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Original publication:

Van Oorschot, Frederike

Making Public Theology Operational. Public Theology and the Church
in: *International Journal of Public Theology* 13 (2019), pp. 203–226

Leiden: Brill 2019

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15697320-12341572>

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‘Making public theology operational’. Public theology and the church¹

Abstract

This paper examines how public theologians aim to bring their theology into the practice of the church. In the first part it analyses the references to the church in the work of contemporary public theologians from the US and Germany and suggests four different categories for the relations explored (explicit function, implicit function, public church, church as public). In the second part, it discusses three systematic aspects of these relations. First, following Kuyper, it defines the term ‘church’ more accurately. Second, it offers insights into liturgical research in order to help to sharpen the places where and means by which the implicit shaping of individual ethical behaviour in the church takes place, as exemplified in the work of Dirk Smit. Third, it discusses the task of pastors as mediators between church and theology.

Keywords

Public theology, church, ecclesiology, worship, liturgy, pastoral training

A lot of work has been done on public theology – from different countries, traditions, theological backgrounds, and with differing goals and implications. Working on some parts of this debate, mostly focussing on the US-American, South African and German discussions,² I consistently return to the question of how exactly this theology – oriented toward practice by its very concern – can be fed into practice. Or, as Breitenberg puts it, ‘how to make public theology operational.’³ Almost every theologian points to the church in this matter: It is the church where public theology has its practice, application and foundation. In contrast to other ethical efforts – for example philosophical thought – theology has the particularity of being genuinely connected with this institution in the public

¹ Parts of the following article are based on a presentation on ‘Worship as ethical category. A public ecclesiology’ held at Kuyper Conference 2014 in Princeton. The title picks up a phrase of E. Harold Breitenberg, who used it in his analysis of the work of Max L. Stackhouse. Cf. Eugene Harold Breitenberg Jr, *The comprehensive public theology of Max L. Stackhouse: Theological Ethics, Society, and theological Education*. A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor in Philosophy (Richmond, 2004), p. 224 [unpublished].

² Cf. Frederike van Oorschot, *Öffentliche Theologie angesichts der Globalisierung: Die public theology von Max L. Stackhouse*. *Öffentliche Theologie* 30 (Leipzig: EVA, 2014); Id. and F. Höhne, eds, *Grundtexte Öffentliche Theologie* (Leipzig: EVA, 2015); Id., ‘Public theology facing globalization’, in H. Bedford-Strohm, F. Höhne and T. Reitmeier, eds, *Contextuality and Intercontextuality in Public Theology: Proceedings from the Bamberg Conference 23.-25.06.2011*. *Theology in the Public Square/Theologie in der Öffentlichkeit* 4 (Münster: LIT, 2013), pp. 225-31; Id., ‘Öffentliche Theologie und öffentliche Vernunft: Zur Entwicklung der public theology in den USA auf dem Hintergrund des politischen Liberalismus’, in G. Etzelmüller and H. Springhart, eds, *Gottes Geist und menschlicher Geist* (Leipzig: EVA, 2013), pp. 317-24.

³ Breitenberg, *The comprehensive public theology of Max L. Stackhouse*, p. 224.

sphere. As Stackhouse puts it very sharply, the importance of theology in social and ethical issues rises precisely from the fact that it has a social figure which forms the institutional counterpart of public theology⁴. The church forms 'a socio-cultural manifestation of what people mean concretely when they say they believe in this or that creed or cult.'⁵ Besides this institutional aspect, the importance of the church as a place of ethical formation and shaping of ethical decision making is stressed repeatedly – by shaping the individual believer as well as the whole society. These different relations of public theology and church all share the same question: How can public theology be connected with church practice? How can it influence the believers it addresses?

In the following, I will first examine this ecclesiological dimension of current public theologies to show the width and disparity of this relation. In the second part, I will discuss parts of these analyses regarding the concrete 'where', 'how' and 'who' of the relations drawn between church and public theology. In the first part, the analysis of selected contemporary public theologies from the USA and Germany shows four different ways to describe the relation of public theology and church: Explicitly functionally as institution in civil society, implicitly functionally by shaping society and individuals, conceptually as a public church, and descriptively as the public of theology.⁶ These descriptions only answer the question, what function the church may have for public theology – without seeking to develop a comprehensive ecclesiology from a public theological perspective. The analysis has to take this interest into account to avoid misunderstanding or misjudgement. The analytical first part is followed by a more systematic approach to the relation of church and public theology in the second part. Three aspects raised in the analysis will be object of discussion. As a first step, the use of the term 'church' needs to be elaborated in its institutional and non-institutional dimension. Kuyper's distinction between institution and organism serves as one possible differentiation, which helps to clarify the term. Second, the understanding of the implicit function of the church – stressed by many public theologians – will be explored: Where and how does the shaping of believers take place, what significance does worship have in this regard? Referring to the work of South African theologian Dirk

⁴ Max L. Stackhouse, 'Public Theology, Human Rights and Missions: An Ecumenical Protestant View', in A. J. Dyck, ed, *Human Rights and the Global Mission of the Church*. Boston Theological Institute Annual 1 (Cambridge: Boston Theological Institute, 1985), pp. 13-21 at p. 14. Cf. Id., 'Why Human Rights needs God', in E. M. Bucar and B. Barnett, eds, *Does Human Rights need God?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 25-40 at pp. 39-40.

⁵ Max L. Stackhouse, 'The Sociology of Religion and the Theology of Society', *Social Compass. International Review of Sociology of Religion*, 37:3 (1990), pp. 315-29 at p. 328. Cf. Id., 'The Vocation of Christian Ethics Today', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 16:3 (1995), pp. 284-312 at p. 304.

⁶ Two of these categories are influenced by Robert Benne's description of the indirect and direct influence of the church in public. Benne does not use 'public church' or 'church as public' as categories, but rather includes these aspects in the other two relations. The analysis of different public theologians required more distinct categories I specified above. They should not be confounded with Bernd Wannewetsch's description of the explicit and implicit political dimension of worship, as he evolves a distinct ecclesiological model instead of using them as analytical categories. Cf. Robert Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 181-224; Bernd Wannewetsch, 'The Political Worship of the Church: A critical and empowering practice', *Modern Theology*, 12:3 (1996), pp. 269-99.

Smit, this is the most elaborated part of systematic reflection. Third, I focus on the person mediating public theology into the churches. Thereby the trained theologians – usually serving as ministers – come into sight, who stand as ‘stakeholders’ of public theology at the interface of academic theology and daily church life. A short résumé summarizes the impact of ecclesiological thinking in public theologies.

1. Analysis of the church’s functions in current public theological debates

a. Explicit function of the church

Nearly all public theologians describe an explicit function of the church in public. That is, the churches are involved as visible and audible actors in civil society. Let me briefly sketch the most common characteristics from the concepts of selected public theologians from the US and Germany.⁷

Firstly, the church’s function in public is described as advocacy. For example, Max Stackhouse perceives the church’s tasks as development, dissemination and advocacy for public theology. For him the church is the incumbent steward for the formulation of a new Social Gospel in the form of public theology⁸: ‘Tomorrow's church will have a public witness or it will not be the church at all.’⁹ Based on the threefold offices of Jesus Christ, Stackhouse describes a prophetic, priestly, and royal office of the church¹⁰. The prophetic office obliges the church to criticize society on the basis of the covenant and the eschatological vision¹¹. The calling as a prophet needs to be considered individually as well as in the community of the ‘prophethood of all believers.’¹² The priestly office is entrusted with ritual, cult, and

⁷ I predominantly refer to the US-American theologians Robert Benne, Max Stackhouse and Ronald Thiemann and the German theologians Heinrich Bedford-Strohm and Wolfgang Huber as they exemplify the broad spectrum of the relationship between church and public theology in current debates. Supplemental positions are consulted occasionally according to requirements.

⁸ Max L. Stackhouse, ‘An Ecumenist’s Plea for a Public Theology’, *This World* 8 (1984), pp. 47-79 at p. 68; Id., *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 31, p. 161; Id., ‘The Vocation of Christian Ethics Today’, p. 304; Id., ‘Toward a Theology for the New Social Gospel’, *New Theology* 4 (1967), pp. 220-42 at p. 239.

⁹ Max L. Stackhouse, ‘Public Theology and the Future of Democratic Society’, in D. T. Hessel, ed, *The Church’s Public Role: Retrospect and Prospect* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 63-83 at p. 83.

¹⁰ Max L. Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace. God and Globalization Volume 4* (Harrisburg: Continuum Publishing, 2007), p. 182. Cf. Id., ‘Art. Public Theology’, in E. Fahlbusch et al., eds, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity. Volume 4* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 443-7 at p. 446; Id., ‘Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology: What’s the difference?’, *Journal of Political Theology* 5.3 (2004), pp. 275-93 at p. 291.

¹¹ Max L. Stackhouse, *Eschatology and Ethical Method: A Structural Analysis of Contemporary Christian Social Ethics in America with Primary Reference to Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr*. PhD. Diss. (Harvard University, 1964), p. 242 [unpublished]; Id., ‘The Moral Meanings of Covenant’, *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 16 (1996), pp. 249-64 at p. 258.

¹² Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace*, p. 177; Id., ‘Liberalism Revisited: From Social Gospel to Public Theology’, in R. J. Neuhaus and G. Weigel, eds, *Being Christian Today: An American Conversation* (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1992), pp. 33-59 at p. 41.

service to others.¹³ This service is the task of all believers and therefore is called the priesthood of all believers.¹⁴ The royal office describes the social responsibility of theology which needs to answer questions in society with the power of the word.¹⁵

Robert Benne also favours advocacy as form of the explicit function of the church. He generally distinguishes direct and indirect connections between church and society and defines direct connections as the intentional action of the church as institution in the public sphere, usually in form of so-called 'social words'.¹⁶ Since this form of influence is directly linked to questions of everyday life, 'social words' are widely discussed.¹⁷ From society's perspective the churches fulfil their most important role as a moral guiding system with the ability to generate new social meaning.¹⁸ Key guidelines for this task are credibility, comprehensibility, and consideration of the various levels of authority.¹⁹ However, he considers these connections as risky, as they contradict the paradoxical vision of Christianity, which encompasses the entire world and the being of the church and therefore has no need to rely on this direct enforcement of its own interests.²⁰ For Benne, only cases of advocacy are an acceptable exception as they are 'soft' forms of direct action', i.e. direct exercise of influence on behalf of others.²¹

The second task for the church in society is its publicly expressed social teaching. Here the church as an institution offers general orientation on moral issues in the public sphere. As already shown in Benne's position, this task is often closely related to advocacy. In contrast social teaching does not have to be related to one group of people advocating for them, but can also refer to theoretical questions. In German public theologies, this form of the churches explicit action is the most important implementation of public theology.²²

For example, Wolfgang Huber defines public theology as a 'theological project to interpret the questions of common life and its institutional design in their theological relevance and to determine the contribution of Christian faith to the responsible design of our world.'²³ Public theology reflects 'on the work and the effects of Christianity in the social public sphere, as

¹³ Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace*, p. 180, p. 193.

¹⁴ Max L. Stackhouse, 'Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era', in M. L. Stackhouse et al., eds, *Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era*. Abingdon Series on Christian Ethic and Economic Life Volume 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), pp. 11-73 at p. 59; Id., *Public Theology and Political Economy*, p. 171.

¹⁵ Max L. Stackhouse, 'If Globalization is true, what shall we do? Toward a Theology of Ministry', *Theological Education* 35:2 (1999), pp. 155-65 at pp. 158-9; Id., 'Public Theology, Corporate Responsibility and Military Contracting', *ICCR Brief* 11:12 (1983), pp. 3A-3D at p. 3A.

¹⁶ Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision*, pp. 181-224. See esp. p. 201.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 205-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 206-214.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 215. 217.

²¹ Ibid., p. 218. Cf. pp. 218-224.

²² The relevance of this aspect for the German theologians is deeply influenced by the unique public-legal status of most of the protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church in Germany.

²³ Wolfgang Huber, *Gerechtigkeit und Recht: Grundlinien christlicher Rechtsethik* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), pp. 12-3. [my translation]

well as the dialogical participation in thinking about the identity and crises, the goals and tasks of society.²⁴ The explicit task of the church in public is in fact part of Huber's description of the intentions of public theology:²⁵ first, it shows that the subject of theology is not limited to the private sphere; second, it examines the place of the church in public; and, third, it expects an accessible and transparent presentation of theological thinking. For Huber, public theology is characterised by not using a special theological language, but rather seeking common intelligibility and communication with other sciences.²⁶ Thereby, it provides a counterbalance to 'communicative abstinence' on questions of truth and stimulates communication in civil society.²⁷

Similar descriptions of the churches task of social teaching can be found in the work of Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, a German theologian and chairman of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).²⁸ For him, public theology offers a theological basis for the active engagement of the church in the public realm. For this to be done consistently, i.e. rooted in its own traditions, the church needs public theology.²⁹ Due to their public mandate, the church is an important stakeholder in civil society. Bedford-Strohm describes the churches as places for discourse about ethics.³⁰ Therefore, the churches play an important role for the regeneration of the moral resources of society in order to become a source of life for democracy³¹. The churches are obliged to take advantage of positive religious liberty and see themselves as independent and critical voices in civil society.³² Due to this responsibility, the churches are obliged to become effective political agents in civil society.³³ For him, the social statements, e.g. by the EKD, are therefore part of the most powerful public theology.³⁴

²⁴ Wolfgang Huber, 'Öffentliche Kirche in pluralen Öffentlichkeiten', *Evangelische Theologie* 54:2 (1994), pp. 157-80 at p. 175.

²⁵ Wolfgang Huber, 'Vorwort', in B. L. Birch and L. L. Rasmussen, eds, *Bibel und Ethik im christlichen Leben* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993), pp. 9-12 at p. 9.

²⁶ Huber, *Gerechtigkeit und Recht*, p. 13.

²⁷ Huber, 'Öffentliche Kirche in pluralen Öffentlichkeiten', p. 175.

²⁸ Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, *Gemeinschaft aus kommunikativer Freiheit: Sozialer Zusammenhalt in der modernen Gesellschaft. Ein theologischer Beitrag*. *Öffentliche Theologie* 11 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), p. 455, p. 457; Id., 'Öffentliche Theologie in der Zivilgesellschaft', in I. Gabriel, ed., *Politik und Theologie in Europa: Perspektiven ökumenischer Sozialethik* (Ostfildern: M. Grünewald Verlag, 2008), pp. 340-66 at p. 346.

²⁹ Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer als öffentlicher Theologe', *Evangelische Theologie* 69:5 (2009), pp. 329-41 at p. 331. Cf. Id., 'Öffentliche Theologie in der Zivilgesellschaft', in Gabriel, ed, *Politik und Theologie in Europa*, p. 344.

³⁰ Bedford-Strohm, *Gemeinschaft aus kommunikativer Freiheit*, p. 458.

³¹ 'Die fünfte These [...] bezieht sich auf die Rolle der Kirchen bei der Regeneration der moralischen Ressourcen der Gesellschaft: Die öffentlich relevanten Wertorientierungen, die die Kirche von ihren inhaltlichen Quellen her als gelebte Überzeugungen in die Entwicklung und Pflege des gesellschaftlichen Grundkonsenses einbringt, dürfen nicht als bloßer soziale Klebstoff verstanden werden'. Bedford-Strohm, *Gemeinschaft aus kommunikativer Freiheit*, p. 457. Cf. Id., 'Öffentliche Theologie in der Zivilgesellschaft', in Gabriel, ed, *Politik und Theologie in Europa*, p. 346.

³² Bedford-Strohm, *Gemeinschaft aus kommunikativer Freiheit*, p. 455.

³³ Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, 'Politik und Religion - öffentliche Theologie, Verkündigung und Forschung' 54:2 (2009), pp. 42-54 at p. 48.

³⁴ Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, 'Sozialethik als öffentliche Theologie: Wie wirksam redet die Evangelische Kirche über wirtschaftliche Gerechtigkeit?', in Id. et al., eds, *Kontinuität und Umbruch im deutschen Wirtschafts- und*

Likewise, the German theologian Wolfgang Vögele stresses this aspect of public theology as 'science of orientation' (Orientierungswissenschaft) reflecting on the conditions of orientation in society.³⁵

Summing up, the explicit function of the church can be described as the churches public commentary on societal issues. Church representatives take up issues discussed in civil society or political debates and comment on them publicly according to their beliefs. Therefore the explicit function of the church is reactive, responding to questions of the time (in contrast to other functions accrued out of convictions of the church without external occasion). It can be done authoritatively by church leaders or by individual members of the church. As this explicit functions reacts to societal issues, usually it is limited to publications etc. (eventually accompanied by some activities), but not focused on structural changes or exemplary social action inside the churches themselves.

b. Implicit function of the church

In addition to these explicit functions of the church, three forms of implicit function can be found in current public theologies. These differ seriously from the explicit functions of the church describes above focussing on individual believers (the first and second form) and the structure of the churches (the third form).

Firstly, public theologians perceive the church as a place to learn about ethics ('Lernraum') in and for the whole society in an affirmative and critical perspective. Stackhouse describes the church as a place of ritual and cult which offers a place to search for truth and communion with God and therefore has intrinsic symbolic character.³⁶ Public theology needs to consider this sacramental sensibility to strengthen community in society.³⁷ Similarly, the German theologian Bedford-Strohm describes the church as a place for ethical discourse, following Francis Schüssler-Fiorenza and Michael Welker.³⁸ In addition, Robert Benne describes the

Sozialmodell (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), pp. 329-47; Id., 'Öffentliche Theologie in der Zivilgesellschaft', in Gabriel, ed, *Politik und Theologie in Europa*, pp. 352-6.

³⁵ Thus, public theology affects both church and society: 'Public Theology ensures a connection and intermediation between the internal task of matching the statement of Christians and churches with their own normative standards, and the external task of participating in public debates about aims and norms of society.' Wolfgang Vögele, *Menschenwürde zwischen Recht und Theologie: Begründungen von Menschenrechten in der Perspektive öffentlicher Theologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000), p. 41f [my translation]; Cf. Id., *Zivilreligion in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994), p. 424.

³⁶ Unfortunately Stackhouse does not explore his understanding of this 'symbolic character'. Stackhouse, *Public Theology and Political Economy*, p. 32.

³⁷ Stackhouse, 'Liberalism Revisited', in Neuhaus and Weigel, eds, *Being Christian Today*, p. 51; Id., *Public Theology and Political Economy*, p. 32; Id., 'Reaffirmations of Foundations for an Ecumenical Ethic', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 15 (1978), pp. 662-82 at p. 673. In 'Public Theology and Political Economy' he explores the relation of sacrament and technology to show the ambiguity of technology in categories of sacrament. Stackhouse, *Public Theology and Political Economy*, pp. 138-56. Without explanation he mentions that he took this category from Tillich. Max L. Stackhouse, 'Humanism after Tillich', *First Things* 72 (1997), pp. 24-8 at p. 25.

³⁸ Bedford-Strohm, *Gemeinschaft aus kommunikativer Freiheit*, p. 458.

churches as 'schools of virtue'.³⁹ As places of learning, discussion and formation of opinions churches shape their members and thereby influence society – not directly and explicitly as in advocacy or social teaching, but indirectly and implicitly.

Ronald Thiemann stresses the critical task of the church in this regard. For him, the churches potential regarding ethical learning is grounded in their critical perspective on society due to the antagonistic connection between ecclesial community and society.⁴⁰ Thiemann characterizes this combination as loyalty and criticism. Therefore, he perceives the individual believers as '[...] persons committed to the fundamental ideals of democracy yet able to see the shortcomings of any particular regime'.⁴¹ Thiemann calls this antagonistic relation between one's own community and society, between loyalty and criticism, 'dual citizenship' of believers as 'connected critics'.⁴² Since the church is part of the long-term structure of civil society, it can offer continuous support and criticism of liberal institutions.⁴³ Churches can be understood as 'schools of public virtue', which can provide room to search for meaning.⁴⁴ As communities of hope they contribute to the renewal of the liberal democracy.⁴⁵ Thereby they might contribute e.g. to multicultural coexistence and understanding in society etc.

Central to every description of the implicit function of the church is, secondly, the shaping of the individual believer. Again it is Stackhouse who describes believers as the first reference group of public theology, because every change in society is based on changes in personal beliefs.⁴⁶ Inside Christian communities personal beliefs are deeply influenced by teaching, preaching and sacraments.⁴⁷ Given that believers shape their surroundings, for him the sanctification of individuals offers a unique potential for changing society.⁴⁸ Hence, Stackhouse emphasizes the importance of local congregations by contrast with national church structures.⁴⁹ He calls this an 'inside-out'-approach: believers shape society in their

³⁹ Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision*, p. 185, p. 187.

⁴⁰ Ronald F. Thiemann, 'The Public Theologian as Connected Critic: The Case of Central European Churches', in M. Shahan, ed, *A Report from the Front Lines: Conversations in Public Theology*. A Festschrift in Honor of Robert Benne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 105-19 at p. 113.

⁴¹ Thiemann refers to Michael Walzer in this point. Ronald F. Thiemann, 'Public Theology: The Moral Dimension of Religion in a Pluralistic Society', *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 42 (1998), pp. 176-90 at p. 187; Id., 'The Public Theologian as Connected Critic', in Shahan, ed, *A Report from the Front Lines*, pp. 112-3.

⁴² Thiemann: 'The Public Theologian as Connected Critic', in Shahan, ed, *A Report from the Front Lines*, p. 113.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 111.

⁴⁴ Ronald F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 43. Cf. Id., 'Public Theology', p. 183.

⁴⁵ Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology*, p. 25; Id.: 'The Public Theologian as Connected Critic', in Shahan, ed, *A Report from the Front Lines*, p. 113.

⁴⁶ Stackhouse, 'An Ecumenist's Plea for a Public Theology', p. 68; Id., 'Art. Public Theology', in Fahlbusch et al., eds, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, p. 446; Id., 'Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology', p. 291; Id., *Public Theology and Political Economy*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ Stackhouse, 'Public Theology and the Future of Democratic Society', in Hessel, ed, *The Church's Public Role*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ Stackhouse, *Globalization and Grace*, p. 228.

⁴⁹ Hak Joon Lee, 'On Being reformed Today: An Interview with Max L. Stackhouse', *Perspectives. A Journal of Reformed Thought* (October 2005), <http://www.rca.org/page.aspx?pid=3080> [accessed February 7, 2014].

personal spheres of life from the inside out, just as the church as an institution influences the society.⁵⁰ Similarly, this implicit function of the church is central to Benne, although he differs in his consequences: For him, churches have a deep impact on their members if they define themselves as narrative communities.⁵¹ This way, churches can shape the hearts and spirits of their members through practical or moral arguments.⁵² He calls this task an 'indirect and unintentional influence' of the churches, which limits the influence of the churches to the conviction of their members.⁵³ Therefore, it also evokes critique as this influence can be negative, too.⁵⁴ Similar arguments can be found in the work of the South African theologian Dirk Smit.⁵⁵ For him, the place of public theology is the church. The churches call to public is rooted in God himself:⁵⁶ It can be deduced from common grace (e.g. A. Kuyper or M. Stackhouse), from the Holy Spirit as a public person (e.g. M. Welker), from Christology or from the Trinity (e.g. L. Newbigin). The churches as institutions act in different ways related to society: On the one hand, the individual Christians act as Christians in their daily life and roles and, on the other hand, they are organized in voluntary associations. Worship services, local activities of the congregations, or ecumenical events are, according to Smit, important ways to convey public theology to the believers.⁵⁷

In addition to these two aspects, a third aspect relates to the structure of the church as such. For Benne, the vision of God's society is embodied in the shape and behaviour of the church itself.⁵⁸ This forms a second way of unintentional and indirect influence of the church. Benne prefers this indirect mode, since it corresponds to the nature of the paradoxical vision: it takes the duality of God's reign into account and the church therefore acts as an instrument of the gospel for the individual and for itself.⁵⁹ Therefore, Benne is convinced that the being of the church is already its most important political contribution in secular time, which encompasses the proclamation of the Gospel and its moral expression in the Decalogue.⁶⁰ This core vision influences the theological thinking of the church, the social teachings, and

⁵⁰ Stackhouse distinguishes this approach against the 'top-down' approach of political theology and the 'bottom up' approach of civil religion. Stackhouse, 'Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology', p. 291. Cf. Id., 'Art. Public Theology', in Fahlbusch et al., eds, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, p. 446; Id., 'Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era', in Stackhouse et al., eds, *Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era*, p. 59; Id., 'The Vocation of Christian Ethics Today', p. 311.

⁵¹ Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision*, p. 185, p. 187.

⁵² Benne is convinced that churches as 'narrative communities' deeply influence their members and therefore become 'schools of virtue'. Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 184.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 188, p. 190.

⁵⁵ Dirk Smit, 'Notions of the Public and Doing Theology', *International Journal of Public Theology* 1:3-4 (2007), pp. 431-54 at pp. 452-3. Cf. similar arguments in the work of his colleague in Stellenbosch, Nico Koopman. Nico Koopman, 'Contemporary Public Theology in the United States and South Africa', in R. D. Smith, ed, *Freedom's Distant Shores: American Protestants and Post-Colonial Alliances with Africa* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), pp. 209-22 at p. 218.

⁵⁶ Smit, 'Notions of the Public and Doing Theology', pp. 450-1.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 452-3. Cf. chapter 2.b.

⁵⁸ Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision*, pp. 192-7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 199-200.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 72-3, p. 224.

dynamic political context in concentric circles.⁶¹ Without favouring the indirect influence as Benne does, Stackhouse likewise unfolds this implicit function of the church in relation to its covenantal structure. For him, it forms a model and 'avant-garde' of the federal liberal society.⁶² Thereby, the church implies a normative approach to the coexistence of the people beyond the Church: 'Indeed, the church is a meta-historical model of history living in history that attempts to preserve the integrity and transform the sustaining power of all systems, within itself and for society at large.'⁶³ The church's 'covenantal-federal' order points to an understanding of society as a community of communities, which can be realized in history under the conditions of evil, seduction, and destruction.⁶⁴ By its orientation to the divinely-ordained order, the church anticipates the development towards the eschatological kingdom of God.⁶⁵ Thus, the church embraces its special responsibility by using its opportunities to promote the sanctification of society and individuals.⁶⁶ This needs to be lived out through forms of being church – in hierarchical structures as well as in financial issues, in the commitment of church members as well as in social work etc.

As mentioned in the beginning, the descriptions of the implicit function of the church differ seriously from its explicit function. It is an active form (in contrast to the reactive approach of the explicit function) rising out of the existence and activity of the church itself. Therefore the church's activity and structure is of prior importance. This is pointed out by the emphasis the first two aspects place on the importance of all the faithful – bearing the risk to postpone the question how to make public theology operational on a purely individual level.⁶⁷

Despite this high estimation of the indirect function of the church in public theological discussion, a second critique may not be concealed. Likewise, to the British theologian Duncan Forrester, any public theology is necessarily church-related theology.⁶⁸ The church serves as a place of truth, as a community of moral discourse.⁶⁹ However, he points out the difficulty of recognizing 'the church' today. In the church as the one body of Christ, the

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁶² Stackhouse, *Eschatology an Ethical Method*, p. 61.

⁶³ Stackhouse, 'Toward a Theology for the New Social Gospel', p. 239. Cf. Id., *Ethics and the Urban Ethos: An Essay in Social Theory and Theological Reconstruction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 88, p. 147, p. 155; Id., 'Religious Freedom and Human Rights: A 'Public Theological' Perspective', in W. L. Taitte, ed, *Our Freedoms: Rights and Responsibilities* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), pp. 69-114 at p. 89.

⁶⁴ Stackhouse, 'Public Theology and the Future of Democratic Society', in Hessel, ed, *The Church's Public Role*, p. 68; Id., 'Religious Freedom and Human Rights', in Taitte, ed, *Our Freedoms*, p. 89.

⁶⁵ Stackhouse, 'Toward a Theology for the New Social Gospel', p. 240. Stackhouse emphasizes that in church history interactions between organized religion and structures of society always existed Id., *Ethics and the Urban Ethos*, p. 151.

⁶⁶ Stackhouse, 'Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era', in Stackhouse et al., eds, *Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era*, p. 57; Id., *Globalization and Grace*, p. 228.

⁶⁷ cf. chapter 2b.

⁶⁸ Duncan B. Forrester, 'Working in the quarry: A Response to the Colloquium, in W. F. Storrar and A. R. Morton, eds, *Public Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), pp. 431-8 at pp. 432-3.

⁶⁹ Forrester, 'Working in the quarry', in Storrar and Morton, eds, *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, p. 433.

gospel must become manifest, which is the proclaimed kingdom of God. Public theologies take place in this tension between the churches and the church as kingdom of God.

c. Public church

Closely linked to both these implicit and explicit functions of the church for public theology a third debate needs to be mentioned, concerning the public church. These debates overlap in some points; in others they stand incompatible with one another.

In the US-American context, it was again Martin Marty who developed a concept of a public church linked to public theology. For Marty, public churches are involved particularly in the *res publica*. They form an ecumenical model that challenges Christians to live in symbiosis in a community in communities of mutual interdependence.⁷⁰ When a public church reflexively examines and critiques existing social practices and cultural understandings in the light of its deepest religious insights into justice and the good society, it practices public theology.⁷¹ According to Marty, public church is 'a partial Christian embodiment within public religion.'⁷² Similarly, the Australian theologian Robert Simons picks up the term public church.⁷³ Furthermore, Catholic theologians in particular, like Michael and Kenneth Himes, refer to the concept of public church in order to oppose the privatization of the church and the separation of faith from social existence.⁷⁴ 'It combats privatization without denying the legitimate autonomy of social institutions from the church. The public church's direct task, however, is not to oppose privatization but to build up the public life of a people.'⁷⁵ It deeply influences their understanding of public theology:

As believers reflect upon and analyze the experience of a church that is engaged in the nation's public life, a theology emerges which seeks to make sense in the ecclesial experiment. [...] It is a manner of theological reflection which examines the resources latent within the Christian tradition for understanding the church's public role.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Martin Marty, *The Public Church* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1981), p. 1, p. 6.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 98-9.

⁷² Ibid., p. 6.

⁷³ 'When believers reflect upon and analyze the experiences of the Church as engaged in the public life of society, a theology emerges which strives to communicate the meaning of the Church's public involvement.' Simons refers to Hollenbach, Himes and Thiemann. Robert G. Simons, *Competing Gospels: Public Theology and Economic Theory* (Alexandria: E. J. Dwyer, 1995), p. xiv. Cf. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church: For the Life of the World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

⁷⁴ The authors emphasize that this is a decidedly Catholic understanding. Public church means, first, respect for the autonomy of the church in regard to other social institutions; second, acceptance of the responsibility for the welfare of society; and, third, commitment to collaboration with other social institutions to shape the common good. Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (Mahwah/New York: Paulist Press, 1993), p. 2, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Cf.: 'Public theology wants to bring the wisdom of the Christian tradition into public conversation to contribute to the well-being of the society. But public theology also aims at rendering an account of Christian

A similar understanding can be found in Wolfgang Huber's term 'öffentliche Kirche' (public church), which describes the attention of the church for the society.⁷⁷ The church should not take its duties from the requirements of society, but rather proclaim its strange truth under the present conditions.⁷⁸ Although this public mandate is anchored in the biblical tradition, the adaptation to the respective publics is, however, always relative and provisional.⁷⁹ Therefore, the understanding of what is referred to as 'public' needs to be disclosed carefully.⁸⁰ Huber characterises today's society by multiculturalism, which influences the internal pluralism of the church.⁸¹ He therefore urges the churches to overcome the duality of church and state in the understanding of the public mandate and to rather perceive and reflect the plurality of different publics theologically.⁸² To Huber, basic characteristics of the Christian church are the interpretation of reality in the light of its relation to God, the devotion towards the weak, and the perception of humanity in the midst of creation.⁸³ These are all encompassed in a public theology: It reflects on the work and the effects of Christianity in the social public, as well as participates dialogically in the reflection on the identity and crises, the objectives and tasks of society.⁸⁴

The analysis of the term 'public church' shows, that it is a hybrid between explicit and implicit function of the church tending towards forms of implicit action in society. Similarly to the explicit function, the public church can be agent in civil society commenting on societal issues. Similarly to the implicit function, the acting and being a model for society of the public church accrues out of its being and structure. It therefore is active and reactive alike comprising activities and exemplary being of the churches.

d. The church as public of theology

The fourth description of the relationship between church and public theology differs significantly from the three previously mentioned. It opens up a new level in the relation analyzed: So far the relationship between church and public has been examined; now the relationship between church, public and theology comes into view. While the previous forms worked on the mediation of a certain theology by a church into the public, now the question arises how the relationship between theology and church can be determined in this context. In his well-known and in public theological discussions often-cited book 'The Analogical Imagination', David Tracy develops a description of three publics of theology. He

belief that articulates what it means to be a member of the church. An interpretation of the Christian creed that ignores the social dimension of human existence falls far short of the fullness of faith.' *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Huber, 'Öffentliche Kirche in pluralen Öffentlichkeiten', p. 159.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-71.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171, p. 173.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

distinguishes society, academia and church as three publics of theology he wants to approach both sociologically and theologically.⁸⁵ The theologian has to approach these in its three forms as fundamental, systematic and practical theology.⁸⁶ Every theologian speaks in and to all three publics, because ‘the demands and plausibility-structures of each public have been internalized to different degrees of radicalness in each theologian.’⁸⁷ The church as a public of theology demands increased attention since theology itself is involved in the reflection of its own ties to the church.⁸⁸ Additionally, the role of the theologian in the church varies.⁸⁹

Many public theologians refer to Tracy’s model of the three publics.⁹⁰ But the references to Tracy usually remain superficial. His description of the three publics of theology is neither theologically nor sociologically debated. Also, Tracy’s definition of the relationship between theology and church is not yet made fruitful for the typology of the relationship between church and public. The question of how the interaction of theology and its three publics affected each other, i.e. the question of how a public theology in a church influences the church’s behavior in public (and vice versa) is still an open question in public theology.

2. Public theological thinking about the church. Some questions and remarks

Having sketched out these four functional descriptions of the church for public theology drawn from various public theologians, some more systematic questions about this relation need to be raised. One may ask for example: Can the church be described in this functional perspective from a theological point of view, or might theology itself rather be understood theologically as a function of the church? Moreover, what is the relation between the explicit and implicit function of the church, and Tracy’s description of the church as one of the publics of theology? How does the church as one of the publics vis-a-vis theology relate to the public of the church? What impact does theology have in and for this function of the

⁸⁵ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroads, 1981), p. 23.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸⁷ David Tracy, ‘Defending the Public Character of Theology’, *The Christian Century* 98:11 (1981), pp. 350-6 at p. 353.

⁸⁸ Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 22.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹⁰ Following Tracy, Linell Cady and Ronald Thiemann stress that theology must be adopted to the various publics. Similarly – to name only few – Robert Benne, Harold E. Breitenberg, Michael and Kenneth Himes, and even South African theologians Nico Koopman and Dirk Smit, as well as Australian theologians James Haire and Clive Pearson refer to Tracy’s model. Cf. Benne, *The paradoxical vision*, p. 3; Harold E. Breitenberg, ‘To tell the truth: Will the real public theology please stand up?’, *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 23:2 (2003), pp. 55-96 at p. 57; Linell E. Cady, ‘A Model for a Public Theology’, *Harvard Theological Review* 80:2 (1987), pp. 193-212 at p. 194; James Haire, ‘Public Theology – a Purely Western Issue? Public Theology in the Praxis of the Church in Asia’, *CTC Bulletin* 23:3 (2007), pp. 48-61 at p. 48; Himes and Himes, *Fulness of Faith*, pp. 16-17; Nico Koopman, ‘Public Theology in (South) Africa: A Trinitarian Approach’, *International Journal of Public Theology* 2:1 (2007), pp. 188-209 at p. 188; Clive Pearson, ‘The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology’, *International Journal of Public Theology* 1:1-2 (2007), pp. 151-172 at p. 156; Smit, ‘Notions of the Public and doing Theology’, p. 442; Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology*, p. 20.

church? And how exactly is theology – which, at least in Germany, is usually part of academia – connected with the church?

Only some out of many questions can be discussed. In the following, I want to discuss only three aspects of this kaleidoscope of relations between public theology and the church. Firstly, the understanding of ‘the church’ needs to be stated more precisely: What is ‘the church’, to which theological and/or sociological term do we refer? Secondly, I turn to the implicit function of the church many theologians stressed. The implicit function seems to be one of the most important relations: It is favoured by different theologians from different churches and countries; it is not as strongly defined by political and social circumstances as other parts; and it is widely discussed in recent practical theological, especially liturgical, research. Therefore, I will examine the concrete place, time, and means, where this implicit shaping takes shape. Insights into formative liturgy, taken up by South African theologian Dirk Smit, show one possibility of sharpening this dimension of public theology. Thirdly, the theologians should come into sight as he or she usually serves as mediators of public theology into the churches and to the individual believers. Which role does theological education play in this regard?

a. Notions of ‘the church’ as institute and organism

As Duncan Forrester already stated referring to the indirect function of the church, it is difficult to recognize ‘the church’.⁹¹ In the church as the one body of Christ, the gospel must become manifest, which is the proclaimed kingdom of God. In this tension between the churches and the church as kingdom of God, public theologies take place. This difficulty points to one of the main problems in the actual discussion of the churches’ role in public theology: What is ‘the church’, where does it become manifest, how does its theological character as the body of Christ relate to the sociological realities of the churches we are surrounded with?

These questions are usually neglected in the current debate about the functional understanding of church related to public theology. Asking from this functional point of view, Abraham Kuyper’s description of the church may be helpful. One of the most important distinctions Kuyper draws is the distinction between the church as an institute and as an organism.⁹² As an institute, the church exists in its own sphere as part of society. It consists

⁹¹ Forrester, ‘Working in the quarry’, in Storrar and Morton, eds, *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, pp. 432-3.

⁹² Heslam states that Kuyper does not use these categories comprehensively and bases his approach on Albert Schweitzer. Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 133. Cf. Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid: Volume III* (Kampen: H. J. Kok, ²1909), p. 215. How this distinction is rooted in Kuyper’s theology of grace, Gerard Dekker and George Harinck have demonstrated comprehensively. Gerard Dekker and George Harinck, ‘The Position of the Church as Institute in Society: A Comparison between Bonhoeffer and Kuyper’, *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 28:1 (2007), pp. 86-98 at pp. 87-9.

of believers who seek to spread doctrine in the world, to baptize and to live in a community.⁹³ According to Kuyper, the church is

an ‘assembly of believers’, a host of adherents acting together, who share their religious life in obedience to the ordinances that Christ gave them for this purpose. [...] There are only faithful, confessing people, who, owing to the sociological urge of all religion, congregate, and, in submission to Christ as their King on high, try to live together.⁹⁴

This community was designed according to the covenant of man with God as a ‘confederation’ in a synodical form.⁹⁵ The church is therefore one, but exists in different institutions.⁹⁶ As an organism, the church is not limited to its institutional sphere, but related to the whole society.⁹⁷ As Hesham states, ‘The formation of a Christian mind or disposition, for instance, as well as Christian social organizations, Christian science, and Christian art, came into the realm of activity belonging to the church.’⁹⁸ This formation is modelled by the institutional constitution of the church, as Kuyper emphasized with reference to its democratic and liberal structure.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the institutional separation of church and state should remain untouched.¹⁰⁰

This dual character causes a tension between the restriction of the church to its own sphere and its comprehensive influence. Interestingly, Kuyper does not separate the two characteristics. They are never exclusive but always in conjunction. This provides a deeper insight into the explicit and implicit function of the church as described above. As an institute, the church can take the explicit function in offering advocacy, providing social teaching, and being a public church. However, Kuyper explicitly contradicts a ‘clericalization of life’ and adheres to secularization as a fundamental principle of Calvinism.¹⁰¹ Only in an indirect way should the church influence society.¹⁰² The implicit function of the church can only work if one considers the church as an organism as well. Based on the limits and

⁹³ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: Being the Six ‘Stone’ Lectures given at Princeton Theological Seminary USA*. With Introductory Chapter by Rev. Henry Beets (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), p. 102.

⁹⁴ Cited in Dekker and Harinck, ‘The Position of the Church as Institute in Society’, p. 91.

⁹⁵ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 104.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 85.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 90.

⁹⁸ Hesham, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, p. 134.

⁹⁹ ‘Het Christendom is democratisch naar aard en wezen [...]’ Abraham Kuyper, *Confidentie: Schrijven an den weled. Herr J. H. van der Linden door Dr. A. Kuyper* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Zoon, 1873), p. 79.

¹⁰⁰ Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie: Volume II* (Amsterdam: Hoveke & Wormser, 1903), pp. 274-6.

¹⁰¹ Dekker and Harinck, ‘The Position of the Church as Institute in Society’, p. 95. Cf. Richard J. Mouw, ‘Culture, Church, and Civil Society: Kuyper for a New Century’, *Princeton Seminar Bulletin* 28:1 (2007), pp. 48-63 at p. 60.

¹⁰² Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie: Volume II*, p. 273.

opportunities of these two functions, public theologians need to evolve a 'public ecclesiology' that keeps both poles together.¹⁰³ To quote Kuyper again:

However, if one realizes that the Church is not merely institute, but also an organism, and as such consists of believers, with the many powers of grace living amongst them and working in them, then of course it's an entirely different matter. Then those believers are the same people who in their families act as parents and children, in their business as patrons and workers, in society as citizens and who, as such, make the powers of the kingdom felt in their domestic lives, in their education, in their businesses and in all contacts with people and also citizens in society. Whereas the Church as institute is removed from the world and therefore stands opposite to it, the Church as organism enters into the life of the world in exactly the opposite way, turns it around, gives it another form, raises it and sanctifies it.¹⁰⁴

b. Implicit formation of believers – thinking about worship

Talking about the implicit function of the church requires talking about the place and the time where the implicit formation takes place. Referring to the shaping of believers, theologians usually point to worship, as we will see later on. Therefore, worship is a matter of public theology and, in a more general dimension, genuinely part of public theology: it is the central component of the churches public life. According to the churches self-understanding worship usually forms the heart of church life. It is the churches' first, genuinely public embodiment. During the worship service, the congregation opens its doors and blurs the 'border' between inside and outside the worshipping community; however this might be understood ecclesologically. Since the 4th century, churches do not have to search for a 'public' – it is rather part of their own constitution as *cultus publicus*.¹⁰⁵ Martin Luther confirmed this understanding during the Reformation era: to him, worship services are 'public ceremonies' because and insofar as they have missionary and catechetical character (Deutsche Messe), their communication is understandable (Torgauer Kirchweihpredigt), and the liturgy is accessible for the whole congregation (inauguration of the Castle Church in Torgau).¹⁰⁶ This description is amazingly similar to the description of the claim of public

¹⁰³ Cf. Breitenberg, 'To Tell the Truth', pp. 59-60; Harold E. Breitenberg, 'What is Public Theology?', in D. K. Hainsworth and S. R. Paeth, eds, *Public Theology for a Global Society: Essays in Honor of Max L. Stackhouse* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 3-17 at pp. 13-6; Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church*.

¹⁰⁴ Abraham Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie: Volume III* (Kampen: H. J. Kok, 1932), pp. 424-5 [English translation in Dekker and Harinck, 'The Position of the Church as Institute in Society', p. 96].

¹⁰⁵ David Plüss and Kathrin Kusmierz, 'Politischer Gottesdienst?! Eine Einleitung', in D. Plüss and K. Kusmierz, eds, *Politischer Gottesdienst?! Praktische Theologie im reformierten Kontext 8* (Zürich: TVZ, 2013), pp. 9-16 at p. 9. Cf. Peter Cornehl, 'Öffentlicher Gottesdienst: Zum Strukturwandel der Liturgie', in P. Cornehl and H.-E. Bahr, eds, *Gottesdienst und Öffentlichkeit: Zur Theorie und Didaktik neuer Kommunikation* (Hamburg: Furche, 1970), pp. 118-96 at p. 171.

¹⁰⁶ Plüss and Kusmierz, 'Politischer Gottesdienst', in Plüss and Kusmierz, eds, *Politischer Gottesdienst*, pp. 10-1.

theology in Breitenberg and Cady: Public theology should be intelligible, comprehensive, and configure an opinion on public issues.¹⁰⁷

Coming back to the implicit function of the church shaping the individual believer, one might ask how this claim of public theology can be determined in relation to the worship service. Insights might be found in liturgical research, where debates about the ethical character of worship have now taken place for several years. Starting from discontent with the focus on political preaching, interest in the liturgy as a whole emerged.¹⁰⁸ As the German theologian Michael Meyer-Blanck states, the liturgy in its rhetorical-discursive and ritual dimension has to interpret the faith and shape the words and deeds of the faithful.¹⁰⁹ The key term 'Formative Liturgy' refers to attempts to describe how liturgical practice can shape ethical attitudes, as in the work of James K. A. Smith, Stanley Hauerwas, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Bernd Wannewetsch.¹¹⁰

This debate has been picked up and related to public theology by the South African theologian Dirk Smit.¹¹¹ His insights – mainly following Stanley Hauerwas, John De Gruchy and Nicholas Wolterstorff – offer a helpful explanation of the very widely understood implicit formation of believers: He tries to answer the question, why Christian worship shapes the believer and how this is rooted in a Christian understanding of worship itself. Therefore, it shall be sketched a little more detailed. For Smit, worship services are a manifestation of the public church and of the place of public theology, since the believers can be empowered for their service in public there.¹¹² Quoting John De Gruchy, he is convinced that, 'Christian piety at its best has made a significant contribution to the social transformation of the world.'¹¹³ Following Bonhoeffer, Smit states that the most important

¹⁰⁷ Breitenberg, 'To Tell the Truth', pp. 63-5; Cady, 'A Model for a Public Theology', pp. 197-8. p. 210.

¹⁰⁸ David Plüss, 'Politischer Gottesdienst als liturgische Praxis oder: Von der rituellen Performanz des Politischen', in D. Plüss and K. Kusmierz, eds, *Politischer Gottesdienst?! Praktische Theologie im reformierten Kontext 8* (Zürich: TVZ, 2013), pp. 73-94 at p. 73.

¹⁰⁹ Plüss, 'Politischer Gottesdienst als liturgische Praxis', in Plüss and Kusmierz, eds, *Politischer Gottesdienst*, pp. 73-4.

¹¹⁰ Plüss and Kusmierz, 'Politischer Gottesdienst', in Plüss and Kusmierz, eds, *Politischer Gottesdienst*, p. 12; Plüss, 'Politischer Gottesdienst als liturgische Praxis', in Plüss and Kusmierz, eds, *Politischer Gottesdienst*, pp. 73-94. Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1977), pp. 153-168; James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 399-434; Bernd Wannewetsch, *Gottesdienst als Lebensform: Ethik für Christenbürger* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997).

¹¹¹ As introduction to the South-African discussion see Kathrin Kusmierz, 'Politischer Gottesdienst – öffentlicher Gottesdienst: Ein Diskussionsbeitrag vor dem Hintergrund südafrikanischer Theologie und Geschichte', in D. Plüss and K. Kusmierz, eds, *Politischer Gottesdienst?! Praktische Theologie im reformierten Kontext 8* (Zürich: TVZ, 2013), pp. 95-115.

¹¹² Smit, 'Notions of the Public and Doing Theology', pp. 452-3; Dirk Smit, 'Liturgy and Life? On the Importance of Worship for Christian Ethics', *Scriptura* 62 (1962), pp. 259-80; Dirk Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently: On Prayer and Politics', in L. Holness and R. K. Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue: The Impact of the Arts, Humanities, and Science on Contemporary Religious Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 271-84.

¹¹³ Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 271. Cf. John De Gruchy, *Cry Justice!* (London: Collins, 1986), p. 23.

task of Christian ethics is learning to see: 'Seeing the world sub specie Christi is the paramount theological activity for Christians'.¹¹⁴ Seeing and perception for him is the *proprium* of Christian ethics, because acting always follows perception, '*agere sequitur videre*'.¹¹⁵ Therefore, Christian ethicists need to search for the place where people can learn to see. Seeing and – consequently – acting are deeply dependent on the particular social context of a person.¹¹⁶ For Smit, worship is one of these social locations, a place to 'see things differently'.¹¹⁷ He repeatedly cites Hauerwas:

[E]thics is first a way of seeing before it is a matter of doing. The ethical task is not to tell you what is right or wrong but rather to train you to see. That explains why, in the church, a great deal of time and energy are spent in the act of worship: In worship, we are busy looking in the right direction.¹¹⁸

Subsequently, Smit firstly explains the medium and secondly the two reasons of this understanding of worship. Following Calvin, the medium of seeing in the service is hearing, especially hearing the Holy Scriptures: 'The Scriptures are not something to look at but rather through, lenses that refocus what we see into an intelligent pattern.'¹¹⁹ The first reason why the worship especially is the most important place for learning to see is its special configuration in time. Following the German theologian Wolfgang Huber, he calls it the 'Ungleichzeitigkeit der Religion' (non-simultaneity of religion): In worship, remembrance, hope and experience come together.¹²⁰ It is a tension between tradition (memory) and hope (future) which arises out of the nature of faith itself.¹²¹ This creative ('schöpferisch') tension makes ethics possible and necessary, and therefore needs to be accentuated by Christian ethics.¹²² The second reason for this understanding of worship is the relation of liturgy and justice, which the worshipping community can see in worship. This understanding is deeply

¹¹⁴ Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 272. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (London: SCM Press, 1959), pp. 7-8. Smit also refers to Heinz E. Tödt, Johannes Fischer, John De Gruchy and other South African theologians in this regard. Cf. *ibid.*; Smit: 'Liturgy and Life', p. 259.

¹¹⁵ Smit, 'Liturgy and Life', p. 261.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* He follows L. G. Jones in this point.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 262; Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 273.

¹¹⁸ Cited in Smit, 'Liturgy and Life', p. 262. The origin of the quote of Hauerwas is not indicated. Smit combines this understanding with Karl Barth's thinking about *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. Cf. *ibid.*, 263-4.; Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 274-5.

¹¹⁹ Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 274. He refers to 'Clifford Green, *Imagining God* (San Francisco, 1989), p. 107'. As this book does not exist, Smit probably refers to Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 107.

¹²⁰ Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 276; Smit, 'Liturgy and Life', p. 265. Cf. Wolfgang Huber, 'Erinnerung, Erfahrung, Erwartung: Die Ungleichzeitigkeit der Religion und die Aufgabe theologischer Ethik', in C. Link, ed, *Die Erfahrung der Zeit: Gedenkschrift für Christian Picht* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), pp. 321-36.

¹²¹ Smit, 'Liturgy and Life', p. 266.

¹²² Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 276. Huber describes the task of ethics as: 'die schöpferische Ungleichzeitigkeit des Glaubens im Blick auf die ethischen Probleme der Gegenwart zur Geltung zu bringen'. Huber, 'Erinnerung, Erfahrung, Erwartung', in Link, ed, *Die Erfahrung der Zeit*, p. 322.

influenced by Nicholas Wolterstorff. To Wolterstorff, liturgy qualifies the Christian acting in the world in its relation to holiness and justice:

God's justice is a manifestation of his holiness; our justice is a reflection of God's holiness. When we deal with justice, we are dealing with the sacred. Injustice is desecration. The preoccupation of the liturgy with holiness does not separate liturgy from justice. On the contrary, holiness binds liturgy and justice together.¹²³

Therefore, justice is a manifestation of God's holiness in the world, newly defined by Jesus himself:

The holiness of a community resides centrally in how it treats human beings, both those who are members of the community and those outside [...]. We learn from Jesus that a community which shuns the broken ones can never be a whole community – that is, can never be a holy community.¹²⁴

Consequently, authentic liturgy is always related to justice.¹²⁵

Given the relevance of worship for ethical formation – for Smit especially relevant in the Reformed tradition¹²⁶ – he closes with a warning remark on the ambivalent character of worship: 'However, Christian worship has been and still is an ambivalent phenomenon. In reality it is often more a reflection of society than a critical and creative interruption of society. Worship often legitimates society instead of subverting and interrupting it.'¹²⁷ He is aware of the highly idealistic character of the picture he draws: not every worship is 'true Christian worship', which is why he advocates a 'theology of worship, also providing critical tools to interpret and evaluate our worship practices.'¹²⁸ This theology of worship has to uncover 'false piety'¹²⁹ and all forms of misuse of worship to sustain the task of the church in the world: 'The Christian Church betrays society when it is no longer the Church and when

¹²³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Liturgy, Justice, and Holiness', *The Reformed Journal* (1989), pp. 12-20 at p. 13. Cited in Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 278; Smit, 'Liturgy and Life', 268-7.

¹²⁴ Wolterstorff, 'Liturgy, Justice, and Holiness', p. 20. Cited in Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 279.

¹²⁵ 'Worship acceptable to God, authentic worship, is the worship of a pure heart. And the only pure heart is the heart of a person who has genuinely struggled to embody God's justice and righteousness in the world [...].' Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Justice as a Condition of Authentic Liturgy', *Theology Today* 48:1 (1991), pp. 6-21 at p. 21. Cited in Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 280.

¹²⁶ Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, pp. 280-1; Smit, 'Liturgy and Life', p. 270. This confessional thesis cannot be investigated in this paper. Given the importance of this dimension also for the decidedly Lutheran theologian Robert Benne, it needs to be modified for the public theological discussion.

¹²⁷ Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 282. Cf. Smit, 'Liturgy and Life', p. 272.

¹²⁸ Smit, 'Liturgy and Life', p. 272.

¹²⁹ Quoting De Gruchy Smit names some forms of false piety from the South African history. *Ibid.*, pp. 273-4; Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 283.

it no longer worships *as the Church*. The Christian Church betrays society when it merely becomes a mirror image, a reflection, of everyday life, of reality outside the place of worship.¹³⁰

Similar insights can be found in the work of Smit's colleague, Nico Koopman¹³¹. Very closely related is also the work of Swiss theologians Kathrin Kusmierz and David Plüss: They advocate for a close relation of public theology and the original understanding of worship as *cultus publicus*.¹³² They describe worship as 'heterotopias' (Foucault), as an interruption of time and present in contrast and in relation to the 'world'.¹³³ Therefore a careful reading and interpretation of biblical texts relating to the situation, as well as the ability and willingness for arguments among church members is required.¹³⁴ All these theologians attempt to define the relation between church and public theology at the interface of God's reality and human endeavour in worship.

From this ecclesiological perspective, worship can be described as a formative event that changes individuals. Worship serves as a new lens to see the world differently, mediated by hearing the scriptures. The potential for ethical formation arises out of the creative tension of present realities with the past and the future drawn from liturgical elements. It trains individuals to see the world in the light of eschatological tension, in the light of divine justice shaping liturgy. It should be added, that liturgical elements take up emotions and narratives, often contradicting secular social contexts and secular liturgies and thereby re-shape the faithful. For example the indiscriminate access for all faithful to the Lord's Supper might overcome social, political or racial boundaries bringing together the body of Christ. The focus on God in the prayer in the beginning framing all following words and deeds contradicts our self-referred daily life hoping and praying for God's Holy Spirit. Turning towards one another in the kiss of peace after confession and forgiveness of sins can be an embodied overcoming of mutual harms, boundaries and strife. These insights may help to sharpen the postulated implicit function of the church in public theologies and even to strengthen public theological thinking about the 'where' and 'how' of the shaping of believers. As mentioned above, this approach is in danger to postpone the question how to make public theology operational at the level of the individual. Thereby it is not dissolved nor does it spare the implicit function of the church itself. The ideas drafted above about shaping individual believers through worship deeply depend on the arrangement of worship itself in order to make worship a place of learning how to see, of interaction of remembrance, hope and experience or even a

¹³⁰ Smit, 'Liturgy and Life', p. 272 [italics by D. Smit]; Cf. Smit, 'Seeing Things Differently', in Holness and Wüstenberg, eds, *Theology in Dialogue*, p. 283.

¹³¹ 'We might develop ministries where worship services, for instance, indeed become spaces of transformation and subversion, spaces where hopelessness is transformed into hope and where the strange values of God's reign find a path for embodiment in the world.' Nico Koopman, 'After Ten Years: Public Theology in Postapartheid South Africa. Lessons from a Debate in the USA', *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif* 46:1-2 (2005), pp. 149-64 at p. 159.

¹³² Plüss and Kusmierz, 'Politischer Gottesdienst', in Plüss and Kusmierz, eds, *Politischer Gottesdienst*, p. 12.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

heterotopia. As the worship usually is led by a pastor, this leads us to the third aspect thinking about the pastor as public theologian.

c. At the interface of (public) theology and church – the pastor as public theologian

After deliberating on the 'how', 'when' and 'where' of ethical formation in the church, a last remark on the mediators of public theology in the churches needs to be made. Usually the relation between theology and a church is personified: The trained theologians who work as pastors of a congregation serve as a connection between academic theology and church life. Stackhouse especially stresses this point. For him, the relation to the church marks one major difference between theology and philosophy: Theology speaks from the academic sector into an institution which is not primarily academic.¹³⁵ 'Christian theologians have a constituency,'¹³⁶ and therefore, public theology is not limited to the academia only, but is necessary in the churches. As the public world constitutes the contexts of faith, it should be addressed in the teaching and practice of the church.¹³⁷ As usually the pastor serves as mediator between the churches teaching and academic theology, Stackhouse consistently deals with questions of theological training and education.¹³⁸ The framework of church and pastoral activity is influenced by the social institutions, whose ethical dimension must be revealed not only in academic theology, but also in the church.¹³⁹ Especially important to Stackhouse are secularization and inter-religious dialogue, for which the church officials are usually not sufficiently prepared.¹⁴⁰ He therefore advocates a reform of theological education with the aim of training all pastors as priests, prophets, and public theologians: While the priestly task concerning spirituality is addressed in the context of practical theology, and the prophetic dimension was emphasized by the liberation theology, the royal task is usually not taken into account: It aims to train pastors in the social analysis of publicly relevant issues and the uncovering of potentials of the theological tradition for theological

¹³⁵ Max L. Stackhouse, 'Toward a Theology of the New Social Gospel', *New Theology* 4 (1967), pp 220-42 at p. 231.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Max L. Stackhouse, 'The Pastor as Public Theologian', in E. E. Shelp and R. H. Sunderland, eds, *The Pastor as Theologian* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1988), pp. 106-29 at p. 110.

¹³⁸ Cf. for example Max L. Stackhouse, 'Globalization, Faith and Theological Education', *Theological Education* 35:2 (1999), pp. 67-77; *Id.*, 'If Globalization is true, what shall we do? Toward a Theology of Ministry', *Theological Education* 35:2 (1999), pp. 155-65; *Id.*, 'The Pastor as Public Theologian', in Shelp and Sunderland, eds, *The Pastor as Theologian*, pp. 106-29. For Breitenberg theological education is Stackhouse's approach for 'making public theology operational'. Breitenberg, *The comprehensive public theology of Max L. Stackhouse*, p. 224.

¹³⁹ Max L. Stackhouse: 'Art. Public Theology', in N. Lossky et al., eds, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2002), pp. 1131-3 at p. 1131; *Id.*, 'The Pastor as Public Theologian', in Shelp and Sunderland, eds, *The Pastor as Theologian*, p. 111.

¹⁴⁰ Stackhouse, 'The Pastor as Public Theologian', in Shelp and Sunderland, eds, *The Pastor as Theologian*, pp. 117-8.

judgments about public issues.¹⁴¹ In Stackhouse's view, this is particularly necessary facing globalization, since the local churches are increasingly linked globally.¹⁴² Using the existing resources in the church and professions, it is the pastor's calling to share this theology in teaching and preaching to prepare the faithful for dealing with public issues.¹⁴³

The German theologian Bedford-Strohm adds another perspective to this concern of Stackhouse.¹⁴⁴ He points out that especially for public theology the believers themselves represent a great resource of the churches, as public theology by its very concern deals with not only 'theological' questions (in terms of professional scientific specification), but with problems from various specific fields. Therefore, the priesthood of all believers helps to guarantee the required interdisciplinary discussion of public theological issues. The believers themselves are by their professional training experts of all sorts of fields, such as biology, economics, politics, etc. The members of the churches are thus the main resource in the discussion of public theological questions. This applies not only to the institutional level of church leaders – as shown in the chambers of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), which consist of theologians and professionals from the fields to be worked on – but also for local discussions of urgent public theological issues.

This view of mediators of public theology in the life of the churches at the interface of theology and the daily life of the believers has hardly been considered. When public theology aims to shape believers, it needs to take Stackhouse's questions serious: How can pastors be trained in order to be aware of the issues and concerns of public theology? When public theology aims to take place not merely at the structural level of church leaders and groups of experts, how can pastoral training help to find theologically responsible answers to urgent public theological questions? In addition, we have to ask: How can we build up spaces and opportunity of participation that take the expertise from the ranks of our own church members seriously for discussions of relevant local public theological questions?

Stackhouse himself answered this question by developing a public theological methodology.¹⁴⁵ His basic methodological question is the relation of descriptive empirical analysis and normative perspective: 'Protestant ethics, like most Christian ethics, requires coming to judgment by interpreting the context and weighing purported facts and by

¹⁴¹ Stackhouse, 'If Globalization is true', p. 158; Stackhouse, 'Religious Freedom and Human Rights', in Taitte, ed, *Our Freedoms*, pp. 108-11; Id., *Public Theology and Political Economy*, p. 174; Id., 'The Pastor as Public Theologian', in Shelp and Sunderland, eds, *The Pastor as Theologian*, p. 110.

¹⁴² Max L. Stackhouse, 'Globalization and Theology in America Today', in W. C. Roof, ed, *World Order and Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), pp. 247-63; Id., 'If Globalization is true', p. 155. p. 161; Id., 'The Global Future and the Future of Globalization', *The Christian Century* 111:4 (1994), pp. 109-18 at p. 109.

¹⁴³ Stackhouse, 'Religious Freedom and Human Rights', in Taitte, ed, *Our Freedoms*, p. 112; Id., 'If Globalization is true', p. 162.

¹⁴⁴ Bedford-Strohm, 'Öffentliche Theologie in der Zivilgesellschaft', in Gabriel, ed, *Politik und Theologie in Europa*, p. 350; Id., 'Politik und Religion – öffentliche Theologie', p. 53.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. van Oorschot, *Öffentliche Theologie angesichts der Globalisierung*, pp. 119-42.

discerning what principles, values, or laws are of God [...].'¹⁴⁶ Ethical learning and training relate the empirical situation and a normative reference point, but they are not opposed. Public theology does not understand 'ethics as a fixed loyalty to a standard of conduct which can be and must be applied to all people in all situations in exactly the same way', but relates context and absolutes in a specific situation.¹⁴⁷ The normative reference point for Stackhouse can be found in biblical motives and theological traditions.¹⁴⁸

Theological education usually focuses on the normative part of public theological work as Stackhouse calls it. Therefore a great need of education in empirical analyses and methodological tools for relating one to the other is needed. Maybe systematic public theology can learn a lot from other theological disciplines. For example in practical theology, especially in the field of religious education, a great variety of analytical tools from social sciences are already used. Forms of social scientific analyses of the target audience, empirical investigations of existing convictions and questions on theological themes in different groups of society ('empirical theology') etc are a matter of course before starting to develop concepts of religious education. Learning these tools is integral part of the training as religious educator – but usually not of the pastoral training. But probably the ability to analyze the questions, convictions and issues of a congregation and the other publics of theology is as important as it is for religious education. Therefore pastoral training can learn from social scientific research and analysis of existing 'empirical theologies'. In order to prevent public theology from declining into a mere hermeneutic of application ('Applikationshermeneutik') of its empirical and normative work, insights from the extensive debate on the interpretation of Scripture can be taken up as it is subject to a structurally similar hermeneutic challenge: How can Scripture be interpreted in the light of current issues? Similarly, public theology asks how Scripture and tradition can illuminate current public issues. From the extensive debate only two observations might illustrate this path: Firstly, Schlink's observations of the structure of dogmatic statements (dogmatic, doxologically etc) and their different characters and implications might be useful for a public theological hermeneutic.¹⁴⁹ Public theology has to ask, who it talks to in what way and how this structure changes the contents of its statements. Secondly, Pannenberg's notes on theological hermeneutics have to be taken seriously.¹⁵⁰ Scriptural hermeneutics does not mean mere application, rather the interpretation itself is part of analysis and the challenges of the time are always a challenge of theology itself. Not the issues of society need to be

¹⁴⁶ Stackhouse, 'Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era', in Id. et al., eds, *Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. van Oorschot, *Öffentliche Theologie angesichts der Globalisierung*, pp. 174-209.

¹⁴⁹ Edmund Schlink, 'Die Struktur der dogmatischen Aussage als ökumenisches Problem', *Kerygma und Dogma*, 3 (1957), pp. 251-306; Id., *Ökumenische Dogmatik: Schriften zu Ökumene und Bekenntnis 2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, ³2005), pp. 33-59; Id., 'Theologische Sprachanalytik im Vorfeld der Ökumenischen Fragestellung', *Ökumenische Rundschau*, 26 (1977), pp. 63-74.

¹⁵⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Über historische und theologische Hermeneutik', in id., ed, *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, ³1979), pp. 123-58 at p. 123. p. 125.

answered by theology, but the answers of society also question theology. (Public) theological hermeneutics is therefore a constant interplay of mutual questioning and interpretation of theology and its publics.

3. Conclusion: 'Making public theology operational'

The outlined descriptions of the relation of public theology and church allow an analytical view on different understandings of the churches functions related to public theology. As noted at the beginning, the analysis shows different functional descriptions of the church in the field of public theology, which still need to be discussed ecclesiologically. This paper can not anticipate this discussion, but offers a starting point by identifying some issues and analyzing available options. The analysis showed that this relation is not uniquely and distinctly defined but varies depending on theological underpinnings, political and social conditions etc. For debates in the field of public theology, these different models of the relation of church and public theology should be taken into account and simultaneously need to be distinguished carefully. The explicit function of the church and the self-understanding as public church very much depend on the political and social conditions of a church's theological thinking and acting. Clear confessional proclivities can – against prominent examples – not be seen and were not central for my analysis.

The systematic discussion raised only some of the urgent questions on public theological thinking about church and ecclesiology. Discussing the churches role, the term needs to be defined more closely. Kuyper shows that the explicit and implicit function of the church cannot be pitted against each other. The church in the public realm within civil society is also part of the public function of the church as a public entity. Both aspects need to be considered likewise in order to prevent activist or quietist impasses – to prevent a purely functional description of the church¹⁵¹. The insights of formative liturgy, especially its public theological aspect advocated by Smit, help to define the places and means that need to be discussed in relation to implicit forms of theological shaping of believers. Additionally, Kusmierz's determination of worship as heterotopia might be helpful to sharpen the dialectical tension of worship between contrast and connection to the 'world'. The focus on the persona of the theologian, usually serving as minister in a congregation, helps to concretise the relation between the very abstract parameters 'public theology' and 'church'. Therewith, concrete measures of relating theology and church need to be developed in order to prepare the ministers for their work, also as public theologians. In interdisciplinary discourse, these discussions need to be deepened to help making public theology 'operational'.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Thorsten Meireis, 'Politischer Gottesdienst als öffentliche Theologie: Bedeutung, Rahmen und theologische Bedingungen', in: D. Plüss and K. Kusmierz, eds, *Politischer Gottesdienst?! Praktische Theologie im reformierten Kontext* 8 (Zürich: TVZ, 2013), pp. 153-75.