

GUNNAR HEIENE

# Aila Lauha ja pohjoismaiset kansankirkot

## – Aila Lauha and the Nordic Folk Churches

Helsingin yliopiston teologisen tiedekunnan pitkäaikainen dekaani professori Aila Lauha täytti 60 vuotta 16.9.2011. Päivän kunniaksi tiedekunta järjesti kaikille avoimen juhluennon, jonka pitäjäksi oli pyydetty professori Gunnar Harald Heiene Oslasta.

Gunnar Heiene on toiminut etiikan professorina Oslon seurakuntatiedekunnassa (Det teologiske Menighetsfakultet) vuodesta 1996 alkaen. Hänen erityisalaansa ovat sodan ja rauhan kysymykset, bio- ja ympäristöetiikka sekä perhe- ja seksuaalietiikka. Hän oli yliopistonsa dekaani vuosina 2002–2004. Eettisten kysymysten lisäksi Heiene on osallistunut myös pohjoismaiseen kirkkohistorian projektiin, jonka tuloksena hän on yhdessä Aila Lauhan, ruotsalaisen Björn Rymanin sekä tanskalaisen Peter Lodbergin kanssa kirjoittanut teoksen *Nordic Folk Churches: A Contemporary Church History* (Eerdman 2005). Hän on myös yksi Aila Lauhan juhla-kirjan kirjoittajista.<sup>1</sup>

Nyt julkaistavassa juhluennossaan Heiene tarkastelee pohjoismaisia kansankirkkoja näkökulmana kolme ajankohtaista haastetta. Nämä hän on otsikoinut: kirkko ja yhteiskunta, kirkko ja ekumeniikka sekä kirkko ja etiikka. Ensimmäiseksi hän kysyy, mikä on kansankirkon asema monikult-

tuurisessa yhteiskunnassa. Käyttäen esimerkkinään Oslossa heinäkuussa 2011 tapahtuneita terrori-iskuja ja Norjan luterilaisen kirkon roolia niiden jälkihoidossa hän esittää, että luterilaisten kansankirkkojen on löydettävä tasapaino yhtäältä avoimuuden ja inklusiivisuuden, toisaalta kristinuskon erityisyyden ja luovuttamattoman sanoman välillä: ”Kirkko on monin tavoin integroitunut ja juurtunut siihen yhteiskuntaan, kulttuuriin ja valtioon, jonka keskellä se elää, mutta samalla se ylittää kaikki nämä kategoriat.”

Toisen haasteen tämän päivän pohjoismaisille kansankirkoille luo ekumenia: kuinka olla yhtä aikaa sekä tunnustuksellinen luterilainen että ekumeenisesti avoin muille kristillisille traditioille? Heienen mukaan kansankirkkojen tulee olla erityisen sensitiivisiä ekumeenisesti, jotta ne eivät omi kristinuskon monopolia omassa maassaan vaan kunnioittavat pienempiä kristillisiä yhteisöjä ja antavat niille tilaa toimia. Ekumeniaa ja sen keskeistä tavoitetta *koinoniaa* tarvitaan sekä kirkkojen välillä että kirkkojen sisällä – erityisesti juuri suurissa, monia eri näkemyksiä sisältävissä kansankirkoissa.

1 Laine & Laitinen 2011.

Kolmas teema, kirkko ja etiikka, on ollut erityisen ajankohtainen viime vuosikymmeninä. Yksi kiistellyimpiä kysymyksiä on suhtautuminen homoseksuaaleihin, heidän asemaansa kirkossa sekä samaa sukupuolta olevien vihkioikeuteen. Kirkon kannanottoja kritisoidaan yhtäältä liian liberaaleiksi, toisaalta liian konservatiivisiksi. Vaikka eettinen kannanotto pluralistisessa yhteiskunnassa ei ole helppoa, eettisen keskustelun ylläpito postsekulaarissa yhteiskunnassa kuuluu Heienen mukaan erityisesti kansankirkkojen perustehtävään.

*Teologinen Aikakauskirja* julkaisee professori Heienen luennon sen alkuperäisessä muodossa. Samalla toimitus tahtoo yhtyä dekaani Aila Lauhan runsaslukuisten onnittelijoiden joukkoon.

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In this lecture, I will look into some contemporary challenges for the Nordic folk churches with a special emphasis on the issues which have been in the forefront in Aila Lauha's important academic contributions. We have both been involved in a project on the Nordic folk churches after Second World War.<sup>2</sup> Long before that, Lauha had finished her dissertation on the international and ecumenical relations of the Finnish Church 1917–1922,<sup>3</sup> a work which was followed by a monograph three years later, covering the period 1923–1925.<sup>4</sup> Words like nation and international relations, ecumenism, peace and reconciliation are important in these works. In the Nordic project already mentioned, the period had shifted to the Second World War and the development after the war in the different Nordic folk churches. Ecumenism was still important, and we covered issues like theology and spirituality, church and society, politics and ethical discussions. In later years, Aila Lauha has also been engaged in projects about European integration<sup>5</sup> and the cold war<sup>6</sup> in relation to the churches.

This lecture is inspired by Aila Lauha's valuable research, which should be seen not only as a contribution to church history, but also as a good example of contemporary theology, narrowing the traditional gap between historical and systematical disciplines in theology. Therefore, I will concentrate on three con-

temporary challenges for the Nordic folk churches, firstly, Church and society, including the relationship to culture, nation and politics, secondly, Church and ecumenism, and thirdly, Church and ethics.

## CHURCH AND SOCIETY

The concept of "folk church" in the Nordic countries implies a close relationship between church and society, church and state, church and nation. In Denmark, "The Folk Church" is the official name of the main church, representing 80 % of the population, but the concept of "folk church" is also common in the other Nordic countries. Documents from Church of Sweden often refers to "folk church" as a fundamental characteristic of the church, and in Norway, where the relationship between church and state is on the political agenda, the "folk church" concept will soon be introduced in the revised §16 in our Constitution: "The Norwegian Church, an Evangelical Lutheran Church, remains Norway's Folk Church and is as such supported by the State".<sup>7</sup> In a vision statement, the Church of Norway is called "a confessional, missional, serving and open folk church",<sup>8</sup> and among Norwegian politicians "folk church" has become a slogan in the current debate on church reforms. Political leaders from many parties, especially the social democrats, underline that the present changes in the state – church relations should aim at strengthening, not weakening the Church of Norway as a folk church. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is also described as a "folk church" in official documents, both referring to the church as an integrated part of the history of the Finnish people and to the comprehensive task of the church, aiming at the whole people.

When we started the project on the Nordic folk churches in the late 1990's, many of us were still thinking of the post-war time as a time of secularization. Religion and church seemed to be less important in the society than they used to be. However, during the last years much has changed. Obviously, the dramatic events ten years ago during the 9/11 attacks led to a new interest in the role of religion in society. Many new books spoke about "the resurgence of religion" in our secular societies, and the concept of the "post-secular" was introduced

and discussed. Already in 1999, Peter L. Berger had revised his theory of secularization in a book entitled *The Desecularization of the World, Resurgent Religion and World Politics*.<sup>9</sup> In 2005, Jürgen Habermas surprised many Norwegians in a lecture he gave in Bergen on "Religion in the Public Sphere" stating – with explicit reference to Peter Berger – that "religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new, hitherto unexpected political importance since the epoch-making change of 1989–90".<sup>10</sup> Habermas spoke about the need to overcome "a narrow secularist consciousness" in awareness of the fact that we are living in a post-secular world. Habermas' new interest in religion and in the possible constructive role of churches and religious traditions in the current ethical debate is one of many examples of a new mentality which also means a challenge to our folk churches.

In another article, "Notes on a Post-Secular Society",<sup>11</sup> Habermas deepens his analysis of the post-secular society by discussing the conflicting attitudes of two extreme positions, the *Kulturkampf* between the "multiculturalists" and the "secularists":

The party of the multiculturalists appeals to the protection of collective identities and accuses the other side of representing a "fundamentalism of the Enlightenment", whereas the secularists insist on the uncompromising inclusion of minorities in the existing political framework and accuse their opponents of a "multiculturalist betrayal" of the core values of the Enlightenment.

The debate on multiculturalism, especially related to the growing presence of Muslims, is a very important challenge to the Nordic folk churches, although the situation is not similar in each country. While Denmark has had open controversies especially due to the Muhammad cartoons, the situation in Norway has been less polarized, although we have observed a growing tendency to extremism on both sides during the last years. Few days ago, some Muslims were arrested in Sweden, accused of planning terrorist attacks linked to Al Qaeda. Last year three Muslims were arrested in Norway with a similar suspicion.

But in Norway the terror attacks on July 22 this year changed the situation dramatically. In the first

hours after the bomb attack against the governmental buildings in Oslo, many people suspected that Muslim extremists were behind, and many Muslims have reported about unfriendly reactions from ethnic Norwegians in the hours before it became known that the terrorist was a young, white Norwegian man, claiming to act on behalf of Christianity against the Islamic threat to Europe. Interesting enough, there were no reports on Muslims blaming Christians or Christianity for the terror acts when the terrorist's identity was revealed. No one claimed that the Church of Norway should declare that the terror acts could not be legitimized by Christianity. But if the terrorist had been a Muslim extremist, many people would probably have expected the Islamic Council to declare that they condemned such attacks. In fact, the Islamic Council very soon declared that they did not in any way see the events as caused by Christianity. After July 22, we have learned that it is important to avoid generalizations about religion and ethnicity.

In the days and weeks after these events, the Church of Norway has played an important role demonstrating different aspects of being a folk church. Many pastors were involved in pastoral care, trying to comfort those who were affected by the terror acts and the families of the victims. Many people went to their local churches to get comfort, to seek silence in the church and to bring flowers and light candles. The ocean of candles and flowers outside the Cathedral of Oslo was enormous, and during the first days, hundreds of thousands of people spent some minutes in the church. Most of the 77 funerals took place in churches, especially in the Church of Norway, and there were representatives from the government and the social democratic

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2 Schjørring 2001; Ryman & al. 2005.

3 Lauha 1990.

4 Lauha 1993.

5 Lauha 2004.

6 McLeod & Lauha & Saarinen 2006.

7 "Den norske kirke forbliver Norges Folkekirke" 2008.

8 "Visjonsdokument" 2008

9 Berger 1999.

10 Habermas 2006, 1–25.

11 Habermas 2008.

party in all funerals. Some politicians said that they had never been so close to the church before, and in many ways the Church of Norway demonstrated what it means to be a folk church in a time of national crisis. It is important to be open and accessible and to give room also for the vague religious sentiments which are clearly present in the population, although the number of people being actively involved in church work is quite modest in Norway. In this case, churches all over the country have been central meeting places for people affected by tragedy and loss. In some respects, the situation was close to what happened during the Second World War, when Norway was invaded by Germans, and people gathered in the churches to seek comfort and strength in a difficult time.

Nevertheless, there have been discussions about this central role of the church. Secular humanists have said that the church got too much publicity, and that the memorial events should have been more "neutral". Especially, some leading humanists criticized that in the Sunday worship in the Cathedral of Oslo two days after the terror attacks, both the King and the Queen, and most members of the government, including the Prime Minister, were present. But this criticism was met by other secular humanists who claimed that in this situation, even atheists can define themselves as "cultural Christians" since they share a common Christian tradition, being part of a Christian culture with deep historical roots. Anne Holt, a well-known secular humanist, a social democrat and a former member of the government, expressed this in an article in the liberal newspaper *Dagbladet*:

In the same way as I think that every Muslim woman has a right to wear *hijab* where and whenever she wants, I find it quite unproblematic to seek a tradition that has lasted for thousand years for Norwegians: To use the church in memory of the dead. In this way the church room became much larger than usual; the church became a common place for the people as a whole. Some were present, others took part through television. The fact that the atheist Jens Stoltenberg gave the best and most moving speech in perhaps the most beautiful room in Oslo did not reduce the experience of dignity and fellowship.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of "civil religion" has been used mainly to describe the role of religion in the USA.<sup>13</sup> What we have seen in Norway in the weeks after the terror attacks, might be interpreted as a Nordic version of "civil religion", telling us that the folk churches have a national role in times of crisis.

Still, this role of the church is disputed. We have heard some critical voices also from church people, especially on the conservative side, who think that the church has been too open and inclusive in this situation and that the confessional character of the church has not been taken seriously enough. This criticism mainly comes from conservative theologians who are generally critical to what they call "folk church ideology" claiming that "folk church" is used as a term to express the religious dimension of society without any further qualifications.

The church leaders have met this criticism by saying that it is possible to be both inclusive and confessing, proclaiming the gospel in a respectful manner.<sup>14</sup> As far as I can judge, the message from the bishops and pastors in these weeks cannot be characterized as vague and humanistic, but rather as evangelical and contextual.

I have used these tragic events in Norway recently to illustrate a very important challenge to all the Nordic folk churches. It is necessary to find the balance between openness and inclusiveness and the specific Christian message. The church should be contextual and relevant, and at the same time present the gospel as a challenging message. The church is in many ways integrated and imbedded in the society, culture and nation where it is situated but, at the same time, it transcends such categories. In the present situation, it is particularly important for the church to be involved in dialogue with people of different faiths and to defend the rights of those who come from other ethnic and religious backgrounds. In Jürgen Habermas' terminology, we ought to avoid both the relativism of a radical multiculturalism and the universalism of a radical secularism.

In an academic context, it is also important to recognize the role of theological institutions in dealing with issues like the role of religion in contemporary society and the need for better mutual under-

standing across religious borders. Theology should help churches to handle the challenges coming from a pluralistic, multicultural society, offering tools to analyze the situation and to take good decisions in line with the Christian faith and for the benefit of the whole society. Especially, theology could prepare the churches for interreligious dialogues, giving space both for the humble presentation of one's own faith and for the other and the other's liberty, dignity and claim for the truth. Religious dialogues should be open and respectful exchanges of views between individuals and groups with different cultural and religious backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. Sound academic theology could help church leaders and church members to develop this attitude, based on a deeper understanding of differences in worldviews and religious practices.

In a speech about "The Attitude of Dialogue", Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, now General Secretary of the World Council of Churches presents the challenge for religious leaders in this way:

We, as religious leaders are accountable for what we present as the core values of our faith. Our religions can contribute to peace and justice for all peoples, locally as well as globally. We are all custodians of our heritage of values given in our faiths. We have to be aware of the great potential we are stewarding in our positions. We also have to be aware of how our legacy of faith can be used and abused and become sources of confrontations, discrimination and even war.<sup>15</sup>

These words, spoken to Muslim leaders two years ago, remind us of the ambivalence of all religious faith and traditions. The challenge of the Nordic folk churches is to deal with their heritage and traditions in a way that contributes to peace and justice instead of mistrust and hatred.

## CHURCH AND ECUMENISM

The second challenge is the ecumenical challenge. The organization World Alliance, established in 1914 as the First World War started, was early introduced in Finland. Both in her dissertation and in the follow-up monograph, Aila Lauha presents

and analyzes the early ecumenical debate in Finland, especially the controversies between skeptical, confessional church leaders and more open-minded ecumenical leaders like Bishop Jaakko Gummerus. The growth in ecumenical relations, especially after Second World War, has been enormous in all Nordic countries, and the city of Porvoo has become an important ecumenical word in the last 15 years.

One obvious challenge for all Nordic folk churches is to act ecumenically as majority churches. A folk church with about 80 per cent of the population as members will always be tempted to overlook the smaller churches and congregations living in its shadow. One of the criticisms directed against the Church of Norway in the last weeks came from representatives of minority churches who complained about the minor role given to these churches both in the pastoral care and in the national and local memorial services. Folk churches are always tempted to act on behalf of all Christian churches, often forgetting the varieties in the broader ecumenical fellowship.

Still, I agree with Bishop Gunnar Stålsett in his "Foreword" to our common book on the Nordic folk churches: "The Nordic churches have been among the founders and staunchest supporters of the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Conference of European Churches."<sup>16</sup> Stålsett continues by saying that the Nordic churches in many ways "speak and act with one voice", although "there are also significant variations on a broad scale of issues".

Variations and diversity between churches should not be seen as a problem as long as they do not turn into fragmentation and brokenness. We have become increasingly aware of the contextual character of the Christian message and the differences between Christian churches, expressing Christian faith in many ways. But diversity can also

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12 Holt 2011.

13 Cf. Bellah 1967.

14 Cf. Byfuglien & Johnsen 2011.

15 Tveit 2009.

16 Stålsett 2005, vii.

lead to conflict, and this is the reason why we need ecumenism. Ecumenical work always strives towards *koinonia*, fellowship across different customs, liturgies and theological traditions – both between churches and within churches, especially large and comprehensive folk churches with many inherent differences and tensions.

Ecumenism caused tensions and disagreement in Finland in the early 1920's, as shown in Aila Lauha's work. But the ecumenical movement was also met by skepticism in Norway, especially among confessional Lutherans, like Ole Hallesby, Carl Fredrik Wisløff and Leiv Aalen, all prominent professors at my own faculty, MF Norwegian School of Theology. A proof of the completely new ecumenical atmosphere in Norway is the changes that have taken place at this faculty, especially during the last decade. Still defined as a Lutheran faculty, MF now has opened up for professors from different churches, and today we have several teachers and doctoral students who belong to the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostal congregations or the Methodist church. Now we see how this change has created a better ecumenical atmosphere both among teachers and students at the faculty, and also within Church of Norway. Shortly after the Second World War, the Norwegian Bishop Eivind Berggrav, an ecumenical pioneer both on the national and international level, said that "in 50 years, the word *ecumenical* will be as dear for Norwegian Christians as the word *mission*."<sup>17</sup> Obviously, his words came true. There are numerous examples of local ecumenical initiatives both in Norway and in the other Nordic countries, and the contact between Christians from different traditions has improved a lot during the last decades. At the same time, we see the need for deeper reflections on how our Lutheran heritage can offer a valuable contribution to church life in Norway. In other words, there is no inevitable conflict between being confessional Lutheran and being ecumenically open to other Christian traditions.

Our Nordic folk churches are members of the main international ecumenical organizations, and they also play an important part in national ecumenical councils, like the Finnish Ecumenical Council (FEC) and the Norwegian Ecumenical

Council (Norges Kristne Råd). The churches have established councils for international relations, taking part in the ongoing discussion between churches. As a recent example, I have chosen the statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland Council for International Relations on December 13, 2010 on the CPCE Document *Scripture – Confession – Church: Provisional Result of a Doctrinal Discussion of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe*.<sup>18</sup> The statement gives a positive evaluation of the document, with some critical remarks based on a Lutheran understanding of Scripture and Tradition. According to the statement, the aim is to give "some constructive input to the ongoing work on the basis of the Evangelical Lutheran confession and the ecumenical strategy of our Church which intends to 'seek unanimity with all Christians on the basic truths of faith'". This is a good example of how Lutheran identity and ecumenical openness can be combined in a constructive way. There is still a long way to go in the ecumenical work, but I am optimistic about the contributions from the Nordic folk churches in today's ecumenical work, especially since the Danish folk church signed the Porvoo agreement last year.

## CHURCH AND ETHICS

The ethical task of the churches is closely linked to the other two fields I have discussed. The folk churches are important parts of the societies where they are situated and they have an obligation to speak out on important ethical issues, both on the national and international level. This task has been even more underlined in the ecumenical fellowship and today we see many examples of how churches formulate joint statements on important social ethical challenges, like peace, justice and environmental issues. As an example, I could refer to another recent statement from The Council for International Relations on a CPCE Document, *Stand up for Justice: Ethical Discernment and Social Commitment of the Protestant Churches in Europe*.<sup>19</sup> The statement refers to two important documents from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland on socio-ethical issues, the bishops' statement from 1999, *Towards the common good*,<sup>20</sup> and the *Catechism of Civic Re-*

*sponsibility* (2005), both important documents for the ethical discussions.

The Church of Norway and the other Nordic Folk Churches have also become increasingly active in responding to socio-ethical issues in our time, especially since the early 1970's. In Norway, there has been a debate on church statements on issues which are discussed in the public debate. Some critics, both among politicians and from the conservative "low church" organizations, have maintained that the church should restrict itself to the preaching of the gospel and not interfere into political issues. For example, church statements about boycott of South Africa during the apartheid time were highly controversial. In recent years, there have been debates about church statements on environmental issues, especially related to oil production in Norway and climate issues. Before the Copenhagen climate change conference in December 2009, the Norwegian bishops were very visible in the public debate and they were criticized, especially on the part of conservative politicians, for mixing religion and politics.

Traditionally, church leaders have also made statements on issues like abortion and sexuality. Such issues are personal ethical issues, but at the same time they are linked to political discussions and changes in legislation. The church involvement in the discussions about a new, liberal abortion law in the 1970's met massive criticism from many different groups, especially radical feminists. Many people left the church in these years and sociological studies still tell us that no generation has so little contact with the church as the generation called the "68-generation", people who were radicalized after the student revolts in Europe and influenced by neo-Marxism.<sup>21</sup>

Today, this has changed and the young generation seems to have a more positive attitude toward the church although many of them would want the church to be more radical in the issues of homosexuality and same sex marriage. This is the most debated ethical issue today, not only within the Church of Norway, but in many churches all over the world. Within the Church of Norway, there has been a gradual development during the last 20 years. In

1995, the bishops' meeting revealed for the first time their disagreement on the issue of homosexuality, as three out of eleven bishops accepted the liberal view on homosexuality. Since then, the liberal view has become even more common and today, more than half of the bishops hold this view, although most of them do not accept the new marriage law from 2009, allowing same sex marriages as equivalent to marriages between a man and a woman.

In this issue, many have warned against the danger of splitting the church into two fractions, and during the last decade some pastors and active church members have left the Church of Norway. In the diocese of Stavanger, one of the most conservative dioceses in Norway, a group of pastors has established a fellowship named *Carissimi* and this group is very critical toward their own bishop. Some of the members have left the church, others still hope for a solution. In other dioceses, however, the situation is quite different. In the diocese of Hamar, which is often called a typical "folk church" diocese, less influenced by the conservative pietistic tradition, most of the candidates in the recent election to the diocese council declared that they would work for the rights of homosexual couples to get married in the church.

Obviously, ethical issues can represent important challenges to the Nordic folk churches, both when they cause heavy disagreement among pastors and church leaders, as in the case of homosexuality, and when they cause reaction from politicians and other people who think that the church should not take a stand in controversial issues, as in environmental issues and in biotechnology, where the church always has been on the restrictive side. We live in societies which are characterized by ethical pluralism and disagreement, to some extent also within our churches.

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17 Cf. Heiene 1992; 1997; 2011, 97–110.

18 "Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland" 2010b.

19 "Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland" 2010a.

20 *Towards the Common Good* 1999.

21 Heiene 2005, 41–48.

Still, I think that it is important for the Nordic folk churches to keep the discussions on ethical issues alive and to help people to reflect on ethical challenges. Again, I refer to Jürgen Habermas in his "Notes on a Post-Secular Society":

Religion is gaining influence not only worldwide but also within national public spheres. I am thinking here of the fact that churches and religious organisations are increasingly assuming the role of "communities of interpretation" in the public arena of secular societies. They can attain influence on public opinion and will formation by making relevant contributions to key issues, irrespective of whether their arguments are convincing or objectionable. Our pluralist societies constitute a responsive sounding board for such interventions because they are increasingly split on value conflicts requiring political regulation. Be it the dispute over the legalisation of abortion or voluntary euthanasia, on the bioethical issues of reproductive medicine, questions of animal protection or climate change – on these and similar questions the divisive premises are so opaque that it is by no means settled from the outset which party can draw on the more convincing moral intuitions.<sup>22</sup>

According to Habermas, the churches should not be modest about their role in the debates on ethical issues and values in our post-secular society. Contributions from a religious point of view are just as important as contributions from a secular or humanistic point of view. During the last two decades, it has become increasingly clear that religion will not disappear, as adherents of the secularization thesis claimed from the 1960's on. Today, we see a growing recognition of the role of churches and other religious communities in discussions about values and ethics and the Nordic folk churches should be ready to take part in this important process, as churches situated in a specific society, within a specific nation, but also as churches belonging to a globalized world and a world-wide ecumenical fellowship.

## KIRJALLISUUS

22 Cf. footnote 11.

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