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Transvaluation of values in

practical theology – a circular movement

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Abstract

In practical theology the experiences of outsiders should be taken seriously. Heteronormativity should be uprooted and replaced by a kind of thinking that does not regard the pairs acceptable/unacceptable, sacred/secular, orthodox/heterodox, inside/outside the church as mutually exclusive. Breaking the hegemony of heteronormativity calls for the transformation of the institutional church with its tradition and theology in order that the church can become part of the lives of marginalised and excluded people in a liberating way. Trends in practical theology illustrate how exclucivism is being overcome. First there was a shift from an emphasis on clergy to include laity and later to also embrace outsiders in such a way that they can also enrich the faith community. This "transvaluation of values" constitutes the perspective from which practical theology can look to the future. The objective is that this holistic spirituality will become the focal point of the practical formation of theological students.

Introduction

My own recent research focused on pastoral counselling with marginalised people in church and society. It reflects on some challenging and provocative topics in the disciplines of the social sciences, humanities and theology. This multi-disciplinary research was done in a context that could broadly be described as postmodern,

postcolonial and postsecular (see Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology edited by Miller-McLemore 2012; Schweitzer 2004). Some themes include:

- Is the Bible really good news for people in churches, people on the periphery of churches, people who have turned their back on the institutional church, and people who are spiritual but for whom the church is irrelevant?
- Decentering difference (see Dreyer 2008a:715-738): Traditionally diversity was seen as a threat and the other was excluded. Some people seemingly embrace the postmodern paradigm and claim to accomodate differences by unifying them, but actually the focus is still on difference. A genuinely postmodern approach does not ignore diversity. It deconstructs the inherent oppositional thinking underlying this apparent accomodation of difference. It focuses on how the one damages or enriches the other in relationship. The unity lies in authentic humanness and humaneness.
- The church in partnership: The church has a role to play in society, but not by being prescriptive or coercive. In this mindset theology is not the the "anchor of all knowledge" or the "queen of the sciences" and practical theology is not the "crown of theology", but both theology and practical theology find themselves in multi- and interdisciplinary partnerships with others.
- Prejudice and homophobia in the Christian faith community (see Dreyer 2006:153-173): Neutral knowledge in not possible. In hermeneutics it has been acknowledged that presuppositions contribute to how one observes. Theological tradition, denomination, culture and identity play a role in acquiring knowledge. Presupposition becomes prejudice when the own identity, group (e.g. church), culture (e.g. nationality and ethnicity) are seen as the norm whereas the other is subordinate. Homophobia is a destructive result of prejudice and even more so when the subordinate other internalises homophobia which then turns into self-hatred.
- Heteronormativity as hegemony (see Dreyer 2007:1-18): Homophobia (the irrational fear and hatred of others, discimination and self-hatred) is perpetuated by the social phenomenon of hegemony – norms (in itself a positive concept) that become coercive because of the fundamentalist conviction that one's own norm is the only truth. A consequence is

oppositional thinking: *my* tradition vs *your* tradition; *my* religion vs *your* religion; *my* ethnicity vs *your* ethnicity; *my* sexual orientation vs *your* sexual orientation. There is no grey area. This "I vs the other" way of thinking is heteronormativity.

- The unhealed wound (see Dreyer 2008b:1235-1254; cf. Kennedy 2001). The wound is caused by exclusivism and is not healed by the supposed accomodation.

- Engaged hermeneutical listening calls for a shift in ways of knowing. A shift has already taken place from positivism (the subject controls the object by knowing and objectifying it) to dialogical thinking (the subject and object communicate). This sounds like a mutual relationship, but the communication must be circular – neither subject nor object should dominate at any given time. If the parties are not self-critical with regard to their presuppositions and prejudices, the communication will not be truly symmetrical (cf. Habermas in Klemm 1986:203-208) and circular, there will be no mutual enrichment and the wound caused by heteronormativity and hegemony will not be healed.

- An inclusive practical theological perspective.

My own research has brought me to a vision for the Department with regard to the 3 challenges of research, teaching en learning and social responsibility and community development.

In order to illustrate my vision for the formation of students, it is necessary to reflect on the development of practical theology from an ecclesial discipline to a discipline that as opened up to the world. In a keynote address at the International Academy of Practical Theology in Amsterdam in 2011[1] I pointed out some trends in practical theology (see Dreyer 2011) that I now revisit briefly in order to illustrate how past, present and future unfold in a circular movement. We in the present, learn from the past in order to meet the challenges of the future. The challenge is to equip students to serve one humankind, whether as pastors or not, whether in churches or not. This

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[1] Keynote address, International Academy of Practical Theology, Biannual Conference, July 21-25, 2011 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Theme: 'City of Desires, City of God'.

necessitates a sense of social responsibility and a critical awareness of the dangers of hegemony, homophobia and heteronormativity.

Practical theology in circular movement

According to David Tracy (in Miller McLemore 2009), practical theology plays a key role in 'healing the modernist split between academic theology and spirituality'. Our world is not longer stuck in rational modernism. We find ourselves in a fluid era where some are still premodern, others modern and yet others are becoming postmodern – an era of secularization and postsecularization. Sociologist of religion Peter Berger (1961a; 1961b; 1970) was one of the creators of a 'theory of secularization', the value of which is to help to rid the church of the 'bad faith' of civil religion (see Berger 1961a:39-57; 1970:78) – mixing culture and religion in a way that is bad for both. He now defends the thesis of 'desecularization' (see Heelas & Woodhead 2005:60; cf. Dreyer and Pieterse 2010:p. 3 of 7) – religion and spirituality have not disappeared from the world as proponents of the theory of secularisation predicted. But the church is no longer in the centre.

Well-known German theologian who suffered much during the Second World War, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, already described *discipleship* (Bonhoeffer 1937:91-92) as not necessarily being a member of a church, but rather as following a mentor – *the* mentor Jesus. In secularized culture it is possible to be 'an anonymous Christian' for whom it is not so much about *religion* (see subtitle of Heelas & Woodhead 2005, *Why religion is giving way to spirituality*) as about being an *authentic person* – a whole person who reflects Jesus. Postsecular culture acknowledges that the signs of transcendence (God) are present in this world. The tension between religion and spirituality seems to be dissolving.

For practical theology this shift means that it is no longer about clergy applying instructions from the Bible as God's revelation to the church. First the horizon broadened to include laity (cf. Graham 1996:58, 80; Norman [2002] 2003:155) and later also those outside the church (cf. Pattison and Woodward [1994] 2000:49-50). In the Roman Catholic world Vatican II, signalled the end of the monopoly of church hierarchy (see Congar 1965:57; 1967; cf. Mallon 2010:179, 196-197). Vatican II used

Yves Congar's image of *intra muros* and *extra muros* to distinguish between those 'inside the walls' and those 'outside the walls' of the church. Though laity were technically 'inside the walls', church hierarchy treated them as outsiders. Vatican II broke down this wall and the voices of laity and other former outsiders could also heard.

Vatican II was a product of the Kantian revolution in the Protestant world, which recognized that human knowledge has its limitations. This means that God can no longer be known *only* through the Bible as 'the revelation of God' from above. Dialectical theology, building on Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), acknowledges that human beings also play a role in the process of 'knowing God' (Kant [1783], in Friedrich [1949] 1977:70-117). For some, these ideas were the beginning of secularization, the split between religion and spirituality in the modern era (cf. Leaves 2011:147-166).

Where is practical theology now? It is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary (cf. Graham, Walton and Ward 2005:12-13) and has progressed from a sole focus on the work of the clergy, to including the laity and now also the voices of those 'outside the walls' – the marginalised. The concept marginalisation is complex (see Del Pilar and Udasco 2004:3-15). Normally we understand marginalisation as *involuntary* rejection (Germani 1980 in Roberts 2004:195-197; cf. Turner 1969 in Weber 1995:525-236). They did not want it, but it was done to them: the poor and homeless, but also people of all walks of life who, because of social conventions, find themselves on the margins of society and/or the church. But marginalisation is not always only about being a victim. Some *choose* to function outside of generally accepted norms, convictions, and behaviour. Their marginalisation is *voluntary*. And then there are also the *in-between* people (Stonequist 1935:1-12) who, on account of their birth, migration, pigmentation, sexual orientation, sex or other reasons, are doomed to 'in-betweenness' (Del Pilar and Udasco 2004:4). Among these in-between people are the *seekers* – those who are spiritual but not part of the church, spiritual but not religious. They are part of 'churchless Christianity' (Hoefer 2001). They 'believe, but do not want to belong' (Avis 2003:108). The term 'seeker' refers to those who, for some reason, find themselves on the margins or even outside of ecclesial structures. A 2007 book entitled *They like Jesus but not the church*, gives the following reasons why seekers do not like the church (Kimbal 2007:73-209):

- the church represents organised religion which has a political agenda;
- the church is judgemental and negative;
- the church is governed by men, and a few women who accept attributed roles;
- the church is homophobic;
- the church is arrogant in its judgement that all other religions are false;
- the church has many fundamentalist members who interpret the Bible literally.

Currently the tendency is to focus on the growth of 'new religiosity and spiritualities outside Christendom and outside "the walls" of the churches' (Van Haarskamp 2011:p.1 of 8). Such 'secular belief' can have value for the church and practical theology. For Bonhoeffer, who already pre-empted such a renewed spiritual paradigm (see Zimmerling 2006:212), the value of secularization was that it halted the hegemony of church hierarchy and exposed the 'bad faith' of civil religion. However religion does not exist in a vacuum. Religion and culture are intertwined and religion can play a constructive part. For Berger the role of religion is that of a 'sacred canopy' (Berger and Luckmann 1967). In the words of Gary Dorrien (2001:32): 'The purpose of religion is to construct a sacred cosmos. Religion offers a protective canopy of transcendent legitimacy, meaning, and order to the insecure constructions that society calls "reality"'. However, according to Christian Möller (2004:50), 'The meaning and objective of the reign of Christ is not to Christianise or "churchify" the world, but rather to liberate it to authentic human existence' (my translation] (cf. Meyer-Blanck and Weyel 2008:51). For Berger (1970) theology should again find 'signals of transcendence' in the natural world, but should also be able to transcend this world and should be able to discover the religious implications of everyday human experiences.

In his work, *A secular age*, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2007) reflects on postsecularization:

- Postsecular theology does not serve outdated theism and fideism.
- It does not want to be hegemonic.
- It deconstructs power.
- It does not want to be apologetic or defend eternal truths and dogmas.
- It does not restore orthodoxy.

- It does *not only* consist of evangelical emergent religion which has become so popular in our contemporary culture (see Ward 2008:65).

In a climate of economic recession and uncertainty, conservative propaganda can tempt people to confuse spirituality with 'naive childlike faith'. Postsecular theology is critical theology and therefore eminently suited to guide the people of today to a second naiveté (see Wallace [1990] 1995). This does not mean becoming victim of religious hegemony once again. This critical theology is accutely aware of the danger of present-day imperialism. Michel Foucault (1982:778) uses the concept 'panopticon' (watchtower) as a broad metaphor to refer to this invisible comprehensive control over people's lives.

There are two facets to this control: exteriority and interiority. Exteriority is about the social conventions that regulate human lives. One is aware of this control and that you cannot escape it. Interiority is about being unaware that you are a co-creator of these conventions, that you help to maintain them and accept them, even though they may be damaging to yourself and to others (see Foucault [1975] 1995:173). You expect of others to conform. You and the other are both subjected to *the* norm. If others do not conform, they are out. The divisions become rigid: mad versus normal, sick versus healthy, good people versus bad people, homosexual people versus heterosexual people (Foucault 1982:778; 1986:229-242). This is heteronormativity: the other cannot be respected as a whole entity independent of me. Heteronormativity is totalitarian. But, says philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1969:185-219; see Veling 2005:123; cf. Levinas1990:85): '"I am other to you." Every face says, "I am not you." Every face says: "Don't kill me; don't absorb me into your world; don't obliterate me by making me the same as you. I am other. I am different. I am not you"'.

According to Foucault (1980:156), authentic human existence is to be aware of the *panopticon*, to be aware of one's complicity in perpetuating it, to acknowledge the damage it does to oneself and to the Other, and to constantly protest against the abuse of power (Foucault [1975] 1995:221-222). If one does not *decide* to oppose it, one in effect makes a choice for *indecision*. Indecision contributes to the spiral of damage. Most people, even those who become aware of the abuse of power,

choose to remain silent. Indecision on the part of the powerful majority leads to inarticulacy on the part of the powerless.

The challenge to Practical Theology is to reflect on what Taylor (1989:53-90) calls the 'ethics of inarticulacy'. Practical theologian James Poling has been listening to 'unheard voices' for many years. According to him (Poling 1991:187, my emphasis):

> Practical theology is theological *interpretation* of the *unheard voices* of *personal* and *community* life for the purpose of continual *transformation* of faith ... and power toward *renewed ministry practice* … *Reflection* begins with the presence of *differences and otherness* in *experience*. Difference provokes thought. When persons or communities become aware of some *desire* that contrasts with *identity*, the potential contradiction requires reflection …. Without difference and contrast, there can be no *self-conscious* experience.

However, accomodating difference often means to still focus on difference. Overcoming difference is to focus on unity amid diversity. In order to do this a genuine openness for the Other is necessary. This is what a postcolonial postsecular paradigm stands for. Hybridity, a postcolonial term meaning: ostensibly accomodating the other, but only as far as the other conforms to *my* norms, is not possible in this paradigm. Postsecular spirituality is suspicious of exclusive fundamentalist tenets that stifle a dynamic faith.

Poling provides a *point of departure* for practical theology in a postsecular paradigm. In search of an adequate *method* (see Pieterse 2010:118; Smith 2010:99-113), the 'first task', according to practical theologian Rick Osmer (2008:33-34), is 'a spirituality of presence', a 'matter of attending', 'priestly listening'. Listening should not be limited to a congregational setting, but should include listening to the unheard voices of those outside the walls. Listening as a transformative action can contribute to renewing ministry practice and could overcome the indecision of the church and the inarticulacy of seekers. It brings symmetry to the relationship between those previously inside and outside the walls. It can create space for the authentic human existence of all people.

From the academic field that links neuroscience with spirituality, Bergemann and others (2011:101) observe that '... many religions may be at risk of perhaps even inadvertently creating an "in-group" versus "out-group" mentality, rendering their role in society as a wedge, creating a greater divide between us. Yet the various religious doctrines and a secular approach to spirituality are not mutually exclusive by any means. Therefore we hope that religious and secular individuals alike can channel their connectedness to one another ..." (Bergemann et alia 2011:101).

Should this happen, then genuine listening to the authentic longing of marginalised people is be possible. Their 'differences and otherness of experience' (Poling) will not be seen as an obstacle, but as enriching.

One authentic humankind

Seeking God outside ecclesial walls is a characteristic of postsecular spirituality. According to philosopher Charles Taylor (1991), spirituality is the desire to fill the deepest emptiness of human existence. If practical theology wishes to acknowledge the authenticity of the yearning of seekers it cannot abide by traditional theories. That would amount to 'theological inability', the words of Dutch practical theologians Ganzevoort and Visser (2007:206). Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1951:436 – my translation), from a context of existential suffering in prison during the Second World War, puts it as follows (my translation):

> The church is church only when it exists for others … The church should be involved in the ordinary problems of secular human life; not by dominating, but by supporting and serving.

How this is to come about, Bonhoeffer (1937:91-92 – my translation) says:

> In order to be church for others, the church will need a new language ... liberating and reconciliatory – just as Jesus' language was, just as Jesus himself was; though this language will shock people, it will also empower them; it is language about the righteousness that is fitting to the new life;

it is the truth of the gospel; it speaks of God's peace for people who abide in the kingdom of God which comes day after day.

For practical theologians this means that pastoral models and methods for accommodating those outside the walls, are needed. Tradition is a treasure trove of wisdom from the past which is applied to the praxis of today and is transformed by that praxis. With other practical theologians (e.g. Osmer 2008:167), Gerben Heitink (2007:182) reminds the church of its prophetic task to call for change. Hereby Heitink means that the institutional church should combat injustice. This can be seen in ecumenical action against child labour, war and famine. The events of 9/11 a decade ago has brought this into sharp relief. The tension between what is simplistically called the 'Christian West and Muslim East' does not serve to help a sick church which is turning increasingly towards fundamentalism and therefore exclusivism (cf. Taussig 2006:39). Practical theologian Howard Clinebell (1984:138; cf. Hill 2008:16) already described this age in 1984 as 'marked by an epidemic of moral confusion and value distortion'.

The tendency of 'contemporary public theology' is to focus on injustice *outside* of the faith community (cf. Habermas 2006:1-4; see Dreyer and Pieterse 2010:p. 3 of 7). However, for Elaine Graham (Atherton, Baker and Graham 2006:63-82; cf. Hermans 2006:221) the pathways to the public square lead to those outside, but should also return to those on the inside. Practical theologians will probably agree that the Christian faith community also has the task of eradicating injustice *inside* the walls. The church's struggle with homophobia, emotional violence, and institutional exclusivism are examples. The root of these struggles on the inside is tradition which manifests in the traditional use of the Bible and dogmatism. This influences pastoral practice.

So what can be done? The experiences of outsiders should be taken seriously. Heteronormativity should be replaced by a kind of thinking that does not regard the pairs acceptable/unacceptable, sacred/secular, orthodox/heterodox, inside/outside as mutually exclusive – either ... or. This calls for a transformation of the institutional church, its tradition and theology in order that the church can become part of the

lives of marginalised and excluded people in a liberating way. Practical theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore (2006:97) says that returning to the church 'is not to return to mainline hegemony, but for greater understanding of Christianity's proper role in an increasingly diverse and religiously pluralistic society.' The title of a 2006 contribution of Riet Bons-Storm (2006:87-93) captures this transformative movement: *From the Lord and his servants to God and her friends: The importance of 'equality' in a world of violence.* According to James Poling (1991:27), the abuse of power is the result of anxiety that motivates people to want to gain and maintain power over their lives. The philosopher Levinas finds the underlying cause of the anxiety in the drive towards self-actualisation, which he calls 'egology' (Levinas and Kearney 1986:31). The 'I' is central and the other is seen as an impediment to one's ambitions (Levinas 1969:185-219). If understood collectively and systemically, this 'I' and the problem of 'egology' can also refer to the institutional church. The excluding effect of power manifests in the church. It is easier to destroy the other than to acknowledge one's own flaws and mistakes (Poling 1991:28). Levinas calls this 'totalising thinking'.

Just as with Bonhoeffer, Levinas' holocaust experience informs his thinking (see Veling 2005:115-116; cf. Wüstenberg 2006). How could the holocaust have happened in Western civilisation? How could apartheid have happened in Christian South Africa? According to Levinas the reason is that Western civilisation (and Christendom?) is totalitarian. It should be the opposite, says Levinas (1996:92): 'I am responsible for the other. The other transcends me.' For Terry Veling (2005:125) the Other 'rises above us – demanding our attention, commanding our response, requiring our love'. The problem comes in when people totalise, when they treat the other as an object. The institutional church has such a totalising tendency. An example is how the missional task of the church is often seen. If it is one-directional, the church *to* the outsiders and victims of injustice, it is totalitarian, even when trying to do good. The otherness of the other is denied, totalised away. A transformative pastoral model aims to take in-betweenness seriously, and to acknowledge the inadequacy of a one-directional approach.

The church is responsible for both those inside and outside ecclesial structures (cf. Chopp 1987:120-138; Van der Ven 1993:65; Müller 2007:20-31). This would require

a willingness to listen to the narratives of people in need. As Dutch practical theologian, Gerrit Immink (2003:159), puts it: 'It is impossible to work with the homeless, asylum seekers, migrant workers and marginalised young people without the telling, interpreting and remembering of stories.' Pastoral listening to the life histories of in-between people requires openness to those on margins, what is nowadays called 'public theology' which Ruard Ganzevoort[2] (2006) describes as follows:

> For me, public theology is not only theology with an open eye to the needs of this world. It is more than a theology that is willing to engage in the troublesome issues of public debate, and it is different from a theology that seeks to demonstrate the value of the Christian worldview for this debate.

Public theology, for Ganzevoort, is 'the *sharing* of our methodological expertise and our knowledge of spirituality, meaning, transcendence, and religious life' (my emphasis). Part of this task can be the hermeneutical analysis of 'public phenomena, such as popular culture or the biographies of traumatized people'. Social responsibility is about taking *co-responsibility* along with other partners (cf. inter alia Schnettler 2006:87; Sager 2011:201-210). Such a *mutual* task can only be undertaken when walls do not get in the way. Partners can then include seekers, members of the institutional church, public theologians – *everyone* who has the passion to make a difference (see Graham 2008:7-26; 2009).

This requires 'superseding earlier views', rather than succumbing to the temptation of holding on to comfortable old ideals (Taylor 1989:65; cf. Taylor 2006:297). It is inherent to people to strive for the highest values in life, which Charles Taylor (1989:62-73) calls "hypergoods". One should first understand the values of the modern era and secularization before these values can be superseded ("die Umwertung aller Werte" – Nietzsche [1888] 2008:7) – the transvaluation of values – and postmodern/postsecular values can be embraced (Taylor 1989:65; 2006:297). If

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this transition cannot be made, but one remains stuck in the past, *indecision* is the result. This indecision often manifests in the resolutions of ecclesial institutions with regard to the marginalised, be it gender, race, victims of political-economic injustice or sexual minorities. Taylor (1989:70-71) describes how modernist thinking

> frequently portrayed religious moralities of the "higher" not only as the source of self-expression but also as the justification of social oppression, as the supposed carriers of the "higher", be they priests or aristocrats, exercise their natural right to rule the "lower" orders for the latter's own good.

Examples of this in the past and present are (Taylor 1989:70-71):

- 'the exclusion and domination of women',
- a civilized rationalisation of control 'that excluded and dominated the lower classes (as well as women again)',
- definitions of civilization that 'exclude and marginalise dissidents' and subjected races (cf. Taylor 1995:152-208).

According to Taylor, Christianity especially is known for 'laying a heavy burden on those in whom it inculcates "a sense of sin" in the name of subscribing to the so-called '"good"', but 'to which one cannot really subscribe' (Taylor 1989:81), because one cannot be 'guilty' of being a woman, being black or being gay. In their endeavour to promote morality, churches themselves often act and speak in ways that are in fact immoral. 'Love' and 'outreach' have no meaning if the beneficiaries are judged and stigmatised (see Mavor, Louis and Laythe 2011:22-43).

A transformative practical theological model would aim to expose this. Only when the church recognises its own totalitarian tendency, can it become truly open to the Other without expecting conformity. Practical theologian Elaine Graham (1996:204; cf. Reader 2008:35-51), who emphasises being open to alterity, calls for practical theology to break out of the clerical paradigm and focus on social justice as part of the mission of the church. The task of practical theology is therefore expanded to include the marginalised in its focus and bring 'the qualities of solidarity, wholeness

and reconciliation, practices by which divine disclosure can be effected' (Graham 2000:112) into play.

The mission of the church should be a two-way street: the marginalised also inspiring the church (cf. Cilliers 2009:19). Breaking down the walls is about contributing together to a better world. Emmanuel Lartey (2006:117) describes it as follows: 'God is the God of the other who will remain other in authentic difference …. The otherness of other humans will not be overcome by assimilation into our likeness.' On the one hand there should be a respect for difference, whereas on the other hand 'difference can be overcome in God'. For Larry Graham (1997:177), living as the image of God in this world means 'to ferociously protect and tenderly cherish the uniqueness of each entity in the world, while seeking the conditions of justice in which each might be fulfilled'. For Ganzevoort (2006)[3] the mission of practical theologians is 'to investigate how people of today live their lives and how they transcend themselves and their circumstances through their hopes and dreams and desires and how they relate to whatever they call or do not call God' (cf. Ganzevoort 2005:61).

Theories and models in practical theology that are relevant for our day, should expose harmful attitudes. The faith community cannot condone indecision and ambiguity. Empirical studies have made it abundantly clear that 'double speak' is harmful to people (cf Onedera 2008:51). In his book, *Theology for liberal Presbyterians and other endangered species*, Douglas F. Ottati (2006:viii) points out that, though 'liberal Protestantism' is rather diverse, what such critical theologians want to do is to 'retrieve, restate, rethink, and revise traditional theologies and beliefs in the face of contemporary knowledge and realities.' This is the task of practical theology in a nutshell.

According to David Perrin (2007:205), 'in Christian spirituality, the transformative event includes transformation of the life of the individual, the Christian community, and the world in which we live'. Charles Taylor (2010:723) does not want postsecularity to be usurped by present-day consumerist culture. What is needed in

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[3] Ganzevoort, R.R., 2006, 'The social construction of Revelation', *International Journal of Practical Theology* 10(1), doi: 10.1515/IJPT.2006.003, *vu-nl.academia.edu/RuardGanzevoort/.../The_Social_Construction_of_ Revelation* viewed on 14 June 2011.

our time is an 'ethics of authenticity'. Terry Veling (1996:14-15) pleads for the recognition of the 'in-between space' because 'marginal space is the gap in which hermeneutics begins and ends – forms and re-forms' (Veling 1996:14). This liminal 'blank space' (Lee 2003:11-28) is 'as much about what is missing and excluded as it is about the hope or vision for what could be new possibility.'

Therefore, responding to the Other is not self-serving accomodation of the other. Veling (2005:122) points out that Levinas 'disturbs our quest for a self-satisfied harmony and wholeness'. He is 'trying to wake us up, lest we fall asleep in our own drowsy, comfortable worlds. Attitudes of "seeking, desiring and questioning", rather than "rest and repose" provide the best environment for the revelation of the Other.' For Levinas (2001:53) 'human emotion and spirituality begin in the for-the-other, in being affected by the other.' For Ricoeur practical theology is *Oneself as another* (1992). In the reborn story there are no walls.

Practical theology in a postsecular culture

In practical theology the Jesus story and Christian values are the roots, beneath the surface that form the presuppositions and not the explicit model descriptions for teaching and learning. Growth (teaching and learning) takes place in the context of the contemporary world. The fruit have been enriched by the *Zeitgeist* and will in turn enrich the people who live in the contemporary world. This interaction between learning and the contemporary world stimulates research that will contribute to among other things social cohesion and poverty alleviation, that are both crucual to this country.

Traces of mutual enrichment can be ween in the way in which the sub-disciplines of practical theology are already interdisciplinary. The insights of the humanities, social sciences and other theological disciplines are used fruitfully in research and in curriculum content:

- The insights of developmental psychology and generation theory enrich *youth ministry*. The spirituality of young people is investigated in a globalized context.

- In *church development* and *pastoral care and counselling* the insights of anthropology, environmental studies and economic management, sociology, psychology that make life history research possible, are utilised.

- The fields of *liturgy, homiletics and hymnology* are informed by the rich history of the early church, ritual studies, spirituality types, communication theories and reception aesthetics and elocution.

- In *diakonia* intercultural studies provide imporant insights.

Such are the epistemological premises of the paradigm in which practical theology can fulfil its task in this day and age. To meet the challenges, practical theology has broadened its vision to all who live in the world. Our students who live in the world should be enriched by their *learning in dialogue with the world,* in order for them to go out into the world and enrich it.

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