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Religious Heritage and Change in the North

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
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Religious heritage in the North

Monocultural or multicultural?

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The article takes as its point of departure the notion that the Scandinavian countries have been dominated by a monocultural Lutheranism. This notion is nuanced by focusing on everyday life and oppositional voices. In the nineteenth century, the Lutheran state churches began to interpret their past as religious cultural heritage. Focusing especially on Norway, it is argued that this monocultural perspective has been replaced by a multicultural one with emphasis on ethnic minorities and indigenous religious heritage, dialogue and tolerance.

IT IS OFTEN CLAIMED as a fact that the Scandinavian countries have for centuries been dominated by one Christian confession: Lutheranism. The argument is that Denmark-Norway and Sweden(-Finland) did not allow other confessions or religions to practise or preach in their territories. This article is an attempt to apply some historical nuances to this picture by asking about the different cultural levels of the seemingly dominant position of the Lutheran churches in the North. The religious culture should not only be regarded through the lenses of royal power, legislation or official professions; daily practice, everyday life and oppositional voices should also be considered. This article also focuses on how the Lutheran state churches of Scandinavia have recently interpreted

the past as religious cultural heritage, with special reference to Norway.

The Lutheran Church from above

The principle of the Nordic reformations was clear. The Christian king was symbolically omnipresent, even in the churches' interior decorations, and the territorial principle was established, not least by the Augsburg Settlement of 1555 ('*cuius regio, cuius religio*'). The new state churches should be organized by congregations served by a pastor in a parish church. No pilgrimages were allowed for the future, and there should be no individual 'running' between parishes in search of healing or salvation. The Word of God was to be presented locally and univocally by a religious specialist with an acknowledged training and competence. The parish church and the local religious cultural landscape became an exclusive arena for interaction between pastors and congregations (Amundsen 2017: 170ff.).

As seen from above, the Lutheran system was based on unity, uniformity and religious concord. Through different media and institutions, the king was in control of the interpretation of the Lutheran religion and its rituals. Services were regular,

hymns and liturgies were regulated by law, and the local pastor was the unchallenged religious expert. However, even within this organized structure there were different layers and levels of understanding and interpretation. The pastor, but also to a certain extent lower officials such as clerks, church wardens and sacristans, controlled the local church and the local services. How these groups acted and interpreted the new Lutheran doctrine and practices is now not always clear, but their responsibility for ritual behaviour, economic affairs and maintenance and use of the local church without doubt gave them opportunities to act on their own, to a degree independently of the pastor. In addition, there was 'the culture of the gallery': in most churches, galleries were filled with young people, servants and poor members of the congregation, whose respect of the service and the pastor was not always whole-hearted (Malmstedt 2002).

The Lutheran Church from below

The reference to 'the culture of the gallery' can also serve as an introduction to the fact that the Lutheran churches in Scandinavia in the centuries after the Reformation also contained substantial ambiguities and dissonances. In fact, Sweden did not finally confirm its adherence to confessional Lutheranism until 1593, which created several conflicting cultural processes and loyalties. This becomes clear when daily religious life is viewed from below, that is from the perspective of the ordinary members of the local congregations (Berntson 2017).

This is an observation valid not only for Sweden, but for all Scandinavia. On a basic level, there were few widespread, open protests or criticisms against the Lutheran clergy. A plausible explanation for this is in part the fact that the majority of the Roman

Catholic local clergy stayed in office during the Scandinavian reformations. Only slowly did the clergy collectively change into a professional group deeply convinced of the truth of the new religion. And even then, there seems to have been considerable room for ambiguities and dissonances in religious interpretation and practice. One example is the widespread use of so-called holy wells, natural springs of water dedicated for instance to St Olaf, the Holy Cross or the Virgin Mary. The Reformation did not prevent visits to such wells in search of medical cures and to express piety (Amundsen 2001). Some churches were also visited or received attention as bearers of extraordinary religious and miraculous powers, such as the Røldal stave church in Norway, where visitors came from afar to take part in a service and a procession to honour the old crucifix that was kept there. Also objects inside and outside the local churches had miraculous effects attached to them according to members of the congregations, for example baptismal fonts, church bells or earth from the cemetery (Laugerud 2018: 268ff.). Attempts have been made to define these practices as remnants of Roman-Catholic traditions, which in many ways they are (Laugerud 2018). But they were hardly expressions of a conscious and continuing Catholic piety.

These examples illustrate the existence of a tradition of Lutheran pilgrimage that illustrate how, despite the strict order introduced by the new church authorities, the religious landscape was flexible, and not limited to the parish and the congregation (Eriksen 1986).

Opposition and protest

Seen from the perspective of the church authorities, the traditions of Lutheran pilgrimage were problematic, but not necessarily crucially so. Of a different and more

oppositional kind were practices and religious opinions that openly challenged the authority of the king and the Lutheran clergy. During the whole post-Reformation period there were small groups of believers who had different religious practices, of whom the majority belonged to left-wing Protestantism inspired by the enthusiastic traditions of the Anabaptists and Calvinist notions of the purity of the church (Amundsen 2006).

Of a different kind were so-called magical practices and beliefs. They cannot be analysed historically as a consistent and cohesive opposition or protest against the established church. Rather, they were linked to old wisdom and medical cures that were especially abundant in rural communities far from any professional medical help (Stark 2002).

In some cases, however, magic was inspired by 'black arts' and even diabolism: open denial of the Christian God and acceptance of the devil as the world's authority. Through rituals and individual pacts these people tried to establish a life-long relationship with the diabolic world (Olli 2007).

An intriguing question is whether there was also room for 'free-thinking' within the framework of the Lutheran state churches in Scandinavia. At least in the eighteenth century, there are examples of such positions, even if they must have been rare and indeed quite extraordinary (Amundsen and Laugerud 2001).

'Complexio oppositorum'

One of the first Scandinavian historians to try to grasp analytically the complex picture of the developing Lutheran churches and the new religious culture and cultural landscapes in the centuries after the Reformation was Hilding Pleijel (1893–1988). Pleijel was Professor of Church

History at the University of Lund, Sweden, from 1938 to 1960 (Brohed 1995). In the 1930s he advocated the view that the community of the seventeenth century could be described as a Lutheran household society based on Martin Luther's Little Catechism, where religious paternalism prevailed (Pleijel 1935). Inspired by contemporary ethnological research, Pleijel also took an interest in religious culture from below, arguing that the history of the Christian church could not be described merely through normative and elite-based sources, but needed supplementing with accounts of the actual life of common people. Using such sources, the picture of the religious past became much more varied and complex. To describe this, Pleijel coined the expression 'complexio oppositorum', not to undermine his previous conclusions regarding the household society, but to widen them and include elements that to later generations might seem contradictory to such a society (Pleijel 1961).

To add to the 'complexio', Pleijel also focused on radically new elements in Swedish church life. In his doctoral dissertation from 1926, he analysed the early Moravians in southern Sweden. He described these as dominated by a new theology, new religious practices and new heroes of piety. By studying the early representatives of the movement on an individual level, Pleijel managed to describe the potential for protest in its culture and pious ideals (Pleijel 1926).

What Pleijel and later researchers on Moravians in Scandinavia have emphasized is that this movement created a new religious culture with a trans-national ideology, ecumenical practice and theology. Thus, a new religious landscape developed that challenged the territorial principles established during the eighteenth century. An explicit example of this is the

establishment in 1773 of the Moravian colony of Christiansfeld, ‘The City of God’ in the Lutheran parish of Haderslev in southern Jutland. The colony was granted ten years of tax exemption, and financial support from the king, who regarded them as pious and industrious citizens (Thyssen 1964).

The Moravians also developed a new, corresponding inner landscape, with strict focus on the Holy Word, attracting strong emotional responses combined with strict order and regulation of behaviour. They represented an experimental, avant-garde piety, unbounded by borders, and with the immaterial, intangible parts of piety as the most important (Ahlberger and Wachenfeldt 2016; Amundsen 2021b: 189f.).

Church and state relations

The Moravians, and later Pietist movements in early-nineteenth-century Scandinavia such as the Haugeans in Norway (Gundersen 2022), the so-called Strong Jutlanders in Denmark (Thomsen 1960), and the followers of Jacob Otto Hoof (1768–1839) and Henric Schartau (1757–1825) in Sweden (Nelson 1933, 1937), clearly demonstrated that even within the Lutheran state churches there was a multitude of religious practices and ideals. Some of them were openly critical of the existing order of the churches, others defined themselves as relatively independent of this order.

Political and ideological changes also led to changes in church and state relations in Scandinavia. In fact, the Norwegian Constitution of 1814 included a paragraph



The ‘Society of the Lutheran household’, painting 1857 by Gustaf Brusewitz (1812–1899).

on religious freedom, but the paragraph was removed during the final editing of the text. Even if the Scandinavian countries – Finland becoming part of the Russian empire in 1809, Norway an independent kingdom in union with Sweden in 1814 – kept the Lutheran churches as state churches, in most cases with the monarch as their head, new legislation loosened the ties between states and churches. In Norway, the so-called Conventicle Act of 1741, that prohibited any religious meetings not authorized by the Lutheran pastors, was abolished in 1842, and in 1845, individual citizens were granted freedom to leave the Lutheran state church (Amundsen 2020). The Danish Constitution of 1849 established the same principle. The Swedish Conventicle Act of 1726 was abolished in 1858, and in 1873, members of the Lutheran Church of Sweden were allowed to cancel their membership.

These changes meant that during the nineteenth century, the relationship between citizenship and religious identity was terminated in all Scandinavian countries. The nation was no longer identical with the territorial Lutheran church. The Lutheran churches slowly re-oriented towards identifying themselves as institutions with their own history and confessional legacy, which was deeper and longer than the nation-state. This started a development of national folk churches claiming historical dominance, and terms like the Church of Sweden, the Danish Folk Church and the Church of Norway were coined (Thorkildsen 2017).

The Scandinavian folk churches also started to modernize their activities to meet the challenges from Pietist movements inside the churches, new Christian confessions, a rapidly growing working class, religious scepticism and urbanization. Parish borders were revised, old churches were demolished

and replaced by larger, lighter, and warmer churches in rural areas, and new churches built in urban centres (Amundsen 2022).

Reshaping the religious cultural landscape

These new trends and preferences contributed to a reshaping of the religious cultural landscapes in Scandinavia in very complex ways. Norway can serve as an example of the complexity.

Alongside the demolition of old churches, Norwegian historians, architects and artists started to emphasize the aesthetic, historical and cultural values of the national Middle Ages. Most stave churches were demolished and replaced by modern, neo-gothic parish churches, but the voices arguing for preservation of these buildings became louder. A National Trust of Norway (Foreningen for norske fortidsminde-mærkers bevaring) was established as a private enterprise in 1844, and the Trust acquired, protected and restored a small number of stave churches, thus defining them not primarily as religious buildings or objects, but as national cultural heritage and inspirational models for future artists and craftsmen (Myklebust 1994).

These perspectives were rarely embraced by the Norwegian church and its clergy, who instead focused on the need for modernization and functionality. Their interest seems to have been to cut loose from the local religious and historical traditions embedded in the old churches. Even if the old churches were kept, they were restored, which meant that much of the interior from previous periods was removed, destroyed or sold in auctions to finance the modernization. Old seating regulations were abolished, and the new churches were open to all, regardless of their social status (Amundsen 2021a: 276ff.).

In some cases, the needs of state church modernization and the growing interest in



The Borgund stave church, drawing before 1856 by Auguste Etienne François Mayer (1805-1880).

national cultural heritage were combined. The old stave church was left as a museum object, while the new parish church was erected close by, and in some instances with architectural references to the stave-church style. This was the case in Borgund, where the architect Christian Christie (1832–1906) designed a modern parish church in stave-church style, leaving the medieval stave church as a monument just a few metres away (Amundsen 2022).

Another striking example is the cathedral of Trondheim. Having been the see of the Norwegian archbishop until 1537, Trondheim and its cathedral went through a lengthy period of decay with fires, negligence and lack of resources. In the nineteenth century this process was radically altered. Trondheim became a symbolic centre for state rituals and historical continuity in Norwegian history. According to the Norwegian constitution of 1814, the coronation of future kings of Norway was to take place in the cathedral, the first being

in 1818. In the 1840s architects and historians contributed to a deeper understanding of the historical and architectural structure of the building, with continuous economic support from the national authorities. From 1869, the restoration of the cathedral started, with grants from Parliament. The perspective was that the cathedral of Trondheim was a national monument under state protection and regulation. The position as restoration architect brought with it power and influence. Obviously, the cathedral became part of the national heritage of Norway, but to the present day, its status as a site of religious heritage has been debated (Ekroll 2019).

The inner opposition - alternative religious landscapes

As the conditions for religious practice changed during the nineteenth century, with both Pietist opposition within the state church and confessional dissidents establishing their own churches and organ-

izations, the religious cultural landscape of Norway also changed.

From the 1840s, when lay preaching was formally legalized, different Pietist groups organizing inner mission (Christian mission among the members of the Lutheran church) raised their own community buildings called prayer or mission houses (Sw. *bönhus*, Da. *missionshuse*, No. *bedehus*). Many of these houses were owned by local groups or local associations both in rural and urban areas. They were often non-clerical and non-sacramental, meaning that their activities were not based on or dependent on the Lutheran clergy, and the main purpose was to preach the Gospel (Swensen 1997). It became a tradition that these prayer houses were given biblical names like Bethesda, Bethel, Zoar, Zion, Tabor or Bethania, thus introducing the cultural geography of the Holy Land into the Nordic landscape (Ørebech

2006: 28; Larsen 2014: 106f.; Amundsen 2021b: 190ff.). Aesthetically, the houses were simple and often made by local craftsmen. The interior was constructed with an emphasis on intimacy and community, as an orchestration of the individual meetings with God.

The Dissenters, on the other hand, in many cases developed their own architecture. That was also the case with non-confessional mass movements that developed during the last part of the nineteenth century. These movements were influenced by Anglo-American preachers, such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92), who had the impressive Metropolitan Tabernacle built in London, 1859–61, with William Willmer Pocock (1813–99) as architect (Lindahl 1955: 41ff.). Buildings of this kind were not focused on intimacy or community, but on mass conversions and ‘religious theatre’ performed by the preachers (Kilde 2002).

Jan-Tore Egge, 2016 (Wikimedia Commons, CC BY SA 4.0)



The Prayer House ‘Betlehem’, now at the Norwegian Folk Museum, Oslo.



The 'religious theatre', Calmeyergatens Missionshus in Oslo. Oslo Museum.

An important Scandinavian expression of these new ideals for religious architecture was Blasieholmskyrkan in Stockholm, built 1867 by Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen, and with the Lutheran pastor Gustaf Emanuel Beskow (1834–99) as its central preacher. Another example is Calmeyergatens Missionshus in Kristiania/Oslo from 1891, with the non-confessional preacher Otto Treider (1856–1928) as its central figure (Eldal 2020: 98).

These 'religious theatres' were impressive religious buildings in urban environments, but most of them were silent in that they had no church bells calling people to gather or marking a territory. In diverse ways, they represented a visual competition with Lutheran church building in urban religious landscapes. An interesting example is the Methodist Church, established in Norway and Scandinavia from

the 1850s. The churches built by Methodist congregations followed the aesthetic standards developed by the international community of Methodist churches: they were to be simple, functional and inviting. Some of them had towers and even tower clocks, but no church bells. Examples from Norway are the Methodist churches in Sarpsborg (1857), Fredrikstad (1868), Drammen (1878), Hamar (1888) and Porsgrunn (1907) (Andersen 2020).

The Roman Catholics partly chose another direction in church architecture. The Roman Catholic church regarded itself as the historical and confessionally true continuation of the medieval church in Norway and expressed territorial claims through the establishment of a full-scale church organization. As a part of this strategy some of the Catholic churches were appropriations of national, historical

aesthetics with references to the medieval stave churches, as for example the church of St Svithun from 1898, the church of Our Lady in Porsgrunn from 1899, or the church of St Bridget in Fredrikstad from the same year (Hundre år 1999; Klavestad 2014: 135; Lund 1907: 36). These churches reminded the Norwegian public that the national Middle Ages were also the Catholic Middle Ages.

This Roman Catholic strategy also invoked the issue of national religious legacy and memory. In a situation where the alleged monocultural societies in Scandinavia were openly challenged by new confessional organizations, who had the right to claim ownership of the past and of the cultural monuments?

The quest for religious memory

During the nineteenth century the idea of a monocultural Lutheran society in Scandinavia was challenged, as it has been ever since. Such a society – if it was ever a historical reality – must have struggled in the face of new problems. And if the historical legacy was confessionally monocultural, which parts of the past should be invoked? These issues were especially important in nineteenth-century Norway, for at the beginning of the century Norway had unwillingly and unprecedentedly been handed over from Denmark to Sweden, suddenly facing a political and cultural situation of freedom. With a constitution from 1814 accepted by the Swedish king, Norway slowly started to define its own historical and cultural identity. Sweden had for centuries been the enemy, and Denmark the colonizer. The cultural exchanges with Sweden continued to be marginal during the period of the new union, 1814–1905. Only slowly did the cultural ties and connections with Denmark dissolve and come to be challenged by efforts to establish a

H. E. Straume (Wikimedia Commons, CC BY SA 3.0)



The Church of Our Lady, Porsgrunn.

Norwegian cultural identity. This national identity was based on conceptions of a national history through the centuries (Bagge *et al.* 2012), a cultural history with roots in the Viking period and the Middle Ages and especially linked to a continuum of poetry, custom and narrative preserved in popular culture.

Representatives of the nineteenth-century Lutheran state churches also contributed to the building of a national identity, basing their ideas on a combination of confessional theology and Romantic ideas about cultural continuity and ‘Volksgeist’. Some of these theologians, such as Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802–80), worked as folklore collectors, heritage activists and religious poets, in addition to their

positions as vicars (Hodne 2022). The general political development in Norway, however, made many of these theologians pessimistic about the future of what was regarded as the genuine Norwegian culture. The folk culture was increasingly influenced by urban and foreign fashion, the authority of the church and its servants decreased, and non-Lutherans were successful in disrupting traditional church life. What was left to do was to document and save what was left of the unspoiled Norwegian culture (Amundsen 2019).

After the introduction of parliamentarism in Norway in 1884, the interest in the country's national identity became highly politicized and mainly linked to nationalist, liberal groups aiming to dissolve the union with Sweden and establish a new democratic ideology, and to fight against the control of the state church and civil servants (Stenseth 1993). This meant that conservative representatives of the Lutheran church no longer regarded national identity based on folklore and folk culture an important issue.

This did not mean, however, that the Lutheran state churches in Norway or elsewhere in Scandinavia abandoned their claims to represent the historical religious culture of their countries. A good example of this can be found in the field of architecture. Both in the Lutheran state churches and in other denominations, architecture became an expression of ambitions to secure control, claim historical predominance or recruit members (Amundsen 2022). An interesting question is how these ambitions linked to another development in the nineteenth century, namely the new focus on national history, conservation, restoration – and heritage.

Of course, the dominant discussions about church restoration, establishment of national trusts and national memory were

led by historians, art historians, architects and artists. These discussions also marked the development of new competences independent of the church and theology. This is not to say, however, that the heritage dimension of the churches and the religious material culture was regarded as irrelevant in theological circles. The orientation towards the Gothic style as the main inspiration for both restoration of old churches and construction of new ones was also motivated by theological concerns about the relationship between religious experience and aesthetics.

New aesthetic ideals were appropriated, highlighting the Christian Middle Ages. The confessional Lutheranism of the nineteenth century seems to have focused on the Gothic style as an architectural expression especially well suited to containing and disseminating genuine Christian historical continuity. New churches were built in this style and old churches were restored in the same style (Eldal 2002; Amundsen 2021b: 203ff.). The gothicization of the state church architecture made visible the Lutheran claim to historical and national dominance in religion and heritage. In many cases, this meant that the links to the local historical culture were excised in favour of a more general, aesthetic link to Christian cultural continuity (Amundsen 2022).

Despite this, there was no room for the non-Lutheran and non-Norwegian in religious culture as conceptualized in nineteenth-century theological thinking. In the thinking of Lutheran theologians and church leaders the past belonged to the state churches, a position that excluded both the Roman Catholic church as part of the Scandinavian past and the multivocal expressions of popular religion past and present.

Again, using Norway as an illustration, the Lutheran church showed an increased interest in its past, defined as cultural heritage, during the 1920s to 1930s, especially in connection with anniversaries of the first canon law in Norway (1924) and the death of the most important medieval saint, King Olaf Haraldsson (1930). Publications were edited, rituals created and central historical sites, such as Moster, Stiklestad and Trondheim, were used and contextualized within a perspective of unbroken Christian and national continuity of nine centuries. Basically, it was the material and tangible heritage of the medieval past that was focused on, followed by heritage-based protection of the medieval churches. The anniversaries were dominated by a high-church elite in the Church of Norway, positioned far from the different forms of Pietist culture that dominated the religious life inside and outside the state church (Hognestad *et al.* 1924; Kolsrud 1937).

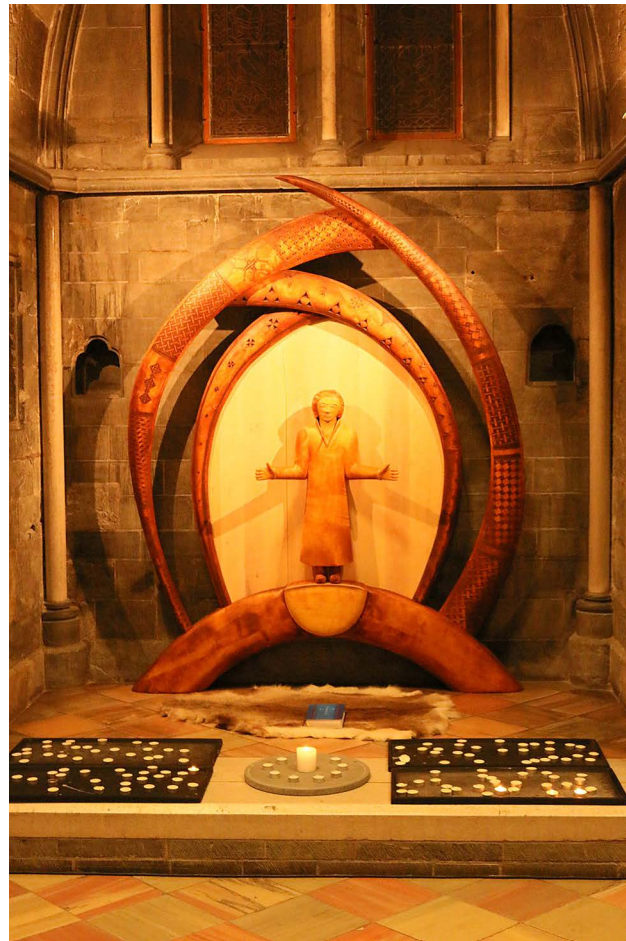
Ethnic minorities, indigenous religious heritage

In recent years, the Church of Norway, which since 2012 is no longer a state church, even if it is recognized by the Constitution (§ 16) as the ‘folk church’ of Norway entitled to special support by the Norwegian state, has developed new ways of looking at the national religious heritage. In 2022, the Church Parliament (Kirkemøtet) passed a ‘strategy for cultural heritage’, where hardly any of the dominant interpretations of the anniversaries a century earlier could be found. Instead, much weight is put on an ‘inclusive’ perspective in the sense that ethnic minorities and indigenous groups receive special attention. The largest indigenous group in Norway is the Sámi, and the strategy document argues for the need to investigate the ‘Sámi tangible and intangible religious heritage’, including sacred

spaces and healing practices (Kirkelig kulturav [2021]: 73–95). Sámi religious culture was afforded space in the historically most important church in Norway, the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, by inaugurating a side altar for the South Sámi population in 2017 (Nidarosdomen 2020).

Despite the lack of academic analysis and strict arguments, there are many interesting attempts in the strategy for including history, and material and immaterial culture, in education, communication and daily practice. The main impression, however, is that the strategy document concludes in a technical and bureaucratic way:

Sparrow, 2019 (Wikimedia Commons, CC BY SA 4.0)



The Sámi Altar in the Cathedral of Trondheim.

the Church of Norway should improve its knowledge of its historical material and immaterial heritage, and more administrative and economic resources should be allocated. How this strategy will influence future discussions about the need for research, preservation and practical actions is still to be seen (Kirkelig kultur-*arv* [2021]).

The most striking element of the strategy document, however, is the lack of explicit theological argumentation. In my reading, the document emphasizes the importance of history, of historical monuments and traditions, in a very interesting way. But the question remains: what are the implications of the Christian religion as a monotheistic, historical religion, basing its identity on continuity, exclusivity, rituals and coherence in thinking and practice? And what are the implications of the Christian church's historical claim to truth, geographical control and ideological superiority?

Perhaps even more striking, the 2030 anniversary of the death of St Olaf will focus on the celebration of the historical continuity of the state of Norway, not of the Christian church. That St Olaf was a Christian saint, widely accepted and venerated far beyond Norway, is a minor aspect in the official plans for the anniversary. The national committee responsible for the celebration is chaired by the president of the Norwegian Parliament, who is an immigrant Muslim from Iran, and the Church of Norway holds only one seat in the committee of ten members. The difference from the 1930 anniversary could not be clearer. Thematically, the events in 2030 and in the years leading up to it focus on dialogue, diversity, the multitude of narratives about Norway's history and critical questions about the past. In an attempt to normalize the radical and unprecedented

cultural, demographic and religious changes in Norway over the last generation, the basic statement of the anniversary is that 'Norway has always been diverse' (Grunnlagsdokumenter n.d.). In this way, the 2030 anniversary mainly withdraws the Christian historical element from a narrative of the Norwegian past and creates a new past in which continuous dialogue and diversity have lain at the heart of the country's cultural heritage.

What is left of the Christian religious heritage in this context is ecumenical dialogue between different denominations, and dialogue between religions and incompatible cultural traditions recently imported to Norway.

Ecumenical, multivocal, ethnic - or the end of the heritage discourse?

What is considered as cultural heritage will of course always be selective and qualitative, and the processes behind the definitions of cultural heritage will perhaps reflect the present more than the past. However, cultural heritage is not only a contemporary construction, since in different ways it is also an interpretation of a historical past represented by material objects and immaterial traditions. Moreover, cultural heritage also creates realities in the form of concepts, experiences, interpretations and practices.

When it comes to religious cultural heritage, the nineteenth-century legacy in Scandinavia was based on a focus on the national, monocultural ambitions and claims by both Lutheran churches and national states. On the one hand, these claims were justified by the fact that the Christian religion and Christian church institutions represented a historical continuity of a millennium. On the other hand, and as this article has tried to demonstrate, this perspective left out the variety

of interpretations of the Christian faith and everyday practices. The Christian culture, and hence the Christian cultural heritage, was regarded as both monocultural and multivocal.

This way of defining the religious cultural heritage of the Scandinavian countries seems to have vanished quickly in recent years, even in the Lutheran churches. To replace the old definitions, ecumenical, cross-religious, ethnic and international perspectives have been inaugurated. In a post-Christian Scandinavia, dominated by identity politics, wokeism, demands from new, imported religions, and Lutheran churches identifying themselves with explicit political left-wing perspectives, the question is whether there is any room left for a religious cultural heritage for the twenty-first century. If religious conflicts are the new reality and cultural heritage is redefined as pure diversity and the need for dialogue without values other than tolerance, a pessimistic historian might conclude that this could be the end of the cultural-heritage discourse.

But still, the past fights back. The Scandinavian cultural landscape, basically created during the nineteenth century, has its own language. Mosques arise in most rural areas, and politically correct discourse embraces them as part of what in the political newspeak of the day is referred to a 'new us'. This cannot annihilate the fact that the material, if not the immaterial, religious landscape of Scandinavia still has the imprint of Christian religion – in its multivocal, diverse versions.

How long this will last is another question. ■

Arne Bugge Amundsen (b. 1955) is Professor of Cultural History at the University of Oslo, Norway. He has published books and articles focusing on museum history, regional and local history and church history. His latest contribution is to be found in Arne Bugge Amundsen, Tarald Rasmussen and Hallgeir Elstad: *Norwegian Epitaphs 1550–1700. Contexts and Interpretations* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2022).



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