

Christian values as the common good, not the good of Christianity?

Public communication by Church of Norway leaders when faced
with immigration from Muslim-dominated states

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explain the pro-immigrant attitudes among Church of Norway (CoN) leaders. These are shown in two Norwegian Leadership Surveys (NLS) – 2000 and 2015 – to constitute the Norwegian elite group with the most positive attitudes on immigration. Similar tendencies are also found in other studies. As the term used in NLS is «get access» it is not EEA citizens, but rather immigration of asylum seekers that leaders are asked about. The article applies a hegemony-critical theory and four conceptual frameworks, the latter either developed from Christian tradition or from the context of civil society actors. Rather than being concerned about maintaining hegemony or privileges for CoN, the leaders emphasise an inclusive approach, seeking to promote the common good for all living in Norway. This implies no support by CoN leaders to politicians seeking to utilise terms like «Christian values» for defending a restrictive asylum policy and no concern over the presence and growth of other religions in Norway. The article provides new insight of how a dialogical approach to other religions is also reflected in justifications for a inclusive asylum policy, expressed by a church that used to be a part of the state apparatus that promoted homogeneity and actively prevented ethnic diversity.

Keywords: Bonhoeffer, Church of Norway, common good, inclusive theology, Kairos theology

INTRODUCTION

The present article seeks to explain how a dialogical approach to other religions is also reflected in justifications for an inclusive asylum policy. In 2020 I carried out a survey among Norwegian Christian leaders about how they view the term Christian values used in the public, with immigration as the relevant background (Haugen, 2020); being a part of my dr. philos. dissertation in political science (Haugen, 2022). In this earlier article the term «values» was not defined, as the approach was inductive. Rather, the term «values» was contextualized, primarily as «Christian values», a term *not* used in the questionnaire, but the terms «national values» and «Islamic values» were used in *one* statement in the questionnaire.

For the purpose of this article, I apply this definition of values: «individual and collective trans-situational conceptions of desirable behaviors, objectives and ideals...» (Askeland et al., 2020, p. 3). Disagreements over values will often result in deeper cleavages as compared to disagreement over interests. While the latter can most often be reconciled through negotiations and payments, contradictory values can be much harder to reconcile.

In the data collected for the 2020 article, deans and bishops in Church of Norway (CoN) constituted two of the five focus groups. CoN members were also part of the three other focus groups (church, diakonia and mission). Parallel to these focus groups I also conducted six focus groups among professors and associate professors at six higher education institutions training for service in the churches (Haugen, 2021). The findings reported in this subsequent article are similar to the first article (Haugen, 2020). More than the substance of Christian values, the articles sought to explain why the term Christian values is not seemingly widely approved by the Christian leaders. To avoid interview bias a brief questionnaire was filled in before the focus group sessions. This small survey, that cannot be considered representative, affirmed what was said in the focus groups.

This following three main findings from this previous article were shared among all 11 informant groups: negative views regarding how the term Christian values is used in the public, little concern for consequences of immigration, and little negative perceptions regarding the presence of Muslims in Norway (Haugen, 2020; see also Haugen and Gulbrandsen, in press, and Haugen, 2021). It was also emphasized, but to a varying degree, that churches could be more explicit in speaking positively about what constitutes the Norwegian.

This article is about leaders' attitudes and perceptions, a field of study where Norway stands out internationally (Engelstad et al., 2022; Gulbrandsen, 2019; Gulbrandsen et al. 2002). I seek to explain whether the attitudes among CoN leaders can be understood by theories on moral societal leadership. Most research on clergy's moral societal leadership is from the U.S., and even if the religious landscape is highly different in the U.S. and Norway three findings from the US. are interesting. First, churches termed mainline protestant – a category encompassing CoN – have members who are less likely to agree that clergy are influencing their members, with the absolute lowest score among the clergy of these churches (Djupe and Gilbert, 2009, p. 32). Second, support from congregations can motivate clergy to speak out publicly (Djupe and Gilbert 2003, p. 45). Third, those being pastors in minority congregations were more outspoken, which was understood as a strategy for encouraging also their members to become active in public life (Djupe and Gilbert 2002, p. 607). Hence, a Protestant majority tradition, with diverse attitudes among its members should according to the U.S. studies *not* lead to an outspoken role of clergy, in our case primarily CoN's bishops, deans, and leaders of churches, mission and diaconal organizations, most of the latter having theology education, having served as priests.

This article seeks to identify how and explain why CoN leaders challenge the political authorities' rhetoric when faced with immigration. Particularly, I seek to understand whether

CoN leaders refer to some (general) values above other (specific) values. General values are derived from several sources, religious and non-religious, like equal dignity and solidarity. Specific values are derived from one religious tradition and can be reflected in the national legislation. One example can be forgiveness, that is given as one of the Christian-humanistic values in Section 1 of the Norwegian Education Act (1998) and the Kindergarten Act (2005), both revised in 2008. Even if it is correct, as emphasized in the two provisions, that this value is also expressed in other religion and belief systems, the emphasis on forgiveness is particularly strong in the Christian religion. Section 2 of the Norwegian Constitution has since 2012 emphasized the Christian-humanistic heritage, as well as democracy, rule of law and human rights.

A theory that encompass power is chosen: the hegemony-critical theory. I also introduce and apply four conceptual frameworks: (i) the doctrine of two kingdoms/regiments; (ii) the three-fold conceptual framework from the South African Kairos document (Kairos Theologians, 1985), separating between state theology, church theology and prophetic theology; (iii) the recently introduced framework of *vocatio – ad-vocatio – pro-vocatio* (Nordstokke, 2021, 237); and (iv) Trägård's (2019) distinction between altruistic *conditional* solidarity and altruistic *unconditional* solidarity.

The next section presents theories on hegemony and explains what is meant by the term hegemony-critical. I then present the four conceptual frameworks. A brief overview of CoN is also given, highlighting general information on legislative and demographic changes. This is followed by an outline of how CoN defines itself – and what is specified for CoN in Norwegian law. As the term common good and related terms might not be obvious, a fifth section elaborates on these, in light of what is termed Nordic Protestantism and its current societal impact, primarily through the lens of path dependency. A more in-depth presentation of my earlier findings, that also includes historical and ecclesial explanations (Haugen, 2023; 2022, p. 77-78; 2015) follows in section seven. Finally, I seek to discuss and explain the shifting perceptions by CoN leaders by bringing in the relevant theories, before a conclusion.

Acknowledging the many rich studies on specific leadership roles and practices within CoN in times of major reforms (Sirris, 2022; Sirris and Askeland, 2021; Askeland and Schmidt, 2016), this article has another main focus. Rather than analyzing leadership and values work within CoN involving professionals, other employees, those elected (Sirris, 2022, p. 121-122; Sirris, 2021) and the volunteers (Sirris, 2023; 2015; Fretheim, 2014), this article seeks to situate CoN in the overwhelmingly secular Norwegian context, to answer the research question: *How do CoN leaders, representing a church that used to be a part of the state apparatus – now operating in a secularized context – view the use of the term Christian values when seeking to foster an inclusive national belonging?*

CHALLENGING HEGEMONY

Elaborating on the concepts of ideology, hegemony and discourse, Stoddart (2007, p. 194) elaborates on the movement from ideology towards discourse, based on his understanding of ideology as a coherent body of thought (2007, p. 202). He takes as a premise that that ideology – and class – have lost ground, whereas discourses relating to ethnicity and gender have gained ground. One could add that discourses relating to religion have also lost ground, or at least that religion in the public space has been reframed, from being primarily about believing and behaving, to being about belonging (Davie, 1990). For Davie the term belonging refers to affinity to a given church, and as will be clarified below, there are five other reasons for being CoN member that rank above the reason «I am Christian» (Birkedal and Lannem, 2019, p. 14). As was specified in the research question, belonging can also refer to national belonging.

Behaving in this context is about *organized* religious practice by participation at services or Christian meetings, whereas believing can be one measurement of *individual* religious practice.

Acknowledging that theories on hegemony traditionally take the social class as the starting point, this article has a different embedding, due to the CoN's previous role as the religious monopoly exercised by the Norwegian political authorities. This religious monopoly role had several expressions: (i) no other faith community was permitted in Norway until 1845; (ii) confirmation was compulsory 1736-1912; (iii) headmasters and religion teachers at public schools were until 1969 required to be members of CoN; and (iv) the King was the highest authority of the CoN, and appointments of priests (until 1989), deans and bishops (until 2012) were taken by those members of Government who were CoN members, as part of its overall mandate to appoint high ranking officials («embetsmenn»).

These and other characteristics gave CoN a hegemony in Norwegian society, a hegemony that CoN leaders over the last decades has been less eager to maintain, as compared to many members of Parliament (Haugen, 2015). Hence, viewing CoN merely through a lens of hegemony, more specifically an instrument of political oppression, misses an essential insight of CoN's roles and communication in recent years. Its agency has been limited, as for instance illustrated by the previous lack of appointment authority, as seen above. This hegemony from the past is, however, crucial to understand the actions and communication of the present. CoN as existing in the past can be said to represent what has been termed «contractual role obligations», a term that Sementelli (2005, p. 563-564) borrows from Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit*. For CoN, there was no negotiation of this «contract» and it was imposed from above. Sementelli (2005) provides an interesting view on how critical theory, that questions prevailing societal structures, can be linked to institutional theory, that explain the logics of institutions as shaped by their societal surroundings. The key terms for making this link are the concepts of hegemony and role obligations.

Hegemony can be used for various forms of oppression. This negative form of hegemony reflects *non-contractual* role obligations, and hegemony-critical approaches apply to these forms of hegemony. Hegemony can also be used for a predictable use of power, as when institutions involved in the exercise of state authority carry out their mandates; reflecting *contractual* role obligations. This power by legitimate institutions can be seen as a positive hegemony. Such use of power, being in line with law, can, however, under certain circumstances be found to maintain forms of injustice and non-respect of human beings. The phenomenon of civil disobedience will be returned to in the discussion below.

Such perspectives are relevant to explain the changed structural position of CoN and its new roles. CoN is no longer an instrument of political oppression, but representing a majority might imply tensions with minorities, also minorities within CoN. As specified in the introduction, the focus of this article is on the views by CoN leaders as reflected in their overall public communication.

Being a Lutheran church, are there any perspectives from a Lutheran theology or from the wider church family that provide insight for public communication when faced with policies with which the churches fundamentally disagrees? Four conceptual frameworks will be introduced.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS ON CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CHALLENGING POLITICAL AUTHORITIES

One way to challenge political authorities is for church leaders to make their views heard in the public. The Lutheran doctrine on the two kingdoms/regiments was developed as a contrast to the Catholic church, that in the late Medieval was seen as abusing its ecclesiastical power to gain excessive influence in the political realm. The doctrine on the two kingdoms/regiments has not explicitly been applied as a basis for actual distinctions of the powers of state and church, respectively. One important explanation for this is that the most Lutheran parts of the world – the Nordic states – actually had/have a state-church system, with the King as the highest formal authority of the national church. Nevertheless, the doctrine on the two kingdoms/regiments can serve as one relevant theory when analyzing church-state relationships.

The doctrine on the two kingdoms/regiments is not about separation or dichotomies between church and state but rather highlighting discernment, allowing the church to react if state bodies abuse power and the state to react if church bodies abuse power (DeJonge, 2017; see also Haugen, 2015, p. 215-216). Moreover, seeing the church as part of civil society would generally justify that a church seeks to provide corrections to public policies which are alleged to be contrary to those values promoted by the church.

The context for the origin of another interesting church-centered framework is the Apartheid regime in South Africa. This context is obviously different from the Nordic context, at least under normal circumstances that have characterized the Nordic countries. The German occupation (1940-1945; Norway and Denmark) and German collaboration (1941-1944; Finland) is an important exception to these «normal circumstances», primarily in Norway due to the harsh nazification policies that included the CoN. This resulted in 93% of the priests adhering to the 1942 document *The Foundation of the Church* («Kirkens Grunn»; Church of Norway bishops, church leaders and organizational leaders, 1942), and disassociating themselves from the state-related functions of their priest service (Hassing, 2014). No inspiration except from the Bible is found in *The Foundation of the Church*.

A potent church-centered criticism of the state is the three-fold conceptual framework from the South African Kairos document (Kairos Theologians, 1985). The framework separates between state theology, church theology and prophetic theology; distancing itself from state and church theology, the latter being «limited, guarded and cautious» (Kairos Theologians, 1985, p. 9), whereas prophetic theology is confrontational, emphasizing hope, and being spiritual and pastoral (Kairos Theologians, 1985, p. 18).

The term prophetic is not commonly used by CoN, even the term prophetic diakonia is applied in the main documents from the Lutheran World Federation (2009). Moreover, the emphasis on *confrontation* in the South Africa Kairos document – justified by a reference to Dietrich Bonhoefer's emphasis on physical force as a last resort against political oppression (Kairos Theologians, 1985, p. 14; on Bonhoeffer's confrontation, see Henriksen and Repstad, 2022, p. 109) – goes beyond the thinking in *The Foundation of the Church*, which emphasizes *non-cooperation*. Nevertheless, it is relevant for CoN's self-understanding that CoN has a document that justifies non-cooperation with a political regime which claims that it should be the highest authority in all aspects of life.

The conceptual framework of *vocatio – ad-vocatio – pro-vocatio* was developed in a workshop for German Brot für die Welt and then in other seminars and a Norwegian book (Nordstokke, 2021, 237). It is referred to in the Introduction and in one of the two forewords of a joint World Council of Churches (WCC)-ACT Alliance document (2022, p. 8 & p. 15) – without crediting Nordstokke. Vocation is often used parallel to a calling, being a relatively

common term in Christian thinking. The term advocate can refer to a person speaking on behalf of someone, but is specified in Cambridge Dictionary online to also refer to «someone who publicly supports something.» Provocation is in Cambridge Dictionary online understood as «an action or statement that is intended to make someone angry»; the Oxford Dictionary online uses the phrase «annoyed or angry...». Hence, reflecting on the specific meaning of these terms, the WCC and ACT Alliance (2022) have given their members a mandate to speak out despite of the reactions this might cause. The joint document identifies the long-term aim of diakonia, namely to «contribute to the common good...» (World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance, 2022, p. 77).

Finally, two concepts developed by Lars Trägård (2019) are able to capture the different understandings of whom is included in the universe that is entitled to have a share in the common good. Writing in the context of hospitality, Trägård introduces a distinction between altruistic conditional solidarity – relating to citizens – and altruistic unconditional solidarity – relating to human beings, irrespective of their legal status.

These conceptual frameworks will be used in the discussion to seek to explain the shifting perceptions by CoN leaders.

UNDERSTANDING CHURCH OF NORWAY

As a secularized context is part of the research question, this section provides insight into this secularity. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the (diminishing) role of CoN I emphasize some legal and demographic changes, acknowledging that much more can be said about CoN's internal organization, processes and many forms of interactions, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

It took almost three centuries after the Reformation until the name Church of Norway was used for the first time (Aschim, 2022), and the term «state church» was first used in connection with the 1845 Act that allowed other faith communities, as in the section Challenging hegemony. Hence, CoN was closely integrated in the state apparatus; being a part of the state's available tools for whatever policies that were in force. Various councils at local, regional and national levels came throughout the 20th century, culminating with annual CoN Synod, first assembling in 1984.

CoN has recently become independent from the state, a process starting with an agreement between the political parties in 2008, via new Sections 2, 4 and 16 in the Norwegian Constitution in 2012, to the granting of legal person status and transfer of employer responsibility for the priests, deans and bishops from the state to CoN in 2017. Section 16 specifies in the official translation that CoN «will remain the Established Church of Norway [Norwegian text: «Norges folkekirke»] and will as such be supported by the State», whereas the last sentence of Section 16 specifies the principle of equal treatment of religious and worldview communities. Specific provisions on CoN are found in chapter 3 in the 2020 Act on religious and worldview communities.

By the end of 2022, 63.7 per cent of the Norwegian population were members in CoN. While this is still a high figure, the percentage has gone down with more than one percentage point each year during the last 13 years; in 2008 more than 80 per cent were members.

Moreover, an increasing share of those being members are indifferent to CoN. A 2021 survey among 2983 members in Church of Norway found that an increasingly larger share of the members are neither church-goers nor believers: 24 per cent in 2019; 34 per cent in 2021 (Opinion, 2021, p. 8; 2983 CoN respondents).

Asking members what the reason is for their membership, the top four answers in 2012 were: «I am baptised», «I will be entitled to make use of the CoN's services», «I will support the Christian heritage» and «As a Norwegian citizen, this is natural» (Birkedal and Lannem, 2019, p. 14, author's translation; all translations from Norway done by the author). Only as number five and six came «I feel attachment to CoN» and «I have a Christian faith»; the latter mentioned by 35.8 per cent. Finally, only 12.7 per cent of the CoN members participated at the 2019 elections (Church of Norway, 2019; for an overview of the Synod of CoN, see Church of Norway, 2022).

These figures are obviously a great challenge for CoN. The visibility of CoN in the aftermath of the 2011 terror attacks in Oslo and at Utøya was also seen in the increase in the number of attendants at Christian services; averagely 102 at each service (Church of Norway, 2014, p. 16). Since then, interest in CoN, measured by number of attendees at ordinary services, is deteriorating. The last year before the Covid-19 forced the churches to be closed or limit the number of participants, 2019, had on average 87 persons at each service. While this decrease makes it harder for CoN priests to communicate with the members, it must be remembered that there are other ways to communicate, for instance through the media and congregational magazines, which are widely distributed.

People in Norway do, however, recognize a societal role for CoN; when asked about «churches and other religious organizations», Norwegians are presumed to primarily think about CoN. 77 per cent of Norwegians acknowledge their role in helping the poor and needy and 53 per cent acknowledge that they protect and strengthen morality, being the 4th and 6th highest shares among 15 West European states, respectively (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 145). Moreover, there are 40 per cent of Norwegians who agree that «we should invest in a society where Christian values play a greater role». Only one tenth of these are churchgoers, church members or confessing Christians (Nilsen, 2017), which indicates a «belonging» relationship to Christianity.

THE MANDATE OF THE CHURCH, SPECIFIED FOR CON

As the last part of the research question is on how CoN leaders view the use of the term Christian values when seeking to foster an inclusive national belonging we need more insight into its specific mandate. CoN has defined itself to be confessional, diaconal, missional and open, the latter operationalized as inclusive. Being missional is the most distinct characteristic of these. Engelsviken (2022, p. 88-95) provides a detailed outline of what a missional church implies. Moreover, Section 10 of the 2020 Religious communities Act specifies that CoN shall be country-wide – operationalized as locally embedded and reaching all parts of Norway – and democratic – operationalized to imply that all members are entitled to be nominated for positions and to vote.

Hence, the two elements in the 2020 Act on religious and worldview communities – country-wide and democratic – are different from how CoN views itself. The four characteristics that CoN chooses in order to describe itself, irrespective of what is specified as falling within each of them, imply that churches are substantially different from any political or civil society actor.

A church-internal perspective with relevance for the churches' public role is outlined by Engberg Vinkel (2022), inspired by Moe-Lobeda (2004) and Wannewetsch (2004). Three dimensions are emphasized: (i) accessible, understood as inclusive for all members; (ii) visible, understood as carrying signs of God's presence; and (iii) relational, understood as being a part

of and serving the wider community. Wannenwetsch emphasizes the churches' balancing between seeking to be a contrast to the prevailing values in society and being in constructive engagement with the various other actors in the public realm. The notions of public theology (Fretheim, 2021; de Gruchy, 2007), political theology (Misje Bergem, 2019), and political or prophetic diakonia (Fretheim, 2013; Lutheran World Federation, 2009) are all seeking to provide relevant insight for such elaborations.

Being aware of these various approaches, CoN nevertheless did not include any of these terms in its Plan for diakonia, rather specifying four «expressions» of the Gospel in action: loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice (Church of Norway, 2020; 2010 [2007]).

The role of Lutheran churches in the public, or more specifically, political, realm has been outlined in three comprehensive documents by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF; 2022; 2018; 2016). It might be a surprise that a world-wide body for a denomination that has emphasized a proper distinction between the earthly and the divine realm is emphasizing in such clear terms that political advocacy is an integral part of the church's mandate. It is also relevant to acknowledge that the sharing of office facilities with the WCC has led the LWF to play a decisive role in the development of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) and the Action by Churches Together (now: ACT Alliance).

These self-defined, legal and scholarly approaches to express the mandate of CoN must also be seen in a Nordic context.

AN INCLUSIVE COMMON GOOD THINKING AS CENTRAL WITHIN THE NORDIC LUTHERAN HERITAGE?

What is implied by the term common good? The WCC and ACT Alliance (2022, p. 77) emphasize that the common good is the long-term aim of diakonia. Askeland (2020), researching values work in a Christian, diaconal organization, identifies three characteristics of the 'good' organization. These characteristics are considered to be relevant to understand how CoN leaders frame overall values: good home, the common good, and good practice. Among these three terms, common good is most relevant, and a clearer understanding of this term and an understanding of its scope will be provided.

Another term to encompass this notion of the common good is Scandinavian creation theology, whose main proponents are Danish Knud E. Løgstrup and Swedish Gustaf Wingren. Central is caring for the other, as every holds the same dignity and is deserving respect.

When identifying the communication by churches in a secularized and pluralistic context, Henriksen and Repstad argues for «the impossibility of a morality and a society based on authoritative divine command...» (2022, p. 79). Rather they emphasize what they see as moral progress: «The shift from ... the church and the *communitas* of the *ecclesia* to the common and the *civitas*...» (2022, p. 79). Henriksen provides arguments for how upholding a religion's role in society must be done from «the premises of secularity, harvesting from its fruits» (2011, p. 143), specifying this secularity as open towards religion (2011, p. 153).

This way of approaching religion and belief was strengthened by a 2013 report by the Public Commission on religious policy, termed «The worldview-open society» (NOU 2013:1). The report provided the basis for a subsequent legislation (Religious communities Act, 2020). Together with its Regulation on religious communities (2020) the Norwegian policy of *formal* equal treatment of religious and worldview communities is further institutionalized, but the Act and Regulation also led to stronger control of and reporting requirements regarding the

activities of such communities. The communities are allowed to maintain their distinctness, for instance having only preachers with a said position on for instance same-sex marriage (Equality and anti-discrimination Act, Sections 9 and 30).

Hence, Norwegian policies are to enable a broad range of religious and secular communities and emphasizing their positive contribution to the Norwegian society (Government of Norway, 2019, p. 10-11). This broad approach to religious and secular belief organizations, representing a «community of disagreement» (Iversen, 2014), implies seeing all these as contributing to the common good of society. Said in other terms, the Norwegian policies seek to uphold distinctness and the common good simultaneously, having broad perceptions of the common good. On the individual level, notions of the common good can be seen in the fact that most persons keep their membership in CoN even if most of the members do not report to have a Christian faith (Birkedal and Lannem, 2019, p. 14). A 2009 seminar can be seen as a contrast to this emphasis on the common good by highlighting the importance of morality as derived from the Bible to be more reflected in the legislation (Greipsland, 2009).

This Norwegian secularity is also seen among leaders in diaconal institutions, using media rationalities in the public (Leis-Peters, 2022, p. 139); and «diaconal rationality» in internal values work (Leis-Peters, 2022, p. 140). Hence, the term «diakonia» is not frequently used in the public communication by these leaders.

Are these ways to frame one's roles and work relevant for CoN and other majority churches in the Nordic countries? The term Nordic Protestantism is said to be characterized by trust and sharing (Wyller, 2021, p. 18). I specify these two terms in somewhat greater detail: (i) a traditionally close relationships between state and church, to the extent that the church was part of the state apparatus, as seen above; (ii) a common value basis between the secular and the religious realm; (iii) a universalistic thinking on entitlements, implying that all are entitled to a certain minimum of services; and (iv) *no* long-term and institutional attempts by the majority churches to resist the state's growing influence. Hence, the common good concept and an inclusive approach can be understood as intrinsic to Nordic Protestantism.

The fourth of these characteristics requires some more nuances. There has been opposition by central CoN leaders in the realm of education and welfare, particularly in the second half of the 20th century. CoN leaders were skeptical of the expansion of the welfare state in the first decade after the Second World War (Tønnessen, 2000), and the proposed changes of Christian education in the public school was in the mid-60s met with the largest petition ever organized in Norway (Berg, 2021). Christian schools still host the largest number of pupils among the non-public schools and their establishment can be understood also as a reaction to the less emphasis given to Christianity in the public schools.

To explain the general commonalities between the Nordic states seems less ambitious as compared to explaining these commonalities by referring to the Lutheran heritage, but as will be highlighted in the discussion below, influences from Scandinavian creation theology might be identified. While religion has a reduced role in Scandinavia, the key term to identify the presence of the religious heritage is path dependency. In short, values originating from previous institutional orderings of society continue to influence prevailing attitudes even after a new institutional ordering is in place.

This path dependency can be seen on broader societal levels but can also be applied to explain attitudes among segments of a population. The percentage supporting the statement saying that Norway should accept *fewer* refugees is *lowest* for those CoN members who are church-goers and believers (Opinion, 2021, p. 50; for diocese figures, see p. 51-53).

Two other studies affirm this pattern that church-going Christians in the Nordic or Protestant Europe display positive attitudes to immigration. First, church-attending Christians in *three* of the four Nordic countries are the most positive to accepting immigrants: Finland

Norway and Sweden (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 23 [question is about «immigration levels»]; see p. 161 for operationalization of «church-attending»). This is contrary to the general trend in Western Europe, including Denmark, as the share of those agreeing that immigration should be reduced is highest among church-attending Christians.

Second, using data from the European Social Survey (ESS-8), Vaughan (2021) finds that religious service attendance overall correlates positively with pro-immigration attitudes (the question is about «application for refugee status»). However, merely *identifying* as Catholic – what can be termed «nominal Christian» – is not positively correlated with pro-immigration attitudes. Vaughan explains this by the traditional dominance of Catholicism that its members are eager to maintain, and that can be more difficult to sustain in a situation with more religious diversity (Vaughan, 2021, p. 322). Previous research using older data essentially affirm these tendencies.

Two questions are relevant when seeking to link these findings from recent survey data to Christian leadership in CoN: First, is the communications by the CoN leaders likely to be an explanation for these differences in attitudes? To answer this question requires more insight about causality: I therefore find it difficult to say with certainty what actually makes the church-going more pro-immigration in Norway and some other countries. The answer might be the stories of welcoming refugees in the Bible, that appeal more to church-goers as compared to the so-called «non-practicing» CoN members and the non-affiliated.

The second question relates to the topic of this section, namely the notion of common good: In other terms, to whom does the common good thinking apply?

Using Trägård's distinction between conditional and unconditional altruistic solidarity, politicians are likely to affirm the conditional solidarity, while civil society organizations, including churches, are likely to affirm the unconditional solidarity. Based on recent figures (Opinion, 2021, p. 50-53), an inclusive understanding of whom are included in the common good dominate among church-goers in CoN. Thinking about the common good only for *citizens* – the logics of politicians – has different implications as compared to thinking about the common good for those who *reside* in the country – the logics of civil society – for human rights enjoyments and specific services.

There are obvious differences between Trägård's two terms, as states can treat citizens and non-citizens differently with regard to political, civil, economic and social human rights, notwithstanding the distinction between developed and developing states as regards economic rights in Article 2(3) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Trägård's conceptual framework highlights that there are differences in the common good thinking central within the Nordic Lutheran heritage, between those having a conditional and those having an unconditional approach.

WHAT PERCEPTIONS ON INCLUSION DOMINATE AMONG CON LEADERS – AND WHY?

The very last part of the research question is on inclusive national belonging. CoN's change from an overwhelmingly state loyal to more state critical attitude can be explained by four shifts taking place in several realms.

The most obvious shift is less power at several levels: nationally, for instance by less influence on overall structure for religions education in public schools; in the municipalities, for instance by no longer having a permanent position in the municipal child welfare councils;

and on the level of individual prestige, as priests are no longer considered a part of the «ruling elite» (Haugen and Gulbrandsen, in press; Haugen, 2022, p. 77-78).

Another shift is that CoN leaders have been – to various extent – receptive to liberation theology impulses, primarily from Central & South America or South Africa. In this context it is relevant that Ulstein (2022, p. 391-392 & 470) is more cautious in his assessments of the influence of liberation theology in CoN as compared to Bakkevig and Kristensen (2018, p. 159-167).

A third shift that were seen from the 1990s onward is the higher awareness of how good-minded efforts by CoN priests and others in the past were part of an overall strategy of what can be termed forced assimilation, with resulting processes for reconciliation (Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2023; NOU 2015:7; Haugen, 2017a).

A fourth shift is the acknowledgement of how CoN leaders in the 19th and early 20th century had an inclination of being skeptical of political change, including distancing themselves from Marcus Thrane, a student of theology who never became priest, and who was the first to organize laborers. This skepticism of such organizations remained throughout the subsequent growth of trade unions (Haugen, 2015). Even if the two last explanations refer to experiences in the past, these are presumed to be generally known among CoN priests.

These shifts in recent years have implied less institutional interests to defend, willingness to always listen to and take the perspective of the weaker part, and an inherent reluctance of contributing to forms of assimilation. In the realm of immigration and integration these shifts are evident, as will be shown in the discussion below. Only two per cent of the CoN leaders in the 2015 Norwegian Leadership Survey (NLS) support assimilation (Haugen and Gulbrandsen, in press). 81 per cent support what is termed «individualist-integration», that is embedded in everyone's rights as equal citizen, and 16 per cent support two forms of pluralism (termed «individual-autonomy» and «multiculturalist integration»).

Finally, also regarding the 2015 NLS – conducted when two right-wing parties were in government – include three other interesting findings for the CoN leaders. First, CoN leaders is the elite group with the least trust in the government (Gulbrandsen, 2019, p. 150). Second, CoN leaders are the most supportive of measures to reducing income disparities (Engelstad et al., 2022, p. 159). Third, CoN leaders are the most supportive of measures for promoting ethnic diversity (Engelstad et al., 2022, p. 173). Hence, CoN leaders support policies being favorable for those least well-off.

The finding that CoN leaders are pro-immigration and pro-equalization is probably not a surprise for those knowing about CoN; whereas the finding that being a CoN leader correlates with having little trust in the government (in 2015) is more surprising.

DISCUSSION

As explained in the initial and third paragraphs, I used focus group interviews to have a better understanding of the term «Christian values», and a questionnaire with 13 statements that implicitly or explicitly related to immigration affirm the main content of the five focus group interviews (Haugen, 2020). The informants expressed negative views regarding how the term Christian values is used in the public, little concern for consequences of immigration, and little negative perceptions regarding the presence of Muslims in Norway.

Four statements were most approved of: International solidarity and equalizing injustices; Hospitality, humanitarian values; Bible emphasizes hospitality to foreigners; and Jesus' example in meeting those oppressed by others. The two first reflect an internationalist or cosmopolitan thinking while the two latter reflect more distinct Christian arguments, that

nevertheless have a broad appeal. These can be understood as reflecting Scandinavian creation theology, as briefly outlined above.

Drawing upon these earlier findings and other publications showing similar attitudes among CoN leaders (Haugen and Gulbrandsen, in press; Engelstad et al., 2022, p. 173; Gulbrandsen, 2019, p. 128; Gulbrandsen et al., 2002, p. 182) and CoN church-goers (Opinion, 2021, p. 50; Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 21-23; see also Vaughan, 2021), I will discuss these pro-immigration attitudes from a societal moral leadership perspective. I will structure the discussion by three questions including the term «inclusive»; all relate to ways of being positive to the presence, participation and visibility of persons belonging to immigration minorities coming from Muslim-dominated states.

The opposite position – to be skeptical of immigrant minorities and pluralism in general – could be considered rational if upholding CoN's power, prestige or privileges, and hence the status of Christianity in Norway were considered as important objectives. Today, a large share of the asylum seekers – but not necessarily the refugees selected in cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees – do come from Muslim-dominated states. The granting of asylum to asylum seekers from these states is likely to be disapproved by many of the approximately 40 per cent who approve of Christian values.

As we saw under prophetic theology, being confrontational is one of its characteristics (Kairos Theologians, 1985, p. 18). This raises two questions. First: is the criticism that has consistently been expressed by CoN leaders of Norwegian asylum policies over many decades possible to understand by applying the prophetic theology framework? Moreover, is it reasonable to understand that the CoN leaders hold that the core Christian values are not about preservation but rather seeking to let values be practiced in various encounters? My previous findings (Haugen, 2022; 2021; 2020; 2015) do at least show that the CoN leaders are skeptical of those politicians who seek to utilize the term Christian values for protectionist or preservationist perspectives.

We saw above that Sementelli (2005) distinguishes between contractual and non-contractual role obligations. Even if his theory is applied for institutions carrying out state authority, and knowing that CoN is no longer a state church, CoN is still carrying out important public authority. The main difference between CoN and other religious communities in Norway – in addition to Article 16 of the Constitution – is that its municipal councils (*fellesråd*) manage public burial places – with some exceptions (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, 2020; Burial places Act, Section 23(2)). Moreover, as seen above, according to the Religious communities Act, CoN shall remain country-wide, which is not a requirement for other religious communities. CoN's roles in the four transitional rituals – baptism, confirmation, wedding and funeral – do, however, not differ substantively from other faith communities, as they can similarly exercise these functions. Having 65 per cent of the Norwegian population as members enables a wide outreach for CoN on these occasions.

Acknowledging that CoN is still exercising public authority, Sementelli's (2005) emphasis on hegemony exercised as predictable use of power is relevant for CoN. Its mandate is defined in its own self-definition of being confessional, diaconal, missional and open, striving to communicate the Gospel in words and in deeds. CoN has historically been crucial in embedding the values derived from the Gospel in the overall public administration, due to the religious monopoly that formally existed until 1845 and due to the crucial roles particularly the priests had in the conduct of public affairs on the local level. Even if there will be many views on the core of these values, CoN's roles and communication in recent years has been about openness for external impulses and publicly apologizing that CoN was a tool for the political oppression of minorities. These practices were more or less in line with contractual role obligations, as outlined by Sementelli (2005). There are, however, examples that priests – who

were members of the *previous* municipal child protection councils (vergeråd; now barnevernsnemnd) – exceeded their authority by being involved in taking children of Romani origin from their parents *before* a decision allowing for this had been made. These and other experiences – and the basic Christian calling of caring and welcoming the stranger – seems to be important explanations for the stronger emphasis on pro-immigrant and pro-minorities practices over the last decades.

Faced with those embracing the term Christian values for protectionist or preservationist perspectives, the view of one retired bishop is interesting: «...the church meets people with a message that comes from outside this community's own context» (Sommerfeldt, 2010, p. 64). He nuances this emphasis on the Scripture, however: «It is in the encounter between contemporary realities, the norm of Scripture and the experiences of human beings and nature that ethics is developed and positions shaped» (Sommerfeldt, 2010, p. 63). Hence, human experiences and perceptions do have a role in forming the message.

These realities is also provide some justification for an assessment of the two kingdoms/regiments doctrine. Simply stated: Because the biblical mandate on welcoming the stranger is strong throughout the Bible – even if other messages are also heard – CoN leaders are consistent in arguing for what has often been termed a *human* asylum policy, which in the public discourse is often specified as a contrast to a *strict and just* asylum policy. These two are not necessarily compatible with Trägård's (2019) distinction between unconditional and conditional, as a conditional policy can also be human. Hence, this doctrine has *not* prevented CoN from being vocal when challenging Norwegian authorities on Norway's asylum policies.

How can CoN leaders' views be understood as reflecting a conscious strategy among CoN leaders of seeking to promote a Norwegian mentality that is inclusive of persons who neither originate in Norway nor have a Christian faith background? Even if data from the Norwegian elite survey 2015 reveals that equal rights, and not pluralism has strongest support among CoN leaders (Haugen and Gulbrandsen, in press), increased pluralism will inevitably be one implication of pursuing a policy in line with CoN leaders' preferences.

I read the various responses from the focus group interviews as an expression of an unconditional altruistic solidarity. Irrespective of one's view on immigration, most persons would be expected to affirm the importance of having a belonging relationship to Norway among those actually living in Norway. Even if people in Norway overall do have a strong sense of belonging to Norway, the differences in belonging to Norway between «foreign-born» and «native-born» are among the largest in Western Europe (OECD and EU Commission, 2018, p. 135); differences for «life satisfaction» are smaller (OECD and EU Commission, 2018, p. 139). CoN leaders can be presumed to be concerned for everyone's perceptions of belonging and are therefore concerned about not speaking in hegemonic ways than might be understood as perceiving Christianity as being either superior or more natural to Norwegian as compared to other faiths.

The importance of such inclusive approach expressed by CoN leaders (Engelstad et al., 2022, p. 173) can be justified by perceptions among Norwegian church-attending Christians. Almost half of them agree that one's family background is important «to be truly [Norwegian]»: 46 per cent agree (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 26). This is almost similar to the share among the so-called non-practicing Christians (48 per cent), whom are much more skeptical of immigration, as indicated above (20 per cent versus 39 per cent; Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 23). Wide-held support for «Norwegian family background» being important for being «truly» Norwegian can be presumed to impact the perception of belonging to Norway among persons with another ethnic background, self-named as being «melanin-rich».

Loving and welcoming particularly those who have been uprooted from far away places can be said to be a core message of the Christian Bible; acting in similar manners can

therefore be considered to be a calling («vocation»; Nordstokke, 2021, p. 237) for Christians and Christian leaders.

A second question found relevant for understanding societal moral leadership exercised by CoN leaders is this: *How* inclusive of persons living in should Norway CoN leaders be expected to be in their public communication? To answer this question I chose one category of persons who are formally and legally excluded from Norway, a topic not derived explicitly from the previous survey (Haugen, 2020).

The universe of those entitled to be included are not only citizens, but all residing in Norway, with and without legal permits («papirløse»). I do not have any data on the attitudes of CoN leaders regarding treatment of persons who for some reason do not have legal permit. However, I find it reasonable to presume that the inclusive approach by CoN leaders applies not only to citizens and non-citizens residing with legal permits but also to those residing in Norway without legal permit or whose permit has expired.

This presumption is based on two simple premises. First, the previous other data presented in this article. Second, the fact that a non-inclusion of these persons would actually result in life choices being taken and living conditions being affected that would be contrary to an understanding of the common good, specified as a long-term aim of diakonia (World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance, 2022, p. 77). Ways to support these persons by assisting them to make a living by own labor can be in violation of Section 108, third part (a) in the 2008 Immigration Act, that specifies that it is prohibited to employ a foreign national who «does not hold the permit required.» This raises issues of civil disobedience, which is not addressed in any of the Lutheran World Federation documents (2022; 2018; 2016; 2009). Harsh accusations have been expressed by Norwegian Government ministers against CoN leaders for undermining respect for the law by providing sanctuaries (Haugen, 2010, p. 216-217). Therefore, the term «pro-vocation» (Nordstokke, 2021, p. 237) comes to mind.

It is noteworthy, however, that the coordinated efforts by devout Christians to secure employment for persons without a permit has *not* been met with broad-based CoN support. The support from the local congregation and pastors of these devout Christians – IMI Church in Stavanger – is considerably stronger, for instance to contribute to paying a fine of NOK 1,5 million. This form of civil disobedience (Karlsen 2019), done openly and for the purpose of changing the law, was also alluded to by the retired bishop of Oslo when he was found guilty by the local court to have violated the same provision in the 2008 Immigration Act, albeit on a much smaller scale.

The last question to identify the nature of CoN's leaders' attempts of societal moral leadership does also imply a relationship to the political authorities, namely alleged Christian converts. There is no other policy area that is met with so consistent communication from CoN leaders and other Christian leaders than what is required as evidence for assessing asylum seekers' alleged conversion to Christianity (Haugen, 2017b; 2010, p. 217-218). Even if such efforts *can* be seen as being about promoting Christianity, not the common good, there are obvious common good elements involved, most specifically the legitimacy of Norwegian asylum policies. Over the last decades the many media reports about asylum seekers and pastors or priests having followed them are not being believed by the immigration authorities – with criticism of this – do indicate that this policy area affects the public's overall trust in the system.

It is relevant that baptism and inclusion of asylum seekers is more wide-spread among pentecostal and other congregations not belonging to CoN, and few of them actually end up in CoN. The asylum seekers come from Muslim-dominated states, many without experiences of Christian teaching in their home countries.

This third example of CoN leaders seeking to exercise societal moral leadership, primarily vis-à-vis Norwegian immigrant authorities, can be understood as a form of «ad-vocatio» (Nordstokke, 2021, p. 237).

Whether these examples of exercising societal moral leadership is actually effective in achieving mentality changes as well as policy changes are not possible to answer in this article. I have above emphasized that we cannot know exactly which way the causality goes. What is possible to say is that the overall attitudes in Norway on various issues relating to immigration are rather stable, unlike what can be seen for instance in Sweden, with anti-immigration attitudes increasing (Martinsson and Andersson, 2022, p. 22).

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that CoN's previous role as a state church, and the previous tendencies for CoN leaders to be loyal to the prevailing institutions, often actively resisting institutional changes, is considerably different today. Moreover, the attempts of exercising societal moral leadership in the context immigration from Muslim-dominated states are not of a recent date, as CoN were equally critical of Norwegian political authorities from at least the 1980s onwards.

The CoN leaders do not seem to be overly concerned about the changes seen in Norwegian society over the last decades, characterized by increased pluralism and the positive as well as the negative consequences of globalization and increased mobility. Whether CoN leaders should be more concerned about how to communicate *with* or on behalf of the 40 per cent who prefer emphasizing Christian values – without necessarily being neither believers nor active in churches (Nilsen, 2017) – is not possible to answer in this article. The majority of these 40 per cent link Christian values *primarily* to identity, not faith (Nilsen 2017; see also Haugen, 2022, p. 97-103) and to a nationalistic, not a humanistic protection discourse (Nilsen 2017; see also Haugen, 2022, p. 92-97). This understanding of Christian values differs from the views expressed by CoN leaders, highlighting for instance hospitality (Haugen, 2020). The previous experiences of being a part of state efforts of forced assimilation, not being afraid of opposing public policies, and seeking to side with the non-privileged has been given as explanations.

Nonetheless, CoN leaders attempt to play a role as societal moral leaders, promoting an inclusive theology drawing upon stories about loving your neighbour and exercising hospitality; notwithstanding Wyller (2021) and his editors (Nahnfeldt and Rønsdal, 2021) being critical of certain forms of exercise of hospitality. CoN seeks to promote an inclusive theology.

Building on an unconditional altruistic solidarity (Trägård, 2019), societal moral leadership is exercised by CoN leaders by being inclusive and not protective and hegemony-upholding in seeking to foster the common good.

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