



CULTA Religion and Multiculturality: Educational Pathways for Local Church Leaders

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Majority church and migration: A Norwegian case study

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International migration, be it voluntary or forced, is often discussed in terms of the push and pull factors that force or motivate people to uproot from their homes and resettle elsewhere. Common push factors are economic insecurity, political instability, persecution, conflict or war and in this perspective migration is an attempt to escape from difficult living conditions, social problems or perceived injustice. Pull factors are the opposite: opportunities in terms of economic security, education, political stability, freedom or relative peace. But migrating not only solves problems. Settling in a new place represents challenges both for the migrant and the countries and communities they settle into. Governments are called to make policies on immigration and integration, as well as illegal or undocumented migration. Similarly, civil society organisations, community groups and individuals are challenged morally and practically. How should they respond when strangers knock on the doors of their homes or present themselves at national borders? How should they handle

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political conflicts related to socio-economic insecurity and cultural and religious differences?¹

In the following I will examine the Church of Norway's response to international migration as this is expressed in official church documents and public statements made by representatives of the church. I will highlight the Church of Norway's responses to the immigrant Roma community in Norway and to current refugee and asylum policies. Using the concepts of nationalism, cosmopolitanism and social capital as analytical tools I will discuss the implied church-state relations in these responses.

I begin by first giving a more detailed presentation of Norway and the country's experience with migration and the role and position of the Church of Norway in Norwegian society. I then introduce the relevant theoretical perspectives before I analyse the various church responses to international migration.

State, society and migration

The Kingdom of Norway is a product of national romanticism and political nationalism. Political independence was first declared through the adoption of the national constitution of May 17 1814. This year thus saw the end of the dual monarchy of Denmark-Norway that had lasted for almost 400 years and a new correspondence between the ethnic community (Norwegian people) and political borders (the Norwegian state). Real-political negotiations demanded, however, a union with Sweden already the same year, but national

¹ Studies addressing such questions include among others Gibney 2004; Boswell 2005; Prill 2008 and Daniel 2010. See also the vast literature on multiculturalism, for example Kymlicka and Bashir 2008; Modood, Levey and Taylor 2009 and Triandafyllidou, Modood and Meer 2012.



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sentiments remained strong. In 1905 Norway also broke political ties with its neighbour in the east and presented itself (again) to the world as an independent nation state.

Situated in the very northern part of Europe and with a nationalist self-understanding as the country where Norwegians live and belong, Norway and Norwegian society came to be understood by (most of) its inhabitants as distinct and separated from other countries and the outside world. Accordingly, the notion of Norway as a homogenous country of and for Norwegians has deep roots and a long tradition in Norwegian culture and society, and is part of social life and the public debate even today (see Eriksen and Neumann 2011).

However, the history of Norway cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional narrative of seclusion, unity and homogeneity. In fact, as already noted, for five out of the last six centuries Norway has been politically integrated with other countries: Denmark and Sweden. International trade and shipping, as well as a remarkably high number of Norwegian missionaries abroad, add to the picture of a country closely integrated into a wider international context. In fact, the Norwegian constitution draws heavily on the American declaration of independence (1776) and the ideas of the French Revolution (1789). Undoubtedly, recent oil discoveries and growing globalization have increased Norway's participation in the international exchange of information and ideas, the global economy and related migration patterns. This has resulted in a profound contrast between the notion of Norway as distinct from the rest of the world and the more realistic understanding of Norway as an integrated part of a global, international order.

The phenomenon of migration precedes national borders, and the topic of migration is not new in Norway. Thousands of Norwegians migrated to the USA in the 19th century, and during World War II the Norwegian royal family, politicians, members of the resistance and others sought refuge in Sweden, the United Kingdom, Canada or the USA. In the period after

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World War II, the main migration flow has been the other way. A net emigration out of Norway has turned into net immigration into the country. Swedish and other Scandinavian immigrants have always been an important group, but have close cultural ties with Norway and integrate with relative ease into Norwegian society.² For such reasons, the group more often referred to in discussions about immigration into Norway are the non-European or non-Western immigrants, for instance the first Pakistani work immigrants who came in the 70s and later arrivals from Vietnam, the Horn of Africa, the Balkans etc.

Immigration into Norway is quite restricted and most non-Norwegian citizens need explicit permission to settle in the country. But there are also important openings. Norway has a shared labour market with the other Nordic countries and, although not an EU-member, Norway is also part of the common European labour market, as well as the Schengen agreement on free travel within several European countries. Accordingly, as long as they can provide for themselves, most EU citizens can travel freely to Norway. In addition, experts and other professionals in demand in Norway can seek residency based on their job opportunities in the country. Finally, Norway receives refugees and asylum seekers (as well as their family members) from countries in war and conflict such as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and others.

One consequence of these trends is that the cultural, ethnic and religious mosaic of Norwegian society is changing (Kjeldstadli 2008; Eriksen and Næss 2011). The growing cultural and religious pluralism is expressed in for example an increased number of

² In 2012 a total of 78570 persons immigrated into Norway, while 31277 emigrated. Most of the immigrants came from Poland (11477), Lithuania (6600) and Sweden (5782); <http://www.ssb.no/befolkning/statistikker/innvutv/aar/2013-05-02#content>, accessed 22.05.13. For more on the history of immigration to Norway, see Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008.

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immigrant organizations and faith communities.³ It is estimated that about 60 % of the non-Western immigrants to Norway have a Christian identity⁴, but the Muslim identity of many migrants is more visible in social life and seems to stir more public and political debates.

Church and migration

The Church of Norway is a majority church that dominates the religious landscape in Norway. Since the reformation in 1536 it has represented and proclaimed Lutheran Christianity in Norwegian society and the church has strong ties to both the state and the people. For centuries, and until 2012, it was a state church where the pastors were civil servants and the bishops were appointed by the government minister of church affairs. As a national *Folk*-church, the church serves the people of Norway. Historically the vast majority of the population has been members of this church, and even today this number remains relatively high: approximately 75 %.⁵

The Church of Norway's self-understanding is that it has a mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and work for compassion and justice in the world (Kirkemøtet 2004). Put differently, the church is called to do two things: to evangelize and to do diaconal work. To fulfil this mission, the church has a dual hierarchical organisation: an episcopal structure going from the local pastors to the bishops on the one hand, and a democratic, synodical structure from the local parish council to the national General Synod of the church on the

³ For more on the relationship between immigration and social and religious change in Norway, see Predelli 2006; Fuglerud and Eriksen 2007; Hagelund and Loga 2009; Loga 2011 and Loga 2012. For international studies on migration and religion, see ; Chafetz and Ebaugh 2002; Leonard 2005; Foley and Hoge 2007 and Levitt 2007.

⁴ <http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/norge/1.6902411>, accessed 22.05.13.

⁵ For a more comprehensive presentation of the Church of Norway in English, see Tveit, Olav Fykse: *A Church of Norway, but not of Europe*, <http://www.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5748> (accessed 22.05.13).



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other hand. This makes the church rooted in and oriented towards Norwegian society and the Norwegian people, and gives it a pronounced national character.

The Church of Norway's engagement with migration can be traced back to the increased labour immigration of the 1970s. The twofold mission to evangelize and to do diaconal work can be seen also in relation to immigrants. Partly they have been regarded as a mission field and partly they have been seen as people in need. By and large, the church's attitude has been positive and welcoming (Haugen 2010) and it partners with other organisations in the field. One such partner is the ecumenical organization Christian Intercultural Work (*Kristent Interkulturelt Arbeid, KIA*) that organises women's groups, multicultural gospel choirs, camps, seminars, courses, etc.⁶ Another example is a project organized by the Norwegian Christian Council called Church network for the integration of refugees and immigrants (*Kirkelig nettverk for integrering av flyktninger og innvandrere, Flyktningenettverket*). This project aims at strengthening the churches' involvement with refugees and immigrants in Norway and organizes courses, joint discussions and information sharing between various churches and local congregations, as well as government authorities and other actors. Resources for increased integration and tools for working in multicultural study groups have also been developed in an ecumenical partnership (Norwegian Christian Council 2012).

⁶ Publications by key staff members at KIA include Hatlehol 1991; Heitmann 1991; Østby 1999 and Opsal, Seierstad and Østby 1999. Publications from the Church of Norway include Kirkerådet 1989; Holme 1989; Hesselund 1998.



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Cosmopolitanism and social capital

Before looking more closely at the Church of Norway's response to international migration, it is important to note that the topic of migration can be dealt with from different perspectives and through the use of different argumentative discourses. I will highlight three of them. Firstly, a cosmopolitan discourse that emphasises the human worth and dignity of every human being, and secondly a discourse of integration that focusses on how immigrants meet, and are met by, the society they settle into. Debates concerning church-state relations and how the church responds to the current migration and integration policies of governments can be considered a third discourse.

A cosmopolitan discourse is at play for example when churches make international law and human rights a key concern in regards to migration. One example of this can be found in a statement given by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), an ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. At a meeting in 2011, the CCME argued that "[f]rom a Christian point of view every human being is created in the image of God. Therefore, human rights and dignity are non-negotiable regardless of the legal status of persons" (CCME 2011:29). This kind of statement also indicates how the cosmopolitan discourse is affiliated with the human rights discourse (Agamben 1998; Agamben 2005). Both adopt a universal approach and downplay, or outright reject, the political or moral relevance of national, ethnic, political or religious borders and divisions. People are first and foremost human beings, and the current international order is secondary to this. Cosmopolitanism thus contrasts with a nationalist stance that places strong emphasis on national, political borders and considers the existence of such borders the premise for the discussion on migration.

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Both cosmopolitan and nationalist discourses make themselves known in the churches' response to migration. In the case of the Church of Norway, this seems especially relevant. Being a church that draws on the Biblical notion of all human beings being created by God and in his image (Genesis 1), there are obvious universal elements in its values and world view. On the other hand, being a *Folk*-church, its identity is clearly national and its affiliation with a particular national community evident. Consequently, the tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism cannot be placed simply outside the church, but is an integral part of the church's self-understanding.

While the cosmopolitan discourse is of special relevance to international migration, the concept of integration relates more closely to the resettlement process and the relationship between migrants and the wider society into which they move. The concept of *social capital* is a key concept in this regard. This refers to the resources migrants bring with them and how they can utilise these resources when they settle in a new place, or in Robert D. Putnam's definition: "features of social life – networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1995:664-665). Putnam argues that social capital has two dimensions: *bridging* and *bonding*. When social capital is used to make links with groups other than one's own, bridges are built across perceived divides. This is the process of bridging. When social capital is used primarily to make links between people within the same group, it is a process of bonding (Putnam 2001).

These concepts of social capital, bridging and bonding, thus offer analytical categories that can be used in the analysis of the Church of Norway's response to international migration. To what extent does the church acknowledge the social capital of migrants, and how is this articulated and assessed? How does the Church of Norway engage

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in bridging with migrants and to what extent do migrants engage in bridging with groups and congregations in the church?

Church-state relations

The Church of Norway's responses to international migration can also be examined in light of the relationship between church and state. As explained, the church has a long history of being a state church with close ties to the majority ethnic group in the Norway. Over the last century, however, these ties between the Church of Norway and the Norwegian government have been gradually weakened. Through a compromise between all political parties in the Parliament in 2012 the status of the Church of Norway as a state church was formally abandoned. This allows the church to see itself more as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) than part of the official state bureaucracy, although the state continues to give extensive financial support to the church.

This kind of financial link between the government and other organisations or institutions both in the private and voluntary sectors, is common in Norway and an expression of a generous welfare state policy. Accordingly, such government ties are not something peculiar for the church or other religious bodies. Though critical analysis of this arrangement has been offered (Tvedt 2009), such ties are largely evaluated positively in the public debate. Against the claim that close ties inhibit a critical stance and civil society's role as a government watchdog, the argument is made that there is room for criticism in these relations and that they facilitate an on-going dialogue between the government and civil society groups. In other words, government funding does not necessarily mute criticism. This also applies to the Church of Norway and, in fact, on several occasions church officials have publicly criticised the Norwegian government.

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This kind of church participation in public debates gives witness to both the national and public role of the Church as well as its relative independence from the state and government. However, the church can, and does, participate in these public debates in different ways, and one can distinguish between examples of public, political and prophetic theology (Fretheim 2013). Firstly, when actively engaging in the public debate through church officials and using theological arguments and Biblical reflection, the church and its representatives engage in what can be called public theology. Theological perspectives are brought into and made relevant in public debates. Secondly, if the church more specifically criticizes and suggests policy measures to be implemented, it is doing not only public theology, but political theology. Theological perspectives are used to justify specific political decisions. A third version occurs when the church criticizes power, denounces exploitation, and speaks out against injustice. In such cases, the church's public involvement can be described as a way of doing prophetic theology. Theological perspectives are used to further radical political change along the lines of the Old Testament prophets.

One way of investigating how the Church of Norway responds to political and social issues is thus to ask how the church has placed itself within this typology in its engagement with international migration. This is the topic for the second half of this article.

Immigration and integration

As indicated above, the Church of Norway has responded to international migration in a number of different ways: as a call to preach and to serve, in words and deeds, at the national level as well as the local level of church and society. On its website, the church programmatically states:

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The Church of Norway wants to be an inclusive fellowship and works actively for an inclusive society. We know that one has to work politically and to change attitudes – both inside the church and in society in general - in order for Norway to become the generous, colourful and inclusive society that we want.⁷

In a comprehensive document on the church's identity and mission, the church also states: "When dealing with immigration in Norwegian society the Church of Norway wants to be a church where people can find a place to belong irrespective of ethnicity or language". (Kirkemøtet 2004:16-17). Similarly, the diaconal work of the church is guided by a vision to create inclusive communities through congregations that are open and inclusive (Kirkerådet 2009:16).

Through such statements the Church of Norway comes across as a church with a positive attitude towards immigration and with a commitment to contribute to their integration in Norwegian society at large and to facilitate bridging in local congregations of the church.⁸ It is also noteworthy how a positive attitude to cultural and ethnic pluralism refers not only to the wider society, but also to the church itself. The church states: "Based on one baptism and one faith the Church of Norway is an equal fellowship of men and women, old and young..." (Kirkemøtet 2004:8-9). At the 2006 General Synod the committee discussing integration similarly stated and emphasized that "[t]he church is a global fellowship built on a fundamental equality between all human beings, no matter culture or ethnicity".⁹ Theologically the church is not limited to one ethnic group, but unifies diversity

⁷ <https://www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=6891>, accessed 03.05.13. This an all of the following quotes originally in Norwegian have been translated by the author.

⁸ The Church Act states that parish councils are responsible for initiating and developing diakonia at the local level (Kirkerådet 2009:12).

⁹ <http://www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=38095>, accessed 22.05.13.

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on the basis of faith. In this way, and adopting an explicitly cosmopolitan discourse, the Church of Norway detaches its self-understanding from a (too) nationalist discourse.

Increased immigration has, however, resulted in an increased number of migrant churches in the Norwegian society. Often they are established on an ethnic basis, indicating that they are important arenas for bonding between members of these ethnic groups (Synnes 2012). Considering the ambition to be a multi-ethnic church, this represents a challenge to the Church of Norway. In its response to a government white paper on integration (NOU 2011:14), the Council on International and Ecumenical Relations (MKR) states:

... one will work systematically at including Christian immigrants in Norwegian congregations, increase contact locally and nationally between the Church of Norway and migrant congregations, and at developing strategies to increase the recruitment of immigrants to positions and appointments in the Church of Norway.¹⁰

This is in line with the recommendations of the report. In fact, the values and ideals of the government committee (democracy, rule of law, human rights, gender equality, freedom of speech, freedom of religion etc.) are fully supported by the Council on International and Ecumenical Relations.

Studies indicate, however, that there is a gap between these stated attitudes and intentions on the one hand, and local congregational life on the other. Although local clergy and church members have made a range of practical arrangements to integrate immigrants into various activities in the congregations, the intentions have proved difficult to put into practice. For such reasons, it has been suggested to consider multi-ethnic congregations as

¹⁰ *Høringsuttalelse fra Mellomkirkelig Råd for Den norske kirke på NOU 2011:14 Bedre integrering*, see www.kirken.no



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an ideal that can only be realised after migrant congregations have been established (Nilsen 2009).

Against this background, there seems to be an important cosmopolitan dimension to the church's approach to migration and integration. The equal worth and value of every human being is emphasised and is important to the understanding of both human beings and the Christian community. Integration on the other hand is perceived as goal, but also a challenge. Doubts are raised about the ability of the church to facilitate bridging across ethnic divisions in the work of the church. Further, the church participates actively in the public exchange on these issues, but largely by supporting the policies of the authorities. The church's statements seem to reflect a fundamental consensus between church and state and with a harmonious relationship between the two implied.

Roma people

A more specific topic that the Church of Norway has addressed in relation to international migration is the increase of foreign Roma people in Norway. The Roma are a subgroup of the larger Romani people and an ethnic minority in Europe. They are present in most European countries, but are a vulnerable group experiencing harassment and prosecution and often at risk of falling outside the established welfare systems (Council of Europe 2012).¹¹

Non-Norwegian Roma in Norway today experience the same kind of harassment and prosecution others have experienced before them and they themselves are familiar with

¹¹ In Norway, the initial government policies towards the Roma/Romani people were forced segregation, but was later adjusted towards forced assimilation (Johansen 2010). More recently the Norwegian authorities have recognized their cultural heritage and they are today considered one of five national minorities (together with Kvens, Jews, Forest Finns and Tater). An action plan to improve the living conditions for Norwegian Roma was published in June 2009 (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet 2009).



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from elsewhere. Most of them are EU citizens and are therefore able to travel freely within Europe as tourists or in search of employment. With the open borders and the current recession in Europe, Norway is attractive to many, but in general the Roma lack education and do not possess particular professional skills. For such reasons they have in a number of cases ended up begging and in conflict with the authorities. In the summer of 2012 newspapers could report that:

Around 200 migrants from south-eastern Europe, who claim to be looking for work in Oslo but mostly resort to begging, have landed in yet another conflict after settling in a privately owned gravel pit over the weekend. [...] The migrants, most of them Roma people from Romania and Bulgaria, were ordered to leave the grounds around Sofienberg Church in Oslo where they'd settled last week. After months of camping out under bridges and in city parks, repeatedly violating city sanitation laws in doing so, the migrants banded together and set up camp outside the church in Oslo's trendy Grünerløkka neighbourhood to seek refuge from what they claimed was police harassment. [...] Both city and church officials, the latter suspecting they were being used as pawns in the conflict, ordered the church camp disbanded.¹²

Responding to the situation developing in downtown Oslo, the bishop of Oslo, Ole Christian Kvarme asked the Roma to dismantle their camp outside the Church. He argued that the church could not solve the problems of this group. At the same time he committed to facilitating improved communication between the Roma and the authorities and said he would not ask for police assistance in clearing the camp outside the church.¹³

A somewhat different approach can be found among other church or church-related actors. Diaconal organisations such as the Oslo City Mission, the Salvation Army, but also a few local congregations within the Church of Norway have provided practical assistance to

¹² <http://www.newsenglish.no/2012/07/16/roma-campers-land-in-new-conflict/>; 16.07.12 (accessed 22.05.13).

¹³ <http://www.kirken.no/?event=dolink&FamID=301876>, accessed 22.05.13.



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the immigrant Roma in Norway. There has been a cultural event in *Tøyenkirken* and in the suburb of Haugerud local staff has tried to address prejudices and to change attitudes in Church of Norway congregations (Oslo bispedømmeråd 2013). In a letter to other congregations, the latter highlighted the need for a change of attitude in the local congregations and the need for short term assistance to the Roma people (showers, washing of clothes, accommodation, information about rules and regulations in Norway) as well as long term efforts to improve their living conditions and integration into the larger society.

Given that the Roma people are predominantly Christian, their presence challenges the church not only in its diaconal work, but in how it can be inclusive also in its worship and spiritual practice. This has proved to be as difficult as the diaconal tasks, but there is no lack of programmatic statements. A few months after the incidents in Oslo the bishop of Bodø, Tor B. Jørgensen, encouraged members of the church to “open the doors of the church and our hearts and invite Roma and other marginalised groups into the service and other parts of the life of the congregation”.¹⁴ Similarly, in a statement before Christmas the same year, key church officials stated: “All human beings are entitled to be met with respect and decency. The way we meet people, disclose our values and our compassion. It is all about human dignity”.¹⁵

In the case of the Roma community, the church’s engagement with migration thus comes across as an engagement through public theology, though with elements of political theology. In the case of the Roma outside the Sofienberg church the Church of Norway representatives did not prescribe specific policy measures, but spoke more generally about the dignity and worth of every human being. The current government policies were not

¹⁴ See <http://www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=doLink&famId=242334>, accessed 22.05.13.

¹⁵ <http://www.kirken.no/index.cfm?event=doLink&famId=242334>, accessed 22.05.13.

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challenged and the church response relied on a notion of a division of labour between state and church. By keeping the Roma community at arm's length, the church also seemed to rely on a national self-understanding, in a certain contrast to the cosmopolitan discourse often used. The social capital of the Roma community does not seem to be a prominent resource for the integration process otherwise called for by the church. There seems to have been made only a few practical efforts to integrate the Roma community into the church, although this issue is addressed in several public statements made by church officials. To some extent, however, local involvement in the Roma issue has included a more policy oriented approach and even some degree of political advocacy and criticism of current policies.

Refugees and asylum seekers

Another topic the Church of Norway has voiced concern about on several occasions is the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Norway. This involvement is presented by the church as an engagement “for a more generous and more humane asylum and refugee policy”, as this is “value politics and concerns human dignity”.¹⁶ Three different incidents illustrate the church's response to these issues.

In August 2008 a group of Afghan asylum seekers undertook a pilgrimage from Trondheim to Oslo. Norwegian church leaders expressed concern for their situation and sent a letter to congregations and staff in the Church of Norway where they stated that the Church of Norway is concerned that “Norway fulfils its international obligations and treats asylum seekers with respect and dignity”.¹⁷ They said they “see this situation as a diaconal

¹⁶ <http://www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=38094>, accessed 22.05.13.

¹⁷ <http://www.kirken.no/?event=showNews&famID=57748>, accessed 22.05.13.

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responsibility and encourage people and congregation in the Church of Norway to solidarity and diaconal support for the Afghans on their journey from Trondheim to Oslo”.¹⁸

More recently the white paper *Stortingsmelding nr. 27 (2011-2012) Barn på flukt* (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet 2012) stated that the present practise of returning children who have been in Norway for a long period is too strict considering the intention of the law and that the child’s interest and the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be given increased weight when considering their cases. In January 2012 the bishops responded to the white paper by participating in a country wide demonstration in support for these children. Thereafter, the General Synod adopted a statement saying that: “In the case that the law is an obstacle to a more humane asylum policy, we encourage Parliament to change the law”.¹⁹ The General Synod also stated that it is worried about “the development of Norwegian asylum policies” and is “in particular concerned about the approximately 450 children living as undocumented immigrants in Norway”²⁰.

Finally, in the beginning of 2013, the High Court decided that two nine year olds, Verona Delic (from Bosnia) and Mahdi Shabazi (from Iran), could be deported from Norway. Following this verdict the national broadcaster NRK reported that all bishops were disappointed and the meeting of bishops stated in February 2012 that “... it is, from a humanitarian point of view, unacceptable to return children who in fact have lived in Norway for several years”.²¹ The presiding bishop Helga Haugland Byfuglien argued that the “children who have stayed here for a long time must be given amnesty or their case should

¹⁸ <http://www.kirken.no/?event=showNews&FamID=57748>, accessed 22.05.13.

¹⁹ <http://www.kirken.no/?event=ShowNews&famId=280407>, accessed 22.05.13.

²⁰ <http://www.kirken.no/?event=ShowNews&famId=280407>, accessed 22.05.13.

²¹ *Troverdighet og medmenneskelighet*, BM 14/12, www.kirken.no

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be reconsideration based on a new regulation”²² and the bishop of Møre, Ingeborg Midttømme, said: “What I dislike strongly is that children who are born and raised in Norway, with their whole childhood here, now must carry the burden of being sent out of the country when they in fact do not have any affiliation to any other country but Norway”.²³

The underlying premise for these responses is clearly cosmopolitan. It is the concern for the dignity and rights of all human beings that brings the representatives of the church to challenge government policies and court decisions. Accordingly, in this case the church largely engages in not only public theology, but also political theology, addressing decisions made by politicians and suggesting alternative policies for implementation. Compared to the church’s response to integration in general and in line with some of the statements regarding Roma people, a more critical voice is heard when it comes to the issue of refugees and asylum seekers. The political voice of the church features more strongly, bringing tensions to the relationship between state and church.

Conclusion

Having examined how the Church of Norway has responded to the issue of international migration, both consistencies and contradictions emerge. It lies beyond the scope of this article to enquire into the reasons for such variation, but the complexity in the response of the Church of Norway to international migration has become clear.

In its encounter with migrants, the church acknowledges its position as a majority institution, being part of and representing the Norwegian establishment and the largest ethnic and religious group in the country. This is in contrast to the minority situation most

²² <http://www.kirken.no/?event=dolink&famId=332232>, accessed 22.05.13.

²³ http://www.dagsavisen.no/nyemening/alle_mening/catl003/subcat1010/thread262060/#post_262060, accessed 22.05.12.



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migrants and immigrants in Norway find themselves in. The church has also made inclusion into the church an explicit aim in a manner similar to the state's policy of integrating immigrants into Norwegian society. The Church of Norway programmatically states the intention and vision of being an inclusive church for all, irrespective of ethnicity, language etc., though the ability to put this vision into practice seems limited. The church largely seems to remain an arena for ethnic bonding rather than bridging. Although, there is a strong element of cosmopolitanism in the church's approach to the issue of refugees and asylum seekers, there seems to be less of an emphasis on their social capital and contribution to Norwegian society.

On the issue of integration in particular the church largely speaks with the same voice as the government. The church-state relationship is by and large defined by a spirit of cooperation and negotiation. In general the Church of Norway supports the immigration and integration policies of the Norwegian state, but challenges its policies on more specific issues: Roma community and refugee and asylum policies. This brings some tensions to the relationship between state and church, but even in these cases there is a strong sense of cooperation and negotiation.

The church's response to international migration is also marked by its public role. Church officials engage in public theology and on some of the more controversial issues it explicitly criticises current policies and suggests alternative political choices. The analysis shows, however, little evidence of a more prophetic role of the church. The cosmopolitan notion that humans are first and foremost human beings not citizens of particular countries and the related rejection of national borders is not expressed through a vision of an alternative: the borderless, global community. The church proclaims human rights and is a witness of cosmopolitanism, but does not challenge the status quo in any radical way. As this can be

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considered an important part of the Christian contribution in the public sphere, it seems this is a dimension of the churches' response to migration that could be strengthened.

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