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PRACTICAL THEOLOGY'S CONTRIBUTION TO RELIGIOUS AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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This study aims at clarifying the nature, method, and goal of a re-created theological discipline currently known as Practical Theology. Although this Practical Theology has been in the works for twenty-five years or more, it still remains in general poorly understood by many theologians who reject, or at least ignore, its potential value. These theologians seem to be turned away from considering Practical Theology seriously, often apparently because of its historical background and frequently misunderstood title, Practical Theology. But from the evaluation proposed in this study, Practical Theology could actually contribute significantly toward helping even these theology professors to profit positively from its theological approach to studying and understanding the Good News. The purpose of this essay, then, is, by critical analysis, to foster a more accurate understanding of the origin, nature and characteristic methodology of Practical Theology,[1] and hence of its potential importance for

[1]This study flows from two previous essays which inspired initial interest in Practical Theology. Cf. Ma. Lucia L. Natividad, Markus Locker and Joseph L. Roche, "The Use of Scripture in Theology and Religious Education: A Holistic Approach," *Loyola Schools Review* 3 (2002): 3–32; and Markus Locker, Ma. Lucia L.

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religious and theological education in the 21st century, particularly in our Philippine context.

This study is developed in four sections. The introductory first section provides a brief account of some shifts in theology that have provided the impetus for re-creating the old discipline of Pastoral Theology. It then briefly sketches the general history of theology from apostolic times, as introductory to an initial exposition of Practical Theology's history and new focus. The second section proposes a description of the nature of Practical Theology in a three-step, deepening process which brings out both the positive and weaker dimensions of its present status. The third section shifts to its self-defining characteristic methodology of focusing on Christian Practices, the key element in its unique approach, while the final section analyzes the potential practical impact of Practical Theology on both religious and theological education, particularly in terms of the ministry of the Word in our local Catholic Church in the Philippines. The study ends with some brief recommendations for how to move forward.

Some Basic Theological Shifts: Proximate Origin of Today's Practical Theology

In the period of post-World War II and Vatican II twenty years later, significant shifts in Catholic theological education took place. From a *sociological* viewpoint, many theological studies moved from seminaries to universities with graduate Theology Programs. This

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Natividad, and Joseph L. Roche, "Grounding A Holistic Approach To Scripture in 'Practical Theology'," *Loyola Schools Review* 5 (2006): 57–72.

Regarding this study, since Practical Theology today refers to many disparate ways of theologizing, a choice was made to focus sharply on Practical Theology as exercised in one basic area (religious and theological education), by one select group of practitioners (C. Dykstra, D. Bass, M. Volf and A. Purves), and focused on its potential to contribute significantly to religious and theological education in the Philippines.

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involved considerable changes in the theological faculty, basic orientation, and the majority of students taking up the various courses and degrees. From a *methodological* view of Catholic theology, the shift was from a basically objective scholastic approach to the subject in transcendental philosophy and theology—as exemplified by two major Jesuit theologians, Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan. They brought a new focus on human experience and historical praxis which was captured in a summary description of Vatican II's "Church in the Modern World" as moving from dogma to intent and implications.[2]

Since Vatican II's triumphant years, however, post-modernism has, to a certain extent, taken over with its relativistic and pluralistic vision, which has rejected many major epistemological and metaphysical claims of both the traditional objective and the modern subject-centered theologies. Nevertheless, beyond these negative aspects, a good number of commentators point out how post-modernism offers several positive supporting themes for Practical Theology, such as its recognition of the subjective dimension of human action, the importance of the community in perceiving reality, and the significance of narrative and story.[3]

While recognizing these very broad shifts in Catholic theological education, then, we wish to focus sharply on the area traditionally called Pastoral Theology. In pre-Vatican II times, pastoral theology was definitely a peripheral theological discipline in which the results

[2]The following is drawn largely from two initial articles drawing attention to the emergence of the transformed pastoral theology newly termed Practical Theology. Cf. R. Maddox, "The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 550–72, and R. Imbelli and T. Groome, "Signposts Towards a Pastoral Theology," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 127–37.

[3]Cf. Harold Horell, "Fostering Hope: Christian Religious Education in a Postmodern Age," *Religious Education* 99 (Winter 2004): 5–21; also Joanmarie Smith, *A Context for Christianity in the 21st Century* (Thomas More, 1995), and more recently, Benedict XVI's inspiring second encyclical, *Spe Salvi: Saved in Hope* (Makati: Word & Life, 2007).

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of the core theological disciplines (Scripture, systematics, Church history) were applied to liturgical rites, homiletics, catechesis and counseling, etc.—none of which were presumed to have significant theological substance of their own. Since in such a view, pastoral theology was concerned merely with application, it was less demanding and rigorous, mostly relegated to part-time teachers, teaching at odd times, about content which lacked any clear, integrative vision of its own.[4] One unfortunate result was that such an understanding of pastoral theology offered the substantive theological disciplines an excuse for not addressing current major pastoral questions and theological concerns.

The Practical Theology that has developed over the past thirty years or more represents a complete shift from the above "application" view of Pastoral Theology. According to one of its major proponents,

> Practical theology is gaining new shape. It is stepping out of the shadow of being viewed only as the application of findings and guidelines developed by the so-called foundational theological disciplines of exegetical, historical and systematic theology. Rather the new practical theology is reminding all of theology of its practical nature.[5]

The new practical theology corrects the core deficiency of the former pastoral theology by revising its understanding of the relation between theory and practice, stressing its much more intimate and reciprocal quality than the notion of application could possibly convey. A major principle of the new Practical Theology is this: theory proceeds from practical interests, and practice itself is theory-laden.[6] The new

[4]This brief sketch of the traditional understanding of pastoral theology draws on the originating articles identified in footnote 2.

[5]Quoted from the Foreword in the series "Studies in Practical Theology" by Don Browning, et. al., in J.A. van der Ven, *Formation of the Moral Self* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), ix.

[6]On this point, among the deluge of more recent sources, cf. Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 14–22, which develops the complex, ever

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practical theology, then, exemplifies the current stress on historical consciousness by its heightened appreciation of Christian theology's original concrete contexts. The Christian creeds are not timeless truths dropped down ready-made from heaven, but arise within a specific historical setting of the ecclesial community's reflection on its pastoral life and practice.

Foundational Insight

What perhaps is most fundamental in this new practical theology is its basic, foundational insight into theology's saving, profoundly dialogic nature and purpose—proposed as intrinsic to the whole theological enterprise.[7] This insight is articulated as an objective real force that must permeate the entire theological work and undertaking, based on the conviction that the *raison d'etre* of all theology is to communicate the Gospel of salvation and elicit from believers their living commitment of Christian Faith, both personal and communitarian.

But this implies that the more comprehensive issue at stake here is not just practical theology in itself, but the very nature of the whole theological enterprise, and specifically for this present study, authentic religious and theological education. All theological disciplines, flowing from the Biblical narrative and faith vision, must ultimately aim at active engagement and transformative action in the daily living out the Faith. The basis for this claim is that Christian Faith is a way of life which cannot be reduced to an academic intellectual vision, basic moral stance, or detached prayerful contemplation.[8] Many of today's varied

changing "Theory to Practice" relationship through the pre-modern, modern and postmodern views of reality and its implications for Practical Theology.

[7]Cf. Raymond Webb's paper, "Catholic Practical Theology: Challenge and Opportunity," as summarized by Kathleen A. Cahalan in *CTSA Proceedings* 58 (2003), 146.

[8]This stress on Christian Faith as a way of life is developed in Joseph L. Roche, *Practical Catechesis: The Christian Faith as a Way of Life* (Quezon City: Phoenix, 2008).

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theological currents exemplify this vision: for example, the current stress on integrating moral theology and spirituality, or Spirit-Christology, or the pneumatic-Christocentricity claimed for all Christian theology, or the ecclesiology of the believing subjective community, especially the local Church, or finally the importance of the liturgical enactment of Christian identity as a call to action (mission).[9]

Having affirmed this broader, comprehensive perspective of Practical Theology, however, one must add that the need for a specific course in Practical Theology for practical concerns is recognized by all current commentators.[10] Such a need is affirmed, at the very least, for a period of transition. More realistically, perhaps, there will probably always be a need for such a course which consciously takes its perspective from the contemporary life of the Church, the daily living out of the Christian Faith in today's world. Such a practical theology course would still differ from the Biblical or systematic theology courses which also relate their findings to the current scene because the practical theology course consciously begins with, and relates immediately to, the current living Christian Faith of the people of God (the Church) in the world, and appropriates the past tradition from this vantage point.

One explicit concern that animates much of current Practical Theology is the formation of a community for transformation, according to God's salvific reign revealed in Jesus Christ. This is called by many the foundational praxis around which all other pastoral practices cohere. Christian conversion always takes place in a specific social situation that demands specific renunciations and commitments. Practical theology, in a nutshell, seeks to inform, form and help

[9]Cf. James W. Fowler, "The Emerging New Shape of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology: International Perspectives*, eds. F. Schweitzer and J. van der Ven (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 75–92.

[10]Cf. Raymond Webb, "The Development of a Catholic Practical Theology," *Chicago Studies* 45 (2006): 105–17.

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transform that praxis of both the members of the community and of the community itself.[11]

Brief Historical Background of Practical Theology

Theology in early Christian practice included not only the saving knowledge of God—the *habitus* of the Christian believer—but the study, instruction, and discipline needed to form this *habitus*. This general approach shifted in the scholastic period when the place for theologizing changed from the episcopal/pastoral parish setting or monastery to the independent university. St. Thomas' view of theology as primarily a speculative science took over, characterized by the creation of scholastic *Summae theologiae* which became one of the major sources of university theology. These all-embracing summaries of the doctrines of the Faith were created through logical rational methodology developed in and through subtle academic, philosophical argumentation. Unfortunately, as time went on, this scholastic approach gradually began to crystallize into petrified systems which so concentrated on doctrinal clarifications that it profited little from actual living Christian faith, and exerted very little influence on that life. The result was a theology whose relation to human life became problematic, in the words of Congar.[12]

In contrast, as a process of reconceptualizing theology, Practical Theology began as a non-technical theology, then moved into a basic

[11]Cf. Don Browning, "Toward a Fundamental Strategic Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology: International Perspective,* eds. F. Schweitzer and J. van der Ven (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 54–74. Browning's specific approach is modified in some ways by Katherine A. Calahan and James R. Nieman, "Mapping the Field of Practical Theology," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education and Christian Ministry*, eds. Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 62–85.

[12]Fowler, "Emerging New Shape," 76–78; also Edward Farley, "Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm," in *Practical Theology,* ed. Don Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 22–24.

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moral stance, and on to a "Functional-Specialty Discipline," and finally to Practical Theology as described above.

New Focus: Recovering Theology as a Practical Discipline

Some commentators stress Practical Theology's self-becoming process in terms of rather distinct steps, which indicate something of its nature. Initially Practical Theology took the form of a "Functional-Specialty Theological Discipline" which gradually developed the idea of the broadened task of transforming current Christian praxis into more authentic forms by bringing in the normative convictions of Christian Faith—thus calling for recovery of theology as a practical discipline in itself.[13] This step has been clearly manifested in the current re-integrating of a spiritual ethics with doctrinal reflections by focusing on ethics as cultivating abiding virtues and character. Such an approach stresses the need to form the person's cognitive and affective character from which good moral acts flow. This integration actually parallels early Christian theology as both a *habitus* and a discipline.

But perhaps the more significant step in Practical Theology's self-becoming process was recovering the Socio-Political Dimensions of Theology. This is exemplified in liberation theology viewed as "a practical activity characterized by concreteness in dealing with particular events, stories, and witnesses," rather than limiting theology to the role of an analysis of general concepts.[14] From a different starting point, the new theological Feminism exemplifies the same thrust. Both new theological currents have called for a de-rationalization of the still current typical theological reflection dominated by a western scientific

[13]Recovering Theology as a practical discipline is stressed by many commentators. Cf. e.g. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* I, 11–76.

[14]Cf. Denis P. McCann, "Practical Theology and Social Action," in Don Browning, ed., *Practical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 105–25. For a recent work on the socio-political dimension of theology, cf. the critique by the U.S.-Latino theologian Orlando O. Espin, *Grace and Humanness: Theological Reflections Because of Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007).

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[Enlightenment] rationality. A final step was noted in the renewed insistence on re-affirming first order theological activities—such as creating liturgies, composing hymns, and shepherding discipleship—which exercise the reciprocal relationship between doctrine and worship (prayer, liturgies, etc.) within actual moral daily living.

Such a schematic overview of the self-becoming process of Practical Theology offers some initial pointers toward understanding the more comprehensive, developed new view of Practical Theology's very nature.

Searching for the Specific Nature of Practical Theology

There is a major difficulty in presenting a simple, clear, objective description of the nature of the theological discipline currently called Practical Theology. Despite its many commonly shared factors, there are almost as many divergent Practical Theologies as there are major practical theologians and commentators. Pluralism rules the day.[15] In such a pluralistic context, this study proposes to attempt at least some basic description of the nature of practical theology by adopting three specific steps: (1) focusing sharply on one basic area in which practical theology operates, namely, religious and theological education; (2) choosing one basic common approach and group of theologians who can reasonably be accredited as leaders in that area, Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra, and (3) proposing three successive descriptions which move from the simplest to the more complex and comprehensive. Since the first two steps are evident from the rational flow of this study's content, as well as from its constant reference to the same basic primary sources, we can immediately address the proposed series of descriptive definitions.

[15]This pluralism simply adds to the more intrinsic difficulty of defining Practical Theology's nature arising from its widely misunderstood "practical" name and essence.

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A. Practical Theology as Inherent in Faith Itself

In simple terms, Practical Theology is aimed at helping people today—especially lay leaders, religious and theological educators—live out their Christian Faith with integrity, vitality and creativity. It does this by fostering critical reflection on Christian Faith as a way of life shaped by participation in basic Christian practices. Practical Theology's primary focus is the actual capacity of individual believers and communities to practice a Christian life-giving way of life. Through theological engagement with specific, concrete dimensions of personal, social and ecclesial existence, Practical Theology seeks to study, clarify and strengthen the shape of Christian living in and for the world.[16]

Hence Practical Theology is a way of reflecting and thinking intrinsic to the life of faith itself—in which every community of believers engages in one way or another while striving to live in ways that respond to the merciful loving call of the Triune God made known to us in Jesus Christ. How can, and how do, our lives and our life together share the way of life that reflects God's own life of Love? What is the shape of a contemporary way of life that truly is life-giving in and for the sake of the world? How can the Christian community, the Church, foster such a way of life for the good of all creation?

Concretely, Practical Theology also refers to a disciplined, academically-formed way of thinking that emerges in the teaching, research and ministry of a certain number of religious and theological educators. This discipline is closely related to, but not identical with, the contextually alert, practice-shaping general theological reflection just described. As a specific theological discipline, Practical Theology involves patterns of discipline, criticism, and scope that flow from the norms of scholarly inquiry and the pedagogical needs of the Church. But the inner core of this academic Practical Theology flows directly from the life of faith itself, and thus academic Practical Theologians

[16]For the source of this basic description, cf. Dorothy Bass in *Prism* (Dec 2006) online at http://www.yale.edu/ism/Prism/prism-a2.htm.

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play a specific role within and on behalf of the way of life they share with other Christians—a role of leadership through teaching and research conducted in service of this way of living Christian life.[17]

B. Practical Theology as Serving a Way of Life

A second approach to Practical Theology's nature arises from the very common complaint of college students regarding theological topics: "But what does that have to do with *real* life?" Moreover, after all the critically articulated objective academic responses, the feeling of inadequacy still remains. True, there are still some theology teachers who continue to teach and write as if they could not be bothered by the trite problems of their students' daily life. But the complaint is against a much larger number of theology courses which in presenting the great theological themes of the Revelation, Christology, Trinity, etc., often make little or no effort to link these truths to the mundane matters of daily life. Theology teachers rightly focus on conceptual difficulties raised in understanding the Faith, but in the process they often seem to miss or ignore the larger significance of these doctrines.[18]

In addition, contemporary academics are characterized by the commonly ever-increasing specialization as a necessary condition for fundamental research. As exercised in today's conventional view of theology, this often involves the unfortunate consequence of separating the research from the rightful overarching subject of all theology, namely, living the Good News of the Gospel. Such a view of its research defines theology as a theoretical rather than a practical science,

[17]Cf. e.g. James Fowler, "Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian Lives," in Don Browning, ed., *Practical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 148–66, and Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry* I: Practical Theology (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2003), 3–68.

[18]This description is drawn primarily from Miroslav Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,* eds. M.Volf and D. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 245–63.

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and thus the scholarly interests of theologians are not concerned with the realities and challenges of daily living as Christians today.[19]

In contrast, Practical Theology's foundational insight is that theology is more properly taken to be a practical science—science in the broad sense of a critical, methodological disciplined reflection—whose purpose is not simply to deliver knowledge (a plausible intellectual vision) but rather to serve a way of life (a compelling account of a way of life). Hence this is best done within the pursuit of the Christian way of life, involving the complex relations between beliefs and practices or, put more in terms of disciplines, between systematic theology as a critical reflection on beliefs, and the Christian way of life as the sum of Christian practices.[20]

But how exactly do Christian beliefs and practices intersect? A critical study of their complex inter-relations provides sound ground for developing this second descriptive definition of the nature and role of Practical Theology.

Belief-Shaped Practices

Simply put, beliefs about Jesus Christ—who he is, what he did and does—, expressed in the form of the biblical narratives and

[19]This critique of theology as a theoretical science was confirmed—rightly or wrongly—by a recent "Appeal and Proposal" from the Association of Catechetical Centers and Colleges with Religious Education (ACCCRE), signed by Bishop Socrates B. Villegas, Chairman of ECCCE, to drop the title of "Department of Theology" at the college level and replace it with "Religious Education." The reason given was the fact that there is such a great difference between theology and catechesis. The present author considers this proposal extremely questionable—not only as rejecting 1500 years of Catholic catechesis, but precisely because of the reality of Practical Theology proposed in this study.

[20]"Beliefs" here refer to core Christian beliefs, convictions implicit in the basic act of Faith (the Creed) of both Christian individuals and communities. "Practices" refer to cooperative and meaningful human endeavors that people do together, over time, and that seek to satisfy fundamental human needs and conditions.

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ritual actions, provide the norm for Christian practices for which Christ serves as the model (and more) for all practitioners. To be a Christian is to explicitly believe in Jesus Christ and be committed to follow his way of life. Christian practices are by definition normatively shaped by Christian beliefs. Moreover, since the story of Christ is embedded in the larger stories of God with Israel and the nations, and the even larger stories of creation, the Fall, redemption and final consummation, Christian beliefs provide the normative Christian moral space (questions about what is good or evil, what is meaningful and important versus the trivial and unimportant) in which alone engagement in Christian practices makes sense.[21]

That beliefs shape practices is clearest in beliefs about God who is not a particular object in the world with which humans may relate, but the Creator, Redeemer, Consummator of all that exists. This is the proper object of all theology, God, upon whom all humans depend completely for their identity, their freedom, their fulfillment and very existence. What is said of God does not have to be applied later to humans—what is said of God is already addressed to humans. Beliefs in God, precisely as beliefs, already entail practical commitments which are not added to the beliefs but inhere in the beliefs themselves. They provide a normative vision for practices. Thus Christian practices as such already have a Christian normative vision as part of what they are, and Christian beliefs as such are essentially practice-shaping.[22]

But the role of beliefs as shaping practices, from a theological viewpoint, though very important in itself, is secondary. The whole Christian way of life, with all its practices, is shaped by what God has

[21]Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," 250–51. Cf. also the insightful article of Serene Jones, "Graced Practices: Excellence and Freedom in the Christian Life," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,* eds. M.Volf and D. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 51–77.

[22]This is the key to grasping Practical Theology's specific understanding of practices, particularly in the Dykstra-Bass group of practitioners, an understanding that stands in direct contrast to conventional theology's understanding.

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done, is doing, and will do. Christian Faith is not primarily about what humans are doing but about humans receiving. Thus Christian beliefs cannot be reduced to mere knowledge [information]; they provide the normative guide for agents of Christian practices by situating them within the narrative of the total reality of God's actions with humans. But do practices actually contribute to beliefs in any way?

Practices Come First

In many Christian adult conversions there is an acceptance of Christian beliefs before the actual, habitual exercise of Christian practices. But this is not the case of the great majority of Christians who are born into Christian families, baptized as infants, and grow up in and through Christian practices. Practices are first, and Christian beliefs come initially as entailed in the practices, and gradually accepted, developed, and brought to explicit awareness through upbringing and education.

Christian practices continue to play a significant role in this process of coming to a deeper understanding of Christian beliefs. Acting morally seems in some sense to be a precondition for correct moral understanding, similar to the way habitual immoral actions often lead to poor moral discernment and motivation. For most Christians, Christian practices are the ordinary means by which they come to understand more deeply, and perform more accurately, the core Christian beliefs they profess. Thus we can speak of the hermeneutical impact of practices since the formulation of Christian beliefs through the centuries has basically been a hermeneutical process. Core beliefs are always initially formed in specific concrete situations of Christian living which ground the process toward deeper understanding through the continued exercise of Christian practices.

Christian Beliefs as the Ultimate Ground for the Christian Way of Life

But given the mutual impact of beliefs and practices on each other, the significant question arises, which grounds which? In Christian living, what precisely is the status of beliefs inherent within the

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practices? In both academic and popular culture today, beliefs are usually subordinated to practices, developed after the practices for justifying them. But Christian theology claims to be focused not simply on talk about God, but on the reality of God. Thus Christian beliefs are not just reasons for such and such practices, but rather express the reality grounding the practices. Christians do not develop an image of God to safeguard some practice—rather God is the ultimate reality justifying the Christian practices and way of life.

Christian beliefs, then, as drawn from God's self-revelation in sacred Scripture and tradition, are the ways through which we identify God, and thus they become the ground for all Christian practices. Our Christian way of life must ultimately be grounded on our Christian beliefs about God. Christian theology must therefore be concerned about the truth of our Christian beliefs about God since they ground our Christian way of life. Concern for the truth of our beliefs about God here means how these beliefs about God and God's relation to the world fit together among themselves, and with all other human beliefs. The Christian beliefs about the Trinity, the Incarnation, Grace and the Eucharist must fit together, and fit with beliefs about human dignity, freedom, justice and love.[23]

C. Viewing Practical Theology: On Earth as It Is in Heaven

A third way to begin the arduous task to describe accurately and clearly the nature of Practical Theology would be to ask: why is it so difficult? Two reasons are commonly proposed. The first is the fragmentation of theology in general into numerous specialized fields (e.g. systematic, historical, moral, liturgical) which naturally inspires

[23]Compared with the great majority of commentators describing the belief-practice relationship, Volf's exposition is exceptional. It clarifies the relationship by grounding beliefs and practices in the very nature of God's engagement with the world, and therefore of Christian Faith. Cf. Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," 254–62.

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the question: "What is the specialty of Practical theology?"—to which the simplest answer may be: "a certain reintegration of theology's specialties, in terms of Christian living." Practical theology has a certain antipathy to neat descriptive definitions that distinguish it from all other theological disciplines. The second reason is that the ordinary inquiry into the nature of practical theology presumes theory is distinct from actual practice. This presumed mind-set already contradicts Practical Theology's nature which claims to indwell in practice itself. Only in the actual practice of doing theology do we come to understand better its proper nature.[24]

The first key, therefore, toward the positive understanding of Practical Theology is to realize it is more like something we do (verb-like) rather than some thing defined (noun-like).[25] It is more an activity to be practiced than an academic discipline to be strictly analyzed. Nevertheless, it is definitely not a question of the usual understanding of theory first, which then is put into practice. On the contrary, Practical Theology aims at radically changing this two-step division by stressing the intrinsic connection between theory and practice within the unity of Christian living. Theology always arises out of, and continues to be embodied in, the concrete historical and cultural life of the religious communities. The Incarnation and total Paschal Mystery ground this undeniable value of human living, in spite of the

[24]This third approach to Practical Theology's nature concentrates primarily on the work of Terry A. Veling, especially his *Practical Theology: On Earth as It Is in Heaven* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2005), which was signaled out for high praise for offering a spirituality of practical theology. See also Veling's earlier article, "'Practical Theology': A New Sensibility for Theological Education," *Pacifica* 11 (1998): 195–210.

[25]But even before the current era of post-modernism, there were numerous examples of this insistence on actual living over systematic analysis popularized by Paulo Freire (e.g. his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [Penguin, 1972]), and exemplified in the whole thrust of liberation theology (e.g. Gustavo Gutierrez, "Liberation, Theology and Proclamation," in *The Mystical and Political Dimension of the Christian Faith*, eds. C. Geffre and G. Gutierrez [New York: Herder and Herder, 1974]).

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ever present temptation to reduce the Word of God to context—Word to flesh. For it is in our concrete human lives that we find God's Self-Revelation calling us to salvation through love.

A second key toward grasping what Practical Theology is all about is its stress on understanding as more than just knowing, involving practical doing over mere theoretical thinking.[26] In conventional academic [seminary] theology, understanding has often been reduced, erroneously it must be said, to its many and varied possible applications. In actual fact, understanding initially goes beyond simple knowing by grasping the major relationships which surround and partially define any complex reality—prior to any specific application. Then precisely as theological, this understanding takes on the image of thoughtful attention, arising directly from the Christian faith as a loving way of life, which is not reducible to either any abstract intellectual synthesis or to utilitarian pragmatism. Such is a major theme of both the prophets and the Psalms: discovering God's attentiveness and concern for humans—we are apprehended by God. Current interpretation of the prophets stress that they were not primarily concerned with what humans do with their human ultimate concern, but rather with what they do with God's concern for humans.[27]

Characteristics Formed in the Process

These two keys toward grasping Practical Theology's nature (verb-like over noun-like, and understanding over knowledge) give rise to a number of specific characteristics.[28] Its action as a loving way of

[26]This second key notion of understanding as more than just knowing will be developed more fully in the final section.

[27]Cf. the insightful little book which brings the message of the prophet Micah [6:8] to bear on catechesis: Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks and Thomas H. Groome, *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly: An Agenda for Ministers* (New York: Paulist, 1986).

[28]As with M. Volf, Veling insists on Practical Theology's God-focus. Cf.

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life, for example, identifies Practical Theology as the work of God revealed by Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 5:17, 36; 17:4; Lk. 4:18; 7:18–23). This divine grounding of Practical Theology's work, then, renders its work as truly vocational, a response to the call of God, which, although it is a characteristic common to all theology, may perhaps be even more manifestly and realistically in Practical Theology than in most other theological disciplines as currently exercised. For Practical Theology's basic methodological focus, as we shall discuss in the next section, is on authentic Christian practices. These constitute the concrete ways through which today's Christians faithfully live out the Johannine text: "But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that their deeds may be clearly seen as done in God" (Jn. 3:21).

A further characteristic quality, then, is that the test for the truth in Christian living is measured not by any comparison with some great theory of life, but primarily by the fruit it bears (Mt 7:16–21; 12:33; Lk 6:43–49; Jas 1:22, 2:17). St. Paul makes lucidly clear that mere knowing the truth means little unless it is infused with love (1 Co 13:1–2).[29] But even this clear insight can be misleading, given the current widespread intellectual stress on method, the how to emphasis. Method often tends to separate the learner from the inner core of what is being studied. Thus some prefer to focus on understanding which integrates the truth-seeker directly into the process of the loving knowledge of Christian faith that is under study.

If the truth of Practical Theology is measured by the fruits it achieves—fruits that go beyond any reductionism or utilitarian pragmatism—then Practical Theology can claim that its own theological practice is itself a way of life, a craft in and through which the practical theologian answers and responds to the call to enter into

"What Is Practical Theology?," in *Practical Theology: On Earth as It Is in Heaven* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2005), 12–13.

[29]Veling's test for truth as grounded in the fruits which Practical Theology bears owes more to the Gospels and St. Paul than to any utilitarian pragmatism. Cf. Veling, "What Is Practical Theology?," 13–14.

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the world of reality within the vocation of Christian apprenticeship and discipleship in God's ways. The way of life which Practical Theology claims as its own goes far beyond learning how to use the basic theological tools in an appropriate method. Rather it is generally related directly to traditional phronesis—the practical wisdom that is gradually achieved through reflected human development and growth. [30] Such a wisdom-type understanding is described as a *habitus*, a disposition of mind and heart from which our actions naturally flow—but in our case of Practical Theology, actions which are supernaturally elevated by grace, according to the Spirit indwelling in us.

This craft of exercising practical wisdom, characterized by its attentive, searching and responsive qualities, is to be exercised and developed at all times in every effort in, and exercise of, the theological task. Such a craft often requires, as a general rule, working together as partners with other disciplines such as the social sciences, or dialoguing with artists, novelists, poets, song-writers and others who are deeply involved with "reading the signs of the times."[31] That this is not an easy task is clear from Jesus warning that we "know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky, but not the present time." (Lk 12:54–56). Instead, when it comes to reading the signs of the [present] times, we look but do not see, and hear but do not listen or understand (Mt 13:13; cf. Is 6:9).

But how is it that we do "look and not see, hear but do not listen?" Why must Jesus preach in parables? Why is "the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" granted to some but apparently not to others (Mt 13:11; Lk 8:9–10; Mk 4:10–12)? Surely God does not wish what Isaiah's text clearly seems to say:

[30] The traditional theme that theology has wisdom/phronesis as its proper objective is also stressed by Veling. Cf. Veling, "What Is Practical Theology?," 16.

[31] The stress on the attentive searching quality of Practical Theology enables Veling to bring its wisdom/phronesis knowing-objective together with practical wisdom, thus forming a craft. Cf. Veling, "What Is Practical Theology?," 15–56.

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> Go and say to this people: "Listen carefully but you shall not understand, look intently but you shall know nothing! You are to make the heart of the people sluggish, to dull their ears and close their eyes; Else their eyes will see, their ears hear, their heart understand and they will turn and be healed." (Is 6:9–10)

An intelligent interpretation of the Synoptics' use of this text is that they are citing a traditional text as precedent for the fact that Jesus' teaching was largely unheeded and disbelieved.[32] God did not intend Isaiah's preaching to fail and produce these negative results; but God knew that these would be the actual results—that Isaiah's call for repentance would never achieve the desired conversion. So too with the teaching of Jesus, the one greater than all the prophets. Jesus intended his parables to clarify, not conceal, the truth. His parables were designed not to be pointless riddles, but to challenge the hearers to penetrate more deeply into the faith realities proposed. The apparent absurdities of Jesus' message—for example, "whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in the world will preserve it for eternal life" (Jn 12:25)—become paradoxes that challenge the believer to examine more closely the nature of Christian faith and living.[33]

Practical Theology's final basic characteristic formed in its self-becoming process is that it reads and interprets its sharp focus on the concrete conditions of human life in the light of the kingdom of God, the unconditional claims of God's living Scriptural Word. Practical

[32]For this interpretation, cf. Bruce Vawter, *The Four Gospels* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 156–58. The present author cannot let this opportunity pass by without explicitly stating the clear superiority, for religious education, of Vawter's work over the great mass of current popular level historical critical method-dominated interpretations.

[33]That Jesus taught in parables was surely to foster deeper reflective understanding of the truths of Faith which he often expressed in paradoxical form. A similar effort is made in presenting six Paradoxical Characteristics of Faith to foster deeper, critical, reflected understanding of Christian Faith. Cf. *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: ECCCE Word and Life Publications, 1997), Chap 3., Nos. 142–54.

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Theology is a theology![34] Its work is to discover the timeless beauty and truth of God's amazing grace within human time and history, to reveal God's own transcendent Self-gift to all peoples, challenging them all to become his own people, full of faith, hope and love, justice and mercy, a people striving to live and act on earth "as it is in heaven."

Some Key Practical Objectives of Practical Theology

A parallel way to getting to the nature of any discipline is to focus on its objectives—what precisely it attempts to accomplish, its goals.[35] Focusing on the key objectives of Practical Theology can therefore help in coming to a more concrete notion of its nature. A first objective is clearly that of unifying the various disparate theological elements (e.g. Scripture, Tradition, experience, faith and reason) around the common focus on Christian praxis as the norm. The goal is a certain "holistic, integrating orthodoxy, orthopraxis and orthopathy." For Catholic Practical theology, one could add an intellectual, ecclesial, spiritual, sacramental and ecumenical/inter-religious dialogue as an indispensable means.[36]

A second objective is stressing the primacy of praxis, drawn directly from the needs and challenges arising from actual, concrete Christian living in the world. This is what sparks the authentic unity of all theological activity. But this primacy rests on the critically developed authentic notion of Christian Practices (e.g. as proposed by Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass). The direct result flowing from this

[34]That Practical Theology is truly theology is emphasized by Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996), and also by James N. Poling and Donald Miller, *Foundations For a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

[35]In traditional scholastic philosophy/theology, following Aristotle, there is a direct relation between the formal and final causes of any reality.

[36]Anderson develops this at length from his specific viewpoint. Cf. R. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 23–60.

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interpretation of praxis is an inherently transformative understanding/knowledge/truth, and which, precisely as intrinsically transformative, challenges all theology to go beyond the present status quo.

A third objective commonly associated with Practical Theology is the desire to overcome the professional isolation so common among those pursuing one or other of the various theological disciplines. Put positively, Practical Theology focuses on the legitimate communal/contextual character of all theology. Yet it must be admitted that up to the present, Practical Theology has not been very successful in achieving these admirable goals—due mostly perhaps to the still very limited exercise and use of Practical Theology by most contemporary theologians. But we can hopefully look ahead toward greater success in the future as more and more theologians become acquainted with the authentic nature and method of Practical Theology.

But a more serious reason for Practical Theology's present lack of significant impact on current theology, and its present greatest concern, is its own problem of multiple versions and consequent lack of unity and consistency.[37] First, there is a notable difference between the way Practical Theology is studied, understood and exercised in Germany and in the United States—perhaps due more to the local theological culture and tradition rather than any theoretical basis in Practical Theology itself. But more alarming is the significant differences among the American Practical Theologians, some of whom seem to reduce theology to an inter-disciplinary study, lacking any clear, unified nature. This problem will be developed in this study's final section dealing with Practical Theology's impact on religious and theological education.

[37]Ballard and Pritchard, in their *Practical Theology in Action,* devote a whole chapter to various models (57–70). But such an academic listing of various approaches and intended objectives is not the real problem. Rather, it is the basic ambiguity about the very nature and appropriate functioning of authentic theology that is at the root of the lack of unity and consistency among many of Practical Theology's present practitioners.

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III. Christian Practices in Practical Theology

The key notion and reality in Practical Theology is Christian Practices, which directly modify Practical Theology's whole notion of theology itself, and theological education in particular. Practical Theology's unique understanding of the nature and role of Christian practices is so important that we shall develop its exposition in three steps. First we begin with a dictionary understanding of practice in general, then secondly, proceed to a detailed description of Christian Practices' unique meaning and role in the form of Practical Theology proposed in this study. Thirdly, we shall bring out how such an understanding of Christian practices contrasts with the more common acceptance of theory and practice in current theology, and thus introduces the final objective of this study, namely, to clarify Practical Theology's potential to contribute significantly to a fuller understanding of theology in general and theological education in particular.

'Practices': Basic Definition

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives four meanings of practice. The first is "the action of doing something; patterned activity—not random or haphazard, but with an inner or outer coherence." The second meaning is "the habitual doing or carrying out of something; usual, customary, or constant action; a regular pattern of repeated behavior." The third meaning is "doing something repeated or continuously, for the purpose, or with the result, of attaining proficiency; the basis of a skill." The fourth and final meaning is "carrying on or exercise of a profession or occupation; e.g. law or medicine."[38]

Christian Practices

We now turn to the specific meaning and role of *Christian* Practices precisely as understood in Practical Theology. We begin with a simple description:

[38]Duncan Forrester, "What is Practice?," in *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2000), 3–6.

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> Rather than speak of a Christian way of life as a whole, we shall speak of the "Christian practices" that together constitute a way of life abundant. By "Christian practices" we mean things that Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to, and in the light of, God's active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ.[39]

This descriptive definition is initially clarified by identifying twelve such practices among which are: honoring the body, hospitality, keeping the Sabbath, discernment, testimony, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well, and signing our lives to God.[40] But given the different ways in which practices are understood, even among (and perhaps especially among) those professing to be adherents of Practical Theology, much more needs to be specified in order to achieve an adequately accurate notion of Christian practices as proposed in this study.[41]

In order to bring out these specifics most sharply, it will help to sketch the contrast between the typical way in which practices are generally understood in post-Enlighten-ment [clerically dominated] theology, and in Practical Theology's understanding, for the specific contribution of Practical Theology to current theology in general, and especially to religious and theological education, depends completely on a clear grasp of how basically different these two understandings of Christian practices really are.

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[39]Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 18.

[40]Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," 19. Cf. also Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practices in Theological Inquiry and Education," in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition,* ed N. Murphy (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 161–82, hereafter referred to as "Reconceiving Practices."

[41]The references cited clearly indicate that the notion of Christian practices proposed here is drawn from the works of Craig Dykstra, Dorothy Bass, and their co-workers.

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The Fundamental Problem of Post-Enlightenment Theology

Much of conventional post-Enlightenment theology and theological education have generally been carried on in the form of a technology which effects causal changes, whose values are judged in terms of mastery of techniques, uncovered primarily through the social sciences. This grounds an understanding of theology that is harmfully individualistic, technological, ahistorical and abstract. When practice is reduced to merely an application of theory or current procedures, then all Scripture, systematic, moral and liturgical studies become theological disciplines in which practice has no intrinsic place. Moreover, practices could not be intrinsic to, or constitutive of, a way of life, but rather are reduced to the merely functional and the weaknesses of theology just sketched above.[42]

But when practice is rightly understood, the academic disciplines are themselves seen to be practices: their very own subject matter includes practices. Practices rightly understood refers to Dykstra's alternate view which starts by adapting MacIntyre's basic notion of practice and developing it in three main emphases. First, the theo-practitioner is not aiming at mere information, but views the complex interplay of human activity, involving theology professors, pastors, students, ordinary Christians, etc. Second, this action involves the practitioner's whole self precisely as participating in the moral and cognitive faculties of the community members, and thus, third, recognizes the basic good of theology as a way of life. These emphases reject both technology as the ultimate judge of the practical skill of living faith in the Christian tradition, and theology conceived as the individualistic, abstract, ahistorical discipline described above.[43]

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[42]Cf. Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practices," 162–63. From another point of view and approach, see also Farley, *Practicing Gospel,* 3–68.

[43]Brad J. Kallenberg in his Introduction as editor to C. Dykstra's article "Reconceiving Practices," 161–62.

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Theology's Conventional Picture of Practice

In post-Enlightenment theology, practice can be described as:

1. we (e.g. theologians) do something (like preaching, teaching) to others (recipients);
2. this "we" are acting as individuals in our doing—there is no larger social and historical context;
3. as practitioners we know what we are doing and how to do it, guided by theory in which the social sciences play a significant role. Biblical, systematic studies provide content, or shape character, develop clear thinking, discerning skills, etc.;
4. this technological picture assumes the theory-practice relationship common to science-technology.[44]

Initial Critique

Practice thus means making something happen, producing some result. The criterion is effectiveness. Theory traces the causal relationships: how things work. Attention is focused on the cause-effect relationship, prescinding from moral questions as extraneous. When practice is basically reduced to procedure, its value is its utility. Morality then relates to the value of the results, not to anything intrinsic to the practice itself.

Thus the problem with this understanding of practice rests in its limited focus and exclusion. The specific focus often changes, but the one criterion is extrinsic effectivity. Such a technological idea of practice is both ahistorical and abstract. Practice is applied to a situation, but the practice itself is not regarded historically. Each practice is a unique singular event, with no internal history of its own.

[44]Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practices," 164–66, following Edward Farley's repeated historical descriptions of clergy-based theology. Cf. Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), chapter 5.

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It is abstract, since there is no interest in the historical development of the practice itself.[45]

Summary Description of the Alternate View of Practices

Both in terms of its implications and effects, and of its very assumptions, such an understanding is extremely questionable for a good number of reasons that will be sketched below. But what is needed now more than a critique is a clear objective alternate view of practice.[46] The following offers some key insights:

1. Practices are not something an individual is doing, but are inherently cooperative, things in which a number of people are involved;
2. they are not doing something to others as much as with others—being engaged in a common practice;
3. nor can they be reduced simply to group activity since they can be exercised by an individual (e.g., prayer, which is a coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity);
4. hence practice is participation in a cooperatively formed pattern of activity that emerges out of a complex tradition of interaction among many people over a long period of time. That is to say, practices are a form of socially established activity which gives people direction, meaning and significance;
5. the form of the practice itself, which must be coherent though complex, embodies the reasons for, and intrinsic value of, the practice;

[45]Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practices," 166–68; Farley, *Fragility of Knowledge*, 10–11.

[46]Here Dykstra supplies the needed positive grasp of authentic Christian practices in his "Reconceiving Practices," 168–72 . He also lists eight authors who propose similar critiques of the conventional view of "practices." Cf. Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practices," 169 n. 12.

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6. this means that to participate intelligently, with good results, one needs to become aware of the history of the practice;
7. therefore practices cannot be abstracted from their tradition; nor can they be created on the spot by an individual, but are formed only through a process of interaction among many people over a sustained period of time.

Some of the criteria for evaluating practices are intrinsic to the practice itself. For example, moral standards and values are built into the practices themselves which therefore by nature have moral weight as well as the epistemological importance with which we are primarily concerned. "Epistemological weight," therefore, refers here to the fact that by participating in certain practices, we come to see more than their inherent value—certain other realities outside the practices, e.g., new loving knowledge of the Triune God revealed by Jesus Christ. The concrete exercise of Christian practices in the everyday life of faith creates a new way of life, which presupposes a transcendent source or ground. The New Testament, for example, makes clear that certain practices (e.g. serving others) are the necessary pre-conditions for recognizing the risen Lord.[47]

The Proper Place for Practices in the Christian Life

In conventional theology, practice was understood technologically, individualistically, and a-historically—reduced to the merely functional. But Dykstra's alternate view puts Christian practices in the center of Christian living. He supports this position by three basic truths: first, our very identities as persons are existentially constituted by practices and the knowledge and relationships they mediate; second, correlatively, our communal life is constituted by practices—in fact communities themselves are practices; and thirdly, serious questions are constantly being asked about practices (e.g what status do they have? What power, under what conditions? What practices are sustaining?

[47]Cf. Marianne Sawicki, "Recognizing the Risen Lord," *Theology Today* 44 (Jan 1988): 441–49.

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etc.) which the prevailing conception of practices fails even to generate. Any possible answer would have to cut across all the lines that presently divide biblical studies, systematics, moral and liturgical studies, and religious education.[48] Hence the identification, study and fostering of Christian practices are important tasks for theology.

Learning Practices

Learning practices has much affinity with conceiving theology as intrinsically linked to wisdom (phronesis and *habitus*) as discussed above. Here we are emphasizing the life-orienting, identity-shaping qualities which practices, taken as constitutive of Christian life, develop. With the help of others who are competent in these practices and can help us as our models, mentors, teachers, or partners, we need to understand the practices from the inside, as it were, not as something imposed from outside (e.g. "why do we have to go to Sunday Mass?"). Thus it is worthwhile to consider briefly what are the most effective ways of truly and accurately learning these practices.

Most of us come to learn practices best in conditions and situations in which:

1. we are active in them, actually *doing* what they involve, engaging in them personally in particular physical and material settings and in-face-to-face interaction with other people;
2. we participate in them jointly with others, especially with those skilled in them;
3. the people involved in the practices with us are personally significant to us;

[48]Dykstra cites with approval Margaret Miles, *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 87–144, approving her exposition of ascetic practices, worship sacraments, service and prayer, but questioning her tendency to equate practices with "exercises"—two realities which he holds must be distinct. Cf. Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practices," 173–75.

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4. we are involved in increasingly broader, more varied and more complex dimensions of the practices;
5. we come more and more to connect the expressions of the significance and meaning of these practices, and the ways that various practices are related to one another, with our own activities in them and our reasons for engaging in them.[49]

Participation can occur naturally, but some practices demand planned and systematic education in the practices. We live our lives at the intersection of many different practices. Theological education must concern itself with the mutual influences which various practices have on one another—their complementarity or mutually conflicting qualities. Our whole lives are lived moment-by-moment within an ever changing and developing interplay and mutually inter-influencing of many practices.[50]

Practical Theology and Religious and Theological Education

The exposition of the nature, meaning and role of Christian Practices, especially as proposed in Dykstra's alternate view, has already provided one sound basis for Practical Theology to be a full theological discipline, its impact on the whole of theology, and on religious and theological education in particular. This final section

[49]Dykstra has a whole chapter on "Education in Christian Practice" in his *Growing in the Life of Christian Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999), 66–79. He focuses more sharply on "Learning Practices" in "Reconceiving Practices," 175–78.

[50]Other sources on Christian practices are: Bass and Dykstra, *For Life Abundant*, 28–34; Elaine Graham, "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice," in J. Woodward and Stephen Pattison, eds., *Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Blackwell, 1999), 104–16, and Elizabeth Liebert, "The Role of Practice in the Study of Christian Spirituality," *Spiritus* 2 (Spring 2002): 30–49.

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of our study develops this understanding of Practical Theology by one specific example within a brief sketch of current theology and theological education. This serves to confirm Practical Theology as an important academic discipline (theological form) with great potential for contributing significantly to the whole theological enterprise, and theological education in particular. The second section focuses on Practical Theology's potential for improving religious education.

Professional Theological Education Today

The first thing that one notices in theological education today is the proliferation of courses. The sheer quantity and diversity of these new courses of every description are impressive. Whether this is simply a response to the present market for theology, without any particular direction or purpose, only time will tell. Moreover, there is a certain recovery of confessional theology, perhaps as responding to the current societal pluralism, or to some challenges from post-modernism. Most popular are courses in Missiology and Theological Reflection, with a decided upswing for Practical Theology with its integration of life and practice as a theological source.[51]

Practical Theology as a Full Academic Theological Discipline

If theology as a distinct discipline can be described in terms of a complex activity with four essential qualities—descriptive, normative, critical and apologetic—then Practical Theology easily fulfills these essential marks for authentic theology. Moreover, it clearly manifests the threefold academic pattern: first, as a *practical discipline with built-in theory* rather than a purely theoretical science, it exercises the qualities needed for evaluating and developing practices within the very process of laying the foundations for an adequate critical theory;

[51]Cf. Paul Ballard, "Reflections on Professional Theological Education Today," *Theology* 107 (2004): 333–42; John Vincent, "Theological Practice," *Theology* 107 (2004): 343–50; Don Browning, "Toward a Fundamental and Strategic Practical Theology," 54–74.

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second, it is a *recognizable field of study*—the Christian life and practices of the community of Christian faith flowing directly from Christ's revelation; third, it is a *critical reflective discipline*, exercising an open critical activity, probing, questioning, challenging assumptions, serving the Christian community by its unique service of integrating detachment, commitment and involvement.[52]

As a theological form, Practical Theology is recognized in three distinctively different approaches: the "Branch Approach" which follows the lead of Schleiermacher; the "Process Approach" of Browning and Farley; and the "Way of Being and Doing [and Living] Approach" of Dykstra, Bass, Veling and Volf. All three approaches are described as manifesting the same basic five phases: 1) experience; 2) situational analysis; 3) theological analysis; 4) situational analysis of theology; and 5) response.[53]

Trinitarian Basis for Practical Theology and Its Impact on Theological Education

One critically developed exposition of Practical Theology as Christian theology in its fullest sense, and as significant for all theology, particularly for theological education, is Andrew Purves' clear but dense article grounding Practical Theology in the Trinity itself.[54] He

[52]Paul Ballard, "Practical Theology as an Academic Discipline," *Theology* 98 (1995): 112–21. The same topic is taken up in Ballard and Pritchard's *Practical Theology in Action*, Chap. 2, 9–26.

[53]Emmanuel Lartey, "Practical Theology as a Theological Form," in J. Woodward and Stephen Pattison, eds., *Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Blackwell, 1999), Chap. 8, 128–34.

[54]Andrew Purves, "The Trinitarian Basis for A Christian Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 2 (1998): 222–39. Purves draws on a number of outstanding current trinitarian theologians: John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Colin Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge U. Press, 1993); Thomas F. Torrance, *The*

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begins by describing Practical Theology as a theology concerned with action, not simply ideas and arguments, while stressing that all theology—all knowledge of the acting, self-revealing God—is practical. All Christian knowledge of God is knowledge of the "missio Dei," of Jesus' ministry to the glory of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the world.

It is not we by our actions who make theology practical (the old notion of practical theology as applied theology), but God by virtue of what God does, who makes knowledge of God inherently a practical knowledge. Churchly practice arises out of our sharing in the practice of God. There is nothing more practical than teaching about who God is in relation to us and the concern to live in that relationship with God as the constitutive basis for what it means to be human in the first place, and Christian, in the second.[55]

Knowledge and theology of God in Jesus Christ, then, leads to a Trinitarian way of thinking about God which is inherently practical because it is knowledge of God's action grounded in his very being. This basis for this vision of the Trinity (both economic and immanent) rests on the Nicene Creed's identifying Jesus as "one-in-being with the Father."

At a second level is practical theology more narrowly viewed in terms of the Church's ministry, focusing on the dynamic interaction between knowledge of God (*missio Dei*) and critical reflection on what that calls forth and makes possible as the Church's ministry of participating in Christ. The result of this is twofold: 1) the knowledge

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Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

[55]Purves, "The Trinitarian Basis for A Christian Practical Theology," 223–24. Seeing all ministry as first of all God's ministry in Jesus Christ—the pastoring God as source of all meaning, creating, forgiving, saving, healing —before it is the Church's ministry is stressed by Volf in his "Theology for a Way of Life," 258–62.

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of God is illumined by the study of human situations and events, and 2) the practice of the faith is enriched by an ever deeper practical trinitarian wisdom (phronesis), rooted in a graced Spirit-empowered sharing in God's mission reality.[56]

To summarize: practical theology is a bipolar hermeneutical process concerned with action. It involves the movements both from God's practice (*missio Dei*) to Churchly practice in human situations and events, as well as from situations and events to illumine and confirm God's practice.[57]

Christian life, therefore, must be understood as sharing in the Trinitarian practice of God. Following this *missio Dei*, the subject matter for practical theology is Churchly practice, which is the sharing through the Holy Spirit in the mission of the Son to the glory of the Father. In terms of doctrine, worship and morals, to live the Christian trinitarian faith consists in the Spirit-led sharing in Jesus' communion with the Father in worship, and in Jesus' mission from the Father to the world in vocation and ministry.[58]

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[56]All attempts to identify God's ministry apart from the Church's ministry lead to abstraction, while identifying the Church's ministry apart from God's ministry leads to utilitarian pragmatism. God is active through both the Scriptures and situations of human experience; the Scriptures provide the basis for interpreting human experience, and the meaning of Scripture is found as a lived reality in human experience (Church's pastoral practice).

[57]Purves then presents a critical reflection on the central use of the doctrine of the Trinity in defining the nature of and method for Practical Theology, including clarifying the accurate understanding of being, nature, person and the personal in the Church's trinitarian theology. God is viewed as inherently Self-related within the triune communion in describing who God is to us and for us in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit (*missio Dei*). The failure of much current theology to begin with the doctrine of the Trinity as communion means that it never effectively starts with, or gets to, God at all, or how God relates to us.

[58]The article then develops at length this Trinitarian image in both worship and ministry. In worship, focus is on the role of Jesus as High Priest uniting us by his Spirit to his life of worship and communion with the Father against any

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Practical Theology's Impact on Religious Education

We now move on to Practical Theology's impact on religious education. We propose a concrete example of how Practical Theology has already begun to contribute significantly to improving the quality of Christian religious education through a critical analytic reflection on one specific catechist formation program, FIRE (Formation Institute for Religion Educators).

Critical Reflection on Practical Theology's Impact on the FIRE Program

One common educational approach to raising the quality of both teaching and learning has proposed a sequence of three stages: 1) identifying desired outcomes (results) of a particular program, course, method; 2) determining methods of testing and assessment that show achievement of objectives (placed before the third step); 3) planning the actual instruction and learning experiences (pedagogy).

Practical Implementation of these Stages

This calls for a process of moving from a uniquely objective academic approach to catechetical content/method, to recognizing the direct impact of the desired outcome (e.g. fostering Faith maturity) on prioritizing and selecting the content, method of teaching and of testing, in both input (content) and practicing catechesis. Practical Theology stresses this intrinsic interplay between the course content and the methods of communication, e.g. content (doctrine, morals, and worship), involving *performance and understanding*, which involve more than simple objective content and knowing, mere head knowledge of the Faith.

Pelagian Unitarian worship which focuses primarily on what we do—singing, praying, listening, giving money. In ministry, through the Spirit the Church also shares in Christ's redemptive mission for the world.

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A. Identifying Religious Education/Catechetical Goals (First Stage):

Established Goals: Content + Performance

Both content and what the catechized are expected *to do* with what they learned.

Practical Implementation

Can the catechized perform what they have learned in their RE class? Practical Theology stresses that Christian faith is not a theory, but something to be lived and exercised in basic Christian practices. There is a direct intrinsic link between religious education/catechesis and daily living of the Faith. Catechesis needs to exercise these *existential linkages* more than mere logical definitions or precedents taken alone, because the goal of catechesis is not merely to inform, but to form and transform.

B. Further Goal: Genuine Understanding [Knowledge + Understanding]

To understand involves: 1) relating the term/word to the concrete reality it expresses, 2) including this reality's basic relationships with other terms/realities; 3) while realizing that the terms used in communicating the Faith resonate in concrete ways with the personal and cultural life of the catechized; 4) who grasp faith realities not primarily by theoretical, academic analysis, but by their aesthetic, affective, imaginative and rational participation in the Christian way of life—teachings, moral actions, sacramental, symbolic rituals—with their fellow believers in the Faith (cf. the "Reality Principle").[59]

[59]Cf. "The 'Reality Principle' in CFC's Communicating the Faith," in Joseph L. Roche, *A Companion to CFC* (Manila: ECCCE, 1998), 139–52.

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Practical Implementation

Real understanding focuses on the total personal grasp of the content (doctrine, morals, worship) explained in the religion class/ catechesis. Different methods are used in teaching this content at various educational levels, but all methods are always in direct relation to the actual exercise (living out) of the faith in daily life, e.g. teaching Biblical inspiration, the act of faith, Jesus as the God-man, human freedom, conscience, moral laws, the sacramental principle, the Eucharist … as exercised in the daily living of the faith.

Key means for achieving this understanding is integrating

1. content with living the Christian way of life (Life Integration);
2. Scripture with Church Teaching and basic human experience—*effective and accurate use of sources* (Source Integration);
3. Creedal truths with one another, and moral values, norms and goals in a unified vision, and personal and public liturgical prayer together—all as exercised in daily life (Dimension Integration);
4. instruction and learning experiences with the way these catechized learn anything (Subject Integration), and
5. all this in the existing concrete culture and context. (Environmental Integration).[60]

C. Core Tasks in the Light of Pastoral Challenges

This refers to the catechized response to the objective pastoral challenges in their local Church by using (applying) what they learned

[60]Cf. "Multiple Integrations in NCDP and CFC," in Joseph L. Roche, *A Companion to CFC* (Manila: ECCCE, 1998), 37–56, and Joseph L. Roche, "Towards a Review of Integration in Catechesis," *CBCP Monitor* 11 #19 (Sept. 17–30, 2007): C3.

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in their religious education/catechetical courses. All real world tasks are multi-faceted.

Practical Implementation

Here, core tasks can be addressed more effectively and fruitfully by concentrating on the specific tasks flowing directly from the Content + Performance ("A" above) and the Knowledge + Understanding ("B" above) of the specific catechesis.

Practical Theology teaches us that the real challenges are drawn primarily not from facing tests of our abilities, but from the objective difficulties, obstacles, and specific catechetical needs of the local Church. Living the Faith calls us to grapple with the trials and tests of the daily following of Christ in the essentials of the Faith as a member of his community, the Church.

Conclusion: Agenda for Renewed Theological Education

At the conclusion of this exposition of Practical Theology and its potential for contributing significantly to religious and theological education, we offer a simple summary in the form of how to move forward from our present position. Dykstra brings to an end his key article, "Reconceiving Practices in Theological Inquiry and Education."[61]

1. Christian educators are not ultimately teachers of practices; they are teachers of the Gospel. But this means education in truth and reality, in and through those practices by which truth and reality are manifested and actualized.
2. In the present theological system of curricular areas and departments, Practical Theology has to contend with a

[61]Cf. Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practices," 178–82. Cf. also Maureen O'Brien, "Disciplined Conversations, Faithful Practices: Practical Theology and the Theological Education of Lay Ecclesial Ministers," in *Religious Education as Practical Theology*, eds. Bert Roebben and Michael Warren (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 273–306.

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stripped down form of practice as mere know-how. The major theological disciplines continue to disregard practice almost entirely.

3. What is needed is to bring out the contributions that existing disciplines and courses can make to the understanding and interpretation of the Christian practices which actually permeate the subject matter of these courses. For example, Scripture study in its present form is itself the engagement of people in many of these practices. So too are historical and systematic studies: all these areas and courses are relevant and necessary for the kind of systematic investigation and understanding needed for an accurate grasp of the basic Christian practices. Likewise, all these courses could be enhanced significantly by recognizing and making explicit the relevance and necessity of these practices.

Soli Deo Gloria

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