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Sven Thore Kloster

Rapport fra Porvoo Church Leaders Consultation, 10.-12. oktober 2019 i Porto, Portugal

Nytt fra den verdensvide kirke – Porvoo

Sammendrag

Det vises til vedlagte rapport med konferanse-uttalelse og foredrag om kirke som uenighetsfellesskap som vedlegg.

Forslag til vedtak

Mellomkirkelig råd tar saken og Rapport fra Porvoo Church Leaders Consultation, 10.-12. oktober 2019 i Porto, Portugal, til orientering.

Rapport fra Porvoo Church Leaders Consultation, 10.-12. oktober 2019, Porto, Portugal v/ Sven Thore Kloster

Berit Hagen Agøy, Christofer Solbakken og undertegnede representerte Dnk på Porvoo Church Leaders Consultation i Portugal. Church Leaders Consultations arrangeres hvert fjerde år. Vertskapet for møtet var den anglikanske kirken i Portugal: The Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church. Kirken springer ut av flere gammelkatolske menigheter i Portugal som ble dannet i protest mot første Vatikankonsil, og som søkte seg inn i den anglikanske kirkefamilien på slutten av 1800-tallet. Møtet var en påminnelse om at Porvoofellesskapet består av både store, nasjonale majoritetskirker og små minoritetskirker, og at til tross for – eller kanskje nettopp på grunn av – disse forskjellene er det dypt meningsfullt å møtes, bekrefte hverandre og få perspektiver både på ens egen lille og den større kirkelige kontekst.

Konferansens tema var *The Voice of the Church in the Public Square*. Blant annet ble kirkens stemme og vitnesbyrd i en på samme tid sekularisert og postsekulær offentlighet diskutert. Undertegnede bidro med foredraget *Church and Public Theology in times of Plurality and Polarization* (vedlagt), hvor jeg argumenterte for at kirken er et uenighetsfellesskap, og at man derfor burde snakke om the voices of the church in the public square. Ellers var det særlig interessant å høre ulike perspektiver på Brexit fra representantene fra de anglikanske kirkene i England, Skottland, Wales, Nord-Irland og Irland. Til informasjon kan nevnes at Church of England og EKD har utgitt antologien *After Brexit? European Unity and the Unity of the European Churches*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019.

I forkant av Church Leaders Consultation var det møte i Porvoo Contact Group. Nytt av året er at biskop Matti Repo fra Finland har overtatt som luthersk co-chair, og at Erik Berggren fra Svenska kyrkan har overtatt som luthersk co-secretary. Contact Group-møtet uttrykte bekymring for at den lutherske kirken i Litauen nok en gang ikke prioriterte et møte i Porvoo-sammenheng, og håper at dette ikke er et tegn på at den distanserer seg fra Porvoofellesskapet slik den lutherske kirken i Latvia delvis har gjort. Det ble avtalt nye initiativ inn mot Litauen som en oppfølging av møtet.

I 2020 er det planlagt Porvoo Theological Consultation 8.-11. oktober i Strängnes i Sverige. Her vil temaet være ekklesiologi og ulike resepsjoner av Porvoo Common Statement. I 2021 blir det Porvoo Primates' Meeting 14.-17. oktober i Finland, og her vil også Porvooavtalens 25-årsjubileum markeres.

Vedlegg:

1. Statement from Porvoo Church Leaders Consultation, Porto, 2019
2. Church and Public Theology in times of Plurality and Polarization

**Porvoo Communion Church Leader's Consultation and Meeting of
the Porvoo Contact Group
"The Voice of the Church in the Public Square"
PORTO – 10-12th October 2019**

Representatives of the Churches of the Porvoo Communion gathered in Porto, Portugal between 10 and 12 October 2019 for a consultation entitled 'The Voice of the Church in the Public Square'. The consultation took place at the Seminário de Vilar in Porto where delegates were made welcome by the Rt Revd Jorge Pina Cabral and the Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church. The relationship of communion between our churches was grounded and made visible in our gathering together for prayer, celebration of the Eucharist, debates and fellowship. Bishop Sifredo Teixeira from the Methodist Church and Bishop Armando Esteves Domingues from the Roman Catholic Church participated in the conference on one afternoon and brought greetings from their churches.

The Consultation took place shortly after the death of the Rt Revd Dr Tore Furberg, sometime Bishop of Visby in the Church of Sweden and Lutheran Co-Chair of the conversations that led to the Porvoo Agreement. We gave thanks for his ministry and the legacy he leaves.

Throughout the consultation we heard and reflected on issues relating to the Church in the Public Square. The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough began with a paper entitled 'Secularism: confused friend or active foe?' He argued that secularism grew out of the European enlightenment and gave honourable voice to the political will and decision of the people. Secularism has, however, moved into a new situation and needs today to rethink its role in a post-secular age as much as religion does. He argued that a new dialogue is needed, without the language of the victory of one view over the other.

One way of being present in the public square was described by Adrian Harris, Head of Digital Communications in the Church of England, who talked about digital presence. He explained the importance of a strategy of engaging with the worldwide web and social media in a culture where people spend increasing amounts of time online, with a view to enabling people to make contact with church life at a local level. The Church's new strategy shows how the Church can move from being pre-secular to post-secular.

Lutheran contributions from the Revd Professor Cristina Grenholm from the Church of Sweden and Dr Sven Thore Kloster from the Church of Norway posed questions about the nature of the Church's involvement in the public square, drawing on the Lutheran doctrine of the two regimes and on practical examples of churches addressing difficult political issues either through seeking consensus or recognising diversity.

A special panel discussion dealt with European relationships with a focus on Brexit. The panel consisted of the Revd Helene Steed from the Church of Ireland, the Revd Dr Ainsley Griffiths from Church in Wales, Ms Miriam Weibye from Scottish Episcopal Church and Dr Rachel Jepson from the Church of England. The panel explained the

very different views about Brexit prevalent in the UK: church communities are divided and the issue is complex. Those present agreed that relationships between churches can transcend divisions and borders.

The consultation was fortunate to hear from Mr Antonio Marujo, an experienced Portuguese journalist who gave his perspective on the public square in Portuguese society. The religious landscape of Portugal is diverse, but with a dominant Catholic Church. There were expectations among the public that the churches should make a contribution to public discourse and that the churches had to speak. Mr Marujo gave examples of where the churches had contributed in the public debate but also when the churches had declined to speak.

Ms Lena Kumlin and the Revd Dr Tomi Karttunen gave a presentation on the Church of Finland's profound work on climate change, built on a foundation of Christian theology and ethics. The goal of the Church's energy and climate strategy was a carbon neutral church by 2030. The Church takes into account the consequences for the environment and climate when developing its business. The Church's environmental diploma provides an opportunity for parishes to plan their activities in an environmentally friendly way. Environmental and sustainability issues are playing an important part in Finland's outworking of its presidency of the European Union.

The Porvoo Communion Church Leader's Consultation concluded with a visit to a Lusitanian parish for evening prayer followed by dinner and cultural evening. The Porvoo Contact Group expresses its gratitude to the Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church, to the Rt Revd Jorge Pina Cabral, the Revd Sérgio Alves, Ms Catarina Sá Couto, Mr Richard Domingues and Mr José Sequeira for making members so welcome to Seminário de Vilar and the city of Porto. The Group looks towards its 2020 meeting: a theological conference hosted by the Church of Sweden.



Participants

Church in Wales

The Revd Dr Ainsley Griffiths

Church of England

The Revd Dr William Adam *Anglican Co-Secretary*
Dr Rachel Jepson
The Revd Dr Anderson Jeremiah
Mr Adrian Harris

Church of Iceland

The Revd Dr Sigurður Árni Þorðarson
Svana Helen Björnsdóttir

Church of Ireland

The Revd Helene Steed
The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson *Anglican Co-Chair*

Church of Norway

Dr Sven Thore Kloster
Ms Berit Hagen Agøy
Mr Christoffer Solbakken

Church of Sweden

The Revd Prof Christina Grenholm
The Revd Per Kristiansson
The Revd Dr Erik Berggren *Lutheran Co-Secretary*

Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Revd Tauno Teder
Ms Kadri Eliisabet Pöder

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

The Revd Dr Thorsten Rørbæk
The Revd Christina Rygaard Christiansen

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

The Rt Revd Dr Matti Repo *Lutheran Co-Chair*
Ms Lena Kumlin
M.Th. Suvi-Tuulia Vaara
The Revd Dr Tomi Karttunen

Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad

The Very Revd Andris Abakuks
Ms Rūta Abakuks
Ms Inguna Mieze

Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church – Portugal

The Rt Revd Jorge Pina Cabral
The Revd Sérgio Alves
Ms Catarina Sá Couto
Mr José Sequeira

Reformed Episcopal Church of Spain

The Revd Spencer Reece
The Revd José António Esteban
The Revd Daniel Caravaca

Scottish Episcopal Church

Ms Miriam Weibey
The Rt Revd Ian Paton

Church and Public Theology in times of Plurality and Polarization

Presentation by Sven Thore Kloster, Church of Norway, on the theme of *The Public Square*.
Porvoo Church Leaders Consultation, Porto, Oct. 11, 2019

Introduction

Not long ago a Norwegian church leader stated the following in a newspaper-article: “In times of polarization and division, also in religious contexts, it is imperative that we, as a church, work together – and support each other - in what we have in common.” It is easy to agree to this statement. However, I wonder whether it says everything there is to be said about disagreement and unity.

My point of departure is the question: *How* should the church act and speak politically in times of turbulence and polarization? While Church of Norway over the last few decades has engaged more explicitly in some political debates, the Norwegian public has been more polarized in regard to several political issues. In order to avoid polarization, the church has often sought consensus-based statements on “difficult” political issues. What I want to problematize in this presentation is whether the church necessarily should work towards consensus-oriented positions when expressing its voice in the public, or whether it should try to relate to the plurality of opinions in a different way. And, if so, what would an alternative to the consensus-oriented model look like and what would be its benefits?

Chantal Mouffe

In order to elaborate on these questions, I will draw on the contemporary Belgium political theorist Chantal Mouffe and her conception of agonistic pluralism. Mouffe develops her ideas about agonistic pluralism in the years after the cold war, when liberal democracy had won and become the dominating political system. According to Mouffe, this time was characterized by what she calls a “post-political vision”, a conception of politics in which political conflicts were ignored or not seen as significant. Communism was defeated, so was also the belief in collective identity. A world without political enemies was within the reach. Conflict and disagreement belonged to the past; now consensus and political agreement could be achieved through rational dialogue. Mouffe’s project is to criticize this idea of deliberative political liberalism. She wants to draw the attention to what she believes constitutes and fuels politics and democracy, namely disagreement.

Mouffe is partly rooted in a post-marxist tradition, and partly in a french republican tradition where democracy is constituted on the two sociopolitical values liberty and equality. Liberty is understood as an individual value and equality as a collective one. Equality regulates individual liberty and sets limits for it, so the two constituting pillars of democracy in this tradition are therefore to a certain extent ir-reconcilable. Mouffe’s understanding of liberal democracy, thus, implies that both values are necessary, while at the same time incompatible. They make up a democratic paradox. In this way, Mouffe distances herself from John Rawls who she accuses of trying to reconcile the principles by granting priority to one of them. She

also criticises Jürgen Habermas' model of political liberalism, and this is what I will dwell on here.

In Habermas' theory of communicative action the political is seen as a space where morality is applied so that it is possible to create a rational moral consensus by means of free discussion.¹ Habermas's idea of "ideal discourse" advocates impartiality and openness in such a way that the better argument is thought capable of generating interests that can be accepted by all relevantly affected. For Mouffe, this is to ignore clashes of interests, and to ground political legitimacy on rationality. Although Habermas in later works admits the unlikelihood of the full realization of an ideal discourse, Mouffe accuses him of still thinking of it as a "regulative ideal" as primarily empirical and practical reasons hinder its realization.² For Mouffe, political consensus and ideal discourse are impossible categories – not on account of empirical or historical reasons, but conceptually. The sociopolitical values are incompatible and any implementation of them are results of power struggles, rivaling interests, and will thus always be contested. – so, this doesn't mean that she denies the possibility of making political compromises but she sees compromises as temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation.

There are two reasons why Mouffe finds consensus problematic as a regulative ideal for the political conversation. First, she argues that it is excluding. Those who do not seek for and contribute to consensus are excluded based on what is claimed to be rational or moral reasons. Mouffe, on the other hand, wants exclusions to be based on political reasons – that is, whether one accepts the principles or not – not on how one prioritizes between them. Second, Mouffe finds consensus to be a false ideal because it threatens democratic involvement: it makes democracy implode, she argues. To Mouffe, disagreement is primarily something productive, a motive force for democracy. Constant disagreement about the interpretation and implementation of the socio-political values mobilizes people to democratic participation, engagement, and fills up the political space with content – namely, multiple claims and diverse interpretations.

In summary, we can say that unlike different accounts of liberalism, which regard antagonisms as something that can be reconciled or neutralized – for example through efforts of seeking consensus, Mouffe's agonistic democracy acknowledges the permanence of the antagonistic dimension in society, while at the same time aims to give it a democratic outlet by taming it. Politics is therefore seen as practices of disagreement among political adversaries that inscribe their confrontation in a democratic framework, that is to see themselves as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place.

¹ See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

² Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 88. For Habermas's revising comments on previous work, see, for example, Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) and *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1993), 163-64.

Church, interpretive space, and disagreement

Enough about Mouffe. Now the question is: *how* can we make use of Mouffe's reasoning in a theological context? Has it anything to offer?

I believe it has, in at least two ways. First, one can think in a liberation theological way. This means to consider the church as an agonistic participant in the public square. The church can contribute in the public with a different language – not only for example a rational or bureaucratic one. In this way, the church can articulate ideas, critique and imaginaries that enriches and fuels or disturbs the public debate, by for example representing marginalized voices. I have nothing against this way of reasoning or practising church in the public. However, it is not what I want to highlight here. The drawback of this model is that it risks communicating that the church is a homogenous political community, which I believe it is not. So, my focus is not the church as one agent in the larger society – but, instead, the church itself as a political and theological diverse community within the larger society. So, if the role of the church is not to strive towards articulating one voice in the public, can it, then, highlight various and even rivaling voices? - It might be “the voices of the church in the public square”

The church, of course, is not constituted on liberty and equality. However, no matter what we think about what constitutes the church, the meaning and implication of this is not given. The Christian traditions and symbol systems are simply too rich and polyvalent in order to direct a specific interpretation of what it means to be church or a Christian in a particular situation. I believe this condition of interpretive contingency and diversity prompts contestation and interpretive disagreements, and therefore I think it can be fruitful to approach theological meaning-making from the perspective of agonistic pluralism. In order to take the preliminary and open nature of the questions of theology seriously, it is important that the church not only allows but also stimulates to various and different interpretations, theological ones as well as political ones. In this way, a church can be seen as a community of disagreement, or a community of argument – to use Kathryn Tanner's phrase. In a community of disagreement, dissent on theological and political issues are part of the Christian self-understanding. Theological and political interpretations are sites of continuous contestation and struggle.

Let's look at the bishops' collegium as an example. This collegium has a particular responsibility of nurturing unity and making unity visible in the church. The bishops can choose to express themselves publicly by the means of consensus. What they *can* express, then, is what they agree on. The danger of this strategy is, first, that there might not be so much to say. Second, it risk communicating that unity depends on agreement. A third risk is that consensus-based statements are often uninteresting (or even boring). Here it is time to quote another Anglican theologian, namely Stephen Sykes:

Christianity only becomes interesting as a concept when someone has the courage to spell out in greater or lesser detail one or other of the contestable possibilities which the definition permits.

So, as an alternative to the consensus-oriented model, one can choose a more agonistic approach, in which the collegium actively expresses and communicates disagreements. One bishop means this, another one that. In this way, the community and its leeway is expanded.

The interpretive space is not narrowed by a strive towards consensus. In an agonistic approach the problem is not so much if representatives from the church express controversial opinions in the public but rather if they express *one* opinion. The benefits of an agonistic model would be that it expands the interpretative space and thus accommodates and includes a larger amount of people and opinions. It would also, hopefully, have the capacity to mobilize and engage people. It does not favour or prescribe rational deliberation. And, it makes existing differences visible and by that it also has a clarifying function. In other words: Outspoken and disagreeing bishops are not necessarily a threat to church unity. Perhaps they are the opposite.

Agonistic pluralism is not only a theoretical thought-experiment. I'll give you an example: The struggle for same-sex marriage in the Norwegian public debate – which was as much a theological as a political debate – illustrates how an agonistic conflict can materialize quite fruitfully in a church context: In Norway, the conflict was characterized by mutually irreconcilable stances. Despite some attempts at establishing deliberate communicative standards for the conflict, the different parties have used all kinds of rhetorical strategies, as well as various ways of affective and conflictual mobilization. The conflict has indeed mobilized church members and has also made the different views more clear. At some point, one party was in the position to change the official view of the Church of Norway, by bringing its interpretation in conformity with a selected range of interpretations, values, and practices favored by a majority of church members, however, without excluding the opponents from the community but instead recognizing them as legitimate opponents.

A Common Symbolic Space:

To advocate theological and political diversity as I have done in this paper, is not, however, to say that anything goes. Certainly, there must be limitations to the diversity, otherwise theology and its political implications would not be interesting at all. The Christian community of disagreement is not a community without limits, but a community whose limits are constantly part of the debate.

Agonistic pluralism presupposes a symbolic space that is strong enough to accommodate conflicting struggles. Mouffe has been criticized for not taking into account that the sociopolitical values, that make up *her* common symbolic space, might *not* be strong enough to carry the conflicts she envisages. I really acknowledge the challenge of defining the common space in such a way that it is symbolically strong enough to unite and commit people, and flexible enough to allow for diversity and bear conflict. – and I believe Mouffe has not answered sufficiently this criticism. However, my suggestion is that agonistic pluralism might be a more suited resource for theology than for political science: The churches have plenty of resources like rituals, worshipping practices, language, hymns, articulations of faith, and so on, that constantly insist on, and remind its members, that Christian identity exceeds the social Christian community and its internal political or

theological conflicts. To once more put it in the words of Stephen Sykes, Christian identity can be “conceived as a *body* with unavoidable and restless internal conflicts.

In this presentation, I have not tried to prescribe a universal model of how to be church in the public square, but simply offered an alternative to a consensus-based model that could be considered in some situations. I am deeply aware of the significant differences between our various contexts – from Brexit in UK to a much more conform and less polarized public space in Norway. Perhaps Brexit demonstrates there are some limits also to the intensity and tone of the disagreement?

So, in order to sum up: Interpretive struggles and disagreements are exhausting. However, we probably won't get rid of them, neither in church nor in society. So, why not try to look for their blessings? Can we get a blessing out of the conflict? If one accepts the church to be a community of disagreement, then it might be easier to see the clarifying function of disagreements, and to see dissent as a mobilizing factor that expands the interpretive and imaginative space, and that also have the capacity of generating involvement and commitment.

Literature:

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Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997