



**PRAXIS AND PRACTICE IN THEOLOGY:
CURRENT CHALLENGES AND TENDENCIES**

AARHUS UNIVERSITY, 26-28 OCT. 2016

PAPER ABSTRACTS

Wednesday 26.10; 15.45 – 17.05

AIAS Auditorium

Torsten Cress:

Materiality and devotion. Investigating religious practices with Theodore Schatzki

The presentation elaborates on how Theodore Schatzki's practice-theoretical approach can be exploited for the ethnographic study of religious practices. At its core are catholic belief practices – as can be found at pilgrimage sites such as the Sanctuary of Lourdes or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, but also in daily prayer routines – for which the inclusion of specific material forms is constitutive. With Schatzki, such practices can be described as emergent entities that are organised according to certain principles and follow particular routines and rules, and are characterised by certain affective qualities. With such a perspective, the presentation suggests, religious practices can be studied not only with respect to their structure, their preconditions, and the degrees of freedom they provide for their participants, but also in terms of their physical, mental and affective dimension. In particular, the way in which material forms – the rock faces of the grotto in Lourdes, the Stone of Anointing in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, rosaries, light, etc. – play a role for the feasibility and performance, the characteristic properties and the transfer of these practices can thus be investigated in detail.

These aspects are discussed on the basis of videographic material and interview data that were collected in Lourdes and Jerusalem for a sociological research project on the materiality of catholic belief practices. This way, the presentation combines ethnographic case studies with an explicitly methodological and conceptual interest and is thus supposed to provide impulses for new perspectives on religious practices.

Morten Holmqvist / Astrid Sandsmark

Intervention research design in religious practices

This paper investigates intervention research within organized religious practices. The phenomenon in question revolves around Christian Education and the staff members' cooperation when organizing Christian Educational practices. The Christian Education reform in the Church of Norway has not only reformed educational practices but brought in a new work group and new practices that connect nearly all professionals in a Church of Norway staff. Hence, the employees have to negotiate new practices with new methods and goals. Cooperation is understood as the employee's interaction and ways of negotiating a common objective that is mediated by and constituted through material tools within an activity system. Intervention research, in this respect, is developed within a Cultural Historical Activity Theoretical (CHAT) framework. Drawing on an ongoing research project, the paper aims to discuss how intervention research in religious practices can be designed. The study seeks first to identify possible tensions among church professionals using interviews and observations from staff meetings and selected Christian educational practices. Secondly, using a CHAT intervention design, we aim to utilize the data as means of interventions in the activity. Working collaboratively with staff members, we seek to develop new tools and strategies for the staff cooperation in Christian Education.

Wednesday 26.10; 18.30–19.50

Track 1

Building 1231, room 220

Jette B. Rønkilde

The concept of theology in qualitative empirical theology

Using the tools of qualitative empirical studies in theology invites theological reflection on different kinds of practices, the ordinary, concrete activities of people and their 'theology'. This kind of theology is described as e.g. ordinary theology, lived theology or everyday theology and it is deeply embedded in the practice of both everyday life and different kinds of practice e.g. participation in church services. The question is what are the epistemological presumptions that defines the theology of ordinary theology? The main aim of this paper is to investigate the concept of theology that is examined, analyzed and discussed in qualitative empirical theological studies. Further, the paper engages in a discussion of how the theology of qualitative empirical theological examinations relates to the theology of systematic theology and the classical theological concepts and categories. By examining the main theological concepts and figures in qualitative empirical theology the paper elaborates a Trinitarian, relational concept of theology that is in thread with the currents of recent empirical theology and imbedded in traditional theological discourse.

Kati Tervo-Niemelä:

Creating and finding meaningfulness in religious praxis – a mixed method approach

Various studies show that wishes for happiness and for a meaningful life are the most widely held goals by which people measure and motivate themselves. People actively construct meaning of their lives on a daily basis and meaning can be seen as a part of every action and thought. One can distinguish global and situational meaning; religion and spirituality are often involved in both of these levels.

But, what are factors that are linked to meaningfulness and to a sense of meaning in religious praxis? In this paper I aim at scrutinizing these factors in a church context from various perspectives. By using various empirical data sets, both quantitative and qualitative, both national and large international data sets, the paper aims at analysing factors that create meaningfulness in different church practices and ministerial work. This is done by analysing the data sets both from the perspective of religious leaders (ministers and other church workers) and from the perspective of parishioners, and by discussing what challenges these results – linked to the current societal changes – pose to Christian theology.

Track 2
Building 1231, room 224

Tone S. Kaufman:

From the outside, within or inbetween? Normative dimensions in practical theology

The relationship between the descriptive and normative is implicitly or explicitly addressed in numerous publications in the field of practical theology. Yet, as noted in the invitation to this conference, “empirical research in theology is not conceived in contrast to theology as a normative enterprise, but as an integral part of it.” This paper examines some significant practical theological contributions (for example Swinton & Mowat, Don Browning, the ARCS team and Clare Watkins, Elaine Graham), seeking to map the field in terms of what is given normative priority (for example the theological tradition or human experience and practice), and how and where this normativity is located. I suggest that it is helpful to distinguish between normativity-from within and normativity-from-the outside. Moreover, building on Afdal’s work, I argue that normative dimensions are deeply interwoven and present both in the empirical theological voices as well as in the existing theological tradition and academic works of the field. Hence, rather than opting for practical theology to become more prescriptive, I make the case for a rescriptive normativity that acknowledges that the distinction between the normative and the descriptive is only one of degree.

Elisabeth Tveito Johnsen:

Towards a non-prescriptive understanding of normativity in practical theological research

One major tendency in the “empirical turn” of practical theology is to conceptualize “description” and “normativity” as sequential steps in the research process. Such an understanding underpins a methodology where the first level is description and the last level is theological evaluation (Browning 1991, Osmer 2008, Swinton and Mowat 2006). This paper challenges this approach by presenting a case study where normativity is built into the research design in a nonprescriptive way.

The case study I will present is an analysis of three Sunday morning worship services in the Church of Norway. The theoretical approach I use is called activity theory, mainly developed by Yrjö Engeström (2001, 2008, 2015). The selected worship services are from a sample of congregations where young people (confirmands) unfamiliar with this religious practice have expressed a high level of satisfaction. The empirical material is established through participant observation. The analysis identifies three modes of worship in the material; 1) a community of strangers, 2) a community of all times and 3) a community of peers.

The paper uses these findings as an argument for a nonprescriptive understanding of normativity in practical theological research. Empirical practical-theological research can contribute to the development of religious practices not by instructive application, but by theoretical re-interpretation.

Thursday 27.10; 11.15 – 13.00

Track 1

Building 1231, room 214

Hans Stifoss-Hanssen/Lars J. Danbolt:

An empirical research project in theology: Pastoral care

The research project has started out with a positive attitude to the empirical turn in theology, and the explicit ambition of operating within a knowledge paradigm strongly influenced by empirical methods and thinking. The empirical focus can be understood on the background of contextual theology and theologies of liberation. The increasing interest in theology in religious practices, e.g. ritualization, also points to the same direction.

The project is planned to be carried out in phases: The first phase has been the distribution of questionnaires to the clergy and the deacons in The church of Norway, an analysis of quantitative and qualitative material from this questionnaire has been carried out, and results from this phase of the work is published in a scientific paper (Tidsskr f Prakt Teol # 1 2016). Next phase is planned to include collection of material on pastoral care conversations from persons seeking pastoral care (“users”), preferably in a focus group design. We also imagine creating research material from other christian denominations, and other religious communities, and to publish in various channels. We have also organized annual workshops for professionals in the field, facilitating discussions on the research material, and the construction of pastoral care knowledge.

Our study shows convincingly that the ecclesial practice of pastoral conversations has a confident-centered profile, deals with the people’s psychosocial stresses and coping with illness and grief. Theologically, this may indicate that the potential of this practice field has to do with providing a caring and supportive environment, and thereby conveying a message of the church as a place for experiencing meaning and belonging.

Marianne Gaarden:

Implications of the empirical turn for theological teaching and education

Recent empirical Nordic research projects in sermon reception/interaction highlight the congregations’ request for the preachers’ personal authenticity arising from the dialogical way listeners interact with the sermon and create personal meaning. Similarly, empirical studies from US into ministry reveals that ministry today is less about exercising the authority of an office but more about embodying an authentic contextual wisdom gained by daily practice of ministry. I argue that traditional homiletical teaching can benefit with an additional level moving from sermon formation towards preacher formation, which can support the preachers’ authenticity. This can be done by the didactic method which establish a room of learning where power is reduced, allowing the preacher to reflect upon own practice without being judged, evaluated or critiqued. By means of questions raised by the preacher him or herself a group of colleges/students reflect upon the questions the preacher has raised. I will explain how the method works in practice, and show how ministers experience this kind of learning by presenting the results of a focus group interviews with ministers in Elsinore diocese. I will reflect upon the didactic principles of the ministers’ practical experiences in dialogue with theories of Gaarden, Pearce, Andersen and Foucault.

Track 2
Building 1231, room 216

Pekka Metso:

Reforming eucharistic practices in Orthodox Church in Finland since 1970: A modern example of lex credendi shaping lex orandi

In the beginning of 1970's a set of new practices were introduced by the bishops of the Orthodox Church of Finland (OCF) to enhance Eucharistic life and active participation into the sacraments of eucharist and confession in the church. Opposed to prevailing practices, the novelties were presented as more traditional. In the new practice, especially the theological vision of Archbishop Paul (1960-1987) was reflected. His personal understanding of genuine Orthodoxy (lex credendi) and his administrative determination shaped the liturgical and sacramental life (lex orandi) of the OCF permanently, so it seems. After couple of decades the eucharistic practices - and life - of OCF had changed dramatically: by the middle of 1990's eucharistic participation had considerably increased while confession had dramatically declined. Revision of practices since 1970's has also brought about a changed understanding of traditional Orthodox eucharistic practice in the present day OCF. Thus, "Tradition" - often described in Eastern Christian Orthodoxy as something immutable - allows to be interpreted and expressed according to new conventions.

Hans Austnaberg:

Validity of worldviews? Paul G. Hiebert as anthropologist and missiologist

Paul G. Hiebert (1932-2007) was a leading missiological anthropologist and thus he operated in the encounter between anthropology (an immanent and descriptive research tradition) and missiology (holding a strong normativity). The article studies selected works of Hiebert, focusing on the validity of worldviews. The task is to investigate and discuss how different worldviews can be evaluated in relation to each other. Is it at all possible to evaluate different worldviews in relation to others or do we have to leave each worldview as equally valid? Are there any meta-cultural norms by which it is possible to consider one worldview as more valid than another is?

The article first presents Hiebert as an anthropologist and his thinking of worldviews as basic assumptions of a given culture. Then his stance as a missiologist is presented, by furnishing his own standing point, his epistemological position and his contextualisation project. I discuss the concept of worldview, Hiebert's normative view of the Bible, especially his view of the Bible in relation to critical realism, and his establishing of meta-cultural grids or standing points above cultures. I conclude by suggesting that Hiebert has chosen a specific worldview as the basis of his thinking and this directs him in his evaluation of the validity of other worldviews.

Thursday 27.10; 16.15 – 17.35

Track 1

Building 1 170, room 240

Jan Nylund:

The construction of the “I” in the Lord’s Prayer: A social constructive discourse analysis

This paper addresses how the “I” of the praying individual is constructed in the interaction with the divinity in the praying of the Lord’s Prayer. This approach draws on social-constructive theory on identity formation and developmental psychology and a close reading of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6 and the Sermon on the Mount. It is the assertion of this paper that a discourse analysis of the Lord’s Prayer that takes into account the social and psychological processes that are instigated and put into motion in the interaction with the divine help us understand how the spiritual formation and personal development of the praying individual takes place.

Sr. Maura Behrenfeld

Abstract art as embodied medium for engagement in “natural religiosity”

In Catherine Pickstock’s recent contribution to the Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology, Sense and Sacrament, she states: “Maybe we are naturally religious creatures because we have a certain kind of body, just as much as because we have a certain type of mind.” While Pickstock persuasively demonstrates that intensified body involvement positively impacts religious intensification, what remains unclear is what “type” of body involvement and mind engagement actuates such connection. Surprisingly, abstract artists may offer valuable insight into the type of embodied act that mediates connection between the human being and the Divine.

This paper presents abstract art as embodying a powerful narthical role — a position of inviting and communicating. The term narthical, discussed in Bert Roebben’s model for “transformative learning,” will be expanded and used to advance an understanding of abstract art’s potential for affecting sacramental actuation. Devoid of any recognizable association with material reality, abstract art has a privileged capacity for dynamic engagement with its viewer. I argue that the “narthical role” of abstract art is invaluable for elucidating the “type” of body involvement crucial to releasing the “natural religiosity” within created being. However, ultimately an interpenetrating-inhabiting artistic dynamic is the pivotal factor for transformative actuation.

Track 2
Building 1170, room 248

Fredrik Saxegaard:

Exploring passage points between practice theories and practical theologies

Practice theory and practical theology are multivoiced and diverse traditions; more bundles of theories and theologies than a theory or theology. They may be distinguishable from other social theories and from other parts of theology respectively, but the exact boundaries and markers are fuzzy. This means that the use of practice theoretical perspectives in any practical theological project raises complex issues.

This paper elaborates these issues, related to an ethnographic project on pastoral leadership in Church of Norway parishes. In the project, I made use of perspectives from Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

The paper discusses the relationship between CHAT and a sample of other practice theories (in particular Schatzki and Wenger): What are their implications, their strengths and weaknesses? How do a given practice theoretical strand afford some constructions of practical theology and constrain others?

The paper argues that different practice theories provide different optics on tensions of stability and fluidity, both concerning issues of boundaries/cohesiveness, and issues of tradition/emergence.

Hans Raun Iversen:

From empirical theology to the participatory turn and practice as research

For a number of reasons the debate on praxis and theory has been restricted in theological research and education. This is probably not least the case in Denmark, where theology is a full subject at the secular university – and not given much academic attention outside the university (Iversen 2014). It has taken a long time, in Denmark, to have empirical studies and fieldwork fully integrated in practical theology (Iversen 2015). An even more comprehensive challenge we face from the present participatory turn as it is evident in church work as well as in new approaches to academic studies (Iversen 2016). In this connection, also the challenges from Practice as Research (Nelson 2013 and Rhiger 2016) must to be reflected. This paper will attempt to track and critically assess these present tendencies.

Friday 28.10; 09.00 – 11.00

Track 1

Building 1231, room 214

Sivert Angel:

Homiletic research as a study of rhetorical praxis

Homiletic research has seen a move away from literary analysis of sermon manuscripts to analysis of sermon reception based on interviews with listeners. By this move, it has aimed at describing what is heard in a sermon more than what is intended. Several studies have questioned the connection between what is said and what is heard and, in continuation, what it is that should be considered the real “manuscript” of a sermon, since the sermon that is heard is constructed by the infinite number of contexts it enters in the minds of the hearers.

In my paper, I will discuss some weaknesses I see in this approach. When focus on what is heard and not on what is occasionally accompanied by lack of interest for rhetorical form, such studies risk that their claimed for a non-correspondence between what is said and what is heard has a weak basis. A weakness on a normative level, is that such research strategies may produce research that has little basis for qualitative claims about rhetorical practice.

In my paper, I will therefore propose a revised form of rhetorical analysis for homiletic research. It sees the sermon as a form of praxis to be analyzed on the basis of a comprehensive description of the event the rhetorical practice is a part of. Thus I point towards a homiletical research strategy which aims at describing connections between rhetorical form and actual communication.

Linn S. Rystad:

Narratives IN USE in preaching – a sociocultural and dialogical approach

In this paper I want to explore the narrative dimension in use in preaching through Bakhtin's concept of dialogue and a socio-cultural lens. I will do this by analyzing two preaching events from worship services in the Church of Norway where children of a given age were especially invited. The narrative dimension includes both biblical narratives and other narratives that are in use in the preaching. The main focus is on the use of the narratives, not what kind of narratives they are.

Though I am aware that it is difficult (and maybe even impossible), I attempt at operationalizing Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue and “the foreign word” for analysis of the empirical material. Inspired by Marlene R. Lorensen's work on Bakhtin and preaching, I will try to see if the narratives are used in a monological or dialogical way. Are they used as scaffolding or architecture? The narrative dimension is viewed as one “foreign word” that the preaching event interacts with. However, adhering to Wertschs' socio-cultural take on Bakhtin “the foreign word” is not limited to the narrative dimension in use in the preaching event; it also includes the use of artefacts, space and body language.

My hope is that this exploration can lead to a further discussion on the dialogicality of preaching events, especially when faced with the task of preaching for young and old at the same time.

Sini Hulmi:

Participants of worship as makers of sermon – a case study

The presentation is based on a qualitative empirical study with the aim of understanding and analyzing the formation, hearing and influence of the sermon. The sources are interviews

conducted in Finland in two Lutheran congregations a few days after a Sunday service. It turned out that listeners of sermons shape the sermon. The sermon does not gain its form and content only through a process internal to the preacher. A sermon should be viewed more widely than something which exclusively occurs in church during the service and to some extent in the preparatory work of the preacher. Listeners affect the sermon in many cases and in many ways, including its form, the way it is heard, its reception and its influence. The sermon as a whole is a result of their interaction and cooperation. The listeners of the sermon become the makers of the sermon. The sermon is a process rather than an act or an event.

Track 2
Building 1231 room 216

Kirsten Donskov Felter

Office or personal calling? Negotiations of ministry among Danish Folk Church Pastors

In a Danish context, formal and normative theologies have traditionally privileged the idea of ministry as an office, which mirrors how pastoral work has been historically institutionalized in the Folk Church. However, in accordance with increasingly individualized practices among the members of the church, Danish Folk Church pastors tend to prefer ideas of personal calling or vocation when asked to describe their views on pastoral work, while the idea of the office seemingly plays a minor role. Based on a recent empirical study the paper examines the ways that the pastors negotiate different ideas of ministry, and discusses the complex interplay between the pastors' espoused and operant theologies.

In dialogue with Clare Watkins, Franklin Pilario and Natalie Wigg-Stevenson I will reflect on the relations between the normativity inherent in the practices and interpretations of the pastors and the explicit normativity of Danish theological tradition. How can the differently situated theological voices articulated in the study be assessed in order to reconceptualize pastoral ministry in a church undergoing significant changes?

Karen M. Mestad:

The pastor: A leader of the Sunday service

"How do pastors lead their congregations during Sunday service, and what factors form the way they do so?" This is the research question for my PhD-project in practical theology. I want to investigate leadership during Sunday services, and try to trace possible factors that form pastors and their practices. I have an abductive approach, where empirical data from observations and interviews form the basis of the thesis. My main theoretical perspectives come from practice theory, Harald Askeland's theory of institutional leadership and Jackson Carroll's theory of pastoral leadership. I study the pastors' practice through the setups, their sayings, doings and relating, using a modified version of Stephen Kemmis' practice theory. My methods are document analysis, participatory observation and interviews with pastors in two dioceses in Norway. After observation of one or two services led by each pastor, I refer to specific observations during the subsequent interview, as well as probe their general reasoning related to leading Sunday services. I will also draw theoretical perspectives from liturgical theology when analyzing the material. At the conference, I would like to present a part of the analysis of the material.

Terese B. Kessel:

"When one is sick, we are all sick." African diakonia as a model for European diakonia?

Women for Christ, or Femmes pour Christ, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon are Africanising diakonia. Merged with Biblical teaching, the movement transform local traditions of care in community into the church's diakonia. In a context with no social welfare, women develop a mutual social emergency capital to lean on in times of crises. They practice a non-institutionalised diakonia, and visit the sick in the neighbourhoods with prayers and hymns. My

empirical study is inspired by the “empirical turn” in practical theology and investigates religious practices in an African church context.

Linked to a Western context, I last ask if a Norwegian church context, responding to needs in a pluralistic society, can benefit from features in African diakonia. Diaconal practices developed on knowledge of care expressions from the cultural background of new residents, such as the refugees, may be beneficial to diaconal approaches in Western churches.