

Friedrich Schweitzer

Introduction

This volume contains the papers from the second meeting of the International Academy of Practical Theology which was held in Berne, Switzerland, in June 1995. The conference topic was *„Normativity and Context in Practical Theology“*. For reasons of space, only the plenary papers could be included in this volume. The collegial papers which were presented at the conference, would fill one or more additional volumes on practical theology.

The program of the conference was carefully prepared and planned in detail by an international program committee¹. The format of the conference was based on the idea of not just having a number of speakers who would address the conference topic independently of each other. Rather, there was to be a clear connection between the various presentations. Reading the papers of this volume, it might be helpful to keep this connection in mind.

Before a description of this connection can be given, some background information is necessary. During the first conference of the Academy (Princeton 1993), a number of concerns referring to the future work of the Academy were expressed:

- Plurality of contexts: Presentations should come from different parts of the world and from different positions from North and South, East and West, women and men.
- Plurality of approaches to practical theology – in dialogue: It is the Academy's expressed intention to include not just one approach to practical theology but to become aware of the existing plurality within this field. The aim is to establish dialogical relationships between the different approaches through comparative studies and applications.
- Seminar nature of conferences: While contributions from non-members are welcome in the Academy, speakers should generally come from the membership in order to strengthen personal relationships and collegial cooperation, rather than having anonymous conferences with different people attending each meeting.

¹ Members of the committee were: Maureen Junker, Emmanuel Lartey, Friedrich Schweitzer (chair), Johannes van der Ven, Klaus Wegenast. Consultant members were: Hendrik Pieterse, Daniel Schipani, Joon Kwan Un, Krystian Wojacek.

In the light of these concerns it seemed important to approach the conference theme from two perspectives: First, the plurality of different contexts, experiences, approaches, methodologies, and understandings of practical theology was to be presented. Second, the question of unity and identity of practical theology was to be posed, not independently of the contextual presentations but in reference to them. So the flow of the contributions which are contained in this volume, roughly follows a three step bottom-up procedure: Starting from a *description* of concrete diverse *experiences* (1), moving on to different *interpretations* of these experiences (2), finally placing both, experiences and interpretations, into the context of existing *methodologies and theories* of practical theology (3). It is hoped that this procedure may preserve plurality while not giving up the question of unity and identity.

Together, the contributions which are documented in the pages below, were to form a sequence which, at least in theory, can be described as follows:

1. *Discovery of Context in Theology*: The introductory lecture (Franz-Xaver Kaufmann) had a twofold task. The first task was to attempt a phenomenology of theology's treatment of context. The second was to evaluate and to critically reflect upon the respective developments.
2. *The Tension Between Normativity and Context in Theory and Praxis within Theology*: This topic was addressed in three subsections, each with speakers from different backgrounds and with different perspectives.
 - 2.1 *Experiences of Context in Different Locations*: This section is to bring out the various ways in which people actually experience „context“ (Jürgen Henkys, Abraham A. Berinyuu, Joon Kwan Un).
 - 2.2 *Comparative and Fundamental Perspectives*: This section is focussed on the understanding of „context“ as a theoretical term (Paul Ballard, Marcel Viau). The reports from the previous section were to be the prime basis for these reflections – an idea which, unfortunately, could not be fully realized because of technical delays.
 - 2.3 *Different Models of Analysis*: The idea for this section is to present various different models for analyzing the tension between normativity and context (for example: hermeneutical, feminist, empirical, marxist, liberation theology, historical) (Riet Bons-Storm, Gerben Heitink).
3. *The Contribution and Identity of Academic Practical Theology*: In this section, the question is raised if, how and where the various contributions of the conference may come together as practical

theology and what this means for practical theology as an academic discipline. Since again consensus can not be presupposed, the approach was to be inductive. Four subsections are included here:

- 3.1 *The Variety of Analytical Models and the Identity of the Discipline:* The focus here is on the variety of different approaches within practical theology as well as on their relationship with each other, including the question of a possible disciplinary core (Reiner Preul, Richard R. Osmer [this paper is not included in this volume since it will be published elsewhere]).
- 3.2 *Practical Theology and its Relation to other Theological Disciplines:* The question of the identity of practical theology can not be answered only from within but also needs to take account of the expectations of other theological disciplines, especially exegetical and systematic theology (Klaus Wegenast).
- 3.3 *Practical Theology and Ethics:* Given the close relationship between both fields (in some countries they are actually taught by the same person or even are considered as a unity), the identity of practical theology has to include an understanding of its relationship to ethics (Duncan B. Forrester).
- 3.4 *Interdisciplinary Relationships:* Practical theology has often been described as an interdisciplinary enterprise. Here especially the relationship to the social sciences has to be addressed (James E. Loder).

The lecture of James W. Fowler was held as a public lecture at the University of Berne. In many ways, it may be read as a first summary of the conference.

We are grateful that this journal has made it possible that these papers become accessible to a wider public. The Academy will continue its work through future conferences and international research.