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Norwegian Religiosity and Ecclesial Ideals in a Late-modern Age

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Artikel beginnt mit der kürzlichen Trennung von Staat und Kirche und der neuen Trauungsliturgie für gleichgeschlechtliche Paare in der Kirche Norwegens und untersucht die gegenwärtige Entwicklung der Religiosität im Land. Er stellt die hauptsächlichen Veränderungen bei der Frömmigkeit in Norwegen fest, und zwar in Bezug zu Charakteristika der späten Moderne, wie Authentizität, Individualismus und Pluralismus. Diese Veränderungen

umfassen den Prozess religiöser Differenzierung, das Auftreten einer alternativen Religiosität sowie einen tiefgreifenden Wandel dessen, was Religion für die Menschen in Norwegen bedeutet. Die Ursachen für die rückläufigen Zahlen bei der Kindertaufe werden als Fallstudie behandelt. Der Artikel erforscht, wie gewisse Merkmale der späten Moderne die Kirche herausfordern, und er zeigt schließlich auf, wie vier unterschiedliche Gruppierungen in der Kirche den Veränderungen auf unterschiedliche Weise begegnen.

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article considère les récentes évolutions de la vie religieuse en Norvège en partant de la séparation récente de l'Église et de l'État ainsi que de la nouvelle liturgie pour le mariage entre personnes de même sexe dans l'Église norvégienne. L'auteur éclaire les principales évolutions de la vie religieuse en Norvège par des traits caractéristiques de la modernité tardive comme l'accent sur l'authenticité, l'individualisme et le pluralisme. Le processus

de différenciation religieuse, l'apparition de nouvelles formes de religiosité et un changement radical de la manière dont les Norvégiens considèrent la religion font partie de ces évolutions. L'auteur prend pour exemple le déclin de la pratique du baptême d'enfant et en explore les raisons. Il examine certains aspects de la modernité tardive auxquels les Églises ont à faire face, pour ensuite considérer les manières différentes dont quatre groupes différents de l'Église réagissent à ces évolutions.

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SUMMARY

Starting from the recent separation of state and church and the new same-sex marriage liturgy in the Church of Norway, this article investigates recent developments in Norwegian religiosity. It identifies the main changes in Norwegian religiosity in relation to features of late modernity such as authenticity, individualism and plu-

ralism. These changes include the process of religious differentiation, the emergence of alternative religiosity, and a pervasive change in what religion means to Norwegians. The reasons for the decline in numbers of infant baptisms are used as a case study. The article investigates how certain features of late modernity are a challenge to the church, and finally charts how four different groups in the church encounter the changes in different ways.

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1. Introduction

In 2017 two fundamental changes came into effect in Norwegian Christianity. From 1 January 2017, Norway no longer has a state church: The Church of Norway (CoN) now is an independent legal

entity. On 1 February, a new gender-neutral marriage liturgy was introduced in the CoN, a liturgy that facilitates same-sex marriages. These changes in the CoN are closely connected to an increased organisational and theological democratisation.

The present article investigates recent developments in the CoN in connection with the overall development in Norwegian religiosity and shows how the changes in Norwegian Christianity are related to the cultural conditions of late modernity. It is reasonable to assume that factors other than the cultural context also have an influence on the developments. Hence, this article should not be understood as a complete explanation; it rather highlights one perspective that expands our understanding of Norwegian religiosity and the developments in Norwegian Christianity.

The article begins with a clarification of how I understand the term late modernity. Next I will outline some core features of Norwegian religiosity and highlight some of the crucial changes. At the end the article takes a practical theological turn as I investigate in what way the changes in Norwegian religiosity pose a challenge to the church. Here I identify four ecclesial ideals that display how various Christian groups relate to the late-modern cultural condition. The question I am seeking to answer in this article is: In what way is Norwegian religiosity in the late-modern age in change, and which ecclesial ideals find expression in this changed religious and cultural context?

Norwegian religiosity and contemporary changes in it form a broad field to which I can hardly do justice in an article. Nevertheless, I will attempt to highlight the main factors in this field and I will try to draw a picture of their scope. Moreover, I will supplement the numbers on *belonging* with research on *believing* and *behaving*, that is, research on Norwegians religious beliefs and practice.

2. Characteristics of late modernity

I prefer the term late modernity over postmodernity, because the preferred term implies that the modern era is not quite over after all. Whereas the term postmodern indicates that there has been a clean break in history, the term late modernity recognises that important changes mark our age, but understands these in continuity with modernity.

A spokesman for this understanding is the British sociologist Anthony Giddens, who argues that, 'Rather than entering a period of postmodernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before.'¹ Giddens does recognise a difference between the past period of high modernity and the present late modernity, but

argues that we have actually never left modernity as such. Instead he saves the prefix 'post' for tradition, distinguishing between the premodern traditional culture and the post-traditional modernity. A consequence of this understanding is that we have moved from a time in which our actions were largely prescribed by traditions and customs to the present post-traditional age in which – Giddens argues – responsibilities and expectations are more fluid and subject to negotiation.² This changed influence of tradition causes a society in which we have no choice but to choose, as he puts it.³ In a description of the 'post-traditional' society, Jackson Carroll maintains that:

[W]e have moved to a place where inherited traditions play less and less decisive roles in the way that we understand and order our lives. ... Or they play quite different roles than they have played in the past. If traditions remain important to us, they do so because we choose to follow them; we choose to acknowledge their importance; we choose to seek their guidance in the changed and changing context in which we live. And we often reinterpret and change them in the process.⁴

That said, Giddens and scholars who prefer other designations of the present time, will to a large extent agree to some common trends which others connect with the term postmodern. This means that independent of whether we understand the present as post-modernity, late modernity or liquid modernity, we can agree upon some features which typify this age. In connection with Giddens' description of the post-traditional and reflexive society, I understand the present age as characterised by pluralism, individualism and authenticity.

Ida Marie Høeg and Ann Kristin Gresaker at KIFO, the Norwegian Institute for Church, Religion and Worldview Research,⁵ share this understanding.⁶ They maintain that the emphasis on the freedom of the individual and on individual choices actualises questions such as 'What is best for me?', 'What do I believe in?' and 'What should I choose?'. This perspective is similar to Giddens' understanding of a reflexive society. Referring to the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor,⁷ Høeg and Gresaker maintain that our time is characterised by the human quest for autonomy and authenticity. Autonomy is to be true to oneself, and authenticity is the moral ideal on which the self-realisation of our age is based. As such, humans are self-interpreting and self-reflecting beings. We

create our own reality and identity, and act in this world based on a continuous search for meaning.

Before I turn to Norwegian religiosity more explicitly, I will briefly present some theories on religious change which will serve to illuminate the relationship between the above understanding of the present and the empirical description of Norwegian religiosity. For a long time, theories on religious change claimed that religion was declining parallel to modernisation. More recent theories are questioning this understanding, however, with some suggesting we have moved into a post-secular age⁸ and others suggesting that the perspectives of secularisation and sacralisation fail to capture the religious changes. Pål Ketil Botvar argues that more models, for example of privatisation and individualisation, are needed in order to understand the complexities of present religiosity.⁹

Karel Dobbelaere helpfully distinguishes between secularisation at various levels in society.¹⁰ On the micro level, it means a decline in the individual's connection to and identification with religion. On the middle level, it means that religions, religious organisations and institutions are secularised and are re-oriented towards values and concerns common to human experience. On a macro level, secularisation means that public institutions are released from religious influence.

3. The Church of Norway and other churches

Historically, Norwegian religiosity is more than anything characterised by hundreds of years of state religion. Christianity was a privileged religion, denomination and church.¹¹ Church historian Bernt Oftestad describes state religion as

a heritage from the absolute monarchy and the reformation in Denmark-Norway in the 1530s, when the Danish king established – with force – an evangelical church – first in Denmark, later in Norway.¹²

The Evangelical-Lutheran religion was included in the Norwegian Constitution of 1814, and maintained at the formation of the free Norwegian state. The state church system was terminated in 2012, although according to article 16 of its Constitution, the CoN is 'the folk church of Norway and is as such supported by the state'. The CoN officially ceased to be the state church on January 1, 2017.

This historical privileged position of the

Evangelical-Lutheran religion makes it reasonable to talk about, and distinguish between, the CoN and 'the others'. The second article of the 1814 Constitution not simply identified the Evangelical-Lutheran religion as the state religion, it also stated that monastic orders, Jesuits and Jews had no access to Norway. From the early 1840s, this legislation was softened and different Christian groups were allowed to practise their faith. An expression of this change was the repeal of the 'Konventikkelplakaten' (the ordinance governing religious assembly) in 1842 and the 'Dissenterloven' (the law on dissenters) in 1845. Dissenterloven allowed all Christian groups to practise their faith in Norway, with the exception of the Jesuits who were first legalised in 1956. This right was given to non-Christian religions in 1891. Oftestad argues that the establishment of 'Dissenterloven' marked the beginning of a unidirectional development towards more religious freedom, more pluralism and a limitation of the power and influence of the CoN in the public sphere.¹³ Still, it took more than 100 years until the second article was changed. In 1964 the Constitution determined that all residents in Norway have religious freedom.

Long-term but also in a shorter perspective, changes in Norwegian religiosity are characterised by increased plurality. Fewer people are now members of the CoN and a greater proportion of the population are members of faith and worldview communities outside Christianity or members of Christian churches outside the CoN. Moreover, a larger share of the population is not a member of any faith or worldview community. The numbers for 2015 show that 73% of the population are members of the CoN and 11% are members of another faith and worldview community.¹⁴ This leaves approximately 15% of the population outside any faith or worldview organisation. In 1980, 88% of the population were members of the CoN, whereas the rest of the population largely belonged to other Christian churches (3%) or were registered without religious affiliation (3%). In 2015, 5.7% of the population were members of a Christian denomination, 2.7% were members of an Islamic faith community and 1.9% of the population were members of a secular worldview community (in particular the Human-Etisk Forbund). Inger Furseth argues that these figures signal a process of religious differentiation in Norway.¹⁵

Ulla Schmidt has compared affiliation to the main religions and different Christian denomi-

nations between 1990 and 2009;¹⁶ the numbers for 2015 suggest that the trends she signalled are continuing. The world religions, such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, now represent a larger part of the faith and worldview communities outside the CoN. Among the Christian denominations, the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church are growing, whereas the traditional Protestant free churches (Pentecostals, free Lutheran church, Methodists, Baptists and the Covenant Church) are in decline.

In view of this, Schmidt points out how the first phase of religious plurality of 150 years from the 1840s was characterised by Protestant Christianity.¹⁷ From the 1990s there is a shift with the Protestant churches declining and in particular Islamic faith communities and the Catholic Church increasing. In addition to this quantitative pluralism, Schmidt also signals qualitative pluralism. There is a broader range of faith and worldview communities, and the growth is largest in religions and denominations at a greater distance to the Evangelical-Lutheran religion which historically has been the dominant tradition in Norway.

4. Alternative religiosity

Another feature of Norwegian religiosity that contributes to its increased plurality is 'alternative religiosity', also known as 'new spirituality' or New Age. It is difficult to obtain an overview of this phenomenon but the scope of literature about alternative spirituality and practice, and the numbers of people attending the various alternative conventions, suggest that it is growing in Norway. Surveys such as the 'International Social Survey Programme 2008: Religion III'¹⁸ show that more Norwegians express belief in alternative religious ideas such as reincarnation, healing and astrology. The British researchers Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead argue that traditional Christian beliefs are being replaced by alternative religious ideas,¹⁹ a development they connect with the thesis of the 'subjective turn' of modern culture. Although some have questioned their conclusions, studies by Norwegian researchers on alternative spirituality do point in the same direction.²⁰ For example, Arild Romarheim investigated the change in the perception of god or 'image of God'²¹ and Per Magne Aadnanes studied how folk religiosity has been changed towards alternative religiosity.²²

To understand and explain this change or development in Norwegian religiosity, several

researchers point to the cultural framework, for example the individualisation of society.²³ Botvar and Henriksen point out how 'individualisation may weaken the link between individuals and traditions, and between individuals and institutions'.²⁴ This kind of individualism means that individuals should not bow to an external authority, but rather focus on themselves and be their own authority. Botvar and Henriksen maintain that it is not surprising that

religious authorities and religious practice affiliated with institutions are weakened at the expense of more experimental and individually shaped expressions of religiosity.²⁵

In connection with this they ask if we are facing a transition from religion referring to something outside the individual to religious expressions in which individuals are their own religious authority. The cultural framework of late modernity means that people are (more) free to test and choose their religiosity, both in terms of practice and affiliation.

In addition to the cultural turn towards the individual and the emphasis on personal experience, studies suggest that the change is connected to the interpretive framework. Studies on people affiliated with an alternative organisation or network, and a study by Henriksen and Pabst on paranormal phenomena and Christian belief, suggest that there is a mismatch between people's religious experiences and a Christian interpretative framework.²⁶ Informants affiliated with a form of alternative spirituality argue that their religious experiences to a larger extent match an alternative or new religious interpretive framework. These informants are drawn towards the alternative scene because it allows more spiritual search and openness.

5. Developments in the Church of Norway

So far I have not included the CoN in the picture. For many years the declining percentage of church members was largely explained by immigration, as people from ethnic minorities do not join the CoN. Most immigrants rather adhere to another world religion, such as Islam, and also to Roman Catholicism. However, the changes in the CoN cannot be explained exclusively by a more diverse religious population, because between 1988 and 2017 220,000 members left the CoN and only 30,000 people became members,²⁷ an

actual decline in church membership.²⁸

Moreover, the numbers of Statistics Norway for 2015 also show a decline in terms of attendance at church practices. Fewer people are attending worship services, and there is a decline in support for the life rites, which traditionally have been an important connection between the CoN and its members. Mission societies – such as the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, Normisjon, and the Norwegian Mission Society – and the revival movement are also in decline; traditionally these evangelical organisations administered youth programmes related to Christian education, and as such they were influential in the entire church. With the church education reform, the church administers these programmes itself, offering an extensive programme of church education. These factors combined mean that a growing part of the population is moving away from the CoN. At the same time, Furseth argues, the church has changed since the late 1980s: the evangelical mission organisations are less influential and the church now has more extensive and varied activities.²⁹

6. Norwegian religiosity in change

‘The International Social Survey Programme 2008’ displays more features of religious change in Norway than I have covered so far. This survey, which also was conducted in 1991 and 1998, shows that between 1991 and 2008 the proportion of Norwegians that reported ‘no special connection’ to any religious group increased to 74%.³⁰ While the felt affiliation with congregational life in the CoN went down from 10% in 1991 to 7.5% in 2008, other Christian groups had a similar negative development. This means that fewer people are connected with organised religiosity, and fewer people experience affiliation with congregational life in the CoN or groups affiliated with the church.³¹

Botvar has analysed some of the findings of this survey.³² Although there has been a significant increase in the number of Norwegians who do not believe in any kind of god, most could still be described as believers of some sort (in ‘a higher power’ for example). The trend that fewer people believe in God is also reflected in responses to a question about belief in a God who takes an interest in individuals, and belief in life after death – which both saw a decline in numbers. Moreover, the survey revealed that 45% of the population report that they never pray. This means that fewer

Norwegians believe in God, fewer believe God is interested in the individual, fewer believe in a life after death and fewer describe themselves as religious. That said, two-thirds of the population in Norway do, to some extent, believe in the existence of some sort of higher power. This means on the one hand that Norway is secularised in the sense that there is less religious belief and practice among individuals; on the other hand, Botvar points out that it seems as if traditional religiosity is accompanied by new and more individualised beliefs.

Inger Furseth has investigated religion and religiosity as expressed in personal life stories.³³ From extensive interviews with 72 Norwegians she identified a change from a quest for truth to emphasis on being oneself. She thus argues that the most important change in Norwegian religiosity is not the decline in membership, participation or support of beliefs. Rather, whereas religion used to be a matter of supporting a set of given beliefs, mediated in a collective and institutional fellowship, it is now to large extent judged depending on how it enables individuals to express themselves and to live authentically. Religion has changed from being concerned with finding truth to a quest of being oneself.

Ulla Schmidt recognises the conclusions of Furseth,³⁴ but also points to the increase in affiliation to collective and institutional religions such as Islam and the Roman Catholic Church. Even though this particular growth is connected with immigration, it means that not all change is towards an individualistic religiosity. Thus Schmidt argues that secularisation in Norway, in the sense of less religion at the individual level, first and foremost challenges the historic Protestant religiosity.

7. Change as a challenge to the church

How do the changes in Norwegian religiosity challenge the church? To some extent the above outline of Norwegian religiosity is an implicit summary of the challenges facing the church. The Evangelical-Lutheran religion is now one of many religious and worldview alternatives in Norway. A further example of how plurality challenges the church relates to its internal plurality. In our neighbouring country, Sweden, revivals in the last part of the nineteenth century led to the founding of many free churches; but in Norway the state church managed to incorporate the revival movements and evangelical prayer houses within

its frames,³⁵ so that it could maintain and perhaps even strengthen its privileged position. The spiritual plurality was contained within the church. The relationship between the CoN and the prayer houses has been described as an elliptical model. Harald Hegstad sees them as two parallel structures, the ‘official’ and the ‘voluntary’.³⁶ Like the geometrical figure of an ellipse, there were two focal points in the ecclesial context, one based on legislation and the state apparatus, the other the result of voluntary initiatives. In terms of theology this structure meant that evangelical Christians and revival movements were given great freedom within the frame of the CoN. Today the complementary and supplementary relationship between the church and the prayer houses is changing, as the revival movements and the prayer house movement are establishing their own independent congregations and denominations.³⁷ What used to be an internal diversity is now to a large extent external plurality.

Moreover, as fewer Norwegians have any official religious or worldview affiliation, fewer believe in God and fewer experience any relationship with the congregational life of the church, the CoN is losing ground, which may be seen as a challenge in itself. Another feature of this development is that knowledge of Christianity is declining; this is a particular challenge for the evangelical revival movements which have historically based their ministry on a basic knowledge of Christianity. Furthermore, the decline in knowledge of Evangelical-Lutheran Christianity in particular means that Norway is losing a common frame of reference in religious matters. This is, for example, visible in the above data on alternative spirituality: the church is no longer the uncontested interpretive framework for religion and religious experiences.

On the other hand, more than 70% of the Norwegian population are still members of the CoN. More than anything else this relates to the traditional wide support for infant baptism. Baptism in the CoN was a common Norwegian ritual to highlight the arrival of new members of the family and the community, but this is now changing and the number of baptised children is falling. In 2015, 58% of the new-born children in Norway were baptised, a 21% decline since 2005; in Oslo less than one-third of the new-born babies were baptised. These numbers are affected by immigration and the increased religious plurality. As such it is interesting to look at the number of infant baptisms in situations where at least one of

the parents is a member of the CoN. In this case, 77% of Norwegian two-year-olds had been baptised.³⁸

8. Case study: baptism

A closer look at this trend shows that it is connected with late-modern culture and its challenge to the church. Reports published in 2015 and 2016 show the decline in the number of baptisms in the CoN and reveal that parents who decided to baptise their infant did so largely because of tradition; the religious meaning of the act is relatively unimportant.³⁹ In a post-traditional culture this could be interpreted in different ways. At first sight it would seem likely that in a post-traditional culture, where ‘inherited traditions play less and less decisive roles’, as Jackson Carroll puts it,⁴⁰ the number of baptism is likely to fall further and faster. There is, however, an alternative and more optimistic interpretation of this argument for baptism. We may understand it as evidence that tradition is important to us after all. Diana Butler Bass points out that church congregations are among the few places in this culture where history and tradition can be located; as such, congregations are ‘one place where individuals hope to connect with larger communal, moral, and spiritual traditions’.⁴¹ The growth in Islamic and Catholic communities, although closely connected with immigration, suggests that there is room, and perhaps even a quest, for tradition-bearers in a late- or post-modern age.

This conclusion also relates to the plurality of our era. Some of the studies on alternative religiosity referred to above point out that postmodernity means that phenomena which – according to many – belong to a different time, are still present and to some extent influential. Henriksen and Pabst connect this observation to postmodern theory and ‘the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous’.⁴² Aadnanes argues that postmodernity is simply one of the solutions to the end of modernity and that many are fleeing back to premodern, authoritative and fundamentalist expressions of religion.⁴³ The latter may not be the preferred self-designation of evangelicals, but my point is that traditional religiosity may still have a place in our culture.

Another reason given by parents for baptising their children was that it gives the child ‘an opportunity to decide for themselves later in life’. This suggests that many still see baptism in the CoN as the default option – and we may ask how increased

plurality and secularisation at the individual level will affect this understanding. Parents who did not baptise their infants used a similar argumentation, but in their case with the opposite conclusion: they decided against baptism because they wanted their children to decide for themselves later in life. I interpret this latter argumentation as an expression of individualisation. The parents mark the child as an individual with a right to choose and shape his or her own religiosity. This removes baptism and religiosity, at least to some extent, from the task of upbringing and instead connects them to the child's task of self-construction. It also contributes to an understanding of faith as a highly private matter. Moreover, this means that baptism is to a larger extent connected with personal beliefs or convictions. From a practical-theological perspective one might argue that this individualisation challenges the traditional Lutheran understanding of baptism.

Another concern of the 'non-baptising-parents' is authenticity. They will not simply do something out of tradition; they want to make well-founded decisions which reflect who they are. Thus parents report that 'they can't support the promise by the baptismal font', 'they disagree on the theology of baptism' and that 'lack of identification with the church' causes them to forego baptism. These arguments relate to the quest for authenticity.⁴⁴ It is important to the parents to be true to themselves and to make decision they can stand by and defend, and this late-modern feature challenges the baptism practice in the CoN.

9. Ecclesial ideals in late-modern Norway

In this article I am showing how Norwegian religiosity is characterised by secularisation, increased plurality and individuality, and a quest for authenticity. The decline in the number of baptisms is an example of how these late-modern features challenges the church. We will now see that the changed religious context, which I have connected with features of late modernity, is understood and approached by means of various ecclesial strategies. As a result, in addition to the separation between the state and the CoN, we are witnessing a fragmentation of the church. Mission societies and organisations, which were previously organised as complementary practices within the CoN, are now establishing ecclesial practices outside it. At the same time the CoN is becoming more complex and divers, both in terms of practice and theology.

To outline this complexity of the Norwegian church is somewhat difficult because the ecclesiological developments are taking place at various levels. In an attempt to overcome this problem, I have chosen the term 'ecclesial ideals', which covers both practical ecclesial expressions and church political programmes and resolutions. What these contributions or groups have in common is an ideal for the church in Norway, although there are large differences between the contents of their ideals and the ways in which they attempt to realise them. In a simplified but still explanatory approach, inspired by Diana Butler Bass' four points of reference, I will distinguish four groups of ecclesial ideals in late-modern Norway. Moving beyond the old liberal – conservative division, Butler Bass argues that 'Protestantism is better understood as having four points of reference: Two along the theological continuum of liberal and conservative; and two along the practice poles of established and intentional.'⁴⁵ These points create a grid of four ecclesial ideals on which the various groups might be placed. This grid in turn enables us to distinguish the ideals according to how the late-modern features influence their theology and/or practice.

9.1 The 'folk church'

A first ecclesial ideal I have identified is the 'folk church' ideal as expressed in the resolutions, programmes and liturgies agreed in the General Synod of the CoN. After the separation of church and state, this Synod is the highest authority in the CoN. It has in the last decade made several decisions which suggest an ecclesial ideal of a theologically liberal and practice-oriented church. Beside the new same-sex marriage liturgy, it has implemented a new liturgy for the main worship service and a reform of Christian education. Both reforms show an increased focus on the active and participating members of the church, emphasising lay participation, involvement and practice. The 'folk church' ideal as expressed in the Synod suggests a theologically liberal church that focuses on the core congregations.⁴⁶

This 'folk church' ideal is largely late-modern because its core values are individualism, authenticity and plurality. Theologically its late-modern features are most evident in the same-sex marriage liturgy. In this case the General Synod ratified what might be described as a theologically liberal liturgy but, in my view even more interestingly, the Synod argued that the CoN now has two opposite but equal views (not teachings or doctrines) on mar-

riage. This decision and its grounds facilitate theological pluralism; moreover, it leaves it to the local congregations and priests to decide how they want to handle this issue. Thus the Synod's decision also facilitates theological individualism and late-modern quests for authenticity, which means that something is regarded as authentic if it mediates a true expression of individual values or beliefs.

In a similar manner the 'folk church' ecclesial ideal betrays a late-modern view on practice. The core concepts of the new main worship liturgy in the CoN are localism, involvement and flexibility. These concepts facilitate local expressions of worship which may focus on what the local congregation wishes. In addition to a more pluralistic worship, the core concepts of the new liturgy also facilitate more involvement from lay members and a late-modern understanding of authenticity. In the grid of Butler Bass this ideal is theological liberal and intentional.

9.2 The Open Folk Church party

The second ecclesial ideal appears in the election programme of Åpen folkekirke ('Open Folk Church'), which is the first and only political party within the CoN and was established prior to the 2016 General Synod elections. With a focus on the same-sex marriage liturgy, Åpen folkekirke won these elections. In its election programme the party emphasises democratic structures that secure a church which reflects the views of all its members. It aims to achieve a theologically liberal and culture-affirming church. Moreover, participation and the core congregation have little place in this ideal because the church is rather viewed as an important public institution that should be open and ready to serve all members of society.

This 'Åpen folkekirke' ecclesial ideal can be described as a pre-modern practice combined with a late-modern theology. To some extent it represents a counterculture to late-modern individualism because it sees the church as a collective in which participation and practice are secondary, while official membership is important. In terms of practice this ecclesial ideal highlights the church as a bearer of tradition and a steward of cultural heritage. This suggests that in practice recognition is more important than plurality. In terms of theology, on the other hand, this ecclesial ideal seeks to construct a late-modern theology which celebrates interpretive plurality and values late-modern authenticity and individual experience over doctrinal orthodoxy. In view of Butler Bass' grid, this

ideal might be described as theological liberal and established.

9.3 Profile churches

The third ecclesial ideal I have identified is formed by the 'profile churches' which are being established within the CoN and the new congregations affiliated with the prayer house movement. As the old ellipse structure of the Norwegian church context changes, evangelical Christians are establishing new congregations either as a development of a prayer house fellowship or as a profile church within the CoN organisation. Both are largely autonomous congregations with an evangelical theology, which emphasise personal involvement and practice.⁴⁷

This ecclesial ideal draws on late-modern features in the sense that the shape and practice of these congregations is characterised by individualisation, plurality and a late-modern understanding of authenticity. This view of authenticity as a true expression of an individual or community's values or beliefs resembles the quest for authenticity as for example seen in the alternative religiosity discussed above. In terms of plurality, congregations with this ecclesial ideal represent an external plurality: they see themselves, their activities and the shape of their congregations as an alternative to the other congregations in the parish or local area. Moreover, they display a certain internal plurality in that they appeal – for example – to families with younger children from various denominational backgrounds. The plurality of this ecclesial ideal is also evident in their open and flexible understanding of tradition, which means they draw on various liturgical traditions. In terms of individualism, congregations with this ecclesial ideal have a close link between personal features and their understanding of relevance: for something to be relevant it must be personal. Individualism also manifests itself in the quest for individual involvement in ministry.

Whereas the practice in this ecclesial ideal is characterised by late-modern features, its theology is not. The profile churches advocate an evangelical theology with emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy. That said, traditional dividing lines such as denominational affiliation are subordinated to evangelical commonalities such as a conservative view of the Bible, emphasis on the atoning work of Christ on the cross, the conviction that human beings need to be converted, and the view that the gospel needs to be expressed in good deeds.⁴⁸ We

can thus describe this ecclesial ideal as a combination of late-modern practices with traditional, pre-modern evangelical theology. Applying the grid from Butler Bass, this ecclesial ideal is theological conservative and intentional.

9.4 Traditional practices and doctrine

The fourth ecclesial ideal I have identified are Christian fellowships which view traditional practices as imperative in order to maintain a conservative evangelical theology. This is a conservative ecclesial ideal in terms of both theology and practice. This ecclesial ideal is most evident in parts of the prayer house movement which come together in small, largely homogenous groups. These prayer house fellowships view their traditional practices as important for maintaining their traditional conservative theology, and they see revival meetings as their main ecclesial practice. Depending on the local CoN congregation, these groups seek to maintain the traditional connection between the church and the prayer house; alternatively, they continue the prayer house practice without any church affiliation.

This ecclesial ideal is only to a limited extent influenced by late-modern features, which are most evident in their understanding of authenticity. In this ecclesial ideal something is regarded as authentic if it resembles a certain type or kind of practice. That is, something is regarded as authentic if it corresponds to a particular classification, to a set of expectations regarding how such things ought to look. Authentic worship, for example, means that one follows one particular order of service, carrying out a particular set of practices. This view of authenticity limits plurality in this ecclesial ideal.

The emphasis on personal conversion in the revival and prayer house movement suggests influence of late-modern individualism, but this is only partly the case, because in this tradition conversion largely follows predetermined patterns. It is also the most important common denominator of this movement. The apparently individualistic practice of individual conversion connects the individual to the collective, and hence it is a practice experience which the individual shares with the rest of the congregation. As shown above, the most particular feature of this ecclesial ideal is the close link between practice and theology: a conservative approach to practice is expected to sustain a conservative theology. In the grid of Butler Bass this ideal is theological conservative and established.

A footnote to this ecclesial ideal in Norway is a transfer of individual Christians from the CoN to other denominations, not least to the Roman Catholic Church. Although it could hardly be described as a significant feature of Norwegian religiosity, some theologically conservative Christians convert to the Catholic Church as a result of dissatisfaction with the CoN. Such individual conversions are made possible by late-modern individualism, but they nonetheless represent a movement towards an ecclesial ideal which largely rejects late-modern influence on practice and theology.

10. Conclusion

The two fundamental changes in the CoN at the beginning of 2017, the separation of state and church, and the implementation of the same-sex marriage liturgy, have inspired this article on Norwegian religiosity and ecclesial ideals in late-modern Norway. Its first aim was to draw a picture of Norwegian religiosity for non-Norwegian readers, focusing on the peculiarities of Norwegian religiosity past and present. This presentation includes the process of religious differentiation, the emergence of alternative religiosity, and a pervasive change in what religion is to Norwegians. The changes identified in Norwegian religiosity are understood in relation to the late-modern features of authenticity, individualism and pluralism. In the second part of the article I have, through a case study of the reasons for the decline in the number of baptisms, investigated how these late-modern features challenge the church. Finally, I have identified four ecclesial ideals in late-modern Norway, which show how Christian groups, both evangelical and mainline, respond to the developments identified. Related to Butler Bass' four points of reference and a basic distinction between practice and theology, I am arguing that the ecclesial ideals identified may be divided according to their relation to late-modern features in theology and/or practice.

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Endnotes

- 1 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1991) 3.

- 2 David Gauntlett, *Creative Explorations: New Approaches to Identities and Audiences* (new edn; London, New York: Routledge, 2007) 9.
- 3 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) 81.
- 4 Jackson Carroll, *Mainline to the Future: Congregations for the Twenty-First Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 10.
- 5 KIFO, the Norwegian Institute for Church, Religion and Worldview Research, is a research institute organised as a private foundation. Its financial basis is secured through grants from the Church of Norway National Council, Oslo. KIFO's main emphasis is on empirical research.
- 6 Ida Marie Hoeg and Ann Kristin Gresaker, *Når det rokkes ved tradisjon og tilhørighet* (Oslo: KIFO, 2015).
- 7 Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
- 8 Inger Furseth, *Religionens tilbakekomst i offentligheten?* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2015) 170, who mentions Peter L. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (2nd edn; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and Jürgen Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', *European Journal of Philosophy* 14.1 (2006) 1–25.
- 9 Pål Ketil Botvar, 'Endringer i nordmenns religiøse liv', in Pål Ketil Botvar and Ulla Schmidt (eds), *Religion i dagens Norge* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2010) 24. See also Nicholas Jay Demerath III, *Crossing the Gods: World Religions and Worldly Politics* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2001).
- 10 Karel Dobbelare, *Secularisation: An Analysis at Three Levels* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2002).
- 11 The material in this section was obtained from Statistics Norway, various reports by KIFO and two anthologies on Norwegian religiosity, entitled 'The return of religion in the public?' (2015) and 'Religion in today's Norway' (2010) respectively.
- 12 Bernt T. Oftestad, *Den norske statsreligionen* (Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget AS, 1998) 11.
- 13 Oftestad, *Den norske statsreligionen*, 247.
- 14 '11 prosent i trus- og livssynssamfunn', *ssb.no*, åpnet 24. september 2016, <http://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/statistikker/trosamf/aar/2015-11-25>.
- 15 Furseth, *Religionens tilbakekomst i offentligheten?*, 27.
- 16 Ulla Schmidt, 'Norge: Et religiøst pluralistisk samfunn?', in Botvar and Schmidt, *Religion i dagens Norge*.
- 17 Schmidt, 'Norge', 28–31.
- 18 'Spørreundersøkelse om religion, 2008, norsk del av ISSP', Data samlet av Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS (Bergen, 2009).
- 19 Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2004).
- 20 For example Pål Ketil Botvar and Jan-Olav Henriksen, 'Mot en alternativreligiøs revolusjon?', in Botvar and Schmidt, *Religion i dagens Norge*, 60.
- 21 Arild Romarheim, 'Nyåndelig folkereligiøsitet?', in *Nye guder for hvermann?* (Kyrkjefag Profil 15; Volda: Tapir akademisk forlag, 2011) 41–60.
- 22 Per Magne Aadnanes, *Gud for kvarmann* (Volda: Universitetsforlaget, 2008).
- 23 Ingvild Sælid Gilhus and Lisbeth Mikaelsson, *Kulturens refortrylling*, 2. utg. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2005); Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*.
- 24 Botvar and Henriksen, 'Mot en alternativreligiøs revolusjon?', 61.
- 25 Botvar and Henriksen, 'Mot en alternativreligiøs revolusjon?', 61.
- 26 Jan-Olav Henriksen and Kathrin Pabst, *Uventet og ubedt* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2013); referred in Pål Ketil Botvar and Ann Kristin Gresaker, 'Når troen tar nye veier', KIFO Rapport 2013:1 (Oslo: KIFO, 2013) 80.
- 27 Furseth, *Religionens tilbakekomst i offentligheten?* Inger Furseth studied the development between 1988 and 2013. In this period 150,000 members left the CoN, and 26,000 became members. This development continued in recent years: in 2014, 11,000 left; in 2015, 15,500 left; and in 2016, 41,500 left while 3,000 joined. Two things make 2016 special; first of all, a new electronic service has made it easier to leave the church; secondly the CoN election in 2015 and the subsequent decision regarding the same sex-marriage liturgy probably had an influence on the numbers.
- 28 I will discuss the decline in the number of baptisms below.
- 29 Furseth, *Religionens tilbakekomst i offentligheten?*, 28.
- 30 'Spørreundersøkelse om religion, 2008, norsk del av ISSP'.
- 31 Olaf Agedal, Elisabet Haakedal and Frode Kinserdal, 'Profesjonalisering og frivillighet' (Oslo: KIFO, 2014) 11.
- 32 Botvar, 'Endringer i nordmenns religiøse liv'.
- 33 Inger Furseth, *From Quest for Truth to Being Oneself: Religious Change in Life Stories* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 2006).
- 34 Ulla Schmidt, 'Religion i dagens Norge: sekularisert? privatisert? pluralisert?', in Botvar and Schmidt, *Religion i dagens Norge*, 199–200.
- 35 The Norwegian Mission Society was established in 1842, Normisjon (previously Santalmisjon) in 1867, and the Norwegian Lutheran Mission in

1891. These and other missionary societies were organised in small groups which gathered in private homes or prayer houses ('Bedehus'). The missionary organizations and the prayer houses played an important role in both international mission and domestic revivals.
- 36 Harald Hegstad, *Kirke i forandring: fellesskap, tilhørighet og mangfold i Den norske kirke* (Oslo: Luther, 1999) 75.
- 37 See also Robert Lilleaasen, 'Likedanning i det norske kirkelandskap', *Tidsskrift for praktisk teologi* 1 (2017) 48–57.
- 38 Høeg and Gresaker, *Når det rokkes ved tradisjon og tilhørighet*, 28.
- 39 Høeg and Gresaker, *Når det rokkes ved tradisjon og tilhørighet*; Tore Witsø Rafoss, 'Et religiøst landskap i endring' (Oslo: KIFO, 2016) esp. 37, 41.
- 40 Carroll, *Mainline to the Future*, 10.
- 41 Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon VA: Alban Institute, 2004) 51.
- 42 Henriksen and Pabst, *Uventet og ubedt*, 168.
- 43 Aadnanes, *Gud for kvarmann*, 79.
- 44 Høeg and Gresaker, *Når det rokkes ved tradisjon og tilhørighet*, 86.
- 45 Butler Bass, *Practicing Congregation*, 84.
- 46 A further presentation of the CoN as a folk church is offered in Harald Hegstad, 'The Church: From Public Institution to Public Fellowship', in Christine Moldenhauer and Jens Monsees (eds), *Die Zukunft der Kirche in Europa* (Beiträge zu Evangelisation und Gemeindeentwicklung 22; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlagsgesellschaft, 2016). Hegstad investigates the folk church in relation to Jose Casanova's theory on secularisation and offers a positive evaluation of folk church as a missional fellowship in late-modern Norway.
- 47 Robert Lilleaasen, 'Old Paths and New Ways' (PhD dissertation; MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2016).
- 48 David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) 2–3.