FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
RESEARCH PROGRAMS 2014-2018

The Faculty of Theology encompasses a wide variety of research areas with a range of research foci within the studies of religions. Through its breadth and specialization, the faculty has a unique profile and position within the area of Religious Studies and Theology in Sweden.

Research at our faculty contributes to increased knowledge and understanding of religions and perspectives on life in history and today – both in Swedish society and in a broader global context.

Research is carried out principally in the programs described below, although there are also projects, especially doctoral dissertations, that are not limited to a single research program. As a complement to the shorter research programs that follow, descriptions of each academic discipline and longer explanations of those disciplines’ research programs are also available.

History of Religion

Religion and Racism Without Races: The Case of Islamophobia
Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this program consists of six distinct projects that produce, through longitudinal studies, reliable data on anti-Muslim hate crimes in three major and three minor Swedish cities. The studies also produce critical knowledge of how Muslims have been presented and debated in Swedish TV news programs, in Swedish newspapers and in social media, examining anti-Muslim dimensions in liberal discourse and conducting a comparative study of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Through fieldwork, the program explores both radical anti-Muslim networks and the Muslim civil rights movement. The results, which are significant also to policy makers and the fostering of a civil society, will appear in academic publications and will also be made accessible through a digital archive.

The program will cooperate with scholars who explore anti-Semitism, antiromanism, Afrophobia, and homophobia. As a result of that cooperation, a Center for the Study of Racism may evolve. The empirical data produced by this research will provide a basis for a thorough review of our theoretical understanding of racism, asking In what sense is Islamophobia a type of racism? What analytical tools may be developed to unravel the mechanisms by which racism is rearticulated even in liberal democracies? What can the discipline of comparative religion contribute to shedding new light on the historical-discursive tradition of racism in its pre-biological and post-biological facets?

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Religion, Globalization and Social Change in India

The overall aim of the program is to describe and analyze two contemporary, globally dispersed Hindu trends that inspire rapid social changes currently taking place in Indian society. A second objective is to place those trends in a global context. One of the program's projects, led by Dr. Ferdinando Sardella, is Vaishnava devotion, or “bhakti,” and focuses on mobility, religious change, identity, new religious phenomena, secularism, and the resurgence of India of new religious movements that are establishing themselves among the Indian middle class. The second project is led by Professor Eva Hellman and examines the Hindutva movement, which
Organisations/VATnr: 202100-2932

Aims at creating a Hindu India. The central research question in the program's second project concerns the relationship between the Indian secular constitution and the various Hindu inspired constitutions drafted by the Hindutva movement. The program's research questions address, from a postcolonial perspective, issues related to globalization and social and religious change.

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Language, Gender and Power in Ancient Eastern Mediterranean Traditions

This program focuses on the interplay between language, ritual, gender and power in ancient cultures in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The research combines general philological methods with various theoretical and methodological models of interpretation. Iconographical studies also play a central role. The main research questions concern the creation of gender identities in Greek and Sumerian literature; the production of knowledge about antiquity in contemporary scholarly discourse; and ritual aspects in the use of ancient Egyptian funerary texts and images. The program consists of four particular projects: "Verbs, Nouns, Temporality and Typology: Categorizing and Narrating in History of Religion" studies how unwarranted stereotypes are created in the encounter with ancient knowledge conceptions. "Garments for Eternity" investigates 300 fragments of Egyptian mummy bandages with Book of the Dead inscriptions found at the Museum Gustavianum in Uppsala, aiming at a philological text-critical analysis of the spells and an interpretation of their ritual role in a funerary context. "Female Threats?" investigates aspects of space, gender, sexuality and power in a queer reading of Homer's Odyssey. Finally, The World of the Sumerian Mother Goddess: An Interpretation of Her Myths interprets the two Sumerian myths of ancient Mesopotamia where the mother goddess is one of the main actors.

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Psychology of Religion

Public Mental Health Promotion and Existential Meaning

The central aim of this project is to create a new research area for psychology of religion within the Swedish and Scandinavian contexts, an area linked to international developments in this field. The research is expected to provide new empirical studies in a variety of relevant clinical areas that can impact treatment practices and promote well-being and resilience strategies. The research also aims to contribute to the production of empirically tested theoretical models and to the development of strategies for mental health promotion at the societal/institutional levels.

Central research questions include: In what ways are cultural- and existential sources/information being used in clinical contexts? How can the types of existential information that patients actually experience and describe be classified in relation to existing existential typologies of meaning making? In what way(s) does existential information seem to contribute to protective and/or risk factors for mental health? How can the research results contribute to understanding the function(s) of existential information in relation to resilience and coping strategies? What recommendations can be suggested for implementation of the research findings in relation to public policy and in societal/institutional praxis to enhance public mental health promotion? Which societal institutions should have responsibility for the promotion of the existential dimension of public mental health?

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Immigration and Acculturation

This research area includes projects on distinct research populations. One large project focuses on Iraqi refugees and their resettlement in Sweden. The aims for this research are: to determine the role of religio-cultural resources and problems for mental health among Christian and
Muslim Iraqi refugees; to explore the role of religio-cultural processes practices of enculturation and acculturation processes among Iraqis; and, to contribute to method development for the inclusion of religio-cultural assessment in Swedish immigration research. Central research questions include: What characterizes the Iraqis’ enculturation and acculturation processes, both in adulthood and through earlier life phases in life? What characterizes the religio-cultural processes that assist or impair their mental health function?

A second project examines the Syrian refugee population — those who, due to the civil war in Syria, are in transit countries, such as Turkey, as well as those who have recently been granted asylum in Sweden. The aims are: to determine the daily life use of religio-cultural resources by Syrian immigrants and refugees; to explore the psychological conditions and well-being among Syrians; to assess perceptions and explanations of mental illness related to religio-cultural resources among the Syrians; and, to map changes in the networks related to immigration and mental illness and health. Central research questions are: What characterizes the adaptive responses (the identification of risk and protective factors) among Syrians in terms of religio-cultural resources and problems? Do any mental health and existential effects result from a lack of a functioning system of existential worldview orientation among the Syrian refugees, and if so, how do they describe and adapt to this situation?

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Sociology of Religion

Media as an Arena for Religious and Cultural Change

The relationship between modernization and secularization has been a core issue in Sociology of Religion. Ongoing societal changes and increasing religious and cultural diversity call for a more nuanced understanding of religious change. The aim of this program is to analyze the role of the media in the construction of religious values and identities. The program focuses on the dynamic between media texts and how those texts are used by different groups in society. Research questions explored are: How is religion represented, and through which topics, actors and arguments? How is the relationship between religion, culture and identity constructed? How do various media formats and genres affect this process? How does the presentation of religion in the media shape individuals’ constructions of meaning and identity? Methods used are quantitative content analysis, discourse analysis of media texts, and interviews with media producers and consumers.

Research is carried out through the project “The Resurgence of Religion?! A Study of Religion and Modernity in Sweden with the Daily Press as a Case Study.” By analyzing editorials and op-eds written 1975-2010, the research project will produce a study of religion as depicted in the Swedish press. A similar study of religion in the Swedish press between 1988, 1998 and 2008 is carried out in a Nordic comparative project (NOREL). Two doctoral projects are located within this program. The first one studies religion, gender and wellbeing in Swedish women’s magazines (Anneli Winell). The second project studies religious identity negotiation in online and offline arenas among LGBTQ Orthodox Jews (Oriol Poveda). The aforementioned projects are carried out within the interdisciplinary research program “The Impact of Religion: Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy.”

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Religion and Values in Young People’s Everyday Lives

This program approaches religious and social change from the perspective of young people in dialogue with Youth Studies. By emphasizing the role of religion in young people’s everyday lives, we analyze socialization, participation and meaning making in relation to institutions such as the family, peer groups, religious groups and the school system. We also consider the effects of globalization and interactive media on these socialization processes.
The main research question is: Under what circumstances does religion function as a resource, or as a limitation, for young people’s health, literacy and participation in society? This question is explored in relation to various social arenas relevant for young people’s lives: the home, the school, civil society and mass media. The methods used include quantitative surveys, interviews, field observations and document analysis.

This research is carried out in collaboration with the project “Religion and Human Rights,” which investigates attitudes toward human rights among youth from different religious traditions in over twenty-five countries. Another project concerns young people's experiences of religious education in state schools. Yet another project surveys the presence and meaning of religion in everyday life among young Swedes. The last mentioned project is linked to an interdisciplinary research network that includes researchers across several disciplines in the study of religion, such as Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Education, Political Science and Ethnology. The project “Teaching Religion in Late-Modern Sweden” studies how teachers of Religious Education (RE) in state schools deal with tensions inherent in the academic subject of RE in contemporary Sweden. All these projects are part of the interdisciplinary program on “The Impact of Religion.”

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Religious Actors in civil society

The increasing religious and cultural diversity in modern society suggests that research in the Sociology of Religion must broaden its scope from studying solely Christian churches and denominations to include other religions, such as Islam and Judaism, as well as new avenues for research. The overarching aim of this program is to analyze how religious organizations interact with and impact contemporary society at a time when those organizations increasingly function as organizations within civil society. At a macro level, the organizations’ role as guardians of traditions and overarching societal values of solidarity and care is a significant area of interest. At an intermediate level, the program focuses on relationships between faith-based organizations, on the one hand, and the state, other organizations and individuals, on the other hand. At a micro level, these organizations are studied from the perspective of the individual by exploring changing patterns of religious socialization and consumption.

Research is currently being carried out through two projects. The first focuses on religious agents in the public sphere as providers of welfare in Tanzania. The second project explores Islam in the public arena and the intersecting social, political, economic and discursive practices involved in establishing purpose-built mosques. Finally, projects are being initiated on religious groups’ contractual relationships with public authorities and on the work of faith-based organizations with marginalized young people. These projects are all carried out within the research program “The Impact of Religion: Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy.”

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Old Testament / Hebrew Bible Exegesis

Identity Construction in the Hebrew Bible

For over two thousand years, the texts in the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament) have contributed to the shaping of identities. The characters in the biblical stories have served as examples. In light of the biblical texts’ vast cultural and religious impacts, it is important to analyze how those texts construe identities and various types of relations in regard to gender, age, class, ethnicity, etc. Due to a growing interest in critical perspectives on power, such as in feminist and post-
colonial studies, research on identity construction holds a prominent position in current biblical scholarship.

This research program encompasses a variety of approaches on identity construction. A number of different methods are employed, especially rhetorical and ideological analysis. A wide array of topics can be studied, from gender roles in narratives to the construction of identities, such as “Israelite” and “Philistine,” in biblical history writing. Two projects within the program study perspectives on strangers or enemies in the biblical texts. How and why have these images of the “other(s)” been constructed? Another project, which is part of the emerging field of Childhood Studies, examines portrayals of children in wisdom and prophetic literature.

The interdisciplinary character of this research program opens up possibilities for cooperation with other academic disciplines and forums, such as New Testament Exegesis, Ancient History, History of Religion, and the seminar on Postcolonial Studies at Uppsala University.

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**Studies in Reception History**

Representing one of the most expansive fields within biblical research, reception studies aim to understand the plurality of meanings that readers have ascribed to the biblical texts. Research may focus on religious use and interpretation – especially, but not exclusively, within Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Further, Reception History may focus on the history of biblical scholarship, including political usage of its results. Another area within the field concerns Bible reception within the arts, such as literature, art and film. Reception History even encompasses the use of biblical motifs in popular culture – for example, in commercials, TV series and computer games. Finally, the biblical texts can be studied as cultural artifacts, for instance, in relation to legislation and political debate. Studies within the field are characterized by theoretical interest in the act of interpretation.

This research program examines a wide array of reception studies. In the last decade, there has been an emphasis at Uppsala University on the Bible and Literature. At present, the reception of the Bible in film is a prioritized area. One project studies the works of Lars von Trier and their virtual mythology. We welcome studies of Jewish reception, as well as comparative research involving studies of the Koran. At Uppsala University, the Forum for Jewish studies and the field of Islamic Theology and Philosophy offer valuable resources for such studies. We also welcome studies of biblical reception within Christian traditions and value, as potential cooperation partners, Systematic Theology, Church History, and World Christianity.

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**New Testament Exegesis**

*The Historical Jesus and the Early Jesus Movement*

Jesus was born, lived and died as a Jew. He directed his mission to his fellow Jews in Palestine, which at that time was part of the Roman Empire. The early Jesus movement likewise developed within a Jewish context but eventually spread beyond Palestine and became even more popular among Gentiles than it was among Jews. This research project explores the historical Jesus and the early Jesus movement based on a firm understanding of the Jewish society in the first century of the Common Era, a time when parts of that society were profoundly influenced by Hellenism and when Judaism was not uniform but strongly heterogeneous.

There are many different possible directions for research within this program, including studies of the NT in comparison with the Dead Sea Scrolls and/or other Second Temple Jewish literature. Researchers can also focus on a variety of issues — for example, interpretations of
Jewish laws, rituals and praxis (including purity praxis); common beliefs, such as understandings of God, angels and demons; and particular themes, including apocalypticism, eschatology and predestination. One current project analyzes various redeemer figures within Judaism and traces their influence on Luke’s Christology. Another project examines Paul’s views on sacrificial meat within the Hellenistic cultural context of the Jewish diaspora.

A solid understanding of historical Jesus research and the ancient Jewish society is a prerequisite for any work in this field. Scholars may use various methods and theories to analyze ancient texts within their cultural contexts. Based on various aspects of the Jewish-Roman society, research within this field of study can also focus on the historical Jesus, including his message and work as a popular healer. One project examines Jesus’ attitude and praxis with regard to purity laws. Another project studies modern historical Jesus research, based on theoretical insights from modern historiography. Using postcolonial theory on “hybridity,” another project examines the constructions of Western identities in historical Jesus scholarship during the last 120 years, especially in scholarship’s constrictions of a dichotomy between “East” and “West.” A possible direction for future study would be to examine the Jesus movement as a social phenomenon in comparison to other movements. Another project aims at comparing mechanisms for, and expressions of, identity formation and ritual praxis in the early Jesus movement with the Qumran movement.

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**Philological and Literary Studies of the New Testament Writings**

The study of philological and literary aspects of the NT writings is, in several respects, a central area of research within New Testament Exegesis: the discipline’s main focus is on the interpretation of the NT texts, and it is within the framework of language and usage of language that people’s views are shaped, codified and developed under the influence of experiences of various kinds. In recent decades, this area of research has undergone significant transformations through the development, for example, of text linguistics, rhetorical analysis, narrative criticism, hermeneutical reflection and translation theory.

Within this research program are found several projects with somewhat different focuses. One project examines expressions for “to believe” in earliest Christianity and what those expressions can teach us about conceptions of faith then. Another project is a comparative investigation of expressions for “Spirit” in the Pauline and Johannine writings. A third project studies the literary function of passages on baptism and death in Mark and Paul. A fourth project analyzes Jesus as an example in Luke, as indicated by that Gospel’s genre and markers within the text of Luke. Additionally, a new translation of Galatians and Luke is being prepared in cooperation with the Swedish Bible Society. A new grammar of NT Greek is also being written in connection with this research program.

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**Diversity and Developments in Christian Literature of the Second Century**

Traditionally, the two academic disciplines of "New Testament Exegesis" and "Patristics" (i.e., Late Ancient Christianity) have been kept separate, often for dogmatic reasons. But the notion that the year 100 C.E. should demarcate a boundary between the “apostolic age” and an emerging “catholic” church is anachronistic if one looks at the Jesus movements of the first and second centuries C.E.

This research program explores relationships between the earliest Christian writings (of which many are in the NT) and subsequent Christian literature. Questions about unity and diversity and about continuity and developments play a central role. Since the NT did not exist as an authoritative and closed canon of Scripture during the first centuries C.E., it is more accurate
historically to investigate all Christian literature in its entirety, which emerged from various Jesus movements and in relation to ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman literature.

Within this research program, work on a new commentary on the so-called Second Letter of Clement has begun. Additionally, a new Swedish translation of the Apostolic Fathers is being prepared in collaboration with the Swedish Bible Society. Another project examines how Heracleon, in the second century, and Origen of Alexandria, in the third century, interpreted the Gospel of John. Yet another project examines the fragments of Papias of Hierapolis for their reception in early Christianity as well as their relation to certain texts that later became part of the NT. All projects that focus on pre-Constantinian Christianity are welcome within this program.

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Church history

**Swedish Church History from the 18th Century to Present**

Our research about Swedish church history from the 18th century to present pursues a fuller understanding of the gradual break-up of church uniformity and Lutheran orthodoxy in the Church of Sweden. This entails two major areas of research. One concerns the Evangelical revivals, Free churches and migrant churches that came into existence during the last two centuries. The other major area deals with the relationship between the Swedish state-church organization and the surrounding society and state power.

The background of the break-up of church uniformity and Lutheran orthodoxy is the close relationship between church and society in the modern and early modern era. From the Protestant reformation until the late 18th century only one form of Christian faith and practice was publicly authorized and accepted, that is Lutheranism.

During the 18th century new ideas about tolerance gained entrance and support in Swedish society. In a longer term this led to changed legislation and a gradual loosening of the chords between church and state. The break-up of church uniformity meant a decisive change of mentality among individuals and groups. The result was a division of society in a spiritual and a worldly sphere. The progressive development of modernity encompassed a number of phenomena: individualism, demographic changes, urbanization, industrialism, diversification, secularism, and intensified international relations. German and Anglo-Saxon forms of Christian faith and practice influenced individuals and groups in Sweden. Associations and Christian movements came into being, Free church denominations were developed and migrant churches with different confessions were established. At AD 2000 the state-church status of the Church of Sweden was abolished. This meant the final culmination of a more than two centuries long demise of church uniformity.

Sources for research about this process are available in public and private archives.

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**Pastoral History**

The topics of Pastoral history as a perspective of Church history concerns local and regional conditions and expressions of Christian churches and denominations. The purpose is to gain a better understanding of the role of churches and denominations in the contexts they actually have met and influenced individuals and groups. The local pastoral work is analyzed and put into its historical context, which includes national and international conditions. Church history research has earlier often to a great extent dealt with national and regional developments, focusing on church leaders, decision-making bodies or major changes in church legislation or revival movements. The Pastoral history brings in a different perspective. The
major questions of this type of research are related to local conditions and pastoral practices and initiatives, which are put into a larger context. One important area of research concerns developments and changes in pastoral practices in local churches, dioceses, districts and parishes. The purpose then is to explain and better understand the history of churches through different ideas about pastoral work. The object of study is not only the publicly authorized and regulated pastoral work of churches, but can also include ideological movements, associations and persons which in their conflicts and cooperation have had a pastoral purpose.

Sources for this type of research are available in public and private archives. Private archives are many times indispensable in this type of historical research, especially when personal pastoral strategies and practices are focused.

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Ecclesiology

Implicit Ecclesiologies

This program connects with a series of renowned research projects in the discipline, including developments in theory and method. Implicit ecclesiologies are conceptions of "church" hidden in practices or texts that, although they have a decisive influence, are not discerned by, for example, a theologian or a denomination. Through various types of analyses, it is possible to make evident and describe such ecclesiologies. Research can thus be made on various sorts of practices and texts – dogmatic, theological and non-theological (e.g., political) texts. Objects of research also include worship practices, juridical or financial systems within churches, and even politically formulated strategies and goals. Implicit ecclesiologies can also be researched in cultural and societal contexts where perceptions of “church” not are formulated in expressly theological categories.

Over several years, there has taken place a comprehensive theoretical development in regard to the advance of operative ecclesiology, meta-ecclesiology, theories on ecclesiality, theories on implicit ecclesiology, etc. This research program Implicit Ecclesiologies gives a great possibility to make use of, and to develop, those insights in new fields of research.

The program aims to identify and analyze implicit ecclesiological perceptions and thereby to contribute to a broader and deeper understanding of what is construed as "church" in various cultural, social and political contexts.

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Ecclesiology in Communicative Processes

The purpose of this program is to analyze and understand the interplay and the conflict between liturgy and diakonia (Christian social practice) by means of modern communication theory. The program connects with a long tradition of studies (doctoral theses and research projects) of liturgy and diakonia as significant elements in Ecclesiology. Significant for this program is the concentration on liturgy and diakonia as two focal points in a communicative ecclesiological embodiment. Interaction with the Social Sciences is important in the program, since liturgy and diakonia form strong communicative processes not only within churches, but also in relations between church and a wider societal context. Liturgy and diakonia may be seen as both opposing and being stamped by power structures in society, structures that are based, for example, on gender, class and ethnicity. Diakonia might be embodied in engagement with current social and political questions, such as climate change or social injustices. At the same time, diakonia is dependent on the ritually embodied forms of communication in the liturgy (e.g. sacramental or homiletic). Liturgical expressions are shaped by a long historical tradition but also reach out to society today in interactive communicative processes.
World Christianity and Interreligious Studies

World Christianity

World Christianity, as it is studied in Uppsala, focuses on Christians in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania, and relations between Christians in these parts of the world and Europe and North America. The research perspectives are both diachronic and synchronic. Chronologically, we focus on the period from about 1500 CE. It is a priority to study concrete historical examples of Western mission in the world beyond Europe. Through empirically and theoretically rigorous studies, World Christianity Studies in Uppsala aims at documenting, analysing, and question Christian life and activities in different times and in different places. As researchers in Sweden, we have unique access to Swedish missionary archives, missionary publications in Swedish and Swedish missionaries’ experiences, memories and private collections. We therefore have a special responsibility in the international research community to catalogue, analyse and present this material so that it becomes accessible to a larger community of researchers. World Christianity Studies in Uppsala will continue this academic heritage and map out new areas of research in the field of Swedish mission. Religions spread mainly not by propaganda but through migration. Our time sees gigantic migrations, voluntary as well as forced. Among refugees and migrants from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia are a large number of Christians. Within Global Christianity Studies the study of Christian global mobility takes a privileged place.

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Interreligious Studies

Interreligious Studies in Uppsala is the study of how Christian individuals and groups relate to other religious groups. Our focus is on empirical, contextually grounded studies of Christians in relation to other religious groups. The main question is how Christians relate to religious diversity. The strategies to address diversity can be of intellectual and theological nature: how are Christian claims to exclusivity perceived in a society that is built on respect for diversity? It can also be about social and political strategies: how to survive as a church in a society where Christian missions are challenged or banned? A central area within Interreligious Studies is research about conversion and conversion processes. In a wider context, one may speak of “religious change”. Such a change may be in transition from one religion to another, but also in an intensified relation to one’s own religion or in leaving one’s religion without joining another. Research on religious change in Interreligious Studies is about this, but also about changes within Christian communities, such as when a church changes its character by choosing to develop in a charismatic direction.

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Ethics

Ethical Theory

This program investigates fundamental theoretical issues in the study of ethics. Among the most important questions is whether values can be construed as existing independently of human consciousness and practices. Another central problem is how moral judgments can be justified. Further, we study the interplay between theological and philosophical ethics, as well as the
relationship of ethical theory to different understandings of humanity and society. Several projects focus on the role of practical reason as compared with the role of theoretical reasoning.

Various questions of great significance for Christian Ethics are examined within this program. How are moral convictions related to an individual’s views of humanity and society, and how are those convictions connected to Christian traditions? Should a reasonable Christian ethic be formulated in agreement with a common human morality, or should that ethic seek to articulate some unique moral content within Christian traditions? Can Christian Ethics legitimately aspire for universal applicability in a contemporary pluralistic society?

We also endeavour to relate projects on ethical theory to recent developments in philosophical ethics. Our projects also interact with scholarship in Jewish Ethics and Islamic Ethics. One important issue is whether religious traditions give any particular contribution to value theory and theory of justification.

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**Political Ethics and Human Rights**

Theological Ethics in Uppsala focuses, in particular, on social and political ethics. For many years, ethicists in Uppsala have been conducting research on ideological critique, private property, views of humanity and morality within liberal and socialist traditions, theological foundations of human rights discourse, moral issues within Swedish debates on international developmental aid, and moral evaluation of international interventions in domestic conflicts. The meaning and substance of social justice is the central research question in social ethics and is of the highest priority within this research program. We study various theories of social justice and relate them to philosophical analyses of political ethics, as well as to different religions’ views of society and politics. Several projects study social ethical theories within Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

This research program also prioritizes the study of human rights. How should we interpret human dignity, and how can we best protect human rights? How are the legal, moral and political aspects of human rights related? Can the individualism of the traditional liberal human rights discourse be combined with postcolonial conceptions of liberation? Several research projects deal with these issues and seek to enrich Western understandings of human rights through insights from other cultures and religions.

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**Practical Ethics**

From politicians and others in society at large, there is a high demand for studies in practical ethics in Sweden and internationally. Ethicists in Uppsala conduct several important projects in practical ethics. What makes our research special is the ambition to relate practical issues to theoretical developments and methodological reflections. Practical ethics challenges ethical theory, while the ethical theory grounds the methodological stringency of our projects on practices.

Several projects are conducted within this area of research. They deal with environmental ethics and animal ethics, as well as biomedical ethics and sexual ethics. Research is also going on within economic ethics and ethics and literature. Those projects examine various ethical problems from both philosophical and theological points of view. How should a reasonable theory within global ethics be formulated? In what ways can literary fiction enrich an effective and advanced critique of power? What are the moral dimensions of global environmental crises? What are the most important explicit and implicit assumptions about human dignity within the Swedish healthcare system?
We are especially interested in how different religious and theological traditions can contribute to a further development of practical ethics.

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**Philosophy of Religion**

**Faith and Reason**

The purpose of this program is to study the relationship between various conceptions of truth, knowledge and rationality that are prominent within the sciences and within religious and secular worldviews. Attention is given both to the impact of science on people’s understandings of their own beliefs and worldviews and to their understandings of others’ religious beliefs and worldviews. Further, it is asked what impact religious and secular worldviews have on science.

Key questions within the program are: How are faith and reason related to each other? Is faith a condition for knowledge, or is it something radically different from to knowledge? Are there different forms of knowledge? Or, as scientism claims, does science set the limits for what we can know? Could it even be the case that what is true – not just what we believe is true – depends on a person’s context, culture or worldview? What might happen to the different claims made within science and religion if we were to see not only truth but also knowledge as socially constructed? Would such a relativistic perspective imply that we must accept that even science can be shaped by atheistic or religious (e.g., Christian or Muslim) worldviews? Should science then be “worldview-customized,” or should science be regarded as neutral with respect to the various worldviews that set people apart?

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**Religions and Worldviews in a Pluralistic Age**

The objective of this program is to study philosophical problems that result from today’s diversity of religious and secular worldviews. These problems can be understood, analyzed and solved from the perspectives of individuals, of institutions and of society as a whole. In private and public contexts, the number of encounters between secular and religious worldviews has increased significantly; that increased interaction stems from a number of social developments, such as globalization, secularization and increased immigration. In addition, a growing number of people claim that secular societies, where religion is relegated entirely to the private sphere, are incapable of handling the great challenges that confront humanity today. This perceived lacuna in what a secular society can offer to solve humanity’s existential problems has led to a renewed interest in the contributions that religious traditions can make to public issues and debates.

Key questions within the program are: What kind of attitudes could we adopt toward people of other faiths and worldviews? Could both religious and secular worldviews play a constructive role in public debate, and to what extent may public debate have a constructive influence on different worldviews? Is it possible to develop an understanding of “freedom of religion” that takes into account both the need to respect minority groups and the need to protect the human rights of individuals within those groups?

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**Worldviews and the Creation of Meaning in Transition**

Today in the Western world, we witness an increasing reliance on subjectivity in the formation and the defense of beliefs and worldviews. This trend fosters a trend toward privatization and emotionalization within both religious and secular worldviews. The purpose of this program is to
study the implications of this trend for the creation of meaning, for understanding established
religious traditions and secular worldviews, and for the academic study of religion. Particular
attention is paid to the role that emotions can play in the creation of existential meaning, to how
new conceptions of God and the human condition are shaped and justified, and to the
implications of the growing interest in spirituality.

Key questions within the program are: Which conceptions of God and humankind are prominent
today, and how are those conceptions related to established theological doctrines? How can we
understand philosophically and articulate the tension between personal conceptions of God and
those conceptions that hold that God is a reality beyond human experience or an impersonal
life-force within every human being? What characterizes “spirituality,” and how can it be studied
from a scientific point of view? In what way does an appeal to emotion challenge established
theories of rationality and established practices of justification of one’s position within the
philosophy of religion? How does an increased reliance on subjectivity influence public debates
about religious beliefs and worldviews?

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Systematic Theology and Studies in Worldviews

Tradition, Identity and Relevance

Nowadays in the Swedish post-Christian society, Christian churches and communities display a
rising interest in their confessional identity. One example is the Roman Catholic Church and its
debate about the extent to which the decisions of the Second Vatican Council should be
implemented (or rescinded). Of course, questions about the interplay between tradition and
renewal are not limited to the Roman Catholic tradition. The (Lutheran) Church of Sweden’s
transition from being a state church to having a less encompassing relationship to the state has
contributed to a critical internal wrestling with that church’s theological and ecclesiological
heritage. The challenges that face the Church of Sweden in a post-Christian society have
generated a marked interest in, and a need for, work on the relationship between traditional
ecclesial identity and the church’s relevance today within society as a whole. Comparable
processes can also be seen in many other Christian denominations.

This research program has strong ties to both Historical Theology and contemporary Christian
reflection on theological traditions. The purpose is to analyse, criticise and contribute
constructively to the general debate about the relationship between the identities of traditions
and those traditions’ contemporary relevance. The program focuses on the history of Christian
doctrine in relation to the contemporary situation and aims to be constructive and of
contemporary relevance, although a critical analysis of contemporary Christian doctrinal
debates is naturally to be built on a thorough historical investigation of the material in question.

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World Views and the Post-Secular Situation

In certain respects, secularization, understood as the political, cultural, social and individual
marginalization of religion, has been succeeded by a new significance and public visibility of
religious phenomena. Five interesting characteristics of such a post-secular society can be
discerned: (a) an increasing pluralism of worldviews, (b) various expressions of New Age
religion, (c) a new visibility of traditional religion, (d) increased opportunities for choosing among
competing worldviews, and (e) the perception of “fragilization” – that is, the result of people
becoming more prone to change their beliefs, so that the new worldviews come to be embraced
more tentatively and with greater uncertainty.
For the discipline of Systematic Theology and the Study of Worldviews, these developments create a need for theories and methods for examining a greater variety in degrees of certainty. With an increased appreciation for people’s varying levels of confidence in their worldviews, we thereby abandon the previously dominating notion that faiths and worldviews consist of firm ideas and manageable systems of thought, to which the individual relates in the form of free and autonomous acceptances or rejections.

Within this research program, theoretical and methodological work is performed in close connection to postmodern and post-secular theory. Special attention is directed to humanity’s existential questions, situations, needs and ideas in light of the social and cultural contexts where those phenomena are expressed.

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**Existential Questions and Artistic Expressions**

Artistic expressions have a particular capacity to name and to help sublimate theoretical problems and existential questions. That capacity could be due do the links between artistic expression and life, fiction and reality, art and everyday life, and devotion and reason. Art can be seen as the negation of the world of objects and sensory perception, but it can also forge inroads to worlds that are alive and rich in sensations. Additionally, artistic expressions, such as poetry, music and film, can give rise to critical voices and challenge habitual patterns of thought. Art is often experienced as true to life, perhaps because artistic expressions remind us of ourselves – that we, too, are not particularly systematic or definable. As Jacques Derrida expresses it through his notion “hauntology,” which describes the indefinable ontology of human being, human life is “haunted” and is always part of what has happened previously, of the Other, of the future, and of death.

This research program focuses on questions of aesthetics in relation to theology and to theology’s areas of debate. The research is carried out through theoretical work on methods and approaches and also through interpreting various artistic expressions – above all, in literature, the visual arts, and film. With the goal of contributing constructively to theological debates, we also engage in dialogue with experimental thinkers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Simone de Beauvoir and Hélène Cixous.

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**Theology and Continental Philosophy**

Continental Philosophy is characterized by questions about interpretation, understanding, human existence, commitment and embodiment. It is often guided by a critique of reason or society. The concept Continental Philosophy embodies a non-polemical demarcation from analytical philosophy (including analytical Philosophy of Religion).

Many modern Christian theologians have been highly influenced by German and French philosophy from the 19th and 20th centuries. More recently, various continental philosophers have approached theological questions in new ways. This trend has become an important area of debate among theologians. Both these circumstances motivate a research program anchored in Continental Philosophy, a program that is performed through studies of relevant concepts, traditions, and thinkers, such as Theodor W. Adorno, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, Michel Henry, Søren Kierkegaard, Max Weber and Slavoj Zizek.

An important question in this research program concerns different expressions of a dialectic between the forces of secularization, on the one hand, and the religious cultures that historically have formed society, on the other hand. Continental philosophical programs, such as hermeneutics, phenomenology, poststructuralism and critical theory, provide Systematic
Theology with important tools for interpreting the interplay between theological traditions, established worldviews, and social transformations. One area investigated is the potential substantial relationships between dominating theological traditions and those secular worldviews that, whether implicitly or explicitly, deny the existence of the Divine (that is, different forms of atheism).

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Islamic theology and Philosophy

Research in Islamic theology and philosophy at Uppsala University is at its beginning. Research in this field covers a broad area that includes the study of Islamic world-views, philosophical ideas, theological interpretations and ideologies that have influenced the Muslim world of ideas. Fundamental for this field is theological traditions and philosophical perceptions developed in the tension between different orientations within Islam. This concerns both the Sunni and Shia traditions of interpretation as various law schools in the respective direction. These include, for example, such theological interpretations that have opened for the emergence of various directions in political Islam.

Another area is the perceptions shaped by the interaction between Islamic cultures and other cultures and intellectual traditions. The latter concerns specifically the perceptions of Muslim thinkers who have developed new interpretative traditions through their contacts with other cultures' intellectual heritage during premorden age as well as early modern and modern time. One such area is, for example, discussions of the right centred tradition of interpretation which puts human rights at the centre. An interpretative model that is critical of a traditional duty centred approach and look at faith and religiosity as a human right, where the individual's faith or lack of faith becomes irrelevant factors in terms of civil rights.

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