



Institut für Sozialethik

From May 4th-5th 2023 Dr. Lea Chilian and PD Dr. Frederike van Oorschot invited nearly 20 researchers to meet online and in person in the Institute of Social Ethics, coming from Germany, Great Britain, Norway, Peru, USA, South Africa and Switzerland to discuss different approaches of theological research, which have in common to embrace the importance of the reference to the world and daily life in their understanding of modern theology. Through empirical, narrative and hermeneutical research theologians try to connect the Christian tradition to everyday reflection and experiences. One could therefore distinguish between theology in a broad understanding – referring to all forms of religious reflection – and academic (systematic) theology as methodological viable attempt to reflect on theology in a broad sense in the light of the Christian tradition and Scripture.

In some approaches, quantitative and qualitative research is a component of theological work - so far, mainly in practical theology. However, in German-speaking Systematic Theology there is a noticeable gap in the connection between traditional research and reflection on dogmatic topoi and the methodologically grounded research on experience of faith in everyday life and the ecclesiastical access to theology. In the workshop we asked: Where and for what purpose empirical observations and results of social developments or "lived theology" are taken up for systematic theological research? Is there a task for coherence or systematization of individual orientations and empirical observations? Do theologians face the task to connect daylife observations with the tradition sources (incl. the scripture)? And if so, what is the function?

The "systematizing" perspective - in contrast, for example, to a systematic or dogmatic perspective – may express the ongoing process in which observations of the present are interpreted and appropriated with Christian traditions in an attempt to read them into this perspective. On the one hand, it claims the constitutively unfinished character of this undertaking. On the other hand, it is not focused on the interpretation against one or more dogmas. Systematizing theology does not aim at reading the texts or the religious experiences into a certain system or at interpreting them in view of dogmas, but relating perspectives and experiences into collage-like sets of interpretation. Thus, it is primarily a hermeneutical task of Systematic Theology to illuminate the processes of understanding.

In the theological research landscape, various approaches can be noted that attempt to introduce the contemporary into dogmatics and ethics and mark it as relevant for systematic theological research: Public Theology, Everyday Theology, Empirical Theology, Experiential Theology, Ordinary Theology, Constructive Theology, Narrative ethics, and qualitative research in ethics. We tried to gather all these different approaches, to collect and coordinate the different answers of inductive approaches to challenged systematic theology.

Our workshop followed a problem-oriented approach: The questions outlined were discussed under different "labels" - coming from different perspectives and contexts worldwide. Our concern was not so much the definition of a certain approach and its demarcation, but rather to bring different problem descriptions into discussion: What are commonalities in the direction of questioning, epistemological interest and understanding of theology? What are the accents of the different approaches? In this way we came closer to the common questions and got into a fruitful exchange, which will be continued.



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Presentations:

Empirical Theology: lived theology (PD Dr. Sabrina Müller, Zurich)

Ordinary Theology (Prof. Dr. Jeff Astley, Durham)

Narrative Ethics (PD Dr. Katharina Peetz, Landau)

Inductive research in theology – **intermediate surveillances** (Prof. Dr. Andrea Bieler, Basel)

Evening Lecture: “Theology and the End of Doctrine” (Prof. Dr. Christine Helmer, Chicago)

Experiential Theology: liberation and pragmatist theology (Dr. Raúl E. Zegarra-Medina, Chicago/Lima)

Everyday Theology (Ass. Prof. Kristin Graff-Kallevåg, Oslo)

Constructive Theology (Dr. Henco Van Der Westhuizen, Bloemfontein)

Public Theology (Dr. Florian Höhne, Erlangen-Nürnberg)

Panel Discussion: Inductive research and interaction in theological disciplines (Dr. Megan Arndt, Heidelberg; Dr. Kinga Zeller, Kiel; Katharina Merian, Basel)

Further Participants: Dr. Matthew R. Robinson (Bonn), Lina Henze (Basel), Megan Bedford-Strohm (Chicago), Dr. Dylan Belton (Villanova), Lea Gröbel (Zürich), Marie Kamlah (Marburg), Dr. Elisabeth Maikranz (Heidelberg)