



Arkivsak: 17/04041-10

Saksdokumenter:

Dnks høringssvar til CPCEs læresamtale-dokument Church Communion
Dnks høringssvar til CPCEs studiedokument Religious Plurality in Europe

Nytt fra den verdensvide kirke – Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)

Sammendrag

Generalforsamling i CPCE, Basel, Sveits, 13.-18. september 2018

CPCE arrangerer sin neste generalforsamling i Basel i Sveits, 13.-18. september 2018, med tema: «*Liberated – Connected – Committed*».

Dnk får sende tre delegater. I tillegg deltar sittende rådsmedlem og kandidat til nytt råd, samt rådgiver for delegasjonen:

Kristine Sandmæl (delegat, leder i Mellomkirkelig råd, Dnk)

Stein Reinertsen (delegat, biskop i Agder og Telemark bispedømme)

Eivind Holmedahl Hermstad (delegat, ung, lek, legestudent)

Tron Fagermoen (Førstelektor diakoni/teologi, kandidat vara til CPCEs råd)

Kristin Graff-Kallevåg (Førsteamanuensis systematisk teologi, utgående medlem av CPCEs råd)

Berit Hagen Agøy (rådgiver til delegasjonen, generalsekretær i Mellomkirkelig råd)

Generalforsamlingen skal både jobbe med et visjonsdokument for ny periode, vedta konstitusjonelle endringer, vedta eller motta resultatet av en rekke studieprosesser og velge nytt råd. Dette skjer gjennom arbeid i plenum, i arbeidsgrupper, i workshops og mindre «forum», som så leverer arbeidet tilbake til plenum. Det foreligger et visjonsdokument hvor det forventes mye diskusjon. Det foreligger også et utkast til konstitusjonelle endringer, som er knyttet til at CPCE nå får fast generalsekretærstilling og tilknytning til hovedkontoret i Wien, Østerrike.

Følgende studieprosesser/dokumenter skal opp til diskusjon og eventuelt vedtak:

- *Church Communion*. Dette er resultatet av en lengre læresamtale hvor Dnk har levert høringssvar. Mye arbeid er lagt ned i forberedelsene til denne saken, og delegasjonen er forberedt på at det kan bli en del diskusjoner rundt et eventuelt spørsmål om en europeisk synodal struktur.
- *Plurality of religions*. Dnk har levert høringssvar til denne studieprosessen. Både Bispemøtet, Teologisk nemnd og MKR har engasjert seg aktivt i innholdet i dokumentet,

og delegasjonen er forberedt på spennende diskusjoner rundt innholdet. Det er ventet at studieprosessen vil legge føringer for videre arbeid i kommende periode.

- *Continuing Education for the Ordained Ministry* er resultatet av en studieprosess som nok er mest relevant for mindre kirker. Dnk har ikke jobbet mye med dokumentet, men det har relevans for samarbeid mellom kirkene om rekruttering til kirkelig tjeneste.
- *Theology of Diaspora* er et studiedokument som kan legge føringer for arbeidet i kommende periode.
- *Education for the Future* er en studietekst utviklet av en regional gruppe i Sørøst-Europa, hvor det uttrykkes ønske om at CPCE jobber videre med spørsmål knyttet til utdanning i Europa og kirkenes rolle i utdanning.
- *Migranter og Kirken* er en kortere rapport fra en ekspertgruppe som foreslår videre arbeid med spørsmål knyttet til forholdet mellom kirkene, migranter og migrantmenigheter, særlig med tanke på forståelsen av kirkefelleskap.
- *Ethics of Reproductive Medicine* er et ressursdokument som MKR har mottatt og behandlet. Dette har også vært behandlet i Teologisk nemnd, og vil studeres nærmere i Norges Kristne Råds teologiske samtaleforum. Ulla Schmidt har medvirket i ekspertgruppa og er nå Dnks og Den danske folkekirkes kandidat til CPCEs råd.
- *Consultation with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* er resultatet av en lengre teologisk samtaleprosess med Det pavelige råd for fremme av kristen enhet, hvor Stephanie Dietrich fra Dnk har deltatt. Det ventes at diskusjonen gir føringer for den videre samtaleprosessen.

Følgende valgfrie workshops finner sted på generalforsamlingen: Sosialetikk, vitnesbyrd og tjeneste, Økumeniske dialoger, Teologisk og dogmatisk arbeid i CPCE, Aktuelle samfunnsendringer og utfordringene det gir kirkene i Europa.

22. august 2018, deltok den norske delegasjonen på et forberedelsesmøte i København sammen med delegasjonen fra Den danske folkekirke og en representant fra Metodistkirken i Danmark. De finske, svenske og islandske folkekirker var invitert, men kunne ikke delta (i CPCE er disse «deltakende kirker» uten fullt medlemskap). Møtet ga en god innføring til generalforsamlingen. Det var også stor enighet om samarbeidet i nominasjonsprosessen til nytt råd (styre) i CPCE. Den danske folkekirke og Dnk har hatt et samarbeid hvor den ene kirken stiller med et medlem av rådet mens den andre stiller med et varamedlem, i annenhver seksårsperiode. Etersom Kristin Graff-Kallevåg tok over som medlem i rådet, men nå går ut av dette, forslås Ulla Schmidt fra Danmark som medlem, og Tron Fagermoen fra Dnk som varamedlem. I tillegg stiller Jørgen Thaarup fra Metodistkirken i Danmark til gjenvalg som varamedlem. Forberedelsesmøtet anbefalte at orienteringer og felles nordisk samarbeid om CPCE bør tas opp på de årlige nordisk-baltiske sekretærmøtene, for å styrke det nord-europeiske samarbeidet.

Forslag til vedtak

Mellomkirkelig råd tar saken til orientering.

Church of Norway's Response to the CPCE Doctrinal Conversation on "Church Communion"

Oslo, January 9, 2018

Introduction

Church of Norway hereby wishes to express our gratitude to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe for the document "Church Communion". We appreciate the work that has been put into the document, following the CPCE Assembly in Firenze, Italy in 2012. At that time two documents were adopted, based on the doctrinal conversations "Scripture, Confession, Church" and "Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé". We appreciate our chance to be involved in the continuation of these important and challenging conversations.

The Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations sent the document to its Theological Commission for a more in-depth discussion, before a draft response was sent to the Council on Ecumenical and International relations and the Bishops' Conference for final comments and adoption. We are grateful for the extra time allowed for this process.

In the process we have taken into consideration our own discussions around the previously mentioned doctrinal conversations. We have also looked into the responses from other churches.

We have organised our response according to the key questions following the document chapters. Kindly find the final response from Church of Norway below.

1. Do you think that the CPCE's course of development is properly reflected in part 1 of the document? Which aspects would you like to see further elaborated upon or made more precise?

We find the presentation of the developments in the CPCE to be adequate. Church unity is both a gift and a task. The chapter recounts what the basis for the Leuenberg Agreement is, and what the understanding of church unity is. The chapter also gives a description of the increased attention given to the work for church unity, a unity which requires a continuous movement towards a deeper understanding of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the church's witness and service to the world. We share this view, and we see the document itself as part of this positive development.

We also consider the course of the development of CPCE as properly reflected in the document. . There is no reason to question the intention of church communion described as an active participation of the member churches in a communion of worship, witness and service in Europe.

Although the first chapter of the document does not treat concrete organisational developments in-depth, these developments are elaborated upon later in the document. In light of the very clear organisational suggestions that occur in the chapters 3 - 5, we find it

important to point out that chapter 1 could have introduced some key ecclesiological concepts, which then could have been dealt with in the course of the document.

Some of these ecclesiological issues have been thoroughly discussed in previous study processes, without necessarily leading to agreement. In response to some of these study processes, Church of Norway therefore recommended further work on the different understandings among CPCE member churches of what constitutes the Church, and the churches' relations to confessions.¹ These are important clarifications to be made before conclusions can be drawn on what constitutes a church communion, and what a communion in doctrine might mean.

In this regard, we would like to make a comment to the last part of Paragraph 2:

Other churches ask again and again about the ecumenical meaning of church communion and how the member churches of the CPCE might shape it. They have the impression that the concept of church communion is only to a limited degree suitable as ecumenical model, in that it models the diversity rather than the unity of the church, and so adds to the strengthening of the status quo.

It is unclear to us who the term “other churches” refer to in this paragraph. It would be helpful with a clarification in this regard, since the argument brought forward here is used later in “Church Communion” as an argument for change in CPCE structures. We do not necessarily share the view that the current ecumenical model only to a limited degree is suitable as an ecumenical model. To the contrary, chapter 1.3 refers to the very positive experience of church communion and how it is realised in the life and the shared worship of the communion, as well as through the doctrinal conversations, the existing formal structures and the common witness and service of the CPCE churches in the Europe of today.

2. Do you deem that the basic theological foundation of the model of church communion is properly reflected in part 2 of the document? Which aspects would you like to see further elaborated upon or made more precise?

We appreciate the attempt in Paragraph 46 to explain linguistically the challenge of translating the concepts of *church fellowship* and *communion* between different languages, as it is done in Paragraph 46. We understand the intention of bringing this in line with international ecumenical uses of the term *communion*. We are not convinced, however, that the translation of *Kirchengemeinschaft* in German into *Church communion* in English is correct, nor that it is necessary. A similar linguistic challenge can be found in Scandinavian languages. In our understanding there is a theological distinction between the terms *Church Fellowship/Community* and *Church Communion*, while *Kirchengemeinschaft* does not contain this distinction and can mean both. We could support an understanding of *Kirkechengemeinschaft* as church communion, meaning a deep organic understanding of churches belonging to one other. This, however, does not mean that a more binding structure is necessary as a model for church communion. Anyhow, we find that the term *community* sufficiently expresses the fellowship to which we are committed. At this point, we would therefore recommend to keep the current name of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

¹ CoN's Response to the CPCE Doctrinal Discussion on Scripture, Confession, Church, p.4

A number of good theological reflections are offered in Part 2 of the document. The former study processes on “Scripture, Confession, Church” and “Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé” were both fruitful processes leading up to the CPCE Assembly in 2012. Church of Norway would have liked to see that some of the unsolved issues from these processes would have been further elaborated in this document on “Church Communion”. In addition to the already mentioned issues, we particularly miss theological reflections on diakonia as a constitutive element of being church, which is crucial to the understanding of church communion.

We also find that the issue of oversight, understood as episkopé, is missing from “Church Communion”. In our Church of Norway’s response to the CPCE document “Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé”, we specifically pointed out that the issue of oversight for many churches is not only a collegial matter, but also includes a personal dimension. We then referred to the LWF Statement on Episcopal Ministry (1997), in order to deepen the understanding of episkopé for the mission of the church:

The LWF document underlines that the task of the ministry of oversight is to serve the church and thereby serve the purpose of caring for the life of a whole community. It also underlines that oversight never is a merely administrative and institutional matter, but is always personal. This personal character cannot be separated from its collegial and communal aspect (§§47-49.) The document also underlines that there is “a need for the Lutheran churches to develop a broader common understanding of how Episcopal ministry points to the diaconal dimensions of the apostolic tradition and also of how the personal, collegial and communal dimensions of episcopate take shape in practice.” (§ 61) On these issues, the CPCE document should be further broadened.

Any proposal to strengthen the formal structures of the CPCE would require further studies on ordination for ministry (and ministries), as well as the different elements of episkopé. Paragraph 56 brings in a new concept; “communion of communions”. We appreciate the wish of Protestant churches in Europe to appear as one body when encountering other churches or church families. However, this may not always be a relevant description of CPCE in all ecumenical dialogues, since CPCE remains a community of member churches, where many are committed also to other churches and church bodies. “Communion of communions” may confuse an understanding of a single church that together with all Christian churches form the One Church of Jesus Christ. Although it is necessary for Protestant churches in Europe to stand up for common interests as a community, we believe that any possible formation of ecumenical blocks should be avoided, so long as our basic common understanding of the church is that the church is both local and universal.

We appreciate Chapter 2.5’s review of church communion as an expression of the event of justification. However, in paragraph 58 the Cypriatic expression “extra ecclesiam nulla salus” is brought in rather surprisingly. We do not quite see the reason for this, since there is no in-depth discussion on the relation between the salvation in God’s justification and the role of the church.

Paragraph 61 deals with the matter of decision-making. Although we agree that it is helpful to have common methods for decision-making, we don’t see that the method of discussion and voting as presented here, needs to be the only method to reach agreement in the understanding of the Gospel. It is one of several democratic procedures used in the ecumenical movement.

Another decision-making procedure used ecumenically would be the method of reaching consensus. In this regard, we find Paragraph 62 most helpful. It brings in creativity as a helpful means of dealing with differences, which can help the community to avoid “to set up other standards arbitrarily”.

Paragraph 64 brings in the significance of the ordained ministry for the being of the church. We strongly support further studies on this, and would like to reiterate the need for studying ordination in light of several ministries in the church, as we suggested in our response to “Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé”:

Concerning 1: We support a critical examination of the understanding of ministries within the CPCE churches. This need is reflected in ongoing processes and discussions also within the Church of Norway.

Concerning 2: It is important for the churches to work on their patterns of ministry in a comparative perspective. At the same time it is possible to compare and recognize single ministries without necessarily having identical patterns of ministry.

Concerning 3: We agree that churches should ordain those responsible for the service of public preaching and the administration of the sacraments. However, this does not exclude the commissioning of others in situations of lack of ordained ministers.

Concerning 4: We agree with the necessity to consider the doctrine and practice of ordination, which also includes a clarification of the concept itself; whether it is exclusively linked to the ministry of word and sacrament or not.

Concerning 5: We support a further study on the diaconate, including its position in relation to ordination.

Mutual accountability within a fellowship or communion of churches does not immediately lead to a need for growth in formal structures. Although it may naturally follow as a consequence of deeper theological understanding among the churches, Church of Norway does not find it necessary, nor advisable to go in direction of stronger formal structures. Clarifications in the understanding of ministries within the CPCE churches, including the understanding of ordained ministry, are needed before further discussions on any binding formal structures can take place.² “Church Communion” does not give an account of the place and role of the ordained ministry (or ministries) in any binding synodical structures.

3. Do you deem that the current challenges faced by the CPCE and the model of church communion it represents are properly reflected in part 3?

We appreciate the attempt of finding satisfactory English terms for the German term «verbindlichkeit». A number of suggestions have been made in this document, as well as in other ecumenical documents, such as “mutual engagement”, “loyalty obligation”, “mutual recognition” or “mutual accountability”. It seems that one of the challenges is to settle the degree of commitment of each member church to the church community, while another challenge is to settle the degree of authority of the church community to which the member

² CoN’s Response to the CPCE Doctrinal Discussion on “Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé”, p. 5

churches are committed. Paragraph 70 points to the challenge of verifying this authority in order to be able to experience the communion. The paragraph then lists the five points of verification, which are the areas of community that already can be experienced. We appreciate the description of these five areas where community is experienced, and find the definition of these areas as a good expression of CPCE as a living and active expression and realisation of the Leuenberg Agreement.

This understanding in our church also corresponds to our understanding of paragraph 80. We do not see that the distinction between “declaration” and “realisation” takes us from a “pre-conciliar” to a “conciliary” situation. Signing the Leuenberg Agreement was already an active realisation of church fellowship, a step taken in a conciliary situation. Based on this understanding we do not find it necessary to enter into formal synodical structures. The Church of Norway Synod expressed this view in 1999, when the decision of signing the Leuenberg Agreement was formally taken.³

The recommendation not to form synodal structures corresponds to Paragraph 84 b), raising the question of whether initiatives towards a common church order are necessary. Formally, Church of Norway recently separated from the state. The church is currently in the process of developing a new church order. The historical heritage and current situation of Church of Norway makes it formally impossible to consider entering into a European Protestant synod. This may also be the case for member churches with a completely different structure, e.g. churches belonging to an existing European or International church structure. This view of Church of Norway does not affect our commitment to CPCE as a community of churches.

As for the question of catholicity, there seems to be a concern from “other churches” (Paragraph 85) that CPCE’s current model results in status quo. It is not quite clear to us who these “other churches” are, and we also don’t recognise the danger of a status quo. We find that CPCE already gives ample space for vibrant ecumenical life and deepening theological conversations.

We believe that a crucial point for the life of the universal church, and therefore an important challenge for CPCE, is how we regard *diakonia*. The diaconal service of the churches not only contributes to ecumenical fellowship and commitment through a common service to the world. We also believe *diakonia* to be part of the very essence of being church, and must therefore be part of the very essence of a church communion. It is therefore surprising that this perspective seems to be lacking in the document, and we hope this may come to the fore in continuing studies.

4. How do you regard the recommendations outlined in part 4? Which suggestions would you wish to emphasise, and which are you sceptical about? Where should the CPCE focus its efforts over the forthcoming years?

Church of Norway understands the need for CPCE to be a clear expression of church unity on several levels. We believe that we do unite in common worship, in professing the faith together and through acting as one community in our service to the world. Paragraphs 90 and 96 expresses these needs by using the term *one church*. Although we support the need to

³ The signing of the Leuenberg Agreement was followed by a signatory statement, dated November 19, 1999. Point 5 in the statement clearly says that Church of Norway does not wish a development towards European Protestant synodical structures.

highlight our unity, we do not find the use of the expression *One church* formally correct. *One church* is also an expression of the universal church, understood as the Church of Jesus Christ. In a wider ecumenical setting, it could therefore be misleading to use this expression as descriptive for a community of Protestant churches in Europe. We believe that CPCE is an adequate expression of a community of several churches. This is also how we read the articles 42 – 45 in the Leuenberg Agreement.

To the recommendations given in chapter 4, we have the following comments:

Paragraph 102 suggests more collaboration on ministerial formation. Church of Norway appreciates the idea of exchange of knowledge and collaboration on relevant themes related to ministerial formation. However, as our church's education for ministry is part of university education, it is difficult to add further formal guidelines to the ministerial formation.

Paragraph 108 suggests topics for further exploration in the coming years. We appreciate the suggestions and will be happy to take part in conversations on these topics. As for the third proposal, to explore Christian faith and Islam in the context of the Europe of today, we suggest that inter-religious dialogue as whole be taken into account. It is important that Christianity and Islam are not treated as particular opposites in an increasingly multi-religious Europe.

We find that the first part of Paragraph 109 clearly expresses the need to strengthen our community. We do not see the need for strengthening the structures in order to achieve closer unity, as it is suggested in the last part of the paragraph.

We appreciate the acknowledgment of other ecumenical bodies in «Church Communion», whether they are ecumenical organisations, or theological agreements where churches have entered into deep and committing communions. As Church of Norway is a member of a number of ecumenical organisations, and have signed and is committed to several agreements, we do not agree with the characteristic in Paragraph 126; that “most other ecumenical models have not yet led to the desired results”. We regard our ecumenical commitments as rewarding on our common journey towards unity in the One church of Jesus Christ. To apply a pilgrimage motive to our common ecumenical journey may be helpful in this regard. It is in this perspective we see the CPCE model of “unity in diversity” as a valuable contribution.

5. Do you opine that the suggestion of compiling a “charta spiritualis” should be pursued? Should the CPCE clarify the principle of communion on which it is based more clearly in its English title by changing this from the “Community of Protestant Churches in Europe” to the “Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe”?

The Paragraphs 112 and 116 launches the idea of a *charta spiritualis*, as a spiritual guide to how churches can live in close community with each other. The proposal seems to be closely connected to the “Charta Oecumenica” of the Conference of European Churches. As far as we understand it, the “Charta Oecumenica” still gives valid advice to churches on how they can journey together towards closer unity. It would be helpful to have a clearer description of what a possible *charta spiritualis* would entail.

Church of Norway finds that the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe adequately describes what CPCE is, and what we want it to be. We will be happy to take part in

strengthening the community further, and do not see that a change of name is needed to this end.

With these comments, we hope to contribute to a very important conversation on what it means to be church, and what it means to be in communion with each other. Although we for different reasons hesitate to enter into further formalisation of structures of the CPCE, we want to reiterate our commitment to our common journey as Protestant churches in Europe. In this commitment lies a strong sense of communion, in our common witness and service to the gospel.

Yours sincerely,

Helga Haugland Byfuglien
Presiding Bishop

Berit Hagen Agøy
General Secretary,
Council on Ecumenical and
International relations

Church of Norway's Response to the CPCE Study text "Protestant Perspectives on Religious Plurality in Europe"

Oslo, January 9, 2018

Introduction

Church of Norway hereby wishes to express our gratitude to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe for the study document "Protestant Perspectives on Religious Plurality in Europe". Following a recommendation from the CPCE General Assembly in 2012, we deeply appreciate the time and effort put into a study on the religious situation in Europe, and the document has been read with great interest in our church.

The document has been treated in the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, its Theological Commission, as well as in the Bishops' Conference, before its final adoption. In this particular process, we have also been able to seek advice from one of the members of the CPCE drafting group. The process has taken quite some time, as it has caused great interest and conversation around a diversity of issues and opinions. We therefore apologise for the prolonged delay of our response, and we are grateful for the understanding CPCE has shown for this delay.

We have organised our response according to the key questions following the document chapters. Kindly find the final response from Church of Norway below.

1. Do you think that a proper outline of the situation in Europe is given in part 2 of the document?

Which aspects would you like to see further elaborated upon and which made more precise?

Chapter 2 attempts to describe Europe and the religious situation in Europe. It is a demanding task in itself to describe such a complex situation. We appreciate the chapter, as it gives a useful introduction to the document as a whole. Although some things may seem self-explanatory, an introduction needs to give a general overview of the situation. This chapter does provide a good overview, showing that the religious – including the Christian – landscape is very diverse. The relations between minority and majority situations is an important part of explaining this diversity. We also appreciate that the chapter builds on a geographical understanding of Europe, rather than a political, economic or mythical definition. In fact, we find that the chapter may be useful in an educational context.

Several topics have been brought up in our process, which perhaps could have been further developed in the introduction. At the same time, we understand that there is a limit to how much can be included. One thing that could be considered is to bring in longer historical perspectives on the religious developments in Europe. Also, the context of increased secularisation and on-going changes in the relations between church and state could have been further developed.

At some points in the introduction, it seems that almost too much is described in a few sentences, e.g.: “The religious change in Europe may be expressing secularisation, or pluralisation, or the return of religion, or the transformation of religion, or even a combination of these ideas”. At the same time, the situation in Europe probably *is* all of this, so we do recognise the dilemma of describing a situation that is very complex and sometimes even contradictory.

We would have appreciated a clearer definition of the term *religion* in the introductory part. In certain contexts, religion is sometimes defined as *the established religions*, other times it is a more diffuse concept. A chosen and explained definition of religion could be helpful in sorting out the complexity of religious plurality. It may also be helpful with a clearer definition of religion, for the sake of the theological discussion. An element of religion, which we would have liked to see reflected in a document on religious plurality, is also the mystery – the wonder – of religion.

Chapter 2.4. ”Dealing with religious diversity” ends with a paragraph summarising challenges that religious plurality presents for the churches. The paragraph seems to say that the situation creates a need for Protestant churches to “give account of their values and convictions” (line 345). This would imply that there already is a certain set of convictions among the Protestant churches, which they will need to defend, even with one voice. However, this assumption does not seem to be the case for the rest of the document, which seems to have a fresh and more open approach to how churches encounter the situation of religious plurality.

2. Do you deem that documents your church has published are properly described and incorporated in part 3 of the document?

Would you please let us know if there are any texts that we appear to have overlooked?

We find that part 3 of the document provides a very useful overview, as well as material for further studies, and we acknowledge the time and energy put into this chapter. We are grateful for the presentation of the documents from Church of Norway, and would like to add that the 2016 Synod of Church of Norway worked on the matter of inter-religious dialogue including the church’s role in an increasingly pluralistic society. Decisions adopted at this Synod may be of interest for this chapter. The same year the Bishops’ Conference issued a guide on dealing with inter-religious encounter in connection with church services and prayers.¹

If anything, we would like to comment on the first part of the chapter, 3.1, “Ecumenical guidelines”. The study of ecumenical documents gives a useful glimpse into the discussions on inter-religious dialogue among the different actors of the ecumenical movement. It is interesting to note that while WCC has renewed its approach to mission and evangelism, the evangelical movement has opened up to discussions around inter-religious dialogue. It would be useful for this overview to bring in the document “The Cape Town Commitment” from 2010.

¹ See KM 15/16 at https://kirken.no/nb-NO/om-kirken/slik-styres-kirken/kirkemotet/dokumenter_vedtak/kirkemotet-06.04.2016-12.04.2016-trondheim/

3. Do you think that part 4 provides a helpful orientation aid regarding the basic principles of interreligious encounters and cooperation?

Part 4 provides rich theological and biblical reflections on inter-religious encounters. We note that the chapter starts with a systematic reflection of *radical grace*, before discussing the concept of truth in Christian faith, before it finally looks into the biblical material. We recognise the hermeneutical explanation given for this order, and will offer our comments accordingly.

To use the notion of *radical grace* is an interesting entry point and hermeneutical key to the discussion on Protestant theology in the face of religious plurality. *Radical grace* can be interpreted from several theological viewpoints, depending on the understanding of Christ and God's grace. The text explores the theme at different levels, which invites to broader discussions. From this perspective, we find it timely to bring forward *radical grace* in the 500th anniversary year of the reformation.

At the same time *radical grace* is an ambitious and demanding entry point. Grace is radical because it has its root in God, and in God alone. The question is whether this is a natural entry-point. At least, it would be helpful with further discussion around this as a starting point for a study on religious plurality. For instance, a more common starting point could perhaps have been a creation theological approach.

The choice of *radical grace* as entry point makes it possible to connect God's salvation to (God's) presence and action outside the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is problematic for our church to subscribe to. That God can bring salvation outside the church (*extra ecclesiam*) is in itself not a new and radical thought. Traditionally, the church would uphold that God is always greater (*Deus semper major*), but as Christians we are bound by the gospel of Christ and the sacraments. That God wants and may bring salvation outside of the given means of grace does not imply that the church is free to choose this as a basis for its teaching.

How God's radical grace can be used as a theologically consistent methodology is one of the basic problems of Christian theology. The concept of radical grace will always relate to a certain breach, a broken relationship. Grace cannot be used as a confirmation of grace, without exploring the need for God's grace, from the viewpoint of a broken relationship. The document's use of *radical grace* can imply an understanding of God's salvific grace as something that is accessible in present in all religions. Such an understanding is in danger of mixing a general understanding of God's revelation through creation and the revelation of God's grace through the specific act of salvation through Jesus Christ. We would appreciate further reflections on the Christian confession of the revelation of God, where the broken relationship is restored through the grace of God.

We appreciate the chapter 4.2, "Truth in Christian faith". The two first paragraphs of 4.2.3, "Living in the truth provides space for openness", gives very broad perspectives on truth in a few sentences. Perhaps a part of this could be further un-packed, e.g. by giving a clearer explanation of the sentence: "As embedded normativity it exists in, and with, the persons who live in it and who connect with God in a living relationship" (lines 1010 – 1011).

The last part of chapter 4, dealing with Biblical texts, invites to further study. One could discuss the transition from the systematic theological parts into the biblical theology. One option would be to treat the biblical material alongside the systematic discussions on *radical*

grace and *Christian truth*. Still, we find that the biblical material presented is very relevant to the theme. The text provides rich examples of the preaching and practices of Jesus. In fact, the chapter concludes by stating that being open towards people of other faiths is to follow Jesus' example (lines 1224 – 1226).

Regarding the biblical material, we would have liked to see further reflections on the relationship between the Father and the Son, as well as reflections on a Trinitarian understanding of God (cf. our previous comments on the revelation of God).

In our discussions, questions have been raised regarding chapter 4.3, particularly on how the New Testament deals with certain other religions. The document presents an understanding that the New Testament's claim to truth cannot be understood as relevant when it comes to religions who did not exist at the time when the New Testament was written (Paragraphs 1057 – 61; 1149 – 51). This is a view we cannot approve. On the contrary, we think it necessary to hold that the truth-claims of the New Testament regarding God's salvific action will stand confronted with any future event that might occur.

In the context of the chapter as a whole, this gives a basis for a theological understanding where the general revelation of God is based in God's salvific, radical grace, which can be recognised in all religions. A possible consequence of such a theology could be that the Christian encounter with religious plurality may seem (involuntarily) paternalistic, in the sense that "there is space for your truth in my truth".

The chapter is rather general, and it could perhaps have further explored the relationship with Jews and Muslims in particular. E.g., we miss a reflection on the relationship between the New Testament and Islamic teaching on the New Testament. Compared to Asian religions, it is particularly these two religions (Judaism and Islam) who are exposed to the biblical material, and therefore relate in their particular ways to the biblical material. We acknowledge that this may be a very large topic, but perhaps one could consider distinguishing between religions that relate to the biblical material in a different way than Christians, and other religions. Another option would be to initiate a separate study on the relationship between Protestantism and Judaism, and Protestantism and Islam. Another option would be to elaborate further on the paragraph that deals with "misuse of biblical texts" (lines 1057 – 1061).

***4. How do you regard the thoughts and recommendations outlined in part 5?
Which aspects would you wish to emphasise or expand?***

Again, we appreciate the thoughts and recommendations outlined in part 5 of the document. We find it relevant that the document concludes with a more practical theological part, presenting concrete challenges. However, we recognise the difficulty of naming concrete challenges, since the task of practicing dialogue is perceived in very different ways: "For some, dialogue is part of their spiritual journey; for others, dialogue is more of an intellectual adventure. For others again it is a socio-political necessity" (lines 1982 – 1983).

In chapter 5, a certain tension between religion in the private sphere and in the public sphere can be read between the lines. This makes the question of what possibilities there are for dialogue rather complex, because it also depends on how much and in which way our

societies are affected by modernisation and secularisation. We appreciate that this complexity is present in the document, and the mention of concrete challenges. One such example is the importance of bringing in gender perspectives in the dialogue, while gender issues at the same time may be challenging to the dialogue (chapter 5.2).

Then, there are certain aspects of living together in religiously plural societies that we would have liked to see expanded. One such topic is how we as Christian churches give *witness* to the world. Another aspect, which could have been explored further, is how we relate to *religious spirituality* within interfaith dialogue. What can we say about religious mysteries and wondering? It may be helpful to share some reflections on *what are the limits to what we can say* about religious spirituality. Finally, this leads to what may be the biggest challenge, which is not other religions' claim to truth, but rather the notion that there is *no truth at all*. A relevant dichotomy today is that between nihilism and trust, the lack of hope versus hope.

While we find chapter 5 important, we would still ask what the connection between the different chapters is, and what the overall purpose of the document is. In the introduction we find mention of the purpose: "...how to constructively shape interreligious relations and how to view such relations theologically" (lines 43 – 44). Particularly chapters 4 and 5 try to respond to this challenge. Perhaps a way of clarifying this would be to look at how the Protestant notion of *radical grace* can be brought into the discussion on how we relate to other religions in practice, and how we live together for the better of society. We strongly recommend that CPCE continues to explore what particular contributions can be made by Protestant churches, for instance in their interpretation of grace.

***5. Should the CPCE continue to examine this topic over the forthcoming years?
What particular kind of support does your church most need from the CPCE?***

The document contains deep theological reflections and provides interesting perspectives on religious plurality. We are perfectly aware that the document cannot provide a complete guide to the theology of religions, but we appreciate the attempt to raise a number of issues related to religious plurality that are relevant to the churches, and in an accessible way. This way the document serves as a resource to the churches, gives legitimate reasons to open up for inter-religious dialogue, and provides a guide for entering into dialogue.

Since the religious situation in Europe is continuously changing, we believe the topic will continue to be of utmost relevance. We therefore strongly recommend that further studies be undertaken in the coming years, also in areas of disagreements, that reflect the complex situation of Europe.

We have mentioned that the document is useful for study and discussions within the church. In our discussions it has also become clear that the document is relevant for educational purposes, such as theological and religious studies. We would therefore like to challenge the CPCE to look at ways of developing the material for academic purposes, either as a whole, or in part, as well as for study purposes within the churches.

With this, Church of Norway would like to offer our sincere thanks to the CPCE for providing an in-depth study on one of the most relevant challenges the churches in Europe are facing today. We warmly welcome further studies on the topic of religious plurality, and we will be happy to contribute in any way that CPCE may find useful.

Yours sincerely,

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