



Research Strategy of the Faculty of Theology

2025

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Research at the Faculty of Theology is organised and nurtured within three sections of Biblical Studies, Church History and Systematic Theology and a Centre of African Studies with a great variety of individual and group-based research projects, programmes and networks that enrich the study programmes of the Faculty with research-based teaching of high quality and standard.

The vision and ambition of the Faculty are to consolidate and strengthen its position as a world leading research institution. We aspire to be an international vanguard of original scholarly inquiries, pursuing innovative approaches and methodologies.

Our strategy aims to improve our research environment and to nurture basic and curiosity driven research at the highest international level which continues to be the backbone of our scholarly identity. We also want to make a focussed effort to maintain and improve the volume of our grant capture to foster the advancement of new methodological, interdisciplinary, and topical grounds.

Our ambition is also to strengthen the societal impact of our research by addressing topics and issues with social relevance and by broadening the outlets to disseminate our research findings to the wider public.

To achieve our research ambitions and objectives, we are committed to six strategic priorities:

1. To develop our national and international collaborations, including internally at the University of Copenhagen, with other research institutions as well as with public and private organizations, such as the Church of Denmark, museums, think-tanks, and governmental and non-governmental agencies, and civil society.
2. To be the best place for the best talents in line with the research goals of the different sections and centres.
3. To maintain and strengthen a culture of ambitious, innovative and impactful research through programming (i.e. research seminars and open guest lectures on both section and faculty level, research support and review groups) that facilitates fruitful exchange of ideas, questions, sources, and methods across the various sections of the Faculty and beyond.
4. To maintain and strengthen the integration of research and educational activities, which includes raising awareness of the need to balance between core research and interdisciplinary/highly specialized research.

5. To improve public visibility and societal impact of our research locally, nationally, and internationally through, for instance, public engagement, the active use of various media outlets, attending, hosting and organising conferences, participation in editorial and advisory boards.
6. To maintain to conduct research with the area of Digital Humanities and to critically engage with the innovative potential of digitization, including AI and other digital tools.

Biblical Studies Section

The Section studies the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam which are – to varying degrees – considered foundational, normative and sacred. Our focus is on:

- The Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and other formative documents of ancient Judaism including, e.g., the Dead Sea Scrolls, Hellenistic and Rabbinic Jewish sources,
- The New Testament and other formative documents of early Christian studies including, e.g., ancient Jewish, Graeco-Roman, and non-canonical Christian sources, and
- The Qur'an and its earliest traditions and commentaries.

Our research and teaching encompass the various exegetical traditions, historical contexts, material cultures, and reception histories that emerge around each of these three collections of sacred writings.

In line with the overall vision and ambition, we strive to establish the section as being world leading in Scriptural Studies. For the coming years, we foresee a special focus on digital, material, and interdisciplinary approaches to ancient texts, especially in ways that break traditional boundaries between the three religious traditions represented in the section.

Research areas

End Time Studies and Eschatology

The section will break new ground in the field of end time studies and eschatology. Building on the ongoing research project AMRAM and new research on hope, happiness, and despair, the section will expand the scope of its research to the cross-historical and cross-cultural phenomenon of End Time Narratives more broadly. This requires a transdisciplinary and international research team.

Diaspora and Human Mobility

The section will look for ways to integrate its existing expertise on diaspora, migration, and incarceration around the theme of human mobility. Alongside current migration scholarship, we aim to adequately map the earliest noted movements of ancient Israelites and add textured, nuanced accounts of their lives affected by said movement over and against singular, narrow narratives.

Materiality and Lived Religion

The section enjoys a long history of commitment to archaeology and material culture, especially throughout the 20th century. In the coming years, it will renew this area of research in ways that push beyond its previous focus. Building on the thematic and methodological focuses of ongoing research projects, faculty members of the section will seek to perform research at the forefront of materiality

and lived religion, in relation to both ancient contexts and modern uses of scriptural traditions and their implementation, both existing work on the law and incarceration and beyond.

Texts and Reception

Religious texts and their interpretations are at the core of our scholarly activities. As the indispensable foundation for an adequate understanding of Scriptures, the section promotes the ongoing study of the source languages. Apart from this, the section will develop new themes and approaches to study the movement of Scriptures. Members of the section will be centrally involved in producing the new authorised Danish Bible translation by 2036. Together with international partners, we will also further develop our research on the mutual reception of Scriptures into a large-scale project.

Digital Humanities

The section will consolidate its position as a leading institution of studying Scriptural and related texts with the help of Large Language Models and advanced statistical methods. The section will continue to produce and improve on open-source datasets of the most important ancient religious texts.

Church History Section

The section conducts research in the history of Christianity from antiquity until today with a fourfold scholarly profile:

- Research into textual sources and foci, e.g. the intellectual, cultural and social history of Christianity.
- Research into material sources and foci, e.g. spaces, cities, buildings, images, liturgies and practices.
- Interdisciplinary research in cooperation with History, Law, Architecture, History of Ideas, Philosophy, Philology, Musicology, Art History, Literature, Social Science, Welfare Studies, Medicine and Psychiatry.
- Digital and data driven studies in the history of church and Christianity, strengthening the existing research as well as novel projects and themes by way of new methods and perspectives.

Research Areas

Strengthening Research in Church History before the Year 1500

Within the period of Late Antiquity, our topics of priority include Christian urban culture, urban space, public ritual, and ritual mobility. In the field of studies of the Middle Ages, we aim to strengthen history of scholasticism (philosophy and theology), scholastic sacramental theology and liturgy between cultural history and history of theology. Also, we wish to increase efforts to recruit talents from outside the University and promote and retain talents in-house.

Consolidating Reformation Studies within Centre for Copenhagen Luther Research

This centre seeks to establish a solid research environment around the study of Luther. It investigates Luther from a medieval and renaissance perspective as well as in the historical context of his own day. The centre also has a strong focus on his reception-history, and it unites students, PhD-students, national colleagues from Theology and the Humanities, international scholars, societal stakeholders and others with an interest in ongoing Luther-related research.

Developing a Platform for Studies in Christianity and Culture

A special characteristic of our section's research has long been the focus on how theological and religious thinking are combined in material culture, artistic works, literature, social practices, welfare and the ways in which societies are formed. Research in Christianity and the Arts, Christian rituals and Cultural Heritage have traditionally enjoyed special attention at the section. We aim to continue targeting and promoting these issues in specialized studies as well as dissemination through teaching activities and collaboration with societal sectors and stakeholders.

Cultivating New Studies in the Discipline of Danish Church History, including Norway, the Dutchies and Colonies

Emphasis is placed on the topics of reformation, the 17th and 18th century, revival movements, the nineteenth-century theologians, particularly Grundtvig, Kierkegaard, and Grundtvigianism with regards to church and politics in modern-day Denmark as well as developments and the secularization in the 20th century. We aim to collaborate within the Nordic countries and beyond, and to critically assess national narratives. We work to strengthen the classical studies and develop novel research through collaboration with archival institutions, with regards to digitization and the use of digital methods and AI.

Developing historical privacy studies

The Danish National Research Foundation Centre for Privacy Studies (PRIVACY, 2017-27) will broaden its collaborative and interdisciplinary research into early modern instances of privacy from a mainly Eurocentric to a more global perspective, including research on the Caribbean, Greenland, and West Africa. This research is structured in five themes: beliefs, health, home, law, and urban space. The ambition to contribute historical research insights to contemporary privacy debates is pursued, e.g., in connection with Privacy Studies Journal.

Systematic Theology Section

The Systematic Theology Section aims to explore and contribute to contemporary theology through its three disciplines and their relationship to other theological disciplines and to non-theological academic fields. It addresses current issues in church, culture and society while integrating research and education.

Dogmatics

For Dogmatics this vision implies analysis, interpretation and conceptual clarification of methods and classical Christian topics. With an emphasis on reformation theology, dialectical and post-dialectical theology, incl. ecumenical theology and the theology of religions, Dogmatics aims at integrating critical and constructive approaches in the strategic period.

Ethics and Philosophy of Religion

The vision of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion is to analyse, interpret and conceptualize ethical, religious, and philosophical aspects of modern and contemporary thought through an approach primarily influenced by phenomenology and hermeneutics. Focus is on religion and critique of religion, identity and narrativity, existence and normativity, selfhood and sociality, and Kierkegaard Studies, with the aim of interdisciplinary outlooks to disciplines such as aesthetics, literary studies and psychiatry.

Practical Theology

The vision of Practical Theology for the strategic period is to explore Christian and ecclesial, liturgical, homiletical and pastoral practices, as well as ecclesial forms of organization including church leadership and relations of the church to state, society, and law.

To achieve this vision, the section relies on a synergy, which will be promoted, for example, through joint seminars and open lectures. The section broadly collaborates with other disciplines within the Faculty, UCPH, international research milieus as well as with external partners, not least through its centres.

The coherence between the three disciplines of Systematic Theology and between the centres and individual researchers of the section is strengthened by the four yearly internal research seminars and by two yearly guest lectures, open to the whole Faculty and to the public, hosted by the section and planned in turn by the centres and the units of the section. The backbone is the curriculum of the systematic disciplines with an overlap of themes, issues and contexts and of contemporary relevance.

The section supports seminars with multiple speakers on a common theme and conferences on crucial issues and topics.

The section supports research cooperation with the other sections of the Faculty, e.g. through centre activities. The section welcomes Faculty hosted research seminars on shared theological issues, faculty workshops on shared methodological themes and seed money for small workshops at faculty and interfaculty level, as well for collective travel. It welcomes professional research assistance especially for fundraising purposes.

The section hosts several international and national conferences every year, planned and conducted by its centres. It supports the international presence of its researchers, including participation in editorial and advisory boards, co-organisation of international conferences, invited guest lectures and presentations at conferences abroad. The section welcomes Faculty support to visibility initiatives at UCPH, nationally and internationally such as e.g. video recording of selected open lectures, working with various medias and communication of research activities

Research Areas

The section's aims for the period are reflected in the five thematic fields with the shared ambition to stimulate ideas and research cooperation. Within these interconnected platforms the researchers and centres aim to attend to pertinent questions and challenges of existence, society, and church and thus strengthen the section's impact outside the faculty.

Existence, self-understanding and crises and creativity related to lifestyle

This platform concerns the examination of human existence including an approach to subjectivity as embodied, socially situated and embedded in nature as well as experiences of social change and transformations related to difference and community. With attention to human conflicts and crises, death, evil and suffering, it investigates concepts of dialectics, paradoxes, repetition, recollection and anticipation and a concern for issues related to gender, ethnicity and class. Thus, the examination of existence includes identity, alterity and sexuality as well as formation and confession. It explores core expressions of existence including Christian expressions, as well as questions of self-understanding and lifestyle, in the context of different conditions of life and contemporary challenges to e.g. health, well-being and the environment.

Ethics, normativity and ambivalence

In the section, ethics is examined within the context of existential ambivalence. This implies a broad approach to questions of normativity. Ethics thus assesses ambivalences in relation to subjectivity and otherness, existential convictions and life conditions. This ethics is not merely a matter of law, norms or morality, but also about faith and fallibility. This implies critical questions of justice, a critical approach to structures of power, and the dilemmas and ambivalences of politics. Thus, this field encompasses questions of empowerment, communication of power and liberation as well as of forgiveness and atonement, while attending to contemporary challenges concerning health and psychiatry, and issues of climate change.

Epistemology, truth and rationality

The section examines the acquisition of truth and knowledge in the context of contemporary philosophical and scientific discussions on rationality and conceptions of reality, including classic questions of epistemology. With special attention to phenomenological and hermeneutical accounts of knowledge, this approach focuses on metaphysical and post-metaphysical theories of truth, forms and limits of knowledge, the distinction between faith and reason, and explores in detail the relationship between truth, revelation, experience, and practices of understanding.

Religion, religions and spirituality

The section explores constructions and criticisms of religions in the context of philosophy, phenomenology, hermeneutics and language of religion(s). It examines the religious and confessional differences as well as conflicts and cooperations between lived religions and their associated practices. The field encompasses also public theology, the subfields of law and religion, church and state, including notions of secularization and the post-secular, and the role of the natural sciences in contemporary religious and Christian self-understanding.

Christianity, church and communication

The research of Christianity and Christian churches in their communicative and institutional contexts, has a conceptual as well as an empirical dimension. One particular focus is the examination of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD). In addition, the confessional writings and forms of practice including the disciplines of communication within liturgical studies, homiletics, poimenics, and diaconal studies are critically and constructively explored with respect to the historical sources as well as the contemporary context of digitalisation, migration, acceleration, and green transition.

Centre of African Studies

The research vision of the Centre of African Studies is to contribute to broader social science and humanities knowledge by bringing in interdisciplinary African Studies perspectives and thereby expand and challenge existing paradigms. Our ambition is to broaden the conventional and traditional parameters and theories that have long-framed the dominant boundaries of the social sciences and humanities. Drawing on our research we aim at contributing to key global challenges and concerns such as climate, sustainability, citizenship, democracy, and the role of religion, and at deepening our knowledge of the diverse histories, complex realities, challenges and possibilities of a simultaneously localized and globalized Africa. Our research provides nuanced understandings of the continent's multi-layered dimensions and its relationships to the world more broadly and brings attention to the differentiated conditions for and processes of knowledge production itself, and dissemination, within Africa and in the rest of the world. Our ambition is to expand networks with key researchers in as well as on Africa and to develop an Africa @ KU strategy and network.

We work according to the following principles:

- Interdisciplinarity and cross-fertilisation across research themes, which guide our research design and practices.
- Inclusion of and engagement with a wide range of African perspectives, scholars and knowledge arenas (broadly defined) within our research areas.
- Through consciously combining theoretical and empirical work, research at Centre of African Studies contributes to deepening or rethinking key concepts and theories relevant within our research fields.
- To 'think' the world and its intellectual foundations and borders through Africanist and African eyes.

While interdisciplinary overall, and open to a range of topics within both social sciences and humanities, our research is organized in three primary thematic research platforms:

Research Platforms

Environment, Climate and Sustainability

The research platform focuses on the discursive and material practices through which 'nature' is conceptualised and used, and on the multiple effects of and responses to the climate crisis and other environmental and sustainability concerns. It considers a range of diverse actors engaged with, affected by and/or struggling with policies and practices related to resource control and utilisation,

ecotourism, biodiversity crises and conservation, among others. New research asks how ideas, knowledge and projects associated with nature-based solutions, the green transition and green governance are constructed and materialised and with what effects for whom. Research also focuses on the history and knowledge of nature conservation in relation to development planning and governance as well public-private partnerships and local governance of access to water.

Sovereignities and Citizenships

The research platform Sovereignities and Citizenships takes a relational approach to the ever-evolving relationship between state making and citizen making in Africa. Within multiple and overlapping spaces, people struggle over power, protection and rights; territory, movement and borders; property and natural resources; identity, belonging and personhood. This platform explores these arenas in relation to differently positioned actors and the interplay between larger-scale structural dimensions and everyday intimate worlds. Key research includes the changing, increasingly digitised certification and identification regimes across Africa, and how these are reshaping both states and citizens; and processes of personhood and homemaking in flood-risk areas in Mozambique.

Religion and Social Change

The research platform Religion and Social Change approaches the study of religion in Africa in its wide historical and social contexts. It builds on the premise that broad questions of religion shed light on key dimensions of social and cultural life, and as such moves away from a doctrinal and textual approach to research on religion in Africa. New research focuses on religious authority, identity and mobility; religion and African popular culture; religious institutions, religious infrastructure and social diversity in urban Africa; religion and health; as well as questions around privacy, spirituality, cultural heritage and memory making.

Several research projects cut across the thematic research platforms.

To enhance coherence and collaboration between research areas, we will continue to strengthen our internal research seminars, further develop broader interdisciplinary approaches to African Studies, invite external guests and further develop our guest research program. At the same time, within the Faculty, we explore new opportunities within areas of common scholarly interest, and to enhance research collaboration with society more broadly we will identify relevant research partners and stakeholders in Danish society and continue our already strong international networks within and beyond our fields of research.

Finally, we work to actively make more visible the range of our already existing engagements, activities, and contributions to various knowledge domains at the University of Copenhagen, within Danish society and internationally, and these activities in themselves contribute to the visibility of the Faculty and the University.