

Summary of Thesis

The title of this thesis is *ATMOSPHERING: A Study of Atmosphere and Religion in a Copenhagen Night Church*. It is an article-based PhD thesis. It consists of three research articles and a unifying text. The thesis explores an empirically observed phenomenon. In the last few decades, there has been an increasing focus on sensory and affective experiences in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD). This has also entailed more explicit attention to atmosphere. This is, among other examples, evidenced in the Danish night churches—a relatively new phenomenon in the ELCD—where the atmospheric experience has come to the fore among both visitors and pastors.

The greater focus on the sensory and affective in the ELCD can be said to reflect a more general movement toward what some scholars have identified as more explicit attention to aesthetics in Western religion. In the same time period, an increased interest in aesthetics as *aisthesis*—sensory perception and knowledge of the world—has also emerged in the study of religion and has led to the establishment of aesthetics of religion as a subfield. In close proximity to material religion and religion and media, aesthetics of religion focuses on the production and reception of aesthetics in religious contexts and practices. Despite the increasing focus on *aisthesis*, atmosphere remains a largely neglected phenomenon in aesthetics of religion and the study of religion more generally. The main aim of this study is to help fill this knowledge gap and contribute to aesthetics of religion by making atmosphere in the Night Church of the Church of Our Lady (the Cathedral of Copenhagen) the subject of a practice theoretical exploration and conceptualization. More specifically, the study seeks to answer the following two-part main research question:

How is a Night Church atmosphere constituted in practice, and how does this, in turn, constitute religion in the Night Church?

The answer to this research question derives from a case study based primarily on fieldwork inside the Night Church. It is comprised of ethnographic methods and thus invokes different types of participant observations and interviews to generate data. The study explores the main research question from the perspective of pastors, volunteers, and visitors and through the interrelated analytical themes of facilitation (Article I), legitimization and use (Article II), and reception (Article III). The use of theory is reflexive and eclectic but primarily rooted in a practice theoretical framework. However, the study also invokes insights from Gernot Böhme's aesthetics of atmosphere

and Hermann Schmitz' philosophy of atmospheres. Using a practice theoretical vocabulary in combination with Böhme and Schmitz helps identify different theoretical blind spots and foster abductive theory development. Most importantly, it affords a conceptualization and exploration of a Night Church atmosphere as *atmosphering* (a type of sociomaterial practice) and, in relation to this, religion in the Night Church as *performative atmospheric prosumption*.

The main contribution of this thesis is thus theoretical. In this regard, the contribution transcends the aesthetics of religion as a subfield. By abductively developing a practice theoretical conceptualization of a Night Church atmosphere, the thesis, while not its primary aim, also contributes to the study of atmospheres and practice theory. If atmospheres have a marginal existence in the study of religion, they have likewise rarely been studied from a practice theoretical perspective. In addition to its main theoretical contribution, the thesis also contributes empirically to aesthetics of religion by being the first empirical study to invoke and explore a Danish night church as an example of what some scholars have termed an *aestheticization of religion*. This entails exploring how the constitution of a Night Church atmosphere (trans)forms religion in the Night Church by, for instance, reshaping pastoral authority, creating an aesthetic of ambiguity, and relating religion to a corpo-affective atmospheric experience.