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The Confessional Movements in the Scandinavian Countries

Jan Bygstad

I. A Brief History of the Scandinavian Churches after the Reformation

To understand properly the contemporary situation of the confessional movements in the Scandinavian churches requires an outline of the post-Reformation history of those churches. The state-church system that is still prevalent in the Nordic countries has resulted in certain distinctive characteristics that would otherwise be incomprehensible. This paper concentrates on the situation in Norway, both because it is the situation with which the author is most familiar, and because the situation is essentially similar in the other Scandinavian countries.

There are two features that uniquely distinguish church life in the Scandinavian countries. The first is the state-church system. The second is the role of the free lay organizations. These two features condition each other to the point that the strong position held by the lay organizations is unthinkable without the state-church system.

For more than 400 years (1319/97-1814) Norway was united with Denmark. In the beginning this was a union between equal partners, but the Great Plague (1349) so impoverished Norway, that she gradually became totally dependent on Denmark. With the Reformation in Denmark-Norway, Norway lost the remainder of her political sovereignty. The last Roman archbishop's (Olav Engilbreksson in Nidaros) struggle against the king's reformation was not only a religious contest, but also a battle for Norway's national independence. Archbishop Olav played on the strings of nationalism in a futile attempt to retain Norway for the Roman Catholic Church. By the time Olav fled in April 1537, Norway had nearly become a Danish colony. The new king in Denmark, Kristian III, was crowned in 1536, and in 1537 he formally introduced the Reformation in Denmark-Norway. In that year the first Lutheran Church Order (*Kirkeordinantsen av 1537*), was introduced and Bugenhagen came to Copenhagen to ordain the first Lutheran bishops.

The Reverend Jan Bygstad is from Bergen, Norway. He is a pastor in the Church of Norway and president of the Northern European Luther Academy.

This ordination caused a decisive ecclesiastical rupture. First, because Denmark-Norway now had an episcopate that did not have "apostolic succession," which was a fundamental break with canonical law. Second, because the new bishops did not keep the title of "Bishop," but were called "Superintendents." It was the king who was "Summus Episcopus" in the church.

The Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, along with the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, served as the theological basis for the new national church. Politically, the king was the absolute ruler and sovereign in his country, and his sovereignty included command of the church. The king gave and approved all laws concerning ecclesiastical matters, and he alone had the right to appoint the superintendents. In this way the ministers of the church also became the king's officials, and representatives of his absolute power. The Lutheran idea of the general or spiritual priesthood of all Christians provided the basis for the king's supremacy by giving him the status as the foremost within this priesthood.

Cultural unity in the European nations at this time was safeguarded by the king and only one religion was allowed: *Cuius regio, eius religio* (whose region, his religion). This maxim does not necessarily demand, however, that the king should be the absolute sovereign of the church. Yet in Denmark-Norway this is indeed what happened during the Reformation.

Later, the king explicitly bound the church of Denmark-Norway to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, but also denied full acknowledgment of the Book of Concord. Thus the churches in Denmark and Norway are two of the few Lutheran churches in the world without the Book of Concord as their basis. One of the leading Lutheran dogmaticians in Norway in this century, Professor Leiv Aalen, somewhere said that "Perhaps it may be possible to be a Lutheran *without* the Book of Concord, but it is not possible to be a Lutheran *against* the Book of Concord!" This statement has had no little significance to many within the confessional movements in Norway.

In Sweden and Finland (which were one united kingdom at the time), the Reformation took quite a different course. It was not centered in royal policy, but a deeper and slower process within the church itself, in which the church vigorously defended herself against the king's repeated attempts to subdue her under his authority. The final result was a church

that, by her own decision, was reformed "from head to foot," and also acknowledged the Book of Concord as the genuine expression of her faith (during the "Uppsala" meeting in 1593). It is only in this century that the Church of Sweden has fully come under the disgraceful bondage of the state, and this happened when the church got her own council (or synodical meeting) for which the delegates to a large extent were *politically* elected. In this way the political parties are ruling the church, and there has been neither the power nor the will to break loose from this ideological bondage. In Sweden this has led to the banishment of candidates for the ministry who confess the orthodox faith. The formal basis for this is mainly feministic. Candidates who do not accept female ministers and refuse to cooperate with them are not ordained in Sweden today. Also, there are no longer any Swedish bishops who oppose the homosexual movement, but rather they radically support it. This came to its utmost point around July 1998, when the archbishop of Sweden opened the main church (the national sanctuary) in Uppsala to an utterly blasphemous exhibition of paintings portraying our Lord and His disciples in a homosexual context.

When Norway got her own constitution in 1814, §2 in the constitution stated that "The evangelical Lutheran religion remains the public religion of the state," and the king and his government were obliged to confess this faith. But during the breakthrough of the parliamentary system in 1884, the national assembly became the *de facto* head of the church. The representatives of the parliament were no longer confessionally bound. At first, this had no obvious consequences for the church. During our century, however, and especially after World War II, it has become increasingly evident that it is the secular state that is ruling the church. This has resulted in a situation where most of the church leaders today oppose the state-church system and desire some kind of free church, but the politicians of the parliament want to keep the church under their sway.

Still, the state-church system embraces most of the population of Norway. Twenty-five years ago, ninety-six percent of all Norwegians were members of the church, a membership obtained through baptism. Today, about ninety percent of the population are members of the church.

The second feature that distinguishes the Scandinavian churches is the role of the lay organizations. These organizations are numerous and fairly

large, most of them (apart from the Bible society) being for outer or inner mission. The roots of the free organizations are in the great revivals of the nineteenth century. These came in two waves. The first was through the awakening led by Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824) in the beginning of the nineteenth century. This revival was a kind of "sanctity-awakening" and was included with a strong pietistic character. It therefore often became very legalistic. This awakening swept through the whole of southern Norway, and made a deep and lasting impact on the population. Even today, 200 years later, one can sense Hauge's legacy. In areas where Hauge visited there are still prayer houses and an active Christian life, and areas where he did not go are usually spiritually barren.

The second wave broke upon Norway through the leadership of Swedish preacher C. O. Rosenius (1816-1868). It is not too much to say that "Rosenius saved Hauge," meaning that Rosenius had a genuine understanding of the Lutheran heritage and a clear grasp of law and gospel, which he was able to apply personally in his preaching and writings. This brought most of the Norwegian (and Scandinavian) lay movements into a more consciously Lutheran mainstream and gave it a clear Lutheran identity. Lay people, little by little, started building their own mission-houses (in Norway called *bedehus*, houses of prayer). Lay preachers traveled the country, holding their meetings in these buildings. The gatherings were also led by lay people. This movement, rooted in the prayer houses, formed the basis of the various missionary organizations that were established in the nineteenth century: the Norwegian Missions Association (1842), the Norwegian Mission to Israel (1844), the Norwegian Seamen's Mission (1864), the China Mission (1891), two large societies for inner mission, and so forth. These organizations have been driven by a genuine zeal for the salvation of the lost, and have made Norway the largest country in world-wide mission, in terms of the number of missionaries sent out in relation to the total population.

The stress on lay preaching and missionary work was theologically motivated by the Lutheran teaching about the priesthood of all believers. Sociologically, the *Konventikkelplakaten* ("Law concerning religious gatherings"), which forbade laymen preaching or gathering around the word of God without the official minister being present, drove the movement forward. This law led to Hauge's imprisonment in 1804, which lasted for almost ten years. The law was first annulled in 1842, but had

created a lot of enmity against many officials of the state church, who had urged that the law be enforced. Therefore, radical anti-clericalism is a significant feature of the lay movements in Norway. This anti-clericalism has, in some organizations and in various areas of Norway, resulted in the fact that believers with a strong and clear biblical confession almost never go to church. The slogan has been "In the church but not under the church." The ministers in the local parishes often were looked upon with a high degree of suspicion, not because they were heretics, but because they were labeled as "high-church." The clergy, therefore, were often not trusted as leaders within several of these organizations.

The anti-clericalism within the free church organizations was also often accompanied by a strong anti-liturgical attitude. This attitude had its roots in a minimalistic view of church order and a certain spiritualistic ecclesiology coming from Reformed influences in England (especially the Plymouth Brethren). During the first decades of the nineteenth century a few of the radical lay organizations also won the legal right to distribute holy communion without an ordained minister of the church being present. In this one sees the radical and logical consequence of the slogan "In the church but not under the church." This legal right contributed significantly to the antagonism that existed between parts of the clergy and the free organizations.

In the last half of the twentieth century this antagonism has decreased. It has become commonplace to compare Norwegian Christianity to an ellipsis: As an ellipsis has two centers, so does the church. The one center is the local parish, where the local minister is the leader. The other is the prayer house, where the laity are in charge, and where one will also find a strong engagement in missionary activity. The point in the example of the ellipsis is to portray the relationship between church and prayer house not as competitive or hostile, but as complementary. There also is a growing feeling of unity between the biblically-oriented laity and orthodox ministers of the church, a unity occasioned and strengthened by the spiritual need and doctrinal decay of the official church.

II. Spiritual Development in the Scandinavian Churches in the Twentieth Century

Scandinavian Christianity in this century has mirrored the experience of Protestantism in the West. Modernism and liberal theology have made

an increasing impact on church life. They have resulted in fierce battles over the fundamentals of faith, division and schism within the churches, and in the marginalization of confessional groups and the biblical faith.

The shift in Norway began in 1904, when a liberal, Johannes Ording, was appointed professor of systematic theology at the University of Oslo, which at that time was the only faculty educating candidates for the ministry in Norway. This led to the resignation of a leading orthodox professor in New Testament theology, Sigurd Odland. With the support of the laity and the free organizations, he was able to establish a free theological faculty in 1907, the *Menighetsfakultetet*. Six years later, in 1913, this faculty received its legal right from the Norwegian parliament (*Stortinget*) to graduate candidates for the ministry. In this there was also an acknowledgement of the sufficient academic level of the faculty.

Along with this there was a difficult theological battle going on in the media, both on the academic theological level, and in the newspapers. The main issues in this controversy were the basic points in the second article of the Apostles' Creed: the virgin birth, Christ's divine nature, His atoning death, and His corporeal resurrection. Of course, behind this was the question of the status and authority of Holy Scripture. After four years of truce during World War I, the controversy burst out again in 1919. The reason for this was that several mildly conservative leaders within the church now deemed it necessary to cooperate with the liberals. Professor Ole Hallesby quickly became the leader of the opposition to this development.

Hallesby had been appointed professor in dogmatics at *Menighetsfakultetet*. While having a background in the liberal camp, he had since experienced a radical conversion, which also made him a determined enemy of the liberal phalanx. He was indeed both fearless and outspoken, and led an intelligent campaign against the liberals, which won him confidence both from conservative ministers and from the lay organizations. Theologically Hallesby had his background in the Erlangen-school and in Pietism.

During the winter of 1919-1920 two important events occurred. First, the initial confessional organization of Scandinavia was founded. Its name was *Bekjennelsestro Presters Broderkreds* ("Brotherhood of Ministers Faithful to the Confession"). It was not an organization open to laity. The organization's name was later changed to *Foreningen for Bibel og*

Bekjennelse (FBB, "The Association for Bible and Confession"), and some thirty years ago was opened also to laymen. This organization today counts about twenty to twenty-five percent of all ministers within the official church as members.

Second, in late January of 1920 there was a large meeting in Calmeyergaten Mission House in Oslo, which drew representatives from all the lay organizations in the country. The leaders were Dr. Hallesby and the chairman of the Inner Mission, Mr. Fredrik Wisløff. The meeting produced two resolutions, later labeled "The Calmeyergate Program," which were adopted almost unanimously. The first resolution stated that Christians wanting to be faithful to God's revelation "are not to enter into voluntary cooperation with those who have broken away from the authority of the Bible." The second noted that "Within the free Christian work we will keep watch that only people who are unreservedly standing on the fundamentals of Holy Scripture as our church is witnessing it in her Confession will be elected and called as representatives or workers." Dr. Hallesby also wanted the assembly to support a separation between church and state, but this did not obtain sufficient support.

During the following ten years the liberal influence was broken within most of the church, and the liberals were silenced for several decades. Yet, no steps were taken to deprive the liberals of their positions in the church! The leaders in the official church were content that their mouths were closed and their influence repressed.

The "Calmeyergate program" recognized that the Church of Norway was a divided church. It became an accepted opinion that within the outward church body two churches were living side by side: the true church, which is Christ's body, and the false one, which is the harlot of Babylon. In consequence this meant a break in church fellowship: *Nulla communio in sacris cum hereticis et schismatici*. The result is that for several years the Church of Norway experienced the peculiar situation that within the same church body there was a break in church fellowship. This break had, for most of this period, been among the lay mission organizations and the liberal teachers and ministers of the official church. However, with the emerging issue of homosexuality, public and outspoken breaks between minister and minister and between minister and bishop became the rule.

Some fifteen years after World War II, the church went into the second stage of her struggle with liberal theology. Now it was no longer the fundamentals of faith or basic points regarding the Bible that were at stake, but a question that to most people seemed to be a "small" one and seemed only to have implications on church order: the question concerning female ministers. Already in 1937 the Norwegian parliament had voted in favor of this reform and had approved a law concerning the matter. The first woman was ordained in 1961 by the liberal bishop in Hamar. (Denmark and Sweden were a few years ahead of Norway.) This led to strong opposition from the other bishops and from the rest of the church. Again, however, the opposition restricted itself merely to verbal statements. The confessional leaders did not take any binding actions against this ecclesiastical way of taking the law into one's own hands. Seven years later only three more women had been ordained. But now the social democratic government was appointing one bishop after another who was willing to ordain women, and the process gained momentum. Presently one finds no bishops in Norway, Denmark, or Sweden who oppose the ordination of women and in Finland there is only one. There are a growing number of female ministers in Scandinavia: in Sweden today about fifty percent of the clergy are women; in Denmark and Norway the percentage is much lower, but steadily increasing. In 1993, Norway was one of the first Lutheran churches in the world to have a female bishop, Rosemarie Köhn in Hamar. She is clearly liberal and a strong advocate on behalf of the gay movement, which reflects her general antinomian perspective. One of the most revealing facts concerning her appointment were the words that were uttered by the secretary of state who appointed her. As a representative of the social democratic party he said that "our Lutheran faith has always been built on the acknowledgment that man can obtain new understanding," and that in this respect modern society has to be the teacher of the church, which is too attached to antiquated views. As he put it: "The king (through his cabinet) leads the way, the church follows." In many ways, this is sadly true in Norway.

This reform had a profound and deep impact on most of Norwegian Christianity and has led to certain significant consequences for the confessional movement. First, it gradually broke down the common opinion in many parts of lay Christianity about biblical inerrancy. Because the people within the lay movements usually did not want to

establish their own congregations with separate administration of the sacraments, they went to church when they wanted their children baptized. Very often they let themselves be ministered to by female clergy. Of course this involved a growing accommodation to the situation, and a de facto breakdown in the conscious resistance against the liberal forces. One event that confused the situation was when the conservative free theological faculty, founded by Prof. Odland back in 1907, turned around and accepted women's ordination in 1973. This has led to the bewildering feature in Norway that it is possible to be deemed a conservative theologian even if one accepts women pastors.

The third important stage in the spiritual development within the Scandinavian churches came at the close of the twentieth century. The 1990s were a time predominantly characterized by the homosexual issue, and a bitter battle took place in all mass media and on every level within the church. In Norway homosexuality was decriminalized in 1972. Twenty-one years later (1993) Norway followed Denmark and became among the first countries in the world to institute a law establishing a marriage-like partnership between persons of the same sex. This relationship did not receive the name "marriage," but persons living in such a partnership had the same legal status as married couples, with one exception: they did not yet have the right to adopt children. The gay organizations have become a major force in public opinion. They dominate television and the press, and are running a very efficient campaign to achieve two goals: they want the legal right to adopt children, and they want to bring the church to her knees. The reason that these organizations are targeting the church is the acknowledgment that the church is the last moral force in society resisting their lifestyle. Within the churches the gay organizations have a strong and cunning ally in the theological modernists. They have demonstrated an exceptional ability in obtaining leading positions within the church. The aims they are aspiring to reach in the church center on two specific points. First, ecclesiastical acceptance of homosexuals living in partnership as ministers, and second, a church rite for marriage of persons of the same sex.

In Denmark and Sweden the first issue is no longer a matter of discussion. There is a growing number of openly gay and lesbian ministers. On the second point the bishops of these two countries have taken a formal procedure, and have taken the issue into further

consideration. Sweden has yet to make any formal decision on the matter. The Danish bishops made a statement in the autumn of 1997 where they abstained from introducing a church rite. Instead, they made it a voluntary matter whether a minister would pray to sanctify such a relationship, and expressly stated that they could not see that "living in a homosexual relationship was in contradiction with the article on justification by faith."

In Norway things have not gone as smoothly for the homosexual activists (it is common to say that Norway is ten years behind Sweden in most matters of this kind). Among eleven bishops in the Church of Norway there are now four supporting the gay organizations (the fourth being the former general secretary in the Lutheran World Federation, Gunnar Stålsett, who was appointed bishop in Oslo in 1998). On the other hand, the whole political establishment is supporting the gay activists. The bishops' biannual meetings have long been regarded as the institution giving the church's public standing on various theological and also political issues. Therefore the bishops always have aspired to give unanimous public statements. They seek this because they see themselves as having the "office of unity" in the church. During the spring meeting in 1995 this unity broke down precisely on the homosexual issue, and the bishops came out with a divided statement. There were eight bishops with a conservative and three with a liberal stand. What was really serious in this statement was that the conservative bishops, in a vain attempt to avoid the growing antagonism in the church, expressly stated that the aberrant view was not heretical, but only an "opinion" that was both feasible and legitimate within the framework of the Christian faith. Thus they expressly said that practicing gays and lesbians were not to be denied the Holy Sacraments, but on the contrary, they were to be included in the fellowship and worship of the local congregations. Second, living in a homosexual relationship was in contradiction to God's will, but not a sin. Finally, having different opinions on this matter did not and should not destroy the unity within the church.

Thus even the conservative bishops reduced the importance of the question to the realm of *adiaphora*, something that created an indignant and terror-stricken reaction throughout most of the Church of Norway. The motivation of the bishops for this was first—under the strong hand of its *preses* (*primus inter pares*) bishop Andreas Aarflot in Oslo—to try and rescue what was left of ecclesiastical unity, and secondly to rescue the

church from a critical collision with the politicians of the parliament, which would have meant a deep crisis for the whole state church system.

Much has happened in the Church of Norway since then, but it seems that the outcome of it all is that the church system has as its prime goal its own survival, and this goal is being achieved through theologically ambiguous statements that aim not to provoke the ruling forces in society too much. "Truth is the first victim in war," as Winston Churchill said.

III. The Confessional Movements in the Scandinavian Countries

As noted earlier, the first confessional organization in Scandinavia, *Foreningen for Bibel og Bekjennelse*, was founded in Norway in 1919. Corresponding organizations in the other Scandinavian countries were not found before the 1960s. In Sweden, "Ecclesial Gathering around Bible and Confession" (*Kyrklig Samling*) was founded around 1965, the intention being to gather all Bible-believing organizations under one "umbrella" in a network-like fellowship. The leading force here was the renowned and exceptionally gifted bishop Bo Giertz. The occasion causing the creation of *Kyrklig Samling* was primarily the ordination of women, an issue that has been causing an almost persecution-like situation for orthodox ministers in Sweden because of the strong feministic influence in society.

Denmark has seen a slowly growing confessional movement, which began when a group of ministers issued a statement in 1964 called "The Yes and No of the Church." This group of no more than eleven ministers soon received the name of the statement associated with them, and about ten years later the movement was formed into an organization having almost the same name as her Swedish counterpart (*KSBB*).

During the 1960s the confessional movements in all the Scandinavian countries faced somewhat of a turning point. Until then the orthodox stand had represented the mainstream in church life. In spite of fierce theological controversies during the past decades, orthodoxy was in the majority and set the tone on all levels within the church. With the issue of the ordination of women, however, this situation changed radically within a period of ten years. From representing the ecclesial mainstream, the orthodox faith gradually was reduced to a minority and was soon

seen as sectarian. Norway experienced two special features in this area that distinguished it from Denmark and Sweden.

First, a set of ecclesial rules was drawn up called "the traffic regulations," which aimed at avoiding conflicts and collisions. These "traffic regulations" gave orthodox ministers the right to withdraw from fellowship with female ministers and from all kinds of cooperation that compromised their convictions. The "traffic regulations" have been widely accepted by all parties in the church, and have reduced the conflict level considerably. The problem, though, is that these regulations imply and admit a pluralistic view on these sorts of questions, a fact that has been overlooked to an astonishing degree.

Secondly, the Church of Norway gradually developed a new "establishment" at its top level. This establishment was in favor of women's ordination, yet, at the same time, defined itself as conservative and as the ecclesial center. From their "centrist" position they politically defined the two "wings" of the church, the left wing being the liberals, and the right wing the orthodox. The orthodox side had perhaps as many as four times the number of the liberals. In 1977, Andreas Aarflot became bishop in Oslo and *preses* among the bishops. He was an extremely strong and able bishop, and he claimed to be theologically conservative. During his episcopacy, which lasted until 1998, he followed a determined church policy. He effectively excluded the right wing from every influential position in the church, thus marginalizing the orthodox faith and wiping it out from the public testimony of the church. On the other hand the left wing was included as part of the church's apparatus on every level in spite of their (until then) relatively small representation. The reason for this was largely political: to achieve his goals in reform policy, Aarflot deemed it necessary to stay on good terms with the political establishment. One of the main means for this was to create a kind of "balance" between the liberal and the conservative camp. The orthodox camp was labeled "irresponsible" because they easily could provoke a crisis in the relationship between church and state. The price of this church policy has been a kind of institutionalized pluralism within all councils of the church. Even the new council for doctrinal matters (founded in 1987), which has the task of keeping doctrinal discipline, is pluralistic in this way.

Denmark and Sweden had no equivalent to the "traffic regulations." In Sweden this meant that when the feministic wave came in the beginning of the 1970s, orthodox belief and practice very soon became socially unacceptable. Feminism has, more or less, become the central issue to confessional Lutheranism in Sweden in its struggle to maintain its integrity. It has become the cause of banishment of orthodox candidates from the ministry. The Church of Sweden today is utterly pluralistic. One can believe or preach whatever one likes, and live any way one pleases, but if one is against women's ordination one is excluded from the ministry.

The question of female ordination had a healthy influence on the confessional movement in Norway. During the fifty some years since the founding of the *Foreningen for Bibel og Bekjennelse* (FBB), there has always been clarity concerning the central doctrinal points. But this had been coupled with a feeling of self-security—after all the confessionals also represented the mainstream. Within a few years this changed. The new situation forced a new consciousness, not only on biblical and doctrinal matters, but also in reflection on ecclesiology: What are the ecclesiological consequences of heresy as well as church disorder? The Norwegian confessionals received strong impressions from the Swedish situation, and in 1969 the organization "Renewal of the Church" (*Kirkelig Fornyelse, KF*) was founded. This was a kind of "high church" movement, and its goal was the renewal of the church through the renewal of her prayer life and liturgy. *KF* never has had more than 120 members, and most of them were also members of *FBB*. *FBB* had, until then, been somewhat indifferent in ecclesiological matters, and it united "high church" and "low church" theology. This gradually changed, and for seven years during the 1980s *FBB* had a most able chairman, Asle Dingstad, who also had his spiritual home in this "high church" movement.

In the 1970s Norway experienced a harsh battle around the question of abortion. The social democratic party finally won the battle in the parliament, which resulted in a law on free abortion in 1975. This led to two sensational episodes in the church. The day that the parliament voted for abortion, the bishop who most strongly had opposed this in the public, Per Lønning, resigned. This won him enormous respect within the church. Secondly, a year later, a parish minister in northern Norway, Børre Knudsen, resigned from that half of his office which implied loyalty to the government, but at the same time maintained his congregational

and ecclesial duties. He therefore refused to receive wages and to answer mail from the government. He argued that a state, which publicly had renounced its duty as a Christian state through giving laws that were anti-Christian, no longer had any legal right to govern the church. This he substantiated by referring to the special Norwegian confession which was made during World War II, "The Fundament of the Church" (*Kirkens Grunn* from 1942), where the Church of Norway as a whole broke with the Nazi state, and at the same time maintained its work as the Church of Norway. The bishops and ministers also declined their wages from the government. Børre Knudsen's bishop protected him, and the government therefore could not touch him. But as soon as the bishop resigned, the government appointed a new one who would be at its disposal in this matter. Pastor Knudsen was put to trial and deprived of his ministry. His case had to be tried, even up to the Supreme Court. Here the sentence did not confine itself to the isolated case of Pastor Knudsen, but also gave a juridical opinion on the relationship between church and state. The essence of this was found in the sentence "The state is the church!" — a sentence that de facto deprived the church of the right of self-determination.

During the 1980s, two more pastors were deprived in court of their ministries on the same grounds. These three continued as ministers in small congregations that followed them and were willing to support them, and formed a union called *Strandebarm prosti*. A large number of pastors within the confessional movement founded a supporting network, especially on behalf of Børre Knudsen, the network simply being called "The Contact Net." The significance of these events to the confessional movements was that it forced new reflection on the relationship between church and state. Seeing how the state wanted ideological control of the church in such manner, these events led to a more determined opposition to the whole system. On the other hand it seemed that the bishops were only too willing to be the obedient servants of the government when it came to church order, and this led to a growing distrust between the confessionals and the bishops.

In 1991 a new confessional organization was founded, "Joint Deliberation on the Fundamentals of the Church" (*Samråd på Kirkens Grunn*, SKG). The core of this new organization was the "Contact Net" (which now was dissolved). Its aim, however, was not primarily theological consciousness (as FBB), nor liturgical renewal (as the KF), but

to establish a practical alternative to the Church of Norway, and through this, to prepare for an exodus. Norway was divided into five areas each led by a "Guide" (there still was no move to appoint and ordain an alternative bishop). The strategy was first to make what was called an "inner exodus," establishing an ecclesial substructure within the church, and then, in time, to prepare for the real exodus. This was seen as a bold step by the establishment of the official church, and led to rather harsh reactions in the press.

Unfortunately, the leadership of SKG consisted exclusively of persons from the "high church" movement. These had, very much inspired by their Swedish connections, become increasingly open towards Anglican and Roman Catholic Christianity. They were strong leaders—to a certain extent rather strong-willed—and, in spite of widespread skepticism, dragged the organization into fellowship with the Anglican confessional movement "Forward in Faith" (which was formed in 1994 in opposition to the opening of the Anglican church to female ministers), and a few years later via this connection also with the "Polish National Catholic Church" in the United States. When the organization was asked to revise this direction, and instead consider an alternative Lutheran network consisting of Lutheran confessional movements and Lutheran churches that were intact, the leadership voted against this with the consequence that the organization cracked (in the autumn of 1996), and the conscious confessional Lutherans left. This breakdown created deep wounds and a feeling of depression and resignation among most of the confessionals. A year later some of the central leaders of SKG converted to Roman Catholicism and also brought with them a number of theological students.

These events took place at the same time the controversy around homosexuality was at its peak in Norway. As noted above, during the spring of 1995, the bishops issued a divided statement. This statement provoked a joint reaction from the three confessional groups in Norway, which at that time still shared a strong feeling of unity. It comprised three points. It stated the biblical teaching on this matter, pronounced the three bishops teaching against the biblical doctrine "heretics," and advised no Christian to listen to nor stay in fellowship with them, and finally, recommended that every minister who was serving in their dioceses break communion with them, that is, no longer accept them as bishops,

not celebrate service with them, and not administer Holy Communion to them.

This happened during the author's time as chairman of the *FBB*, and it certainly led to quite an uproar. During the following year a number of confessional ministers broke fellowship with these bishops. The most prominent one in southern Norway was Asle Dingstad (former chairman of the *FBB*), who was now dean in the small city of Larvik, serving under the heretical Bishop Osberg.

In northern Norway events turned in a more radical direction. The pastors who broke with their heretical bishop asked the government to give them an alternate bishop, as according to Norwegian church order it is both a "right and a duty" for a minister to have spiritual supervision. This request was denied them, and some of them consequently took measures to ordain their own bishop, the aforementioned Børre Knudsen. Knudsen enjoys a deep respect among believers because of his hearty witness and uncompromising stand all the years since he broke with the state, a stand that to him personally has had a considerable price. The ordination took place on April 6, 1997, based on the wording in the *Treatis on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (66 - 72), and on Martin Luther's letter of 1523 to the congregation in Leisnig ("*That a Christian Congregation Has the Right to Judge Every Doctrine and Call Ministers*," WA 11, 408 - 416).

This led to two responses. First, the ministers in northern Norway who ordained Bishop Knudsen were put on trial, and, in late 1999, were in court. The liberal bishop could not tolerate this kind of rebellion, which in his eyes endangered the "unity" of the church, a unity of which he as bishop was the symbol. The sentence has not yet fallen. Second, Asle Dingstad did not join in the ordination of an alternate bishop, but because of his high position in the church (as dean, *Prost*) he has caused a considerable amount of distress to his liberal bishop. The bishop, therefore, at last put him on trial before the Church's doctrinal committee. The question that he wants to put to the test is whether it is in accordance with the doctrine of the unity of the church to deny having fellowship with the bishop. Dingstad, in turn, has put this question before the tribunal: "Is it in accordance with the gospel (referring to Augsburg Confession VII) to accept homosexual practices?" He publicly stated that anything less than a clear "No" to this question would lead to his resignation from the Church of Norway. The doctrinal committee of the

Church of Norway gave its verdict on March 7, 2000. The verdict reads, in short, that the liberal view on homosexual practices "is not necessarily contrary to apostolic Christendom," that "the issue [about homosexual practice] is not a question about eternal salvation or condemnation," and that "this question is not church dividing." Consequently, Asle Dingstad's denial of fellowship with his bishop on this issue was deemed unlawful. Dingstad therefore resigned from his service in the Church of Norway only a few days later. It is not yet clear whether he also will leave the church.

All conscious Christians in Norway feel it is a provoking fact that these faithful and able pastors shall have to be deprived of their offices, while at the same time the liberal (female) bishop of Hamar has broken all her promises and installed a lesbian pastor in the ministry. They rightfully ask this question: What kind of church has the Church of Norway become, when she is removing faithful, biblically-based pastors, while at the same time installing heretics? This question reflects a deep frustration and puzzlement among ordinary lay Christians. Things have degenerated into such disorder that a feeling of bewilderment and hopelessness is spreading because of the lack of any credible alternative. The breakdown of the SKG on the one hand, and the paralyzation of the free lay organizations on the other, have contributed to a depressed atmosphere among confessional ministers. The last half year, though, a new vision and will seems to be surfacing within some of the lay organizations. This implies a certain openness and growing readiness to launch a genuine alternative, meaning that organized groups in the prayer houses may transform to a full congregational life outside the jurisdiction of the bishops and the official church. This would mean a full administration of the means of grace and the institution of a ministry to this end. This development, to a large extent, is due to the influence from Denmark. The situation there has been far more difficult than in Norway for orthodox Christianity. The confessional movement has been smaller and weaker, and the downfall of the church far more rapid and all embracing. For some years now the confessional organizations there have been looking to Norway, hoping that Bishop Knudsen will gain a more general acceptance. The lay organizations have been discussing ecclesiastical alternatives. At present, we now see an increasing will within one of the largest organizations ("Lutheran Missionary Organization," LM) to accept and form local congregations with full administration of the means

of grace, and with these an ecclesial structure. At least five congregations have been formed, and this number will likely gradually increase. The problem for the confessional ministers is that they, in a way, are being "left behind." The lay organizations have long since managed themselves, and have not had any need for ministers. In the fight for biblical faith, these two parties have stood side by side. But when it comes to the future, it seems that the free organizations will continue in this self-sufficiency, leaving the ministers to an even more lonely destiny.

During the 1990s a most important development has taken place within the ecclesiology of the Church of Norway. As noted earlier, about ninety percent of the population are baptized and members of the national church. Of course, only a small percentage (from two and a half to four percent) of these confess faith and partake in worship and congregational life. Because the vast majority of church members are only nominal Christians, it has been the goal for most pastors to build *ecclesiola in ecclesia* in their local parishes. This implies some kind of dividing line between the nominal and the confessing church. Under the pressure from liberal theology and the politicians in the parliament, a new kind of ecclesiology is emerging and becoming increasingly dominant. This ecclesiology accepts all that are baptized as Christians apart from any kind of biblical faith or confession. In this way the whole people is being defined as a Christian people; the church is a *Volkskirche*. To make any demands concerning confession and a Christian life is called legalistic, because "the gospel in its very nature is unconditional." This makes for an antinomian ecclesiology, which claims that every kind of boundary is pharisaic, and therefore heretical. It is the people, as such, that shall have the right to decide on ecclesial and doctrinal matters through general suffrage. Of course, the National Assembly in such a context is becoming the lawful representative of the people. In this we find a theological legitimization of the secular state as the ruler of the church. In this context we now see secular politicians (especially from the social democratic party) becoming increasingly ideologically active towards the church, demanding the church to show "tolerance" and adjust to the general values of society. This certainly also implies that a pastor in such a church is obliged to give every member of the church the sacraments, regardless of how they live or what they believe. The church thus is being reduced to the state's religious service organization. Maintaining "the keys"

consequently becomes impossible. It is nothing but a reminiscence of earlier days' narrow-mindedness and intolerance.

In this respect we find an explicit antagonism between *das Volkskirche* and *das Bekenntniskirche*. Typically, in a newspaper interview a few years ago, the female bishop of Hamar maintained that she did "not want a church with a confessional profile, as this endangered the *Volkskirkche*." But a church which is not a *Bekenntniskirche* is not a true church. The "conservative" bishops are indeed trying to hold back in this situation. But since they at the same time are compromising in their relationship with the state and the government, there is little power of conviction in their stand. In reality, the Church of Norway is facing a change of identity. It is only a question of time before the Church of Norway will be in the same situation as the two other Scandinavian churches, where all the bishops are openly liberal, and the church order is despotic towards the orthodox camp.

In this situation it is becoming of vital importance for the confessional movements to uphold "the keys." This will be the focal point and central issue with which the confessional movements, both in Norway and in the rest of Scandinavia, will be standing or falling. At the same time, this is an issue for which we can expect no kind of understanding in public. But God has never let us choose the battlefield. We have to face the enemy where he is, and we cannot hide away in the vain hope that he will come back later at a more convenient time and place. In this time of trouble we cling to the promise of our Lord to his believing and confessing church: ". . . the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Soli Deo Gloria!