

Between *Kuriaké* and *Ekklesía*

Tracing a Shift in Scandinavian Practical Theology Based on Handbooks in the Discipline

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Introduction

In some respects, Practical Theology in Scandinavia has always been a work in progress.¹ Since Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) first defined it in the early nineteenth century, societal, theological, and scientific transformations have contributed to changed understandings of the discipline.² In recent decades, this can be exemplified by changes in the name of the discipline in Uppsala, Sweden: from “Practical Theology” in the seventies through “Studies of Churches and Denominations”, “Practical Ecclesiology”, “Ecclesiology”,³ and most recently “Empirical-Practical Studies of Religion and Theology”.⁴

1. In the following, we will use the term “Practical Theology” to describe the discipline. We are aware that there are local and historical deviations from this term, for example “kyrkovetenskap”, but since most of the universities in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway have used and still use this term, we will too.

2. Marie Rosenius, “Empiri och teori i ekklesiologiska studier belysta genom ‘den nya kyrkosynen’ och ‘den tjänsteinriktade folkkyrkosynen’”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 91 (2015), 90–100.

3. Sven-Erik Brodd, “Ecclesiology Under Construction: A Report from a Working-Site”, in Sune Fahlgren & Jonas Ideström (eds.), *Ecclesiology in the Trenches: Theory and Method under Construction*, Eugene, OR 2015, 8–9.

4. See “Empirical-Practical Studies of Religion and Theology”, <https://teol.uu.se/research/empirical-practical-studies-of-religion-and-theology/>, accessed 2021-02-05.

The underlying hypothesis of this article is that there has been a significant change in the way the discipline is conceptualized, from a historical/systematic textual study of “the church” understood in terms of different practices, to a practice-oriented discipline engaged in empirical approaches. This becomes especially evident when comparing what we henceforth in this article will call “handbooks”, in other words reference works intended to give instruction and information on a particular academic discipline. In short: literature that a graduate or post-graduate student in Practical Theology would be expected to read and refer to in order to understand and define their field of study. Every time a change in the understanding of Practical Theology has emerged, there has been an increase in the production of handbooks in order to pronounce a revised self-understanding of the discipline. In recent years, there has been an increase in Practical Theology handbooks in Scandinavia to a degree that has not been seen since the last major change in the 1990s.

However, this turn to practice in theological studies is not confined to the Scandinavian context. Although scholars may differ in their opinion of when and how the change occurred, they all agree that there has been some sort of empirical turn.⁵ With this article, we want to shed light on how this change has played out in the Scandinavian context. Thus, the research question guiding this study is: how did the understanding of Practical Theology in handbooks shift between the 1990s and the 2010s in Scandinavia?

To further qualify: as the article takes a bird’s-eye view on this change, it will focus primarily on common traits and not go in depth into regional differences. Due to the publication venue and the background of the authors, the Swedish context will be our particular focus. Nonetheless, the interrelation of the Swedish research scene with Norwegian and Danish discourses makes it warranted to talk of the Scandinavian field as a whole. The bird’s-eye perspective is further emphasized in the choice of material. Handbooks represent ideals, and not necessarily what researchers and students actually do. Throughout the article, the main focus will be handbooks by

5. Brodd, “Ecclesiology Under Construction”, 7–9; Chris A.M. Hermans & Mary E. Moore, “The Contribution of Empirical Theology by J.A. Van der Ven”, in Chris A.M. Hermans & Mary E. Moore (eds.), *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology: The Contribution of Empirical Theology by Johannes A. Van der Ven*, Leiden 2004, 4; Paul Ballard & John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, London 1997, ix; Tone Stangeland Kaufman, “From the Outside, Within, or In Between? Normativity at Work in Empirical Practical Theological Research”, in Joyce Ann Mercer & Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (eds.), *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, Leiden 2016, 136, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004324244_008; Kristine Helboe Johansen, “Det folkekirkelige i folkekirken: Praksis som teologisk ressource”, in Lisbet Christoffersen, Niels Henrik Gregersen & Karen Marie SØ Leth-Nissen (eds.), *Den praktiske teologi i Danmark 1973–2018: Festskrift til Hans Raun Iversen*, Copenhagen 2019, 59.

Scandinavian authors. However, we will also give a brief overview of the international handbooks that are used in the Scandinavian context, in order to contextualize the presentation and shed further light on the characteristics of the change.

The change is often described as *a shift in focus*, as a movement from one pole to the other. For example, practical theologians often refer to Roger Haight's distinction between ecclesiology from "above" and "below", where "below" signifies historical, social, and contextual matters.⁶ Another influential description is Nicholas M. Healy's distinction between blueprint and prophetic-practical approaches. Healy argues for the importance of studying "the concrete church", otherwise theologians run the risk of creating a "blueprint church", abstract ideals that are disconnected from reality and forced upon it. Instead, Christian truth (doctrine) and Christian practice (discipleship) should be in a mutual relation to each other.⁷ A third example is Karla Ann Koll's notion of "balcony" and "road" theology.⁸

This article, however, proposes another set of concepts to describe the shift in focus: Diarmaid MacCulloch's *kuriaké* and *ekklesia*. As MacCulloch suggests, these two perspectives have remained in tension throughout the whole of Christian history. In his understanding, *kuriaké* emphasizes the "authority of the master" while *ekklesia* refers to "a local identity within the greater whole of Christianity", emphasizing the decisions of the faithful.⁹ In this article we refer to *kuriaké* as more preoccupied with the assertions of church authorities (usually considered normative sources), while *ekklesia* refers to a focus on the particular expressions of faith by individuals and assemblies within the Christian communities. We introduce these concepts since the previously mentioned ones tend to create problems. Firstly, they often bear some evaluative load. Secondly, they tend to oppose theory and practice, something that we, as well as the authors we analyze, explicitly denounce. The terms *kuriaké* and *ekklesia* help avoid these problems by being deeply rooted in the Christian context. They also underline the importance that the view of the church plays in the understanding of Practical Theology in the Scandinavian context. Finally, they highlight the tension, but not opposition, between two essential aspects of the Christian

6. Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: 1. Historical Ecclesiology*, London 2004, 55–66.

7. Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, Cambridge 2000, 52–76, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511605857>.

8. Karla Ann Koll, "The Theology of John A. Mackay as *Praeparatio Liberationis*", *Theology Today* 73 (2016), 105–116, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573616643363>.

9. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, London 2010, 26–27.

community.¹⁰ In other words, they allow for an understanding of Practical Theology as sustained between the two poles, balancing and connecting them. We will return to these concepts in the final discussion.

The aim of this article is thus three-fold. Firstly, the authors aim to describe the change through developments in Scandinavian handbooks of Practical Theology over the last three decades; secondly, to contextualize these developments by giving an overview of other handbooks currently in use, primarily from the UK; and finally, to briefly discuss the implication of the shift in focus from *kuriaké* to *ekklesia*.

Scandinavian Practical Theology in the 1990s

In the Scandinavian context, the 1990s stood out as a turning point. During that decade, five major handbooks were published by prominent Scandinavian representatives of the discipline: Eberhard Harbsmeier's and Hans Raun Iversen's *Praktisk teologi* in Danish, Olav Skjevesland's (1942–2019) *Invitasjon til praktisk teologi* in Norwegian, and three edited works in Swedish, the revised second edition of *Kyrkans liv, Kyrkovetenskapliga forskningslinjer*, and *Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin*.¹¹ There are regional differences but, as we will show, these five works still share several features.

For most of the twentieth century, Practical Theology has been the twin sister of Systematic Theology and Church History. In the case of Sweden, the historical approach has been dominant.¹² This is expressed in

10. Rosenius, "Empiri och ekklesiologi", describes this more in depth in the Swedish context, while Kirsten Donskov Felter, "Hvor praktisk kan det blive?", in Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, Christine Svinth-Væрге Pöder & Nete Helene Enggaard (eds.), *Eftertænkning og genopførelser: Festskrift til Bent Flemming Nielsen*, Copenhagen 2019, 115–130, does so in the Danish context.

11. Eberhard Harbsmeier & Hans Raun Iversen, *Praktisk teologi*, Copenhagen 1995; Olav Skjevesland, *Invitasjon til praktisk teologi: En faginnføring*, Oslo 1999; Stephan Borgehammar (ed.), *Kyrkans liv: Introduktion till kyrkovetenskapen*, 2:a uppl., Stockholm 1993; Oloph Bexell (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskapliga forskningslinjer: En vetenskapsteoretisk översikt*, Lund 1996; Sven-Åke Selander (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin: Ämneskonferens i Vitterhetsakademien, 12–13 november 1998*, Lund 2001. One may note the difference in terminology. The Swedish scholars preferred the term "kyrkovetenskap" to distance themselves from the idea that the discipline was a *theologia applicata*. This helped them to promote the academic character of the discipline and provided suggestion for its desired direction. This difference, however, is mainly cosmetic, focusing on the naming, not on the content or methods.

12. Skjevesland, *Invitasjon til praktisk teologi*, 30, 44. Åke André, "Kyrkovetenskap ur uppsalaperspektiv", in Oloph Bexell (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskapliga forskningslinjer: En vetenskapsteoretisk översikt*, Lund 1996, 17–20; Carl-Gustaf André, "Kyrkovetenskap ur lundaperspektiv", in Oloph Bexell (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskapliga forskningslinjer: En vetenskapsteoretisk översikt*, Lund 1996, 43–50; Rosenius, "Empiri och ekklesiologi", 93; Oloph Bexell, "Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin", in Sven-Åke Selander (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin: Ämneskonferens i Vitterhetsakademien, 12–13 november 1998*, Lund 2001, 8.

all of the Swedish handbooks. In the introduction to *Kyrkans liv*, Stephan Borgehammar refers to the following official definition of the discipline:

Practical Theology includes research with the use of different methods within a set of sub-areas, which are united in their focus on the practice of the Christian churches and denominations in history and the present: liturgy and pious practices, preaching and teaching, pastoral care and charity work, organizational and legal issues, aesthetic and artistic forms of expression, together with their interrelations.¹³

Borgehammar also states that Practical Theology is “primarily” a historical science, which means that even when it studies contemporary church life, it favours the use of historical research questions and methods, alongside elements of systematic theology.¹⁴

Two of the six authors in *Kyrkovetenskapliga forskningslinjer* refer to the same definition.¹⁵ One of them, Oloph Bexell, states that, although a range of methods may be used, Practical Theology is “a historical discipline that also deals with the contemporary”. Practical Theology “studies the history of the church through her own reflection about her character as it is manifested, historically and in the present, in the practices of the church”. Practical theologians should primarily use textual sources generated by churches or their representatives, rather than creating sources themselves by means of empirical research. That kind of material might be used by practical theologians, but it should be gathered by other disciplines who specialize in that kind of work.¹⁶ In his introduction to the volume *Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin*, Bexell repeats these ideas. Practical Theology belongs in the department of Church History, but it is also systematic-theological in character. Practical Theology studies the churches’ self-understanding of their own character as it is manifested in practice, and how the church as an idea is realized in history and the present. Practical Theology studies the message of the churches as it is proclaimed, while Psychology of Religion deals with how this message is received in the lives of individual believers.¹⁷

13. Stephan Borgehammar, “Introduktion”, in Stephan Borgehammar (ed.), *Kyrkans liv: Introduktion till kyrkovetenskapen*, 2:a uppl., Stockholm 1993, 9. All translations from Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian are ours.

14. Borgehammar, “Introduktion”, 9.

15. Andrén, “Kyrkovetenskap ur uppsalaperspektiv”, 49; Oloph Bexell, “Om kyrkans praxis och dess teologi”, in Oloph Bexell (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskapliga forskningslinjer: En vetenskapsteoretisk översikt*, Lund 1996, 155.

16. Bexell, “Om kyrkans praxis”, 156–158.

17. Bexell, “Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin”, 8–11.

Both volumes also include perspectives from the two professors of Practical Theology in Sweden at that time, Sven-Erik Brodd and Sven-Åke Selander. Brodd agrees that the overall task is to study the particularity of the church but uses the two concepts “ecclesiology” and “ecclesiality” to specify: ecclesiology is the deductive, systematic-theological approach, while ecclesiality is about the self-realization of the church in practice. In Brodd’s view, the two stand in a dialectical relationship. Brodd saw that the social sciences dominated Practical Theology internationally but disagreed with their privileged position. Although sociology might be helpful, it is the systematic and historical perspectives that define the discipline. Practical Theology is a thoroughly theological discipline, the “*constructive and critical reflection on a presumed divine revelation*”.¹⁸

Selander, on the other hand, leans towards the practice-oriented approach. He argues that the task of Practical Theology is to study the church as a phenomenon with a wide range of methods, analyzing and explaining, but avoiding normative claims.¹⁹ His thoughts were further developed in 2001 when he, with reference to Skjevesland’s book, described Practical Theology in Lund as based on empirical research and oriented towards society, and pointed to the use of quantitative and qualitative methods inspired by Johannes A. van der Ven’s “empirical theology”.²⁰

This shift is also evident in the contributions from younger scholars, like Kjell Blücker and Ninna Edgardh Beckman, where especially Edgardh – in the light of gender perspectives – points to the need to develop methods of studying practices that do not leave textual traces.²¹ However, the other approach is still present, for example in the statement that it is the self-understanding of the churches that is expressed in practice.²²

18. Sven-Erik Brodd, “Ecklesiologi och ecklesialitet”, in Oloph Bexell (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskapliga forskningslinjer: En vetenskapsteoretisk översikt*, Lund 1996, 106–112, quotation from p. 110. Italics in original. See also Sven-Erik Brodd, “Kyrkovetenskaplig forskning i Uppsala”, in Sven-Åke Selander (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin: Ämneskonferens i Vitterhetsakademien, 12–13 november 1998*, Lund 2001, 13–26.

19. Sven-Åke Selander, “Fenomen – funktion – analys”, in Oloph Bexell (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskapliga forskningslinjer: En vetenskapsteoretisk översikt*, Lund 1996, 126–127; Sven-Åke Selander, “Kyrko- och samfundsvetenskap i Lund”, in Sven-Åke Selander (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin: Ämneskonferens i Vitterhetsakademien, 12–13 november 1998*, Lund 2001, 27–44.

20. Selander, “Kyrko- och samfundsvetenskap”, 27–44.

21. Kjell Blücker, “Kyrkan som...: Att studera ecklesiologi från olika horisonter”, in Sven-Åke Selander (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin: Ämneskonferens i Vitterhetsakademien, 12–13 november 1998*, Lund 2001, 47–60; Ninna Edgardh Beckman, “Kyrkovetenskap som kvinnoforskning”, in Sven-Åke Selander (ed.), *Kyrkovetenskap som forskningsdisciplin: Ämneskonferens i Vitterhetsakademien, 12–13 november 1998*, Lund 2001, 61–72.

22. Selander, “Kyrko- och samfundsvetenskap”, 30.

The Norwegian Skjevesland gives the following definition: “[Practical Theology] is the discipline that both critically analyzes and constructively reflects on how the church is realized in the world. The emphasis is on how this realization takes place in the local context – through worship, proclamation, teaching, pastoral care, and social work.”²³ Here, Skjevesland was in agreement with several of his Swedish colleagues that the church is an idea that “realizes itself” in the real world, as well as with the idea that the task of Practical Theology is both descriptive and normative or directing. The aim of Practical Theology is to assist the church in the execution of its mission.²⁴

The Danish context was more resemblant of Selander’s approach. Harbsmeier and Iversen give the following definition: “[Practical Theology is] the knowledge of the expressions of Christian life and forms of communication of the church in worship, proclamation, teaching, pastoral care, diakonia, mission, and community in a certain denomination.” The authors clearly state that although ecclesiology may be decisive for the expression in practice, ecclesiology in its turn is decided by how the relationship between the human and the Christian is conceived. This also affects the understanding of how empirical method and theological norms should be valued. The practical theologian should be both critical and constructive. It is not enough to describe, you also have to be able to discuss what ought to be done. To that end, every subject needs to be examined from three perspectives: historically, empirically, and theologically.²⁵

The reference to “the human and the Christian” indicates one of the major regional differences. While the Swedish and Norwegian scenes were influenced by the ecumenical movement in their theological vantage points, the Danish context was characterized more by the Lutheran heritage and the Danish theologian Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872), who coined the phrase “human first, then Christian”. This leads to a view of the church as *function* rather than *essence*, which is evident also in their description of the study of Practical Theology as an ellipse with two focal points, the congregation and the pastor.²⁶

However, despite their phenomenological approach, Harbsmeier and Iversen claim that ecclesiology is a “conditional discipline” (*forudsætningsdisciplin*). In order to be able to analyze the forms of church communication, it is necessary to have a clear definition of what “the church” is. With the aid of Avery Dulles’ (1918–2008) *Models of the Church* (each model, however, related to Luther or Grundtvig) and the “four marks of the

23. Skjevesland, *Invitasjon til praktisk teologi*, 60–61.

24. Skjevesland, *Invitasjon til praktisk teologi*, 61.

25. Harbsmeier & Iversen, *Praktisk teologi*, 21–23.

26. Harbsmeier & Iversen, *Praktisk teologi*, 22.

church” (according to the Apostolic Creed, *Confessio Augustana*, Luther, and Grundtvig), they sketch the features of the “true” church. Although any idea of the church can only be “an assumption that is a matter of faith”, they express a clear idea of “the church”: the *Danish Church*.²⁷

There are several common denominators in the five handbooks. For example, they all claim that Church History and Systematic Theology are the primary partners of Practical Theology. And despite the differences in ecclesiological vantage points, they all in some way talk about “the church” that is communicated, emanates, or is self-realized in practice. This is expressed even more clearly when the authors discuss the structuring of the discipline.

Kyrkans liv starts with a chapter on ecclesiology followed by four chapters about the study of denominations. Ecclesiology is explicitly put first since it is “indispensable” for a correct understanding of the essence and activity of the church. The book ends with seven chapters about the most important “characteristic expressions” of the church: liturgy, homiletics, catechetics, diakonia, church law, ecumenics, and spirituality. Similar disciplines, although with some variation, are mirrored in other books, but the approach to them differs. In *Kyrkovetenskapliga forskningslinjer*, Bexell underlines that “the church” is a theological entity and acting subject, not just an empirically existing organization. Practices are an “emanation” of the theologically motivated essence of the church, and since the seven different practices enumerated above are how the church “traditionally” has manifested itself, they form the “natural” area of interest of Practical Theology.²⁸ Brodd also argues that they shed light on “what the church is” and contribute to a “full view of the church”.²⁹ Selander again takes a different approach and writes about four aspects of research on the church: (1) organization, (2) worship and spirituality, (3) teaching, and (4) community/diakonia/social care, that are analyzed in different fields, like liturgy and homiletics.³⁰

Harbsmeier and Iversen start by describing what the (Danish) church *is*, historically, sociologically, and theologically. Then they move on to the foundational expressions of the life of that church, which are *martyria*, *diakonia*, and *koinonia*, concluding with how the (Danish) church is communicated through worship, ordinances, preaching, pastoral care, and teaching. Skjevesland follows their structure. To him, the “essence” of the church is realized in *martyria*, *diakonia*, and *koinonia* (the church’s mission to witness to the faith, to serve others, and maintain communion).³¹

27. Harbsmeier & Iversen, *Praktisk teologi*, 97–117, quotation from p. 117.

28. Bexell, “Om kyrkans praxis”, 160–167.

29. Brodd, “Ecklesiologi och ecklesialitet”, 115.

30. Selander, “Fenomen – funktion – analys”, 128–133.

31. Skjevesland, *Invitasjon til praktisk teologi*, 74–75.

In this way, the authors all express an approach where ecclesiological ideas are central or even come first, and practices are seen as an expression of, or even the essence of “the church”, structured around the different tasks of the pastor. At the same time, in all of these books we may observe visible elements of a shift towards another approach, as expressed in two ways. Firstly, in the idea that Practical Theology ought to be “normative” and “constructive”, giving guidance for contemporary church life. This is a break with earlier views that wanted to safeguard the subject as objective science. Secondly, it is expressed in discussions about the future of the discipline.

Selander and Brodd express the need for integration between the different fields of study and the possibility of utilizing the social sciences, especially Sociology of Religion. While Selander welcomes this approach more explicitly, Brodd is more cautious, claiming that this should not be something that practical theologians themselves do. Instead, material produced by the social sciences could be useful as a complement to systematic and historical perspectives.³² Bexell writes about the importance of studying “empirical reality” in the local church. He does, however, state explicitly that the perspective should be that of the “sender”, not that of the recipient.³³

Skjevesland mentions the recent debate and two sources of inspiration for a new, empirical way of doing Practical Theology: van der Ven’s concept of “empirical theology” and Don S. Browning’s *Fundamental Practical Theology*. In that book, Browning presents a hermeneutic circle in four steps: (1) descriptive (with the aim of describing actual practices), (2) historical (the content of normative texts), (3) systematic (the fusion of horizons between vision in practices and vision in normative texts), and (4) practical/strategic (where reflection is put into practice).³⁴

To Skjevesland, the time when one could deduce practice from a normative doctrinal system is over. In fact, like some of the Swedish theologians, he seems a bit worried about this development and describes it as a continuation of the 1970s’ “public paradigm” in Practical Theology. He characterizes this paradigm, which was inspired by the principles of Marxist critique, as reorienting the studies conducted within Practical Theology towards practices, social justice, and public relevance. This is problematic, since if revelation does not have normative precedence, one ends up with an echo of general cultural ideas and tendencies.³⁵

32. Brodd, “Ecklesiologi och ekklesialitet”, 106, 110, 112; Selander, “Fenomen – funktion – analys”, 131, 135, 153–154.

33. Bexell, “Om kyrkans praxis”, 160–161, 166.

34. Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, Minneapolis, MN 1991.

35. Skjevesland, *Invitasjon til praktisk teologi*, 55–57.

Harbsmeier and Iversen take a much more positive view, stating that Practical Theology “today” (1995) is done in dialogue with empirical (social) science, as an analysis of social practice.³⁶ As we have shown above, their phenomenological and anthropological approach also contributes to this stance.

In conclusion, the Scandinavian practical theological landscape of the 1990s stood, albeit a bit reluctantly, on the threshold of something new. In the following section we will give an overview of how this has played out. During the last two decades, Practical Theology in Scandinavia has changed into a discipline with new conceptions of its purpose, methods, challenges, and origin.

Scandinavian Shift towards Practice

In recent years, there has been once again an increase in the production of handbooks in the field of Scandinavian Practical Theology. One of the most recent, *Ny praktisk teologi*, was written by Hans Raun Iversen. The title alludes to the previously mentioned Danish handbook from 1995 that was co-authored by Iversen. In the introduction, he points out that although the new book might be similar to the old one in structure, the content is entirely new.³⁷ In 2015, Jonas Idestrom and Sune Fahlgren co-edited *Ecclesiology in the Trenches*, an anthology that sketches the development of *kyrkovetenskap* in Uppsala.³⁸ Idestrom is also co-editor of *What Really Matters* together with the Norwegian scholar Tone Stangeland Kaufman. In addition, two recent Danish Festschrifts deal with these issues: *Eftertankning og genopførelser* and *Den praktiske teologi i Danmark 1973–2018*.³⁹

Just as with the books from the 1990s, there are striking similarities. These books are all thoroughly practice-oriented in their methodological approach as well as in their choice of materials and purposes. This orientation towards practice is, however, *not* practice as opposed to theory. Instead, it strives to integrate the two systems of knowledge. It is practice orientation in the sense of practice as the source of theological concepts. Thus, practice provides both important material and methods for research, as well as being an important aspect of the purpose of research – research is done

36. Harbsmeier & Iversen, *Praktisk teologi*, 15–16.

37. Hans Raun Iversen, *Ny praktisk teologi: Kristendommen, den enkelte og kirken*, Copenhagen 2018, 9–10.

38. Sune Fahlgren & Jonas Idestrom (eds.), *Ecclesiology in the Trenches: Theory and Method under Construction*, Eugene, OR 2015.

39. Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, Christine Svinth-Værge Pöder & Nete Helene Enggaard (eds.), *Eftertankning og genopførelser: Festskrift til Bent Flemming Nielsen*, Copenhagen 2019; Lisbet Christoffersen, Niels Henrik Gregersen & Karen Marie Sø Leth-Nissen (eds.), *Den praktiske teologi i Danmark 1973–2018: Festskrift til Hans Raun Iversen*, Copenhagen 2019.

in order to understand and/or change practice. As a result, the handbooks engage extensively in discussions about challenges in this sort of research, for example, the relation between theory and practice. The references to international sources of inspiration are abundant, as well as contributions from international scholars. The Scandinavian approach is clearly developed in dialogue with the international scene.

In Iversen's description of Practical Theology, practice orientation and international influences are evident. For example, drawing on *The Wiley-Blackwell Reader in Practical Theology* and David Tracy's concept of theology for the academy,⁴⁰ the church, and the society at large, Iversen argues that there should be no separation between research and practice. According to Iversen, the only difference between everyday theology and academic theology is the degree of systematization, scope, and methodological rigour. When Iversen discusses theology as participation and mediation, he draws especially on British sources. With Pete Ward, he argues that Christian faith and practice start with and participate in the self-communication of the triune God. This is why theology, and especially Practical Theology, should not go from theory to practice as it traditionally has done, but from practice over theory to practice.⁴¹

In the Festschrift for Iversen, Kirstine Helboe Johansen states that Practical Theology is "an examination of theology from below in all its plurality, diffusion, and confusion because that is what lived theology is". In this, she expands Iversen's primarily church-sociological approach to a broader study of religious practices. Furthermore, practices are seen as sources of theology. To understand what churches are, one needs to work with practices as expressions of theology.⁴² Similarly, Ulla Schmidt underlines the need to study churches "from below", that is to say through studies of actual churches and practices where the researcher participates in the field. Additionally, practices should be regarded as sources of theology, not just as more or less successful applications of an ideal, invisible, and spiritual church. Schmidt argues that this kind of research is not merely a contribution to Practical Theology, it is a necessary and integral part of it – especially since practices

40. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (red.), *The Wiley Blackwell-Companion to Practical Theology*, Malden, MA 2012; David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, London 1981.

41. Iversen, *Ny praktisk teologi*, 13–31. See also Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Hans Raun Iversens program for den praktiske teologi", in Lisbet Christoffersen, Niels Henrik Gregersen & Karen Marie Sø Leth-Nissen (eds.), *Den praktiske teologi i Danmark 1973–2018: Festskrift til Hans Raun Iversen*, Copenhagen 2019, 36.

42. Helboe Johansen, "Det folkekirkelige i folkekirken", in Lisbet Christoffersen, Niels Henrik Gregersen & Karen Marie Sø Leth-Nissen (eds.), *Den praktiske teologi i Danmark 1973–2018: Festskrift til Hans Raun Iversen*, Copenhagen 2019, 59–65, quotation from p. 59.

could destabilize established theories, such as the idea that the church is a self-dependent and demarcated entity, separate from culture and society.⁴³

In the Festschrift for Bent Fleming Nielsen, Kirsten Donskov Felter discusses the question raised by Nielsen in his 2002 inaugural lecture: “How practical is Practical Theology?” She argues that the discipline has become thoroughly practice-oriented. In light of this, practical theologians work from the presumption that practices need to be acknowledged on their own terms as sources of theological knowledge and interpretation. This leads to a complete understanding of the object of study.⁴⁴

In Brodd’s introductory chapter for *Ecclesiology in the Trenches*, the definition of Practical Theology seems to be rather open-ended. It points to three things: “it is the object of study, it is the way of studying something, and it is the result of the study.”⁴⁵ Just as in the 1990s, “ecclesiology” (doctrine) is paired with “ecclesial life” (practice). However, Brodd states that in the 1990s, they used to separate the two, but this idealistic approach was abandoned, not least because it supports the idea that doctrine is separate from practice. In the 2015 volume, he emphasizes the need to keep doctrine and practice together. Churches need to be studied not just based on what they teach, but also based on the way they practice. He points to a development of understanding:

We can still talk about *the* Church (definite), which implies given normative and exclusive traits, and we can also handle that theoretically. But we can also talk about church in an undefined way which according to given criteria can be studied also in texts and practices that do not claim to deal with or represent church in any traditional meaning.⁴⁶

According to Brodd, the reluctance to study any other material than written text has also changed over time, and social sciences are now included in the scientific toolbox.⁴⁷

The first part of *Ecclesiology in the Trenches* offers studies done within the framework of Systematic Theology. However, even the contributors to

43. Ulla Schmidt, “Empirisk kirkeforskning som bidrag til praktisk teologi”, in Lisbet Christoffersen, Niels Henrik Gregersen & Karen Marie Søb Leth-Nissen (eds.), *Den praktiske teologi i Danmark 1973–2018: Festskrift til Hans Raun Iversen*, Copenhagen 2019, 273–274, 277–278.

44. Donskov Felter, “Hvor praktisk kan det blive?”.

45. Brodd himself refers to “ecclesiology”, by which he seeks to differentiate his vision of the discipline from older ideas of Practical Theology. But, again, the content of the concept is quite similar to what other scholars in the field define as Practical Theology.

46. Brodd, “Ecclesiology Under Construction”, 13.

47. Brodd, “Ecclesiology Under Construction”, 1–30.

this part emphasize the importance of practice for theological reflection. In the second part of the book, practice-oriented methods are presented more broadly. This is also where the contributions of the two editors are found. Jonas Ideström presents yet another type of ecclesiological research: contemporary and based on empirical theology. As he argues, this type of project requires a dialogue between theology and the social sciences, with a deep appreciation for the empirical realities in the field. He introduces an understanding of the church as a communicating and decision-making system, and offers the concept of “implicit ecclesiology”, in other words those parts of the communal, ecclesiological self-understanding that are not immediately accessible.⁴⁸ Fahlgren discusses ecclesiology as a kind of sociology and argues for a shift in ecclesiology’s paradigm: from historically philosophical to that of lived religion. Like Edgardh Beckman in 2001, Fahlgren argues that a practice-oriented approach is needed in the study of churches that do not leave a trail of texts. Researchers have to move away from the general study of “the church” towards that of specific Christian communities in specific contexts from specific perspectives.⁴⁹

Fahlgren repeats this argument in the third handbook, *What Really Matters*. There is a need for ethnographic approaches also in historical studies, where things like artefacts, photographs, and narratives are important sources of knowledge, especially when it comes to Christian communities that are “non-creedal” and experience-based.⁵⁰ The whole book is the result of a decade of dialogue with the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network.⁵¹ It contains Scandinavian, British, and American voices and is oriented towards the juxtaposition of ecclesiology and ethnography and the accompanying mix of social sciences and theology. In her introduction to research in ecclesiology and ethnography, Tone Stangeland Kaufman points towards the growing emphasis on the church as it concretely appears and is experienced by people. This is evident both theoretically – in the form of such theoretical paradigms as Actor–Network Theory (ANT) and Science, Technology, Society (STS) – and in the number of dissertations written within

48. Jonas Ideström, “Implicit Ecclesiology and Local Church Identity: Dealing with Dilemmas of Empirical Ecclesiology”, in Sune Fahlgren & Jonas Ideström (eds.), *Ecclesiology in the Trenches: Theory and Method under Construction*, Eugene, OR 2015, 121–138.

49. Sune Fahlgren, “Studying Fundamental Ecclesial Practices”, in Sune Fahlgren & Jonas Ideström (eds.), *Ecclesiology in the Trenches: Theory and Method under Construction*, Eugene, OR 2015, 87–105.

50. Sune Fahlgren, “The Enacted and Experienced Faith – Creating ‘Stuff’ on Baptist Spirituality in Sweden”, in Jonas Ideström & Tone Stangeland Kaufman (eds.), *What Really Matters: Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Eugene, OR 2018, 200–226.

51. Although Ecclesiology and Ethnography is a British discourse starting in Systematic Theology, in Scandinavia it has been primarily picked up by Practical Theology, having a marginal importance for Systematic Theology.

the area. She mentions that the many names used for this kind of approach to theological research is an indicator that it is a young field, not yet subjected to strict definitions. The common denominator, however, is a turn to empirical and ethnographic approaches.⁵² Ideström introduces the concept of Practical Theology as “faithful participation”, in which he argues that researchers should not be just outsiders but ought to try to understand the insider perspective, which can only be done through participation, engagement, and transformation.⁵³

The Danish contributions to *What Really Matters* offer no definitions but emphasize the importance of an orientation towards practice. Donskov Felter proposes “doing theology as a meaning-making across different fields, as elements from different traditions are negotiated in order to make theological sense of the concrete, and sometimes painful, forms of lived experience”. She argues for the use of the heuristic framework “four voices of theology”, coined by the Action Research in Church and Society (ARCS) team. However, she questions whether it is sensitive enough to the context in which the voices are set.⁵⁴ Marianne Gaarden argues that it is vital that practice and empirical data are allowed to question theory, otherwise theologians run the risk of reproducing already formulated theories that might be wrong. Gaarden also offers her thoughts on how empirical research should be allowed to question theology with its claims to objective truth. An objective truth about God may exist, but since it is not possible to avoid participation in knowledge production, it is not accessible to human beings. This makes empirical findings just as important as theory.⁵⁵

The strong focus on practice and empirical data as sources of knowledge affects the choice of methods. The toolboxes used by Sociology, Anthropology, and Ethnography are included, in addition to theoretical perspectives.⁵⁶

52. Tone Stangeland Kaufman, “Mapping the Landscape of Scandinavian Research in Ecclesiology and Ethnography – Contributions and Challenges”, in Jonas Ideström & Tone Stangeland Kaufman (eds.), *What Really Matters: Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Eugene, OR 2018, 15–37.

53. Jonas Ideström, “Faithful Participation – Engagement and Transformation in Ethnographic Ecclesiology”, in Jonas Ideström & Tone Stangeland Kaufman (eds.), *What Really Matters: Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Eugene, OR 2018, 58–76.

54. Kirsten Donskov Felter, “Office and/or Calling? Negotiating Normativity in the Field of Ministry”, in Jonas Ideström & Tone Stangeland Kaufman (eds.), *What Really Matters: Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Eugene, OR 2018, 109–123, quotation from p. 110.

55. Marianne Gaarden, “How Do We Break Out of ‘the Old Paradigmatic Box’”, in Jonas Ideström & Tone Stangeland Kaufman (eds.), *What Really Matters: Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Eugene, OR 2018, 137.

56. Margit Warburg, “Praktisk teologi og religionssociologi – hvad forener, og hvad skiller”, in Lisbet Christoffersen, Niels Henrik Gregersen & Karen Marie Sø Leth-Nissen

The focus on practice and the idea of participation encourage the use of action research approaches. Dorte Kappelgaard discusses this “turn to participation” and the implications for methodological choices. She presents an overview of the Danish field as well as the international one, including an action research model introduced by Idestrom. Kappelgaard brings attention to the fact that the concept of participation also affects the intention of the researcher. The researcher interacts with the field not just to produce deep and rich knowledge, but with the intention of creating change.⁵⁷ This intention is expressed by several authors including Iversen, Helboe Johansen, and Idestrom.⁵⁸

Just like in the 1990s, the understanding of what Practical Theology should be is reflected in the structure of the handbooks. *Ny praktisk teologi* sets off with two chapters about Practical Theology and empirical methods in the field. After that, there are two chapters about the Lutheran Church of Denmark, its history and sociology, and then, finally, *martyria*, *diakonia* and *koinonia* in the context of that church. The chapters about different “expressions” of church from 1995 are gone. Instead, every chapter begins with a “snapshot”, a narrative about a particular situation or practice, that points to the empirical, historical, systematic, and strategic dimensions of the topic at hand. As shown above, Iversen’s approach to Practical Theology is established with abundant reference to the international scene. As in the handbook from the 1990s, the international influences always appear in combination with sources that are important for the Danish Lutheran folk church, like Martin Luther, *Confessio Augustana*, Grundtvig, Regin Prenter (1907–1990), and Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1905–1981). For example: when Iversen writes about the empirical turn in Practical Theology, he makes references to Johannes A. van der Ven, Don S. Browning, and the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network. But he concludes that “as already Grundtvig argued: you have to find out by sticking your fingers into the local soil, where you work”.⁵⁹

Ecclesiology in the Trenches is structured in three main parts, treating systematic (thesis), empirical (antithesis), and embedded (synthesis) ecclesiology, mirroring the dominant discussion of the relation between theory

(eds.), *Den praktiske teologi i Danmark 1973–2018: Festskrift til Hans Raun Iversen*, Copenhagen 2019, 143; Helboe Johansen, “Det folkekirkelige i folkekirken”, 59–60; Schmidt, “Empirisk kirkeforskning”, 277–278.

57. Dorte Kappelgaard, “Aktionsforskning og teologi,” in Lisbet Christoffersen, Niels Henrik Gregersen & Karen Marie Sø Leth-Nissen (eds.), *Den praktiske teologi i Danmark 1973–2018: Festskrift til Hans Raun Iversen*, Copenhagen 2019, 255.

58. Gregersen, “Hans Raun Iversens program”, 41–42; Idestrom, “Faithful Participation”, 68–75; Helboe Johansen, “Det folkekirkelige i folkekirken”, 65.

59. Iversen, *Ny praktisk teologi*, 13–65, quotation from p. 39.

and practice. All three parts contain both historical and contemporary studies and try to contribute to the discussion on what constitutes ecclesiology. While the main contributions are by Swedish researchers, the reflections on them are by Norwegian (Harald Hegstad), British (Clare Watkins) and American (Teresa Berger) scholars, highlighting influences from and dialogue with the international scene. As the title of the book states, Practical Theology is understood in the volume as done “in the trenches”, something that afterwards would find a British counterpart in *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology* (see below).

What Really Matters is structured by its practice orientation and the questions that arise when theologians engage with field studies. The Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian authors investigate three fundamental aspects – or challenges – in practice-oriented research: reflexivity, normativity, and representation, which also form the three main parts of the book. There are also several international contributions, again highlighting that the Scandinavian view of Practical Theology is formed in close relationship with British and North American Scholars.

In conclusion, the Scandinavian practical theological landscape has undergone significant changes. Practice is no longer just something that emanates from historical and systematic-theological ideas of the church, it is fundamental to the development of ideas. In this way, practice is beginning, means, and end for academic theological reflection. This is shown in the practical theological researcher’s choice of methods and material.

However, it is vital to point out that this is a shift in focus, a movement, not a turn where practice is opposed to theology. Rather, the practical theologians argue for an integrating perspective, struggling to keep different systems of theological knowledge together. The shift is developed in collaboration between Scandinavian scholars and in close collaboration with the international practical theological scene. It is in the light of this strong connection that we now turn to an overview of some of the most important international contributions, which alongside the Scandinavian handbooks are commonly used as introductions to the field of Practical Theology in Scandinavia.

International Influences on Scandinavian Practical Theology

The shift in thinking exemplified by the handbooks may be attributed, at least in part, to the growing influence of international approaches, especially those from English-speaking regions. While there are several sources of influence, for example Asian, the Global South and, not least, North American, the British discourse has been particularly influential. This is due

to a number of reasons, for instance similarities concerning the situation of the state churches in the UK, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, linguistic accessibility of research literature in English, or, as Kappelgaard points out, connections between the Scandinavian and the British scenes in the field of action research.⁶⁰ As a result, many of the most commonly used handbooks in the Practical Theology courses (from first to third cycle) at Scandinavian universities are British. This is also why we, in the following presentation of international influences, have chosen to focus primarily on handbooks by British authors.

The international take on practical theological research is characterized by a high degree of practicality – in the majority of cases, it is oriented towards the understanding and improvement of existing practices and challenges, with a special focus on social challenges and pastoral care. It concentrates on areas such as pastoral theology and empirical studies of the everyday practices of Christians. Thus, three main aspects characterized the shift brought by the British influences: emphasis on practice and its relation to theory, orientation towards practical implementation and action, and empirical grounding. These three aspects will be presented below on the basis of some of the most commonly used handbooks in Scandinavian Practical Theology.

A good example of the first aspect, and the British approach in general, includes one of the widely used British handbooks: *Practical Theology in Action* by Paul Ballard and John Pritchard. Here we can see a different definition of Practical Theology from that of Scandinavia in the 1990s. Ballard and Pritchard point out that Practical Theology is characterized as a “descriptive, normative, critical and apologetic activity”,⁶¹ and in that it is similar to other theological branches. However, Practical Theology’s focus on Christian practice, as well as its dual methodological orientation drawing on both theological and social scientific methods, introduces a significant problem which was not widely considered in the Scandinavian approaches of the 1990s: the relation between theory and practice. The authors highlight how different ways of reconciling the two – precedence of theology, correlation of theology and practice, focus on practice, or the habitus approach – can influence the analysis of the material and the outcomes of the discipline. The same tropes can be found in more recent handbooks, such as *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat,⁶² *Conundrums in Practical Theology* edited by Joyce Ann Mercer and

60. Kappelgaard, “Aktionsforskning og teologi”, 260–262.

61. Ballard & Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 13.

62. John Swinton & Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed., London 2016, 79–80.

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore,⁶³ and *Talking about God in Practice* by Helen Cameron and colleagues from the ARCS team.⁶⁴

Orientation towards practice is also characteristic of the writings of Elaine Graham. Her *Transforming Practice* was among the influential voices in Scandinavia already in the 1990s.⁶⁵ Her most recent contribution is *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*,⁶⁶ written together with Zoë Bennett, Stephen Pattison, and Heather Walton. The book builds upon the numerous milestones that Practical Theology has achieved internationally in the last two decades, including the previously mentioned *Practical Theology in Action*, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* and *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. There, Graham, Bennett, and colleagues describe Practical Theology in a similar manner to their Scandinavian counterparts as, for example, rooted, contextualized, done “in the trenches”, focused on change, and practice-oriented.⁶⁷ However, they go even a step further, arguing that the whole of theology is built by practice, and thus Practical Theology constitutes, in a sense, both the beginning and the end of the whole of the theological disciplines, beginning from the practice of theology and ending with the theology of practice.⁶⁸

The fourfold distinctions are a common trope of all these handbooks, not only when it comes to the relationship between theory and practice. One of the most visible elements of contemporary Anglo-Saxon Practical Theology is its pragmatic orientation – the second of our three aspects – which has revolved around the notion of the so-called “pastoral cycle”. In its earliest version, the pastoral cycle may be observed already in the 1930s in the form of the “See, Judge, Act”-pattern developed by the Young Christian Workers movement. It has grown in significance in the 1960s when it was taken up by liberation theological base communities.⁶⁹ In the form presented by Ballard and Pritchard, the pastoral cycle is a fourfold process of experience, exploration, reflection, and action. Missing any of the steps is described at the end of the book as a kind of fallacy in the approach to Practical Theology.⁷⁰ The theme of the pastoral cycle is further developed by

63. Joyce Ann Mercer & Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (eds.), *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, Leiden 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004324244>.

64. Helen Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*, London 2010.

65. Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, Eugene, OR 1996.

66. Zoë Bennett et al., *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, New York 2018.

67. Bennett et al., *Invitation to Research*, 12–34.

68. Bennett et al., *Invitation to Research*, 96.

69. Ballard & Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 74–75.

70. Ballard & Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 161–175.

Cameron and colleagues as well as by Swinton and Mowat. Cameron and the ARCS team built a whole methodology called Theological Action Research (TAR), which was meant to tackle some of the most significant issues that arise when trying to make a genuine connection between experience and theology.⁷¹ Similarly, Swinton and Mowat translate the pastoral cycle into a research methodology. In both cases the ultimate purpose of the research is to bring about practical change within a faith-based community, in collaboration with its own members. While the notion of the pastoral cycle itself may not be often referred to among Scandinavian researchers, what it entails has had a huge impact on both research and pastoral work in the last two decades.

The third characteristic of Practical Theology in an English-speaking context is the wide-scale use of empirical studies. While Ballard and Pritchard only touch upon the use of social science methods, Swinton and Mowat put qualitative research at the core of their book, which is understood as the “faithful” engagement with ethnographic methods. According to Swinton and Mowat, the main aim of theology is to enable faithful implementation of God’s word and a development of the human relationship with God.⁷² Similarly, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, edited by Pete Ward, proposes that ecclesiology needs ethnography. In the introduction, Ward writes: “to understand the church, we should view it as being simultaneously theological and social/cultural”, and to do that one needs methods of research that are simultaneously theological and ethnographic.⁷³

A common denominator of these authors is that although they have made the shift from *kuriaké* to *ekklesia* and argue for the value of practices, they clearly state that theology has precedence over practices. As Ward writes: “We do not see ourselves as privileging the kind of theology that simply emerges out of social and cultural particulars – what might be termed a theology from ‘below’.”⁷⁴ Similarly, Swinton and Mowat ask: “How can a system of knowledge created by human beings challenge a system of knowledge that claims to be given by God?”⁷⁵ Like Bennett and colleagues, they try to balance lived religion with tradition and theology. Thus, they avoid moving too close to the *ekklesia* pole, the risk that lurks behind too strong an emphasis on the empirical aspects of the life of the faithful.

71. Cameron et al., *Talking about God*.

72. Swinton & Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 86.

73. Pete Ward, “Introduction”, in Pete Ward (ed.), *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Grand Rapids, MI 2012, 2.

74. Ward, “Introduction”, 3.

75. Swinton & Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 83.

These handbooks in English, then, share several common features. Firstly, they all focus primarily on practices and lived religion. In this way, the actions of the faithful become the cornerstone for their understanding of the church, implying a critique of the “blueprint church” characteristic of approaches like those in Scandinavia in the 1990s. Secondly, they all want Practical Theology to bring pragmatic results and to initiate change in the lives of individuals, communities, society, and church institutions. Thirdly, they all propose a strong partnership with ethnography as a method, moving away from the essentialist view of “*the church*”, with some going as far as to reject it altogether. In addition, they claim a fundamental role for Practical Theology. It is theology as it is supposed to be done, integrating theory and practice.

Quo Vadis Practical Theology?

In this article, through an overview of the Scandinavian handbooks of Practical Theology, we have shown that there has been a shift in focus in the understanding of the discipline. The first part of this article described the 1990s, when Practical Theology was viewed as most closely connected to, and in some approaches even subordinate to, Systematic Theology and Church History. At that time, practical theologians focused primarily on textual sources generated by the churches and their representatives. They operated on the general notion of “the church” (even if in the Danish case it was “the Church of Denmark”) and practices were viewed as something that communicated this idea, or even as emanating from its essence. At the same time, the contributors to these handbooks already hinted at a coming change of perspective. On the one hand, they discussed the constructive role of Practical Theology, in which it was supposed to provide guidance for contemporary church life. On the other, they explicitly discussed emerging trends, such as the implementation of methods from the social sciences or new (for example feminist) perspectives, which they viewed as the possible future of the discipline.

The second part of the paper focused on the 2010s, when the understanding of Practical Theology shifted along the presaged directions. The focus on texts was relegated to the background and replaced with a thorough practice orientation. Practice became a significant source in its own right, essential for theological reflection. Increased attention was given to the integration of practice and theory and the involvement of researchers in knowledge production (as expressed, for example, in the notion of “faithful participation”). Emphasis was placed on the particular Christian communities in their specific contexts instead of on the general notion of “the

church”. From a methodological perspective the social sciences, especially ethnographic methods, rose in significance, displacing the dominance of historical and systematic approaches. The 2010s also witnessed the impact of increasing international engagement, which was contextualized by means of the review of international handbooks in part three.

Throughout this overview, we have sketched the shift in focus of Practical Theology in Scandinavia during the last three decades. Since the aim was to offer a bird’s-eye view, we have not gone into a detailed analysis of tensions and differences in perspectives but have presented a cursory description focusing on commonalities. Due to this shift, Practical Theology has been partially “freed” from its subordinate character to Church History and Systematic Theology, becoming a discipline in its own right and offering unique insights. In that sense Practical Theology has been greatly enriched and in the Scandinavian context has become an important partner in international discussions. This shift has also freed Practical Theology from the opposition between theory and practice, making it an integrating discipline.

The analyzed shift shows well how Practical Theology is situated in between two different poles that we, following Diarmaid MacCulloch, called *kuriaké* and *ekklesía*. These two terms highlight different focal points of the discipline – the former refers to the generalized and universalized idea of the church, while the second takes the perspective of individual believers and their particular communities. In this sense, the shift between the 1990s and the 2010s brought a change in primary focus to *ekklesía*, without completely displacing *kuriaké*. In our view, this was a well-needed balancing act, which brought many positive results. But the balance needs to be maintained to avoid renewed disintegration. By turning the 1990s on its head and emphasizing practice as opposed to theory, Practical Theology might lose its theological character and become subordinate to Sociology or Psychology of Religion. While Practical Theology should receive inspiration from and incorporate the methods of other disciplines, its primary strength lies in keeping a balance.

The balancing nature of Practical Theology has been expressed in different ways in the new handbooks. Ballard and Pritchard offer the metaphor of a flower, which frees practice, and by that Practical Theology, by giving it an independent character: all theological disciplines are petals, each and every one with tasks of their own.⁷⁶ Iversen pushes the metaphor of the flower even further, describing Practical Theology as the “middle discipline”, the centre of the theological flower that binds all the other theological

76. Ballard & Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 13–15.

disciplines together as the beginning and end of theology.⁷⁷ Thus, in the new understanding, Practical Theology is both the crown and the soil out of which the tree of theology grows.

However, we think that an even better metaphor would be that of a crossroads. As Miller-McLemore and Mercer point out, practical theologians are “border crossers, boundary walkers, and scavengers looking for truth in many places”.⁷⁸ By integrating and connecting practice and theory, Practical Theology intersects with all the other theological disciplines and makes connections between, rather than separating, different pathways. The metaphor of the crossroads also points to the primary mission of the discipline – to offer orientation in the religious landscape, connecting the two directions of *kuriaké* and *ekklésia*, and in that way providing churches and academia with a deeper knowledge about each other and themselves, as well as the imperative for mutually transformative encounters. ▲

SUMMARY

With every major change in the understanding of Practical Theology in Scandinavia, there was an increase in the production of handbooks for the discipline. In this article, we take a closer look at such handbooks from the last two increases in production, tracing a shift the discipline went through from the 1990s up until 2020. The aim of this article is three-fold. Firstly, it describes a change in the understanding of Practical Theology through developments in Scandinavian handbooks over the last three decades. Secondly, it contextualizes these developments by giving an overview of other handbooks currently in use, primarily from the UK. Finally, it briefly discusses the implications of the shift in relation to a broader conceptualization of the discipline as suspended between two poles, defined by the authors as *kuriaké* and *ekklésia*.

77. Iversen, *Ny praktisk teologi*, 13–14.

78. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore & Joyce Ann Mercer, “Introduction”, in Joyce Ann Mercer & Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (eds.), *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, Leiden 2016, 4–5, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004324244_002.