

7 Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I will first offer a brief review of the main line of thought of the body chapters (2–6) of this dissertation. Second, I will take up the case from chapters 4–6 for the category of ‘Christians’ as the key concept for research on Christians at work and set it in the broader conceptual context of relevant research. Based on the case for ‘Christians’ as a basic category, I offer, third, a conclusion in the form of some conceptual implications, findings, and clarifications regarding five main terms that feature prominently in research relevant to studying Christians at work, that is, faith, spirituality, religion, ethics, and tradition.

These are not final but concluding remarks in that I seek to bring to bear my endeavors thus far on the terminological–conceptual challenges of theological and social scientific research relevant to the study of Christians at work. However, the remarks are not final in any sense as far as the terminology is concerned, since I will advocate an approach to the study of Christians at work which takes the actual embodied existence of Christians seriously and allows it to constantly and dynamically inform any given terminology.

7.1 Recapitulation

Let me recapitulate the main line of thought in the present dissertation so far.¹ I have addressed the study of Christians at work by asking how Christians live as Christians in contemporary work settings (in Western contexts), and how Christian existence is embodied at work. To engage with these questions, I have employed three different types of data (or voices), consisting of, first, two bodies of relevant extant research (fsw and theological approaches to work settings), second, empirical data on Christian managers and, third, a diverse set of literature to explore and accentuate the embodied and bodily character of Christian existence.

To orient the review of extant research, I have used the following six questions and discussed them in the course of chapters 2 to 5:

1 The following passage is not congruent with, but necessarily overlaps with the overview given in 1.5. While 1.5 provides an outlook, the present section offers a retrospective recapitulation as preparation for some concluding remarks regarding terms and concepts used in the study of Christians at work.

- 1) How are fsw constructs defined in the literature? (chapter 2)
- 2) How is fsw related to and situated in theoretical contexts in terms of academic disciplines and discourses, important thinkers and methodological traditions and approaches? (chapter 2)
- 3) How can fsw as a research area be presented from an overview perspective, and how can the research area be structured? (chapter 3)
- 4) What theory building efforts have been undertaken, and what aspects of a theoretical analysis of fsw are addressed? (chapter 3)
- 5) In what way does fsw research contribute to the study of Christians in contemporary workplaces? (chapter 4)
- 6) What can theological approaches to work contexts contribute to the study of Christians at work? (chapter 5)

Chapter 2 provides an overview of fsw in theoretical contexts and of definitions of fsw key terms and constructs. I have identified three main questions from current fsw research (see 2.1.1, 2.2.5): 1) What is fsw?² 2) How are spirituality (or religion, or faith) and work related? 3) How can spirituality (or religion, or faith) be integrated at work? With regard to these questions and the definitions of fsw terms, I have identified in extant research the two problem areas of, first, the vagueness, abstractness, and confusion that comes with these terms and, second, of the relation of fsw terms to the term Christian/s. In particular, even though faith, spirituality, and religion (at work) are the main terms used in fsw research that can (but do not have to) refer to what is at stake with regard to the existence of Christians at work (their faith, spirituality, or religion), these terms, as defined in fsw research, remain not only vague in general terms, but in particular with regard to the study of Christians at work since the relationship of fsw terms to the terms ‘Christian’ and ‘Christians’ remains unclear.

In chapter 3, I have offered an overview of the theoretical contours and contents of current fsw research focusing on the theory of spiritual practice, different levels of analysis of fsw, the notions of leadership, management, and entrepreneurship in the light of fsw, and ways of assessing fsw. I have shown how parts of the vagueness–abstractness–confusion problems can be remedied by drawing upon existing fsw theory. However, some vagueness of general fsw terminology remains, and the relationship of fsw terms to the terms Christian and Christians remains unclear as well. In addition, I have described the use of workplace-related concepts (such as management, work, business, leadership, etc.) as an additional termin-

2 More precisely, what is spirituality (or religion, or faith) at work?

ological challenge in fsw research. Subsequently, I have argued that, while the terms faith, spirituality, and religion at work must remain somewhat vague if approached from a general theoretical perspective, a possible way out of this terminological impasse is offered by the term Christian(s). In particular, I have suggested that from the basis of a clarification of the term Christian(s), the notions of faith, spirituality, and religion can be situated and clarified, not in general, but *in their relationship* to the study of Christians at work.

In chapter 4, I have sketched the roles that tradition plays with regard to fsw research and described how in fsw research Christians are mainly conceptualized as members of a tradition (or of a group of related traditions) where membership seems to be marked by the adoption of particular beliefs and practices. Then, I have considered the particular relationship between Christians and tradition from a sociological perspective, as well as from a Christian perspective which draws on traditional sources. Sociologically, Christians can be described as being localized and localizing themselves at the embodied intersection of worldly and other-worldly realities. I have also looked at how, with reference to Acts 11, the constituting feature of Christians can be described as an existential experience where they are localized and localize themselves with regard to Jesus Christ. I have argued that these different sources all point to an existential and existentially localizing event and experience that is, in a sense, more central to an appropriate understanding of Christians than certain beliefs and practices. The centrality of this existential element, which potentially disrupts and transcends tradition, indicates the dialectic relationship between Christians and tradition. The consideration of the dialectic relationship between Christians and tradition makes it clear that a simplistic and linear construal of Christians as members of a particular tradition marked by certain beliefs and practices is deficient. Subsequently, I have outlined how these more existential aspects of being a Christian are addressed in extant accounts of Christian spirituality at work. This research indicates the role of the existential and existentially disruptive experience of participating in Jesus Christ for the formation of a Christian mode of existence in present-day work settings.

In chapter 5, I have addressed theological approaches to contemporary workplaces. Here, after introducing the question of a theological neglect of present-day work settings and common entry concepts, I have discussed a selection of accounts that offer theological engagement with current work settings. While some accounts explicitly consider the existence of Christians in work contexts, others display what I have termed the 'blindness' and 'lameness' problems of theological approaches to the workplace. In terms

of ‘blindness’, some theological approaches address or propose Christian theological perspectives on work and workplace-related issues, but tend to ignore Christian existence as the actual existential location in which a Christian perspective on work contexts is necessarily embedded. The ‘lameness’ problem characterizes a theological approach which does consider Christian existence but does not address in particular how a Christian mode of existence may ‘walk’ or be embodied in contemporary work contexts. Theological approaches that do explicitly consider the existence of Christians in present-day work settings indicate the direction for the cure of such theological blindness and lameness.

Taking note of the fact that I explored theological *contributions* to the study of Christians at work, this seems to be a rather negative assessment of the role of theology in the study of Christians at work, at first sight. And it is true that I think that some of the theological approaches to contemporary workplaces carry unnecessary baggage (I do not know why), which hinders the study of Christians at work. However, I also wanted to demonstrate that theology has more to offer than unnecessary baggage. In 5.3.6 and 5.5., I employ the notion of ‘Christians’ as an alternative theological ‘entry concept’ to work settings. In particular, I have drawn upon C.S. Lewis’s understanding of Christian living, David Horrell’s work on the history of the label ‘Christians’, Colin Miller’s work on Paul’s theological ethics, and upon Anthony Kelly’s work on the expanding incarnation to sketch how the concept of Christians can open up a space to bring to bear various key theological, Christological, pneumatological, ecclesiological, anthropological, and ethical aspects upon the question of how people live their lives (at work and elsewhere).

In chapter 6, I have sketched the formation of the Christian body at work. The notion of the ‘Christian body’ at work takes up the Christian identification of the many bodies of those who live as Christians with the one body of Jesus Christ. I have further developed how the terminological–conceptual challenges of fsw research with regard to the study of Christians at work (chapters 2–4), as well as the ‘blindness and lameness’ challenges of theological approaches (chapter 5), can be remedied by focusing on the term ‘Christians’ and by recovering its existential aspects. I have argued for employing the notion of ‘being a Christian’ or Christian existence as key to the study of Christians at work. In particular, I have built on the framing practices of Christian managers and used an empirical analysis of scenes of Christian existence embodied at work to sketch the dynamics (‘distancing’, ‘connecting’, and ‘investing’) of Christian living in present-day work settings. In addition, I have discussed this empirically informed account of

Christian existence at work on a broader theoretical level, by using two major theoretical accounts as the conceptual background: Bourdieu’s habitus and Viktor Frankl’s meaning in life, as well as some extant fsw and theological research to flesh out various existential aspects with regard to the study of Christians at work. The comparison between a Christian mode of existence and Bourdieu’s habitus underlines the existential aspects of the notion of ‘Christians’. The juxtaposition between Frankl’s meaning in life and Christian existence accentuates how Christians realize and embody their being in Christ in particular situations.

In sum, the chapter offers a conceptual picture of the dynamic formation of the Christian body at work and indicates how the concept of ‘Christians’ may serve as a conceptual meeting point for crucial theological, Christological, pneumatological, ecclesiological, sociological–anthropological, ethical, and managerial–organizational considerations with regard to work contexts.

In the following section, I will introduce the three main terminological–conceptual conclusions of this study and take up the case for employing the notion of ‘Christians’ as a basic category. This will then serve as the basis for my outlining of some orientations with regard to other key terms used in research relevant to studying Christians at work in section 7.3.

7.2 The basic category of ‘Christians’

The main terminological–conceptual conclusions are:

- 1) I propose the notion of ‘Christians’ and the related notions of ‘being a Christian’, ‘Christian existence’, and ‘Christian living’ as the basic concepts for research on Christians in contemporary workplaces (what I call ‘the study of Christians at work’).
- 2) If terms like faith, spirituality, religion, ethics, and tradition are employed in the study of Christians at work, it is necessary to clarify what these terms mean with regard to Christians.
- 3) Combined notions such as ‘Christian faith’, ‘Christian spirituality’, ‘Christian religion’, ‘Christian ethics’, or ‘Christian tradition’ are potentially *misleading* in the context of relevant contemporary discourses. They should be employed with caution in the study of Christians at work.

That is, it usually has to be clarified what the two combined terms mean individually, as well as in relation to each other.³

To flesh out these three conclusions concerning the terminological–conceptual landscape of the study of Christians at work, I will again draw on the three different types of data or voices already mentioned.⁴ The case has been developed and substantiated in chapters 4 to 6. First, I will now locate it within the problem of the conceptual landscape of relevant research, more specifically within the context of different *types* of concept employed in relevant research (1). Second, I will return to the question of the substance of the term with a view to different academic disciplines and perspectives (2).

1) Conclusion 1, that the notion of ‘Christians’ and the related notions of ‘being a Christian’, ‘Christian existence’, and ‘Christian living’ should be employed as the basic concepts for research on Christians in contemporary workplaces, can be restated in the following way. Research on Christians should not so much focus on exploring concepts or ‘*things*’, such as faith, spirituality, or religion, but *people*, that is, Christians.

3 The need for clarification is not only given in the case of explicit uses of terms like ‘Christian religion’, but also and probably even more so when the category ‘Christian’ is implicitly understood as a ‘religious’ category. See, for example, McGhee (2019): He first discusses spirituality at work and then, when turning to the question of what Christian spirituality at work is, immediately begins to discuss the relationship between ‘spirituality’ and ‘religion’ with reference to ‘institutional religion’ and ‘tradition-orientated religion’ without saying a word about the relationship between the categories ‘Christian’ and ‘religion’. See also Buszka and Ewest (2020:63), who state that “The title of this book, *Integrating Christian Faith and Work: Individual, Occupational and Organizational Influences and Strategies*, includes the term faith and also refers to religion in its mention of Christianity. The term spirituality is not stated, but implied as many people would agree that, for them, spirituality is a part of faith and religion”. This statement is remarkable in that it assumes that as soon as you use the word ‘Christian’, you (automatically?) refer to ‘religion’. They move on to say that the term ‘faith’ “allows us to include both the Christian *religion* and the *spirituality* of the Christian faith within our discussion” (2020:64). Then, they define the terms religion, spirituality, and faith in general and with regard to work, but not with regard to ‘Christians’. In this and the next section, I will propose a different route: I will argue that terms like faith, spirituality, and religion can only be understood with regard to Christians at work if the meaning of the term ‘Christians’ is clarified and taken into account when employing such terms.

4 These are, first, the two main bodies of extant research (as presented in chapters 2–5), second, empirical data from the study of Christian managers (as presented in chapter 6) and, third, a conglomerate of literature which addresses the bodily and existential character of Christian living. For a more detailed description of these three types of data (or voices), see sections 1.2–1.4.

Now, one might say that the notion of ‘Christians’ is also a concept, and that research cannot avoid concepts and just study people instead. Concepts are indispensable for research in that they serve to determine what or who is studied. And that is true. Nevertheless, the emphasis called for in the above conclusion is crucial. While all of the above terms are ‘concepts’, they represent very different kinds or *types* of concept. Simply put, ‘Christians’ is a ‘people-concept’, while faith, spirituality, and religion are ‘thing-concepts’.

To understand this differentiation better, it might be helpful to look at the terminological landscape and the different types of concept that are used with regard to research relevant for the study of Christians at work. First, there are concepts employed with a theological emphasis, like creation, fall, redemption, or justification (e.g. Daniels et al. 2012, Honecker 1995). These are theological concepts or concepts with a theological emphasis because they describe something related to God or to God’s work (and how this relates to contemporary workplaces), or in the case of the ‘fall’, a basic condition concerning the relationship between God and human beings, which is relevant for work contexts.

Concepts of the second type include a stronger theological–anthropological focus and concern the God-given role of humans at work. These are concepts like stewardship, vocation, calling, or co-creation (e.g. Diddams et al. 2005, McCann & Brownsberger 2007, Simmons 2016, Werner 2008, see also section 5.2.). These concepts have a mediating function and are located at the intersection between the theological and anthropological levels, or between God’s work and human actions or roles. For example, the concept of calling refers to the notion that God calls someone to do certain work.⁵

Concepts of a third type can be described as anthropological or sociological with regard to how they are employed in relevant research. These are concepts such as faith, spirituality, religion, tradition, ethics, or morality. In fsw research, they seem to be mostly (but not exclusively, see section 2.2) attributed to human individuals or groups, and denote the faith, spirituality, or religion of person or group XY.

5 The differentiation between type 1 and 2 is not always strict, but it can be a matter of different degrees of emphasis. I have mainly allocated concepts to type 1, where God is usually considered the main agent, while in type 2 concepts, there is more of a combination of Godly and human action. However, depending on one’s interpretation of a concept, the allocation in the typology might differ. For example, in the case of justification, if it is primarily considered to be something that God does, it would be a type 1 concept. However, if one ascribes human action a key role in justification alongside God’s action (as Paul does according to Miller 2014:96f), it could also be considered a type 2 concept.

It is to be noted that the employment of concepts of the third type *does* something with regard to the first- and second-type concepts. First- and second-type concepts appear in a different light, so to speak, as soon as a third-type concept enters the scene. In particular, third-type concepts have an explicative, anthropologically descriptive and framing function with regard to the concepts of types one and two. For example, the concept of redemption per se refers to God's action with regard to the created world. If it is framed as part of someone's faith, spirituality, or religion, this concept becomes a *belief*.⁶ The significance of this shift can hardly be overstated. First, the concept referred to the relationship between God and creation *as a reality*. Afterwards, it becomes part of the ideological content of, say, one's faith. In other words, it becomes something that is 'just in the heads' of some people who, for example, have a particular faith. While, per se, the notion of redemption could also be used as an academic concept to explore contemporary workplaces (see e.g. Daniels et al.2012) and thus as a lens to view reality, if subsumed as part of the faith or religion of XY, it becomes a concept denoting a certain view or opinion held by XY.⁷ The reality it refers to, then, is no longer the reality the concept denotes per se, but that of someone holding a certain view. In this way, current uses of third-type concepts have a tendency to transfer and dissolve the theological substance of first- and second-type concepts or to reframe and reduce theological concepts anthropologically or sociologically.

In principle, a term like faith does not have to be used in such a theological reductionist way. It can also be used in a way closer to the use of second-type concepts above. It could then refer to something like a person who has faith or trust in God. In this way, theological awareness would be maintained. However, that is not how the term is usually used in the fsw literature discussed in this dissertation. In a sense, what Cantrell (2015:24) proposes (see also 4.1.2), drawing upon Marsden (1997:52), is an attempt to connect third-type concepts with first- and second-type concepts in a way

6 For an example, see 5.3.3 on Honecker's use of the concept of justification. Even though justification is a theological concept, he actually seems to employ the concept not on a theological but on a sociological–anthropological level. In other words, he seems to focus not so much on implications of justification for work, but on implications of the fact that people hold a belief in justification for their attitude to work.

7 Interestingly, it seems that Daniels and colleagues (2000) work with a reversed order based on a similar logic by employing 'worldview' as the basic concept with which to differentiate between different kinds of spirituality. The concept seems to be similar to 'beliefs' in its function of denoting convictions people hold, but broader in its content (it can refer to, say, a set of beliefs).

that avoids reductionism and preserves the original meaning of first- and second-type concepts. In particular, he argues that scholars should be free to investigate issues in the form of the question “If so and so religious belief were true, how would it change the way we look *at the subject at hand*?” (Marsden 1997:52, my emphasis). In other words, just because theological concepts can be described or framed as beliefs certain people hold, this does not mean that we cannot address the reality that theological concepts refer to. However, with regard to research relevant to the study of Christians at work, these third-type concepts tend to become the basic categories on which all other aspects are to be understood and framed (for examples of how spirituality or faith serve as basic concepts of comprehensive frameworks of fsw, see 3.2.2).⁸

If these concepts of the third type are used as basic concepts, or as the basis of comprehensive conceptual frameworks, there are two other types of concept that are employed in relevant research that refer to particular dimensions or aspects of these basic concepts. A fourth type refers to concepts and terms that are used as *functional* subcategories of the basic concepts, such as experience, practice, ideology, beliefs, et cetera, as subcategories of, say, spirituality.⁹ A fifth type refers to concepts that seem to be used more as *substantial* subcategories of one of the basic categories, for example concepts like meaning, connectedness, or innerness as aspects or dimensions of spirituality.

So it seems crucial to be aware of the fact that there are very different types of concept at work in relevant research. My first conclusion regarding apt terminology for research concerned with Christians in contemporary work is that the concept of ‘Christians’ should replace concepts like faith, spirituality, or religion *as the basic concept*. In contrast to the latter, which are ‘thing-concepts’, the former is a ‘people-concept’. It is an excellent concept that provides a conceptual meeting point for key managerial–organizational¹⁰, sociological–anthropological, and theological aspects relevant to the study of Christians at work and thus avoids reductionist tendencies that

8 I think that broader (not specifically work-related) frameworks based on such notions as religiosity (see e.g. Huber 2009) are prone to similar reductionism.

9 One could also add here the ‘moral norms’ on which theological research sometimes focuses (see 5.3.).

10 An interesting source to draw upon in pursuing this avenue further could be Michael Black’s (2008) “Theology of the corporation. Sources and history of the corporate relation in Christian tradition”. See also my interpretation of Michael Black’s understanding of (contemporary) corporate life as a call to live Christianly (see 5.4.3, 5.5 and 6.2.1); on Black’s theology of the corporation, see also 2.2.4, 3.1.2, 3.2.3, and 4.1.1).

usages of other concepts as basic concepts are prone to. Sociologically, it denotes people as Christians, as being allegiant to or belonging to Jesus Christ. With regard to management and organizations, it denotes people who dialectically participate in the dynamics of distancing and investing. Theologically, it is non-reductionist but opens up a space in which it is possible to bring together the theological, Christological, pneumatological, ecclesiological, anthropological, ethical, and practical aspects relevant for how people live their lives. While employment of the notion of ‘Christians’ opens up a conceptual space, it also provides some conceptual boundaries to what meaningfully falls under the category ‘Christian/s’. In the following, I will therefore look again at the semantic field of the notion of Christians.

2) Until now, it has become obvious that studying Christians at work displays *a certain resistance to comprehensive conceptual analysis* with the use of the concepts of faith, spirituality, religion, ethics, and tradition. Etymologically and historically, the term ‘Christians’ refers to *people* whose existence is characterized by their *allegiance* or *belonging to Jesus Christ*. This characteristic is, with regard to the historical origins and to the existential aspects of the term, the primary criterion for applying the label Christian(s). While interpretations or evaluations of the content of this criterion may differ, for example from different theological or sociological perspectives, the criterion itself has an objective quality, that is, it entails socio-existential normativity, irrespective of one’s standpoint.¹¹ In other words, ‘Christians’ is not an arbitrary concept, even though the boundaries for its proper use are sometimes violated.

If the substantial–existential connotations become lost in certain usages, the term is then used in a merely nominal way. The two differently connoted usages of the term Christian(s), substantial–existential and nominal, correspond, in the light of our empirical analysis,¹² to two modes of being a Christian, that is, either nominally or existentially. While the nominal *usage*

11 On the particular normativity of the term, see also 4.4., 5.2, 5.3.6. Note also that the term was not first used for self-designation but by ‘outsiders’.

12 The nominal–existential framework of being Christian represents more than a practitioner perspective, even though it is informed, in part, by practitioner perspectives. With regard to our empirical study, it is a systematization of biographical practitioner accounts which resonates with current academic accounts of Christian existence at work (see 4.3), as well as with a historical and etymological analysis of the label Christian(s) (see 4.2, 5.3 and 6.1). On the theoretical status of the empirically grounded theoretical sketch, see the introduction to chapter 6. On the role of practitioner perspectives in the study of Christians at work, see 1.4.

of the term is empty in terms of existential Christian content, substance, or meaning, so too is the nominal *mode of being* a Christian in terms of substance, that is, it refers to a mode of being a Christian merely on paper.

Now, the existential Christian condition of allegiance or belonging to Christ may be related to various forms of beliefs, practices, and experiences, which may or may not be categorized with reference to such concepts as faith, religion, spirituality, ethics, or tradition. However, in the light of the existential aspects of the label Christian(s), the moment such an analysis no longer takes into account the primary Christian criterion of being in a state of belonging to Christ, the term 'Christian' is used, in a sense, in a pornographic way (by displaying an outer form of something without its essence).¹³ However, one might say that because of its focus on Jesus Christ, the above description of the normative criterion for proper application of the term 'Christians' reflects merely an 'inner Christian' or theological ('insider') understanding of the term, while, say, a 'secular' sociological ('outsider') perspective cannot take account of the reality of Christ that Christians refer to. Therefore, one might say they ('non-Christians', 'outsiders', or 'ideologically neutral' academics) have to describe Christians in terms of certain beliefs and practices without reference to Christ. But this would be a strange argument. The term 'Christians' denotes 'followers of Christ', irrespective of whether those using the term 'believe in Jesus' and irrespective of their opinion, evaluation, or interpretation of Jesus Christ or of those who belong to him. The term 'mountaineer' relates to mountains and mountain climbing regardless of my opinion, evaluation, or interpretation of mountains or of those who practice mountain climbing and irrespective of whether I am a mountaineer or not.¹⁴

13 See also 4.4.

14 See also the extensive discussion of questions of definitions of Christians and Christianity in the anthropology of Christianity (for an overview, see Robbins 2014; and Bialecki, Haynes & Robbins 2008; on definitions of 'a Christian', 'Christians', or 'Christianity', see also Bialecki 2012, Bräunlein 2013:252–259, Frankiel 2003, Garriot & O'Neill 2008, Hann 2007, McDougall 2009, Robbins 2003). Robbins (2014:166) notes that most (but not all) anthropological work on Christians has been based on people who self-identify as Christians and in some sense also as committed Christians. He also notes that anthropological work has been criticized for being idealist and culturalist in its understanding of Christianity (Robbins 2014:162), treating Christianity as "something like a culture" (2014:62), emphasizing Christian cosmological conceptions and values rather than, for example, institutions. As an alternative to an idealist emphasis, Robbins (2014:163) points to a study that focuses on 'schism' as a key process of Christian group formation (Handman 2014), and to a study that identifies the capacity of Christianity to plant "enduring institutional structures operating at local, regional and international

In this section, I have further developed my case for the concept of ‘Christians’ as a basic concept for studying Christians at work by indicating how it can be situated in a conceptual landscape and by arguing that the concept opens up a crucial conceptual space but also provides relatively specific conceptual boundaries. On the basis of the notion of ‘Christians’¹⁵, the main terms used in extant research relevant to the study of Christians at work (such as faith, spirituality, religion, ethics, and tradition) can now be located, evaluated, and clarified, not ‘in general’ but as far as the study of Christians is concerned.

levels” (Barker 2014:179) as a defining characteristic of “the two thousand year expansion of Christianity across the globe” (2014:179). However, other research indicates that “institutional structure, regardless of ‘cultural’ content, may not be enough to define Christianity as a topic for comparison after all” (Robbins 2014:167). Comparability is a crucial question, in particular in light of the diversity of cultural manifestations, which has prompted some to argue that there is no Christianity, but only Christianities (see Robbins 2014:167, Frankiel 2003:282). Critics of the anthropology of Christianity have also been concerned that the topics it studies “are not specific to Christian populations” (Robbins 2014:164). Some also criticize that anthropologists “proceed as if they know what Christianity is apart from the various instances they study” (2014:162). A crucial point, then, is that of how one approaches questions of cross-contextual specifics of Christianity (be they ‘cosmological’, ‘cultural’, institutional, related to social processes, et cetera), and additionally, questions of who decides what counts as ‘Christian’, the anthropologists or those whom they study. In light of such conversations, the understanding of Christians I propose here is, on a very general level, a historically informed sociopolitical one, indicating continuing allegiance of ‘Christians’ to a person, Jesus Christ. This understanding has been developed in a process moving back and forth between conceptual and empirical work, and thus between ‘academic’ and ‘practitioner’ notions and understandings. More specifically, it is non-cultural, that is, it acknowledges that Christians are culturally diverse, even though being Christian may contextually resonate or dissonate with various particular forms of culture. It is non-idealist, even though being Christian may contextually resonate or dissonate with various conceptions and ideas, but embodied and existential, in that it recognizes people’s allegiance to Christ as a bodily and existential form of participation in Christ’s death and resurrection. Patterns of such participation (such as those described by Colin Miller (2014) or in chapters 4 to 6 of this study) can be recognized by the sensitive observer, irrespective of whether a researcher self-identifies as a Christian or not, and irrespective of whether the research subjects consciously adopt a conception of themselves as participating in Christ in such a way (on perspectivity, see also 1.4.).

15 And the related notions of being a Christian, Christian existence, and Christian living.

7.3 Terminological–conceptual orientations

In the present section, I will relate the main insights of this study thus far to three important terms and concepts which are used in fsw research and theological approaches: faith, spirituality, and religion (at work). I will offer some basic orientations regarding their use with reference to Christians at work. In addition, I will consider the terms ethics (which is particularly important in theological approaches) and tradition, since they also play a role in framing and shaping extant understandings of Christian existence at work.

7.3.1 *Faith and spirituality*

In chapter 2, I have described how the terms faith and spirituality are used in fsw research in a variety of different ways (see 2.2). In chapter 4, I have introduced contributions to Christian living at work that employ the notion of spirituality (4.3). With regard to faith, in the light of the present diversity of uses, it cannot be taken for granted that it is clear what the term faith, in general, means, or what the term ‘Christian faith’ (e.g., Buszka & Ewest 2020:64, Jones 1997:149, Lynn et al. 2010:682), in particular, should mean.¹⁶ Thus, if the term ‘Christian faith’ is used without clarification of the terms ‘Christian’ and ‘faith’, such a usage becomes merely nominal, that is, empty in terms of content, and the term per se signifies little more than faith *xy*. In light of the existential meaning of the term Christian(s), however, such a nominal usage becomes *misleading* in an fsw research context because it ignores the term’s reference to the existential condition of one’s allegiance or belonging to Christ. This influences the reader toward assuming that ‘Christian’ is merely a nominal subcategory which identifies one type of faith, and individuals as members of that faith. What is problematic about this? With regard to its existential aspects, such a move is not, immediately, a change in the content of the term Christian but a change in its usage. However, this move entails substantial emptying of or a nominal reduction in terms of the existential character of the concept. With regard to the term faith, this is remarkable, given the fact that in Christian tradition, ‘faith’ has been a crucial concept used to refer to people’s allegiance to Christ (see e.g. Konstan 2018, Oakes 2018). It has to be kept in mind, again, that the term ‘Christian’ was originally applied *to people and not to things*. Its application to

16 Interestingly, this combination does not seem to be used very often in fsw literature.

‘things’ is secondary, and its appropriateness is dependent on the term’s primary use. In the phrases ‘Christian faith’ or ‘Christian spirituality’, the term Christian characterizes faith or spirituality as that which is displayed by those who are allegiant to or belong to Christ. However, if the term ‘Christian’ is used in an undetermined and merely nominally categorizing way, for example to refer to a member of a faith or spiritual tradition, these primarily existential and categorical connotations tend to get lost.

With regard to the practitioners studied, one finds the terms faith and spirituality both used on the existential level of being a Christian (see e.g. P5:41, P8:25, P13:42) and the term faith also on the nominal level (e.g. P5:41). On an existential level, the terms are sometimes used as shorthand for Christian existence or ‘being a Christian’. Importantly, in an existentially connoted usage, the categorizing connotations seem to fall away, while the categorical connotations remain in place. What does this mean? The faith of Christians, existentially understood, is for them not simply one possible option among a variety of other options of a similar kind, like choosing between a red or a blue car. The existential Christian optionality is different. In terms of Christian existence, coming to faith takes place on a frame of only two options: It is a question of one’s orientation toward God, which is either marked by faith or not. It is a matter of embracing ‘something’ or not embracing it, and not a matter of choosing one particular type (among many others) of a kind.

With reference to the mode of existence pertinent to Christians, it might be helpful to follow Michael Black (2008) in conceiving of faith and spirituality as moments of the same event (as Black does with reference to corporate existence): “‘Submission’, ‘kenosis’, ‘perichoresis’, ‘faith’, and ‘the presence of the spirit’ are all moments of the same event” (2008:50.52). With regard to Christian existence, then, faith can indicate both an existential trust in Christ and the convictions related to it.¹⁷ More basically, Christian faith refers to faith or trust in God as displayed by those who are allegiant to or belong to Jesus Christ. Spirituality accentuates the “pneumatic vivification” (Miller 2014:130) of sharing in Christ’s death and in the life of the risen Christ.

17 See Tucker (2010:26) on the distinction of faith as trust and as proper understandings. On the Augustinian *fides qua creditur/fides quae creditur* distinction, see McGrath (2011:409). However, Konstan (2018:247f) draws upon the work of Teresa Morgan to argue that the classical Latin *fides* and the corresponding Greek *pistis* do *not* refer primarily to propositional belief, but to relational trust and confidence (see also Alexander 2018, Morgan 2018, Oakes 2008).

7.3.2 Religion

Religion, as used in fsw research¹⁸, is also a term which is potentially *misleading* with regard to Christians. As religion and faith are sometimes used synonymously, the notion of religion used in a categorizing way shares some of the problems of a categorizing or nominal use of the notion of faith (see above). In chapter 6.1, I presented some examples of how Christian practitioners distance themselves explicitly and clearly from the concept of religion by displaying an attitude to it which resonates with a long tradition of Christian theological critique and criticism of religion.¹⁹ I can empathize with much of that criticism. Personally, when I read or hear the term ‘religion’ employed with regard to the study of Christians, the experience I have is often similar to listening to a concert where at a certain point a mistuned instrument is played. You suddenly recognize the wrong tune, without having to think about it first. If you repeatedly and on different occasions hear the same instrument playing wrong, you start wondering if the instrument is even suitable to play in such a setting. This reflects, in a sense, my current attitude to using the term religion in the study of Christians at work. I have yet to find an approach of which I could say: “Here, the concept of religion has really helped to understand Christians at work better.” However, it is difficult to give an account of *why* the instrument is mistuned, even if it is intuitively clear *that* it is the case.

In the following, I will problematize the relationship between ‘Christians’ and ‘religion’ and try to substantiate my claim that the category of religion/religious is unsuitable for use *as a basic category* or concept in the study of Christians at work. First, I will address a possible objection against my attempt to offer a theoretical framing of Christian existence that does not employ the concept of religion (1). Then, I will outline three problems with regard to the employment of the term religion with reference to Christians (2–4). Subsequently, I will discuss a possible solution to these problems (5) and then offer a conclusion concerning the use of the concept of religion in the study of Christians at work (6).

1) The existential–nominal distinction and the criterion of personal relevance, with which the framing of Christian existence proposed in chapter 6 works, seem to be (at least partially) mirrored in Brotheridge and Lee’s

18 On the broader discussion of the concept of religion, see for example Kippenberg and von Stuckrad (2003), Knoblauch (2006), Pollack and Rosta (2015), or Woodhead (2011).

19 See the literature referred to in 6.1.2. In addition, see Metz’s (1981) critique and criticism of civil religion and Hallesby’s (1954) basic work ‘Christian or religious?’.

(2007:291, see also 2.2.4 & 3.4.1) distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religiousness (see also Clark & Dawson 1996, Longenecker, McKinney & Moore 2004, Walker, Smither, & DeBode 2012). Therefore, one might say that the proposed framing of Christian existence rests on a distinction that is not specifically Christian. And that is true. In particular, Brotheridge and Lee (2007:303) argue that the “individual difference variable in organizational research” is the “nature of one’s religiosity rather than one’s religious affiliation”, in other words it is not one’s nominal categorization, but what one is concerned with which matters.

It is, however, not the issue of personal relevance *per se* which makes the proposed understanding of being a Christian distinct from being religious, but the specific character of being Christian. In 6.1.1, I have outlined how religiosity and Christianness can be understood as different categories which can, but do not have to, overlap, and where existential religiosity, even within a ‘culturally Christian context’, and existential Christianness do not have to match (and might be incongruent in certain respects). In other words, and with reference to the above objection against an understanding of the category ‘Christian’ as independent from ‘religion’, the fact that both religiosity and Christianness can be differentiated between according to a nominal–existential schema does not indicate anything particular about the relationship between the concepts ‘Christians’ and ‘religion’; much less is it an argument in favor of understanding the category ‘Christian’ as a subcategory of ‘religion’. A nominal–existential framework might, in principle, also be applied to being a Buddhist, or to being a student, a spouse, or to many other labels.

2) With regard to Christian living in work contexts, one of the problems that comes with using the term religion with reference to Christians is that religion somehow seems to denote or imply a distinct sphere or realm of life or society. And if Christian living is categorized as religious, it seems to become conceptually separated from other spheres or realms. This, then, reflects what can be referred to as the political character of the term,²⁰ the intention to confine a religious sphere and separate it from the rest of life or society. Thus, the use of the term religion with reference to fsw and Christian existence (for example, in phrases like ‘Christian religion’ or ‘Christian religiosity’) seems to be prone to reinforcing conceptual separation between Christian existence, on the one hand, and work contexts, on

20 See, for example, Asad (1993:28), who describes what seems to me to be the ‘political’ intention inherent in the modern Western construction of the concept of religion.

the other, as belonging to different realms.²¹ However, in taking account of the existential aspects of the term Christian, being a Christian concerns the totality of one's existence and is irreducible to religion (or faith, or spirituality) if understood as a category referring to a particular area or sphere of life or society.

3) An empirical case in point against an encompassing understanding of the category of religion, under which Christianity can be subsumed, is presented by the existence of 'insiders' (see 6.1). The term is used to refer to individuals or groups who display an orientation in accordance with the characteristics of Christian existence without nominally adopting the label Christian as they stay within the orbit of their religious socialization, for example as Hindus, Jews, or Muslims (see 6.1 and the literature there).²² In other words, these are 'Christians' without a religious or cultural identity as 'Christians'; they are non-Christians, nominally speaking, but Christians in existential terms. The existence of such 'insiders' questions an understanding of Christianity as a simple subset of the broader category 'religion'. Viewed through the lens of the concept of religion, the existence of 'insiders' indicates that Christian existence seems to be a phenomenon that transcends religion, which cannot be captured by a simple use of the idea of religion. Being a Christian then does not so much refer to one's being a member of a particular 'religious group' but to one's existential participation "in the one particular body of a crucified and resurrected Jew" (Miller 2014:198).

4) In the light of the existential character of Christianity, there is a third problem that comes with using the terms religion and religiosity to refer to Christian modes of existence. As pointed out in 6.1.2, what can be socio-logically categorized as religion or religious is, arguably, in terms of Christian existence, part of what is to be 'put to death' with Christ, as is any

21 This conceptual separation seems to me to be a main reason why some proponents of fsw research seem to be so concerned with 'integration' (see, e.g. 2.1.1). And the conceptual separation is, in turn, made possible by focusing on a 'thing' (religion) instead of people (Christians) (on 'thing-concepts' and 'people-concepts' see 7.2). See also the evaluation of such separation in the respect of 'thinking in terms of separate realms' from a theological ethical perspective by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (2005).

22 The insider phenomenon has also been described as "crypto-religion" (Kent 2011; on crypto-religion with regard to Christian contexts, see also Robbins 2010).

other aspect of human existence. In Christian living, ‘religious’²³ intentions and ambitions are to be crucified. In this light, one might well say that Christians are to be religious as though they were not, like

those who have wives should be as those who have none, 7:30 those with tears like those not weeping, those who rejoice like those not rejoicing, those who buy like those without possessions, 7:31 those who use the world as though they were not using it to the full. For the present shape of this world is passing away (1 Cor 7:29b-31).

If Christians are to be religious as though they were not, this indicates a *dialectic* relationship between Christians and religiosity. This brings me to the next point.

5) Could the problems of the concept of religion described above with regard to the study of Christians be resolved by taking seriously the dialectic character of Christian embodiment as sketched in 6.2? In terms of the embodiment of Christian existence, it can be said that the relationship of Christians to religion is dialectical, in a similar way that their relationship with the world *in general* is dialectical. If engaging in religion or being religious plays a role in the embodiment of Christian existence, it is continually relativized by the individual’s relationship with God (connecting) and by the movements of distancing (disengagement with religion) and investing (engagement in religious activities), which are orchestrated via this relationship. Such a dialectical understanding of the role of religion in Christian life would take the existential aspects of Christianity seriously. It understands religion as a possible aspect of Christian life and not as an overall category under which Christian living can be subsumed.

Regardless of that, some researchers may still want to study Christians at work under the label of religion or argue that their understanding of religion is able to capture existential Christian aspects. In my view, the point is not so much which label is used, but whether they help to account for central aspects of Christian existence when Christians are studied. For example, Mellor and Shilling (2014; see 4.2.1 & 6.2.1) have offered an understanding of Christian lifestyles as religious which takes seriously the existential char-

23 One can, of course, say that ‘religion’ should be understood as an analytical sociological category and should not be taken to refer directly to particular phenomena. However, I do not think that this reflects a dominant usage of the term in fsw research. But even then, employment of an analytical term should not create more analytical problems than benefits.

acter of being a Christian.²⁴ The example of Mellor and Shilling indicates that one can, in a sense, understand Christian existence as a subtype of religious existence and still take the specifics of Christian existence seriously. Or, to take another example, it seems that an understanding of religion that works with the notion of transcendence (e.g. Joas 2017, Knoblauch 2004, Pollack & Rosta 2015) might be well prepared to take into account an understanding of conduct which is marked by the participation of individuals in the death and resurrection of another person. For example, as far as I understand Pollack and Rosta's understanding of religion, they could argue that an understanding of Christian conduct as marked by participation in the death and resurrection of someone is a typical case of a religious understanding of conduct. This is because such an understanding is, first, marked by the distinction between transcendence and immanence (life, death, and resurrection), and then by the reintroduction or 're-entry' of the transcendence–immanence distinction into immanence in stating that it is actual conduct (immanence) which is marked by participation in the death and resurrection of another person. Thus, a Christian understanding of conduct and particular concepts of religion, such as that proposed by Pollack and Rosta, do not seem to be completely incongruent or incompatible.

However, it needs to be noted that the claim that comes with such an understanding of 'religion' seems to be that there are similar patterns of dealing with and relating to 'transcendence' across a wide variety of different phenomena or groups of people. It seems to be this similarity of patterns which is used to justify the employment of the term religion with regard to a broad range of different phenomena and contexts. What is someone who studies Christians at work to make of such a far-reaching claim? I do not know whether it is reasonable to claim that such similarities exist or not. Furthermore, to me, such a question of similarities seems to be largely irrelevant to the advancement of the study of Christians. Therefore, I am somehow indifferent to a claim that I consider to be thus far removed from the study of actual Christians at work. Put differently, I am not concerned so much about whether there are such similarities or not, but I am much more concerned that research related to Christians at work takes seriously and explores central characteristics of Christian existence (rather than speculating or assuming that there are patterns at play in Christians related to a hypothetical higher order phenomenon or category). Most importantly,

24 Note however, that their approach resonates well with an understanding of living as participating in the death and resurrected life of Jesus Christ, even if they do not explicitly refer to it.

<https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748922629-293>, am 16.09.2024, 10:49:11

Open Access –  <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb>

and irrespective of what one thinks of the academic study of such a presumed phenomenon or category, such an endeavor is a *different* project with a different purpose than the study of Christians.

6) So even if it seems to be possible to employ the term religion in a way which is sensitive to Christian existence, I think the problems that are linked to using religion as a basic category for studying Christians should not be underestimated. And, in spite of the discursive pressure in contemporary academic discourses to categorize Christianity as a subcategory of religion, I cannot see a compelling conceptual reason to do so. After all, as a researcher concerned with studying Christians at work, I am not interested in religion, but in Christians.

That said, those doing research on Christians might as well have to find a dialectic approach to engaging in related discourses and to dealing with the term religion, given its current predominance in relevant academic discourses. There might be times when it will be apt to protest explicitly against inappropriate uses of the term religion with regard to Christians or against unsuitable conceptualizations of Christians. At other times, it might be more appropriate to “*gib dem Aff die Banane*”²⁵, as my doctoral supervisor is wont to say, and continue our work without initial protest and enter relevant conversations, even at the risk of others using unsuitable terms and concepts to label and (mis)understand our work.

7.3.3 *Ethics and morality*

In the case of the terms ethics and morality as used in extant research relevant to the study of Christians at work, a (maybe natural) tendency can be observed. If Christian existence at work is studied under such labels as ethics or morality, it tends to be reduced to its moral or ethical aspects, while the constitutive existential features of Christian living are ignored. While I have discussed such reductions at some length with regard to theology (5.3), they can also be found in (social scientific) fsw research. Van Buren’s work (1998) can serve to illustrate this particular problem, as encountered in fsw research that focuses on ethics-related fsw outcomes (see 3.4). Two things tend to be confused in research on ethical or moral

25 A Swiss German expression, literally meaning “Give that monkey this banana.”

outcomes of religion²⁶ at work.²⁷ In particular, integrating one's religion with one's work is identified with and thus reduced to living morally at work. With an explicit reference to Christianity, Van Buren speaks of “making the Monday connection” (1998), by which he means integrating what one hears in church on Sunday into one's work on Monday or during the workweek. He seems to automatically imply that ‘the Monday connection’, that is, the religion–work relationship, is mainly a matter of morality. However, it is one thing to explore the ethical dimension of the religion–work relationship, but something very different to *reduce* the religion–work relationship to its ethical or moral dimension. And no reasons are provided for why such a reduction should be appropriate.²⁸ As Weaver and Agle (2002) indicate, the “religion–behavior linkage” (2002:93) is (more) complex. To reduce it to morality or to conceptualize religiousness as a (mere) motivation for ethical action (e.g. Clark & Dawson 1996) appears to be a kind of ethical imperialism in which the religion–work relationship is reduced to its moral or ethical dimension.

It is interesting that religion becomes the victim of such moral reductionism. Spirituality seems to be less vulnerable to such ethical imperialism.²⁹ In the light of a comprehensive map of (different aspects of) spirituality, such as that proposed by Smith (2008, see 3.2.2), the reductionist tendency of a study of spirituality at work which focuses exclusively on ethical aspects becomes obvious. If one addresses mainly ethics-related outcomes of spirituality at work, one's focus would, in the light of Smith's map, mainly be on the outer layers of spirituality, while one would ignore its more central aspects. ‘Central’, in terms of Smith's map, implies causal. For Smith (2008), these inner and outer manifestations (inner qualities and outer modes of behavior) of spirituality are dependent on a more central

26 For the problems inherent in the usage of the term religion, see above.

27 It seems to be mainly a matter of conceptualization as to whether one understands moral outcomes as an integral part of lived religion at work or whether one conceptualizes moral agency as a consequence or implication of lived religion, which is separate from, but related to the construct of religion at work.

28 This would be a difficult point to argue in favor of. An equation of religion at work with adherence to moral norms, for example, can be criticized with reference to the notion of ‘free agency.’ From a Christian perspective, it could be argued that Christian existence is not characterized by strict adherence to moral norms, that is, not by being a ‘slave’ to moral norms and values, but by being free (see the discussion of Eberhard Jüngel's notion of the gospel as ‘wertlose Wahrheit’ and Luther's notion of ‘freedom’ in Brügger (2010:111–117)).

29 See the discussion above on ethics-related outcomes of fsw (3.4.1) and the dominance of studies which work with the notion of religion in this set of studies.

aspect of spirituality, of which they are consequences, and the practical applications, observable actions, and outcomes of the outer domain arise “automatically” (Wilk et al., quoted in Smith 2008:7) from the inner experience of spirituality. Within such a framework, ethical norms and behavior cannot stand alone as they are consequences of the spiritual experience. In the light of Smith’s map, it becomes clear that spirituality in organizations is not to be reduced to its inner and outer manifestations (views, values, convictions, and corresponding behavior). Instead, he argues, these manifestations are grounded in something more central and direct, in what he terms the ‘spiritual experience’. In this view, there are not certain values, views, convictions, or modes of behavior at the heart of spirituality at work, but the spiritual experience. However, even if one does not agree with Smith’s particular conception of how the different aspects are related, the point that moral agency is but one aspect of spirituality remains important.³⁰ In terms of ‘faith–work integration’ (e.g. Miller, Ewest & Neubert 2018), ethical reductionism would consist of mistaking the whole process of living one’s faith at work for one particular aspect of it, that is, ethical frameworks and moral agency, and thus faith at work would be mistaken for or reduced to being moral and acting morally at work.³¹

With regard to being a Christian, morality is existentially embedded. Christians behave morally at work by living “the presence of Christ performatively” (Kelly 2010:799), which is an embodied and spiritual endeavor (see 5.3.6, 5.5, and chapter 6). If one addresses only normative ethical concepts at work, even from a so-called Christian or theological perspective, but ignores their embeddedness in embodied Christian existence, it is as though one is trying to understand a flower by solely analyzing the color ‘red’, or a tree by only exploring its colors or the shape of its leaves. Yes, these colors or shapes might be important for a particular flower or tree, but they are only one aspect of it.

7.3.4 Tradition

In 6.2.2, I have drawn upon Viktor Frankl’s notions of ‘gestalt perception’ and ‘finding meaning’ and related them to Ephesians 2:10 with a view to understanding the formation of ‘the Christian body at work’. In particular, I

30 In a Christian reinterpretation, Smith’s (2008) spiritual experience could be identified with the spiritual experience of participating in Jesus Christ.

31 See also David Miller and colleagues’ (2018) typology in which the “Ethics” type is one type (out of four) with regard to how faith and work can be integrated.

have suggested that the formation of the ‘Christian body’ in contemporary work settings takes place as individuals perceive themselves as being made in Christ for good works that God has ‘prepared beforehand’, and as they ‘walk in these works’, by enacting and embodying at work their life in Christ. Let me, with this in mind, close this dissertation with a remark on the notion of tradition in Christian life.

I have outlined and criticized above how, in fsw research, Christians at work seem to be construed as members of a particular (group of) tradition(s) whose conduct and convictions can be described in terms of particular traditional practices and beliefs (categorized either as Christian, or with reference to one of the Christian ‘sub-traditions’). Now, this way of putting things seems to be useful in the study of the particularities of various Christian groups and their relationship to work contexts (see 4.1.4). However, to understand the *Christianity* of particular ‘Christian groups’, the dialectic relationship between Christians and tradition (see 4.2) needs to be considered. Thus, I have indicated how the relationship of Christians to tradition is not linear (no mechanical reproduction of certain ‘traditional’ beliefs and practices), but dynamic and dialectic in that they relate to an event and experience that transcends or even disrupts tradition (4.2 – 4.4) and which shapes their relationship to tradition and their attitude to, say, traditional beliefs and practices.

However, approaching the subject matter in this way via a traditional lens still seems to imply that the traditional content of Christian living, that which is ‘handed over’ or transmitted, is primarily these traditional practices and beliefs. Yet, if we take into fuller account the existential condition of being a Christian in understanding tradition, things again present themselves differently. The traditional content, that which is handed over in a Christian mode of existence, is not primarily particular practices and beliefs, but rather I myself am handed over and will, of course, place myself in danger (see Smythe 2018:83) by participating in Christ, in his “total act of self-giving” (Ligo 2011:460), “in the Trinitarian life of self-giving” (2011:465). We die with Christ to live with Christ. And so, while we are working,

we are experiencing trouble on every side, but are not crushed; we are perplexed, but not driven to despair; we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are knocked down, but not destroyed,

always carrying around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our body. For we who are alive are constantly being handed over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal body.

As a result, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

(2 Corinthians 4:8–12)