

ANGLICAN-LUTHERAN SOCIETY

Conference in Trondheim, Norway, 25th-29th July 2022

WELCOME

Welcoming us to Trondheim the Rev Fredrik Ulseth, our Society's National Coordinator in Norway, said that to hold the conference in Nidaros (the ancient name for the city) was a dream come true for him. He was born in the city and was ordained in the Cathedral. The Church of Norway's Council for International Relations had been very supportive, and their Senior Advisor, Beate Fagerli, had given him enormous practical support. We were meeting in an historical site at the corner of the courtyard of the old Archbishop's Palace, in the Armoury of what is now the Army Museum. It is a truly wonderful meeting place. He thanked Beate for taking the project so seriously, not least for making our feeding arrangements. The Cathedral Dean and staff had also been very supportive and he thanked them too.



Our theme, 'Hope', matches the theme of this year's Olav Festival, but more importantly, he asked, how can the churches of today be bringers of hope to society and to the world? We are facing a time of war, the environmental issues with heat and fires are challenging us, lives are being lost and people are losing sleep. Do we have a message of hope to share? Yes, not because we have a history of proclaiming hope but because we have hope today!

Our other theme, 'Pilgrimage', matches the site we are on. Nidaros was one of the most important pilgrimage sites in medieval Europe. Doing a journey is both a dangerous enterprise and an inspiring one. 'Let this conference be a part of our journey towards hope, and on the way let us find out how St Olav can be relevant to the world today.'



Bishop Michael Ipgrave, our Anglican Moderator, responded. He thanked Fredrik, Beate and her colleagues, and the planning group who had made the conference possible, and the Church of Norway both nationally and locally who had demonstrated hospitality in so many practical ways. He was speaking, he said, on behalf of his fellow Moderator, Dr Jaakko Rusama, in asserting how wonderful it is to meet in person and to confront such an inspiring topic of pilgrimage, and to begin on the Feast Day of St James, Patron Saint of pilgrims. He was called by the lakeside to leave what he was doing and to follow the Lord which, for Michael, is a paradigm of the uncertainty and invitation that lies at the heart of a spirituality of pilgrimage. He regretted that he and Bishop David Hamid, our Anglican President, would have to leave early in order to join the Lambeth Conference of Bishops starting in Canterbury on Wednesday.

Fredrik then introduced Preces Olav who, until his election in 2020, served for ten years as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

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SESSION ONE 'A Pilgrimage Towards Hope'

The Most Rev Olav Fykse Tveit (Preces, Church of Norway)



Welcome to the Church of Norway, to Nidaros Diocese, to the Feast of St Olav, to the Archbishop's Court, and to the city and Cathedral. The Cathedral invites all of us to be pilgrims of faith, and this year the theme of the Festival of St Olav is hope, which is also the focal point of your conference. I think this is a sign of our times. We urgently need to focus on what gives us hope. But we need to do more than talk about hope – we need challenges that show what we can contribute to hope, and we all need hope itself! Therefore, we need you as pilgrims of hope.

Not only is this theme pertinent to our own times, it is a theme of the ecumenical movement which is a journey that brings changes that bring us hope that our faith in the promises of God will be fulfilled in the ways that God's time and God's will allows. But as part of the identity of

our Church and, I would say, as an important criterion of being Church, is this question; How do we bring hope?

Ecumenical Dialogue is not an end in itself

Some of you are familiar with the connection between the Lutheran Church Family and the Anglican Church Family here in Nidaros, the city where we signed the Porvoo Common Agreement which affirmed and re-established what we had always had, but in a new way. I had the privilege of preparing the documents for our synod, and the title was very affirmative – 'Together in Mission and Ministry'. This shows that ecumenical dialogue is not just something for itself, but is about how the Church can make our call real, to do what we are called to do in a better way, and different way.

And I think this was also your perspective as you made this the theme for your conference. It is not simply to discuss something interesting. It is to say that together we want to contribute something towards hope. This is our purpose as Churches, but it is also what we need from you as a theological workshop. How do we use our Churches' traditions and history, and our achievements, in a new way in times like these?

Hope must be at the heart of our Christian contribution

Let me begin by reflecting on what kind of a criterion is 'hope' in our work as Churches and theologians. As General Secretary of the World Council of Churches this was, in a way, our daily theme. In what ways might we make a difference in the world? I had to remind my colleagues again and again that we were there because there are some problems in the world! That is the rationale of the ecumenical movement. We want to address the challenges of the Churches and their contribution to the world. We are asked by the United Nations and other agencies to offer a faith perspective.

But what are they asking for? And what can we contribute? My answer is that, if we do speak about faith in these contexts, we must speak about something that gives hope. We are not here as Churches or Councils of Churches for our own interests or purposes. We are here to create hope for the world. And therefore faith in this dimension is more than just a content, though it has content as well, it is not just what we think and what we do, but it is something that is offered to us and is expressed in our traditions, in our liturgies and in our prayers, and particularly in the part of the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.'

The three-fold nature of hope

Ours is a service – a service in prayer, a service in action, a service that shows our confidence in God, our confidence in our doctrine and our confidence to serve and to share it accordingly. Therefore, when we talk about hope, the ecumenical task of advocacy becomes central. To some, this sounds like a side-track from the ecumenical movement – the real ecumenical movement is a theological movement. However, one of the lessons I learned in the World Council of Churches is that theology needs to issue in advocacy – the Church has a voice and must speak up for those who need a voice, must speak up for those who need a theological reflection into a world that needs something other than cynical words, something other than self-orientated discussions. And therefore I think we should, in our reflections on hope, both in St Olav's Feast and also in our conference, focus on what St Paul says in the First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, when he brings together these three, faith, hope and love. Very often we speak about love because he says that love is the greatest, but he says these three remain together.

So I believe that we, as theologians and preachers wherever we are, should not speak about any one of them without relating them to the other two. How can we speak about hope if it is not hope that comes out of our faith – faith in something more than ourselves? It is a faith that has shaped us.

And how can we speak about hope if it is not an expression of love? Hope just for ourselves and our own benefit can be the most selfish and excluding way of expressing hope, and it goes against the call to love. And if I may put it a bit more straightforwardly, in the context of this reflection of St Paul, I would say that there is a 'Christian Hope' and that any hope that is not for the whole world cannot be 'Christian Hope'! If hope is based in the Creator God, the Saviour God and the Life-giving God it cannot be a hope that is only for some of us.

I think this is one of the challenges we face, and I believe that we should spend some energy on reflecting on what that means. It doesn't mean to be less Christian but, rather, more Christian. My experience at the Word Council of Churches has taught me that we need to spend more time saying why we are Christian, why we relate to Christ, and what it means. So I see that this theme which you are considering as part of an on-going discourse.

The pilgrimage theme is very relevant

Your theme of pilgrimage reminds me of what has been the motto of the World Council of Churches since 2015; 'To be Together on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace'. First, this is a way of expressing the joint call of ecumenical effort. There are some interesting and relevant questions that have been developed in order to make that claim. There is urgency in the situation in which we find ourselves. To be on this kind of pilgrimage implies a symbolic way of understanding pilgrimage. How do we visit not only holy places but also holy human beings? How do we visit the wounds of the many, and the wounds of the Church? If on your pilgrimage you visit one another, visit the reality and the context of others, it must quickly become a celebration of the gifts that the others have. It is not a matter of us saying, 'This is what we have to offer you and this is what you ought to receive.' To be on a pilgrimage of justice and peace, and indeed to be on a pilgrimage of hope, is to be open to

receiving gifts from others. This involves showing humility and also working for change. What can be changed through our pilgrimage? What can we show as signs of hope for today?

Theology and service must be intertwined

Second, the theme relates to what have been some difficult internal discussions in the ecumenical movement, and you are probably very well aware of them. It's the relationship between people who regard Faith and Order as an expression of doctrine and people who follow the Life and Work movement as works of diaconia or ethics. That relationship was not really going well all the time. I saw it as part of my task to bring them together and to understand that if we don't work together we cannot do what we intend to do. We cannot have theological reflection that doesn't breed hope.

Service can lead to controversy

The third issue which is a daily question is this; should the Church involve itself in discussions about hope? Should the Church say something that has political implications? Isn't that the task for others? What does it mean in a democracy like ours when the Church or its synods or its bishops say something that relates to the realm of politicians? For me, these are very strange questions because in our work in the World Council of Churches we constantly ask if there is any way of being Church without facing issues of suffering, conflict, injustice, exclusion, discrimination and so on. I think that we in a society like Norway like to think that theology is in its own sphere, but we can't agree. Theology is part of the public discourse. It is about the reality that we all live in.

It is interesting to note that some of those who criticise the Church will support it if it supports their own political views, and find it absolutely intolerable that the Church should speak about these issues if we don't support their views! I think we are in the middle of a democratic reality that is also part of being Church!

How to find a voice in the democratic process was a burning issue in the World Council of Churches. How do we make a contribution to assist people who are working for a better organised world? During the ten years I was involved we could recognise the need among many who were working for the United Nations organisations. We had to remind ourselves that the United Nations Charter speaks of the 'people', and that the 'people' need more than just the secular states to move things forward, and because we represent some of the people of the world we share that responsibility.

The right to hope is a universal right

Those are some of the issues which we must have in our minds when we consider being 'Pilgrims towards Hope'. One of the challenges I faced when I was General Secretary at the World Council of Churches was attending gatherings where I was expected to bring a faith perspective and to make a connection between human rights and the care of creation. The United Nations prepared their COP 21 meeting in Paris in 2015 and there I took the liberty of saying that there are not only some rights that we care about that will bring a better world, but that everyone has the right to hope – to hope that what is intolerable can be changed, things that are unfair, unjust, discriminatory, that create the kinds of conflicts we see today. Everyone has that right to hope.

This right to hope is not just one among many rights. Hope provides the key, the perspective through which all rights are viewed, the things that enable us to organise a better world. And we can do that using our Christian values alongside people of other faiths as well. As Christians we have a contribution to make. Therefore, there is a drastic crisis in ecumenical dialogue when basic human rights – to life, to livelihood, to security – are not just ignored but are actively attacked and with the blessing of one of the member Churches of the World Council of Churches [a reference, perhaps, to the Russian Orthodox Church's apparent support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine – Ed]. I think this unfortunately reminds us of where we come from, how the power of the state and the work of

the Church have for a long time been part of our history and politics. But there is no excuse for saying that it must always be like this. I would argue that the ecumenical movement has brought us to an understanding of what it means to be Church, and that there is no way of being Church unless you involve yourself in working for justice and peace – real justice and peace.

There is danger when this hope is denied

One of Metropolitan Kirill's texts recently published in the past couple of months was to me, as a Lutheran, a very real example of how we can abuse our tradition. As he reflected on the Cross of Christ he said that while some present Christ as they do in the Orthodox Churches as the Victorious Christ, and how even on the cross Christ is the one who brings victory over evil and over everything that breaks down or harms, there are some traditions in the West which show the Suffering Christ, and he spoke about that as something we in the West should overcome. But, to me, if we don't see the suffering of Christ as an expression of our faith in Christ who is in solidarity with the suffering creation and suffering human beings, we are not really bringing the message of our Christian faith and the Christian hope. Hope is not only the victory, but is also the promise of Christ's presence in our sufferings so that we can address the suffering of others. The ecumenical movement is struggling to know how to do this.

I was invited to a meeting in Geneva with other church leaders, and the intention was to meet with leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church as well. But his Eminence Hilarion didn't come, the first time because he had problems getting a visa for Switzerland, which was a problem that could be overcome, but the second time because he had been dismissed from his position and sent to Budapest without any mandate to do anything. But we felt we had to say something together, and we had to say something that was a voice of hope both for the Ukrainians and also for the Russians. Russians are also suffering from this war. We have to be clear that there is no way that this war can be justified, and especially not using Christian arguments. We said that relationships between the Churches cannot be broken because it would remove any possibility of our effecting change through common action that could bring hope. It's difficult to see how this can be done today but it reminded me of the beginnings of the ecumenical movement. It was against all the odds, but it became possible to bring together people who had been suffering through many conflicts and the Great War.

The ecumenical task is an ongoing challenge

I think we need to be a bit humble about how difficult the ecumenical task has been, and to confess that perhaps we have become used to a period of peace within the ecumenical movement towards which our predecessors had to strive as an expression of their hope. In many ways we have reaped the fruits of their labours. Now we see how difficult it can be. But this is not the time for us to say, 'We give up!' Now is the time to say 'This is our task!' But we don't know exactly what to do or how to do it. However, that doesn't mean that the task can't be done. I need to remind you that hope is only apparent when things are not as they should be. Hope is not some extra added value; it is what is necessary to effect change.

So how can Faith and Churches contribute to hope? In a country like ours [Norway] the Church is not always seen as a sign of hope. Sometimes it has spoken the powerfully words of exclusion. This year is 'Queer Year', and we have already seen attacks on the LGBTQ+ community. The shooting in Oslo [in a Gay Bar in Oslo on 25th June when two died and 21 were injured – Ed] could have been a massacre if it had not been stopped. We have to remind ourselves that this is always a risk in being Church; that we can also become an obstacle for people's hopes. We should not necessarily make a connection that says the Church is responsible for any particular event, but we do need to adopt a critical approach to our Church, to our theology and to the practice of our congregations.

A theology of transformation

For me, a deeper understanding of the Orthodox Churches' contribution to our ecumenical dialogue has shown me that incarnation is not just about God becoming a human being. It is a theology of transformation. At times like this we should remind ourselves of the significance of our understanding how our Triune God works in our world, in our lives and in our Churches. I can't move on without mentioning the name of Jürgen Moltmann, who is 95 years old and has lost the ability to speak, though he can still write. I was privileged to meet him twice at the World Council of Churches when he came to present new manuscripts for publication. In one of them he summarises what his theology of hope is. I quote: 'Hope for the ultimate without hope for the penultimate soon loses its force, or it becomes violent in order to extort the ultimate from what is penultimate.' (*The Living God and Fullness of Life*, tr Margaret Kohl, Geneva: WCC, 2016) Dominating knowledge establishes facts, participatory knowledge leads to community. A knowledge of possible change is the key to the future of peace and communities and evaluates their potentialities. Moltmann describes, in a much more elegant way than I, that hope must be an element in theology. It requires an eschatological element as well as an immanent element that shall bring justice and peace.

So, Christian hope is more than a general optimism. It is stating what we believe to be possible against what we see. But we should focus that hope in the way we believe, in the way that we work and in how we do our ecumenical work together – providing signs of hope that enable people to believe and to love. The words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 5 conclude my reflections here; 'Hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.'

Thank you for your attention and may God bless you all.

Questions and Comments

You spoke of hope for the whole world. How do you see inter-faith work intersecting with ecumenical work?

Preces Olav : One of the reasons people don't see the Church as a sign of hope is that too often they express it as 'WE believe in this and THE WORLD believes in something else.' That devalues the potential of the Christian message because if you believe in the Triune God, the Father as creator of all, Christ as the Saviour of all and the Holy Spirit as the life-giver of all, how can we be so limiting in defining what Christian hope is? How would it diminish our Christian hope if we were to say that it is for everyone? I think that some of our theology has been too divisive in a way that it didn't have to be. Some things in our Christian message **are** divisive and provoking, but perhaps not in the sense that some might experience something hopefully and some might not because the message of Christ has the potential for being affordable to all. As Christians we must speak of Christ, and of the hope that is his gift to the whole world.

Kirill's sermons and his remarks have caused a great deal of upset to people in Latvia and on the front line of the Ukraine conflict. I wonder where the limit is drawn. He seems to be heretical and promulgating a theology of division and hatred, which is alien to the Christian way of looking at things – reconciliation, unity, hope and all those good things. I do understand that the World Council of Churches doesn't go around dismissing people or Churches, even in times of Apartheid and so on, but I just wonder how long the Russian Church can go on supporting and in some ways inspiring what is going on in Ukraine, with the appalling violence and destruction, and the fear that others have that it will not stop with Ukraine.

Preces Olav : There is a line – and that is simply what is a Christian message and what is not a Christian message? We need to challenge these kinds of statements. There are some instruments we can use but there is a limit to how far they can go. It will be interesting to see whether, in the forthcoming General Assembly of the WCC, these kinds of statements are addressed or not. To exclude a Church from the WCC must come as a last resort, when all other courses of action have been exhausted. The Churches must walk the second mile before excluding a Church. But there is a mechanism for excluding a Church and in my time we did use it once, but only after about 30 years of discussion. It may be that opposition within the Russian Church is growing up.

Thank you for your suggestion that universal Hope is grounded and validated for Christians in Christ and in the resurrection, and the Holy Spirit is poured out on all people. What can we as Anglicans and Lutherans learn about hope from the Eastern Churches?

Preces Olav : The Feast of the Transfiguration is not part of Epiphany Season. It isn't about how God comes into the world but how he transforms the world. Lutherans believe in justification by faith, but that doesn't mean that the Christian faith doesn't imply transformation. How can you serve your neighbour? The dialogues with the Orthodox deserve more attention than they are given.

Thanks were expressed to Preces Olav.