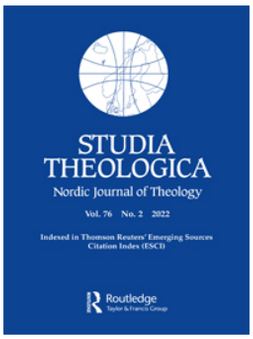

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Maria Ledstam

Christian ethical treatments of work often build on a traditional rationalist path that tries to develop a critical system of work by which different work practices can be judged. This article contributes with a supplementary way of presenting ethical logics of work through a practice-theoretical ethnographic study of two faith-based businesses, one Catholic and one evangelical. I am thereby not interested in building a critical system of work, but through listening to practitioners and in dialogue with practices, I want to map out different kinds of good that exist in these practices and suggest better accounts. The analysis of the empirical material shows that even though operating somewhat differently, the two practices are characterized by reform and negotiation. With both reform and negotiation, the Christian ethic in these practices does not collapse into only negotiation, nor is it idealized by only reform; both processes are essential, and religion contributes in different ways to both.

Introduction

The role of ethnographic research and thick descriptions of everyday practices is increasing within Christian ethics.[1] Still, however, Christian ethical treatments of work tend to be carried out as different models that seem rather distant from how people negotiate the various kinds of "good" in their everyday lives. Typically, such ethical models argue for an interpretation of work as mainly either a blessing or curse; alternatively, they may interpret work primarily in either individual or collective terms, or they may privilege an understanding of work as part of creation, rather than salvation or eschatology.[2]

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In this article, I will discuss a complementary way of presenting Christian ethical logics of work through the use of ethnography and practice theory.[3] I will first discuss two recent ethical articulations of work that serve as exemplifications of how Christian normative logics of work often build on a traditional rationalist path. My aim is not to explicate all of these ideas, but to demonstrate why the normative resources in such theological models need to be complemented. I will then argue that a practice-theoretical logic of work – one that maps out the good that exists in different practices, while also suggesting better accounts – might be an essential complement to more traditional Christian logics of work. Next, I will discuss some methodological considerations concerning the ethnographic fieldwork of the two faith-based workplaces – one Catholic and one evangelical – that this article draws upon, followed by a presentation of the empirical material. Finally, I will discuss the findings of the empirical study in relation to possible contributions to Christian logics of work.

Two accounts of theologies of work

Though diverse, most contemporary Christian normative perspectives on work agree on at least two things. First, they argue for an ontological necessity of work based on a conviction that work is part of what it means to be human. Second, work in its proper state is a good thing, and although often distorted under present conditions, it can be redeemed.[4] Oliver O'Donovan follows this line of thought when arguing that theological reflections on work should start with "existence" – from a notion of creation order and not from the experiences of particular kinds of work, such as the "labours of industrial society." Work should also not be swallowed up in the discourse of economics, "which is only incidentally about work and is primarily about the generation and distribution of resources of life."[5] O'Donovan further criticises western societies that invest energy into "putting people out of work," thus denying work its inner meaning and dignity.[6]

While O'Donovan criticises those who try to "put people out of work," Jeremy Posadas argues that Christian ethicists should actively seek to decrease the amount and necessity of work in everyone's lives, because work itself should not be accepted as an overriding good of human existence.[7] Posadas draws on anti-work perspectives[8] that reject "capitalism's demand that people be integrated as fully as possible into the profit-generating modern-day work structure."[9] Furthermore, Posadas argues that, in order to understand work, one should not

study its value or meaning, but instead focus on "how work constrains the pursuit of new possibilities of subjectivity and sociality […]."[10] Life, not work, argues Posadas, should become the central concern in analysing and evaluating work. Hence, a refusal of work promotes an epistemic space in which we have enough distance to critically evaluate Christian normative scholarship on work.

Arguably, a common point of departure in both these lines of reasoning is that they try to construct a logic of work via a rationalist path, even though they have slightly different points of departure – that is, theology and critical theory. In this sense, they are both trying to build a critical system around good work. While there are many stimulating ideas presented in both contributions, there are, I argue, several problems with such logics.[11] First, both articulations can be described as having a foundationalist character, meaning there are certain principles and values – for example, work as part of existence or work as being against life – that serve as foundational criteria by which different work practices should be judged. They seem to argue that, only when we make the Christian logic pure enough[12] by distancing it from economics or by finding an epistemic space at a distance from "bad" theology, can we then apply such theological logic to everyday work practices. Second, both ethicists make the classical distinction between facts and values – between how people act and negotiate different goods in workplaces and how they *should* act. It is important to note that O'Donovan writes about the importance of learning work through practices, but he offers no context-sensitive examples of what this kind of work looks like; instead, he talks about practices in generic terms. Overall, O'Donovan's and Posadas' perspectives most likely function well in academic and political debates, but such logics of work would benefit from supplementary perspectives more suitable for guiding ordinary people in everyday jobs. Here, I see the need for an empirical contribution, and for this, I turn to ethnography and practice theory.

Work, ethnography and practice theory

As mentioned, a growing number of Christian ethicists have turned to ethnographic methods as part of their undertakings. Luke Bretherton argues that this ethnographic emphasis can be interpreted as a continuation of a concern for the everyday that is already present in Christian ethics, in the shape of virtue ethics, as well as in Christian feminist and liberation theologies.[13] However, the turn to ethnography, he argues, does more than improve what has been present in Christian

ethics for a long time; it also adds something. One critical aspect of ethnographic methods is that the body is the main research tool, and this demands a higher form of self-reflexivity which enables Christian ethicists to scrutinize intuitive and inevitable sympathies for one's own context.[14]

Furthermore, when studying Christian logics of work through ethnography, one cannot merely understand them as products of broader economic, social and political processes and structural forces, but neither can one understand them as pure and isolated subjects. In some cases, religion is interwoven with economy and politics, while in others, these are quite separate.[15]

While the ethnographic method helped me to zoom in on religious-economic practices in faith-based work, I turned to practice theory as my conversation partner for further theorizing about these practices. The increased attention on social and material practices during the last few decades makes it possible to talk about a "practice turn" within social theory.[16] Theodore Schatzki argues that practice accounts "are joined in the belief that such phenomena as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, social institutions, and historical transformation occur within and are aspects of practices."[17] This means that practices are understood as "the primary generic social thing" and that practice theorists propagate a social ontology that contrasts with accounts that "privilege individuals, (inter)actions, language, signifying systems, the life world, institutions/roles, structures, or systems in defining the social."[18] All these phenomena can, according to practice theorists, only be examined through the field of practices.[19] Practice theory is a non-dichotomous approach that offers a remedy to descriptions of the world constrained by irreducible dualism, such as actor/system, individual/social, body/mind, material/spiritual or theory/action.[20] As has been argued by Bruno Latour, such dichotomies enable purification, which is a key aspect of an account of the modern.[21]

Furthermore, practices have a *teleoaffective* structure; they have a certain *teleos* and an emotional drive, and people who participate in practices act to achieve a certain goal or to obtain something meaningful or sought for.[22] Therefore, to analyse Christian logics of work, one does not start in language or texts separated from practices: discourses do not create practices, but rather discourses and meaning-making are features of practices. The same goes for normativities, which are not distinct from social practices, but are established *through* the practices in both interaction and language.[23] The ethicists Widdershoven and van der Sheer claim that, if practices are seen as a source for ethics, then new

knowledge is produced in the interaction between researchers and the practitioners of those practices.[24] The theological ethicists Scharen and Vigen argue that experience – understood in a rich sense – not only is a source of theology and ethics, but also contains moral knowledge and is a "type of truth claim."[25] Hence, from a practice-theoretical approach, one looks for the good in practices. This whole process of "finding truth" requires a method, but it cannot be built on this alone. Instead, it must be based on practical wisdom (*phronèsis*).[26] Even so, an ethical analysis of practices can also expand these by providing what Charles Taylor calls "a better account."[27]

However, it is important to stress that this is not a romantic position. There might be practices in which it is very difficult to see anything good at all or to argue for expansion.[28] Therefore, there is also a need to turn away from practices;[29] this process includes, amongst other things, facing the reality of how power is always a constitutive element of our world and how practices produce and reproduce differences and inequalities.[30]

In using a practice-theoretical approach, I am thus not interested in building a system through which work practices can be judged. Instead, through ethnographic "conversations" with work practices and people's experiences, I aim to map the good that exists in such practices and suggest possible expansions (better accounts). Hence, I will study Christian logics of work by attending to messy religious and economic configurations that inform how people make sense of and organize their own and others' work. More specifically, I will map out negotiations of different kinds of good that exist in two social businesses – one evangelical and one Catholic – and reflect on possible expansions.

Methods

The fieldwork reported here consists of empirical material from an ethnographically inspired multiple-case study of two faith-based businesses. One is situated in the American South and describes itself as being part of the *Business as Mission* (BAM) movement. BAM is a network that sprang out of the Lausanne movement and can be broadly described as Christian-led, for-profit business ventures that aim to function as instruments for world missions.[31] The BAM company is a small business with 22 full-time employees; the customers are primarily non-profits and faith-based organizations, but also some private businesses. The ownership of the business is split between two men.

The other company is located in Eastern Canada and is a member of the Catholic *Economy of Communion* (EoC) network. EoC is a Christian socio-economic movement that provides support for businesses and productive organizations of various juridical forms. The movement sprang from the Catholic lay organization *Focolare* and seeks to end social injustice and create an economic system built on communion.[32] The EoC company is a small business with five full-time employees and is owned by a woman with strong personal bonds to the local and global Focolare movement.[33]

During 2018, I spent one month in each business conducting participant observations and interviews. I completed around 180 h of observations at the two businesses; I also conducted five semi-structured interviews at the Catholic company – four with employees and one with the owner – and six at the evangelical business – four with employees and one with each of the two owners. Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.[34] In the present article, all names of individuals, as well as the names of the two companies, are pseudonymised. Furthermore, information about the two companies' exact geographical location has been removed.

When the ethnographic fieldwork had been completed, I transcribed the material and started the analytical process of coding. I chose thematic analysis as the analytical strategy, here with the aim of identifying themes from coding the material.[35] After reading the transcripts and field notes several times, I coded the material from one workplace at a time, using the software ATLAS.ti. During this phase, I identified and marked out sections in which articulations and activities related to different kinds of goods in the practices were present in the material. I was then looking for patterns among the codes to identify themes. Strategies to identify themes from the codes included looking for repetitions, similarities and differences, as well as missing data.[36] In thematic analysis, the themes come both from the empirical material and the researcher's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon.[37] Hence, analysis was a constant dialogue between the empirical material and theoretical perspectives. Therefore, thematic analysis follows an abductive rationale.[38]

After having written an individual case report for each workplace, I carried out cross-case analysis, looking for similarities and differences between the themes in the two cases. During this phase of analysis, I noticed how *reform* and *negotiation* were acted out differently in the two cases. Hence, it was during cross-case analysis that the processes of *inward* and *outward* (in relation to reform and negotiation) were

crystallised. To present the ethnographic approach in the fieldwork, the two organizations are presented separately in the results section. This means that the drawing together of the two cases mainly happens in the discussion. Although it would have been interesting to reflect more on the results of cross-case analysis on a larger scale, it was not within the scope of the current article.

Considering the overall purpose of exploring forms of good in faith-based work, these two cases were chosen to give access to that phenomenon. The two businesses are from different cultural and theological traditions, but both aim to integrate religion/spirituality and economy in work and thereby act against the differentiation of religion. Hence, the businesses are similar enough, yet different enough, to compare and contrast.

Given the small sample size, the aim of the study is not to reach extensive conclusions about evangelical and Catholic faith-based work in general. As Flyvbjerg argued, case studies often include narratives of complexities and contradictions that might be hard to summarize in general theories, but such "thick" narratives might be a sign that one has found a rich issue.[39] I will argue that the narratives of complexities and contradictions in this study might be transferable, not as generalizations, but hopefully as something recognizable in other contexts.

Work in faith-based businesses – EoC

Reforming the world

Marie, the owner of the EoC business, started the firm with the intent of helping "the poor" while also putting her own talents to use in the service of others.[40] Marie is a practizing Catholic and involved in both ecumenical and interreligious work. However, when hiring people for the business, Marie is not interested in employing people based on their faith, but rather their skills,[41] yet she aims for the company to practise the spirituality of EoC and follow its guidelines – to "live an economy of communion." Hence, the good is thought of as being implicit in the practice itself, in the communion.[42] It is therefore interesting to scrutinize how the employees experience their work in a faith-based business in which different aspects of living an economy of communion are described as central.

One day, during a coffee break, the culture of sharing was brought up for discussion in the form of a Sicilian sourdough cake. Denise, the

employee who brought the cake, told us it was Pope Francis' favourite cake, which he ate every Easter. The owner became excited about the cake as it made her think about an EoC gathering in Rome some years earlier. She told us it had been "absolutely amazing" and that she had been crying while Pope Francis talked about Jesus' parable of the leaven and how, in the past, when there were no refrigerators, you had to share the sourdough in order for it to survive. Pope Francis had told them that it is the same with an economy of communion: "one must share in order to survive."

This coffee break is a clear example of how theological themes are discussed in the Catholic business. The owner, often spontaneously, raises a topic or story related to EoC and tries to start a discussion with the employees about the theme. While the conversations during this particular coffee break focused mostly on the taste of the actual cake, different aspects of a "sharing economy" were also reflected upon in my conversations with the employees. As an example, Denise told me she thinks the basic concept that "the company should give back to the community" makes a lot of sense to her. She further told me that she has seen what good it does, not least in the local retreats for homeless people that the business has organized in the community.

> We know that part of our salary, well, the commissions that usually an agent would make or whatever, and count to the penny and whatever, we know that part of that goes to […] the community. It's not like oh well we're gonna do this and it doesn't get done. Oh, yes, it does get done. I find that it makes you think. And, when you're in that kind of relationship or environment, it makes you feel good that every day a part of you goes outside. It's not just in your bank account, and you can treat yourself, no, you are genuinely helping someone.

It seems important for Denise to emphasize that the money that the business gives to social projects makes a difference in people's lives. It is not merely nice words; things actually get done. This kind of good, which the business generates for the community, also shapes Denise's moral world. She expresses a kind of personal engagement in the social projects that the business supports and feels good knowing that a part of her "goes outside" of the workplace every day. Denise told me later that being a part of this environment has brought back her empathy and, in a sense, enabled her to do more good, because she has felt inspired to befriend people in need in the local community.

It has always been important for the EoC movement to emphasize that a culture of sharing should include both productive and communitarian inclusion to avoid "the poor" becoming an object.[43] What the example with Denise shows, however, is that even though "the poor" the business is supporting often remain distant strangers, the practice's teleoaffective structure seems to open up a path for Denise to practice relational inclusion with people in the local community.[44] The example shows that, while it is impossible to know if the projects that the business is supporting will be effective in the long run, it is significant for Denise that she has seen the difference they make. Furthermore, the good feeling that Denise describes is quite different from the kind of happiness discussed in current economic theories, which is close to Jeremy Bentham's idea of happiness as another word for pleasure. Denise's sense of good seems more connected to the Aristotelian concept of happiness – closely tied to virtues and often described as human flourishing.[45] In summary, working in an EoC business, with its teleoaffective drive towards sharing, has given Denise a direction in life and generated an ethic of care for people in her neighbourhood.

Negotiating the internal culture

However, it is important to note that, while most of the employees are proud of the business' practice of sharing, some express ambivalence towards giving money to charity while experiencing financial difficulties themselves. Florence, a single mother, reflected on this kind of tension:

> So to me, it seems like we're really working hard, really. And the salaries are not that big, or high […] At the same time, there is a kind of ambivalence. There is a way of, ok, I'm glad that we can help people that have even less than we do. But at the same time, you know, on the selfish side, you know, we're the ones working, I'm sorry, our asses off! […] But at the same time to know that we're helping out, that's something that makes you proud as well.

Florence expresses an ambivalence between, on the one hand, feeling proud that the workplace is generating goods for people who have less than she does and, on the other hand, a kind of unfairness that she and her colleagues are working hard without feeling content with

their salaries. As a single mother, Florence has full responsibility for a small child who has been sick non-stop for the last year. Since Florence has used her days of paid sick leave on her child, she has no days left for herself and therefore comes to work even when she is not well. At the same time, she told me that she thinks the workplace probably "saved her" during a very challenging time. Here, we see how, for Florence, the good of giving money to "the poor" is negotiated with the struggle of having enough to support her own family. In the middle of this struggle stands the tired female body.

As employees had told me that salaries are low in the industry in general, I asked Florence whether she and the other employees are part of a union. They are not. Florence further stated that she does not really believe in unions and that, based on her knowledge, unions take money out of employees' pay cheques while still taking the boss' side, so the employees gain little. However, supporting unions and workers' rights is a vital aspect of EoC and of Catholic Social Thought,[46] and one could argue that there is a need for improvement here.

A Catholic logic of faith-based work

In EoC, the logic of work is constructed as both reform directed outwards and negotiations directed inwards. First, the reforms are characterized by a teleological practice drive that is practice-discursive, meaning the ethical logic comes through what is done and how language is used within the practice. The business does not accept the status quo but offers – through its practices – a radical critique of the unsustainable and unjust dimensions of the current capitalist system. However, the change it is working for is not inaccessible; it is a reform that starts in the religious-economic space that it has created for itself within the market economy. Furthermore, the teleological drive towards the world is impure; it is both religiously motivated and economic because the Christian ethic which the business is practizing must function within the economic space in which it is operating.

Second, the EoC project must negotiate inwards while conducting this reform. This means that, while the business is working for the common good, the practitioners also point out the need for higher salaries and other improved working conditions. These negotiations inwards, however, work alongside the process of reform.

Work in faith-based businesses – BAM

Reforming inwards

In contrast to the Catholic business, where the owner does not hire people based on their faith, the evangelical company only employs "born-again Christians." In the beginning, the owners were primarily looking for "good people" when hiring, but learned a hard lesson when they had to fire "good Christian people who did lousy jobs," and the business now prioritizes good professionals rather than those with primarily good character. However, by hiring only Christians, the owners aim to create a thriving culture in which people feel good about coming to work and where employees can grow and mature professionally, spiritually and personally. Michael, the founder, enjoys mentoring his employees and teaching them "life skills." This kind of mentoring is performed through private conversations, in personal and common prayer and through biblical instruction at business meetings. Michael thereby functions both as a professional boss and an informal pastor or mentor.

The focus on reforming the internal culture creates a close and friendly religious working community. It is therefore not surprising that a shared theological language of what it means to be a Christian business seems to exist.[47] As an example, I noticed how the expression "to show grace" was used repeatedly amongst the employees and how Jesus was used as an example: "Jesus showed grace to everyone, and so should we!" When I asked the employees what that looks like, they emphasized the importance of treating co-workers well and creating a culture in which it is okay to make mistakes. One young employee told me that, when working in this business, he does not have to "be afraid" anymore when going to work. He said that he used to work in the restaurant industry, where he had several bad experiences. In contrast, he described the BAM business as "a peaceful environment," which he related to the faith that the people share.

> You know there's a certain way that people are going to react even to bad things because of the faith that we share. Everybody is on the same page, and you don't expect anybody to react like somewhere else. Having worked in the restaurant industry where there's many different kinds of people, and faiths and backgrounds, it was, depending on who was working that night, you either did or did not want to show up to work.

> And here, I've never had that feeling; every day is a fun day. There's never a feeling of, you know, fear to handle something or to confront an issue. Because everybody is kind of looking at it from the same perspective of grace and working with each other.

In this quote, we see how a young employee, who sometimes did not want to go to work before, feels safe and happy working in the BAM business. The employee further contrasts his former diverse workplace, where people had different faiths and backgrounds, with BAM, where everyone shares the same religion. The young employee's previous experience is an important reminder of the anxiety and struggles many people experience in their everyday work. However, while BAM appears to offer a safe and good workplace for its employees, the creation of a close religious communion might risk the business becoming sectarian. Samuel Wells argues that if work seeks to "epitomize an ideal community, or demands the soul of its members, or sets itself the task of putting the whole of society straight," then work has in a certain way become an "alternative church."[48] This example raises questions about what role religious communities can and should have in public economic life.[49] How can the benefits of being a close religious working community be accrued while avoiding the downfalls of becoming sectarian?

Negotiating outwards

The aim of creating and reforming the internal culture is also fulfilled with the broader context in mind. The owners expect the employees to "stand out and shine" because they are required to be honest and fair in all conversations and dealings, and to treat everyone with respect. This ethical standard is summarized by one of the owners as "generally look[ing] like Jesus as much as possible." For the employees, however, it is not always easy to "stand out and shine." Tom, a man in his late fifties, told me about a situation in which, from his perspective, a client completely misunderstood the contracts and several other essential aspects of a deal. Tom described how he became angry to the point of wanting to be violent. As he left the meeting, his immediate reaction was to call Michael, one of the owners, to complain:

> And I said, here's what's going on. I feel like I want to hit somebody. And he said, read James 1:18, and hung up. And I was mad that he didn't tell me what I wanted to hear. And I opened up the Bible on my phone, 'Be quick to listen, slow to speak', and I thought, why does he do this to me? So I understood what he said. After I read the passage, I thought, I know. It was really hard for me, because the human side wanted to be angry, and he did nothing but refer to a Bible verse. And after I read it, I was partly frustrated, partly just sort of laughed to myself about his comment, and I just sat in the truck and let it sink in, and it ran away.

This example shows how individual workers are expected to follow certain ethical standards in their interactions with others. When guiding the employee in this difficult situation, the owner uses a Bible verse as a tool and as a reminder of the expectation to always treat everyone with respect. Tom, who was hoping for a different response, is left negotiating with both his emotions and the direction in which the owner is trying to lead him. This shows that employees are expected to put Christian principles into practice, and it is thus important for the evangelical business that they are believers. It also shows that the logic of work is not only defined by the business' internal culture; on the contrary, as a business that works with non-profit and regular clients, with the local community and subcontractors, the company is interacting with a bundle of practices that affect how different kinds of good are negotiated.

Another example of such negotiations taking place is in the practice of "showing grace" in transactions. Sarah, who works in accounting, described a challenging situation:

> Sarah: A couple of years ago, a job didn't pay its supplier, so then we were responsible for paying it, and that can be frustrating.
>
> Lisa: Actually, we weren't responsible, but we wanted to protect our customer, and so we wanted to protect it and show grace to the subcontractors. We offered to pay the bills that it couldn't afford. It was thousands of dollars, but we did it with the greater purpose in mind. To bless the customer and the subcontractor.

Here, the term "to show grace" is used to describe how the business covered for the non-profit client. Lisa described it as if the business were acting with a "greater purpose" in mind, thus subordinating the

profit motive beneath the good of protecting the client and the subcontractor. We see how the theological ideal of showing grace is moved from the internal culture to the economic centre. The business subordinates the logic of profitability and hence acts against a market-driven rationality.

Since the business wants to have good relationships with both clients and subcontractors and needs to stay profitable enough to survive in a competitive market, it must negotiate when to release money and when to hold it back. Lisa told me that, instead of always being black and white or simply contractual, it wants to have a relationship:

> Eh, so, just recently we had a subcontractor bill us for its work and it did a good job and, we've used it on other jobs, but the customer had not paid us for that work yet, so we weren't able to pay it, but it [the subcontractor] said 'it's really important for it to get paid because we have financial troubles', and we had financial troubles as well. So, […] I talked to one of the owners and he said, 'let's give them half of their payment'. I told them, and they said no. They would rather receive the whole payment a month later, which made me think that they were being deceitful when they said they were in financial troubles. So I was torn between how to react. Should I respond with grace or confront them?

Here, Lisa is reasoning with herself about the limits of grace – whether to show grace to someone who might be acting deceitfully, especially when the business itself is having financial troubles. Hence, showing grace and acting for the common good in transactions is negotiated with the relational aspect of truthfulness and the internal needs of the business.

An evangelical logic of faith-based work

In BAM, the Christian logic of work is constructed as reform directed inwards and negotiations directed outwards. First, while there is a focus in the evangelical business on individuals putting ethical principles into practice, there is also a focus on creating and reforming a good culture or community, such that people feel good about coming to work and can develop both spiritually and professionally. In order to reform the community, different religious tools are used. But while this religious-economic community offers a safe and thriving work

environment, it runs the risk of becoming sectarian. Second, while reforming the community, the practice must negotiate outwards as it interacts with clients, partners and the local community in a nexus of practices. This negotiation is characterized by a teleological practice drive in which ethical logic evolves through improvised activities in the practice.

Discussion

In this article, I have argued that typical Christian ethical models of work, as exemplified by O'Donovan and Posadas, might be fruitful for guiding political and academic debates. However, such models can make one blind to essential dynamics and moral resources hidden in social practices. I would therefore like to add supplementary resources from a practice-theoretical ethnographic study of two faith-based businesses to this stream of research. Briefly, the findings presented above suggest that, while operating in somewhat different ways, the two practices are characterized by *reform* and *negotiation*.

In EoC, reform is directed outwards, and the reform process is characterized by an impure practice drive that offers a critique of the injustices of the current economic order through its practices. The business is, so to speak, "squatting a house"[50] within capitalism and hence reframing the logic of profitability within a logic of communion. Here, the Christian logic of sharing is spread out as the common good is placed at the heart of the economy. However, working for the good of the community is also deeply connected with the good or the happiness of the individual. Furthermore, negotiation in EoC is directed inwards; here, practitioners address the relationships within the business and the issues in need of improvement.

In BAM, reform is directed mainly inwards to create a good Christian culture within the workplace. Furthermore, this process is quite pure, meaning religion is practised in the economic setting of the workplace, but the religiously motivated reform is not aimed at transforming the economy in any fundamental way. The process of negotiation is then directed outwards through interactions with a nexus of practices in the wider community. These negotiations are both pure and impure; on the one hand, the Christian ethic regulates the economy by placing high ethical demands on individual actors – moral and ethical values are brought to the economic mechanism from the outside, and religion and economy thus remain quite separate and pure. On the other hand, the outward negotiations are characterized by an impure teleological practice

drive in which the aim of forming good relationships leads to negotiations that transform the economy from the inside as the practice evolves.

Taken together, the study shows how the somewhat different processes of reform and negotiation in the two cases are best understood in dialogue with each other. This means that a practice in any given context does not contribute a given truth; instead, an ethnographically informed practice-theoretical Christian ethic must be based on the search for practical wisdom *in medias res* – that is, in the middle of things. For example, while BAM's religiously motivated reform of the internal culture makes it a good place to work, it runs the risk of keeping the practice of grace inside the office and thus separate from both the economy and the common good. Here, the reform process in EoC – in which religiously motivated work for the common good is placed at the heart of the economy and the good of the outside community is tightly connected to the good or happiness of the individual – could function as a good dialogue partner for possible better accounts in BAM. Conversely, the improvisation-like, impure, outward negotiations in BAM seem to be driven by the religiously motivated *teleos* of good relationships. These negotiations are further co-produced by other actors as the practice evolves, and this example could serve as a good dialogue partner for possible better accounts in the negotiation processes in EoC, especially as community is a core value.

A further contribution relates to the actual guidance that a practice-theoretical Christian ethic might offer to people in regular jobs. As this study shows, with both reform and negotiation, the Christian ethic in these practices does not collapse into only negotiation, nor is it idealized by only reform; both processes are essential, and we see how religion contributes in different ways to both. The main point is that the Christian ethic at work in these practices is not implemented in the form of a foundation, but rather through actual, collective, impure, action-oriented and meaning-constituting practices. While O'Donovan and Posadas offer system-critical and structuralist perspectives that might work well in academic and political debates, it is difficult to see how their perspectives could contribute to anything other than confusion or discouragement for ordinary workers. What, for example, would the practitioners in this study do with the good that they experience in their actual work practices if, as suggested by Posadas, all forms of paid labour must always be rejected? Posadas' approach seems to inevitably cause one to think that it does not matter what one does because the system is the problem. Furthermore, what would the actors do with a Christian ethic of work arising from the processes of

reforming and negotiating impure religious-economic practices if confronted by O'Donovan's perspective that a Christian ethic of work should start from a pure theological account? This study shows how, for the practitioners of these practices, good or meaningful work cannot be separated from actual work activities, but rather is constituted through both interaction and language in impure religious-economic practices.

Finally, the findings of the current study have to be seen in light of some limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, through the use of ethnography and practice theory, the study focused on Christian ethical logics of work. Hence, although it was not in the scope of the current article to focus on contextual similarities and differences between the two cases—in relation to, for example, the political economy or the role of religion in the public sphere—relating the findings to research on these topics would certainly deepen the empirical findings.[51] Second, the two cases discussed in the present article are taken from a North American context, while this journal is characteristically a Nordic one. Therefore, a final reflection refers to the study's ability to be valuable across contexts and situations. Following an ethnographic approach, I believe the contextual knowledge developed in this study is transferable in the sense of being able to affect and resonate with readers from different contexts and settings.[52] Nevertheless, further explorations of faith-based or Christian logics of work in different contexts would broaden the possibilities of developing the perspectives discussed in the current article. Hence, one research field in a Scandinavian context that is worth investigating further—here in relation to the findings in the present article—is that of organizational hybrids as welfare providers,[53] which are sometimes called: "half charity, half business."[54]

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Notes

1. For exemplifications of how fieldwork has become an established method in Christian ethics over the past fifteen years, see, for example, the special issue on "The Ethnographic Turn" in *Ecclesial Practices*; book series, such as *T&T Clark Studies in Social Ethics*; or volumes, such as Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*.
2. For an introduction to different interpretations of work, see Meilaender, *Working*. For a comment on the tendency to choose some biblical stories and not others as starting points for theologies of work, see Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 110.
3. I am thereby relating this study to the conversations about practices that took place in the special issue "Practice in Contemporary Theology and Religious Studies." *Studia Theologica: Nordic Journal of Theology* 75, no. 1 (2021) – a special issue that in itself can be seen as an example of how the interest in lived religion and everyday practices is increasing among scholars of religion and theology in Scandinavia. However, while the articles in the special issue focus on theoretical perspectives on practices, as well as practices in practical theology and educational research, this article takes a somewhat different direction as it undertakes a supplementary way of presenting Christian ethical logics of work, using practice theory and ethnography.
4. Posadas finds this agreement when reviewing contemporary Christian normative perspectives on work by theologians who draw on magisterial Catholic, mainline Protestant and Protestant evangelical traditions. Posadas, "The Refusal to Work," 330–61.
5. O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, 107.
6. Ibid., 115.
7. Posadas, "The Refusal to Work," 343.
8. Posadas draws particularly on Weeks, *The Problem with Work.*
9. Posadas, "The Refusal to Work," 330.
10. Ibid., 350.
11. The following argument is inspired by Afdal et al. and their argument for an empirical ethic. See, Afdal et al., "Bidrag," 17–18. See, also, Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 40–60.
12. For further explanation of the use of the term *pure*, see footnote 15.
13. Bretherton, "Task of Christian Ethics," 175–6.
14. Ibid., 176–7.
15. When using the terms *pure* and *impure,* I am referring to the modern tendency to place, for example, religion and economy in different spheres as part of the differentiation of religion. However, as has been argued by Bruno Latour and others, the modern narrative of dichotomies, purification and differentiation does not reflect the many hybridization processes in everyday empirical practices. See Latour, *We Have Never Been*.
16. Savigny, Knorr-Cetina, and Schatzki, *The Practice Turn*.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 1–3.
19. Ibid.
20. Nicolini, *Practice Theory,* 2.
21. Afdal, "Practice Theory."
22. Schatzki, *Timespace of Human Activity,* 172.
23. Afdal, "Practice Theory."
24. Widdershoven, *Empirical Ethics in Psychiatry.*
25. Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology,* 63.

26. Widdershoven, *Empirical Ethics in Psychiatry*, 34. For a discussion about the need for *phronèsis* in theological ethical research based on ethnographic studies, see, for example, Bretherton, "Coming to Judgment," 167–96.
27. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 58.
28. Afdal et al., "Bidrag til en empirisk," 18.
29. Bretherton calls this process "disidentifying with idolatry" in Bretherton, "Task of Christian Ethics," 184–5.
30. Nicolini, *Practice Theory*, 6.
31. Johnson, *Business as Mission,* 27–8.
32. See EoC. "The 'Identification Card'."
33. *Focolare* is a lay organization within the Catholic Church that focuses on spiritual and social renewal. See Focolare, "About Us."
34. The study was registered and approved by the data protection officer for research, NSD—Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS. Protocol code: 56548. Date of approval: 17.11.2017.
35. Ryan, and Bernard, "Techniques to Identify Themes," 85–109.
36. Ryan and Bernard, "Techniques to Identify Themes," 89–93.
37. Ryan and Bernard, "Techniques to Identify Themes," 88.
38. Danermark and Ekström, *Explaining Society*, 89–91.
39. Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*, 84.
40. One of the basic ideas of EoC is that a business should share its profit amongst three objectives: helping indigent individuals through initiatives that include communitarian and productive inclusion, developing the business and the diffusion of EoC. See, EoC, "Guidelines to Running."
41. Empirical studies show that most people working in EoC businesses today do not know much about the economy of communion. See, Gold, *New Financial Horizons.*
42. I write more about this theme in the following article: Ledstam and Afdal. "Negotiating Purity and Impurity of Religion and Economy," 588.
43. Gold, *New Financial Horizons*, 68.
44. For an overview of different perspectives on Christian charity and humanitarianism, see, for example, Gregory, "Charity."
45. Bruni, "The Value of Sociality," 61–79.
46. EoC, "Guidelines to Running." See also, John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens."
47. Here, the contextual differences between Eastern Canada and the American South become apparent. For BAM, integrating evangelical Christianity with business means that one is different, but not unique – there are other, similar businesses around, and evangelical Christianity still plays an important role in public life.
48. Wells, *God's Companions,* 200.
49. For historical presentations of the relationship between evangelical Christianity and business, see, for example, Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* or Kirk, *Wanamaker's Temple.*
50. I am borrowing this expression from Luke Bretherton, even though he uses it to describe Pentecostal political theology. See Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life.*
51. See, e.g., Lyon and Van Die (eds.), *Rethinking Church, State*; Haddow, *Comparing Quebec and Ontario*; Harvey, "Race, Culture and Religion"; Johnson, *Political Economy of the United States*.
52. Tracy, "Qualitative Quality." See also my reflections on case studies and transferability under *Methods*.

53. Today, there is a growing scholarly interest in organizational hybrids, not least when it comes to research on hybrids at the intersection between commercial life/business, on the one hand, and civil society, on the other hand. See, for example, Billis and Rochester (eds.), *Handbook on Hybrid Organisations*; Von der Heydte, *Challenges Resulting from Multiple*. In discussions of the transformations of the Nordic civil societies and their organizations, researchers such as Filip Wijkström have exemplified how diaconal institutions and city missions are now playing an important role as suppliers of welfare. From this perspective, Wijkström argues that one can see a re-entry of a charity paradigm in Scandinavia. Writing about Sweden in particular, Wijkström argues that even though these philanthropic initiatives go back to nineteenth-century Sweden, references today are made to civil society organizations in the US, Canada and the UK. Moreover, Wijkström shows how from the 1980s onward, social cooperatives and social enterprises have entered the scene as a new kind of civil society for social service providers in Sweden, combining business models with social missions. See Wijkström, "Charity Speak and Business," 38, 41. Furthermore, I believe using the concept hybrid organization would fit well with my research because it does not take for granted that hybrid organizations produce good outcomes. As has been argued by Elexius and Furusten, the benefits of using the concept when studying hybrids is that it "encourages critical analysis of *possible* ethical and social impacts (among others) of the hybrid, without taking it for granted a priori." See Elexius and Furusten, "Preface," 4. In addition, for research on the majority churches in Europe and their role as agents of welfare, see Bäckström, Davie, Edgardh et. al. *Welfare and Religion, Volume 1&*2.
54. Wijkström, "Charity Speak," 46.

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