

Practical Theology as Theology of Religion

Schleiermacher's Understanding of Practical Theology as a Discipline

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Friedrich Schleiermacher is the founding father of practical theology as one of the disciplines of theological studies. To understand this, one has to consider his broader concept of theology and his understandings of religion and of Christianity. We will therefore discuss all of these matters in this essay, and will do so especially in regard to Schleiermacher's *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*.¹ The thesis is that Schleiermacher, understanding practical theology as a technical discipline, overcame tendencies to form practical theology as a type of applied science. In his construction of theology, Schleiermacher conceived the entirety of theology as a practical science. Within that larger context, practical theology involves reflection particularly on rules of Church leadership, but is based upon a larger theory of Christianity within modern society and is developed in cooperation with all other theological disciplines.

1. Practical Theology in the Context of Theological Disciplines

In the *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, Schleiermacher drafts a theological encyclopedia in which practical theology, in the full sense of the word, belongs to the "cohesive whole" of theology as a science.² This marked the beginning of a new theological discipline. Earlier, in his *Introduction to the Theological Sciences*, Schleiermacher's older contemporary and colleague Gottlieb Jakob Planck (1751-1833), theology professor in

1 Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums, Translation: Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study, translation of the 1811 and 1830 editions, with essays and notes by Terrence N. Tice, New York (Lewiston) 1990 (Schleiermacher Studies and Translations, I) (here quoted as BO).

2 Ibid., §1: "Theology is a positive science, the parts of which join into a cohesive whole only through their common relation to a particular mode of faith, that is, a particular way of being conscious of God." One should note that the German word *Wissenschaft* is much broader than the English *science*. *Wissenschaft* includes any academic theoretical research based on rational argument and presented in the context of the other *Wissenschaften*. The opposition is not that of *science vs. humanities*, but of *Wissenschaft vs. Praxis*.

Göttingen, wrote about practical theology.³ Planck argued, however, that it was a subordinate field within studies of theology proper, and strictly speaking did not really belong to theology. He classified it as “applied theology, *theologia applicata*.”⁴

About practical theology and its subdivisions of homiletics, catechetics, and pastoral theology, Planck wrote:

Therefore they do not belong to theology proper, nor are they necessary to help us with our study of its truths or towards an easier understanding of its doctrine; rather they are meant to teach us the best and most natural, the most appropriate and efficacious way to communicate this our understanding which we already have, to others, and to do so in various ways: These special fields of learning obviously derive most of their principles not from theology, but from other fields of knowledge from whence they apply them to the truths of religion.⁵

Planck gave two reasons why practical theology does not quite belong to theology as such: it is concerned with questions of application only, and it includes and is based on extra-theological learning and research. The difference between Planck’s and Schleiermacher’s understandings of theology in general, and practical theology in particular, is obvious. For Schleiermacher, all of theology is defined by its relationship to the life of the church. Further, he posits a connection with other fields of learning and research for all of the theological disciplines. This view rests on the understanding of theology that Schleiermacher develops in his *Brief Outline*.

In Schleiermacher’s view, theology lives from its subject matter. Its content is given in the praxis of human life. This content is the religion of Christianity, which includes the entire history of Christianity and its continuation to the present day in Christian communities, the church, and, last but not least, church leadership. By this very content, theology as a whole is committed to the practical challenges of “leadership in the Christian church,” and practical theology especially has to deal with rules of church leadership.

This understanding of theology – that theology in its entirety is a positive praxis-oriented science – does not presuppose a special definition of scientific studies that applies to theology and not to other disciplines. In *Über Universitäten im deutschen Sinn* (*About Universities as we under-*

3 Einleitung in die Theologischen Wissenschaften, 2 Teile, Leipzig 1794/95. Schleiermacher used this work ten years later, when for the first time giving a lecture course in Halle about the theological encyclopedia. See: Hans-Joachim Birkner, Schleiermachers “Kurze Darstellung” als Theologisches Reformprogramm (1986), in: *ib.*, Schleiermacher-Studien. Eingeleitet und hrsg. von Hermann Fischer (Schleiermacher-Archiv 16), Berlin/New York (de Gruyter) 1996, 285-305.

4 Planck, *op.cit.* 1, 89.

5 Planck, 1, 117.

stand them in Germany) of 1808, Schleiermacher wrote of the three so-called “higher” faculties of the traditional university – theology, law and medicine – as the “positive faculties” because a connection to practical tasks is constitutive for them.

The practical side of theology as such calls for the development of a special “methodology of church leadership.”⁶ This then is the task of practical theology. Practical theologians have to develop forms and “technical rules” for church leadership (“rules of the art of church leadership” – *Kunstregeln*), from which theology receives its tasks. Practical theologians must further develop pragmatic and technical rules so that church leadership will be able to bring to bear that “deliberate influence upon the Church which is exerted so that Christianity may be more purely represented within it.”⁷ For this, practical theologians need to develop a “technology” to “correct [i.e. appropriate] procedures for executing all the tasks that are to be included within the notion of ‘Church leadership.’”⁸

The concepts of “leadership of the Church” and “Church government,” which Schleiermacher used in §5 of his *Brief Outline* to delineate the relatedness of theology and practice, call for an explanation. Schleiermacher used the concept of leadership in a rather broad sense. It means leadership on the level above that of the parish, i.e., on the organizational level of the Territorial Church, the *Landeskirche*. For this, Schleiermacher mostly used the term “government of the Church.”⁹ But the term Church leadership also includes all forms of leadership in local congregations. Schleiermacher generally described these leadership tasks with the term “Church service” – meaning liturgy, preaching, education, and pastoral care – all of these being part of the life of the congregation and being discussed in the first part of his practical theology.¹⁰ Church leadership according to Schleiermacher includes two institutionally structured forms: the “binding” (*gebundene*) element and what he calls the “discretionary (*ungebundene*) element.” The latter is “expressed in any free influence upon the whole, which any individual member of the Church may undertake who believes oneself called to do so”; this is “the free spiritual power.”¹¹ Evidently, Schleiermacher wanted to strengthen the participation of laity in the church so that they too were involved in theological learning.

6 Theologische Enzyklopädie (1831/1832). Nachschrift David Friedrich Strauß, ed. W. Sachs (Schleiermacher-Archiv) Berlin/New York (de Gruyter) 1987, 252 (= ThES).

7 KD/BO, § 263.

8 KD/BO, §§ 25 and 260.

9 See: KD/BO, §§ 309-334.

10 See: KD/BO, §§ 277-308.

11 KD/BO, §§, 312 and 328.

At the same time, Schleiermacher understood practical theology as distinct from the life of the church. These two are related but not identical, practical theology being “the theory of practice.”¹² The practical life of the church and of Christians within it is not as yet practical theology. Only if this practical life is being reflected upon methodologically, if “technical rules” or “rules of the art” are being developed and applied to support and help it in its purpose, can we speak of practical theology.¹³ Only those who accept this responsibility for shaping and contributing to the life of the church in these ways, those who are trained and called, will make use of practical theology. These persons, however, do not have to be ministers of the church (clergy) exclusively. The decisive point of difference is whether one merely participates in the life of the church – its worship services, pastoral care, and education – or whether one takes on a responsible role for shaping the life of the church, thus serving the Christian life. What people need in this case is practical knowledge, familiarity and competence in regard to methods concerning the planning of worship, preparing a religious speech, teaching classes of Christian education, leading a pastoral conversation, and finally governing and directing the church as a large organization in society. This is what church leaders – all of those people with special responsibilities for Christian life within Christian communities – have to do.

Explicating these ideas further, Schleiermacher differentiates between theology as a whole, including practical theology, and the practical life of Christianity and its churches, which represents religion as it is being lived. Practice is not theology; it is religion. Religious practice is, however, the object of all reflection in theology, which includes practical theology. Like theology as a whole, practical theology is theory of religion, of religious practice. For Schleiermacher, the content questions (which concern a theory of Christianity) of Christian life as it is lived in practice and of church leadership activities belong to philosophical and historical theology (including dogmatics and ethics). These have to provide “the right conception of these tasks” so that practical theology can proceed to consider the “correct [i.e. appropriate] procedure” to get these tasks accomplished.¹⁴ The specific task of practical theology is thus to develop methods, which will provide forms for religious practice in the church.

Christianity is a historical phenomenon. In its shape as the church, it is an important factor in the life of society and its culture. In its organized form, it needs to be supported and strengthened. Therefore we need theology in general and practical theology in particular as an academic science in the universities.

12 Die Praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt. Aus Schleiermachers Handschriftlichem Nachlasse und Nachgeschriebenen Vorlesungen ed. J. Frerichs, in: SW I, 13, Berlin 1850, 12 (= PTh).

13 KD/BO, § 265.

14 KD/BO, § 260.

Theology is not the science of God, as rational Enlightenment theology claimed. Rather, it is the science of Christianity. And Christianity is a form of lived religion, “a particular mode of faith, that is, a particular way of being conscious of God.”¹⁵ Theology is, thus, the science of God in a particular sense; it communicates a way of being conscious of God as given in Christianity. Similarly, it is reflection upon the religious faith of human beings as expressed by Christianity. Theology presupposes the historical and empirical givenness of the Christian religion. It is the form in which reflection upon Christian religion takes shape, and that happens in different ways.

One of these ways concerns the province of practical theology, another that of philosophical theology, and yet another that of historical theology. Historical theology, for Schleiermacher, was “the actual corpus of theological study,”¹⁶ for Christianity is a historical phenomenon. Historical theology supplies the knowledge of this historical whole: from the historical beginnings of Christianity through the course of its history to the present day. Doctrine of faith, or dogmatics, and Christian ethics, or moral teachings, are part of historical theology for they are likewise concerned with historically given Christianity as their subject matter, or with the religious practice of Christianity as we find it in the Christian church. Dogmatics and ethics, or the doctrine of faith and moral teachings, explain what Christianity, what the faith as it is being lived, has to say about human beings, God, and the world, and also what implications it has for the practical life of the church and for the life of the family, society, culture, and politics.

Theology is the secondary product of reflection on a religion that has been handed down in history and is alive in present day practice. The work of theology, as critical and reflective, provides self-clarification for that religion. Furthermore, theology as a science will be needed under certain conditions, depending on the level of development in a religious community.¹⁷ A religion that is alive mostly in symbols and rituals, or one that belongs to “a community of small extent” on the level of family or society, or one that is not institutionally organized, has no need for theology as a science. Such a theology will be needed, however, as soon as the meaning of symbols and rituals come to be questioned, as soon as people no longer agree about their meaning in life. Wherever a church takes shape as a religious organization, theology will develop. The task of this theology is then to provide conceptual explication for the basic beliefs articulated at the roots of religious life. Theology will have to show how these beliefs and life practices correspond with each other. It will have to establish connection with tradition and give new expression

15 KD/BO, § 1.

16 KD/BO, § 28.

17 KD/BO, § 2.

to the old beliefs so they can be understood and communicated in their own time.

Schleiermacher develops this theory of theology in view of the challenges confronting religion amid the crises and fast-paced change of his time. With the concept of practical theology as theory of religion, he wants to guard against the decline of religion. Many of his contemporaries were beginning to question the sense and purpose of religion, and Christianity in particular: what did religion stand for in the social and cultural context of their world, and what were the values for one's life and world that it had to offer? Practical theology can address these questions and take up the task of a theology of religion, but only in connection with historical and, most of all, philosophical theology.

The task of philosophical theology is to define what is the "essence of Christianity,"¹⁸ and also of Protestantism. In order to define the essence of Christianity, it is not enough to describe it as it is found and occurs. It is not enough to go back to the biblical beginnings and the course of its history or to study what its advocates, more and less qualified, claim it to be. It is not enough merely to repeat its own claim to divine revelation and holy scripture, possibly even going beyond this by means of a supra-naturalistic *doctrine* of revelation.

While Schleiermacher was not able to go in the direction of a supra-naturalistic revelation theology, neither could he follow that of a rationalist or speculative theology. For him, Christianity is a historical phenomenon, unfolding in history, an empirical religion, a particular mode of faith, the individual shape and form of religious consciousness. Christianity is a religion among other religions. The acknowledgment of this fact requires a philosophical theology to be a critical philosophy of religion. Such a philosophy is critical in the sense that the "distinctive nature of Christianity" can only be "defined critically (...), by comparing what is historically given in Christianity with those contrasts by virtue of which various kinds of religious communities can be different from one another."¹⁹ The fact that no historical phenomenon in its particular individuality can be deduced from general concepts is true for the Christian religion. On the other hand, the specific particularity of Christianity, of its history and its world of thoughts and ideas, cannot be defined without a general concept of religion and, in addition, a concept of how religions are to be differentiated.

Already in his time Schleiermacher was aware of the modern situation of Christianity, and of religion and society. This is one reason why he saw theology as a whole, including practical theology, as built on a foundation of philosophy of religion. Theology is not already given; it was not given in the origins of Christian faith. The church, in particular church

18 KD/BO, § 24.

19 KD/BO, § 32.

leaders with responsibilities that arise within their situations, call for theology. In Schleiermacher's time, the church's requirements had increased in complexity because of socio-cultural changes and a general awareness of those changes, which had grown with the Enlightenment and continued in the second half of the 18th century. I am here thinking of the religious wars and the experience of religious pluralism following in their wake, and also the rise of historical consciousness. Christianity no longer held the position of the one and only true religion, proven by way of divine revelation. It no longer held the position of being a prime integrating force in society; it was becoming a dividing force instead. It no longer sanctified the whole of the social world, but was turning into a historical phenomenon among and beside other religions and denominations. In addition, the new historical consciousness had a strongly relativizing and particularizing influence. Christianity, which before had possessed the status of the absolute in many parts of the world and had claimed divine authority as its foundation, now stood as one phenomenon among and beside others, with only relative validity and related to a particular culture, as one segment of this culture beside others.

In consequence of these historical changes, theologians have had a progressively more difficult time affirming the absolute priority of scripture. On the other hand, a rational religion, such as Enlightenment theology tried to construct, was not leading to very convincing results. During the same period, the human and historical contexts at the origins of biblical writings were being uncovered by historical biblical criticism. This led to more probing questions about theology, including the question of whether theology was teaching about God or about Christianity and its particular understandings of God. Schleiermacher tried to meet this challenge with his concept of theology.

According to Schleiermacher's concept, practical theology is mainly concerned with methodology in regard to activities of the church. For this, one must have the right conception of what the tasks of church leadership are. Practical theology must therefore work closely together with philosophical and historical theology, offering insights about the essence of Christian life, its historical developments, and its contemporary conditions within the context of modern culture. That is it what practical theology has to explicate and contribute in interdisciplinary discourse. The work of practical theology has therefore nothing to do with any form of applied theology. Practical theology must be based on a critical theory of the Christian religion. Only then can practical theology develop rules and methods for the church and its activities – what Schleiermacher described as “procedures for executing its tasks”²⁰ – in the form of worship and proclamation, pastoral counseling and education, and governance of the church as an organization.

20 KD/BO, § 260.

Schleiermacher's practical theology, as he repeatedly presented it in his lectures, is by no means a mere collection of methods of how to organize church services and church government. Schleiermacher also discusses what actions the church should take to prevent the decline of religion in modern society. In his perspective, all activity in the Evangelical church should get its orientation from the basic Protestant tenet of the priesthood of all believers, the "free and independent exercise of Christianity."²¹ In his practical theology, Schleiermacher focuses on the question of how to bring reality closer to the ideal of democratic participation of all who are involved in the life of the church. No doubt, this ought to be seen in light of his own church-political activities concerning the reform of the Prussian *Landeskirche*.

2. Practical Theology as Technology

If the church is to be governed under these complex conditions of modern society, such as differentiation, pluralism and individualization, we need a practical discipline of theology. Practical theology has to provide technical instructions or "rules of art" (*Kunstregeln*) for those who are active in leadership positions in the church, in order for them to be able to fulfill their leadership tasks expertly and in a well-considered way.

Between 1812 and 1833, Schleiermacher lectured nine times on practical theology, beginning in 1812 with a weekly four-hour course, which was later expanded to five hours. His course on practical theology was one of his most frequently taught courses.²² The lecture texts, which were edited posthumously, and other pieces about practical theology, also published after his death, comprise more than 800 pages. Thus, practical theology has an important place in the huge bulk of Schleiermacher's work.

In the second edition of his *Brief Outline* of 1830, Schleiermacher argued that the work done so far in this discipline of practical theology has been "extremely erratic."²³ He thought it was quite unsatisfactory that this discipline was more or less limited to providing a collection of good advice regarding pastoral duties. He was, however, even more troubled by the fact that practical theology, as he saw it in his time, concerned itself only with those parts and processes of church activity that came to its attention by historical chance, but without developing "a technology in regard to Church leadership"²⁴.

21 PTh, 62.

22 See: Andreas Arndt/Wolfgang Virmond (Hrsg.), *Schleiermachers Briefwechsel (Verzeichnis) nebst einer Liste seiner Vorlesungen*, Berlin/New York (de Gruyter) 1992, 300-330.

23 KD/BO, § 25.

24 ThES, 30.

Practical theology must follow a normative orientation when reflecting on its methods. The goal of church leadership is the “well considered influence upon the Church which is exerted so that Christianity may be more purely represented within it”²⁵. To shape the conditions in the church means to assert the true essence of Christianity more powerfully. “Practical theology, therefore, is only for those, in whom an ecclesial interest and a scientific spirit are united.”²⁶ Its task is to guide the “well considered activity” of those who are interested in the good of the church and who are, at the same time, theologically educated “with clarity of consciousness ... to carry this activity through to its goal.”²⁷ For these reasons, it is a technical discipline. It quite specifically has to do with considerations about how these goals are best to be reached. Schleiermacher here speaks of the “rules of ‘art’ in the narrow sense of the term,”²⁸ in contrast to the “mechanical” arts or crafts, by pointing out that “talent” is needed for the right use of the rules²⁹.

Practical theology belongs to the field of teaching an art, or to the technical disciplines in the realm of the sciences. It shares this classification with other artistic disciplines, such as political science, hermeneutics or education. Making the connection between the idea and the empirically given conditions, these “arts” have to develop rules (of behavior) for intervening in the present state of affairs and for improving and shaping them according to what is essential.

Another point needs to be mentioned in order to come to a clear understanding of practical theology as a technical discipline. Schleiermacher emphasized that the means of church leadership must be adequate for the purpose at hand.³⁰ In regard to the rules developed by practical theology, he preferred to speak of methods rather than means. These rules should not be means towards an end, but should in themselves be part of the intended end.³¹ The purpose, the end to be attained, is the “free and independent practice of Christianity,”³² which includes the ability to engage in religious discrimination and activity in the Christian sense, and competence to lead a Christian life and cope with the challenges it presents. This being the end, the purpose and methods of church leadership must be such that they do not manipulate, but give rise to free activity. Schleiermacher here speaks of church leadership as “a leading of souls,” that is, an influencing

25 KD/BO, § 263.

26 KD/BO, § 258.

27 KD/BO, § 257.

28 KD/BO, § 265.

29 Ibid.

30 KD/BO, §§ 261ff.

31 See: KD/BO, § 263.

32 PTh, 62.

of mind and conscience growing out of understanding and agreement, or what he identifies as religious communication.³³

3. Structure of Practical Theology

In his practical theology, Schleiermacher gives a systematic outline of principles of church leadership activities in a structured order, relating the ends to be attained with the ways to reach them. He calls for agreement on the basic principles and for reflection concerning the purpose of life in the church.³⁴

A defining quality for practical theology is the differentiation between those aspects of church leadership that concern the local parish (“Church service”) and those that have to do with the church as an organization in its entirety (“Church government”). In his *Brief Outline*, prior to his lecture courses on practical theology, Schleiermacher divides practical theology into the two parts – a “theory of Church service” and a “theory of Church government.”³⁵ This division is not necessarily called for by “the nature of the subject,” as Schleiermacher states, but by “the present situation of our Church.”³⁶ As described earlier, Schleiermacher saw the church resting on the association of individual local parishes, which formed a church union on a larger, state-wide scale – the territorial churches or *Landeskirchen*, as they have since developed in German Protestantism.

For the separation of church and state to be realized, and with that the self-government of the religious system that has taken shape in the institutional church, practical theology must deal with those leadership questions that arise from the church as organization. The end of the tradition of church government through territorial princes called for a new understanding of church leadership, and consequently a considerable broadening of the themes and topics of practical theology. This is what we find in the second part of Schleiermacher’s practical theology with its theory of “Church government.” The first part, somewhat more conventionally, deals with the theory of “Church service” – aspects of leadership concerning the “cult,” the “direction of morality,” and the “influence upon the lives of individual people”³⁷ – meaning worship, religious education and pastoral care.

33 PTh, 40.

34 PTh, 29.

35 KD/BO, § 275.

36 KD/BO, § 274.

37 KD/BO, § 279.

4. Theory of Church Service³⁸

In his theory of church service, Schleiermacher deals with church leadership activities in the local parish, on the basis of a differentiation of distinct leadership functions. He argues, however, that the differences between those who are leading and those who are being led, and between those who are active and those who are receptive, must not be codified or sanctioned in any dogmatic way. Such oppositional thinking would contradict the basic Protestant tenet of the priesthood of all believers. Most certainly, church leadership is needed in the congregation, and therefore persons are needed who are qualified to assume such leadership. Herein lies, in Schleiermacher's view, the cause and reason for theological studies in general, and for practical theology more particularly. Certain church leadership functions are also needed in the Protestant or Evangelical church as a social body in society. But here, too, freedom should prevail in whatever forms church leadership takes. Most of all, church leadership must not be seen as belonging to a more elevated theological level. A clericalization of leadership functions – in the sense, for instance, of a divinely created office – must be guarded against.

For Schleiermacher, the justification for parish leadership is not a theological one, but pragmatic and organizational. If we want to have well-ordered life in the church – in worship, education and pastoral care – oriented according to its own underlying meaning, we must have church leadership. Yet it is enough to conceptualize on this leadership as “fixed by agreement at least for definite moments in the Church's life.”³⁹ What are needed are leadership positions that are limited in time, defined by their function, and held according to competence.

The responsibilities of church leadership in the local church service are therefore basically twofold. One is leading the worship service in accordance with its purposes of edification, education and cultivation of Christian religious consciousness. The other responsibility is leading the everyday community life of the parish, with religious instruction, works of charity, and pastoral care⁴⁰.

Practical theology has also to define rules for the arts of liturgy and preaching. This has to do with questions of style, with the aesthetics of liturgy, with facial expression and gesture, with the quality of religious address, and with the choice and distribution of elements of prose and poetry. Furthermore, since practical theology also has to do with edification in a Christian spirit, questions of content need to be considered, for instance which doctrines of the Christian faith may or may not be helpful for better edification in the worship service.

38 PTh, 64-520.

39 KD/BO, § 278.

40 KD/BO, § 279.

Matters of judgment also have to be considered. Particularly in regard to everyday Christian life is the question of how far church leadership, exercised by way of governing and ordering activities, may be permitted to intervene in the moral ways of life exercised by members of a congregation. Are the duties of pastoral care, which always implies some sort of intervention in the social and individual lives of parish members, compatible with the Christian freedom of parishioners? Pastoral care in its broader sense includes catechetical activities, Christian charity, and missionary activities. Pastoral care (“care of souls”) in its narrow sense is turning to individuals who, because of illness or some other impediment in their lives, are particularly in need of such care. The principles for pastoral care practices, as developed by Schleiermacher, have to be measured against the central goal identified with the essence of Christianity. Those who provide pastoral care must be guided by the intention “to enhance the freedom of the parish members and to help them to such clarity” that they will no longer be in need of that special care.⁴¹ Schleiermacher’s guiding principle for church leadership in the local parish, but also, as will be seen, for the structuring of a self-governing church organization, is: “It is the intention of the Evangelical Church to make each one more independent in the whole sphere of his being.”⁴²

5. Theory of Church Government⁴³

Schleiermacher devoted the second extensive part of his practical theology to “Church government,” by which he meant leadership of the church as an institution that unites individual congregations into an organization, or *Landeskirche*. With this, Schleiermacher was crossing new frontiers.⁴⁴ With his theory of church government, and thus of church leadership, in an independent social organization, Schleiermacher gave practical theology the rank of a theological discipline competent to respond to changes in the religious and social situation of modern times.

The old hierarchical world, ordered according to social rank, no longer existed. Schleiermacher hailed the ideals of the French Revolution. In his speeches *On Religion* he wanted to commit the Protestant Church to those ideals too. The church should become a “perfect republic.” Schleiermacher was on the very front line, supporting the independence

41 PTh, 445.

42 PTh, 569.

43 PTh, 521-728.

44 The first to have noted this is: Martin Doerne, *Theologie und Kirchenregiment. Eine Studie zu Schleiermachers Praktischer Theologie*, in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 10 (1968), 360-386. See also: Christoph Dinkel, *Kirche Gestalten – Schleiermachers Theorie des Kirchenregiments*, Berlin/New York (de Gruyter) 1996.

movement in the church. According to him, territorial church government by the sovereign should be abolished. This was not, however, to make room for self-complacent, individual local congregations. Instead of territorial church government, what was needed was the self-government of a constitutionally organized church, with its structure being based on the parish level.

At the center of Schleiermacher's numerous church political activities stood the question of a constitution corresponding to the self-understanding of the Protestant (Evangelical) Church. The same question lies also at the center of what he says, in the context of his practical theology, about church government. The theory of church government thus shows that there is a close connection between Schleiermacher's practical theology and his participation in social and church political changes and in new beginnings of his age; these connections should not be overlooked. These concerns also need to be seen together with the concept of religious autonomy, as Schleiermacher developed it in his *Speeches on Religion*, and again with his turning to a church *realpolitik* during the reform era in Prussia. Finally, these concerns demonstrate that Schleiermacher, in his practical theology, makes use of the basic concepts of social, cultural and religious theory, as developed in his philosophical ethics.

In his ethics, Schleiermacher saw the church as a social organization, which, in the context of functional differentiations within modern society, needs a governing competence of its own. Society needs a place for symbolic religious communication, a place where moral attitudes and conscience can grow within the individual and where religious community can develop and exist. These visions indeed describe the purpose of the church.

There are two further points to be noted that are part of Schleiermacher's practical-theological teaching about church government: The church must become independent of the state, both in its inner and exterior affairs; therefore, it must gain institutional and organizational autonomy and acquire freedom of self-determination in regard to doctrine and life. Further, the church must do this on the basis of its identity, which is grounded in its self-understanding and based in the principles of the Protestant church, the tenet of the priesthood of all believers. This is to be the guiding rule for the constitution of the church, both for the whole and for the individual local parish. This is the norm, giving orientation and direction to the doctrine of church government as well as to that of church service. Methods for church leadership need to be developed in order to make Christianity stand out more distinctly in its Protestant (Evangelical) contours.

At the center of Schleiermacher's theory of church government lies this constitutional question. In the church political debates of his time, Schleiermacher came to understand that complete separation of church and state could not be seen as a realistic goal. Rather, a way must be found

between a degrading compliance with the demands of the state on the one hand, which in the past had, time and again, endangered the credibility of the church, and a complete independence from the state on the other hand, which would endanger the institutional and organizational existence of the church and therefore also its influence in society. In light of these alternatives, Schleiermacher concluded: "The Church must struggle to find its way between a limp independence and an empowering servility, which is counterproductive to its own development."⁴⁵ Dependence on the state, in Schleiermacher's view, lay at the core of the harmful influences afflicting the Evangelical church of his day. In his doctrine of church government, he also pointed out the dangers inherent in a narrow churchiness, as seen in the so-called free churches, which had only their own good in mind and revolved around themselves as their only center. The church must be a public church, or rather it must become a *Volkskirche*, a church of the people, in contrast to a *Staatskirche*, a church of the state. For that, the church needed a constitution to be its foundation in order to govern itself as an autonomous organization, which is, at the same time, well rooted in society.

6. Reception of Schleiermacher's Practical Theology

We turn now to the reception of Schleiermacher's practical theology in order to trace his influence and glimpse the significance of his work. A name that ought to be mentioned first is Alexander Schweizer (1808-1888). Schweizer was pastor of the Großmünster in Zurich and, after 1844, was also a professor of theology. Long before the publication of Schleiermacher's lectures on practical theology in 1850, Alexander Schweizer had, with passages from the *Brief Outline* as a starting point and in debate with Carl Immanuel Nitzsch, written a work on practical theology of his own.⁴⁶

The influence of Schleiermacher's outline of a practical theology can be traced back to concepts in his *Brief Outline* about a scientific methodology. Carl Immanuel Nitzsch, who subsequently made decisive contributions to the definition of practical theology as an independent discipline within the theological academic organism as a whole, followed suit with his practical theology, published in 1847, although he took a critical perspective on Schleiermacher.⁴⁷ The main difference between Nitzsch and Schleiermacher was that Nitzsch did not agree with Schleiermacher's view of theology as a positive science that is primarily functional in its

⁴⁵ PTh, 670; see also KD/BO, § 325.

⁴⁶ See: Alexander Schweizer, *Ueber Begriff und Eintheilung der Praktischen Theologie*, Leipzig 1836.

⁴⁷ Carl Immanuel Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie*, vol. 1, Bonn (Adolph Marcus) 1847, 5, 111.

understanding. Since Schleiermacher's system of science – especially his understanding of theology as a positive, practical science and his construction of an interdisciplinary relationship among the philosophical, historical and practical theological disciplines – was not adopted by Nitzsch or any of the later (practical) theologians, practical theology's concerns came to focus primarily on the normative principle of church leadership, i.e. with its philosophical, historical, sociological and theological foundations.

The wide scope that Schleiermacher had gained when establishing theology as a positive science was already lost with Nitzsch, never quite to be regained. A practical theology founded on an Enlightenment definition of the nature of Christianity in the context of a theory of religion was thus replaced by narrow normative concepts of church doctrine, which were forced on the Christian religion as it was lived – concepts that gathered strength especially with the Word-of-God theology of the twentieth century. Only in 1986 did Dietrich Rössler, in his *Grundriß der Praktischen Theologie (Outline of Practical Theology)*, turn again explicitly to Schleiermacher, facing the modern Christian world and the challenges confronting church leadership in the late twentieth century, especially in the face of individual and social differentiation and the diffusion of lived Christian religion.⁴⁸ Rössler adopted again Schleiermachers' understanding of practical theology as a positive, practical science, dealing with the challenges of church leadership, reflecting Christian praxis in its historical developments, its cultural conditions, and its principal tasks.

7. Schleiermacher and Practical Theology Today

What was modern and what pointed the way to the future in Schleiermacher's concept of practical theology? The modern, as first outlined and then worked out in his lectures, can be summarized as having two aspects. First, for Schleiermacher practical theology was the theory of church leadership, concerned with the *cybernetic* questions of governing the church as an institutionally independent organization in society. Second, Schleiermacher established practical theology in the system of theological sciences and thus gave it a place between philosophical and historical theology, right in the middle between the discussion of principles and the discussion of facts in the science of the Christian religion. Schleiermacher defined practical theology in the sense that it can only be studied and dealt with as theology of religion and therefore always in the context of questions within cultural anthropology, theory of religion, sociology, ethics and history, all of which are topics of theology.

48 Dietrich Rössler, *Grundriß der Praktischen Theologie*, Berlin/New York (de Gruyter) 1986, 52.

Questions about normative criteria for the shape of the church, which practical theology has to consider beyond its methodological interests in church leadership, do not refer practical theologians to dogmatics alone. What is demanded of practical theologians is that they must engage in clarifying a general concept of religion as well as one that specifically rests on the theory of Christianity. In so doing, the challenge of practical theology – as a theory of Christian praxis that exists to improve church leadership – is underscored, and practical theology is further distinguished from any form of applied theology.

With a general concept of religion as a guideline, practical theology has to try to find answers to: why society needs the church as an institutionally established space for symbolic communication; how to speak about shared concerns and differences in regard to the other great religions; how to discern what is truly Christian and make that visible in religious life; and finally how the religious quest outside of the institutionally established religious systems can be understood as being religious, more specifically religious in the Christian sense, and how that can be related to religious communication that takes place inside the church. Practical theology needs to explore how the symbolic strength of Christianity for *making sense of life* and for *successfully coping with life* can take shape in the church under today's complex socio-cultural conditions. Such a practical theology will rightly be called practical theology in the spirit of Schleiermacher.

Zusammenfassung

Schleiermacher hat die Praktische Theologie als eine der konstitutiven Disziplinen der Theologie begründet. Dem von ihm im enzyklopädischen Zusammenhang entfalteten Konzept der Praktischen Theologie ist jedoch immer wieder der Vorwurf gemacht worden, dass es über die Konzentration auf die Methodenfragen der Praxis nicht wesentlich hinausführe. Demgegenüber wird in vorliegendem Beitrag gezeigt, dass Schleiermacher die Theologie insgesamt, damit auch die praktische Disziplin im engeren Sinne als eine positive, der konkreten Christentumspraxis verpflichtete Wissenschaft betreiben wollte. Die Praktische Theologie ist alles andere als eine mit bloßen Anwendungs- und Methodenfragen befasste Disziplin. Ihre Methodenreflexion hat sie vielmehr im Zusammenhang einer empirisch-praktischen Religions- und Christentumstheorie zu betreiben, was ihr wiederum nur in enger Kooperation mit der Philosophischen und Historischen Theologie möglich ist.