1 Introduction

Singing is a basic mode of human expression. The sound of a nursed baby is a form of singing. Children spend much of their time at school and at home singing. And many adults sing, alone or in a choir, just for fun or at a professional level. Everybody listens to singing voices in different styles – on the radio, online or during live concerts.

But what are people doing when they sing? How do they experience singing and what is its effect? What is the significance of singing in religious contexts like worship? Is it possible to identify a religious significance of singing even in a non-religious context, like a football match in a stadium?

In the following chapter, we present and analyse three cases of singing in different religious situations and modes. Then, we deepen central aspects by referring to relevant theories. In the last part, we conclude with the central insights for research and teaching in the field of Practical Theology.

2 Cases of Religious Singing and Analyses

2.1 The Singing Parish of Pitasch

2.1.1 Case 1

When parishioners of the Reformed Church of Pitasch sing, they still sing the old reformed four-part chorales. Pitasch is a small village in the Val Lugnez high in the Swiss mountains. The parishioners’ choir is small as well. There are just a handful of voices supporting the singing during Sunday morning worship. The chorales are performed a capella. There is no organ in the little chapel. Four-part singing has a long and important tradition not only in Pitasch but also in the whole Val Lugnez. The surrounding Surselva is primarily Catholic. Perhaps the conservation of this custom is partly due to a different liturgical and church tradition from the surroundings, and an attempt to cultivate a Reformed spiritual identity. In any case, the tradition of four-part singing is well practiced. The singers do not have to tediously read their part in the hymnbook – they know it by heart. The principal of the council of the elders begins the singing. The pastor is only permitted to lead the chorales if the principal is absent (Plüss 2015).
Four-part singing is part of the Reformed Church’s worship tradition. Since the eighteenth century, schoolteachers have rehearsed the four voices with their pupils and have supported the parishioners’ singing during Sunday morning worship.

2.1.2 Four-Part Singing as Connection of the Different: Analysis 1

What is going on in Pitasch? And why is this little singing parish high up in the Swiss mountains interesting to explore?

Four-part singing is an old and important tradition in the Reformed churches of Switzerland. In the 1770s, the composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt wrote to his friend Johann Wolfgang von Goethe after a Reformed worship in Zurich: “I was never more impressed than through the four-part singing in Zurich. The whole Reformed parish sings the common psalm four-part melodies referring to notes. Girls and boys sing soprano. Adults sing alto and the elderly men tenor and bass. Whoever knows our German chanting has no idea of the dignity and power of this four-part singing supported by hundreds of people of every age. I was really in a totally new mood, my heart was so full and my chest so tight, I felt so good and was moved to tears” (Scholl 2001, 152).

The singing of Pitasch stands in this old Reformed tradition, inspired by the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century and as well by Pietism and the Enlightenment. The mode of singing in Pitasch can be interpreted as a form of lived Theology (Marti 2014, 36). It performs, in an impressive way, the theological axiom of the priesthood of the baptized. The parish answers the Word of God through prayers and hymns.¹ The parish has a central role in the worship, not only standing on the sideline. For the pastor, room for manoeuvre is limited.

The importance of four-part singing in the Reformed Church of Switzerland is surprising, since Huldrych Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich forbade singing during worship to avoid distraction from meditation and the heresy of meritorious work. However, John Calvin allowed and even promoted the singing of psalms. He asked scholars for a translation of the Psalter from Hebrew into French to put the psalms in verses and encouraged composers to create new and appropriate melodies for psalm singing. In 1537 he wrote: “It is a thing most expedient for the edification of the church to sing some psalms in the form of public prayers by which one prays to God or sings His praises so that the hearts of all may be roused and stimulated to make similar prayers and to render similar praises and thanks to God with a common love” (Calvin 1954).

Although Calvin promoted only one voice singing in worship and four-part singing at home and in school, the latter has been practiced in worship since the six-

¹ See Martin Luther in the Sermon held in the Schlosskirche of Torgau on 5 October 1544, the so-called “Torgauer Formel”, Luther (1931).
teenth century. Not only did it become important for the Reformed Church in French-speaking countries, but since the seventeenth century, it became popular in German-speaking countries, in the Netherlands, Scotland, Poland, Hungary, before becoming practise worldwide.

This important tradition within the Reformed Church has undoubtedly inspired the small parish of Pitasch. It is said to be conserved in its pure form due to the diaspora. In the Reformed Church, the congregation is central. It is the main liturgical actor, assisted by the pastor and the school teacher, who leads the singing. The singing of psalms has been a central liturgical act since the sixteenth century. The most important aspects of this act are that:

1. The congregation's singing is the **performance of liturgical agency**, the charge of the priesthood of the baptized. The congregation is active and supports the service. No substitution by an ordained priest is possible for this task. During Reformed worship, the congregation stands up to sing and to say the Lord’s Prayer. Standing before God is an expression of reverence in many Christian traditions. In the Reformed Church, it is a form of heightened action, in addition to reception and attendance.

2. Singing is a **performance of community** (Klomp 2021). The first song transforms the different attenders at church into a community, into the holy priesthood and the body of Christ. Singing is a transformative action. It transgresses the assumed distinct limitations of a person and joins them to others. There are very few situations nowadays that allow for the experiencing of community in such an intensive and evident way as through the act of singing together.

3. Singing is or should be **performing and hearing**. It is simultaneously doing and receiving. The sound space of the other voices is open for entrance. It receives the individual and encourages them to participate. Through participation, one’s own voice connects and melts with the voices of the others. Group singing only works if all the singers keep up the synchrony of singing and listening.

4. Singing is a thoroughly **bodily action** (Klomp 2011). It is performed by one’s vocal cords and resonates not only through the cranial bone but through the whole body, supported by the midriff (Adelmann 2018). Singing is not dependent on reflection or on a secondary expression of a thought.

5. Singing is an **individual expression**. The voice is like a fingerprint. We can discern voices easily and identify a well-known person in the dark or without seeing them in a crowd of speaking people. Every person’s voice is composed of their own tone, colour and articulation. The four-part singing of the parishioner of Pitasch is an articulation of plurality in connection.

6. Four-part singing should be **harmonious**. The four voices are different in tone, pitch and melody. They can differ in rhythm and create moments of tension and disharmony. But they come together in a more or less complex manner and create a common sound, groove and atmosphere which is connected to religious motives, stimulates religious emotions and often resonates much longer than the message of the sermon.
2.2 Taizé Meeting in Basel

2.2.1 Case 2

Following Christmas 2017, the brothers of Taizé were invited to the traditional European Youth Meeting which took place in Basel, Switzerland.² 15,000 young people from all over Europe and beyond gathered together in the old medieval churches of Basel. They sat in densely packed pews and on the floor, to be quiet together and sing in the rather chilly and gloomy rooms, illuminated only by candles at the front of the church near the Communion table. Taizé involves singing short, simple songs together, by heart, over and over again, the same song, melody and words. Nobody counts how often the participants repeat the song. With every single song they enter a shared mood and world. The ongoing singing generates a shared flow. Prayer doesn't have to be explained at this moment but is experienced and evident for all the participants. Anyone unfamiliar with the songs of Taizé merely repeats them over and over. Taizé means singing and praying through repetition. The songs of Taizé are all in different languages. Participants therefore sing in foreign languages they may know a little or not at all. This multilingualism of singing and praying is characteristic of Taizé. It is a widespread prayer and singing movement which reaches many young and also elderly people and integrates different confessions and spiritual styles, more traditional parishioners as well as distant members of the church.

2.2.2 Singing as a Ritual: Analysis 2

Taizé was and still is a youth movement (Kubicki 1999), attracting young people from different European countries, cultures and denominations. But what is the reason for its success?

The most famous elements of Taizé, which are also export products, are the songs, songbooks and CDs of Taizé songs. What is particularly interesting for this study, and which aspects of singing mentioned above are to be differentiated or deepened?

1. First, singing is the liturgical core element in Taizé prayers. Taizé liturgies contain a lot of songs in a row, times of silence and Bible readings. But are mainly comprised of singing.

2. The repetition of songs is striking. Participants repeat the songs about seven or twelve times, with nobody counting. As mentioned above, it doesn't matter if the songs or the language are known or not. The singers enter in the song and participate through repetition. The repetition of the songs is more than repetition; it is like chewing dry bread, which develops its taste all the more. The ar-

ticulation of a song grows and moves by repetition and the singing experience grows and moves with it.

3. Taizé songs are short and simple in content and melody. They are mostly Bible based and contain liturgical speech acts like praise or thanks, confession or calling. The content of the song is quite important but it is not to be memorized or reflected upon. It becomes melody and rhythm, voice and gesture, atmosphere and emotion. This aspect could be one of the reasons for the popularity of Taizé.

4. The melody and mood of the songs seem to be even more important than the words. Foreign languages – including Greek and Latin – create a separate space, a heterotopos (Foucault 1991). A somehow sacred atmosphere seems to be created by the foreignness of the songs. Intelligibility in a cognitive sense is no condition for up-to-date and attractive forms of religious practice.

5. Whereas it is primarily young people who visit Taizé or the Youth Meetings and sing Taizé songs, their melodies and modes are not in the style of the familiar pop culture but rather in a simple orthodox style. They represent a counterculture to everyday life and everyday music.

6. Joining in the singing of Taizé songs seems to be a kind of resonance in a bodily sense rather than of understanding and reflexivity (Rosa 2016, 109–115).

7. Compared with Pitasch, we can see that four-part singing is also important for Taizé. The reasons are presumably the same. The liturgical structure in both cases is rather loose. In contrast to Pitasch, there are impulsive elements of participation especially in small groups. Taizé seems to be even more democratic than the Reformed liturgy and singing.

2.3 Charismatic Singing

2.3.1 Case 3

We are in the Sunday evening worship of the Vineyard Church at 5 pm in the old city of Bern, Switzerland.³ There is no clear beginning to the worship service, no formal liturgical entrance, but rather an informal start with a welcome and long introduction by an elderly couple. They speak about the holiday to Croatia that a group from the congregation went on together. Events of the coming weeks are mentioned and special guests introduced. The parishioners are still entering, greeting and hugging each other, and looking for free chairs. About 300 people are gathering. All the chairs seem to be occupied. The liturgical leaders – so-called moderators – are on stage together with a band. The stage is illuminated; the room of the parish is shaded. Then, the moderators call for the congregation to stand up for worship and the band begins to play: four guitars, drums, an electric piano and a lead singer, six

men and a woman, all about 35 years old. The band plays several well-known and some self-written worship songs in a row. Most of the band members play their instruments and sing with clear voices. The parishioners try to join in. Some songs are easy to join in with because of the repetition of short phrases. Others are quite challenging. The texts of the songs are projected on a screen behind the band. Some songs are chorused with the parish; some are performed by the worship band. When the parishioners sing, they do it in one voice. The congregation is standing; some raise their hands, others teeter, leave their chairs and move around. The intensity of singing and worshiping seems to grow the closer one is to the band and the stage. The worship music played by the band is amplified, loud and fills the room easily. The voices of the people join in, but they can’t build up to a proper singing body.

2.3.2 Singing till Ecstasy: Analysis 3

Praise songs are central to charismatic services (Versteeg 2001; Ingalls 2018). While the Roman Catholic mass is focused on the Eucharist and the Protestant service on the Gospel in the sermon, the Pentecostals and Neo-Charismatics meet God through singing. Singing is a kind of sacrament in the Pentecostal churches and the Charismatic movements. The intensity of the gathering culminates during singing. The presence of God through the Holy Spirit is expected, and is experienced by the congregation when the band is playing and people are standing up, singing and moving around. Since Pentecostal churches and Charismatic movements are growing in Europe and worldwide – even in Roman Catholic and Protestant congregations – and ecstatic singing is a core element of their worship, we have to consider this phenomenon carefully.

1. Most of the neo-charismatic worship songs are structured in verses and chorus like the songs in Pitasch. The chorus is often well known and sung by heart. In contrast to Taizé and Pitasch, the rhythm of the songs is accentuated and excites an immediate bodily and emotional experience.

2. Charismatic songs are part of pop culture. They do not try to be different like in Taizé, but aim to be a part of everyday life.

3. This pop cultural accommodation is linked with the ecclesiology of the Neo-Charismatics. The church should not be separated from the ‘world’ but rather be a part of it. The intention is to be a Greek for the Greeks and a Jew for the Jews. Unchurched people should be reached with the Gospel of Christ. Accommodation in style is a means to attain this goal. The praise-and-worship music is part of these ecclesiological and missiological strategies to reach people.

4. Emotions are expressed and intensified in charismatic worship. Whereas in Pitasch emotions are not expressed at all and in Taizé they are transformed by repeated singing and moments of silence, in the Vineyard, worship emotions are not only allowed but are stimulated. Melodies, rhythms and live instruments viv-
ify emotions; worship leaders and other parishioners seem to express their inner feelings and desires, encouraging the others to do the same. Charismatic singing is emotional singing. Melodies and words are simply the media to give an authentic expression to one’s own desire or gratitude, love and adoration of God.

5. The expression of melody and words is intensified and individualized by bodily gestures. The worshipers are standing up, moving and even swinging with their whole body, eyes closed and hands reached outwards and upwards. Some leave their seats to have more space in which to move. There is a set of worship gestures in neo-charismatic worship, but there is no choreography of the performance. The gestures are rather extemporized by individuals.

6. There is a climax in the charismatic worship expressed by singing or speaking in tongues, weeping or laughing, clapping hands or being quiet. The climax is prepared and accompanied by the musicians and the worship leader. The instruments continue to play and the leader sings in tongues or prays quietly. It is a form of collective, stimulated and cultivated religious ecstasy.

7. When religious experience comprises a touching event, expression (of emotions) and (language-based) interpretation (Jung 2000, 135–149; Plüss 2008, 247–257), the Neo-Charismatic worship is a strong expression of religious experience. While the congregations in Pitasch and Taizé express their religious experiences in a rather ritualized and discreet way, the Neo-Charismatics in Bern allow and express strong emotions, tears and joy.

3 The Theoretical Concept: Brain, Body, and Environment as ‘Open Loops’

Why do human beings sing on their own and in community? Singing in joint worship provides an experience that is simultaneously individual and communal. Here, we suggest an anthropological approach to the question of singing. Singing is a human activity that conjoins body and mind, the individual and the many, in an exemplary way.

Recent anthropological research delves into the rich complexity of the human mind-and-body-relationship that is paramount to activities such as singing. Studies in Anthropology, evolutionary Biology and Neuroscience are continuously developing an ever-deeper understanding of the complex interrelatedness of the physical and mental aspects of life. The model proposed here comes from the dialogue between Theology and Natural Sciences as suggested by Markus Mühling in his book “Resonances” (Mühling 2014). Mühling presents the model of ‘open loops’, as developed in neuroscience and in niche construction theory, and introduces the concept into Systematic Theology. As we suggest, this model can help us to understand the role of worship singing.
3.1 The Model: Brain, Body, and Humankind as ‘Open Loops’

As a systematic theologian, Markus Mühling engages with recent research in the two fields of brain studies and evolutionary theory: The epistemological concept of the “ecological brain” (Mühling 2014, 71–85) overcomes theories that describe the brain as representing or depicting reality by using specific brain areas for specific activities. As an alternative to these models, Mühling introduces the “ecological brain” theory. Here, the functions of the brain appear to be interrelated not only with the entire body, but also with the environment.

Further, the topic of interrelatedness is not only to be found in concepts of brain studies, but also in evolution theories. While the Darwinian theory is based on the adaptation of individuals to pressures of selection, more recent concepts now focus on kinds of interactions called “niche construction” activities (Mühling 2014, 144–166). Not only do organisms change and adapt to pressures, but the environment also changes and is changed by numerous influences.

Both theories, the “ecological brain” and the “niche construction”, are described as open systems, or “open loops” (Mühling 2014, 81).

Here, we propose taking Mühling’s ‘open loops’ as a way of describing what happens in the context of worship singing. Mühling’s theory of the brain and the body can illustrate the personal experience of singing: While singing, our brain functions within the body, words are pronounced, melodies are brought forth while the sound already reaches our ears, and our bodies receive the sounds, through vibrations. We produce and receive emotions while singing. Our brain functions as an ‘open loop’, in connectivity with the entire body and with the environment. We breathe in and out while singing. Through singing, we can physically experience that we receive faith. We are moved and even altered.

The Niche Construction Theory can also illustrate the communal experience of worship singing: We sing within our church community. However, in singing, a Christian community is all ‘open loops’: In singing, our community is linked to the other church communities, to humankind and creation. Through singing, we praise God as one church. We already live what we are to become.

The two parts of Mühling’s model can now be illuminated by recent research in different fields of the Human Sciences. Here we present some examples that might prove relevant for Practical Theology.

3.1.1 Music as Scaffolding of Language

The use of language and language learning are traditionally understood as brain-centred activities. Protestant Theology, over the centuries, has understood itself as centred in the ‘word’ dimension of faith and in human intellectual activities, and thus without much need for the physical dimensions of life and faith, such as singing. The aesthetic strands of worship were seen as little more than decoration, beaut-
tiful, but unnecessary, and potentially even misleading. However, recent anthropological research shows that human language cannot exist apart from its musical dimensions.

Thus, music can be described as a kind of ‘scaffolding’ for language acquisition. In their study *Music and Early Language Acquisition* (Brandt, Gebrian, and Slevc 2012), researchers Anthony Brandt et al. put forward the hypothesis that music precedes language in human development. The researchers came up with a proposed definition for music: “Music is creative play with sound; it arises when sound meets human imagination” (Brandt, Gebrian, and Slevc 2012, 3).

Speech uses sound in a creative way, but differing from music, speech is referential, is symbolic and is used for communication. However, “while speech is symbolic, sound is the bearer of the message” (Brandt, Gebrian, and Slevc 2012, 3).

The authors show how children, while learning to speak a language, play with sounds. “Infants use the musical aspects of language (rhythm, timbral contrast, melodic contour) as a scaffolding for the later development of semantic and syntactic aspects of language” (Brandt, Gebrian, and Slevc 2012, 3).

Young children listen to their mothers’ voices. Parents use their voices in a more musical way when speaking to their children than when speaking to adults. What children can grasp at first is the ‘music of the speech’, the prosody. Only later, they become able to discern the referential features of language. While learning to speak, young children practice their repertoire of musical language features. Then, as they develop, they learn to insert the referential meaning of language into this musical ‘scaffolding’.

As the authors make clear, music is necessary and central to human development. It is learned and trained. However, music does not serve a clearly defined purpose. Music is non-referential. As ‘creative play’ music can be understood as a gift to the human being and to humankind. The gift is the necessary prerequisite for the other purpose-led human activities, such as the use of language.

With Brandt and his colleagues, we could say: In language acquisition and in speaking, the brain can be understood as a ‘loop’ that is open to the body in its entirety. Singing, then, might be called an ‘open-loop-activity’ that links music and language, the brain and the body.

### 3.1.2 The Ritual and the Story: Intertwinements

In his ground-breaking book *Il corpo di Dio. Vita e senso della vita* (Bonaccorso 2006) the Italian liturgist Giorgio Bonaccorso outlines the development of the understanding of the relationship between ‘body and mind’ or ‘brain and body’ in concepts of Theology, Philosophy, Psychology and Neuroscience. He demonstrates how recent studies are continuously uncovering increasingly complex networks of inner (between brain and body) and outer (between human beings and the environment) relations. As a liturgist, Bonaccorso demonstrates how embodied liturgical practices,
precisely when engaging with a rich variety of aesthetic and cognitive strands, can augment the chance of experiences of transcendence. While activities such as the contemplation of a work of art, the listening to the song of one voice, or to the reading a religious story, can already arouse feelings of oneness with the environment, the possibility of such experiences of transcendence grows as the number of aesthetic and cognitive strands increases.

Drawing on findings from Bonaccorso’s research, we might conclude that worship singing engages a number of such strands. Joint singing connects a variety of voices and musical expressions, even more so when there is four-part singing or the involvement of instrumental music. The presence of the other singers, the architectural features and further artwork in the worship space, Biblical readings or a sermon – are all aesthetical and cognitive strands of experience. Together, these liturgical features contribute to growing chances of transcendental experiences.

Through liturgical activities such as singing, the human brain functions as an ‘open loop’, in connection with the body, and the body functions as an open loop, interconnected with the human and non-human environment. Singing can bring forth experiences of transcendence. Singing can be the place where believers can experience faith. However, there is no ‘automatism’. What liturgical activities can provide is a prominent ‘space of possibilities’⁴ for such experiences.

3.1.3 Joint Music Making Promotes Helpful Behaviour

Michael Tomasello and Sebastian Kirschner, scientists at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany, explored the effects of joint music making in four-year-old children. They compared the behaviour of two groups of children with nearly equal tasks and with “the same level of social and linguistic interaction” (Kirschner and Tomasello 2010, 354); the only difference between the two playful activities was that one group, but not the other, used music. As a result, the study made clear that joint music making “increases subsequent spontaneous cooperative and helpful behaviour” (Kirschner and Tomasello 2010, 354). Singing promotes social bonding.

As the study shows, the chance to find the readiness for mutual help in the participants is higher in the music-making group than in the ‘non-singing’ group. However, helping is not the necessary consequence of the joint singing experience. The experience only increases the probability. The children do not sing in order to then help each other. By contrast, when they sing, they experience themselves as a group, joined through the activity of singing, and then they spontaneously help each other. Their singing itself is an aimless activity.

Here, it becomes clear that joint singing widens the ‘space of possibilities’ for spontaneous prosocial behaviour. Singing can not only promote experiences of faith and transcendence, but can also change behaviour. The singing community can experience: what Theology calls sanctification, can actually be observed. A community where prosocial behaviour grows out of singing might also be of help to the wider environment. What anthropologists call ‘niche construction’ can actually be experienced.

3.2 The Theory Model of ‘Open Loops’ and the Case Studies

Here, we suggest the model of ‘open loops’ as a possibility for understanding the apparent importance of singing for the worshiping community more deeply, as described in the case studies. What follows here are some exemplary observations.

In the context of Reformation history and Protestant Theology, the importance of singing often seems to have come as a surprise. The Reformation rediscovered the ‘word’ as the decisive dimension for the Christian faith, and for Theology. In consequence, Zwingli and Bullinger in Zurich forbade singing during worship. Why, then, did Calvin so soon re-establish singing? Why did four-part singing spread so fast in the Reformed churches in Europe and then worldwide? The Taizé community and the Neo-Charismatic Vineyard churches have roots in the churches of the Reformation and their word-centred theologies. Why, then, is singing so important in their liturgies?

The open-loop model suggests that the human brain relies on the entire body and on the environment in order to function. Recent studies indicate that singing is fundamental to speaking. While Reformation theologians may not have been aware of these circumstances, the congregations intuitively longed for singing as the basis for the all-important word dimension of faith, and subsequently the musical aspects of the biblical Psalm words unfolded in unexpected beauty in Reformed worship traditions.⁵

As the Roman Catholic liturgist Bonaccorso outlines, a variety of aesthetic and cognitive strands in liturgical actions augment the chances for transcendental experiences. Calvin remarked that “the hearts of all may be roused and stimulated to make similar prayers […] and thank God with a common love” (cf. 2.1.2.). One eighteenth century witness of Reformed four-part singing found himself moved to tears

⁵ This refers to one surprising experience: at her very first visit to the Zurich University Faculty of Theology in Autumn 2018, Dorothea Haspelmath-Finatti, a Lutheran minister and liturgical scholar, participated for the very first time in a Swiss Reformed worship service. It was a university service, prepared by students of Practical Theology, but open to the public. Here, the congregational four-part-singing was strikingly beautiful. The singers, who were not professional singers, seemed to listen carefully to the other voices while singing their own parts. Their voices blended together in an exceptional way.
through this very special worship experience (cf. 2.1.2.). Both cases speak of experiences of transcendence and transformation through communal singing. In our times, the ritual use of short phrases of biblical content, as in Taizé, can lead to feelings of oneness. Singing can lead to ecstasy, like in Charismatic worship. Both can be understood as examples of experiences of transcendence, where strands of aesthetic and cognitive acts are interwoven.

As further research finds, singing can benefit community. The singing community can be ‘open loops’ to the environment. The century witness speaks of his own wellbeing as brought forth by the experience of singing. Calvin speaks of the oneness of the congregation and of the edification of the church through the singing of Psalms. One might observe that the word ‘edification’ is not far from the term ‘niche construction’.

4 Consequences for Practical Theology

What follows from the above analysis on singing and embodiment for Practical Theology in general? We present our conclusions in short paragraphs:

1. Practical Theology in our German-speaking context is text-oriented and often text-limited, due to Protestantism and a text-focused culture and science. In contrast, religious praxis and experience – like singing and embodiment – are much more than text and language. Therefore, description and interpretation should contain the multifaceted aspects of a phenomenon: texts and spoken (or sung) words, performance and the body, emotions, images and rhythm.

2. Although singing and embodiment are constitutive human and religious elements, they are not common topics of research and teaching in German-speaking Practical Theology (recent exceptions: Klomp 2011, Kaiser 2017, Kühn 2018). This is also true for all forms of (religious) emotions. Since Practical Theology reminds other fields of Theology of the present ‘lived religion’, these aspects have to be focused on, although the methodological approach is not easy to manage since there are no established methods to analyse singing, embodiment and emotions.

3. Religious individualization is becoming the core focus of German-speaking Practical Theology, whereas group forms or aspects of religion seem to be old-fashioned. Regarding singing and embodiment, they can illustrate the fact that religion is a social phenomenon and illuminate the ways in which religious persons can benefit from collective religious practice. Research on singing reminds Practical Theology of the strong and vivid connection between social and individual aspects of religion.

4. Our reflections show that case studies are helpful to explore central aspects of neglected (or new) religious phenomena. We described and analysed the three examples of singing only very roughly. To deepen the analysis of singing and em-
bodiment, it would be helpful to do a “thick description” (Geertz 1973), and a methodologically reflected analysis of the cases.

5. We tried to show that the cases are rooted in their own history and genesis. We are convinced that Practical Theology should not ignore historical aspects in order to better understand religious and ecclesial phenomenon in the present, even after the ‘empirical turn’ in the 1970s in the German-speaking context.

6. It is fruitful to have a first-hand analysis based on the cases before introducing theory models in the field. We neither opt for pure inductive research like Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990) nor for a deductive procedure based on theoretical or theological principals but for an abductive procedure (Peirce 1965, 171), reflecting on cases and theories – like the two focusses of an ellipse – at the same level and time.

7. A basic method of Practical Theology is the method of comparison. If we compare cases, theories and theological interpretations, we can discover the complexity of a phenomenon, its differences and structures. The selection of cases and theories has to be well considered and explicitly justified. However, it is not possible to cover the whole field or to eliminate the dependence on our point of view and our own cultural and personal limitations.

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