

International Report

The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?¹

Elaine Graham

1. Introduction

The Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT) is a new doctoral degree that has been developed over the past three years by a consortium of leading centres of practical theology in the United Kingdom (UK). It will admit its first cohort of students into two parallel programmes at the University of Manchester and Anglia Ruskin University in September 2006. As a part-time, practice-based degree examined by means of a portfolio of work, the Doctor of Practical Theology represents a considerable departure from the traditional British Ph.D. in the arts and humanities, which is normally undertaken by a solo, desk-based researcher working towards the submission of a single dissertation. Yet the DPT also differs from other practice-based programmes, such as the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.), which tend to model themselves on a taught master's degree with a combination of taught courses plus short dissertation.

By contrast, in format and mode of delivery, the DPT may be seen as one of a new breed of so-called 'professional doctorates' in the UK. These have emerged over the past fifteen years and reflect the need for structured forms of professional development in many areas of the public, private and voluntary sector, and for universities to meet the continuing professional development needs of a more diverse, and often work-based, constituency. Unlike traditional doctoral research, professional doctorates take explicit account of the work or practice-based setting of their students as a central component (and knowledge-base) of a particular research project. Professional doctorates may comprise substantial taught elements, or be delivered in a structured fashion through seminars, master-classes or colloquia. They may entail substantial qualitative research in the field; and

1 I am grateful to Chris Baker (Manchester), Zoe Bennett (Anglia Ruskin), Mark Cartledge (Lampeter), Gordon Lynch (Birmingham) and Stephen Pattison (Cardiff), not to mention administrative colleagues at our respective universities, for their various contributions towards the creation of the Doctor of Practical Theology programme.

they tend to be assessed through the submission of a research portfolio, comprising a series of short assignments, plus a long dissertation.

Those of us responsible for conceiving and implementing the Doctor of Practical Theology have promoted it as a development ideally suited both to the changing constituency of adult theological education and to the future research needs of practical theology in the UK. Indeed, given its many potential advantages, we have been given to wonder why such a scheme took so long to emerge. In other ways, however, our initiative would have been inconceivable without other trends in higher education in the UK, such as the growth of practice-based and professional qualifications and a more structured approach to research training in graduate studies. But now, in meeting the needs of a rising generation of practical theologians, as well as enshrining important questions of the relationship between theory and practice, the Doctor of Practical Theology has the feel of an idea whose time has come. This article traces some of the founding principles behind its creation, as well as identifying some possible implications of such a programme for the future of practical theology in the UK and internationally.

2. Origins and Context

The International Academy of Practical Theology (IAPT) played a small role in the genesis of this new initiative. It was at the IAPT conference in Manchester in 2003 that a group of UK-based practical theologians met to discuss the future prospects of the discipline. The motivation for devising a new style of doctoral research programme was prompted by a perception that many of our most talented students at master's level opt not to progress to further studies. Frequently they would be deterred from enrolling in the first place, or forced to withdraw, due to the pressures of sustaining a conventional Ph.D. programme alongside their normal workload. This became the impetus to envisage an alternative doctoral programme in which candidates' own professional activity constituted a major portion of their research, rather than seeing their work commitments and research topic as mutually incompatible.

A small group representing the centres of excellence in practical theology continued meeting throughout 2004-05 with a view to create just such a programme that would better meet these perceived needs.² Discussions were also influenced by two major factors: firstly, the changing nature of practical theology as a discipline, and secondly, developments in wider higher education policy in the UK.

2 The planning group comprised representatives of Anglia Ruskin, Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds and Manchester Universities, Heythrop College (University of London), and University of Wales, Lampeter.

2.1. The Changing Context in Practical Theology

The past decade has seen a significant expansion in the discipline of practical theology in the UK, most notably in the growing numbers of programmes at master's level. This has generated a generation of students with some research experience who might be qualified to undertake doctoral research with a view to remaining in Christian ministry or related pastoral work, rather than seeing such a qualification purely as a route into an academic post. Coupled with this has been a greater theoretical sophistication within the discipline itself. Over the past twenty years, practical theology has reoriented itself, in Pattison and Lynch's memorable phrase, "from hints and tips to hermeneutics"³: a shift away from an understanding of itself as an 'applied' discipline towards a 'turn to practice,' in which the theorization and analysis of context and practice assume major significance, and in which the processes and methods of theological reflection on practice are placed at a premium.⁴

In contrast to the more deductive and propositional nature of systematic and philosophical theology, practical theology implies a more inductive methodology that focuses on the dialectic between theory and practice. The resources informing such a process will be multidisciplinary, drawn from traditional religious texts or disciplines of enquiry (such as philosophical or systematic theology or Biblical studies) and from secular sources, particularly the human and social sciences. Practical theology thus exhibits "an increasing interest in the theoretical and empirical study of everyday, lived experience ... as worthy of sustained analysis and critical reflection,"⁵ which then serves as the basis for further *theological* reflection.

Whilst this shift has given rise to a vibrant and rich body of literature, there is still a degree of concern that the relationship between theory and practice, and the processes by which theological reflection on practice is facilitated, remain under-theorized and lacking in rigour. A number of recent surveys on learning and teaching in practical theology report a high level of satisfaction and commitment to the discipline amongst students.⁶ Good practical theological education was regarded as offering ways of connecting experience with faith, a deeper integration between participants' own experience and theological concepts, and of confronting

3 Stephen Pattison/Gordon Lynch, *Pastoral and Practical Theology*, in: David F. Ford/Rachel Muers, eds., *The Modern Theologians*, Oxford (Blackwell, 3rd ed.) 2005, 408.

4 See: Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice. Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, Eugene, OR (Wipf and Stock, 2nd ed.) 2002; Pattison/Lynch, 408-425; Elaine Graham/Heather Walton/Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection. Methods*, London (SCM Press) 2005.

5 Pattison/Lynch, *ibid.*

6 Gordon Lynch/Stephen Pattison, *Exploring Positive Learning Experiences in the Context of Practical Theological Education*, in: *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 8:3, 2005, 144-154.

participants with new and challenging perspectives (such as liberation or feminist theologies). Yet the same students frequently expressed the view that the business of critical thinking and theological reflection on experience remained vague and unfocused, often lacking adequate connection with historical, systematic and biblical sources.⁷

One way of understanding this evidence is to note that the two fields of knowledge – the traditional skills of academic research and theological discourse on the one hand, and the practical expertise of engaging in reflection on practice on the other – need to be complemented by a ‘middle way’ of concerted, sustained, and well-theorized methodologies for linking theory with practice. It also suggests a need for patterns of experience-based learning, which enable students to become active agents in their own learning but which nevertheless offer robust procedures for constructing effective diagnostic methods and research procedures, as well as critical paradigms, for reflecting on practice. Clearly, therefore, these represented aspects of practical theology’s own disciplinary identity that called for further research-based exploration.

In the light of these trends, the planning group was concerned to establish a number of core principles at the heart of any new initiative. Firstly, the core ethos of any programme should be one of *practice-based research*: participants should be encouraged to use their professional, voluntary, or ministerial practice as the foundation of a structured process of research in practical theology.

Secondly, the programme should specifically be aimed at *part-time*, work-based candidates, who will be encouraged to regard their engagement with professional experience as a primary resource for action-research. Whilst most British universities do admit part-time candidates to the degree of Ph.D., elements such as funding, timing of seminars, and pressure over completion rates often still assume candidates are recent graduates in their early twenties, fully funded, and based full-time in a higher education institution. Yet the nature of our potential constituency seemed to necessitate a programme structure that would foster a supportive research culture, in which students could be supported by regular contact with tutors and peers, often working collaboratively within a year cohort that would meet regularly for seminars and workshops, in addition to the conventional one-to-one relationship with a supervisor.

Attention should also be given to the question of *progression* through the programme. A phased pattern of work deadlines and a timetabled submission of a portfolio of work seemed a better way of punctuating the programme, enabling candidates to remain focused on particular assignments. Whilst the total word count is identical to a Ph.D. (approximately

7 Stephen Pattison/Judith Thompson/J. Green, Theological Reflection for the Real World. Time to Think Again, in: British Journal of Theological Education, 13:2, 2003, 119-31; Graham/Walton/Ward, Theological Reflection. Methods, 1-8.

75,000-80,000 words), it is distributed over a range of assignments such as a literature review, research proposal, and publishable article, as well as a research dissertation. Candidates would also be required to keep a regular research log or learning journal throughout the programme, as another means of monitoring progress and maintaining a measured and regular commitment to their studies.

As far as our *target constituency* was concerned, we identified them as drawn from a range of contexts and institutions:

- Public sector professions, such as health care, education, social services;
- Those working in the caring professions, such as psychotherapy and counselling, social work and community development;
- Ministers of religion in parish, congregational or chaplaincy settings
- Those working for charities, non-governmental organizations, cultural industries, or the arts;
- Those in industry or business wishing to deepen their understanding of the ethical and theological dimensions of their professional and/or voluntary practice.

The programme would therefore be primarily aimed at those in Christian ministry, but not exclusively so; the emphasis would be as much on candidates working in secular settings (even though employment may be in some chaplaincy or other sector ministry role) as purely ecclesial contexts. This highlights the *multi-disciplinary nature of the programme*, as candidates would be required to engage not only with theological sources but also with other disciplines, such as sociology, management, organizational studies, criminology, counselling, education, and social policy.

Nor would the programme be essentially about training in pastoral skills, but rather aimed at producing a generation of researching practitioners capable of generating substantial and innovative understandings that place them at the forefront of the academic discipline and professional expertise. For that reason the programme should contain substantial elements of *research skills training*, especially in qualitative methods of data gathering, action-reflection approaches and, above all, the ability to relate theological understandings and traditions to practical contexts.

After two years of discussion, therefore, and motivated by these core principles, the planning group identified the following core aims for a “Doctor of Practical Theology” programme:

- To assist in the continuing personal and professional development of reflective practitioners across a range of contexts and institutions and contribute to the development of competencies in a range of professional occupations as priests/ministers, counsellors, community workers, managers, etc;
- To provide a structured programme of action-reflection or reflective practice at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the deve-

- development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches;
- To provide participants with opportunities to deepen knowledge and understanding of the theological dimensions of their professional and/or voluntary practice;
- To generate new perspectives, data or paradigms in the engagement between religious, ethical and spiritual world-views and a range of professional and practical contexts.⁸

2.2. The Changing Context in UK Higher Education

As the planning process unfolded and we began to involve colleagues from our respective universities in drafting formal specifications ready for institutional approval,⁹ we began to realise that the needs we had already articulated were not restricted simply to our own field of practical theology. They were familiar currency in other practice-based disciplines, such as health care, education, management, business, social work, and engineering. It is interesting to note that all these share common ground with practical theology, in frequently being regarded as ‘applied’ disciplines with sizable professional constituencies, and in their history of struggle to assert a legitimate research base for the intellectual and professional development of practitioners. They frequently draw from conceptual and theoretical frameworks, such as Donald Schön’s characterization of the “reflective practitioner,”¹⁰ and stress the centrality of contextual, practice-driven, and grounded knowledge, with a corresponding insistence on the epistemological primacy of enquiry-based action-research. Like practical theology, these other disciplines had already grasped the need to place such practice-based research methodologies on a more secure intellectual footing and to meet the needs of a growing constituency of practice-based researchers.¹¹

More broadly still, over the same period, relationships between universities and employers have also changed, with a greater recognition of work-based learning and the so-called ‘transferable skills’ appropriate to the labour market. Coupled with the government’s promotion of life-long learning, this has focused attention on the need to extend higher education (HE) provision beyond its traditional cohort of 18-21 year olds pursuing a first degree, to embrace a wider constituency. It has transformed HE from an elitist pursuit into a mass education sector. As a result, universities have had to adapt their recruitment strategies, their pedagogical approaches, and the range and nature of awards on offer. This has resulted in a diversification and expansion, especially in the range of postgraduate, post-experience, and in-service professional development courses, with a steady rise in part-time and distance attendance.

⁸ See website publicity for the Manchester version of the DPT at: <http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/subjectareas/religionstheology/postgraduatestudy/practicaltheology/>.

The emergence of the so-called professional doctorate was therefore a response, in part, to such trends. Professional doctorates emerged in the UK in the mid-1990s, and have experienced steady growth both in the number of participating institutions and in the range of professional disciplines represented. By 1999, professional doctorates could be found in over twenty fields, ranging from health-care disciplines, such as nursing, pharmacy, public health, psychotherapy, and counselling, to social work, education, business, engineering, architecture, and management, as well as many areas of the performing arts, including music composition, fine art, and drama.¹²

According to Tim Bourner, Rachel Bowden, and Stuart Laing, the development of such qualifications reflected concerns that such professions were not being provided with advanced technical and business competence rooted in industrial or workplace research projects.¹³ Given that the traditional Ph.D. was directed to those seeking a career in academic teaching and research, an alternative was sought which offered advanced training for a wider range of career paths whilst retaining an explicit research focus directed towards enhancing such professions' knowledge base and understanding. "If the traditional PhD is intended to develop professional researchers then the professional doctorate appears to be designed to develop researching professionals."¹⁴

Thus, the professional doctorate addresses specifics of the candidate's own working context, and seeks to extend and deepen their understanding of, and critical enquiry into, such issues in the light of academic knowledge. A professional doctorate works from practice to theory to practice. It is therefore important to differentiate it from the traditional PhD, which tends to take a more theoretical overview of the discipline. However, professional doctoral research can still constitute an original contribution to

9 Each participating university validates its own version of the Doctorate in Practical Theology, although the national consortium will coordinate delivery of certain elements of the programme, such as the residentials and annual summer school.

10 Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*, San Francisco (Jossey-Bass) 1983; see also: David Scott/Andrew Brown/Ingrid Lunt/Lucy Thorne, *Professional Doctorates. Integrating Professional and Academic Knowledge*, Buckingham (Open University Press) 2004, Chapter 5.

11 For example, in 2003, a survey of the work of healthcare chaplaincy within the publicly-funded National Health Service affirmed the importance of attending to the spiritual needs of patients within the broader dimensions of health care provision, but also argued for a more robust culture of training and professional development, underpinned by greater competence in supervision, reflective practice and research. See: South Yorkshire Workforce Development Confederation, *Caring for the Spirit*, 2003.

12 Tom Bourner/Rachel Bowden/Stuart Laing, *Professional Doctorates. The Development of Researching Professionals*, in: Tom Bourner/Tim Katz/David Watson, eds., *New Directions in Professional Higher Education*, Buckingham (Open University Press) 2000, 214-225; Scott *et al.*, *Professional Doctorates*, Chapter 3.

13 Bourner/Bowden/Laing, *Professional Doctorates*.

14 *Ibid.*, 219.

knowledge (conventionally, one of the chief criteria for evaluating the quality of doctoral research), but it may have wider impact than a traditional thesis, in that it seeks to effect changes within the candidate's professional or work-based organization, to influence understandings of best practice within that work context, and to enhance the candidate's individual and professional growth and development. Professional doctorates may thus be constructed around a programme of action-research, in which the aim is not simply about generating new knowledge but also about "enabling new and transformative action."¹⁵ The dynamic of action-research is essentially one of beginning with current practice, engaging in new learning through a process of enquiry, observing or reflecting on practice, and dialoguing with existing conceptual paradigms, leading to a re-evaluation of extant understandings. It is a process familiar to practical theologians, for it is similar to the pastoral cycle of liberation theology, and to educationalists in the shape of David Kolb's experiential learning cycle.¹⁶

In their explicit attention to advanced research – rooted in practice-based or experience-driven enquiry – and in their objective to effect new contributions to theory and practice, professional doctorates might therefore be better described as aimed at enhancing *professional* knowledge, rather than *practitioner* knowledge.¹⁷ Thus, for example, candidates in practical theology would not be assessed on practical competence, such as preaching, or counselling, or other direct performative dimensions of their day-to-day ministry. Rather, they would be invited to demonstrate how such activities invoke skills of critical enquiry, research design and methodology, and ability to reflect in original and sustained fashion on the significance of their practice – which includes theological reflection on practice.

2.3. Characteristics of the Professional Doctorate

Professional doctorates will generally be designed for *part-time attendance*. If taken full-time, then a substantial component of the programme will be spent in the field, such as industry or other workplace settings. Similarly, professional doctorates place an emphasis on *peer-group study*. Whereas Ph.D. candidates often enter a programme at variable points in the academic year, there is more stress within a professional doctorate on belonging to a cohort that embarks on the programme at the beginning of an academic session. Although contemporary higher education places greater emphasis than in the past on the importance of creating

15 John Swinton/Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, London (SCM Press) 2006, 255.

16 Jennifer Moon, *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*, 2000, 24-30.

17 UK Council for Graduate Education, *Report on Workshop on Professional Doctorates*, 1 December 2004, Newsletter 48, June 2005.

a supportive research culture via research training, seminars, and other group activities, the professional doctorate regards this as an essential part of its delivery, and will normally require candidates to attend research seminars, intensive teaching sessions, and summer schools. There may also be allowance for a level of peer collaboration, either in the form of peer review, mentoring, or joint research.

The professional doctorate is likely to have a *modular structure*, either delivered via a programme of taught courses plus research dissertation, or (as in the case of the DPT) a portfolio of independent research assignments plus dissertation. Whether or not there are taught components or other structured input from tutorial staff, most professional doctorates combine elements of substantive content with significant amounts of generic *research skills training*.

It is likely that the *average age of recruits* to a professional doctorate will be higher than those entering a Ph.D. programme, due to the differing expectations of candidates and their reasons for undertaking the qualification. Yet, by definition, candidates for a professional doctorate will also invariably bring a broader range of workplace experience and prior qualifications, factors which, as much of the literature notes, are taken into consideration at the point of application.

Professional doctorates also emphasize the fostering of skills of *reflective practice*. Given the constant interplay in the professional doctorate between theory and practice, and academic and practical knowledge, therefore, a structured and directed way of recording and representing both elements of the dynamic is needed, the better to enable them to interact constructively. Most professional doctorates therefore involve some kind of *learning journal or research log*, in which the insights of conventional research (such as reading or undertaking empirical research) are synthesized with more personal reflection on candidates' day-to-day professional activities and development.¹⁸

In its emphasis on practice-based research, the professional doctorate also has strong affinities with the core approaches of *enquiry-based learning*, which uses the immediate experience and practice of the researcher as the basis of the development of further context-driven skills, such as problem-setting, project design, data-gathering, and critical analysis. Enquiry-based learning embraces a number of different approaches, such as problem-based learning, fieldwork, case study work, or other independent research projects. It has already been applied in a number of contexts on taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses; but it also has clear relevance in relation to a programme such as the professional doctorate,

¹⁸ See, for example: Moon, *Reflection*, 187. Moon notes how the practice of journaling as a means of reflection has significant precedents within religious and spiritual traditions. The use of journals and verbatims as vehicles of theological reflection has also been recently addressed in: Frances Ward, *Life-Long Learning*, London (SCM) 2005.

given its emphasis on fostering the transferable skills of problem-setting, problem-solving, research design, and methodology. Equally, there are considerable affinities between the core aims of EBL and current understandings of practical theology as essentially a form of experience-based form of learning.¹⁹

3. Programme Structure

Finally, therefore, what are the main components of the Doctor of Practical Theology and how do they embody the methodological and pedagogical principles already outlined? The qualification will be assessed via the submission of a portfolio of written work. Many of the constituent elements of the portfolio by which the DPT will be examined will be familiar to anyone who has undertaken doctoral research towards a more conventional Ph.D. thesis. Both will usually involve a literature review, research methodology, extended exposition and defence of core thesis, and so forth.

Part I, designed to be completed in three years part-time, includes a literature review, research article of publishable standard, record of professional development (based on a learning journal), and a research proposal. Part II, to be completed in two to three years, comprises an extended dissertation of between 45,000-50,000 words. This is a timetable that corresponds well with the optimal expectations of six years for a part-time Ph.D. In practice, it is hoped that candidates will be better able to maintain momentum and move towards prompt completion within a more supportive and structured research environment. Ideally (although there will always be individual exceptions), the members of any given student cohort will be working on the same assignment, enabling tutors to offer group support and providing opportunities for peer review.

There will be three residential workshops per year, plus a summer school, concentrating on the delivery of core research skills training plus opportunities to address various aspects of the discipline. Sessions will include work on research skills and methodology, practical exercises in enquiry-based learning and lectures, seminars, and student-led discussions.

The first assignment is the *literature review*, which is intended to offer candidates an initial grounding in the key concepts, methods, and debates in the field of practical theology. It also serves as a valuable induction into the conventions of academic writing, ensuring that participants have acquired the research and presentation skills necessary to undertake research at

19 In 2005, the University of Manchester established a nationally-funded "Centre of Excellence In Enquiry-Based Learning," which has given assistance to the DPT drafting group in helping it to fine-tune some of its programme specifications to embrace insights of EBL as they may be applied to postgraduate research. Website available at: <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/ceeb/>.

doctoral level, such as literature searches, footnoting conventions, compiling bibliographies, and so on. Crucially, also, they will begin to acquire an essential sensibility for successful doctoral study, namely an ability to map their chosen field of research, to advance a critical and constructive appraisal of the current state of scholarship within the field, and to identify their own research questions and objectives in relation to such an evaluation.

Clearly, such practice-based research will require sophisticated diagnosis of a researcher's own context, as well as awareness of extant scholarship. A *publishable article*, as the second element of the portfolio, offers candidates the opportunity to develop their skills in practical theological reflection in relation to a specific context, as well as offering an initial opportunity to review relevant methods of data-gathering and research design. In creating the expectation that such a piece of work is of publishable quality, this element is also stressing the importance of an ability to communicate research findings as an important transferable skill inherent in doctoral work. Candidates will be expected to present an initial piece of work-in-progress to their peer group, thus to demonstrate the capacity to defend and to justify their research and its reception.

In their third year, participants will be expected to submit a *research proposal* for an advanced piece of research in the field of practical theology that demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the issues, questions, and methods that are particularly relevant to the context and performance that they wish to study. They will need to demonstrate a clear awareness of how the goals of their proposed research project are to be achieved by means of adopting appropriate research methods. The focus is thus on designing and defending a particular research *methodology*, which is appropriate to the candidate's research question and which demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of particular research paradigms, as well as the advantages and limitations of specific research methods.

Many professional doctorates require candidates to submit a form of reflection on their *journaling process*, and this comprises the final component of the pre-dissertation portfolio for the DPT. This element is intended to provide a reflexive narrative of the participant's development as a researcher, to trace the development of their understanding of their research topic, and an assessment of the skills and resources they have acquired in order to conduct their advanced research project.

Finally, the *research dissertation* enables the candidate to present in extended form further discussion of their overall project and to present and defend the findings and conclusions of their research. There will be some sustained treatment of the candidate's approach to theological reflection on practice, as well as some evaluation of how the research project as a whole represents a contribution to the field of practical theology.

Overall, therefore, the doctoral nature of the programme is to be established by the ability of a successful candidate to demonstrate all the following qualities:

- The systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge and understanding which is at the forefront of the academic discipline of practical theology and/or area of professional practice;
- The ability to conduct original research or other advanced scholarship that is of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication;
- The ability to integrate theoretical and practical perspectives, knowledge and understanding in such a way as to generate mutual critique and reformulation;
- The general ability to conceptualise, design, and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications, or understanding that are at the forefront of the discipline or area of theological, institutional or professional practice, and to adjust the project design in the light of peer review, evaluation, or new information;
- A detailed understanding of applicable techniques for original research, effective communication, and critical and independent reasoning appropriate to advanced academic enquiry;
- The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment, which requires the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, and in professional/institutional or equivalent environments;
- The ability to work collaboratively with others in problem-solving, clarifying of key concepts, designing and implementing shared research projects, and communicating their findings clearly and effectively.

4. Conclusion

Contemporary practical theology in the UK is characterized by an emphasis on theological and critical reflection on practice, where analysis of the practical context is accompanied by sustained critical and constructive interrogation of the sources and resources of the faith tradition. Practical theology is methodologically committed to the dialectic of theory and practice, as well as understanding itself as a form of action-reflection in which new insights and understandings from a practical context are understood as facilitating transformative knowledge. Such emphases lend the discipline to constructive engagement with models of practice-based research across a range of other professional, vocational, and technical disciplines.

In that respect, the DPT is indeed an idea whose time has come; but it is important to remember that the scheme is still in its infancy and that many issues are unresolved, or even unknown. As the programme develops, there should be a process of evaluation of the effectiveness of such practice-based research. Is the DPT really achieving its objectives of transformative action-research and professional enhancement? Is it

making a difference to models of theological reflection as practised in particular pastoral contexts? How does the particular strategy represented in the establishment of the DPT in the UK compare with similar schemes internationally?

Similarly, some of the distinctive aspects of the programme's organization will need to be evaluated. Will the structured nature of work commitments really have a measurable impact on completion rates? Will it be possible to foster a diversity of research methods and writing styles whilst maintaining quality control to a doctoral standard? What kind of administrative and supervisory burden will this new programme impose on academic staff; and will it prove cost-effective? And will a practice-based research programme succeed in gaining parity of recognition amongst participants, sponsoring bodies, churches and the academy as a legitimate and desirable qualification; or will the professional doctorate be regarded as a 'soft option' in relation to the traditional Ph.D.?

Nevertheless, it is hoped that the professional doctorate will provide practical theology in the UK with an organizational focus for the development of new empirical areas of research, as well as nurturing a new generation of practice-based researchers who will be enabled to publish at and contribute to the highest levels of academic discourse. It will also furnish the discipline with a body of practice-based research around the relationship between theological tradition and the practice of ministry, and will offer new opportunities for adult theological educators to sharpen existing models of theological reflection on practice via the use of enquiry-based learning techniques. The new Doctor of Practical Theology provides a timely focus and testing-ground for many of these developments; if it proves successful, it will represent an exciting new era for our discipline.

Zusammenfassung

Der International Report zeichnet die Entwicklung eines neuen praktisch-theologischen Promotionsstudienganges in Großbritannien nach. Entwickelt unter der Federführung der Britischen und Irischen Gesellschaft für Praktische Theologie soll dieser neue Studiengang im September 2006 starten. Aufgrund einer ganzen Reihe von Faktoren, die sowohl mit der Binnensituation der Praktischen Theologie in Großbritannien als auch mit den weitreichenderen Trends in der britischen Bildungspolitik und insbesondere in den Graduierten- und Forschungsstudiengängen zusammenhängen, hat sich die einzigartige Gelegenheit ergeben, einen innovativen Studiengang zu entwickeln, der die durchgängige Reflexion der individuellen beruflichen bzw. ehrenamtlichen Praxis mit einem strukturierten, auf die jeweiligen Arbeitsbereiche spezifizierten Assessment kombiniert. Indem dabei ein besonderer Nachdruck auf die praxisbezogene Erkundung der religiösen Erfahrungszusammenhänge sowie auf deren methodisch klar strukturierte praktisch-theologische Reflexion gelegt wird, bietet das Studienprogramm in vielfacher Hinsicht Gelegenheit, das theologische Verständnis der eigenen Praxis zu vertiefen, und dadurch sowohl die persönliche als auch die professionelle Wahrnehmungs- und

Deutungskompetenz zu steigern. Darüber hinaus wird mit dem Programm angestrebt, die Forschungs- und Arbeitsbedingungen des Promotionsstudiums auf die zeitlichen Ressourcen der in ihre jeweilige – häufiger in säkularen als in kirchlichen Kontexten situierte – berufliche Praxis eingebundenen Studierenden abzustimmen. Diese aktuelle Initiative zur Einführung eines ‚Doktors der Praktischen Theologie‘ (DPT) verspricht das Fach in vielerlei Hinsicht zu bereichern: So lassen sich mit ihr u.U. bislang eher unterrepräsentierte empirische Felder religiöser Praxis erschließen und neue, berufsorientierte Praktische Theologen und Theologinnen gewinnen. Außerdem kann womöglich das Verhältnis von theologischer Theorie und pfarramtlicher Praxis näher beleuchtet werden. Und schließlich bieten sich durch die Anwendung praxisbezogener Lerntechniken neue Perspektiven für die theologische Aus- und Weiterbildung.