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## Practical Theology in the United States

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## Practical Theology in the United States

Rather than simply an academic discipline, practical theology in the United States today functions more like a hub of intersecting activities amidst distinct but overlapping ecclesial trajectories. It exists in a cloud of ambiguities! The mainline Protestant theologian Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore calls practical theology in the U.S. context “at least four distinct enterprises with different audiences and objectives.” It is at once (1) “an *activity* of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in the everyday, (2) a *method* or way of understanding or analyzing theology in practices used by religious leaders and by teachers and students across the theological curriculum, (3) a *curricular area* in theological education focused on ministerial practice and subspecialties, and, finally, (4) an *academic discipline* pursued by a smaller subset of scholars to support and sustain these first three enterprises.”<sup>1</sup> What these activities have in common, especially since the emergence of U.S. practical theology as an academic discipline in the 1980s, is (1) a habitual and critical consideration of everyday Christian *practices*, and (2) a ever-present self-consciousness about *methodology*, that is, about the disciplined ways we go about reflecting on everyday life in the light of religious traditions, whether the “we” be believers, ministerial teachers and practitioners, or theological scholars.

At the heart of this ambiguous intersectional positionality is a basic dilemma. As systematic theologian Serene Jones puts it, “Does calling one discipline ‘practical’ imply in some way that what those of us in other disciplines do is not?”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there seems to be an implicit criticism of traditional theology as too abstract, as inattentive to the everyday life of Christians, a quintessentially American critique not without merit but also often unfair. Jones resolves the tension by dividing practical theology as an academic activity in two, describing it as “an endeavor shared by the *whole* theological faculty and practical theology as it is undertaken by *designated experts* working within a distinct curricular area.”<sup>3</sup> Yet what of ministers or ordinary Christians? Perhaps it is better to think of practical theology as defined by the type of questions different people pose, questions of practice and of the dilemmas of everyday life, both *ad intra* within the Church and *ad extra* in the society. Such a perspective must never-

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<sup>1</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *The Contributions of Practical Theology*, in: Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, Malden 2014, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Serene Jones, *Practical Theology in Two Modes*, in: Dorothy C. Bass – Craig Dykstra (eds.), *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, Grand Rapids 2008, 195.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, *Two Modes* (see note 2) 197.

theless allow that not all who ask such questions call themselves practical theologians, and that practical questions should not necessarily always be given epistemological priority.

These practical questions vary, of course, according to the various social and cultural contexts from which they come, but they are also addressed differently based on the ecclesial context where they are pursued. In the United States, the disestablishment of religion in the early nineteenth century made space for a plurality of denominational traditions and the right to choose among them. It also unleashed a Second Great Awakening from which arose what Americans call an “evangelical” approach to Christianity – emphasizing the individual’s personal relationship with Jesus as savior.<sup>4</sup> Decades of immigration diversified the traditional Protestant religious identity of the country. As a result, Christian theology in the United States, and practical theology in particular, developed along parallel tracks – mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and Roman Catholic. While African American churches are often included among the three, they have a unique culture and history of oppression in the United States that calls for distinct representation. Orthodox Christian theology has a small but steady presence in theology, but less so in practical theology, and less traditional Christian groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses or Latter Day Saints (Mormons) have habits of reflective practice but no real professionalized practical theology either in terms of curriculum or academic discipline.

### Institutional markers

Institutionally, U.S. practical theology is generally embedded in the ministry training departments and units of mainline Protestant, Catholic, and evangelical seminaries and other post-graduate pastoral training schools and institutes. A handful of guilds and theological associations focus on pastoral theology both as a curricular area and an academic discipline, including the ecumenical Association of Practical Theology (APT), founded in 1984 to supplant Protestant-only predecessors; the ecumenical Association for Theological Field Education (ATFE) and its Catholic affiliate (CATFE); and the Association of Graduate Programs in Ministry (AGPIM), a Roman Catholic guild for universities offering professional ministerial training to lay people. Several broader theological guilds have practical theology sections, units, or consultations. A few philanthropic organizations remain influential in practical theology, especially the religion

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<sup>4</sup> See R. Stephen Warner, *Work in Progress: Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States*, in: *A Church of Our Own: Disestablishment and Diversity in American Religion*, New Brunswick 2005, 18–62.

unit at the Lilly Endowment.<sup>5</sup> A number of smaller professional institutes and research centers remain connected to practical theology as a discipline, including the Alban Institute focusing on the study and leadership of faith communities, the Hartford Institute for Religious Research, the Evangelical Emmanuel Gospel Center, the Indianapolis Center for Congregations, and the Pulpit and Pew project at Duke University. There are very few enduring academic journals specific to practical theology in the United States, among them *Practical Matters* based at the Center for Practical Theology at Boston University and *New Theology Review* at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

The intersectional ambiguity embedded in U.S. practical theology makes it difficult to enumerate the number of schools or students involved. According to the Association of Theological Schools, there are 238 graduate schools of theology in the United States, most belonging to the denominational families already identified, that is, mainline Protestant, evangelical, Catholic, and the Black Church. Almost all of these schools focus at least in part on professional training for ministry. The schools have 41,534 students enrolled in 374 ministry-related master's level degrees and 9,958 students enrolled in 141 ministry-oriented doctoral level programs (usually, the Doctor of Ministry or D.Min. degree).<sup>6</sup> Only eight institutions—three universities and five seminaries or schools of theology—explicitly offer a research doctorate or Ph.D. in practical theology, or with a different name but explicitly identified as engaging in practical theology. The four institutions willing to provide student data together identified 132 doctoral students. Three of the schools are rooted in mainline Protestant traditions, two Catholic, two Evangelical, and one ecumenical and interfaith in orientation. None is historically connected to the Black Church.

### The emergence of practical theology in the United States

The contemporary data just presented suggests that practical theology has truly become an ecumenical discipline and endeavor. Yet this is a relatively recent development. "As an academic discipline, practical theology has been predominantly rooted in a liberal Protestant framework and discourse."<sup>7</sup> Protestant seminaries and divinity schools in the United States had adopted and institutionalized the fourfold theological

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<sup>5</sup> The Lilly Endowment is an Indiana-based philanthropic foundation established in 1937 by the Lilly family. Funded by an original gift of stock in the Eli Lilly pharmaceutical company, it is now independent. See <https://lillyendowment.org/about/> (date accessed: 16.3.2020).

<sup>6</sup> Association of Theological Schools, Annual Data Tables, 2018, <http://go.wvu.de/dwppnp> (date accessed: 16.3.2020).

<sup>7</sup> Claire E. Wolfeich, Reframing Practical Theology: Catholic Contributions and Conundrums, in: Joyce Ann Mercer – Bonnie Miller-McLemore (eds.), *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, Boston 2016, 280.

taxonomy of the German theological encyclopedia movement, practical theology serving as the professional branch in the training of clergy, though often viewed as methodologically inferior to the true *Wissenschaft* rigor of fields like critical biblical studies or dogmatic theology.<sup>8</sup>

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the new politics of the Progressive Era overtook American government and other public institutions, challenging *laissez faire* liberalism and initiating a wave of professionalization in medicine, social work, and clergy education. This movement pushed a few religious institutions toward the development of professional tracks, internships, supervision, and the integration of theory and practice, beginning with the University of Chicago Divinity School. The contemporaneous professionalization of religious education brought the emerging social sciences into theological education.<sup>9</sup> After the First World War, Protestant theological voices, influenced by the global missionary movement, became more trans-denominational in outlook. They began to develop a public theology more critical of modernity, mining both traditional theological disciplines and the social sciences to ground such a critique.<sup>10</sup>

During much of the nineteenth century, Evangelical and “mainline” Protestantism could not easily be distinguished, but the increasing prevalence of critical biblical study in Protestant seminaries coupled with Progressive Era devotion to social issues precipitated a break between the two. Evangelicals embraced a return to biblical fundamentals – they became known as fundamentalists – and divested from mainstream Protestant institutions, creating Bible colleges and institutes in their stead, all of which eschewed practical theology.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Roman Catholics in the United States were also establishing a distinct Catholic subculture as a form of resistance to both Protestant hegemony in the United States and the global rise of modernity. Buoyed by the emergence of Catholic social teaching, however, leaders found a distinct Catholic way to address social issues like poverty or workers’ rights. Catholic scholars like John A. Ryan, ensconced in distinct Catholic academic institutions, became caught up in the Progressive movement. They did not eschew the social sciences, as Evangelicals did, but integrated social scientific study into the see-judge-act methodology of the global lay-oriented Catholic Action movement. Though not explicitly recognized as a form of practical theology at the time (and less influential in seminaries), this approach had all the elements of a practical theology – a focus on practic-

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<sup>8</sup> Richard R. Osmer, The United States, in: The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology, 495–498.

<sup>9</sup> Osmer, The United States (see note 8) 498–500.

<sup>10</sup> Osmer, The United States (see note 8) 500–501.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Root, Evangelical Practical Theology, in: Kathleen A. Cahalan – Gordon S. Mikoski (eds.), Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction, New York 2014, 81–82.

es and their reform, an interdisciplinary openness, and a substantive attempt at correlating Christian tradition with real social challenges.<sup>12</sup>

Initially, all the denominational strands approached at least one social science very cautiously in the early twentieth century, that is, psychology. However, “early twentieth-century psychology demonstrated the value of close study of the ‘living human document’ as a valid ‘text’ for theological study.”<sup>13</sup> The phrase “living human document” came out of the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) movement, which by the end of the 1950s began to have an outsized impact on Protestant practical theology. CPE helped to focus practical theology on pastoral practice with an interdisciplinary openness, and it stimulated the development of pastoral counseling, pastoral care, and field education in the seminaries and divinity schools.<sup>14</sup> After Vatican II, Catholic theological educators also embraced psychology enthusiastically, especially the “client-centered” therapeutic approach of Carl Rogers, and it was not uncommon for theologians and psychologists to work in tandem in what was then called *pastoral theology*, as for example with the influential work of Catholics James and Evelyn Whitehead, he a pastoral theologian and she a psychologist. On the mainline Protestant side, one of the most important milestones was James Fowler’s work integrating insights from developmental psychology with postwar explorations of fundamental theology.<sup>15</sup>

Psychology proved a durable conversation partner for practical and pastoral theology in the United States. Its focus on personal growth was conducive to the individualist ethos of U.S. society. But psychotherapeutic-influenced perspectives also came under fire as a bourgeois individualist approach to faith, the critique powered by a praxis-based form of theological reflection with roots in Latin America. Born in the base communities that gave rise to liberation theology, praxis-based theological reflection was rooted in the see-judge-act approach of Catholic Action, but with a special emphasis on the concerns of the poor and political action for justice. It came to the United States through the 1970s and 80s by a variety of means, including through immigration and the public debates over U.S. economic dominance and military action across Latin America. The local and national *Encuentro* movement in Catholic Hispanic ministry employed the method, forming a generation of Latinx Catholic lay leaders in the United States. The approach also made its way into Euro-American Catholic and Protestant theology after liberation theology texts began to appear in English translation, and the influential pedagogue Paulo Freire’s liberation pedagogy came to practical theology through the related field of religious education.

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<sup>12</sup> On John A. Ryan, see Francis L. Broderick, *Right Reverend New Dealer, John A. Ryan*, New York 1963. On evangelical divestment from practical theology, see Root, *Evangelical Practical Theology* (see note 11) 82.

<sup>13</sup> Miller-McLemore, *The Contributions of Practical Theology* (see note 1) 1.

<sup>14</sup> Osmer, *The United States* (see note 8) 501.

<sup>15</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, New York 1981.

By the 1980s, practical theology began to emerge as a distinct *academic discipline* in the United States, rather than just as the curricular area that included pastoral tasks and skills. “Gone was the shared assumption that the *raison d’être* of the field should be training clergy in the nuts and bolts of ministry. Also evaporating was the previous consensus that grounded practical theology primarily in psychology and human development theory.”<sup>16</sup> The discipline formed at the convergence of several different trends. First, influenced by a “a period of theoretical interest in ‘practice’ and ‘practices’ in the humanities and social sciences,”<sup>17</sup> both ethicists and theologians in the United States placed renewed attention on everyday Christian practices as a *locus theologicus*, and on the church as a community defined by its practices. In a parallel way, Protestant ethicist Don Browning argued that U.S. practical theology as a discipline was born out of a recovered focus on practical reason and wisdom in the tradition of Aristotle.<sup>18</sup>

Second, also in a parallel way, Protestant practical theologians begin building upon the correlation methodologies championed in the United States by Protestant Paul Tillich and Catholic David Tracy. Correlation methodologies helped enable greater postwar attention to societal concerns and to audiences beyond the church, a move identified with both the critical realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the embrace of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*. Practical theologians hoped to bring even greater precision and more concrete focus to such methodologies, shaping them for use in ministerial decision-making and in ecclesial consideration of social issues, inaugurating a new “public paradigm” of practical theology. Don Browning and Richard Osmer both developed textbooks for Protestants.<sup>19</sup> Strongly influenced by hermeneutical theology, Catholic Thomas Groome also developed a practical theological methodology as part of his project of bringing new pedagogies into religious education.<sup>20</sup> The interdisciplinary aspect of practical theology appeared in the 1980s through the emergence of congregational studies as a fellow traveler of practical theology, spurred first by the interpretive cultural anthropology of American Clifford Geertz, and then by the “new paradigm” in the U.S. sociology of religion.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Don C. Richter, *Religious Practices in Practical Theology*, in: *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 203.

<sup>17</sup> Dorothy C. Bass, *Ways of Life Abundant*, in: Dorothy C. Bass – Craig Dykstra (eds.), *Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, Grand Rapids 2008, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, Minneapolis 1991, 2–7.

<sup>19</sup> Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (see note 18); and Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, Grand Rapids 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, New York 1991.

<sup>21</sup> James P. Wind, *Leading Congregations, Discovering Congregational Cultures*, in: *The Christian Century* (February 3-10, 1993), 105–110.

By the early 1980s, white evangelical scholars had begun to overcome their historical opposition to practical theology as a curricular area and academic discipline. Having eschewed fundamentalist separation from the world, the new evangelicals founded Fuller Theological Seminary in 1947 in Southern California as a second intellectual center for their movement, after Wheaton College. Both Fuller and its more conservative neighbor, Biola University,<sup>22</sup> developed schools of psychology in the 1970s to create a generation of psychotherapists with biblically rooted credentials. Fuller also created a School of World Mission that integrated insights from cultural anthropology. Cooperation between these schools and more traditional theological schools led to the emergence of a new evangelical practical theology: “Practical theology in evangelicalism has not developed as the outgrowth of subdisciplines as much as a way of engaging in mission. It has come about as a way of turning theology to the practical operations of mission and evangelism.”<sup>23</sup> The new evangelical practical theology is also distinguished by an interculturalism born of its focus on global evangelism.<sup>24</sup>

### Beyond white practical theology

Echoing the racial and denominational stratification of the nation, voices within the emerging field of practical theology had tended to skew white, Protestant, and male. Yet African American Protestant scholars had already begun to develop their own form of practical theology in the 1980s with roots in homiletics, a central Christian practice of the Black Church and a seasoned academic discipline in African American seminaries. That practical theology attended to cooperation and resistance to racial oppression in the Black Church, “a pastoral-prophetic dialectic” with roots in Black liberation theology.<sup>25</sup> But this theological orientation only gradually and partially found its way into the white male academy. Dale Andrews notes,

“A regrettable irony exists in much of the theological work black practical theologians conduct in the interests of diverse learning. We have not escaped the marginalization of studying the marginalized... That work, however, struggles still to transform how the dominant cultures of the academy or church study themselves strategically for transformation of hegemony.”<sup>26</sup>

Feminist theological perspectives that had arisen during the 1970s into the 80s were also slow to influence “mainstream” practical theology. Only in the late 1990s and

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<sup>22</sup> Biola started out as an acronym for Bible Institute of Los Angeles.

<sup>23</sup> Root, *Evangelical Practical Theology* (see note 11) 94–95.

<sup>24</sup> Root, “Evangelical Practical Theology,” 83–96; Charles J. Scalise, *Protestant Evangelicalism*, in: *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, 584–585.

<sup>25</sup> Dale P. Andrews, *African American Practical Theology*, in: *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 14–21.

<sup>26</sup> Andrews, *African American Practical Theology* (see note 25) 27.



2000s, for example, did feminist practical theologians like Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Joyce Mercer, and Pamela Couture produce volumes exploring the most common of Christian practices, those involved in maternal childcare, including that done by poor women.<sup>27</sup> Also in the 1990s and 2000s, work began to appear – across the fields of pastoral care, religious education, congregational studies, and homiletics – integrating *womanist* (black feminist) questions and perspectives into practical theology, attending to the flourishing of African American women and girls.<sup>28</sup>

Latinx and Asian American theologians struggled with a common challenge. The rootedness of these two theological traditions in questions of practice and everyday life seems to obviate the creation of a boundary between practical theology as a discipline and other theological disciplines. Along those lines, Carmen Nanko-Fernández takes white practical theologians to task for compartmentalizing human life into distinct spheres in a way that makes no sense in everyday life, what Latinx theologians call *lo cotidiano*.<sup>29</sup> Courtney Goto points to controversies around the very idea of an Asian American practical theology, given that it groups together strikingly different cultures and ethnicities with very different contextual concerns. Goto nevertheless defends the designation, but only as represented in a plurality of trajectories: “Asian American practical theologies take multiple paths that intersect, diverge, and sometimes parallel or overlap with one another and other approaches to practical theology.”<sup>30</sup>

The contemporary story of practical theology in the United States is largely the struggle to incorporate these important and distinct voices into publications and conferences once almost exclusively guided and populated by white men. U.S. scholars now find themselves practicing “intersectionality,” that is, exploring race and ethnicity in relationship with gender, socio-economic inequality, sexual orientation, secularization, and/or non-binary conceptions of gender. At the same time, even as the landscape begins to shift in a more inclusive direction, power asymmetries and implicit biases against women and persons of color endure. As Tom Beaudoin and Katherine Turpin note,

“[W]hite racialization was the norm of the discipline, and ‘other’ ethnic or racial groups needed to tell the story of how their cultural norms and racialized identity inflected the universalized (white) field of practical theology... Only over time and through critical reviews have we come to understand the full extent of the white ra-

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<sup>27</sup> Joyce Mercer, *Feminist and Womanist Practical Theology*, in: *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 103–109.

<sup>28</sup> Evelyn Parker, *Womanist Theory*, in: *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, 204–213.

<sup>29</sup> Carmen Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en Espanglish: Context, Community, Ministry*, Maryknoll 2010, 21–28.

<sup>30</sup> Courtney Goto, *Asian American Practical Theologies*, in: *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 35.

cial bias in our theology. In our major works we cited mostly white authors, dealt with mostly white privileged questions, and made reference to cultural-religious resources most obvious to white readers.”<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, my own scholarship has been a struggle to battle bias toward white middle-class, male questions, to ensure that female voices and voices of color appear regularly and not exceptionally as dialogue partners, and to treat my own Euro-American reality as simply one among many other realities in a diverse country.

### Other contemporary questions

Across these distinct voices, today’s ecumenical discipline of practical theology in the United States has developed into two parallel but intertwined tracks, one oriented to reflection on practical theology methodology *per se*, introducing, for example, post-structuralist theory, feminist hermeneutics, and other forms of critical theory into the mix.<sup>32</sup> The other has focused attention on taking up these methodologies in the service of particular questions and in particular areas of concern. Catholic Kathleen Cahalan, for example, developed a comprehensive theology of ministry that begins not with a historical theology of ministry but with the urgent question in U.S. Catholic circles of lay people employed as professional ministers in the church, usually referred to as lay ecclesial ministers.<sup>33</sup>

Across both of these tracks, scholars employ diverse methodologies and approaches. Richard Osmer identifies four different methodological trajectories in practical theology: a broad hermeneutical approach, a transformative praxis approach rooted in liberationist perspectives or post-structuralist critical theory, a neo-Aristotelian approach launched by Alasdair MacIntyre’s seminal 2007 work on practice<sup>34</sup> and developed via the Valparaiso Project as funded by the Lilly Endowment,<sup>35</sup> and a “confessional” approach favored by evangelicals and the post-liberal and radical orthodoxy movements in the United States.<sup>36</sup> Courtney Goto identifies five different trajectories just in Asian American practical theology.<sup>37</sup>

Interdisciplinary partners continue to matter to U.S. practical theologians, though in different ways often influenced by denominational trajectories. Critical theory is an

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<sup>31</sup> Tom Beaudoin and Katherine Turpin, White Practical Theology, in: *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 251–252.

<sup>32</sup> Osmer, *The United States* (see note 8) 503.

<sup>33</sup> Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, Collegeville 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame 2007.

<sup>35</sup> See Dykstra – Miller-McLemore’s anthology *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, Grand Rapids 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Empirical Practical Theology*, in: *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 69–71.

<sup>37</sup> Goto, *Asian American Practical Theologies* (see note 30) 35–37.

especially frequent dialogue partner for mainline Protestants, feminists, and womanists. Evangelicals tend toward psychology. A focus on qualitative research in the social sciences, including ethnographies, case studies, archival work, interviews, and other newer media-based approaches, now reaches well beyond traditional congregational studies into many different areas of practical theology and performed by scholars of all denominational families. Some Catholic and Protestant practical theologians (including the author) employ community-based research protocols in qualitative research. These approaches, rooted in the critical pedagogy traditions of Paulo Freire, train and call local community members to share in the work of collecting and interpreting narrative evidence. This can attenuate some of the power asymmetries between scholarly (often white and middle class) researchers and the more diverse people whose stories we hope to hear and understand, especially in marginalized communities.<sup>38</sup>

In a country as large and complex as the United States, of course, there are too many questions and themes to report, even in a field as small as practical theology. We could, for example, examine the post-modern (even post-Christian) practical theology of Tom Beaudoin, beginning perhaps with his accounts and analysis of the “de-converted.”<sup>39</sup> Or we might reflect on the interfaith approaches to practical theology arising at institutions like the Claremont School of Theology in California.<sup>40</sup> We might investigate the American wing of the “ethnography in ecclesiology” movement (also influential in the United Kingdom), a series of critical responses to the transcendent assertions about the Church made in Protestant postliberal circles and in Catholic image-oriented ecclesiologies that stem from Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*.<sup>41</sup> It would also be productive to note what has been missing in U.S. practical theology, such as greater attention to the environmental practices arising in response to the global threat of climate change, work that is currently occurring within religious studies.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Mary Ann Hinsdale – Helen M. Lewis, – S. Maxine Waller, *It Comes from the People: Community Development and Local Theology*, Philadelphia 1995. Waller was a local informant who became co-author. See also Brett C. Hoover, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism*, New York 2014, 225–237.

<sup>39</sup> Tom Beaudoin – Patrick J. Hornbeck, *Deconversion and Ordinary Theology: A Catholic Study*, in: Jeff Astley – Leslie J. Francis (eds.): *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, Burlington 2013, 33–44.

<sup>40</sup> See the school’s “About Us” webpage, <http://go.wvu.de/9d8yc> (date accessed: 16.3.2020).

<sup>41</sup> See Christian B. Scharen, introduction to *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Grand Rapids 2012, 1–6.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Amanda Baugh, *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White*, Berkeley 2016; and Baugh, *Explicit and Embedded Environmentalism: Challenging Normativities in the Greening of Religion*, in: *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture & Ecology* 23 (2019) 2, 93–112.

## Practical Theology and the Churches

As a final word, it is necessary to note that while the different denominational families of the United States have enriched practical theology, they also reinforce traditional fault lines formed by the tectonics of modernity. These fault lines have strongly affected the relationship between academic practical theology and the churches. The focus on competitive intellectual rigor in modern U.S. universities has tended to privilege the secular, concerned that religious commitments may water down academic freedom. Thus, mainline Protestant universities have frequently drifted away from their denominational roots, eschewing theology for religious studies. As we have seen, evangelical seminaries rejected the very endeavor of practical theology until relatively recently, associating its interdisciplinarity and critical attention to practice as an incursion of modern secularity.

Despite these trends, there are locations where church and university come together. A number of U.S. universities with Protestant roots – among them Yale, Boston University, Emory, Duke, and Vanderbilt – have retained their divinity schools and still train pastors. Some of the most prominent work in U.S. practical theologies takes place there, still connected to churches and ministry through that work. Still, these schools are regarded as elite institutions, and thus more influenced by the secular intellectual currents of American academic in general, but also by more robust interdisciplinary agendas. Scholars at these institutions are much more like to turn away from the “clerical paradigm” of practical theology and to focus on public theology. This is not to say that the public paradigm is not alive at independent mainline seminaries, although much of the daily work of practical theology as an ecclesially oriented curricular area still takes place there, though with many of these institutions struggling financially. Meanwhile both African American and Latinx theologians eschew any strong distinction between clerical or ecclesial paradigms and public paradigms, especially those that devalue the former.<sup>43</sup> Neither group has had the luxury of separating out the problems embedded in social systems and addressed in the public paradigm from the everyday pastoral concerns of the Black Church – oppression has usually made them identical.

Latinx Catholic theologians, however, share in the larger Roman Catholic development of a separation between university and seminary after the Second Vatican Council. In 1967, a group of Catholic university presidents and other scholars met at Land o’Lakes, a property owned by the University of Notre Dame in the upper Midwest of the United States. The resulting document promoted an institutional distancing between Catholic universities (soon legally owned by boards of trustees) and the religious orders or dioceses that founded them. The Jesuit and Holy Cross scholars who

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<sup>43</sup> See Andrews, *African American Practical Theology* (see note 25) 15; and Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en Español* (see note 29) 21–24.

dominated the meeting hoped to pave the way for greater rapprochement with the modern world as proposed in *Gaudium et Spes* at Vatican II, and to show secular and Protestant universities their commitment to rigor and academic freedom, overcoming an historical inferiority complex.<sup>44</sup> Theology departments remained at Catholic universities, but they were now unfettered to examine controversial issues with considerably less fear of ecclesial disciplinary action. Increased Vatican surveillance over theology during the John Paul II era further alienated academic theology at the universities from theology in the seminaries, many of whom became bastions of this new orthodoxy. Disdain for the other proliferated at both of these sets of institutions. Ministry and pastoral leadership were often treated by university theologians as lesser matters, so much so that one theologian argued “to claim identity as either a practical or pastoral theologian often conveys a degree of academic second-class citizenship.”<sup>45</sup> Catholic seminaries, on the other hand, retained an almost exclusive focus on ecclesial issues, often eschewing questions of social justice and focusing on resistance to legal abortion. In between the two, a smaller number of Catholic university theology departments, institutes, and schools of theology and ministry continued to train people for ministry, increasingly lay people who worked professionally in the churches. These institutes have become the heart of a practical theology attuned to sinful social systems but also to pastoral issues.

Despite these institutional barriers between church and academy across some of the different denominational families, there is reason to be hopeful about practical theology in the United States. It seems to have found a path that includes both the public and the ecclesial (or clerical) paradigm, even at elite institutions. It remains nimble enough to respond to rapidly emerging social and ecclesial issues within and without the churches, such as when in 2016, the Association of Practical Theology took up the relationship between the Black Lives Matter movement and the Black Church. There is increasing room for ecumenical and interreligious cooperation, and more practical theologians have become involved in international cooperative efforts. Finally, very gradually practical theology in the United States is overcoming the divisions of race, ethnicity, and denomination, though we still have a long way to go.

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<sup>44</sup> Regarding the move toward autonomy, see North American Region of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, *Land o’Lakes Statement: The Idea of the Catholic University, 1967*, <http://go.wvu.de/6y5vy> (date accessed: 16.3.2020)).

<sup>45</sup> Nanko-Fernández, *Theologizing en Espanglish* (see note 29) 22–23.