

# The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and the Multicultural Challenges

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**Abstract:** Christianity and Danishness are mutually reinforcing phenomena in Denmark. Three factors applying specifically to Denmark explain this: first, the lack of national representative bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark; second, the journal *Tidehverv* (“New Era”) has nurtured a conservative and nationalistic Christian ethics among parts of the Danish clergy; and third, Danish politicians’ abuse of the links between Christianity and Danishness as a tool in their anti-immigration strategies.

Denmark has seen a relatively high level of conflict in the last few years in the encounter between “old” and “new” Danes. A conversation about strategies to encounter this situation must be inclusive and include the religious factor, as religion can be a source of exclusion. As examples of this, see the following quotes by two Muslims on the Danish situation:

The media contribute to an “ascribed” identity, building on prototypes to construct a typical Muslim. The tendency of the media is to present the “Muslim” as a contrast to the “Danish,” hence excluding Muslims from the Danish community. Religious and national categories are mixed, by talking about Muslims and Danes, not Muslims and Christians (Mustafa Hussain, in Leirvik 2000).

## INTRODUCTION

President of Islamic Council in Norway, Senaid Kobilica, said that the tense situation in Denmark after the arsons and riots in February 2008,

Thanks to Peter B. Andersen, Olav Helge Angell, Berit Schelde Christensen, Åste Dokka, Sven-Thore Kloster and Peter Lodberg for very constructive feedback on an earlier draft. The responsibility for the final article rests solely with the author.

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when politicians who used hard words against Muslims were cheered, can be explained by a “lack of emphasis on integration and inclusion in Denmark” (Islamic Council in Norway 2008).

Neither of these two statements must be interpreted as evidence of the truth. Nevertheless, these statements are representative of concerns about aspects of Danish integration policy.

In this article, it will be asked, *which religious-specific factors have influenced the Danish discourse on “the Danish” in such a way that religion has been identified as crucial for what is Danish and non-Danish, hence contributing to aggravating the conflicts between old and new Danes.*

First, there will be some clarification of terms and dimensions relating to the encounter between religions and cultures. Then, five different factors will be introduced, each of which will be assessed independently: (1) the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and its lack of independence; (2) the importance of national-religious values; (3) the political discourse; (4) the Christian magazine *Tidehverv*; and (5) religious dialogue in Denmark. Finally, the article concludes with some ecclesiological reflections.

## **CULTURALISM, XENOPHOBIA, AND DIVERSITY**

It seems reasonable to state that “culture” has replaced “race” in establishing a basis for identifying differences among distinct groups of peoples. This does not imply that the term “racism” is irrelevant, but rather that the term “culturalism” is becoming more relevant. Culturalism is defined as the view that persons are totally determined by their culture (Eriksen and Stjernfelt 2008, 14).<sup>1</sup>

Whether culturalism can be seen as a form of racism will not be definitely answered in this article, but one can at least see a tendency that the same mental mechanisms operate within both the “classical” understanding of racism and the “modern” understanding of culturalism. This article warns against emphasizing culture as determining a person’s attitudes and abilities. It must be possible to make a distinction between legitimate criticism of harmful cultural practices, on the one hand, and categorizing human beings based on their cultural belonging, implying that they are predetermined to represent a given set of values, attitudes, and practices, on the other hand.

In a European context, Swedes stand out by being overwhelmingly positive toward immigrants (Blom 2006, 23–29), in particular, when

asked the question “Would you permit persons from *another* race or ethnic group to come and live in this country?” On the question “Would you permit persons from *your same* race or ethnic group to come and live in this country?” the score is highest for the Icelandic people, and on the question “Will you say that the culture is being enriched by people from other countries to come and live in this country?” the reception among the Finns is the highest, followed by Swedes and Icelanders. Norwegians and Danes share an eighth position on this latter question. This shows that the Nordic countries score relatively high on European opinion polls on immigration, and that the Swedes stand out when asked about persons from *another* race or ethnic group.

Xenophobia can be measured by finding the difference between those wanting persons from one’s own race or ethnic group persons and those wanting persons from *another* race or ethnic group to come and live in the country. The reduction in positive response between these two questions differ between 4 and 33 percentage points, with the least reduction in Sweden, Portugal and Spain, and the most reduction in Hungary, when asking first about the respondent’s own race, and then about *another* race. The reduction in Norway is 19 percentage points, and in Denmark 32 percentage points, being second, while Hungary, Iceland, and Finland are on the level of Norway.

A similar pattern is found by Botvar (2009, 189–191). Norwegians show more xenophobia than Danes, while Danes express more national chauvinism than Norwegians, but the two scores are both well above the scores for the third Scandinavian country, Sweden.<sup>2</sup> Hence, it can be assumed that Denmark and Norway are characterized by relatively high levels of skepticism of foreigners, and that religion plays a crucial role in defining “the other.” On the other hand, the importance of the cleavage along a liberal-authoritarian value dimension, emphasizing immigration, implies that Denmark stands out from its neighboring countries: Unlike other Scandinavian countries, the value dimension is as important as the economic/distributional dimension among voters (Goul Andersen 2007, 121; see also Goul Andersen and Bjørklund 2008, 156; Thomsen 2006). It has been found that this cleavage can be explained by an education cleavage in Denmark (Stubager 2006; 2009).

Three Danish surveys show that religion can promote both dialogue (pluralism) and Danishness (national chauvinism).

First, as evidence that religions can promote dialogue, the “Islam Report” commissioned by the Danish bishops in 1999 is illustrative. The report includes the findings from a questionnaire sent to Danish congregation

council leaders. Under the heading “Focus on co-existence” the findings are generally positive regarding the socio-economic rights of immigrants, which are more positive than among Danes in general. Regarding religious expressions, such as the call for prayer from the minaret, the council leaders are as skeptical as are other Danes. The report, however, concludes that Christian Danes “can contribute to building bridges between Muslims and the secularized Denmark” (Pors 2000, 78, 80).

Second, as evidence that Christianity serves as identity formation, a more recent mapping of Danish mentality (Gundelach et al. 2008) was introduced by the authors stating: “Danish mentality and Danishness are closely connected with our religious background” and “immigration is considered as the only big threat” (Kristeligt Dagblad 2007). When analyzing religion and national chauvinism in Denmark, Lüchau (2007) has identified three categories of respondents based on their different geographical belonging (“locals,” “nationals,” and “globals”) by applying data from the European Value Study. He finds that those with a local belonging are more inclined to tie religion and nationalism together than those whose belonging is more national, but he acknowledges in general “the Christian particularization of the Danish nation-state...” (Lüchau 2007, 93).

Third, in this context, it is relevant to identify if one can identify general attitudes toward “new Danes” among priests in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Denmark. A survey among priests regarding their attitudes to the multicultural Denmark shows that priests are more concerned with both secularism (62 percent) and mixing of religions (31 percent) than with Islam (7 percent) (Marqvard Rasmussen 2007, 176). In addition, 71 percent of the priests say that religious pluralism to “some extent” or “large extent” enriches the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. From this we can conclude that the majority of Danish priests are overwhelmingly positive about the presence of persons of other faiths living in Denmark. As will be seen below, there is, however, a minority of priests who organize themselves in order to strongly disapprove of the presence of Islam in Denmark.

## **EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN DENMARK’S ORGANIZATION AND LACK OF INDEPENDENCE FROM THE STATE**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is at the outset very dependent on the Danish political authorities, as there are no Diocese Councils,

Synod, or Bishop's Conference. Such church bodies, acting and speaking on behalf of the Church, are found in the other Scandinavian churches. Denmark has, however, commissions on the diocese level, responsible for finances and ecumenism, respectively.

If statements by the Church are to be presented, this is done with individual priests signing petitions. Moreover, the bishops are not prevented from cooperating with other dioceses. Statements regarding politics from the priest or bishops are, however, dismissed as improper involvement in politics.

Former Minister for Church Affairs, Tove Fergo (2001–2005), explains why regional and central church bodies with too much power are not wanted:

If the Church is made more independent from the state, with its own constitution and councils, one voice and top-down directions, there is a big risk that it will lose its rootedness in the people... (Fergo 2007, 68).

She refers to those who want to leave the central church bodies in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark as “separatists” (Fergo 2007, 70) and thinks that the current “bishops” coordination meetings’ constitute a form of “Bishops’ Synod” (Fergo 2007, 71). She finalizes her argumentation by pointing to differences in opinion between the priests — which reflects the different opinions also among the lay people — hence implying that in the Danish reality “a Synod will be a falsity” (Fergo 2007, 71).

This attitude expressed by a central politician illustrates that a church operating independent of the state is not wanted, and that democracy on the local level must be sufficient, if the congregations are adequately supported financially (Kirkeministeriet 2004).

Doctrinal issues are also addressed differently in Denmark and Norway. Denmark has an Act on Address by Court of Doctrinal Issues making use of theological expertise (Kirkeministeriet 2006a, 22). A “priest court,” alternatively a “bishop court” is established. Cases that do not address doctrinal issues can be addressed by the Ministry of Church Affairs, with the Civil Service Act as the basis.

An illustration of such latter cases is the complaint about the Bishop of Aarhus, Kjeld Holm, who in December 2005 joined the call “There is still no room in the hostel.” Priests of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark were also asked to address the plight of refugees in their preachings on Christmas Eve. A list containing 296 priests and theologians who had joined the call was published (some errors in the list were reported)

(Kristeligt Dagblad 2006a). Four complaints were sent to the Ministry regarding the support from Bishop Holm and his preaching. In the Ministry, it was assessed whether the Civil Service Act has been violated, and it was referred to the Danish Act 2-4-8 to 10 addressing... “what priests are to abstain from preaching” (Kirkeministeriet 2006b, 3). Hence, we see that the content of a sermon can be assessed by the Ministry based in the Civil Service Act. The Bishop was not found to have violated Danish law (Kirkeministeriet 2006b, 6–7).

Moreover, church bodies have criticized the Minister because of alleged interference by the Minister in the activities of these bodies (Det Mellemkirkelige Råd 2003, 5; 2004, 2).<sup>3</sup> Both of these criticisms were expressed over the former Minister, Tove Fergo, herself a priest.

Based on the examples provided above, it is reasonable to conclude that the Danish Minister for Church Affairs has relatively wide possibilities to interfere against certain sermons by priests. This possibility *can* be applied in a manner in which the government seeks to influence the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark to be loyal to the Danish political discourse on Christianity and Danishness. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark has difficulties in responding in a unified voice, but there are possibilities for individuals within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark to present calls and other initiatives, as individuals.

## THE UNDERSTANDING OF NATIONAL-RELIGIOUS VALUES

The term “civil religion” has been introduced to describe the emphasis on the nation and national symbols among a growing number of Danes (Warburg 2008, 169; Raun Iversen 2006, 79). Moreover, the term “culture war” has been used over the last decades to describe a strategy whereby Danishness and Christianity are operating together to challenge Islam and other “non-Danish values.” The term “culture wars” has different connotations in Europe and in the United States, but what is common is the notion that the “cultural battleground” involves mobilization along authoritarian vs. libertarian values (Stubager 2009, 5; Goul Andersen 2007), and in Europe those identifying themselves with the former set of values oppose immigration. Both Church and political leaders will be referred to when seeking to identify the role of Christianity in the Danish “culture war.”

The analysis will start with a statement by the priest, editor and parliamentarian (for Danish Peoples Party), Søren Krarup.<sup>4</sup> Krarup has combined the two first roles for several decades and even if his

parliamentary role started in 2001, he was active in the Danish Association, which had its strength in the late 1980s. He opposes human rights and perceives human rights to involve “worshipping false Gods” (Krarup 2000, 134). He emphasizes that human beings do belong to a given time- and place-specific reality. This is most clearly expressed in a sermon he gave in 1987:

To be national is to be born in a given place within a given people and in an historical context. Today it is common to despise the national as an expression of provincialism and narrow-mindedness, or — as is the modern term — of racism and xenophobia, but nothing is more contrary to Christianity’s preaching of the Law and therefore what is truly human. Christianity’s preaching of the Law establishes nationality, as the Law addresses respect for the concrete, earthly life that each of us has been given by God. We do not create ourselves. We are created by God, and to creation belongs earthliness, history, and hence nationality: to be born in a particular country and people (Krarup 1987, 25–26).

It must be added that Krarup later in the sermon clearly said that the national is not divine, but rather human. For Krarup, the Law refers to everything that gives Danish society a historical and value foundation, which brings the term “Law” close to the term “custom.” When one knows that the statement is taken from a sermon and reprinted in the magazine *Tidehverv* (“New Era”) — which will be analyzed more thoroughly later in the article — it must be asked whether the statement is primarily a contribution to the Danish “culture war.”

Another position is presented by the former Cathedral Dean, Poul E. Andersen. He holds that it is the identity of the Muslims and the rejection of those who do not share this identity that is the main problem. As Andersen sees it, this identity cannot be united with secular values. Here, the emphasis is on the “Western,” more than on the Danish, as:

tolerant thinking, which equals all cultures and rejects criticism of certain cultural elements, makes it impossible to adopt an ethical position regarding behaviour which confronts with fundamental principles, such as democratic attitudes of Western societies. [...] What distinguishes [Muslims] is that they belong to the umma, the global community of believers of Islam which determines their identity before anything else. Their religion places boundaries between themselves and the receiving population, between Muslim believers and the infidels (Andersen 2006, 104).

The book containing these quotations is recommended on the home page of the Islamkritisk Netværk i Folkekirken, established in 2006. The presentation of the book emphasizes that the “culture war” is of an existential nature, and if it is lost it will imply that “we,” meaning “ethnic Danes,” will not survive, since:

if the immigration is not stopped we will have a Muslim majority in Europe this century. [...] ...the future we will risk, if we are not willing to acknowledge that “culture war” is a question of survival (Slot-Henriksen 2006).

The reviewer is one of 123 members of Islamkritisk Netværk i Folkekirken (“Islam-critical network of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Denmark”). According to another member, all priests “are duty-bound to face the challenge from Islam” (Breengaard 2007). This network consists primarily of persons identifying themselves as priests, but it is impossible to say how many members there are who believe that the “culture war” is a question of survival. The network is presented on the “links” section on the home page of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, under the heading “Religion and belief;” this, however, cannot be understood as an endorsement of the positions of the network. Crucial for those associated with the network is to “distance themselves from the dialogue with Muslims and any idea of a Christian-Muslim forum” (Mogensen 2007, 112). The initiative of late 2005 on a more humane refugee policy has not had a more established structure, even if hearings about refugee policy have been held (Kristeligt Dagblad 2006b).

Finally, I will address the question whether Christian education by the Church is also considered an arena for promoting Danishness. The religious teaching of the public school has been non-confessional since 1975, and will not be analyzed in detail. The Christian instruction for baptized children was approved by a royal decree of 1994, and this decree provides only a framework. The Ministry of Church Affairs published a Guide in 1998 (Kirkeministeriet 1998), but this Guide does not contain formulations that can be seen as an endorsement of the role of Christianity in promoting Danishness. Moreover, there are no reflections on the relationship between the Christian instruction provided by the congregations and the religious teaching provided by the public school. Hence, it is not possible to say anything specific about whether national-religious values are emphasized in the Christian instruction, and the content of this instruction.



The assessment shows that the emphasis on national-religious values finds resonance among the clergy, but it is not possible to identify the proportion of priests who subscribe to this reasoning. Two indications are the relatively low number of priests who are members of the Islamkritisk Netværk i Folkekirken and the fact that a large majority of priests of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark identify secularism as a bigger challenge than Islam (Marquard Rasmussen 2007), the latter finding being more discussed later in the article.

The above findings do not imply that one can talk of a Danish self-understanding as a “chosen people” as elaborated by Smith (2009; 2003; 1999). Even if his focus is particularly on Western Europe, Denmark is not — with the exception of two references to Denmark in the context of the origins of the Saxons (Smith 1999, 71, 72) — addressed in his two books on the religious roots of nationalism. Nonetheless, this article is built on the premise that Denmark is *currently* characterized by a situation where Christianity and Danishness are mutually supporting. As will be shown below, it is a particular form of Christianity that is promoted.

## THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE

A brief clarification of the Lutheran two-realm-doctrine will initially be given. This doctrine says that both regimes, the earthly and the spiritual, are established by God, and it is only legitimate to protest against the earthly regime if this regime acts contrary to the will of God. There has, however, been a tendency to set each of the regimes up against each other, and by stressing the “conflict” between them to ignore the fact that both regimes have a common grounding in God’s creation. The two-kingdoms doctrine has been interpreted to imply that the two realms shall be strictly separated. This is not an appropriate understanding of Luther’s meaning, whose concern was to make a proper *distinction* between the two — to motivate the Christian to participate in the political life, emphasizing that political activity is not subordinate to spiritual activity. A more proper understanding of the two-kingdoms doctrine is to distinguish between the *faith* and the *political ethics* of the Christian. This implies that neither shall political authorities interfere with questions of faith, identifying “correct faith,” nor shall the church use its privileges to influence politics so that the church and people belonging to the church are prioritized above others.

Central in the two-kingdoms-doctrine is also the acknowledgement that faith must be lived through ordinary activities, in the context within which the believer operates. Moreover, the preaching in the spiritual realm will also have consequences for the earthly realm. We will now see whether both politicians and Church leaders are able to make the proper distinction between the two.

Denmark has had a coalition government involving the two right-wing parties, supported by a far right party, since 2001. The political rhetoric emphasizes reduced immigration and emphasis on assimilation more than integration. To be identified as an active opponent of the policy has in some instances led to reduced funding, or the total removal of public funding.

The former Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, has been open with regard to questions of Church and state. It is impossible to give a full presentation (see Fogh Rasmussen 2006; Lodberg 2007), and here the emphasis will be on statements highlighting the relationship between church, people, and state, and the role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark in this context. His approach becomes evident in a lecture given about the two Danes Søren Kierkegaard and Nikolai Grundtvig:

There might be differences in the intensity of religious convictions. But there is agreement on certain basic principles. This includes the non-mixing of politics and religion [...] According to my view, Christianity is a life perception which turns against everything authoritarian and oppressive, emphasizing each individual's freedom and responsibility (Fogh Rasmussen 2005).

Two central points must be read out from these small parts of a longer lecture. First, it is not having a religion that is the problem, but having a religion which does not give freedom to human beings. Western individualism must be understood to be in contrast with a religion that legitimizes oppression. Fogh Rasmussen must also be understood to believe that the two-kingdoms doctrine has a strong standing in Denmark, unlike those states where religion directs politics. The analysis will focus on an opinion of and an interview with Fogh Rasmussen — some months after the Muhammed caricature crisis:

The state does not — and should not — have a religion. The Constitution shall therefore should not only ensure freedom of religion for the individual against interference from the state, but also ensure that religious

organizations do not interfere with the earthly authorities, the state. There is a common perception that Article 4<sup>5</sup> of the Constitution mixes politics and religion. But this is not the case. This Article rather makes it clear that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the Church of the Danish people. This is the people's Church, not the state's Church. (Fogh Rasmussen 2006).

Two aspects of this quote are particularly interesting. First, Fogh Rasmussen claims that the Danish state does not have a religion. Second, the Church is the people's Church, which might explain the first observation that the state does not have a religion. These statements shall be analyzed.

To begin with, it is a surprising statement that the Danish state does not have a religion, when Danish politicians stress that the unique status of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark shall be maintained, when Article 69 talks of "religious bodies dissenting from the Established Church" and when Article 6 reads: "The King shall be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church."

Moreover, the emphasis on a people's Church allows for a close link between the national and the religious. By stressing the relationship to the "people," this potentially excludes those who for some reason feel that they do not belong to this people. Moreover, any national religion is challenged by the universal nature of Christianity.

Fogh Rasmussen (2006) also states that the Church is run "through the congregations" but this ignores the fact that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is to a large extent run by the Danish political authorities. He continues:

The Church has not — and shall not have — any external power. And nobody can speak on its behalf. This is good, as this reduces the risk that a small group within the Church shall claim a right to interpret the Holy Book in a particular, authorized manner. Hence, I strongly reject the notion that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark should be led by a council or a synod. Such a body would certainly start to speak on behalf of the church on all possible issues (Fogh Rasmussen 2006).

This must be understood to imply that a submissive Church that never raises any forms of criticism against any political decisions is an ideal. In the same context, Fogh Rasmussen states: "It becomes totally grotesque when someone demands that the modern individual should comply uncritically and literally with complex interpretations of religious instructions given in Holy Books thousands of years old. That is true eclipse." What

Fogh Rasmussen prefers is “a common culture with a Christian grounding,” based on “Christians of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark who more or less unconsciously carry Christian attitudes and traditions. This leads to peace and harmony.” In brief, it seems as if Fogh Rasmussen does not prefer a Church that is loyal to its confessional basis, but rather a “cultural Christian” Church that is loyal to the Danish people and hence creates a secularized state religion.

Fogh Rasmussen, however, is careful not to instruct the preaching — as freedom of expression allows “all to say what they want” (Kristeligt Dagblad 2006c). In the same interview, he says:

...the individual believer cannot insist that one’s principles, dogmas or faith can be transferred to others, who have to comply with the same. One shall keep it for oneself, but one cannot push it onto others.

To speak about one’s beliefs to others is actually a part of freedom of religion. We see that Fogh Rasmussen is against sharing one’s own belief and dogmas, as outlined in “Holy Books thousands of years old,” with others. By this statement, Fogh Rasmussen seems to deviate from his position of *not* mixing religion and politics, as a politician having a clear understanding of what is acceptable and non-acceptable religious practice. While Fogh Rasmussen never gave instructions regarding preaching in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, other politicians from his own party go one step further, however.

Above, the initiative “There is still no room in the hostel” was presented. Less than a week after the initiative was published, it was strongly criticized by a Danish mayor. The call was said to “be very destructive for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark...” (Jansen 2005). Furthermore, “a parish priest has as his task to preach the gospel for all who want to receive it. To make this task political is a total misunderstanding.” The mayor also presented a threat: “If the priest and his companions do not believe that religion and politics should be separated, they should be dismissed from their official positions.” This statement must be said to be a misunderstanding of the two-kingdoms-doctrine, and as a response that is primarily explained by the fact that the author is substantially in disagreement with the call itself. Another politician from the same party, Jens Rohde, protested against the bishops, as they did not distance themselves from the priest (Kristeligt Dagblad 2006d).<sup>6</sup>

A political discourse where loyalty to the prevailing political agenda apparently is set above loyalty to Holy Scriptures, and where the role of

the Church seems to be primarily to strengthen the “cohesion” of the Danish people, implies that there is a risk for political abuse of the Church. This emphasis on religion and “societal cohesion” leads us over to a brief assessment of whether the Danish political discourse implies that Christianity serves as a form of civil religion (Bellah 1967). One analyst of civil religion in the Nordic context is not fully convinced that the civil religion-approach is applicable (Repstad 2009). Nevertheless, he finds that Denmark stands out from the other Nordic countries as it is more accepted to pursue a strategy of strengthening Christianity in polemics against other religions, and that this comes close to civil religion. The above findings support such an assessment of the particularities of Denmark.

## **A CHRISTIAN CULTURAL MAGAZINE: *TIDEHVERV***

The magazine *Tidehverv* has already been presented above.<sup>7</sup> *Tidehverv* cannot be compared with any other magazine, and its establishment (in 1926) and development must be understood in its concrete political context, where it is crucial to confront the “politically correct.” The inspiration has been Luther’s two-kingdoms doctrine, Kierkegaard’s existensialism and Grundtvig’s emphasis on the people.

*Tidehverv* — which must be understood as a movement, and not only as the journal itself — has over the last decade played a leading role in the Danish “kulturkamp”: “What unites the criticism of the humane idealism is *Tidehverv*’s emphasis on the synthesis between Christianity and Danishness” (Bramming 1993, 115). The editor of *Tidehverv* through the past 26 years, Søren Krarup, defines “kulturkamp” in accordance with the statement by Fogh Rasmussen above: “What is the program and core of the ‘kulturkamp’? I cannot say it more accurately than by emphasizing each Christian individual’s freedom” (Krarup 2007, 194).

The *Tidehverv* movement is described as “the last century’s most influential Danish theological circle” (Schoop 2007). Another indication of *Tidehverv*’s early influence is a statement quoted in *Nationaltidende* (February 10, 1952) from then Minister of Church Affairs, Carl Hermansen, who observed that “the original grundtvigian and the original inner mission practically do not exist any more. Denmark of today is tidehvervsk” (Bramming 1993, 84), meaning that the whole country was influenced by the “New Era” magazine. *Tidehverv* has lost influence, but has contributed to the increased reference to Grundtvig in the nationalistic

discourse, based on Grundtvig's understanding of the Danish: "What is peculiar to the Danish Grundtvigiansim is its underlining of the unity of land, country, God and People ["folk"]" (Østergaard 1994, 48; see also Fidjestøl 2007).

A precise assessment of the actual influence of *Tidehverv* is difficult to make, but it must also be noted that the *Tidehverv* movement makes use of other Danish media to make its collective voice heard. Indeed, Krarup was the most published opinion writer in Denmark in the 1990s (Karpantschof 2002, 29).

A central term to describe *Tidehverv* is "theology of confrontation," directed against "liberal theology, the Danish Church establishment, idealism, moralism and humanism" (Grosbøll 2006, 21). The confrontation has increasingly been related to the Danish "kulturkamp," against everything that is seen as threatening Danish identity and culture. *Tidehverv* has also attacked intellectualism and rationalism, and hence also university theology.

Søren Krarup became part of the editorial staff in the mid-1960s; he became editor in 1984 and MP for the Danish Peoples Party in 2001, together with member of *Tidehverv*'s editorial board, Jesper Langballe. From the end of the 1970s, *Tidehverv* became more clearly nationalistic and conservative, with a stronger grounding in a particular understanding of God's Law. *Tidehverv* claims to be a part of a Lutheran tradition where an acknowledgement of the Law is crucial for the understanding of the Gospel:

Luther's challenge [...] led to a harsh criticism from those who thought in humanistic, spiritualistic, and political ways. To refer to the Law in the context of the Gospel was, as will be known, termed unchristian and reactionary [but] ...if there is no Law, neither can there be any Gospel" (Krarup 2003, 61–62).

A particular understanding of Luther's two-realm doctrine influences the editorial position of *Tidehverv* strongly. Even in a situation where the editor has become a MP for the Danish Peoples Party, and where interventions in the Danish Parliament are printed in *Tidehverv*, Krarup maintains that "Christianity distinguishes between the political and the religious" (Minerva 2007). In an analysis of *Tidehverv*, it is found that Krarup does not want to present himself as a politician, but rather as a "member of the resistance" and "freedom fighter" (Grosbøll 2006, 167 and 178).

What can explain Krarup's involvement in a clearly nationalistic party, with many self-declared racists in central positions? Krarup himself

answers in an article in *Tidehverv*, by emphasizing that “the ‘culture war’ is our task, the only and decisive task, because from the outcome of the ‘culture war’ everything else follows.” Moreover he states: “this ‘culture war’ is to confront any law-abiding religiosity, any totalitarianism, with Islam and ‘culture radicalism’” (Krarup 2007, 194).

While the acknowledgement of the Law is crucial for an appropriate approach to Christianity, law-abiding religiosity in other religions is criticized, as it is only the Evangelical Lutheran Christianity that contributes to freedom for all, while other religions restrict this freedom. Krarup must be understood to be convinced that the Danish Peoples Party will ensure that this “culture war” will succeed.

Krarup’s political career is parallel to his continued theological confrontation. In the article “Kirkekamp” [“Church war”] from 2008 he links the “culture war” in society with the “culture war” within the Church:

... a Christian individual’s freedom must be proclaimed as the original purpose. [...] Therefore the “culture war” depends on the struggle within the Church – the struggle to keep the Church in Denmark Evangelical Lutheran. If the political correctness or the ideological consciousness succeeds in transforming the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark to an effective corporation or a smart branding exercise, it is not only the Church which loses. Also Danish culture loses (Krarup 2008, 3).

To mix nationalism and Christianity seems to be non-problematic for Krarup (1987). This implies that Krarup can be termed a Danishness fundamentalist, but he is not a Christian fundamentalist, as claimed by Karpantschov (2003, 34).

Tidehverv is also a publishing house, which published a book in 1999 (*Mod tyrken og jøden*) containing Martin Luther’s most aggressive texts, such as “On war against the Turk” [1528] and “On the Jews and their lies” [1543]. The same year a book by Monica Papazu was published (*Det sidste slag på solsortesletten — Den nye verdensorden — den nye totalitarisme; The Last Battle at Kosova polje — The New World Order — The New Totalitarianism*) and presented as describing “A new world order, meaning the permanent war against all” (Tidehverv 2008).

Another book by the Tidehverv publishing house has the Danish title *Konfrontation — islam og kristendom*, written by Jens Christensen (1989). This book was originally published in 1977 with the English title *A Practical Approach to Islam*. The translation to Danish gave the book a substantially different title. The Danish presentation says: “If

Islam is to be taken seriously, this encounter is not conversation and dialogue, but Christ-proclaiming confrontation” (Tidehverv 2008). We see that a book that in English is given a title emphasizing understanding of Islam as a precondition for missionary work among Muslims, in Danish has been presented with confrontation as the central term.

*Tidehverv* magazine presents books that are very critical of Islam. The book *I krigens hus — Islams kolonisering af Vesten* [In the house of war — Islam’s Colonization of the West] is presented as a “small miracle” (Ahrendtsen 2004, 19). The authors, according to Ahrendtsen, demonstrate that in Muslim states “politics is in itself illegitimate if it does not derive from Islam.” This is wrong. Muslims in states with a Muslim majority, which do have a religious basis, do not have to view this state as illegitimate.

Finally, we will look at two articles from *Tidehverv*. The articles illustrate the aggressive front in the Danish “culture war,” and the articles are not necessarily representative for what is printed in *Tidehverv*. One of the harshest attacks against Muslims was printed as early as 1988, saying that Islam is “a demonic contradiction ... of Christianity” and that Islam stands for “a demonic boundedness of human being” (Horstmann 1988, 151). The article continues:

Muslim immigrants cannot and will not be integrated in these societies, and this is due not only to their antipathy toward other forms of life, which might fade away, but also to their own religion, which forces them to not want to be integrated. This implies that everywhere where Muslims arrive in non-Muslim countries; there will be a potential or latent conflict with the political establishment in these countries, a conflict which cannot be solved in any other way than by the host country becoming an Islamic state. The demonic fanaticism’s politics, within which all forms of anti-Christian religion reveal their true face if they obtain power, is an integral part of the Islamic religion (Horstmann 1988, 152).

Hence, Muslims are seen as fanatics, who will always create conflict until they succeed in their main project, which to establish an Islamic state. This understanding implies that it is impossible to imagine that Christians and Muslims can live together.

Another clear criticism of Islam is evident in the article “The Hatred of Christianity,” where it is stated that the confrontation with Islam demands a theological perspective. More specifically, the article declares: “Nothing but the annihilation of the Christian world — or for the individual Christian their conversion to Islam — will for the Islamists be a satisfying



outcome of the conflict” (Høgenhaven 2004, 178). This is also a very strong statement. It is very hard to see how a holistic reading of the Qur’an can give such directions.

Editor Krarup stresses that *Tidehverv* shall not undertake censorship. It must, however, be asked whether his editorial responsibility should extend to at least asking the contributors to document and discuss their statements more thoroughly. *Tidehverv* is also listed as an organization on the home page of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Both the magazine and the movement have been central in Danish church life, but it seems as if the influence of the magazine in the 1950s has gradually been lost. *Tidehverv* wants to be an actor in the Danish “culture war,” based on an understanding that Danishness and Christianity are mutually enriching, seeking to mobilize Danish priests in this “culture war.” Through their uncompromising position, it is also reasonable to state that *Tidehverv* has contributed to a polarization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark in questions relating to immigration and the encounter with persons of a different faith.

## THE INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Interreligious dialogue will be analyzed, as the harshness of the encounters that took place between Danish politicians and Muslim leaders is one of the explanations for the aggravation of the caricature crisis in 2006, which also contributed to a polarization within Denmark.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, the first Christian-Muslim encounter in Denmark took place, but without any official backing from the political authorities, and with a counter-reaction, arguing against any dialogue with Muslims (Mogensen 2007, 112).

Interreligious activities in Denmark were earlier facilitated by academic circles. The location of the secretariat for “Folkekirke og religionsmøde” [Church and religious encounter – F&R], initiated in 2001, is with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Århus. “Folkekirken og religionsmøde” presents itself as a point of cooperation among nine dioceses in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and as one concrete outcome of the “Islam report” commissioned by the Danish bishops in 1999 (Nielsen 2000). The F&R cooperation is initiated from the dioceses themselves, and only three dioceses are not members: Roskilde, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The purpose is “based on the Gospel, to strengthen the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark’s encounter with other religions and interpretations of life.”

The objective of F&R is dominated by words such as “involve,” “empower,” “insight-based” and “respect and openness” (Folkekirke og religionsmøde 2008b). The level of activity seems to be very high, and includes also investigations mapping attitudes and activities (Folkekirke og religionsmøde 2006a; 2008a). “Folkekirke og religionsmøde” is also the secretariat for the recently established “Kristent Muslimsk Samtaleforum.” Three Christian-Muslims conferences, with bishops from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark as participants, have taken place,<sup>9</sup> and in 2008 a “Basis” for this cooperation was established.

The different handling of the caricature crisis in 2006 in Denmark and Norway must be noted, and it must be asked whether the lack of a formal structure in Denmark in 2006 can partly explain this difference. In Norway, the established Christian-Muslim forum adopted a joint statement which did stress freedom of expression, but also described the publishing of the caricature of the prophet Mohammed as unwise.<sup>10</sup> A dialogue approach was also chosen by the Norwegian political authorities. This approach was generally endorsed, but has been criticized by Danes for being too soft (Jespersen and Pittelkow 2007, 17–37).

The two main efforts in Denmark were the statement made by the Board of “Folkekirke og religionsmøde” in early February 2006 (Folkekirke og religionsmøde 2006b),<sup>11</sup> and the delegation to Egypt from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and Danmission toward the end of February 2006. The latter sought to “urge that Christians in Denmark want to live peacefully with Muslims, both in Denmark and in the rest of the world” (Kristeligt Dagblad 2006e). None of the initiatives, however, were interreligious. Finally, in February 2006, the Secretary-General of the “Folkekirke og religionsmøde” acknowledged that “the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark has as a faith community certain possibilities to enter into dialogue with Muslims” (Kristeligt Dagblad 2006f).

Moreover, it is interesting that the Danish delegation at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches at the end of February 2006, three weeks after the caricature crisis had exploded, worked hard to make the General Assembly adopt a statement — without any preparations in Denmark prior to the Assembly. The adopted statement deplored both the publication and the reactions. It also said that “freedom of speech has been used to cause pain by ridiculing peoples’ religion, values and dignity” (World Council of Churches 2006).<sup>12</sup> Hence, it seems reasonable to state that the members of the Danish delegation at General Assembly could express themselves without any

conditions in an international forum, while it was more difficult to have similar expressions in a Danish context. If this is due to the personal conviction among the Danish delegates, the structure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, or the fear to go against the overwhelming Danish support for the publishing of the caricatures, is difficult to say.

Other central bodies in the realm of religious dialogue are *Islamsk-Kristent Studiecenter i Copenhagen*. The Center was started by both Christian and Muslims in 1996, and has individual membership. Danmission is one of the cooperating partners. The Center has experienced considerable pressure particularly from the Danish People's Party and members of *Islamkritisk Netværk i Folkekirken*, and saw a drastic decline in public funding after 2001.

The city of Århus hosts three different centers: two Church-based and one academic. *Kristent Informations- og Videnscenter om Islam og Kristendom (KIVIK)* was established in 2001, and is hosted by the Ecumenical Center in Århus. The *Informations- og samtaleforum for Kristendom Og Ny religiøsitet (IKON)* was established in 2003. Århus University hosts the *Center for Multireligiøse Studier*. On the other hand, Århus has also seen the emergence of a broad movement against the building of a mosque.

A survey among Danish congregations finds that "there is more emphasis on the religious aspect when the congregation has more experiences with Muslims" (Pors 2000, 70). Church-based interreligious work on the local level has been going on for several years in Denmark, primarily through centers in the larger cities (Kristeligt Dablad 2008). Moreover, the recent contribution from "Folkekirke og religionsmøde" to involve the dioceses and bishops must also be acknowledged.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

It must be admitted that it is difficult to isolate the explanatory power of each of the religious-specific variables to explain the causes for the relatively high level of tensions that have been witnessed in Denmark, more specifically whether "Danishness" as currently construed prevents appropriate integration. Nevertheless, it seems clear, from the material analyzed in this article, that one may propose three explanations for the role of organized religion, broadly understood.

First, the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark effectively prevents it from being a uniting force in presenting alternative

thinking to the prevailing discourse. This structure, combined with the emphasis on the freedom of the individual, sets few limitations on how different priests might act. The polarization related to immigration and multireligious issues is strong in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark.

Second, the editorial profile of the magazine *Tidehverv* and the whole *Tidehverv* movement has contributed to moving the boundaries for what is acceptable within Church and society, hence allowing for a high degree of criticism of immigration and Islam within the Danish “culture war.”

Third, the political discourse within this “culture war” has linked Danishness and Christianity in a manner through which Christianity is understood as *the* defense against “foreign religions” by emphasizing that by not being Christian one is not Danish enough. As a result of the main explanation about the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, it is not easy to see a broadbased challenge from the Church itself to these perceptions, which are the central premises for the Danish “culture war.” Any differences between the rhetoric of the former Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and the Prime Minister for Danish Peoples Party and editor of *Tidehverv*, Søren Krarup, on the importance of (Lutheran) Christianity in stemming foreign influence and maintaining Danishness, seems to be a matter of degree, not of substance.

It has been found that there has been a tendency in Denmark to emphasize the religious freedom associated with (Lutheran) Christianity. Moreover, Christianity’s role in the Danish political discourse implies that Christianity has not been emphasized so much for its own purpose, but rather for a political purpose, by emphasizing what is Danish and what is not Danish. It is reasonable to state that this discourse was initiated in *Tidehverv*, and was later given legitimacy in wider circles, including the coalition government that has been in power since 2001. In making a religion a tool for a particular political strategy, there is always a danger of compromising this religion. In Denmark, where there is no central Church body, this problem is acute, and there is no practical manner in which the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark can challenge and counter such uses of Christianity. The most explicit challenges to such uses of Christianity have come from the newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad* (2006e) and some academics (Lodberg 2007), as well as the Christmas call by priests (Kristeligt Dagblad 2006a); and the projects established by the Church and religious encounter platform can be said to represent implicit challenges.

The article has also found that among Danish theologians and politicians there is a strong awareness of the two-regime doctrine, but the understanding of this doctrine is not unproblematic. It seems as if priests who are critical of the government's policy, for instance regarding immigration policy, are perceived to be acting contrary to the two-doctrine regime distinction between politics (earthly regime) and religion (spiritual regime). On the other hand, it seems as if priests who argue from the pulpit against pluralism, and then enter party politics, are not understood as acting contrary to the two-Kingdoms doctrine regime.

Even if Danish anti-immigration advocates tend to admit that there are differences among Muslims, as Muslims might have different pluralistic and democratic mentalities, there is also a clear tendency to see Muslims as one uniform group, sharing overwhelmingly negative characteristics. Such beliefs that Muslims cannot support real democracies contrast with opinion polls conducted in states which are overwhelmingly Christian and overwhelmingly Muslim, finding that there are small differences in political beliefs (Norris and Inglehart 2004; see also Esposito and Mogahed 2007 regarding support for human rights). By meeting a minority with confrontation, confrontation will be the outcome. Hence, forces that want to increase the conflicts will be strengthened.

To choose understanding rather than confrontation is not to imply a passive attitude when faced with intolerant values and practices. The author subscribes to the position taken by Norwegian Bishop Gunnar Stålsett, who says that we are challenged to exercise "intolerance of intolerance" (Stålsett 2004, 475; see also Popper 1971, 263). It is challenging to build a society which shall ensure the rights and interests of the minorities, especially if some among the minorities display attitudes and practices that the majority does not endorse. To find solutions, dialogue will be a better response than isolation. Dialogue does not imply that one must compromise on crucial values such as freedom. As has been seen, both Krarup (2007) and Fogh Rasmussen (2006) stress freedom as the central Western value — and the Norwegian Commission for Human Values (2001) emphasizes freedom in their final report. Freedom, however, cannot be delinked from *responsibility*.

Among some, there is a firm belief that Christianity is threatened by the presence of Muslims, and that the political authorities should pursue a policy to reduce as much as possible the presence of persons with a non-Christian faith. Such an attitude is dangerous for two reasons. First, an argumentation which seeks to have a religiously homogenous society makes it almost impossible to argue from principle when faced with

governments working against the presence of Christians and churches. Second, a Christianity which is to be guaranteed by the state in seeking to maintain its privileges, will imply that one should trust the political authorities.

## NOTES

1. There can be no doubt that religion plays a central role in this deterministic understanding of how is formed by one's background. Despite this, the term "religionism" is applied primarily to define a very devout religious person ("excessive religious zeal") not a predetermination of a person based on this person's religion. On <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/religionism>, one of three definitions reads "discrimination or prejudice on the basis of religion or religious beliefs."

2. On the chauvinism index, Denmark scores 7, 27; Norway 6, 36 and Sweden 6, 00. On the xenophobic index, Norway scores 6, 38, Denmark 5, 97 and Sweden 5, 67.

3. In 2003 the criticisms addressed the views that the Minister had expressed regarding which churches in the Middle East that was prioritized. In 2004 the criticisms addressed the fact that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark was ignored during an application for a visa.

4. Rydgren 2004, 472–473 says that the Danish Peoples Party cannot be seen as a continuation of the Progress Party, which it broke away from, but rather as a radical right-wing populist party, characterized by "ethno-nationalist xenophobia"; see also Mudde 2007, 44–47, distinguishing between the Danish Peoples Party and other populist radical right parties, on the one hand, and the Norwegian and Danish Progress Party and other neoliberal populist parties, on the other hand.

5. Article 4 of the Constitution says: "The Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the Established Church of Denmark, and as such shall be supported by the State."

6. In this context, it is relevant to note that Goul Andersen and Bjørklund (2000) have found that the Danish Liberal Party's position on immigration from the late 1990s onwards resembled the claims by the Norwegian Progress Party, which is commonly characterized as neoliberal populist, even if it correct, as stated by Mudde (2007, 47), that the Norwegian Progress Party has occasionally highly xenophobic campaigns.

7. According to priest and contact person of Tidehverv's "Ekspedition," Hans Erik Apelgren, there are now 500 subscribers to Tidehverv, a substantive proportion of which are priests (conversation with author 19 March 2010).

8. Klausen analyzes the Danish caricature crisis by emphasizing the international dimension, in particular the role of Egypt. One of the chapters is titled "Danish Intolerance and Foreign Relations," bringing up as one of the hypotheses explaining the unfolding crisis that Fogh Rasmussen "genuinely believes that there is a 'clash of civilizations' between the freedom-loving West and authoritarian Muslim regimes, and that Denmark had become a front-line in a global struggle" (Klausen 2009, 162). Such an understanding is consistent with Fogh Rasmussen's statements quoted earlier in this article.

9. The conferences were held in 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009, with the most comprehensive report from third and fourth conference (Folkekirke og religionsmøde 2008c; 2009).

10. The resolution is only found in Norwegian; at <http://www.kirken.no/?event=showNews&FamId=4483>. Other sources on the Norwegian Christian-Muslim dialogue – in English – is found at <http://www.kirken.no/english/news.cfm?artid=181157>.

11. The statement said, inter alia: "Therefore, freedom of expression does not exclude the respect of the faith of each human being; rather is the respect for each human being the basis upon which we have freedom of expression in Denmark. With freedom of expression comes respect for others."

12. The statement *Mutual respect, responsibility and dialogue with people of other faiths* says (extracts): "We deplore the publications of the cartoons. We also join with the voices of many Muslim leaders in deploring the violent reactions to the publications. Freedom of speech is indeed a fundamental human right, which needs to be guaranteed and protected. It is both a right and a responsibility. It works best when it holds structures of power accountable and confronts misuse of power. By the publication of the cartoons, freedom of speech has been used to cause pain by ridiculing peoples' religion, values and dignity. Doing so, the foundation of this right is being devalued".

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