

1.

Methodism in the midst of folk-churches.

We have been asked to write some pages about the subject above. I must mainly write about the conditions, which methodism has had and now has in my own country, Denmark.

There had been a long and bitter fight for religious freedom. After the reformation in Denmark 1536 the Lutheran Church was as intolerant against other believers as the Roman-catholic church had been before. As early as 1553 the king ordered as well church officials as civilian officials to warn against those baptizing again and against sacramentarians. No such people were allowed to live in the country or to have any job for anybody. If those secterians would not renounce their faith, they would be punished without any mercy as an example to others.

The bishop of Seeland, Jesper Brochmand, says ~~in the~~ ~~year 1639~~ that in the year 1639 the jews only might stay in the country, if they renounced their religious cult, circumcision and polygami, and even in 1676 artisans and sailors were forbidden to take part in a reformed worship-service.

Here we see, that the reformed church was an exception. The town Fredericia was 11./3.1682 privilged to have free religious cult for inhabitants, who had a Christian faith. The reformed immigrants used this freedom, and the congregation is still in Fredericia. The corresponding priviliges were also granted the reformed in Copenhagen, and it was queen Charlotte Amalis, who took this initiative. There is still a French and a German~~reformed~~ reformed church in Copenhagen.

Already before the new cnpstituion for the country 1849 there were romaⁿ-catholic congregations in Copenhagen and Fredericia, in Fredericia according to the priviliges for this town. The king decided 9./6.1841, that the priests should have "the highest approbation" before they could exercise their office.

According to special order jews could be allowed to stay in the country from 6./2.1651. There was an allowance for a synagogue in Fredericia according to the privilège 1682-Later on another allowance was given in Copenhagen and some other towns. Just now the only recognized synogogue is the one in Copenhagen.

In the year 1849 the new constitution for the country was adopted. Instead of the King's sovereign government, we now get the constitutional kingdom, so that the king had to reign through responsible ministers of state, these chosen by the king, but Rigsdagen (as the parliament was called) had the power to form and adopt the laws, and independent courts are administering the cases.

You will not find a declaration in the constitution, that says, that there must be religious freedom in the country. Those who gave us the constitution considered an abstract declaration superfluous. But there are some paragraphs in the law, which fix certain practical consequences of religious freedom.

The first minister for religious cult was the very wise Monrad, but he could not pass a constitution for the church. He was a liberal for whom the state was in principle religious indifferent, Rigsdag and government is without a Christian confession, religious circumstances has nothing to do with civilian rights and duties. Even then nobody would dream of separating the state and the church, but the church must have a far reaching self-government, built upon democratic principles. So he would gather laymen and clericals to discuss, how the changes should be for the folk-church. This is the first time this word has been used as substitute for the word State-church. Its intention was to stress, that practically everybody in the Danish people had voluntarily joined this church and now should govern it through the people's sovereignty in the same way as it governed the state, in democratic way. Even laymen should take part and be responsible.

Monrad suggested, that a synod should meet every 5 years and there should be voluntary administrative boards in the congregations. The synod should be composed of an equal number of laymen and clericals.

But the synod was never called, because Monrad resigned as a minister of state (he became a bishop), and in 1849 there was war. Then the result became as follows:

§ 3 in the constitution: The Evangelical-Lutheran Church is the Danish Folk-Church and as such it is supported by the state.

It is no longer as it was in 1683 the symbols from the ancient church and from the reformation, which are mentioned, although this is behind it, but it is expressed more weakly, so what is here declared, is more historic than dogmatic. The support

from the state intended to protect the holidays and to protect people from being mocked for their creeds and worship.

§ 6 says: The King shall belong to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church.

Stressing the tie between church and state, the paragraph is caused by fear of a catholic king.

§ 80 says: The constitution of the Folk-Church is to be arranged by a law.

This promise was never fulfilled. That is why there was often a fight about the right of the church to ownership.

§ 81 says: The citizens have a right to unite in societies and to worship God in the way, which is consistent with their conviction, yet nothing must be taught or done, which is against morality or public order.

§ 82: Nobody has a duty personally to contribute to any worship than his own, yet everybody who cannot prove to be a member of a denomination or church (trossamfund) which is recognized in the country, will have to contribute to the school the personal taxes demanded by the law.

§ 83 is important for methodists. It says: The conditions of the denominations, differentiating from the Folk-Church, shall be arranged by a law.

A dissenter-law was never given, but you had already for some time distinguished between recognized and not-recognized denominations or churches.

§ 84 is in the same way important: Nobody may because of his creed be deprived of fully enjoying his civil and political rights, nor can he escape fulfilling any common duty as a citizen.

If we compare this to the constitution of 1953 there is almost no difference in the law.

How then has it been, and how is it to be a methodist in the midst of folk-churches?

When the emigrants returned from America to Scandinavia, bringing with them their new experience, some of them were accepted and received with joy by their families and friends. They lived in a time, when there was not so much religious experience in the folk-churches. However, it did not take long long till methodists were considered secterians. Many had to fight hard to explain, that their faith

was the New Testament faith, even if they stressed personal experience of forgiveness of their sins, conversion, assurance and striving for a holy life. As they very often very strictly were keeping the general rules, which John Wesley had given the methodists, they were considered fanatics. But the inner joy carried them on.

Another feature was the opposition which sometimes came from the Folk-Church, when they dared to build chapels and churches. This seems to have been the case, as Chr. Willerup built a church in Cppengagen and called it St. Paul's. Till this day there is in the neighbour-street to the methodist-church a Lutheran church, caled St. Paul's. But the methodists changed the name, when the Lutherans built this church. Still another name was given to the methodist church after a fire during world war 2. So to-day we have the Jerusalem Church in Copenhagen, and this is a protected name.

This of course is exceptional, and to-day the circumstances are otherwise. There is very much, which we have in common with the Lutherans. Still they are the church, and it may happen that some people from that church tell us, that the greatest part of the population, some say up till 97 (earlier it was 99) per cent, belong to the Folk-Church. As you probably know, it is usual to be baptized in a Lutheran church. Then you are a member, even if you never go there, and you will be considered a member there, if you do not give in your written announcement of having withdrawn or gone over to another church. Now, having a Folk-Church, this is natural. But if you in the Methodist-Church for some time have worked among former passive members of the X Folk-Church, you may be told, that it is none of your business to take over members of the Folk-Church. Now again, this is no longer so strong as earlier, and very often you can work quite freely as methodists.

The question is then: Going into an ecumenical age, has methodism anything special to keep - or ought we to die as an organisation, as we have been told from some methodists in other places.

For me of course there is no question of working towards unity, and it has to me been a great experience to meet my Lutheran friends as well as a student ^{as} later on in the churches. There have been occasions, where we have gone to the Lord's Supper together, metodists and Lutherans and other Christians. Of course we have other free churches in Denmark, and there is as well Evangelical Alliance as The Ecumenical Council.

I still think,methodists have a contribution as methodists,even if ~~there~~ they are minority groups.

The free churches have a common contribution to give in a nation with a Folk-Church.If we do not take up this heritage, others will do so,even form new organisations.As we can be inspired by other churches,we ourselves,guided by the spirit of God,may become an inspiration to others.

The Methodist Church has a contribution to give by keeping the baptism of children,but not stressing baptism too much in neither objective nor subjective direction.The Lutherans are very hard stressing regeneration in the moment of baptism.Most of the free churches are stressing very hard the so called baptism of faith. Methodists know from the New Testament,that God alone is giving us regeneration.We also knows,that God is working as he will,and when he will,and we also know,that we have to turn to God and receive Christ as our personal Saviour in order to have the full blessing from our baptism as children.

About the Lord's Supper,I think we are stressing more,that Jesus meets us here,not only to forgive our sins,but also to give us strength to live as Christians,so that we can go forward to sanctification.This is why a methodist communion is full of joy. Christ is alive.

This leads us to the question of sanctification.In a Lutheran country you always hear about our sinfulness and forgiveness of our sins.This is natural.But you do not hear so much about being freed from your sins and led to a new life,althoughk this of course is an unfair generalisation.Methodism has always proclaimed the good news,that Christ is forgiving and redeeming, and we have tried to proclaim this message according to the gospel.

What has been very important is the social work,done by a small group of methodists.It is important that some social work is done by Christians,helped by the spirit of God,especially in this time of secularisation.

That we are an international church means to me a great deal,because in this way the church is not bound to national feelings I think it is according to the thought of unity,that we are tied together over the borders,even where it is very hard to get over those borders.In continental Europe,we have some rather small methodist churches,kept together through the years by the same spirit.It very often had to be in quite small groups,but the central conferences of Europe came into existence as a sign of

unity between us, where it sometimes was difficult to be a methodist. However to be a minority does not mean to be false. On the contrary the minority-groups have very often been those, who had a very positive influence in the world.

This can of course only be true, if we are led by the Holy Spirit and by faith in Christ, so that we truly honour our Father.