LIVED RELIGION IN LIVED SPACE

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When I visited H.-G. Heimbrock at his faculty in Frankfurt in June 2005, a landscape photo with the words “Seeing is Believing” bade me welcome at the door to his office (cf. Heimbrock 2003). The artefacts and words which a person places in his/her daily surroundings can tell a lot about the person. In this context I interpret the picture which invites the stranger to express an attitude to perceive, meet and treat others with an open eye and open senses so characteristically like a virtue of the addressee of our Festschrift.

My reflection, therefore, departs from this open aesthetic attitude—which through its emphasis on the circle of perception and reflection also characterizes the concept of “lived religion”—and it offers an attempt to connect the concept of “lived religion” with the concept of “lived space” elaborated on in urban studies.

What is meant by “lived space?” How should theologians and scholars of religion approach the spatiality of religion? What does the concept of lived religion mean for “theology in its spatial turn” (Bergmann 2007b)? To begin with, I present and discuss the concept of lived space. Thereupon I will emphasize the need to mine deeper the interaction of religion and city space. Notions as atmosphere, making-oneself-at-home and urban amnesia will be furthermore explored as contributing to a Thirdspace theological aesth/ethics of space with its emphasis on the Holy Spirit.

Theology and Religious Studies as Thirdspace Disciplines

Practical theology has recovered the theme of space and place as the departure point to revise its interpretation of Christian practices among the believers and Churches as well as human religious experiences

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1 This article draws on three recently produced texts (Bergmann 2007abc), and it offers a synthesis of some central thoughts on my ongoing research on “Space, movement and religion.”
In general. In their comprehensive presentation of the discipline as a reflection of “lived religion,” W.-E. Failing and H.-G. Heimbrock elaborate the concept of space, which they differentiate as lived space, tempered space, space of action, and social space, space in between and symbolic space (Failing 1998). Their understanding of lived religion, which mainly draws on sources from phenomenological philosophy, succeeds in giving the well-known concept of “life world” a much more plastic shape than usual in sociophilosophy. In such a spatially and bodily differentiated understanding, the phenomena and experiences of sounds, rituals, dance and movement, but also more central notions in practical theology can be explored anew. This article develops this approach further and connects it to one of the most influential theories in urban studies.

Following H. Lefebvre, geographer E. Soja has offered a Thirdspace understanding which challenges science in general. Religious studies and theology should respond to this call not just by contributing pieces to spatial studies but to re-negotiate its own self-understanding as a Thirdspace discipline (Soja 1996). Religion does not at all work without or beyond space; Therefore, also a study of religion and contextual theology must develop qualitative interpretations of the spatiality of God, the believers, their worldviews and values and their cultural and spiritual practices. Urbanization and the dynamics of synekism should therefore be approached themselves as essential religious processes.

According to Soja, the “trialectics of being” relates spatiality, historicity, and sociality, while the “trialectics of spatiality” relates the lived, the perceived and the conceived (Soja 1996, 71, 74). A Firstspace perspective investigates cityspace with regard to its materialized spatial practices while Secondspace analysis explores it as a mental and ideational field, where the conceived space of imagination is at core. Thirdspace study examines urbanism as fully lived space, “a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual, locus of structured individual and collective experience and agency” (Soja 2000, 11).

“Synekism” is defined as “the stimulus of urban agglomeration” and “in particular, the economic and ecological interdependencies and the creative—as well as occasionally destructive—synergisms that arise from the purposeful clustering and collective cohabitation of people in space, in a ‘home’ habitat.” (Soja 2000, 12)

My plea to regard urbanization and synekism as deeply religious processes challenges scholars of religion to partake in the spatial turn