



*B. Macallan & H.J. Hendriks*

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# POST-FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AS CORRELATIONAL HERMENEUTIC<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The article argues that Practical Theology has moved from the uncertainty of simply being applied theology to a point where its methodology, described as the pastoral cycle in this instance, has gained such confidence that it is viewed as the natural way of doing theology. This shift in confidence occurred because the inherent theological and epistemological fault lines in foundationalism are no longer obscure. The article defines foundationalism and then focuses on describing the local and global dimensions of the pastoral cycle as well as the importance of doing it in an interdisciplinary manner.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Practical Theology has been in flux as a discipline for some time. What characterises the discipline at present? How has the discipline changed over the past few decades? This article seeks to address this question from the standpoint of whether Practical Theology has moved beyond foundationalist assumptions. It will be argued that it has. This can be noted in its affirmation of a correlational hermeneutic, and specifically with how it approaches the sources within that correlational hermeneutic. Before exploring this, a brief definition and understanding of foundationalism is essential.

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1 This article is based on Macallan's doctoral dissertation (2012). Hendriks was promoter and Dr Ian Nell co-promoter.

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*Dr. B. Macallan was a pastor in the Cape and then moved to Australia where he serves the church. E-mail: [brianm@connection.org.au](mailto:brianm@connection.org.au). Prof. H.J. Hendriks, Emeritus Professor, Department of Practical Theology & Missiology, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa. E-mail: [hjh@sun.ac.za](mailto:hjh@sun.ac.za).*

## 2. FOUNDATIONALISM<sup>2</sup>

In many ways, we are all foundationalists in our attempt to root our knowledge in something more basic, or on various other presuppositions. Grenz and Franke (2001:29) note:

In its broadest sense, foundationalism is merely the acknowledgment of the seemingly obvious observation that not all beliefs we hold (or assertions we formulate) are on the same level, but that some beliefs (or assertions) anchor others. Stated in the opposite manner, certain of our beliefs (or assertions) receive their support from other beliefs (or assertions) that are more 'basic' or 'foundational'.

However, the foundationalist agenda goes further and hopes to ground our knowing on a basis that can provide us with certainty and deliver us from error. This basis is regarded as universal and context-free and is available to any rational person (Grenz & Franke 2001:30). This approach can be either deductive or inductive, from innate ideas or the sensory world. Many view Rene Descartes as the "father" of foundationalism in his attempt to establish a sure foundation for knowledge in that he

[C]laimed to have established the foundations of knowledge by appeal to the mind's own experience of certainty. On this basis he began to construct anew the human knowledge edifice. Descartes was convinced that this epistemological program yields knowledge that is certain, culture- and tradition-free, universal, and reflective of a reality that exists outside the mind (this latter being a central

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- 2 Although foundationalism will be explored later, it is important to explain how this term is distinguished from anti-, non- and post-foundationalism, as scholars use the terms differently and interchangeably. It is also important to show the relationship between postmodernism and foundationalism. Anti-foundationalism (Baronov 2005:139-140) is the critique of foundationalist assumptions connected with modernism which, like some aspects of postmodernism, leans towards a relativistic outlook. Non-foundationalism (Thiel 1994:2) is also a critique of foundationalist modernist assumptions; yet it is not relativistic as much as it is a statement of what is "not philosophically tenable". Post-foundationalism accepts many of the criticisms of anti- and non-foundationalism, but seeks to move "creatively" forward to some form of resolution of these philosophical dilemmas (Van Huyssteen 1997:4). Postmodernism is not dissimilar to the various categories of foundationalism just mentioned. It can lean towards a relativistic outlook or have more positive and constructive overtones. With its history in the pragmatic philosophers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, foundationalism predates postmodernism (Thiel 1994:6-7). They are, however, linked by their critique of modern enlightenment foundationalism and its quest for "unimpeachable foundations of knowledge" (Schrag 1992:23).

feature of a position known as 'metaphysical realism' or simply 'realism') (Grenz & Franke 2001:30).

Descartes is central to the story, not only because of his influence, but also because non-foundational critics regard his thought as paradigmatic of foundationalism (Thiel 1994:3). Descartes believed that knowledge could be free from doubt and error with simple and known truths on which knowledge could be based (Kung 1978:7).

Others, like John Locke (1632-1704), argued that sense experience is the foundation of knowledge, which is also known as empiricism (Grenz & Franke 2001:32). Hume (1711-1776), also part of the British empiricist tradition, "argued that sense experience and not ideas provides a grounding for philosophical inquiry" (Thiel 1994:5).

The Enlightenment foundationalist agenda has shaped both conservative and liberal approaches to theology. Grenz and Franke (2001:32-35) have shown that both sought to build their reflections on the assumptions of the foundations of either religious experience or an inerrant bible. This quest for certainty, regardless of foundations, had the impact of Practical Theology simply becoming an applied theology of the other theological disciplines. Sure foundations, sure knowledge, context-free application. Has Practical Theology moved on from these forms of applied theology derived from the foundationalist modernistic project? It is our argument that its embrace of the pastoral cycle and its turn to the local context have indeed shifted it beyond foundationalism. The correlational hermeneutic, rightly placed within this pastoral cycle, is an expression of this move beyond foundationalism. The sources within a correlational hermeneutic benefit from this move beyond foundationalism.

### 3. PASTORAL REFLECTION

Starting with the local contextual situation is vital to Practical Theology, and specifically a post-foundationalist approach (Muller 2005:3). This leads to an affirmation of the pastoral cycle and identifying a pastoral concern (De Kock 2011:8). The pastoral concern seeks to take the global nature of any given reality into account. It also seeks to value and understand people's experience as a source for theological reflection. In attempting to do this, it embraces the social sciences, realising its potential pitfalls and limitations, to provide insight into the nature of any given pastoral concern. A pastoral concern can range from understanding poverty in our local community to the crisis of pollution in our local area. It has individual, corporate and ecological dimensions, consistent with a missional Practical Theology.

The second step is to bring this “raw material” into a dialectical dialogue with cultural resources, on the one hand, and the Christian classics, on the other. In this article, I wish to focus on the specific aspect of the pastoral cycle, yet with post-foundational lenses. When engaging with the local contextual situation, we find a role for both the human sciences and the natural sciences, according to the specific pastoral concern chosen. Dealing with ecological concerns could involve the use of Biology, Geography and Science as a resource for reflection. Dealing with a given individual’s crisis could call for the insights of Psychology, or Psychology of Religion (Ganzevoort 2010). Politics, Economics and Philosophy could play a role in other areas. Recently, Wolfteich (2009:123) demonstrated the importance of the discipline of Spirituality as a potential dialogue partner. Depending on the nature of the pastoral concern, it will lead to the correct appropriation of any given natural, human or other science.

On the other hand, we bring the “raw material” of the pastoral concern into dialogue with the Christian classics. In this regard, we believe that Stanley Grenz’s call for Theology, and specifically Evangelical Theology, to move beyond foundationalism becomes important. This involves both the church’s tradition and the use of Scripture. Needless to say, the importance of the traditional biblical disciplines of Biblical Studies, Church History, Systematic Theology and Theological Ethics becomes obvious. In dealing with both the cultural and the Christian sources, we must take into account an epistemological shift that, in turn, must lead us to a non-foundationalist approach to sources within Practical Theology. This theoretical moment of pastoral reflection must result in a theoretical proposal for pastoral action that must then move back to practice in the form of an intervention in the real world (De Kock 2011:9).

In dealing with pastoral reflection, we shall examine the nature of the correlational hermeneutic itself, followed by an understanding of what a non-foundationalist approach should imply for this hermeneutic in respect of Scripture. Then, more specifically, both the role of the human sciences and the Christian classics will be examined in light of the post-foundationalist turn.

#### **4. A CRITICAL CORRELATIONAL HERMENEUTIC**

The correlational hermeneutic finds itself as a movement within the second part of the pastoral cycle, which we called “pastoral reflection”. The pastoral cycle has achieved a degree of prominence within Practical Theology. The critical correlational hermeneutic is crucial in a post-foundationalist

approach to Practical Theology and Theology, in general, as Van Huyssteen (1997:13) argues:

In theological reflection then, a postmodern critique of foundationalist assumptions will therefore be an inextricable part of a post-foundationalist model of rationality, and will definitely shape the way in which theology is located within the context of interdisciplinary reflection.

Poling and Miller (1985:30-60) attempted to show the three ways in which the correlational hermeneutic could be worked out. They range from the “critical scientific approach” that promotes the importance of the human sciences, on the one hand, to the critical confessional approach that pushes for the prominence of the Christian tradition, on the other. In the middle, is the critical correlational approach, which seeks to hold the two in tension and allow for mutual change and engagement.

Of course, there is a bewildering variety of correlational approaches. Ballard and Pritchard (2006:64-68) note three such approaches. The first is a dialogue between the situation, on the one hand, and the theological tradition, on the other. A second option is one that seeks to combine pastoral concerns with ethics. The public nature of this subset of the correlational hermeneutic comes to the fore in this instance (Ballard & Pritchard 2006:66). The third option is the hermeneutical approach, where an attempt to interpret biblical stories, on the one hand, and one’s situation, on the other, is important.

Tillich is the best known proponent of the correlational hermeneutic, which is often considered his most enduring contribution to modern Theology (Grenz & Olson 1992:119). His correlational perspective involves a dialogue with Psychology, on the one hand, and Christian tradition, on the other (Graham *et al.* 2005:155). More recent exponents are Tracy and Browning. Tracy (1981:64) argues for a revised critical correlational method that seeks an interface between cultural concerns and theological truth claims. Browning (1991:44), who leans heavily on Tracy, tries to connect two poles, which he believes have often been split up:

These two poles are the confessional approach (which sees theology as primarily witnessing to the narrative structure of faith) and the apologetic approach (which defends the rationality of the faith and tries to increase its plausibility to the contemporary secular mind).

Both Tracy and Browning (1991:46) view Theology as a dialogue between the Christian message and contemporary cultural experiences and practices. We are aware that people mean very different things

when discussing a correlational hermeneutic. The form of correlational hermeneutic proposed by Browning certainly takes, at its base element, the assumption of its dialogical nature in terms of how various perspectives interact and correlate with each other (Hendriks 2004:21).

In this instance, the argument will be for a correlational hermeneutic that seeks to hold both sources (human sciences and Christian tradition) in creative tension. It gives neither primacy nor dominance to either in the discussion. It is a “critical” dialogue in that each side opens itself up to potential revision or change.

Once the pastoral concern (that has arisen out of local experience) comes to the “surface”, it meets further “sources” for reflection in the human sciences and the Christian classics. In this moment, a threefold dialogue emerges with relevant insights that interact with each other in plotting a way forward for action. As mentioned earlier, the specific resources used depend on the nature of the pastoral concern. At this point, a specific example will help to illustrate how this article understands the correlational hermeneutic to operate in practice.

A young woman in a large urban Evangelical Church is confronted with the alienating experience of being gifted in leadership, but is told that her denomination does not allow her to hold certain leadership positions. The pastoral concern is the crisis of this woman’s experience and the conflict between her personal experience (being a gifted woman) and her experience of being in a faith community that does not allow her experience to be valid. She then takes up these concerns in a dialogue with the Christian classics and the human sciences. Within church tradition and the Scriptures, she finds a mainly patriarchal view of women’s role in church. However, she also finds a different strand within church tradition (both past and present) and within Scripture, which seems to allow for a fuller expression of women’s gift of leadership.

When listening to the voices of the human sciences, she becomes aware of the sociological barriers that have held women back. She comes across psychological studies that demonstrate that women have equal ability to lead as men. As she holds these various sources in tension, she is able to discern a way forward. The correlational hermeneutic, as we understand it, is that place of tension as her experience is taken into dialogue with the two poles of the human sciences and the Christian classics. An attempt to examine and delineate what is understood by the human sciences and the Christian classics will now follow.

## 5. THE HUMAN SCIENCES

We have already examined the human sciences or, more specifically, the social sciences, when discussing experience as our starting point for theological reflection. We ought to be equally vigilant when heeding the human sciences as part of a correlational hermeneutic.

The challenge we face, in this instance, is one that illustrates the particular “torment” of being a practical theologian. For, depending on the pastoral concern with which we are dealing, it will have an influence over a variety of sciences that might come into play. This problem is even more apparent in the light of how we define the missional nature of Practical Theology. If we say that anything and everything can come under the orbit of Practical Theology, then we say that Practical Theology has the potential to touch any dynamic and situation in life. We also know that the human sciences touch different dimensions of our lives in a variety of contexts and are, therefore, vital in any form of missional Practical Theology.

In our earlier discussion of the nature of Practical Theology, we noted the fact that a practical theologian might be called a “jack of all trades”. Firet (1986:10) comments on the fact that, if practical theologians seek to do a thorough job, they might have to specialise in a host of different disciplines. It becomes even more challenging if we hope for a form of theological reflection that most people would be able to achieve. Yet, if we argue for a correlational hermeneutic, at least in the way that we understand it, we are bound to come into contact with a host of different sciences. Therefore, Practical Theology must take an interdisciplinary approach seriously - again, important for a truly post-foundational Theology (Van Huyssteen 1997:13). This is even at the risk of being viewed in a negative light, as Ballard and Pritchard (2006:115) explain:

Interdisciplinary dialogue has become a necessity. Moreover it is recognized that creative insights often come precisely at those places where disciplines overlap and challenge each other. There is, therefore, no need to be ashamed to be living at the boundaries, in however a lowly way. Maybe the practical theologian has to endure the risk of marginalization, ridicule and error, but he or she can also be at the place of the new possibility, discovery and prophecy.

Firet (1986:10) comments that Practical Theology will often have to use the aid of its sister disciplines and various other sciences. Of necessity, this will mean that it will have to rely on secondary sources more than might be desirable (Ballard & Pritchard 2006:116). It will also pose a challenge as to which disciplines are chosen with which to engage (Graham *et al.* 2005:167). Ganzevoort (2006:3-4) argued for a social constructivist

approach to Practical Theology as a way of creating this dialogue between Practical Theology and other disciplines. He believes this to be vital for a public theology that is taken seriously by the social sciences:

The language we use depends on the criteria that are important to the discourse at hand. In the realm of the church, one may employ religious language more easily. Dealing with social scientists we will accommodate our language to include their language and theories. This is not a matter of chameleonic adaptation, but a consequence of understanding that the meaning of the term is located in a conversation. Obviously, if we are to engage in such diverse conversations, we will encounter conflicts of interpretation that we cannot accommodate. The practical theologian in that case faces the difficult task of maintaining his or her professional integrity while working in conflicting languages (Ganzevoort 2006:3-4).

Although it is true that the social sciences tend to dominate in Practical Theology, there must be a place for the other human sciences – or any science for that matter. As discussed earlier, this implies that, depending on the pastoral concern of any given moment, a specific science or combination of sciences could come into dialogue correlationally with the Christian classics. In reflecting on the emotional abuse of a child, there would be a role for Psychology. When trying to understand the destitute situation of a given family, economic insights could prove vital. Sociology, History, Philosophy, Biology, Political Science, Medicine, Law or Developmental Studies could become a partner in dialogue. Sanchez (2007:230-231) argued for the importance of this interdisciplinary thinking (he calls it a transdisciplinary approach) for understanding the concrete realities within Puerto Rican society. Pattison (2007:21) reminds us that “interdisciplinary work is notoriously difficult to do”, but “is the most incredibly rewarding work possible”.

Despite this, we must remember that the human sciences, in and of themselves, are not neutral. They have also been affected by the postmodern critique of knowledge and the epistemological shift to non-foundationalism.

## 6. FOUNDATIONALISM AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES

We mentioned Descartes and Locke as the genesis of foundationalism – the notion that we can come to certain knowledge by finding a sure footing or foundation on which to construct our views. Locke is of specific relevance when we examine the foundationalist setting of the human sciences. Grenz



(2000:222) argues that Locke seeks to find a universal method of enquiry that could be applicable to all disciplines:

Locke argued that the foundation for demonstrative knowledge, characterized by universality and certainty, and which can be stated in the form of assertions, lies in sense experience, i.e. observations of the world, from which we abstract ideas and induce conclusions. His proposal, known as empiricism, provided the methodological foundationalist turn in science.

Whether starting with an empirical foundation with Locke, or a rationalist one with Descartes, this reigning paradigm found its home in many of the human sciences that emerged from the Enlightenment. The universal claim of science, which emerged from this paradigm, was brought into question in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In understanding the non-foundationalism of the human sciences, we are also forced to get to grips with Jurgen Habermas's relativising of knowledge, which Kung (1978:110) describes as "social-critical de-ideologizing". Before discussing Habermas, the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer must be noted. The latter is important in demonstrating that our tradition and horizon of meaning impact on how texts and reality are understood (Heitink 1999:185). There is a mediating between our present horizon and meaning, and the text's present horizon of meaning (Baranov 2005:125) Heitink (1999:184) describes Gadamar's position as follows:

In our attempts to understand texts or reality we all operate with our own biases. Understanding is always conditioned by the context of the one who explains ... Objective knowledge does not exist.

Gadamer proposes a hermeneutical approach in helping us gain understanding (Heitink 1999:184). Habermas critiques Gadamer for not paying more attention to the role of ideology and power (Heitink 1999:186). Habermas proposes a "community in dialogue" approach to arrive at knowledge that can lead to ethical decision-making in society (Van Gelder 1996:133). Browning (1991:69) notes that many of Habermas's critics have accused him of a foundationalist drive. They even view him as a continuation of the Enlightenment quest for certainty. This is not the place for a sustained interaction and delineation of the views of Habermas or Gadamer. We intended to show that with both of them (and Paul Ricoeur) a shift to a more social interpretive process in terms of how knowledge is gained has been noted (Van Gelder 2007:109). Bosch (1991:351) shows the connection between these social theorists and that of Polyani and Kuhn:

In spite of the differences between them, it could be argued that there is a degree of convergence between the theories expounded by Kuhn and those espoused by Polyani. Habermas, Paul Ricoeur, and more recently John Thompson and Charles Taylor, have worked out similar ideas. In all these views scientific theory, history, sociology, and hermeneutics go hand in hand. A new vision is emerging, and it affects all the sciences, both human and natural.

Our basic thesis regarding the use of the various sciences in Practical Theology has been that it ought to be conducted in light of the post-foundationalist turn, while taking into account the critique of reason and knowledge that the Enlightenment held dear. The previous discussion, showing how there has been a shift in science and the theory of knowledge, has direct bearing on how we engage with the sciences as part of a critical correlational hermeneutic. Browning (1991:79) certainly believes that the results of the hermeneutical turn (represented by Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur) are of direct relevance for a responsible use of the human sciences in Practical Theology.

Browning (1991:81) has shown that the consequences of Gadamer's understanding of dialogue mean that any human science ought to acknowledge its historical situatedness. This, again, is consistent with a post-foundational approach. Therefore, any appropriation of the human sciences must come to terms with the implicit values and presuppositions that accompany the discipline. This applies not only to the discipline in question, but also to the researcher who conducts research within any discipline. Browning (1991:89) further notes that what emerges from these considerations is that the hidden values and assumptions are essentially religious. He comments that:

If the social and human sciences are rooted in a tradition, if that tradition inevitably influences their interpretive perspectives (their pre-understanding and prejudices), and if that tradition has religious dimensions, does it follow that the interpretive horizon of the social sciences is coloured by the religio-cultural backgrounds of the researchers?

## 7. ENGAGING WITH THE HUMAN SCIENCES

When listening to the human sciences, in light of what we discussed earlier, we can make some tentative conclusions. The first is that a correlational hermeneutic cannot do without the human sciences, as it is vital in terms of shedding light on any given pastoral concern that is subject to theological reflection. Secondly, that this requires an interdisciplinary approach that

seeks to build bridges with others. Thirdly, practical theologians should be aware of their own bias in terms of the material they select. By this is meant that, when there are differing perspectives in a given human science, we should endeavour to listen to both sides as part of the dialogue. Fourthly, due to accepting a non-foundationalist approach to the human sciences, we must accept the provisional nature of the conclusions and perspectives on offer. Lastly, and related to the previous point, it is recognised that the human sciences retain their own prejudice, bias and ideological colouring. This affects the discipline as a whole, as well as the unique individual researchers. The religious dimension of the human sciences makes us aware of uncritically accepting their findings, while downplaying the contribution of the Christian classics.

In practice, the task of listening to the various contributions will prove to be difficult – if not impossible. Ballard and Pritchard (2006:116) suggest an attempt to gain some form of specialisation in at least two human sciences and to try to keep up to date with their developments. For the majority who embrace the task of theological reflection, this remains an idealistic illusion. Rather, having access to a good resource base of secondary sources will be the most likely option.

In all probability, to engage with the human sciences will prove the more difficult part of the correlational hermeneutic. This is due to the fact that most often those who engage in theological reflection and Practical Theology are already familiar, even if in a very limited sense, with the Christian classics. We now turn to a consideration of this second pole of the correlational hermeneutic.

## 8. THE CHRISTIAN CLASSICS

The Christian classics are represented by both the Christian Scriptures and the church's tradition. After some initial comments on the Christian classics, and for the purpose of this article, we will focus specifically on scripture in light of post-foundational concerns. The Christian classics are crucial for Practical Theology, as Cartledge (2003:3) notes:

It is essential that practical theologians engage with Scripture and tradition in a rigorous way in order to understand the divine revelation and how it has been used historically. The Christian metanarrative of Scripture as inspiration and truthful vision provides an essential critique with respect to the focus of study, and without which it might become a form of religious studies.

Of course, the understanding and appropriation of these sources to any given pastoral concern is no easy task. The subjective nature of our selection with regard to the content of these sources is inescapable. Which resources do we consult? Which Scriptures? Whose interpretation of Scripture? Whose tradition? We propose that the practical theologian ought to try to bring into account as many diverse perspectives as is possible and realistic. This is what we would call “the ecumenical nature of Practical Theology”. Recently, Hastings (2007) argued for just such an approach for Practical Theology in what he calls a “Missional-Ecumenical Model”. It remains suspicious of our own confessional starting point and must allow itself to remain open to critical revision from within the broader faith community. This is of vital importance in the responsible use of Christian resources.

This can be demonstrated by going back to our earlier example of the woman who was denied leadership responsibility on the basis of her gender. If the only Christian resources consulted are those of a narrow segment of the Evangelical community, she would find her personal experience of being a gifted woman invalidated. Her experience would then need serious revision in terms of how she understands her role as a woman within the church. If she utilised the specific understanding of the Scriptures by certain evangelicals from within the Southern Baptist tradition in the United States, she would have been left with the following “voice” from the pole of Christian classics:

[T]he Bible teaches that men and women fulfil different roles in relation to each other, charging man with a unique leadership role, it bases this differentiation not on temporary cultural norms but on permanent facts of creation (Piper 1991:35).

If, however, in her utilisation of Scripture and tradition, she exposed herself to a different segment within the Evangelical tradition that held a different understanding of Scripture, she might conclude differently that:

Gender, in and of itself, neither privileges nor curtails one’s ability to be used to advance God’s kingdom or to glorify God in any dimension of ministry, mission, society and family. The differences between men and women do not justify granting men unique and perpetual prerogatives of leadership and authority not shared by women (Pierce & Groothuis 2005:13).

Responsible use of the Christian classics would seek to listen to the divergent voices from within the tradition. It would seek to hear what the Methodists, Catholics, Anglicans or Orthodox would state regarding the role of women in its history and dogma. It would seek to consider how

various approaches to Scripture and its interpretations yield different views on the role of women within the church. What have the liberal voices said? How do Evangelicals understand the Scriptures? This ecumenical approach to the Christian classics honours the Christian tradition in its many forms and seeks to bring different perspectives into dialogue with one another. Again, it is important to remind ourselves that these resources are not being utilised in some distant abstract academic setting. They are being appropriated to a unique pastoral concern arising out of real people's reality and experience. In fact, many women's experiences in the past have given rise to fresh reflection within various traditions, as well as a fresh examination of the Scriptures. These reflections become a further resource for new experiences into the future as new pastoral concerns arise.

## 9. THE SCRIPTURES

As the sacred book of the Christian community, the Scriptures are a source for theological reflection. Many would claim it to be the "only" source and norm for Christian theology. Others would not only claim it to be the only source for theological reflection, but also propose a specific view of Scripture which ought to be normative. In this instance, Scripture is considered to be inerrant – without error, a collection of "immutable laws and infallible truths" (Hanson 1986:535). Of course, if this were true, there would be no need for the human sciences to be part of the discussion. Nor would there be any need for our unique local experience to be taken into account. Then, all we would need would be an applied Theology. In a foundationalist sense, Scripture now becomes the foundation from which all other knowledge derives, and is based upon. This is what one of the stalwarts of the Evangelical movement proposed:

The issue is clear: is the Bible truth and without error wherever it speaks, including where it touches history and the cosmos, or is it only in some revelational sense where it touches religious subjects? (Schaeffer 1982:121).

Of course, like many Evangelicals, Schaeffer would argue that the Scriptures must be without error. Within Evangelicalism itself, however, there has been a rethinking with regard to one's view of Scripture. Millard Erickson (1997:76-78), who himself believes in inerrancy, has sought to warn those within the Evangelical movement about this rethinking. Others, such as Olson (2002:67), have urged the identity-forming nature of Scripture for the Christian community and prefer the term "inspiration". At this point, suffice it to say that we do not believe that a critical correlational approach

to Practical Theology can be possible with a doctrine of Scripture that claims to be without error. It would make nonsense of the use of the human sciences (except perhaps to confirm revelation) and would seriously diminish the power of experience as a starting point. It would also require a return to a pre-1960s approach to Practical Theology that would champion a foundationalist and applied Theology.

The desire to view the Bible as inerrant is, in fact, a result of the modernist and foundationalist agenda discussed earlier. Stanley Grenz (2000:70) shows convincingly that the Princeton theologians, who spearheaded the inerrancy debate, were heavily influenced by Enlightenment foundationalist rationalism. This was an attempt to find a sure foundation for the theological truths that emerged from the Bible. It rested on an assumption that knowledge requires that the human senses can perceive the world as it actually is. Foundationalism has exerted an enormous influence on Evangelicalism and its approach to Scripture:

[T]he firm foundation the hymn writer believed had been laid in God's excellent word came to be equated with the words in the Bible themselves, the veracity of which was thought to be unimpeachable when measured by the canons of human reason. With such an incontrovertible foundation in place, conservative theologians were confident that they would deduce from Scripture the great theological truths that lay within its pages ... Enlightenment foundationalism seeped into neo-evangelical theology and became its reigning paradigm (Grenz 2000:189-190).

## 10. A NON-FOUNDATIONALIST APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE?

If we are serious about moving beyond foundationalism in Practical Theology, an appropriate way to engage with the Christian Scriptures as a source will be needed. This is crucial for a post-foundationalist approach because, as Ganzevoort (2006:1) notes,

there are of course strands of practical theology in which a straightforward reference to revelation is accepted, often resulting in deductive or foundationalist approaches.

If Scripture is not inerrant, and the sure foundation for knowledge, then how do we appropriate its insights?

## 10.1 With humility

A chastened rationality means that, no matter how certain we think our interpretation of Scripture is, we remain finite human beings. Our prior confessional and ideological commitments that weigh in upon our interpretation can easily cloud our judgement. Being aware of our own frailty might not give us the right answer, but it certainly places us in the correct position to be open to further insights and guard against potential bias. We agree with Wright (1992:32) that we cannot “read the text straight” in a naïve realistic manner. Along with realising our confessional and ideological bias, we will need to be aware of our personal and historical location that affects how we approach Scripture. Heitink (1999:196) puts it as follows:

One must first of all acknowledge the bias, or the prejudicing, determined by historical, sociological, and historical factors. How people understand the words of Scripture and apply these in a concrete situation is in part determined by their historical context, by the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of traditions within the group to which they belong, and by their personality, their possibilities for understanding, their personal history, with psychological factors that may either foster or hinder religious understanding.

A practical theological engagement with Scripture then approaches the text with due awareness of its own bias. It also realises that a “chastened rationality” requires that it remains suspicious of simple readings and obvious conclusions.

## 10.2 Ecumenically

This is essentially related to a humble appropriation of Scripture. Instead of claiming that one specific confessional approach has a monopoly on understanding what Scripture teaches, we, in fact, affirm the opposite. It involves a process of mutual affirmation and admonition with regard to inherited confessional positions on scripture (Fackre 1998:124). As there is no inerrant biblical foundation, there is no inerrant biblical interpretation. Our approach to Scripture is one that attempts to listen to all interpretations of the biblical text – liberal and conservative, Catholic and Protestant, emerging church and African indigenous. The various insights and interpretations that each brings are held together in a web of belief, or a web of interpretation. We believe that this is consistent with a chastened rationality. This web of interpretation must also heed the marginalised voices and interpretations of Scripture. This would allow it to take seriously the postmodern criticism of how knowledge and power are

interrelated. Of course, such an approach requires the humility, of which we first spoke. The implications for Practical Theology then become clear. In its engagement with Scripture on any given issue (pastoral concern), Practical Theology should avail itself of the plurality of interpretations that are available. Are Practical Theologians ready for this challenge? Hastings (2007:29) believes that an ecumenical approach to Practical Theology has vast implications, including epistemological, for the discipline as a whole and not simply in our approach to Scripture. However, his approach still has insights for our understanding of the Ecumenical nature of Scripture. Whose interpretations do we engage with? Are we, as Practical Theologians, ecumenically involved worldwide, or have we become captive to the turn to the local? Hastings (2007:144) notes that

In spite of the positive direction at the international discussion among Practical Theologians today, it must be admitted that this discussion has not yet discovered ways to fully include our colleagues in the non-Western world.

Dreyer (2010:7) noted that this remains a challenge for South African Practical Theologians, who find themselves more engaged with the non-Western world than perhaps their North American and European counterparts. He argues that we need to become “more ecumenical in our research endeavours and to include denominations and religious traditions that are often marginalised in our research”. An ecumenical approach to Scripture, while engaging meaningfully with our non-Western colleagues, would be one of the ways in which we could begin to engage with ecumenical issues within Practical Theology.

### 10.3 Coherency

Grenz (2005:15) believes that Wolfhart Pannenberg is one theologian who has sought to move beyond foundationalism in his theological approach. Whether theological truth coheres with other forms of knowledge is important for Pannenberg. Coherence is not a new issue within theological circles, as is evidenced by its use in the scholastic tradition. However, Pannenberg rejects the scholastics’ attempt to reduce reason to simply illuminating truth that is presupposed to exist in revelation handed down through inspired Scripture (Grenz 2000:196). For Pannenberg (2000:196), the danger, in this instance, lies in

[P]lacing the Bible in contradiction to every new discovery of truth, rather than integrating scientific discoveries into the truth claim of the Christian faith. In short, their doctrine of biblical inspiration failed



to facilitate theologians in demonstrating the coherence of Christian doctrine with human knowledge.

Pannenberg believes that truth must have a universal content, and that it is displayed in history (Grenz 2000:197). However, just in case we think Pannenberg argues for a rationalist certainty, he reminds us that all truth will be unveiled only at the end of history, at the eschaton. This means that our knowledge and belief remain partial at best. We believe that this approach is consistent with a critical realist approach. Grenz (2000:197) agrees while commenting on Pannenberg that he

draws from a coherentist approach in his attempt to carve out a theological method that is nonfoundational, yet committed to a realist metaphysic.

The principle of coherence becomes vital for any approach to understanding Scripture. A non-foundational approach to Scripture asks itself whether the insights of Scripture, with reference to a given pastoral concern, cohere with other forms of knowledge. The very nature of the correlational hermeneutic aids this principle of coherence. As we allow the knowledge base from the human sciences to be in dialogue with Scripture, we can begin to ask whether the insights of the human sciences cohere with the perspective of Scripture. Of course, this does not mean that, if the human sciences disagree with Scripture, they are automatically right. What it does, however, is give us pause for thought and further reflection and, if need be, revision.

## 10.4 Critical realism

In our treatment of foundationalism and non-foundationalism, we have already discussed the importance of critical realism as a way of moving beyond foundationalism. We mentioned that, when we examined the sources for Practical Theology, and specifically when addressing Scripture, it would again prove important. If this seems a strange thing to do, Van Huyssteen (1997:129) reminds us that:

Personally I am convinced that no theologian who is trying to determine what the authority of the bible might mean today, and to identify the epistemological status of the bible in theological reflection, can avoid the important issues raised by some qualified forms of critical realism for theology.

One of the world's leading New Testament scholars admits that we can no longer simply approach the Bible in a modernistic enlightenment fashion. He also believes that critical realism is the best way forward

(Wright 1992:32). With regard to the biblical text, critical realism steers a position between literalism and fictionalism (Van Huyssteen 1997:134). Wright (1992:33) articulates it thus:

One meets it among naive theologians, who complain that while other people have 'pressupositions,' they simply read the text straight, or who claim that, because one cannot have 'direct access' to the 'facts' about Jesus, all that we are left with is a morass of first century fantasy.

Van Huyssteen (1997:135) mentions how the Bible provides all the models that we might use for understanding our faith. They might not be literal pictures, but are more than useful fictions. However, the Bible is crucial for affirming what we believe about God and his world:

This text, as original witness to the events and person of our faith, in a very specific sense, is all we have. The metaphorical reference of its central concepts remains our only epistemic access to the God we believe in. Because of the importance of this fact, we can talk on an epistemological level about the realism of the text (Van Huyssteen 1997:49).

An approach to the Bible that affirms the reality to which it speaks is important. This does not mean that it is infallible. Van Huyssteen (1997:161) quotes Peacocke in reminding us that our theologies can never be infallible, but some of them can be surer. A critical realist understanding of the Scripture will help us with this. Scripture that is read humbly, ecumenically, and in a way that seeks to cohere with other knowledge forms, will help us with the "critical" side of things. Wright (1992:35) reminds us that a critical realist approach to Scripture

leads to critical reflection on the products of our enquiry into 'reality', so that our assertions about 'reality' acknowledge their own provisionality. Knowledge, in other words, although in principle concerning realities independent of the knower, is never itself independent of the knower.

Perhaps Ganzevoort (1996:56) is right in arguing for the reliability of Scripture as the best way for understanding it.

## 10.5 The mediation of Scripture and tradition for Practical Theology

This is another point where Practical Theology walks on the boundaries, and is open to criticism as being far too eclectic. In order for practical

theologians to engage with the Christian classics as part of a correlational hermeneutic, they must heed other theological traditions. This is even more difficult, as each tradition has its own hermeneutical positions and self-regulating conversations. However, this cannot be avoided. Hendriks (2004:29) lists how these disciplines are used in mediating the Christian classics of Scripture and tradition:

The biblical disciplines of Old and New Testament Studies specialize in understanding the biblical text; Systematic Theology or Dogmatics have organized the content of Scripture in various ways using different methods; philosophical and comparative religious studies play a role; ethical debates have taken place; and church history tells the ongoing story of the church in the world.

To our mind, Practical Theology, without the aid of these disciplines, would remain seriously handicapped. Graham *et al.* (2005:7) argue that theological reflection has been extremely weak in its use of the traditional theological disciplines and has an “uneasy relationship with the study of the Bible”. They further note that practical theologians are far more equipped in dealing with understanding local contexts and socio-economic realities than engaging with church history, doctrine and the Bible. They believe that the main cause is the separation of theological reflection from systematics, historical theology and the biblical disciplines in theological courses and curricula (Graham *et al.* 2005:7). It is our contention that the rush to the practical in Practical Theology is partly to blame for the scepticism or even disdain toward the traditional disciplines.

We believe that, in future, a far closer relationship between Practical Theology and the other theological disciplines must be worked out. It is also incumbent upon academic practical theologians to try to keep abreast of various developments within the other disciplines. As it was with the human sciences, using the other theological disciplines will most likely result in the use of secondary sources. It is also important to have access to archives and resources in the other disciplines, which can be utilised with reference to the various pastoral concerns that are to be reflected upon.

## **11. IN CONCLUSION: A POST-FOUNDATIONAL CRITICAL CORRELATIONAL HERMENEUTIC**

In this section, an attempt was made to show how the two sources of a correlational hermeneutic engage with the human sciences and the Christian classics (with a narrow focus of this article being the Bible).

It argued for a specific understanding of this correlation that remains open to mutual correction and affirmation (hence critical). This study sought to underpin the discussion by noting that, when engaging with both sources, a non-foundationalist approach must be taken. This move beyond foundationalism has been due to the postmodern shift and the hermeneutical turn. A non-foundationalist approach to epistemology leads to a rejection of understanding truth in an absolute sense, and is characterised by a chastened rationality seen in the position of critical realism. Taking these epistemological concerns into account, both sources engage with each other and with the given pastoral concern (that has arisen out of experience in a local context) consistent with a post-foundationalist turn.

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*Keywords**Trefwoorde*

Post-foundationalism

Post-foundationalism

Foundationalism

Foundationalism

Practical theology

Praktiese teologie

Pastoral reflection

Pastorale refleksie

Correlational hermeneutic

Korrelatiewe hermeneutiek