2012, 3) acknowledges. In contrast to Greider, I suggest that the issue is not inherence but hegemony[4] arising from historical and institutional circumstances. Therefore, fundamental changes are required so that participation can be constructive and authentic for all.

The challenge facing practical theological platforms is this: if the field's roots in Western practice and academia are Christian but current growth is international and multi-traditional, then how is this development best supported? Is it through grafting, an additive, supersessionist process that leaves the old core intact but considers the shoot to be the more desirable material? Should it be achieved through cross-pollination that integrates multiple strands into one new plant? Or what of the structure of the rhizome with its individual over-ground shoots which are linked without discernible core?[5] To change the metaphor, is the relationship to be the insider/outsider binary of hosts and guests, or neighbours as equals? If it is to be the latter, then newcomers and familiar faces should engage in shared conversation about the objects and methodologies of this emerging endeavour. The present paper by a European post-Christian has a limited mandate to issue this call.

A confident future-orientation will progress the field towards constructive integration of diversity. But as van den Berg and Ganzevoort (2014, 180) note: "Theological education should prepare students for labour in [institutions[6]] of the future, while their teachers are often more familiar with [institutions] of the past." The current membership of BIAPT and

---

[3] For similar multi-traditional developments in public theology, see Pirner et al. (2018).
[4] I use this Gramscian concept to denote unequal power relations between Christianity as normative and dominant, and subordinate traditions under pressure to adopt Christian-derived models of practice and thought in order to participate.
[5] See Baker (2013) and Foley (2015) on rhizomatic ordering principles necessitated by diversity.
[6] Van den Berg and Ganzevoort (2014) refer to "church".

several UK-based programmes of Professional Doctorates in Practical Theology (PrDs[7]) are indicative of pluralization waiting to be fully realized. Graham (2017a, 22) suggests that PrD doctorands of all faiths and none challenge the discipline "to develop multi-faith practical theology that fully addresses traditions other than Christianity." The following case study explores the PrDs at the Universities of Chester, Birmingham, Anglia Ruskin and Glasgow which form the core of the PrD Consortium since its inception. It is appropriate to connect BIAPT and the PrD since the latter "emerged under the auspices of [BIAPT]" (Bennett and Graham 2008, 34). Subsequently, the Consortium established ongoing links with the BIAPT conference and *Practical Theology* for mutual benefit of individual doctorands and the BIAPT membership.

The PrDs' current state of internationalisation and multi-traditionality offers useful pointers for the constructive pluralization of BIAPT and practical theology. In the following, I illustrate the wider issue with reference to the ways in which opening the BIAPT membership problematizes the scope of practical theology. Second, I explore survey data from PrD alumni in order to understand better what international and non-Christian participants bring to and need from practical theology. The survey findings also indicate opportunities for the fuller realization of constructive pluralization. Finally, I offer initial thoughts on the implications for the field of practical theology and for BIAPT as a platform at the intersection of practice, education and research.

Changing BIAPT membership = changing scope?

Comparison of previous and current BIAPT membership statements illustrates outstanding adjustment. Unlike the 2014 constitution, the current membership statement[8] addresses "those from the United Kingdom, Ireland and many other countries around the world" and "those from all Christian denominations, religious faiths and none". However, not all exclusively Christian reference points have been revised yet: Are non-Christians included under "church-related community work"? This disconnect is also apparent in Lyall's outlook

---

[7] See Bennett and Graham (2008).
[8] https://www.biapt.org/about/ Accessed 17/09/2019.

for practical theology in the British Isles[9]: "[the] main justification [of these developments] must be both practical and theological – the proclamation of the Gospel and the building up of individuals and communities in a life of faith." This makes sense to a Christian minister, but can a Humanist celebrant and a Muslim chaplain relate to this agenda? Lyall and Ballard's (insert year and page ref) projection of "the challenges before BIAPT" in this volume does not acknowledge BIAPT's current multi-traditionality.

As a first step, explicit reference to *Christian* practical theology invites differentiation between tradition-specifics and commonalities.[10] Accordingly, Miller-McLemore (2012, 28) clarifies that, in spite of the generic title, the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* locates its discussion of the state of the art exclusively in Christianity. The necessity of tradition-specific references is exemplified by pluralization of pastoral care. Ganzevoort et al. (2014) identify 'pastoral care' as a distinctly Christian instance of what they call 'spiritual care' in their attempt at a nonspecific umbrella term. Like the PrDs, the authors' (181) considerations arise in a "spiritual care teaching program with students and lecturers from a variety of traditions" at the Vrije Universiteit (VU), Amsterdam. They survey Christian pastoral care alongside secular/Humanist, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu perspectives to demonstrate the impossibility of comparison and exchange (193), and to challenge "the taken-for-granted assumptions" (196). While it is inappropriate in their multi-traditional context to install Christianity as normative, so is the expectation of religious neutrality. "To the degree that the discipline of spiritual care is determined by religious and world-view traditions, it will inevitably become a more intrafaith praxis (194)." Their multi-traditional practice-based programme is built around a number of competencies. Some of these are tradition-specific such as ritual competence and theological knowledge, while others are generic such as hermeneutical, communicative and reflective-professional competencies (195).

The fact that non-Christians participate in practical theology in its current Christian-centred form points to two issues worth further consideration. First, Christian practical theology provides opportunities of sufficient utility to disregard divergences, exclusions and other barriers. But let us not forget that this is not a level playing field: as has been shown for

---

[9] https://www.biapt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Short-History.pdf Accessed 17/09/2019.
[10] Whether the name 'practical *theology'* is sustainable for a multi-traditional field with varying ideas about the significance of the divine is an exciting question for future discussion.

chaplaincy and pastoral care (Gilliat-Ray et al. 2013; Ganzevoort et al. 2014), the Christian tradition is still hegemonic with the support of public institutions such as the health service. In order to gain professional and educational accreditation, other traditions adopt and adapt Christianity-based "methods, models, training programs, and organizational structures" (Ganzevoort et al 2014, 186). This might well have positive outcomes for marginalized communities and individuals. Al-Islam (2006) calls for the renewal of Muslim leadership education by retaining those traditional Muslim resources and approaches that stand up to rigorous critique, and by adding critical pedagogy to address internal marginalization and oppression. Of particular interest is Al-Islam's constructive engagement with the work of Paulo Freire rooted in Catholicism. This is but one example of the utility of Christian resources to other traditions. However, it is equally likely that the requirements of alien frameworks lead to self-denial and distortion of one's tradition and values. To what extent is the marginalized Muslim or Buddhist practitioner forced to satisfy external expectations without defining their role on their tradition's terms? Such a negative process of adaptation resembles what Rey Chow calls coercive mimeticism (Goto 2016).

Second and related, the entrance of non-Christians into Christian practical theology might indicate a lack of equivalent opportunities in their own tradition and other alternatives. Tradition-specific UK institutions such as Markfield Institute of Higher Education and Leo Baeck College prepare students for a range of ministerial roles, but offer no broader programmes in practical theology. Within mainstream higher education, non-Christian students and scholars of non-Christian traditions are seriously limited by the binary division of labour between theological study of Christianity and secular study of other religious traditions. Vincent (2016, 162) rightly complains that "the only academically acceptable way to study their own culture is as methodological outsiders".[11] In the next section, I examine how the UK-based PrDs bridge this gap.

Case study Professional Doctorates

For more than a decade, the PrDs at the Universities of Chester, Birmingham, Anglia Ruskin and Glasgow have supported researching professionals not only from a range of UK-based and international Christian backgrounds, but also Buddhists, Muslims, Jews and those

---

[11] Conversely, it discourages the study of Christianity from outsider perspectives.

holding other action-guiding world-views.[12] Recent research by the University of Chester investigated how to develop a PrD curriculum that more directly addresses the needs of a diverse constituency of doctorands with particular attention to international and multi-traditional perspectives.[13] This acknowledged that provision might not fully serve all doctorands and limit recruitment. Taking a "prognostic-adaptive" (van den Berg and Ganzevoort 2014, 179) approach, the research aimed to enlarge positive outcomes of programme design and to minimize negative ones. An anonymous online survey of about 40 alumni from the first four cohorts asked what they valued about the PrDs and what impact their studies had on their professional practice and their theological development. The response rate was about 50%. Anonymity was preserved by excluding personal information and details of awarding institution.

One respondent expressed the tension between the Christian-centrism of the programme and the diversity of doctorands thus:

"I expected the course to be majority Christian, and it was, though multi-denominational. But I was pleased that, in my year, and since, there have been at least 3 Buddhists, mostly from the psychotherapy disciplines, and the course seemed to cater *adequately* for them." (emphasis added)

I question in the following whether 'catering adequately' is sufficient for a Freirean approach that encourages researchers to investigate their own practice. I focus first on perceptions of the scope of the PrDs, and second on the future potential for inter-religious learning.

1. The scope of the PrDs

A good indication of the PrDs' scope is found in the bibliographies of 'key voices'. Across the four institutions, the vast majority of sources belong to *Christian* practical theology, many without naming their Christian-centrism. This confirms Beaudoin's (2016, 18) observation that "in the larger practical theological tradition globally, Christian-ecclesial traditions … supply the intellectual resources for theological work." Most of the sources are grounded in forms of Protestantism, a few are Catholic. British and North American material dominates, while most parts of the world are absent.

One survey respondent experienced the theological breadth of the PrD as serious limiting for those on the margins or outside its scope: "How do we bring Asian, African and Latin American Theological Perspectives on board? Much of the current … program is very English. However, the fact that individual students are allowed to write on issues affecting them is a good start."

Regarding the charge of narrow cultural[14] scope, is it to be expected that a UK-based programme is 'very English'? In fact, might its attraction be the group of British practical theologians who contribute to the innovation of the discipline collectively and individually?[15] Similarly, Lee (2010) recognizes that the way in which her Korean background shapes the curriculum is only beneficial for some students, leaving others excluded. The dilemma of omissions is a shared concern, yet Lee's cultural position is different from the British PrD leaders situated at the core of global academic production.

Lee (250) finds her efforts to overcome the cultural limitations of her curriculum design frustrated by "our textbooks' cultural unilingualism". This problem is also identified by Andraos who collaborates with Stephen Bevans on intercultural, de-colonial pedagogy for the M.Div. programme at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union. Andraos (2012, 10 n.8) laments that most textbooks "continue to evolve around the work of a few European and Euroamerican male scholars." This is unsatisfactory where theological education aims to help diverse cohorts to recognize the contextual and interreligious nature of ministry and theology. "[F]inding textbooks for such a class is unthinkable", and the construction of the

---

[14] The language of publications is also significant for multilingual students.
[15] See the authors' location statements in Bennett et al. (2018).

course reader is "a very challenging task (10)."[16] However, Andraos' teaching team pool their resources, and intentionally include historically oppressed and marginalized voices. He explicitly refers to their cultural and ethnic diversity as a strength in the process. This is not to suggest that only ethnic-minority educators are responsible for introducing material speaking from their perspective.[17] But if pluralization is desirable, to what extent need this be reflected in personnel?

In terms of international and multi-traditional diversity, the examined PrD cohorts exceed the respective programme teams at the time of writing, hence doctorands' research could feed into curriculum design. The enquiry-based approach, as identified by the respondent above, offers continually updated and widened literature searches which could feed a shared repository. The respondent's point about the contextuality of PrD research as a strength is significant for the pluralization of practical theology: where the PrDs recruit a diverse range of doctorands, the practice-based framework destabilizes Christian-centrism and Western-centrism from within.

In order to exploit this diversity for institutional transformation, Andraos (2012, 5) uses "the lens of colonial difference" to expose "the power of Eurocentric educational approaches" as an epistemic issue in order to decolonize the canon. "[C]olonial difference in the multi-racial, multicultural, international classroom is the dominant consensus, often very subtle and silent, that the different representations and systems of cultural knowledge by authors, students, professors, and so forth do not have the same value (7)." I agree with Andraos (ibid) that "[t]his hierarchical relation shapes students' approach to 'academic' knowledge, their relation to other students who come from different places, and to professors, the authority figures representing 'academic' knowledge." In the case of the PrDs, even partial coverage of individual doctorand's research context in reading lists signals to them and others that they are legitimate and integral participants. Second, coverage beyond Western Christian-centric concerns prompts all to examine their own positionality, to reflect critically on their own culture, and to develop intercultural awareness.

---

[16] See also Greider's (2012, 494) vignette about the practical theologian considering to write their own textbook.

[17] See several chapters in Mercer and Miller-McLemore (2016) and Fernandez (2014); also Beaudoin and Turpin (2014).

There are two exceptions in the examined bibliographies, namely Winter's article on

Buddhism and action research (2003), and Foley's book *Theological Reflection across*

Religious Traditions (2015). Unlike Winter's single-tradition insider approach, Foley (2015,

Introduction) writes as a Catholic "somewhat shameless in borrowing ideas and images from

any and every source" without direct involvement of representatives from the traditions he

uses. Like the PrDs, Foley (ibid.) grapples with the demands of the diversity of seminarians

while retaining theological reflection as a key process by opening it up beyond its explicitly

Christian framework: "reflective believing is my attempt to provide effective, yet

intentionally ambiguous, language for naming this evolving concept." Although Foley draws

on some non-Christian material, 'reflective believing' is not the outcome of an egalitarian

synthesis of a range of existing practices.[18] Similarly, in their chapter on reflection and

reflexivity, Bennett et al. (2018) present what seems to be a generic process but it remains

predominantly built on Christian and secular sources. The only religious exception is Jewish

thinker Emmanuel Levinas accessed via the Catholic Terry Veling.

A step in a different direction is Grace's (2011) design of contemplative pedagogy drawing

on primary sources from a wide range of traditions. A fully enacted process of pluralization

is evident in the collaboration between a Presbyterian Christian and a Conservative Jew on

bi-traditional practical theological education[19] in 'wisdom formation' (Hess 2013). This

involves "identifying commonalities and differences in order to forge *together* new ways of

living in faith companionship (339)." "This longitudinal teaching-collaboration reframed how

to even conceive what we were about in our critical inquiry together (343)." Here is an

example of the active participation of minority voices in the displacement of the "hegemony

of Christian theology" in favour of "a mutuality of everyone being both host and guest"

(Ford 2013).

2. Peer learning across and through diversities

---

[18] See Hess's review (2017, 193): "My only criticism is that given his desire to consider reflective believing across religious traditions, it would have been helpful for him to include in his appendices examples from other religious traditions. There are many varieties of such practices emerging in the comparative theologies context, as well as in inter-religious education."

[19] Greggs (2010a) discusses UK-based bi-traditional youth work training.

Unlike the solitary PhD process, PrDs are designed as 'communities of learning' which are highly apposite for practical theological work (Bennett et al., 2018, Chapter 4). The aim of developing practical wisdom anchors research in a community of practice which generated the initial stimulus for inquiry and is the envisaged target of transformation. The PrD as a community of research practice is formed of "people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner in Bennett et al. 2018, 83). While specifics differ between the examined institutions, all incorporate formal peer learning[20] and participate in the Consortium's Summer School with cross-institutional work-in-progress sessions, and formal peer networking. Given that the duration of most PrDs is six years, doctorands have a significant amount of time to make personal connections, and to shape attitudes and habits.

When asked about the overall positives of their PrD, three quarters of respondents highlighted the primary significance of peer learning and peer support, explicitly crediting the diversity of peers for their progress. One respondent stated: "I was impressed by the range of people in my cohort, and their considerable breadth challenged my preconceptions, and enabled me to sharpen my thinking a lot more than anticipated." (R6 Q5) This is explored further by PrD alumna Linda Robinson (Bennett et al., 2018, 89): "It was of no consequence that our research areas were all different. Indeed, this might well have been strength as we committed to peer supervision that became more attentive and challenging."

These positive evaluations coincide with the PrD creators' views. They (Bennett et al. (2018, 90) elaborate that in order to be effective and sustainable, communities of practice should "embody *critical* enquiry" that makes constructive use of diversity: "The perspectives brought by others in the community of practice challenge taken-for-granted ways of seeing by furnishing a view from another place and by offering comparative viewpoints." Conversely, they warn that homogeneity might reinforce tacit knowledge by colluding in the unquestioned perpetuation of collectively held assumptions. This is of great interest to pluralizing practical theology since it suggests that effective peer learning in community

---

[20] Some PrDs use action learning sets, "a continuous process of learning and reflection that happens with the support of a group or 'set' of colleagues, working on real issues, with the intention of getting things done (McGill and Brockbank 2003, Chapter 1)."

does not require belonging to the same culture and world-view tradition, in fact it can be significantly enhanced by diversity.

In addition to the positive contributions of peer learning to research projects, Bennett et al. (2018, 84f.) explore the significance of the process as an outcome in its own right. "Whilst communities of practice may not have a common faith-commitment around which to gather, the extent to which shared values serve to generate significant levels of trust and mutual solidarity must surely be at the heart of building and maintaining their lives." Although the authors are aware that encountering difference in this context might appear "to pose a threat to one's own identity or values" (98), they advocate a move to embracing the anti-hegemonic dynamic introduced earlier by Andraos: "[encounters with forms of *alterity]* release one from the pretensions towards universality (ibid)." Alumni's appreciation of peer group diversity points to an effective model of mitigating against anxiety and resistance caused by destabilizing interactions.

3. PrD impact on professional and institutional contexts

One of the main aims of practice-based research is capacity building for the benefit of the researchers' professional and institutional contexts. Alumni report that their research has led to development and transformation of their workplaces through multiplication of best practice, instigation of new initiatives, dissemination of findings for example through workshops and teaching.

Consider this powerful statement about personal and professional transformation:

 "First, coming from a highly patriarchal environment, [the PrD] has made it easier for me to love, respect and collaborate with women in ways that shock my peers. Second, [the] insistence on feminist theology was a great eye opener. I now refuse to work in committees where women are not represented."

This respondent also reports a profound transformation of their perception of other marginalized groups, and how this applies to their professional practice. Several respondents commend the PrDs for developing their competence in collaborative working

in reflective practice teams, research teams, and collaborative leadership. This suggests that, after several years in this peer learning environment, alumni continue in the *habitus* for the collaborative generation of knowledge. They actively contribute to communities of practice where goals and values are held in common while differences and tensions within the group are acknowledged and explored (Bennett et al. 2018, 86).

This applies directly to the pluralization of practical theology. As explored in the previous section, survey respondents experienced diversity in peer learning as beneficial. It seems reasonable to expect that they carry this over into the collaborative working in their professional contexts attested to above. PrD alumni can thus be multipliers of a model of internally diverse networks that are invested with social capital, trust, mutuality and critical friendship (ibid, 84f.). Further research is required to ascertain the extent to which PrD peer learning is currently experienced as fully egalitarian by international and non-Christian doctorands or whether there is still need for improvement. By modelling intentionally decolonial ways of tackling current challenges in a collaborative environment, the international and multi-traditional PrD community can make a significant contribution to the transformation of relations in institutions and society.

My starting point was the quest for a transformed practical theological community sharing conversations about the objects and methodologies of this emerging pluralized endeavour so that participation can be constructive and authentic for all. Analysis of the PrD survey identifies as important steps the naming of tradition-specific work as such without retreating into a separatist sphere[21], and the explicit, intentional widening of scope beyond the West and Christianity. The latter should be attempted collaboratively in an egalitarian community of learning where voices from different traditions offer their resources, and collectively wrestle with aims, approaches, and concepts, be they transferable, convergent, incompatible or negotiable. Within parts of the wider PrD community, this is already work-in-progress (Bennett et al. 2018). In the final part of this paper, I consider the implications for the discipline and for BIAPT.

---

[21] Separatist moves might be useful for specific endeavours. BIAPT supports several Special Interest Groups but none of them relate explicitly to non-Christian traditions.

What's in it for the hegemony?

Given the discipline's historical roots in Christianity and its ongoing Western Christian-centrism, it is necessary to ask whether privileged Christian practical theologians have anything to gain from pluralization and its manifestations in publications and associations. I explore this through debates in Christian leadership education, and in internal Christian apologetics[22].

Literature on Christian ministerial formation emphasizes the need to prepare for a contemporary social landscape that makes encounter with diversity inevitable, including cultural and religious diversity. As quoted earlier, van den Berg and Ganzevoort (2014, 180) point to a mismatch between leadership education and current and future social and institutional realities. Regarding the situation in England, this was corroborated by an earlier study of Anglican theological colleges (Gilliat-Ray 2003) which examined ordinands' preparation for work in a multi-faith society, and their theological engagement with religious diversity. Gilliat-Ray (11) cites educators' argument that "Christianity can no longer be taught and studied in isolation from the other faith communities which surround it" as a driver for the coverage of inter-cultural and multi-faith issues. This is but one aspect of Christian leaders' training in contextual approaches to theology and the acquisition of pastoral competence for ministry that relates to the needs of local multi-faith communities (15).

As a partial update on Gilliat-Ray's study, my brief survey of the current Common Awards portfolio[23], from which individual training institutions choose, finds some explicit integration of diversity training. Several modules offer the study of global Christian and non-Christian traditions, religious diversity in England, and theological and practical aspects of inter-faith engagement. In terms of learning methods, some of these modules incorporate an experiential dimension of direct encounter and preparation for future roles in church

---

[22] For this categorization see Graham (2017b, 74f).
[23] https://www.dur.ac.uk/common.awards/modules/outlines.titles/ Accessed on 17 September 2019.

leadership and ministry, community engagement and collaboration with an explicit focus on the common good, community cohesion and anti-oppressive practice.

The social context in the Netherlands is similarly described as characterized by pluralization and also deinstitutionalization, both of which are claimed to necessitate adjustments in training for care professionals "because their future workplace in most cases will be interreligious" (Ganzevoort et al. 2014, 181). A number of North American Catholic theological educators (Lefebure 2006; Andraos 2012; Clooney 2013; Foley 2015) echo this concern for "teaching for cosmopolis", a concept developed by Jesuit Bernard Lonergan (Gunn 2018). This approach negotiates between rootedness in one's own tradition/s and openness to the other.[24] A decidedly more political stance is taken by Christian theological educators who demand heightened attention to cultural and racial diversity not simply as preparation for service, but as a prophetic vision for justice to be realized within theological institutions and wider society (Fernandez 2014).

Analogous to Christian educators, Greider (2012, 493) emphasizes contextuality as a methodological foundation of the academic branch of Christian practical theology: "Practical theologians commonly assert that the primary text of our field is lived experience." She argues that since contemporary lived experience is characterized by encounter with religious diversity, research in Christian practical theology needs to attend to this more intentionally and more substantially if it is to serve Christians and their communities. Recognizing contemporary lived religious identities as more fluid and hybrid than neatly demarcated categories capture, Beaudoin mounts a fundamental challenge against the object of practical theology. He (2016, 23) questions whether "Christianicity is adequate to the range of needs of contemporary persons for choosing integral lives that make sense to them". Practical theology's 'Christianicity' is defined as the "active, ongoing invention of Christian experience (…), what is taken to be real for Christians and how that being-taken is generated" (18f). In the face of deinstitutionalization and multiple identities, Beaudoin rejects the discipline's exclusive aim to discover "*Christian* significance in practice" (8; emphasis added), and "the need to maintain a Christian center" (24). Practical theological method is reconceived as hermeneutically open to otherness and multiplicity.

---

[24] See also the Christian ecumenical Cambridge Theological Federation's motto 'roots down, walls down' (Bennett 2006).

Should the multi-traditionality of the 'world out there' be studied in tradition-specific enclaves or in shared fora? In leadership education, experiential learning with other traditions is pedagogically consistent. Gilliat-Ray (2003, 15) attests this for religious diversity education as part of ordination training by the Church of England. Amsterdam's VU is a multi-traditional institution with students and educators from a range of traditions (Ganzevoort et al. 2014). The Interfaith Center of New York and the multi-traditional Hartford Seminary in Connecticut recognize that not only Christian leaders need to be prepared for diverse contexts (Yuskaev 2013). Yuskaev (367) makes a strong case for the embedding of multi-traditionality in educational programmes not only in the curriculum, but also as embodied in peer learning (366). Similarly to the PrDs, such learning environments "promote an awareness that religious diversity is a valuable resource for the students' professional development and subsequent careers" (367). The significance given to participation in a diverse learning *community* in theological education should translate into constructive inter-traditional and inter-cultural engagement within the academic branch of practical theology. Using BIAPT as example, the opening up of its membership enables the influx of the personnel necessary to become a multi-traditional microcosm for mutual benefit, including its Christian members.

With regards to internal Christian apologetics, there are two notable arguments why all Christians should engage in multi-traditional encounter, one on an evangelical basis, the other drawing on Christian liberation theology. I suggest that both are eminently applicable to Christian practical theologians.

First, Greggs (2010b) counters Christians' possible resistance to engagement with religious others by arguing for its legitimacy and imperative on the exclusively Christian grounds of following the example of Christ. In my view, Greggs' strategy has much potential because it addresses the affective dimension of this leap of faith beset with "risk, loss and openness to change" (Bennett et al. 2018, 97). Affect is also recognized by Beaudoin (2016, 12) in the pluralization of practical theology: "It is threatening for many [Christian] practical theologians to imagine releasing a Christian center for practical theology, but that is exactly what confronts us, with no guarantee of what comes next." Greggs seeks to overcome the threat of uncertainty in his examination of the biblical representation of Jesus as religious outsider and his encounters with members of the Samaritan community and with Gentiles.

This leads Greggs (210) to the necessity for Christians to face "the reality of the religious other in the societies in which we live … [which] is not about ignoring differences or particularity, but it is rather about tending to their needs (and allowing them to tend to ours), recognizing their faith, hoping for a future feast alongside them". In addition, Bennett et al. (2018, 98) argue that "encounters with forms of *alterity* … [lead to] the realisation that the dynamic of destabilisation and of being pushed beyond the boundaries of one's certainty are at the very heart of what Christian theology proclaims as the gospel."

Alternatively, the argument drawn from Christian liberation theology is overtly political in its effort to overcome unequal power structures, the demonization of difference, and related marginalisation in postcolonial, multi-traditional communities. In a radical move, Shannahan (2019, 132) proposes to counter "the contemporary re-invention of divisive politics of Empire" in Britain with "an affirmation of the liberative potential of difference". "When we gaze on the 'common good' from outside and below, dominant perceptions about multiculturalism are disrupted, making it possible to begin to re-imagine a new and liberative theology of the common good that is written by the socially excluded (143)." Navigating the hermeneutical dilemma that 'welcoming the stranger' has the potential to be counter-hegemonic as well as affirmative of hegemony, Shannahan (ibid) argues that "it is necessary to forge a 'hermeneutics of the demonised,' which subverts insider/outsider divides, 'clash of civilisations' essentialism and hegemonic binary framings of guest and host." This pushes practical theology towards a future-orientation that is less concerned with roots to "focus more on routes" (138). I wholeheartedly agree with Shannahan's (145f) design for action: "If the mobilising of minds around a new discourse of diversity which posits difference as a source of potential liberation rather than as a problem seeking a solution is to be effective, it is essential that we overcome the bunker mentality that can inhibit activists and academics. A diverse network of reflective practitioners and activist academics is needed." BIAPT's opening of its membership has the potential to become such a network.

Conclusion

This paper has explored significant factors and actors in the constructive pluralization of practical theology. Instead of extending hospitality that leaves intact the asymmetrical positions of (Christian) host and (non-Christian) guests, practical theology can model a rhizomatic community of practice expressive of international and multi-traditional concerns and approaches. My discussion of PrD alumni perceptions, and literature in theological education and academic practical theology leads me to suggest four interrelated steps for practical theologians to:

1. become explicit about tradition-specific practical theology including Christian practical theology which historically laid exclusive claim to the field;

2. open a shared conversation about different traditions' stake in practical theology, common ground and each tradition's specific capital;

3. remedy the ways in which hierarchies of knowledge negatively affect practice, research and education;

4. actively pursue the pluralization of practitioner networks, research teams, conferences and publications.

References

Al-Islam, A. (2006). 'Educating American Muslim Leadership (Men and Women) for the Twenty-First Century', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 9.2, 73-78.

Andraos, M. (2012). 'Engaging Diversity in Teaching Religion and Theology: An Intercultural, De-colonial Epistemic Perspective', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 15.1, 3-15.

Baker, C. (2013). 'Roots and Shoots and the Curious Case of Schleiermacher's Tree (aka 'Is Rhizomatic Truth Seceding Arborescent Reality?), *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 17.2, 209-231.

Beaudoin, T. (2016). 'Why Does Practice Matter Theologically?' In: J.A. Mercer and B. Miller-McLemore (eds.), *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, Leiden: Brill, 8-32.

Beaudoin, T. and K. Turpin (2014). 'White Practical Theology', In: K.A. Cahalan and G.S. Mikoski (eds.) *Opening the Field of Practical Theology : An Introduction*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 251-269.

Bennett, Z. (2006), 'Ecumenical Theological Education as a Practice of Peace', *Religious Education*, 101.3, 331— 346.

Bennett, Z. and E. Graham (2008). 'The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology: Developing the Researching Professional in Practical Theology in Higher Education', *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 5.1, 33-51.

Bennett, Z., E. Graham, S. Pattison, H. Walton (2018). *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Clooney, F.X., SJ, (2013). 'Comparative Theological Learning as an Ordinary Part of Theological Education', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 16.4, 322-328.

Fernandez, E.S. (ed.), (2014). *Teaching for a Culturally Diverse and Racially Just World*, Eugene: Cascade Books.

Foley, E. (2015). *Theological Reflection across Religious Traditions*, London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. eBook.

Ford, D. (2013). 'Religion Out of the Box: Dialogues with Academy, Society and Culture', Edward Cadbury Lectures, Birmingham.

Ganzevoort, R.R., M.Ajouaou, A. van der Braak, E. de Jongh and L. Minnema (2014). 'Teaching Spiritual Care in an Interfaith Context', *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 27.2, 178-197.

Gilliat-Ray, S. (2003). 'Ministerial Formation in a Multi-Faith Society', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 6.2, 9-17.

Gilliat-Ray, S., M. Ali and S. Pattison (2013). *Understanding Muslim Chaplaincy*, Farnham: Ashgate.

Goto, C. (2016). 'Writing In Compliance with the Racialized "Zoo" of Practical Theology'. In: J.A. Mercer and B. Miller-McLemore (eds.), *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, Leiden: Brill, 110-133.

Grace, F. (2011). 'Learning as a Path, Not a Goal: Contemplative Pedagogy – Its Principles and Practices', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 14.2, 99-124.

Graham, E. (2017a). 'The State of the Art: Practical Theology Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: New Directions in Practical Theology.' *Theology*, 120.3, 172–180.

Graham, E. (2017b). *Apologetics Without Apology. Speaking of God in a World Troubled by Religion*, Eugene: Cascade Books.

Greggs, T. (2010a) 'Inter-Faith Pedagogy for Muslims and Christians: Scriptural Reasoning and Christian and Muslim Youth Work', *Discourse: Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies*, 9.2, n.p.

Greggs, T. (2010b). 'Legitimizing and Necessitating Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Dynamics of Inter-Faith for Individual Faith Communities', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 4.2, 194-211.

Greider, K. (2012). 'Religious Pluralism and Christian-Centrism', In: *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology,* edited by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Malden: Blackwell, 493-503.

Gunn, D. (2018). 'Teaching for Cosmopolis: Bernard Lonergan's Hopeful Vision for Education in a Globalized World', *Religious Education*, 113.1, 26-37.

Hess, L. (2013). 'Being Shaped by the Ritual Practices of Others: a Classroom Reflection', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 16.4, 338-345.

Hess, M.E. (2017) A Review of "Theological Reflection across Religious Traditions: The Turn to Reflective Believing", *Religious Education*, 112.2, 192-193.

Lee, B. (2010). 'Broadening the Boundary of "Textbooks" for Intercultural Communication in Religious Education', *Religious Education*, 105.3, 249-252.

Lefebure, L. (2006). 'Catholic Theological Education in a Religiously Pluralistic Age', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 9.2, 85-90.

McGill, I. and Brockbank, A. (2003). *Action Learning Handbook Powerful Techniques for Education, Professional Development*. London: RoutledgeFalmer. eBook.

Mercer, J.A. and B. Miller-McLemore (eds.) (2016). *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, Leiden: Brill.

Miller-McLemore, B. (2012). 'Introduction: The Contributions of Practical Theology', In: *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology,* edited by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Malden: Blackwell, 28-49.

Pirner, M.L., J. Laehnemann, W. Haussmann and S. Schwarz (eds.) (2018). *Public Theology, Religious Diversity, and Interreligious Learning*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Shannahan, C. (2019). 'Immanuel Kant Believed in Zombies: Multiculturalism and Spirituality in the Postcolonial City', In: Dunn, Jonathan, Joziasse, Heleen, Patta, Raj Bharat and Duggan, Joseph F. (2019) *Multiple Faiths in Postcolonial Cities Living Together After Empire*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 131-151.

Van den Berg, J.A. and R.R. Ganzevoort (2014). ,The Art of Creating Futures – Practical Theology and a Strategic Research Sensitivity for the Future', *Acta Theologica*, 34.2, 166-185.

Vincent, A. (2016), 'The necessity of a Jewish systematic theology', *STK*, 92.3-4, 159-170.

Winter, R. (2003), 'Buddhism and action research: towards an appropriate model of inquiry for the caring professions', *Educational Action Research*, 11.1, 141-160.

Yuskaev, T. (2013). 'Staying Put: Local Context as Classroom for Multifaith Education', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 16.4, 362-370.