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9. "Promotion of life". Reflections on the intentional character of religious practice[1] – Lebensdienlichkeit. Erwägungen zum intentionalen Charakter religiöser Praxis

Abstract: This article deals with issues and problems in the horizon of a specific hermeneutics of religious practice. The core thesis is that religious practice can be understood as a form of recommendation for individual believing. Thus, the article raises the question of what forms of believing could be considered recommendable under contemporary conditions. Overall, it is a plea for a more anthropologically oriented Practical Theology.

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit Fragen und Problemen im Horizont eines Verständnisses religiöser Praxis als Glaubensempfehlung und versucht Auskunft darüber zu geben, welcher Glauben unter zeitgenössischen Bedingungen als empfehlenswert gelten könnte. Insgesamt handelt es sich um ein Plädoyer für eine stärker anthropologisch orientierte Praktische Theologie.

1. Starting situation

Wherever the Christian belief of an individual expresses itself within his or her real life, *something is indicated*, something is *suggested* beyond the factual level, *something is advised in the sense of a recommendation*. Whoever perceives believing people, their way of living and their religious practice (i.e. their embodiment in the widest sense), is instantly provided with conspicuous possibilities, which *could* be discovered, experimentally reenacted or adopted as a part of one's own lifestyle. I write *could* because a recommendation never forces, but only, explicitly or implicitly, suggests something; hence, in some cases, one will gladly follow the recommendations that are inherited within the religious

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1 This article results from the opening lecture of the young academic's symposium "RELIGIÖS: empfehlenswert? praktisch?" ["RELIGIOUS: advisable? useful?"] at the University of Vienna, 11.04.2014, contains preliminary considerations of my dissertation project and was translated by Anna Walchshofer. A more detailed version of my lecture (in German) is published here: Bernhard Kirchmeier: Zweck und Wirkung religiöser Praxis. Ein Plädoyer für lebensdienliche Glaubensempfehlungen, in: idem (ed.), Empfehlenswert und praktisch! Perspektiven junger Theologinnen und Theologen auf die Lebensdienlichkeit christlicher Religionskultur, Leipzig 2015, 11–38.

practice of people – in other cases (often for a good reason) *not.* Besides, an appreciation of the perceptible religious practice of people as recommendation for Christian believing is already established in the New Testament: in the Second Epistel to the Corinthians Paulus interprets his addressees as a *letter of recommendation*, considers them as a text written by Christ and supposes, that it can be read and understood by everyone.[2]

My considerations are not only based on an understanding of practical theology as hermeneutics of Christian practice,[3] that has to explore the specific, and *not* the fundamental, constitution of Christian belief[4], but also on a certain concept of belief/believing (chapter 2), on a certain theological appreciation of the church (chapter 3), on a certain perspective on human communication processes (chapter 4) and on the important, as well as difficult question of criteriology concerning the evaluation of what should be recommended within a culture of belief – and what should not be recommended (chapter 5). In the end, my considerations lead to a demand on the scientific theology and its disciplines (chapter 6). – It is the aim of this article to turn to the aspects mentioned above in order to show and to highlight the backgrounds and consequences of an understanding of religious practice as a recommendation for Christian belief/believing.

2.   To exist visually as a human being within a lived-in world – Reflections on the concept of belief

Birgit Weyel assumes that there are various types of individually lived religion, that have not been examined by Practical Theology yet, and have therefore been *completely* deprived from critical practical-theological reflection so far, which is the reason why she pleads in favour of a 'visualisation strategy of invisible religion' in terms of an evaluation of the religion at the individual's place.[5] It is certainly possible to agree with her findings. Likewise, one can also agree with Wilhelm Gräb, who points out that how and to what extent lived religion is or can be visualized depends on the theological perspective one takes; thus, for ex-

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2 2 Cor 3,2 f.; cf. for example Ulrich H. J. Körtner: Historischer Jesus – geschichtlicher Christus. Zum Ansatz einer rezeptionsästhetischen Christologie, in: Klaas Huizing u. a.: Lesen und Leben. Drei Essays zur Grundlegung einer Lesetheologie, Bielefeld 1997, 99–135, here 131 f.

3 Cf. Michael Meyer-Blanck: Theorie und Praxis der Zeichen. Praktische Theologie als Hermeneutik christlicher Praxis, in: Eberhard Hauschildt/Ulrich Schwab: Praktische Theologie für das 21. Jahrhundert, Stuttgart 2002, 121–132.

4 Cf. Michael Meyer-Blanck: Theorie und Praxis der Zeichen, loc. cit. (s. note 3), 122 f.

5 Cf. Birgit Weyel: "Kenntnis des wirklichen Lebens". Von der Empirie in der Praktischen Theologie, in: PTh, vol. 97, no. 9, 2008, 328–341, here 338.

ample, the focus of a theological scientist with a traditional-ecclesiastical approach will tend to narrow, whereas the focus of a cultural theological scientist *will probably widen*, therefore in the first case less phenomena will be visualized *lived religion* as compared to the latter.[6]

Since I endorse Weyel's demand on the one hand, but on the other hand also share Gräb's insights, I will first of all outline the theological perspective by use of which I a look at religious practice; this hermeneutical groundwork is necessary in order to be able to reasonably evaluate and assess the visible forms and shapes of lived religion in a second step. The following description of my theological perspective is to be regarded as clarification of (my own) preconceptions.[7]

First of all I would like to state, that I prefer the German term "Glauben" (belief/faith) to the term "Religion". I normally do not speak of lived religion ("gelebte Religion") but of lived belief ("gelebter Glauben"). I appreciate the German term "Glauben", since this *nominalisation of a verb* does not only suggest *ideas* (images) but also *behaviours* and is *theologically* as well as *secularly* connoted. The term "Glauben" connects belief/faith and believ*ing*/*having* faith – *fides qua creditur* und *fides quae creditur.* Concerning the current practical-theological critique of the term "Religion" I exemplarily refer to Christian Grethlein,[8] regarding the – somewhat pathetically speaking – potential renaissance of the term of "Glauben" I refer to Wilfried Engemann.[9] To me, *belief* in a broader sense can be defined as the relation between picture(s) and behaviour(s) that is accomplished by subjects and that can be considered as the expression of their self-conception; by a *Christian belief/Christian believing* in the narrower sense, on the other hand, I understand:

> the lived-in existence of a human being, which is explicitly or implicitly shaped by a relationship of image(s) and behaviour(s) that is accomplished by the subject in the religious system as an expression of his or her self-conception and stands in referential context to Jesus Christ (e. g. in the sense of an 'imaging image').[10]

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6 Cf. Wilhelm Gräb: Predigtlehre. Über religiöse Rede, Göttingen 2013, 160 f.

7 Cf. Rudolf Bultmann: Das Problem der Hermeneutik (1950), in: idem: Glaube und Verstehen (vol. 2), Tübingen ⁵1968, 211–235; and Hans-Georg Gadamer: Hermeneutik und Historismus (1965), in: idem: Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen, Register (Gesammelte Werke 2), Tübingen ²1993, 387–424, here 406, esp. note 55.

8 Cf. Christian Grethlein: Praktische Theologie, Berlin/Boston 2012, 170–175.

9 Cf. Wilfried Engemann: Die emotionale Dimension des Glaubens als Herausforderung für die Seelsorge, in: WzM, vol. 61, no. 3, 2009, 287–299; also idem: Lebensgefühl und Glaubenskultur. Menschsein als Vorgabe und Zweck der religiösen Praxis des Christentums, in: WzM, vol. 65, no. 3, 2013, 218–237, esp. 230–237.

10 This "defining formula" implies a triple reduction (which is also encountered in the thinking of Rudolf Bultmann): an *effective reduction*, in which God is thought as being primarily experienced through His ministries ("imaging picture"); an *anthropological reduction* in which these ministries refer to human beings; as well as an *aesthetic-hermeneutic reduction* in which the effects on people are solely understood as a result of perceptual processes and

This means, that for me Christian believing (1) is always connected to human beings and their way of living, it is, because of its place, (2) an occurrence within the individuals' lived-in world, (3) it has to be classed among the context of the social system "religion" in which subjects (inter-)act, (4) does not simply fall from heaven, but is based on subjective signification processes, (5) stands in a context with human self-understanding, (6) can be explained particularly by the inseparable dimensions of form and content and (7) cannot be thought without the conceptual connection of (figurative) *extra nos* conveyed by Jesus Christ.

> In order to address the topics of the young academic symposium against this background, for example the particular awareness of an individual to be perfectly "normal", despite certain differences in comparison to others, can become visual as a form of Christian believing (Urte Borchardt). The same is true when people indulge in certain acts of prayer during a service/mass (Christian Walti), when people proselytize because of certain considerations and insights (Katharina Krause); when someone allows him- or herself to take some time out (Franziska Grießer-Birnmeyer); when people grieve because of participating in a virtual culture of memory (Swantje Luthe).

The idea, that people are visualized *as believing people* before others, because *they make themselves visible as such* and announce themselves as (Christian) believers and/or *are perceived and understood as such by others*, leads to the heart of the Christian Ecclesiology how it has been understood since Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher.

3.   To get sight of and gain insight into each other's Christian belief – Reflections on the community of believers

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher characterizes church as a community of individual symbolizing action or a community of mutual revelation of Christian religious self-consciousness;[11] thus in church service, as the prototypical place of church, people gather in order to mutually put before their eyes their Christian religious self-consciousness, because no one is fully aware of an overall and encompassing notion of Christ[12] – i.e. church is regarded as communicatively

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processes of understanding in terms of an existential-involving self-understanding based on signs in concrete lived-in contexts. – Cf. Hartmut von Sass: Gott als Ereignis des Seins. Versuch einer hermeneutischen Onto-Theologie, Tübingen 2013, esp. 225–227.

11 Cf. Hans Joachim Birkner: Schleiermachers christliche Sittenlehre. Im Zusammenhang seines philosophisch-theologischen Systems (= TBT 8), Berlin 1964, 114–127, here 114.

12 Cf. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt (vol. 2), ed. by Martin Redeker, Berlin ⁷1960, 215 (§ 115.1); and also Michael Moxter: Urteilskraft und Intersubjektivität. Zur Eigenart theologischer Reflexion, in: Klaus-M. Kodalle/Anne M. Steinmeier (ed.): Subjektiver

qualified community, in which people (can) *get sight of* and *gain insight into each others' belief.* I chose the terms to 'get sight of' and 'gain insight into belief', but one could just as well call it the "Circulation des religiösen Bewusstseins"[13] [circulation of religious consciousness] or a hermeneutic and aesthetic process of imagination.

The act of getting sight of beliefs refers to an *aesthetic dimension,* which underlies the communication of the gospel: recommendations of beliefs always imply a sensually perceptible representation on the part of those providing signs and cannot be understood without perceptual processes on the part of those reading the signs;[14] in other words: church is always characterized by *concrete human examples* of Christian believing that people (can) get sight of. Schleiermacher's term of *representing action* ("darstellendes Handeln") expresses what this aesthetic dimension of the concept of church means. To Schleiermacher a community of believers is unthinkable without this representing action of believers, who, in doing so, make their Christian religious self-consciousness visible to others; to him representing action is the actual basis of every religious community.[15] In this aesthetic dimension of getting sight especially *optical visibility*[16] plays an important role, even though perception and understanding cannot be separated from one another.

The act of gaining insight[17] refers to the *hermeneutic dimension* that underlies the communication of the gospel. In ecclesiastical rites and practices people do not only perceive external representations (see above); in the act of understanding they also go through a process of an individual acquisition of what

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Geist. Reflexion und Erfahrung im Glauben (FS Traugott Koch), Würzburg 2002, 25–36, here 33–35.

13 Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Die praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt (Sämtliche Werke I/13), ed. by Jacob Frerichs, Berlin 1850, 201–221, here 216.

14 "Von Schleiermacher bis in die jüngsten Veröffentlichungen zu praktisch-theologischen Fragestellungen hinein ist die Frage nach unserer Wahrnehmung […] das zentrale Thema der Praktischen Theologie. Es ist an der Zeit, die Frage nach der Wahrnehmung von einem impliziten zu einem expliziten Thema der Praktischen Theologie zu machen." – Albrecht Grözinger: Praktische Theologie als Kunst der Wahrnehmung, Gütersloh 1995, 65.

15 Cf. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Die christliche Sitte nach den Grundsäzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt. Aus Schleiermachers handschriftlichem Nachlasse und nachgeschriebenen Vorlesungen (Sämtliche Werke I/12), ed. by Ludwig Jonas, Berlin 1843, 147 (Annex B §6).

16 For optical and hermeneutical visibility, cf. Claudia Welz: Menschenwürde, Blickwechsel und Schamgefühl. Ethische Implikationen menschlicher Un-Sichtbarkeit, in: ZEE, vol. 58, no. 1, 2014, 21–39, here: 21.24–29.

17 As insights cannot be caused deliberately but are more likely to present themselves, the term revelation can be regarded as a traditional-theological counterpart to this hermeneutic-anthropological term; cf. Ulrich Körtner: Der inspirierte Leser. Zentrale Aspekte biblischer Hermeneutik, Göttingen 1994, 43–49, here 47.

(allegedly) was given to understand; in other words: church is also characterized by deep (inner) insights that people generate on the basis of perception. In the context of this dimension of gaining insight *hermeneutic visibility* is of significant meaning, although in many cases optical visibility plays a role here, too.[18]

The fact that church is about a *mutual perception and understanding* of what individual believing is (or seems to be constituted of) and about a *mutual presentation* of the characteristics of individual believing, illustrates the *dialogical dimension* of the communication of the gospel as well as the *egalitarian dimension* of Protestant church. For church service this means that not only ministers are to be regarded as the communicators of the gospel, but in fact all worshippers. More generally speaking this means: all those who believe can become communicators of the gospel in every condition of their life without explicitly having to call into play their own faith; the communicative interaction of believers is not only a necessary but also a sufficient criterion for defining the quality of representing action[19] – there is no need for doing or explicitly communicating 'anything additional' or 'special'; after all Schleiermacher emphasizes that believers continue with this representing action throughout all their active life and thus imprint it with a representing character[20] – just because; this means: examples of Christian belief cannot only be found where Christian belief/faith is explicitly addressed, but wherever believers are (or can be) perceived *as such.* Thus church, as the place of mutual sight of and insight into Christian belief, happens also (or precisely because of that) in the context of everyday life, so that church is to be understood (also and precisely) as a phenomenon (in the midst) of the world.[21] According to Schleiermacher church is not to be confined to Christian church in the narrower sense; due to its interconnection with Christian belief, as a phenomenon of human life and culture, church is initially not a specifically Christian, not a theological but an ethico-cultural-philosophical-sociological term.[22]

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18 Cf. Claudia Welz: Menschenwürde, Blickwechsel und Schamgefühl, loc. cit. (s. note 16), esp. 21.24–29.

19 "Die christliche Kirche bildet sich durch das Zusammentreten der einzelnen Wiedergebornen zu einem geordneten Aufeinanderwirken und Miteinanderwirken." – Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Der christliche Glaube, loc. cit. (s. note 12), 215 (§ 115.1).

20 Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Die christliche Sitte, loc. cit. (s. note 15), 536.

21 Birgit Weyel takes that line when she points out that – unlike what strategy papers concerning mission and evangelisation suggest – religious symbolisation that appropriately describes what "gospel" means can be expected outside institutional church, too; cf. Birgit Weyel: Mission oder Kommunikation? Zur prinzipiellen Wechselseitigkeit protestantischer Kommunikationskultur, in: Wilhelm Gräb/idem (ed.): Praktische Theologie und protestantische Kultur (= PThK 9; FS Peter C. Bloth), Gütersloh 2002, 249–266, here 256f.

22 Cf. Hans Joachim Birkner: Schleiermachers christliche Sittenlehre, loc. cit. (s. note 11), 115.

In practical terms, for homiletics this means: there is no need to explicitly speak about God, to refer to Him and His traces in the world, to name His concrete ministry in life or the parish or to *call on* Christians to reveal something of their own faith (and much else)[23] for the sake of church – in fact the gospel is communicated wherever believers simply *live their life*; their whole way of life may provide opportunities for me to get sight of (external) beliefs and gain concurrently insight *into* my own personal believing. This is the reason why Schleiermacher does not feel called upon to accomplish any educational or missionary task. The *elevating function*[24] of the communication of the gospel is always based upon the representing action, so that church always reaches beyond (seemingly) existing borders; in other words: representing action always *implies* effective expansive action (as well as effective purifying action).[25] In the tradition of Schleiermacher the gospel is communicated, Christian believing is articulated in terms of a recommendation and church is realized (anew) wherever people can witness and experience the believing of others. – The systematic theologian *Ingolf Dalferth* stresses that the gospel is always communicated where (1) Christians simply live their life, where (2) Christians explicitly reveal their life as believer's life to others and finally where (3) Christians reveal the gospel as the *reason* for their believing in plain language. Wherever believers make this last-named interpretation or symbolization, they communicate the gospel *explicitly* rather than "merely" *implicitly* (as in the other two cases mentioned), but in fact not more/less or better/worse.[26]

4.   To make and adopt recommendations – Reflections on the concept of communication

What has been said so far points to a second problem: My thesis is that wherever Christian belief becomes visible it is a recommendation for individual believing. As making a recommendation is a certain mode of communication, in the following this thesis should be further supported by means of communication theory; all the more because contemporary Practical Theology is increasingly guided by the central concept of the communication of the gospel.

The different, increasingly semiotically oriented communication theories basically agree on the assumption that in referring to something "visible" (i. e.

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23 A different position can be found here: Reiner Knieling: Was predigen wir? Eine Homiletik, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2009, 174–177.

24 Cf. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Die praktische Theologie, loc. cit. (s. note 13), 201–221, here 216f.

25 Cf. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher: Die christliche Sitte, loc. cit. (s. note 15), 526.

26 Cf. Ingolf U. Dalferth: Malum. Theologische Hermeneutik des Bösen, Tübingen 2008, 336.

the signifier) communicators try to make something "invisible" (i.e. the sig-
nified) accessible to others.[27] If it is true, that Christian belief becomes or can
become visible in life, because it is, in theological language, consistently un-
derstood as *fides quae and fides qua* and not reduced to an "eternal truth" (i.e.
fides quae in its purest form, see above), then it is not only possible to (vaguely)
communicate about it (i.e. in the sense of a signified), but also *through* it (i.e. in
the sense of a signifier). This means that Christian belief can be practical-
theologically reflected upon as a *medium of communication* as well as a (po-
tential) *content of communication*. Furthermore, Christian belief should be re-
flected upon as an (intended) *purpose* and (possible) *effect* of any *communicative
process*; something which practical-theological research has – not only with
regard to homiletics – always been interested in; I refer here to the aspect of
Schleiermacher's effective expansive action mentioned above. Bearing all this in
mind, communication of the gospel can be understood as the (implicit) attempt
of those providing signs to express 'a Christian belief' (signified) by means of
their (own, concrete) believing (signifier) in order to 'bring about' – what
Schleiermacher calls edification – (concrete) Christian belief on the part of those
(potentially) reading the sign (purpose).

At the very latest now we arrive at the crucial question of contemporary
communication science, the question of the *intention* of communicators.[28] With
regard to the issue of this article, this question is relevant for two reasons: on the
one hand because the author suggests understanding the (religious) practice of
people as a recommendation for individual believing and the term 'recom-
mendation' already connotes an intentional aspect and on the other hand
because the author regards even such personal manifestations as recom-
mendations for believing (see above), in which speakers are *not aware of any
intentions* and certainly do not intend or consciously want to recommend
anything to others by behaving in a certain way. The central point of contention
concerning the question of intention can be illustrated by outlining and ex-
plaining the two most important, competitive positions that underlie this debate
in different variations.

The first position is: Communication always means intentional behavior and
does not exist without the *intention* of "speakers" (in the broadest sense). Ac-
cording to this position the crucial question mentioned above is answered by a
narrower concept of communication; intention is the general criterion for
communication. Reading definitions like, for example the one given by Rudi

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27 Cf. Wilfried Engemann: Predigen und Zeichen setzen. Eine homiletische Skizze mit Bei-
   spielen, in: Uta Pohl-Patalong/Frank Muchlinsky (ed.): Predigen im Plural. Homiletische
   Perspektiven, Hamburg 2001, 7–24, here 8.
28 Cf. Jo Reichertz: Kommunikationsmacht. Was ist Kommunikation und was vermag sie? Und
   weshalb vermag sie das? Wiesbaden 2009, 124.

Keller, who regards communication as intentional behavior that is demonstrated and used in order to signify something to others, emphasizes the essence of this position.[29]

The second position is: Communication happens already where speakers do not intend to suggest anything, probably do not even speak, but (in the broadest sense) *act or behave.* The widespread assumption, which is usually traced back to Paul Watzlawick, that one cannot not communicate, illustrates this position.[30]

One could possibly answer the crucial question mentioned above by arguing that both positions have some merit – however, only when perceiving them as specifically context-related perspectives. Concerning the second position it is to be noted that not every human behavior is *eo ipso* communication; if actually every kind of behavior really was to be understood as communication, it would make no sense to classify certain kinds of behavior as "communicative", as everything at any time would have to be regarded as communication;[31] thus this position has to be narrowed down insofar, as communication only takes place where the behavior of a certain person (A) is (or can be) *perceived* by someone else (B) and A is aware of this (potential) perception; only in such a situation he or she cannot *not* communicate; basically everything that A does in such a situation may be perceived (by B) as communicative behavior or action – whether the corresponding action was intended by A or not[32], as the (potential) observer (B) would start to decode (allegedly) provided signs. On the other hand – and this is where the first position comes into play – the (potentially) observed person A will always start to *consciously* provide signs, once he or she realizes that he or she is (potentially) being observed; as soon as the person starts to consciously provide signs, he or *she will (also) pursue a certain* purpose and want to *influence* the other person (B) in a certain way.[33] At this point it is important to mention that communicative processes cannot be reduced to consciously provided signs; despite the acting person (A) consciously providing signs in order to pursue certain purposes, he or she simultaneously unconsciously provides further signs; basically all observable behavior can (and will be) *understood* as signs – which of course includes behavior that is *not carried out consciously.* To ignore these 'additional' and 'merely perceived' signs as an

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29 Cf. Rudi Keller: Zeichentheorie. Zu einer Theorie semiotischen Wissens, Tübingen 1995, 104 f.

30 Cf. Jo Reichertz: Kommunikationsmacht, loc. cit. (s. note 28), 124–132; Reichertz shows that this thesis had already been presented several times before Watzlawick, for example by Jürgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson.

31 Cf. the objection by Hans Hörmann: Meinen und Verstehen. Grundzüge einer psychologischen Semantik, Frankfurt a. M. 1976, 319.

32 Cf. Jo Reichertz: Kommunikationsmacht, loc. cit. (s. note 28), 132–137, esp. 136 f.

33 Loc. cit.; 198 f.

important part of communication would not only mean that the corresponding research was one-sided but also that underlying paradigms of *power* and *do-ability* were to be criticized, as such a view would grant all power of control over the communication process to those providing the signs.[34]

Thus the first position supports the perspective of the "speakers" or those providing signs: it shows that people, who recommend something simulta-neously, always *pursue a certain purpose*, because they expect positive effects by suggesting certain things as desirable. On the other hand the second position gives more weight to the perspective of the "listeners" or those reading the signs: Every behavior, every act can become a communicative sign where it is perceived (and understood) as such.

Theologically responsible homiletics will always have to capture *both posi-tions*. To ensure that – besides the first position – the second one is captured, too, means – in a homiletic context – trying not to lose sight of the listeners as being part of the communicative process of preaching and correspondingly not to misunderstand homiletics as a science that "only" serves (the interests of) preachers.[35] Thus the understanding of communicating the gospel from the perspective of those providing the signs mentioned at the beginning has to be supplemented by the following defining formula: communicating the gospel (also) describes the perception of the (concrete) Christian believing (of others) (signifier) and understanding it as 'Christian belief' (signified) by the sign reading subject with possibly resulting in acquiring it as one's own, concrete Christian believing (effect).

5.   Test them all; hold on to what is good (1 Thess 5, 21) – On the life-promoting aspects and humaneness of religious practice

Now that the thesis, that (religious) practice is to be understood as explicit or implicit recommendation for believing, has been reflected regarding the aspect of recommendation as communication theoretical question of intention, in the following I shall turn to the question of the evaluation criterion of such a rec-ommendation: On what basis should recommendations for Christian believing, regarded as processes of communication that explicitly (from the perspective of those providing signs) as well as implicitly (from the perspective of those

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34 The demand for the author's death has its place in this context of problem; cf. Umberto Eco: Nachschrift zum Namen der Rose, transl. by Burkhart Kroeber, München 1984, 14; and also Roland Barthes: La mort de l'auteur, in: idem: Œuvres complètes. Edition établie et pré-sentée par E. Marty (vol. 2), Paris 1994, 491–495.

35 Cf. Michael Meyer-Blanck: Gottesdienstlehre, Tübingen 2011, 6; and Wilfried Engemann: Predigen und Zeichen setzen, loc. cit. (s. note 27), 7–24, here 8–12.

reading signs) aim at believing, practical-theologically be judged? *On the one hand* the question of a guiding criterion for the judgment of religious practice as (implicit) recommendation for believing results from the "empirical" experience that Christian recommendations for believing are turned down every day *and on the other hand* it results from the theoretical determination of the task of practical-theological research to critically support and accompany religious practice.

Regarding the first point: Everyone who observes and perceives concrete manifestations of religious practice finds him- or herself asking not only the (semantic) question what it is that he or she is confronted with ("*What* or *which belief* is it that I am suggested here?") but also the (pragmatic) question of how to react towards it ("*How* do I react towards this recommendation?").[36] The answers to both questions depend on the asking subject and are furthermore open-ended; *open-ended* and *subjective* in the first case not least because of the factual ambiguity of signs in general and in the second case mainly because of the fact that even words of commands have no force by themselves; that even correct, clear and intentional utterances do not always bring about what they intend; in other words: very often speech acts have to be regarded as 'felicitous', yet 'unsuccessful'.[37] – This means: wherever recommendations for believing become visible, they will provoke acceptance as well as rejection.[38]

Friedrich Nietzsche is commonly known as a prime example for *not following* the implicit recommendations for believing of his fellows and for even vehemently *rejecting* such recommendations. Whenever he was faced with recommendations for believing perceived in religious people, he came to the conclusion to better not adopt the perceived belief. In this regard a passage from 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' is frequently quoted, in which he states that he would indeed believe if Christians looked more redeemed and sang better songs.[39]

To me this passage is not simply a matter of *ridiculing* the Christian culture of belief,[40] but the expression of an *independent, self-responsible attitude*, that culminates in the rejection of perceived concrete manifestations of religious

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36 Cf. Henning Luther: Predigt als Handlung. Überlegungen zur Pragmatik des Predigens, in: Albrecht Beutel (ed.): Homiletisches Lesebuch, Tübingen ²1989, 222–239, here 233.

37 Cf. Jo Reichertz: Kommunikationsmacht, loc. cit. (s. note 28), 242–246; also Wilfried Engemann: Einführung in die Homiletik, Tübingen ²2011, 223–246, esp. 243.

38 Cf. for example Ulrich Körtner: Der inspirierte Leser, loc. cit. (s. note 17), 43–49.

39 Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche: Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen, in: idem: Werke in drei Bänden (vol. 2), ed. by Karl Schlechta, München 1954, 274–560, here 349.

40 Cf. for example Ottokar Basse: Von der Meisterung des Lebens / Taufe. Sermon about Romans 12,12 (17.1.1993), in: idem: Das Evangelium in Zeit und Ewigkeit. Ausgewählte Predigten (vol. 2), ed. by Ursula Basse-Soltau, Münster 2003, 44–46, here 45; also Eugen M. F. Rosenstock-Huessy: Die Sprache des Menschengeschlechts. Eine leibhaftige Grammatik in vier Teilen (vol. 4), Heidelberg 1963, 209.

practice. In my opinion this rejecting behavior is to be understood as the *result* of a *judgment* based on reasons. However, then the question is: Upon which "principles" are such judgments of different recommendations for believing explicitly and implicitly based? And: Are these criteria permissible and valid from the perspective of Practical Theology?

Regarding the second point: According to Michael Meyer-Blanck Practical Theology derives from Christian Practice and aims at a new, modified Christian Practice.[41] – If this is the case, representatives of this discipline will have to strive for a new practice that brings along improvement compared to the older one – or at least not lead to change for the worse. However, then the question is, which ethical or practical-theological criteria can be applied for the judgment of the "quality" of religious practice. Currently there seems to be broad agreement that the theological correctness of theological utterances – as for example in sermons – alone meets practical-theological requirements only to a limited extent.[42] The times of dialectical theology, when consistency and conformity of facts were the all-dominating criterion, when "the matter with the facts" had to be considered during practical-theological analysis at all times, seem to be gone.[43] Sometimes one gains the impression that nowadays "being life-promoting" has become the prevalent criterion for judging the religious practice of people. But: Is this rather vague term[44] really an *appropriate* criterion?

Taking into consideration these two perspectives and partly in anticipation of what will be said below, it is to be noted: 'life-promoting' remains – despite the widespread use of this term in the academic context – a contentious criterion for theological judgments and the exact meaning of the term is difficult to capture; at the same time there is hardly any doubt in the academic context anymore that people refer to this very criterion at the marketplace of religious opportunities, in order to opt for or against certain offers of the different cultures of belief.[45] The

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41 Cf. Michael Meyer-Blanck: Theorie und Praxis der Zeichen, loc. cit. (s. note 3), 124.

42 "Predigen Sie nichts, was Ihnen nichts bedeutet, nur weil es theologisch richtig ist." – Evangelische Kirche Online: Wilfried Engemann: "Predigt darf kein lauer Kompromiss sein". Predigen Sie sich selbst, rät der Praktische Theologe, Wien 2012, http://www.evang.at/themen/nachrichten/detail/article/engemann-predigt-darf-kein-lauer-kompromiss-sein (retrieved: October 9, 2015).

43 Cf. Ulrich H. J. Körtner: Die Sache mit der Sache oder wovon in der Theologie (nicht) die Rede ist. Ein Beitrag zum Gespräch mit Falk Wagner, in: Martin Berger/Michael Murrmann-Kahl (ed.): Transformationsprozesse des Protestantismus. Zur Selbstreflexion einer christlichen Konfession an der Jahrtausendwende (FS Falk Wagner), Gütersloh 1999, 144–165.

44 "Bei alledem ist der Umstand der Beachtung wert, dass mit dem Begriff des Lebensdienlichen sich nicht die Vorstellung verbindet, es stünde bereits in jedem Falle und in jeder Situation fest, was das Lebensdienliche sei." – Christian Walther: Eschatologie als Theorie der Freiheit. Einführung in neuzeitliche Gestalten eschatologischen Denkens (= TBT 48), Berlin/New York 1991, 43.

45 Cf. Albrecht Grözinger: Homiletik. Lehrbuch Praktische Theologie (vol. 2), Gütersloh 2008,

thesis of this article that will be further developed below is: cultures of belief cannot escape from the "play of traditions" (Grözinger) in which people only follow those (religious) traditions that they perceive as gain or support for their lives;[46] this is true for the culture of belief called 'Protestantism' as well as for the culture of belief called 'Practical Theology'. This shall now be explained in more detail, by, firstly, clarifying the origin of the term 'life-promoting', by, secondly, taking a closer look at its varied, contemporary use and by, finally, outlining my own position.

The criterion of promotion of life ("Lebensdienlichkeit") goes back to Friedrich Nietzsche;[47] his well-founded religious criticism is not least to be understood against the background of the question of 'promotion of life'. Since the beginning of its use in the scientific context, the term, which is usually connoted with subjectivity, is characterized by its peculiar relationship to the term '*truth*', which is traditionally connoted with objectivity: promotion of life and truth just did not seem to get along with each other; Nietzsche was often criticized for making the criterion of truth redundant by introducing the criterion of promotion of life;[48] accordingly whoever uses the term 'life-promoting' today does not seem to be capable of calling something 'true'. And yet, the criterion of promotion of life as evaluation criterion for the (religious) practice of people – as coined by Nietzsche – can no longer be found in philosophical religious criticism only. It is encountered in (1) the context of sociology and philosophical ethics, in (2) dogmatic concepts and the context of theological ethics, in (3) official statements of church organizations and textbooks for denominational religious education and (4) in the framework of practical-theological reflections that cannot do without perspectives from non-theological areas of science[49] and always aim at mediating between systematic-theological reflection on the one hand and empirical culture of belief on the other hand.

ad (1): The philosopher Hermann Lübbe interconnects the criterion of promotion of life to the expectation that its application would lead to a pragmatic

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31–36; also Wilhelm Gräb: Die Bibel und die Predigt. Homiletische Hermeneutik zwischen Textauslegung und religiöser Selbstauslegung, in: Wilfried Engemann (ed.): Theologie der Predigt. Grundlagen – Modelle – Konsequenzen (= APrTh 21; FS Bieritz Karl-Heinrich), Leipzig 2001, 323–336, here 324.

46 Cf. Albrecht Grözinger: Homiletik, loc. cit. (s. note 45), 32.

47 Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche: Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben, in: Nietzsche Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe III/1, ed. by Giorgio Colli/Mazzino Montinari, Berlin/New York 1972, 241–330; and also Kurt Röttgers: Kritik der kulinarischen Vernunft. Ein Menü der Sinne nach Kant, Bielefeld 2009, 89, esp. note 81.

48 Cf. Jürgen Habermas: Zu Nietzsches Erkenntnistheorie, in: idem: Kultur und Kritik. Verstreute Aufsätze, Frankfurt a. M. ²1977, 239–263, here 256f.

49 This is proved impressively by the contemporary practical-theological central concept of "communication of the gospel". Here, a term of the biblical tradition meets a central concept of modern communication theory.

handling of different – also *religious* – truth claims, which could eventually bring about a better life.[50] In his work 'Religion und Modernität' [Religion and Modernity] the sociologist Franz-Xaver Kaufmann immediately refers to Lübbe's view: He doubts that in the horizon of contemporary individualized and pluralized society it is possible to find any agreement on what 'good life' really means and unmasks Lübbe's point of view as subjective; furthermore Kaufmann points out that the talk of good life and its characteristics (in general) is always based on particular subjective value judgments.[51] Kaufmann regards the *individual* and *how he or she understands him- or herself* as the essential criterion for what may (or may not) be considered as life-promoting. Since human beings are increasingly deprived of their cultural selection criteria, the individual is more and more thrown back 'on him- or herself' as the criterion for promotion of life.[52] – But would that not mean that basically everything could be considered life-promoting that fits the individual's self-perception – and thus entirely *arbitrary*? Would that not mean that humaneness and promotion of life were to be understood as synonyms? And: Is it sufficient if the question of validity is 'merely' addressed to and answered by individuals, as a question of their own humanity? – Kaufmann's thesis can be understood as the expression of the special difficulty of the criteriology of promotion of life under contemporary conditions:[53] Because humans are deprived of *all firm* selection criteria they have to, increasingly *insecure*,[54] 'set' themselves *unstable* and basically *arbitrary* criteria for what could be life-promoting.

Peter Ulrich, too, puts the criterion of promotion of life at the center of his ethical reflections, which basically deal with all sorts of human action in the context of economic ethics. To him the criterion of promotion of life is a means for the achievement of higher, literally *vital* purposes, which are only determinable from the *entirety* of a subjectively correct, cultivated life practice.[55] Thus Ulrich's reflections reveal what Christian Walther saw as well and what he called the critical function of the promotion of life: the assumption that this term could

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50 Cf. Lübbe Hermann: Religion nach der Aufklärung, München ³2004, 251.

51 Cf. Franz-Xaver Kaufmann: Religion und Modernität. Sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven, Tübingen 1989, 229f.

52 Loc. cit., 261.

53 Kaufmann explicitly refers to the postmodern state of discussion, according to which a transcendental beliefs have become unimaginable. Cf. loc. cit., 260f.

54 Cf. Stuart Hall: Cultural Studies. Ein politisches Theorieprojekt (Ausgewählte Schriften 3), ed. and transl. by Nora Räthzel, Hamburg 2000, here 56; and also Jean-François Lyotard: Das postmoderne Wissen. Ein Bericht (Edition Passagen 7), ed. by Peter Engelmann, Wien ⁶2009, esp. 131–143.

55 Cf. Peter Ulrich: Integrative Wirtschaftsethik. Grundlagen einer lebensdienlichen Ökonomie, Bern ³2001, 208.

contribute to the differentiation of purposes.[56] Furthermore Ulrich illustrates that promotion of life and humaneness are semantically interconnected. According to Ulrich everything that can be *expected to positively influence people's life* can be regarded as life-promoting. Focus should be placed on the human being with all his or her needs for self-preservation and quality of life.[57] Ulrich emphasizes that thereby the entirety of the individual life has to be kept in sight. This entirety discloses itself only to indivduals; or, more precisely: to living *subjects*, who always have already had a specific notion of a correct life, since they are faced with the challenge of living their own lives *before* they are able to reflect upon the entirety of their lives.

ad (2): Is it possible that even God's judgments are based upon the criterion of promotion of life? This question can be asked with reference to the remarkable but also irritating article of Brigitte Boothe and Philipp Stoellger, who suggest that God Himself/Herself, as the sovereign of law, relativized the law on the basis of the criterion of promotion of life.[58] In his ethics, Wilfried Härle also refers to promotion of life, though in a less spectacular manner. In the context of his reflections on various forms of living, Härle semantically interconnects life-promoting and love-promoting, in order to express the special meaning of emotional security, affinity and sexual love for the ethical judgment of forms of living.[59] Ulrich Körtner also addresses promotion of life, though he is rather skeptical towards this criterion – not least because of its vagueness. As systematic theologian, he points out that wherever promotion of life is applied as a criterion for the evaluation of the Christian culture of belief, the life-promoting aspects of Christian believing should not be made obvious exclusively through moral, but via the differences between gospel and law.[60] Many ethicists and dogmatists use the criterion of promotion of life mostly implicitly and hardly ever explicitly, so that rarely any information is provided, what should be taken into account by referring to the term.[61]

ad (3): The criterion of promotion of life is often explicitly encountered in official church statements which becomes particularly obvious from a series of thesis, published by the Protestant Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck in 1998 under

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56 Cf. Christian Walther: Eschatologie als Theorie der Freiheit, loc. cit. (s. note 44), 42 f.

57 Cf. Peter Ulrich: Integrative Wirtschaftsethik, loc. cit. (s. note 55), 11 f.

58 Cf. Brigitte Boothe/Philipp Stoellger: Einleitung, in: eadem (ed.): Moral als Gift oder Gabe? Zur Ambivalenz von Moral und Religion, Würzburg 2004, 1–15, here 13.

59 Cf. Wilfried Härle: Ethik, Berlin/New York 2011, 347 f.

60 Cf. Ulrich Körtner: Evangelische Sozialethik. Grundlagen und Themenfelder, Göttingen ³2012, 40; cf. also idem: Religion und Gewalt. Zur Lebensdienlichkeit von Religion in ihrer Ambivalenz, in: Adel Theodor Khoury/Hans-Peter Müller (ed.): Krieg und Gewalt in den Weltreligionen. Fakten und Hintergründe, Freiburg i. Br. 2003, 99–124.

61 Cf. for example Hedwig Porsch: Sexualmoralische Verstehensbedingungen. Gleichgeschlechtliche PartnerInnenschaften im Diskurs, Stuttgart 2008, 128–129.

the title "Was dem Leben dient. Familie – Ehe – andere Lebensformen" [What life serves. Family – marriage – other forms of living together]. In this series, the criterion of promotion of life becomes the central reference point for reflection. On altogether 56 pages, the term is mentioned nearly 30 times and is specifically emphasized already in the preface by Bishop Christian Zippert.[62] Promotion of life was also the central criterion for how to evaluate social life in the guidelines published by the Council of the EKD in 1996 under the title "Mit Spannungen leben" [Living with Tensions].[63] However, the guidelines published by the same council in 2013 under the title "Zwischen Autonomie und Angewiesenheit" [Between Autonomy and Dependence], which were vehemently discussed to the end, explicitly refer to promotion of life *only once*, namely where it states that *any kind of violence objects the promotion of life.*[64] The term is, however, encountered much more often in the immediate context of the debate on this document.[65]

The question of promotion of life also plays an important role in contemporary religious education: one of the learning goals that are mentioned in a commonly used teacher's manual is that students should develop criteria by means of which the life-promoting aspects of a religion can be determined.[66] This corresponds to the thesis of Uta Pohl-Patalong, who states that one of the most central tasks of religious education is to make students understand the life-promoting aspects of the handed down Christian cultures of belief.[67]

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62 Cf. Was dem Leben dient. Familie – Ehe – andere Lebensformen, ed. by Theologische Kammer der Evangelischen Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck (= Didaskalia 49), Kassel 1998.

63 Cf. Mit Spannungen leben. Eine Orientierungshilfe des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zum Thema "Homosexualität und Kirche", http://www.ekd.de/familie/spannungen_1996_3.html (retrieved: October 9, 2015).

64 Zwischen Autonomie und Angewiesenheit. Familie als verlässliche Gemeinschaft stärken. Eine Orientierungshilfe des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, Gütersloh ²2013, here 114 (emphasis added by B. K.).

65 Within the official paper of the EKD, where the critical reception of the guidelines is recorded in detail, the term "Lebensdienlichkeit" [promotion of life] is used explicitly in the contributions of Wilfried Härle (2x; 14), Peter Dabrock (2x; 40.42), Ulrich Eibach (5x; 61.62), Alexander Foitzik (1x; 95); all citations refer to: Zwischen Autonomie und Angewiesenheit. Die Orientierungshilfe der EKD in der Kontroverse, ed. by Kirchenamt der EKD, Hannover 2013.

66 Cf. Alfred Weymann: Religion wahrnehmen und deuten, in: Gerd-Rüdiger Koretzki/Rudolf Tammeus (ed.): Religion entdecken – verstehen – gestalten (Werkbuch 11+), Göttingen 2003, 33–45, here 35.

67 "Insofern lautet meine zweite These: *Aufgabe des Religionsunterrichts ist es, die Lebensdienlichkeit der christlichen Tradition erfahrbar werden zu lassen.*"– Uta Pohl-Patalong: '… sed vitae discimus'. Religionsunterricht zwischen Religiosität und christlicher Tradition – didaktische Orientierungen in: IJPT, vol. 11, no. 2, 2007, 173–192, here 186 (emphasis in original).

ad (4): Many representatives of Practical Theology, including Alexander Deeg, mention ‚promotion of life' as only one criterion amongst others.[68] This is, however, different in the branch of contemporary Practical Theology that is strongly influenced by cultural theology. This branch of Practical Theology understands promotion of life as being the crucial point of contemporary, religious needs and makes it the most important criterion for the academic judgment of religious practice. After all it regards the contemporary human being as an individual, who is thrown back to him- or herself, who is the interpreter of his or her own life and as a judging and choosing customer at the religious marketplace, who increasingly resorts to individual life-promoting as evaluation criterion for judging the different offers. What goes along with this image of humanity, is the strengthening of a biography-integrative function of religion (as compared to the traditionally socially-integrative function), as well as the strengthening of the role of the religious subject in a largely economized context.[69] Wilhelm Gräb summarizes his position, which is typical for this theology, as follows:

> "It is more important that the religious contents of interpretation are life-promoting in particular situations of life than that they are free of contradiction. Sermons are being understood and judged according to whether their content seems useful, beneficial and helpful in existentially understandable situations of life."[70]

Finally it has to be said that the criterion of promotion of life plays an essential role in the academic as well as the everyday judgment of religious practice; however, what thereby actually is regarded as life-promoting varies to a great extent. Christian Walther points out that what is considered as 'life-promoting' differs from case to case and has to be judged individually in each situation;[71] which is not only unsatisfactory, but also totally plausible (not to say 'true') – not least because of the findings above. Under contemporary conditions it is not (or no longer?) possible to generally define what is to be considered life-promoting *always and everywhere*, because this question confronts individuals with their own *subjectivity and contextuality*, i.e. with the factuality of their *own* human existence. What promotion of life really means can be captured *only* by moving away from trying to

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68 Cf. for example Alexander Deeg: Das äußere Wort und seine liturgische Gestalt. Überlegungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentalliturgik, Göttingen 2012, 501.

69 Cf. Jürgen Schönwitz: Religion – Identität – Bildung. Ein Konzept religiöser Selbstbildung (= Praktische Theologie und Kultur 23), Freiburg i. Br. 2012, 161–165.

70 Wilhelm Gräb: Die Bibel und die Predigt, loc. cit. (s. note 45), 324 (emphasis added by B. K., translated by Anna Walchshofer); German original: "Es kommt darauf an, dass die religiösen Deutungsgehalte […], in einer bestimmten Lebenssituation als lebensdienlich erscheinen, nicht ob sie sich ohne Widerspruch zusammendenken lassen. […] Was die Predigt zu sagen hat, wird nach Maßgabe des in existentiell nachvollziehbaren Lebenssituationen förderlich, dienlich, gut Erscheinenden verstanden und bewertet." – ibid.

71 Cf. Christian Walther: Eschatologie als Theorie der Freiheit, loc. cit. (s. note 44), 43.

find a general, 'scientific' definition and by *questioningly* turning to the entirety of one's own life and what it takes instead. What can be learned from Ulrich and Kaufmann is that promotion of life always refers to individuals, who are challenged *to judge* what could be life-promoting for *their* concrete lives; they have to reflect on their existence, consider their lives as a whole and understandingly behave towards it. This is also what Gräb, a prominent advocate of the criterion of promotion of life (see above), means, when he suggests his colleagues within the field of (Practical) Theology, no to impose their standards of criticism in a revelation-positivist manner to lived religion from the outside.[72] Nietzsche, who ultimately coined the term "Lebensdienlichkeit" (promotion of life), also emphasized that certain things can only be properly understood by turning to one's *own personal life* and *subjective experience* instead of relying on conventional terms or following the thoughts of others.[73] This *rise of the criterion of promotion of life*, which has started with Nietzsche and goes along with the *fall of the criterion of truth*, affects the (religious) question of promotion of life itself: It is not possible (anymore) to make 'true' generalizations about what 'life-promoting' is, but (at most) 'only' subjective statements on what *could* be 'life-promoting' in view of *my own, personal life.*

I try to make a virtue out of necessity and present the following position: To *me* the question of promotion of life, being a subjective question that asks for one's own personal life and its constitutive conditions and demands, is already 'life-promoting' in itself, because it is literally the origin of all opportunities of human life that can potentially be considered as life-promoting; after all it is this question that makes visible what could be life-promoting for the individual. In my opinion the central criterion of promotion of life consists in the individual *asking for* it. This means that a Christian belief, in which the question of the promotion of life is not asked, because it is e.g. forbidden, can certainly not be 'life-promoting'. Wilhelm Gräb even goes a step further by arguing that a religious belief that does not ask for the promotion of life anymore is actually no religious belief anymore – but "simply *dead*". If under contemporary conditions religious belief is all about giving people the opportunity to gain clarity about themselves and their way of living and about the attempt to control the many dangers of our fragile life as well as the numerous opportunities it entails,[74] the

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72 Cf. Wilhelm Gräb: Religion als Deutung des Lebens. Perspektiven einer Praktischen Theologie gelebter Religion, Gütersloh 2006, 24.

73 Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche: Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben, loc. cit. (s. note 47), 323–325.

74 Cf. Wilhelm Gräb/Christian Modehn: Theologie für die Öffentlichkeit? Ein Interview mit Prof. Wilhelm Gräb, Theologe an der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin (21. März 2014), in: Religionsphilosophischer Salon (Online), http://religionsphilosophischer-salon.de/5194_theologie-fuer-die-oeffentlichkeit-ein-interview-mit-prof-wilhelm-graeb_fundamental-vernunftig-religios-aus-freier-einsicht-interviews-mit-prof-wilhelm-grab (retrieved: October 9, 2015); Christian Walther: Eschatologie als Theorie der Freiheit, loc. cit. (s. note 44), 44.

question of promotion of life has to be an 'essential feature' of individual believing. Against this background, all attempts to separate belief from life and to suppress the vital question of what could promote this life are implausible.[75]

If it's true that those who practice (Practical) Theology do not only *deal with* (Christian) belief as a part of certain (contemporary) cultures of belief, but, being 'practical-theological *existences*', actually *are* themselves *believing* (as part of a culture of Christian belief that is called theology),[76] the fundamental question of religion 'What is this life that we are supposed to live as humans?' and the problem of 'promotion of life' arise not only on the level of the issue of analysis, but first and foremost on the level of the analyzing subjects.

6.   A postulation

It is up to us as theologians to turn to the different shapes of Christian believing as the expressions of a broad culture of belief, in order to describe, understand and contextualize it – but also in order to (subjectively) evaluate what they recommend explicitly and implicitly on the basis of the criterion of promotion of life. One of the specific challenges, yet very important tasks of practical-theological research is, besides making Christian believing visible, to ask the question: Can such a belief really be recommended in good conscience to others? – A Practical Theology that locates itself at the interface of perception and action science and critically and reflectively supervises the activities of church and its believing subjects,[77] may never forsake this task; however, to fulfill it, it depends on subjects who are considerate of the entirety of their Christian life. With that said I argue in favour of practical-theological research that takes a closer look at anthropological problems when reflecting on its subject; that is not afraid of drawing on insights from neighboring disciplines for this purpose; that perceives itself as a contextually conditioned communicative process between concrete subjects that participate in the different cultures (of belief) through their own life rather than as an *abstract* discipline; and that deals with the implicit character of recommendation for contemporary Christian believing in all its facets in an increasingly critical-reflective way.

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75 For a different position cf. Michael Korthaus: Kreuzestheologie. Geschichte und Gehalt eines Programmbegriffs in der evangelischen Theologie (= BHTh 142), Tübingen 2007, 218.

76 Cf. Martin Harants: Religion – Kultur – Theologie. Eine Untersuchung zu ihrer Verhältnisbestimmung im Werke Ernst Troeltschs und Paul Tillichs im Vergleich, Marburg 2008, esp. 27.

77 Cf. Klaus Raschzok: Kunstlehre der Gestaltung des Glaubens, in: Georg Lämmlin/Stefan Scholpp (ed.): Praktische Theologie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen, Tübingen/Basel 2001, 297–315, here 307.