Abstract

The Gospel of Peace. Norwegian Pastors' Peace Union and the shaping of an ecclesial peace discourse 1915-1932.

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In this dissertation I examine The Norwegian Pastors' Peace Union, from 1925 the Norwegian Branch of th World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, and the peace discourse which developed there from 1915 to 1932. The dissertation is largely based upon heretofore unexamined source material in addition to printed sources. Sociological theory of social movements in combination with discourse analysis are the analytical tools for grasping the connections between organizational and discursive development.

The structure of the thesis is chronological, tracking the union's development through 17 years. In the analysis I focus on four main topics. The first is the relationship between being part of a social movement and being representatives of the church as an institution. My central findings in this regard are that the union moved in uneven steps towards becoming a purely ecclesial union, and maintaining its identity as a pastors' organization, even after changing the organization's name in 1925. This was due to the fact that the grass roots mobilization that was hoped for never materialized, and that the cause actually found resonance within the Church, especially in the higher clergy. The fact that the union remained dependent on the Pastors' Union of the Church of Norway for its own organizational needs also played a decisive role, and contributed to the pastoral identity remaining a strong component of the collective identity of the organization. The strong attachment of the organization's identity to central ecclesial practices like services and prayer, was also an important factor in making this an essentially ecclesial entity. On the other hand, the union's work contributed to opening a new space for the church in terms of engagement with a political issue. It is precicely this duality I want to capture by the term «ecclesial peace discourse».

The second main topic is the relationship between Christianity and politics. The central findings are that the union based its work on what I call a «two spheres model»: positing a separation between a spiritual, pre-political sphere which was the church's domain, and a political sphere which was the domain of the politicians and statesmen. Within the pre-political sphere the organization's aim was to turn human beings' hearts and minds in a peaceful direction, and they insisted on this being their main objective. At the same time the political logic of social movements pulled the union towards the political realm and prevented this relationship from ever becoming stable. This made the union vulnerable for criticism both for being too political and not political enough. In reality the union was based on clearly political foundations: a moderate and liberal understanding of peace in which a trust in institutions generally and the League of Nations specifically was essential. These political

convictions were connected to a progressive view of history in which the Kingdom of God to a certain extent was understood as being realized through the steady course of history. This led to the rejection of notions of a radical break to «force» a new social and political order. This moderate attitude also led to the union being at all times in line with the official Norwegian foreign policy objectives. Towards the end of the 1920's a new wave of emotionally charged and individualistic pacifism surged in the Norwegian clergy, making radical demands for unilateral and total Norwegian disarmament, but due to their moderate and gradualistic approach to the cause, the union had no apparatus for welcoming it.

My third main topic is the significance of the dramatically shifting international political context for the development of the union. Here I identify a pattern that seems to be that the more optimistic the mood in the world, the more the union would approach the political sphere and forward the church's ideals of reconciliation and international friendship as political demands, and the more support could be gained from both clergy and laity in the church. We see this in connection with the end of the Great War, and also in the run up to the League of Nations' disarmament conference in 1932. But confronted with more radical demands (such as relinquishing the right to receive war reparations from Germany or championing complete Norwegian disarmament) the union was pending by fear of pushing anyone away. In less hopeful times, as in the early 1920s, the union's activities shrunk and they withdrew to the pre-political realm.

The fourth main topic that is being illuminated in this dissertation is the relation between the notions of the national and the international. The moderate policies of the union also implied support for a national defence as long as international disarmament was not achieved. This was important to counter accusations of being unpatriotic, which would come from the more (politically) conservative parts of the Norwegian clergy. I find that the organization was committed to a form of moderate internationalism that did not question the legitimacy of nations, but envisioned the nations living peacefully together. Thus, they distanced themselves from more radical Christian voices that questioned the idea of the nation. According to the union, there was no contradiction between national identity and peace advocacy: On the contrary the will to peace was presented as something essentially Norwegian and Norway was put forward as an example to be followed in terms of its peace-seeking foreign policy.

This dissertation examines the Norwegian Pastors' Peace Union at a time when the Church's slow transition from being part of state power to becoming an actor in civil society was already on its way. It shows the way in which the union embodied the tensions that was latent in this transition, between clergy and laity, between the Church and the social movement, and between politics and Christianity.