**The Beginnings of the International Academy of Practical Theology**

**Friedrich Schweitzer**

Every true beginning has its own myth. More than 20 years after the inception of the idea that there should be such an academy, the processes that have led to these beginnings are beginning to sink into the realm of myth and mystery.

From what I remember, the idea for an international academy first came up during a conference on practical theology in 1990 at Blaubeuren/Germany, the site of Tuebingen university’s conference center. This conference brought together a number of new interests in \* as an academic discipline, from Germany, from the United States, and from other countries, most of all the Netherlands. Key speakers were, among others, Don Browning, James Fowler, Dietrich Rössler, Karl Ernst Nipkow. I myself had been active as one of the organizers of the conference. Since I had been a postgraduate student at Harvard in the late 1970s and also had started internationalizing my own work by organizing international conferences since the early 1980s, the idea of an international academy seemed very attractive to me. Moreover, it became clear that there was a convergence of similar developments in different countries that we could make use of.

Two key ideas were behind the efforts for founding the new academy. First, it was not considered sufficient that the various subdisciplines of \* should have their international organizations (such organizations exist in a number of areas, like religious education, homiletics, pastoral counseling, etc.) . If \* should be taken seriously as a discipline, it should also have its own organization at an international level. Second, the aim of the academy should be to bring together researchers who are working within the field of \* in different countries. In other words, the aim was not to organize conferences but to facilitate international research projects as well as to create ongoing exchange on research.

A first planning meeting at Princeton Theological Seminary in the summer of 1991 then brought together a number of those who had started the idea or had become involved with it from the beginning—Don Browning, Karl Ernst Nipkow, Dietrich Rössler, Friedrich Schweitzer, Johannes van der Ven—while others joined the group—Richard Osmer as our host, Riet Bons Storm, Camille Menard. Still others we had asked to come—James Fowler, Gerben Heitking, Marcel Viau—could not make it and sent colleagues from their countries. The people present went through many discussions on how the idea of an academy could work. Their discussions resulted in a first version of the By-Laws of the International Academy of Practical theology that could then proceed to have its first conference in 1993 (again at Princeton).

Although \* has developed in new and surprising ways during the two decades of IAPT’s existence, I have found it a wonderful experience to be with this special group of colleagues. Additional international networks have come into existence and I have also been active with some of them—for example, the International Society for Empirical Research in Theology. Yet IAPT has been successful in becoming the most comprehensive and most international body in this field. This is why I continue to cherish this organization and consider it indispensable for our field.

The papers from the conferences mentioned above have been published in two volumes, one in German, the other in English:

Karl Ernst Nipkow, Dietrich Rössler, Friedrich Schweitzer (eds.). *Praktische Theologie und Kultur der Gegenwart. Ein internationaler Dialog*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1991

Friedrich Schweitzer, Johannes A. van der Ven (eds.). *Practical Theology – International Perspectives*. Frankfurt/Main: Pater Lang 1999