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Christian Social Ethics in Sweden

A Contribution to the Critical Examination of Morality in Church and Society

Zusammenfassung

Die Christliche Sozialethik in Schweden ist wie die Kirche im Allgemeinen durch die starke Säkularisierung der Gesellschaft geprägt. Sie steht zunächst historisch gewachsen in der Tradition Luthers, darüber hinaus ist der christliche Realismus prägend für das Fach. Daraus resultierend versteht sich die Disziplin als methodisch kritisch arbeitend und im Kontakt zu anderen Disziplinen an den Universitäten. Der Text stellt verschiedene Themenbereiche und Fragenkontexte mit ihrer jeweiligen Verortung an den Instituten dar und skizziert die großen Themenbereiche, die für die Zukunft entscheidend sein können. Dazu zählen u. a. Umweltethik, Menschenrechte, der Dialog zwischen den Religionen, speziell auch in Fragen der Ethik, und die Rolle der Religion im post-säkularen Zeitalter.

Abstract

CSE in Sweden is conducted at state universities in a highly secularized society. Formed by history it stays in tradition of Martin Luther, furthermore Christian realism is important for the discipline. Because of this impact CSE understands itself as a critical discipline and connected to political philosophy. The text illustrates the different areas and questions in the different departments that teaches CSE. It depicts also topics that will be important for the future of CSE, e. g. Environmental ethics, research of human rights, dialogue between Christian, muslim and jewish ethics, and the role of religion in post-secular society.

Ethical research in Sweden is conducted at state universities. Like any other research discipline it has to meet the criterion of intersubjective testability. This means that ethical researchers in Sweden often make a sharp distinction between ethics and morality. While morality is regarded as a social institution, consisting of different conceptions of what is right and good, ethics is regarded as a theoretical and critical study of this institution. The main task of ethics as a research discipline is to provide a philosophical analysis of moral conceptions in contemporary society. A particular task for theological ethics is the critical examination of conventional morality within the Christian churches (see Grenholm 2014a, 13 ff.; 18 ff.; 287 ff.).

Even if Sweden is regarded to be a highly secularized society, the vast majority of the population are still members of various Christian churches. The Church of Sweden is a Lutheran church with six million members, and it was a state church until 2000. The free churches – Reformed, Baptist, and Pentecostal – have 250 000 members, while there are 95 000 members in Orthodox churches and 120 000 members in the Roman Catholic Church. These churches cooperate in the ecumenical Christian Council of Sweden. Within this council there has been a strong common involvement in some social ethical issues, particularly issues concerning peace, global justice, migration, and refugee rights.

In a society where the Church of Sweden has been dominant, it is no wonder that theological research previously had a particular focus upon the Lutheran tradition. As a state church the Lutheran church had a significant impact on theological research and education, and theology at Swedish universities was still rather confessional during the first half of the 20th century. At the theological faculties in Uppsala and Lund, ethicists were mainly doing research on Martin Luther's theology. Leading ethical researchers such as Einar Billing, Anders Nygren, and Gustaf Wingren had a clear Lutheran confessional profile. Today, such a profile is no longer possible. One reason is that Sweden nowadays is a multicultural and secularized society, where 800 000 citizens are Muslims. Another reason is that theology is understood as religious studies. Theology at Swedish universities is non-confessional research on various religions, with historical, linguistic, sociological, and philosophical methods.

Research in different theological disciplines has a strong position at the universities of Uppsala and Lund, but it is also conducted at the universities of Gothenburg and Linköping. There are some institutions that allow for confessional theological reflection. One is the Church of Sweden Research Department. Others are the Johannelund School of Theology in Uppsala and the University College Stockholm, which is run by the Mission Covenant Church and the Baptist Union of Sweden. However, even at these departments, theology is mainly regarded to be a critical research on religious traditions.

Ethics has a strong position as one of the main research disciplines at the theological faculties. In Uppsala and Linköping it is a distinct research discipline of its own, while it is part of systematic theology at the universities of Lund and Gothenburg. Ethical research is also conducted at the Church of Sweden Research Department and at the University College Stockholm. At Linköping University there is a Centre

for Applied Ethics, which is one of the most successful institutes for ethical research in Sweden.

For the past 50 years, research in ethics has had a clear focus on social ethics. This is largely a result of the impact of the international ecumenical movement. The extensive work on social ethical issues within the department of Church and Society at the World Council of Churches made a great impression in Sweden, especially in connection with the Assembly in Uppsala 1968. One of the pioneers in this field was Dr. Anne-Marie Thunberg, who published several books on ecumenical social ethics (see Thunberg 1960; Thunberg/Thunberg 1966). Ragnar Holte became professor of theological ethics at Uppsala University in 1966 and decided to change the name of the discipline to “Ethics, particularly social ethics”. He also initiated a new series of research monographs at *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis* called “Uppsala Studies in Social Ethics”. During his time as professor several important studies in the field were published there (one example is Heeger 1975).

Since Protestant churches have had a strong impact in the Swedish society, ethical research has had a particular focus on their involvement in social issues. There are three different approaches to social ethics within Protestant theology that have been of particular interest for ethical research in Sweden. One is the social gospel movement in the United States, which was related to a kind of liberal theology with a rather optimistic eschatology. This position was criticized by Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian realism, according to which the all-pervasive character of sin implies that only approximations to the Christian ideal of love can be applied in the political sphere. An even sharper critique of liberal Protestantism was developed by Karl Barth, whose Christocentric social ethics has influenced later traditionalists such as John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank (see Long 2015, 91 ff.).

Ethical research in Sweden relates in various ways to these different directions within protestant social ethics. Often the perspectives of this research exhibit similarities to the kind of Christian realism that was developed further by theologians like John C. Bennett and Ronald Preston. Both, liberal theology and Barthian theology, as well as the new traditionalism, are often sharply criticized. However, Christian social ethics in Sweden is primarily a critical research discipline. From a philosophical point of view, its main task is to provide a critical analysis of prevailing conceptions within the political and economic spheres. In this respect, it has similarities to critical theory.

Studies in social ethics are impossible without interdisciplinary cooperation. Since ethics is conducted both at theological and philosophical departments, it is necessary that research on Christian ethics utilizes theories and methodologies within moral philosophy. In a similar way, dialogue between Christian social ethics and political philosophy is important. Several research projects on social ethical issues in Sweden became possible due to a close cooperation between theologians, philosophers, and researchers within social sciences, such as sociology, political science, law, and economics. In Sweden, feminist theory and gender studies had a significant impact on theological ethics.

1 Christian realism and Lutheran tradition

Christian social ethics in Sweden was influenced by the tradition of Christian realism, as developed by theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr, John C. Bennett, and Ronald Preston. These theologians had a realistic view of human nature, and they criticized the political utopianism within liberal Protestantism. Reinhold Niebuhr regarded the Christian ideal of self-sacrificial love to be of relevance within politics and economics, but due to human sin we have to accept approximations to this law of love in the political and economic spheres. Such an approximation is the ideal of equality as a principle of justice (see Niebuhr 1987, 63 ff.).

In my own doctoral dissertation, *Christian Social Ethics in a Revolutionary Age* (Grenholm 1973), I gave a critical analysis of social ethical theories elaborated by three theologians who had great impact upon the work on Church and Society within the World Council of Churches. One of them was John C. Bennett, who was strongly influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr, a chief leader in the department of Church and Society at WCC, and the author of the important book *Christian Realism* (Bennett 1947). I compared his position to the “theology of revolution” as elaborated by Richard Shaull, who was a proponent of a neo-orthodox, Barthian social ethic. My conclusion was that Bennett’s realism is a reasonable approach in several respects, primarily in its conception of the relationship between Christian and humane ethics and its realistic view on the relevance of moral ideals in politics (see Grenholm 1973, 298 ff.).

Normunds Kamergrauzis (2001), in his dissertation *The Persistence of Christian Realism*, argued that Christian realism had a strong impact on Anglican theology in Britain. He gives a clarifying analysis and critical

assessment of Ronald Preston's social ethical theory and its implications for economic and political issues. In several respects, he shares Preston's approach to political ethics and economics. Kamergrauzis' conclusion is that Christian social ethics should be based not only on the doctrine of creation but also on Christology and Eschatology, in order to make possible both dialogue in a pluralist society and a critical perspective on prevailing moral conceptions (see Kamergrauzis 2001, 223 ff.).

Similar approaches to social ethics and a common interest in the relationships between ethics and economics have made possible a close cooperation between researchers at Uppsala University and theologians in Manchester, related to the William Temple Foundation. This cooperation was initiated by the late Canon Theologian of Manchester Cathedral, John Atherton, who was awarded an honorary doctorate by Uppsala University. One expression of this cooperation is that researchers from Uppsala have contributed with articles on political economy and theological ethics in two volumes, edited by Elaine Graham (see Graham/Reed 2004 and Baker/Graham 2018).

Research on Christian social ethics in Sweden is also influenced by the approach to social and political issues within Latin American liberation theology. Theologians like José Miguez Bonino and Enrique Dussel have demonstrated the significance of a critical eschatological approach to social ethics. They regard the kingdom of God to be a vision of the ideal human community, even if it is not a political utopia. Since this eschatological ideal can never be realized here on earth, it constitutes a strong driving force for a constant critical perspective on prevailing political and economic structures. From this perspective justice is liberation from oppression, which presupposes a change of fundamental social structures (see Bonino 1983, 90 ff. and Dussel 1988, 13 ff.).

The influences from Christian realism and liberation theology mean that social ethicists in Sweden often have criticized positions within traditional Lutheran theology. A recent research project at Uppsala University studied some of the main ideas in Martin Luther's thought and in later Lutheran theology and ethics. Its purpose was to critically assess different positions in Lutheran tradition and to constructively tackle the question what a fruitful formation of Lutheran theology and ethics could look like in today's post-Christian and multicultural society. Several objections were leveled against traditional Lutheran political ethics, which often has been related to the doctrine of God's two kingdoms. This doctrine has often been interpreted in such a way that it

legitimized existing social structures. Since the state should be governed by reason alone and the gospel does not inform social ethics, Lutheran social teaching has accepted a patriarchal principle, according to which the subordinates should respect the authority of those in power (see Grenholm/Gunner 2014a, 6 ff.; 92 ff.).

In my own study, *Tro, moral och uddlös politik* (Faith, Morality and Uncritical Politics), I argue that a more tenable ethical theory in Lutheran tradition should be based not only on the doctrine of creation but also on Christology and Eschatology. This means that the sharp distinction between law and gospel should be challenged, as far as it means that the gospel does not have any implications for the content of ethics. The doctrine of the two kingdoms should be abandoned in order for the conception of God's sacrificial love and the idea of human equality, which are important in the gospel about Christ, to become relevant also within political ethics. In this way, Lutheran ethics could inspire social critique (see Grenholm 2014b, 258 ff.; 275 ff.; 279 ff.).

A similar position is taken by some authors in the two volumes that were published as a result of an international conference on "Lutheran Tradition in Transition", hosted by the Church of Sweden Research Unit and the Department of Theology at Uppsala University. Christoph Schwöbel argues that Lutheran theology can contribute to handling the challenges of a multicultural society since its conception of God's promise and human trust can deepen our understanding of justice as recognition. Tage Kurtén claims that the return of religion means that it is important to develop a political theology also within Lutheran tradition, in which case the traditional interpretation of the doctrine of the two kingdoms must be abandoned (see Grenholm/Gunner 2014a, 15 ff. and Grenholm/Gunner 2014b, 155 ff.).

2 Social ethics in dialogue with political philosophy

Social ethical research at the department of theology in Uppsala is conducted in close dialogue with political philosophy. One of the central research questions concerns the meaning and substance of social justice, and ethicists in Uppsala have contributed to a critical analysis of various philosophical theories in the field. Of particular interest have been liberal theories such as those proposed by John Rawls and Amartya Sen, as well as the positions of critical theory and philosophers like Jürgen

Habermas, Seyla Benhabib and Rainer Forst. These theories have been related to theories of justice within feminist ethics and to theories within various Christian and Muslim traditions. This established a fruitful dialogue between political philosophy and religious social ethics.

Per Sundman recently published an important study on the meaning and justification of social justice, entitled *Egalitarian Liberalism Revisited*. Taking John Rawls's theory of justice as his starting point, Sundman argues that equality of opportunity and desert are central ideas to egalitarian liberalism. He then examines different forms of critique of this liberal position, such as Robert Nozick's version of libertarianism, Karen Lebacqz's idea that injustice is conceptionally and epistemologically prior to positive accounts of justice, and Iris Marion Young's thesis that justice is not primarily a distribution of social values but recognition. Sundman's conclusion is that a liberal theory of justice can be revised in such a way that it gives a fruitful response to this criticism (see Sundman 2016, 28 ff.; 59 ff.; 113 ff.; 140 ff.).

Sundman's main thesis is that social justice ought to be interpreted as a triune conjunction of desert, equality of opportunity and self-ownership. These are the cornerstones of egalitarian liberalism. Contrary to common assumptions, Sundman argues that the elements of desert and self-ownership reinforce rather than contradict a robust conception of equality of opportunity. He further claims that social justice is not only about redistribution of important goods but also about ending misrecognition (see Sundman 2016, 203 ff.; 214 ff.; 221 ff.; 228).

Isaias Chachine (2008) also provides a critical analysis of theories of justice and freedom in Western political philosophy in his doctoral dissertation *Community, Justice, and Freedom*. He examines how such theories relate to different conceptions of the relationships between the individual and community. Chachine offers a critique of both liberal and communitarian theories from the perspective of African philosophy and theology. The African *ubuntu* ethics includes a view of human beings that maintains that to be is to belong – a person is because of others. This *ubuntu* tradition gives new perspectives on justice and freedom (see Chachine 2008, 73 ff.; 266 ff.).

The research program in ethics at Uppsala University also prioritizes the study of human rights. How should we interpret human dignity, and how can we best protect human rights? How are the legal, moral, and political aspects of human rights related? Can the individualism of the traditional liberal human rights discourse be combined with postcolonial

conceptions of liberation? Several research projects deal with these issues and seek to enrich Western understandings of human rights through insights from other cultures and religions. This is also a research field where theological ethics is fruitfully related to political philosophy.

Elena Namli, who is professor of ethics at Uppsala University, recently published an important study on *Human Rights as Ethics, Politics and Law* (Namli 2014). Here she addresses the question of how the moral, political and legal dimensions of human rights are related. She argues that human rights should be understood and practiced as a set of moral principles with a unique capacity to inspire political action. Human rights should not be reduced to conventional and legally protected rights, according to Namli. In order to protect conventional rights effectively we need to be able to articulate their moral content while remaining aware of their political dimension (see Namli 2014, 19 ff.; 193 ff.).

According to Namli there are serious challenges to the lasting legitimacy of human rights. One relates to post-colonial skepticism towards the legitimacy of existing international mechanisms for protecting human rights. Another is the development within an international human rights system that overemphasizes the importance of legal regulations. A third challenge is the lack of transparent instruments for dealing with situations of conflicting human rights. In order to meet these challenges, Namli argues that we need to balance human rights law with political instruments for protecting human rights. Her thesis is also that genuine protection of human rights should take the fact of global political and economic inequality as its point of departure (see Namli 2014, 9 ff.; 207 ff.).

Several researchers in Uppsala have contributed to a critical study of human rights. Helen Andersson has recently given an original analysis of what Hannah Arendt calls “the calamity of the rightless” and demonstrated that this is also a theme in some of the novels by Franz Kafka (see Andersson 2018, 305 ff.). Per Sundman (1996) wrote his doctoral dissertation on *Human Rights, Justification, and Christian Ethics*, defending a constructivist conception for understanding and justifying human rights. He argues that Christian ethics can give an interesting contribution to the understanding of human dignity by regarding moral equality as imported on every human being rather than deserved due to common species-specific capacities (see Sundman 1996, 151 ff.; 166 ff.).

Important contributions to studies in human rights also came from researchers at the University College Stockholm and at the Church of Sweden Research Department. Susanne Wigorts Yngvesson, who is

professor of ethics in Stockholm, studied problems concerning freedom of conscience and religion, and she has also published extensively on ethical, philosophical and theological aspects of surveillance (see Wigorts Yngvesson 2018). Elisabeth Gerle at the Church of Sweden Research Department has published an interesting volume on human rights in the perspective of Christian faith, where she primarily gives an interpretation of the Biblical idea that human beings are created in the image of God and a critique of the overemphasis of rationality in enlightenment philosophy (see Gerle 2006, 60 f.; 71 f.). Göran Gunner has edited some widely read anthologies on theological and philosophical perspectives on human rights (see Gunner 2007; Gunner/Namli 2005).

3 Ethics, economics and global justice

Over many years, ethical research in Sweden was devoted to problems of working life and a critical analysis of moral assumptions in economic theory and practice. An early project on “Ethics of Work” resulted in several publications on the meaning of work, protestant work ethics, economic democracy and fair wage. A later interdisciplinary research project at Uppsala University was “Ethical Reflections in Economic Theory and Practice”. This project studied intersections between economic and ethical discourses, and its main result was that economic analysis is not free from ethical considerations. The ethical approach presupposed in economic theory is most often a kind of utilitarianism. Neoclassical economic theory today seems to be related to a kind of preference utilitarianism. A decision on a market is regarded to be better than another decision, if the consequences provide higher preference satisfaction for the affected individuals (see Granqvist 2000, 11–35).

From the perspective of Christian social ethics, these ethical assumptions in mainstream economic theory should be critically evaluated. A major objection to utilitarianism is that it does not pay attention to the problem of distribution of social values. Preference utilitarianism is typically not combined with any theory of justice, and the reflection of justice is missing in mainstream economics. Therefore, economic theory would need to be informed by an egalitarian conception of justice (see Grenholm 2001, 9–25).

The research project resulted in a series of reports on “Studies in Ethics and Economics”, with articles by researchers within the project

and by invited scholars, such as John Broome, John Atherton, and Julie A. Nelson. It also resulted in four doctoral dissertations. One of these, authored by Malin Löfstedt, offers a critical investigation of the neoclassical view of humans and the theoretical model of the *homo oeconomicus* (see Löfstedt 2005). Another dissertation, written by Ann-Cathrin Jarl, was on *Women and Economic Justice*. Jarl's thesis is that there is a deep concern for more justice-oriented economics among feminist economists. She argues that they could learn from the perspectives on economic justice among feminist ethicists such as Beverly Wildung Harrison and Karen Lebacqz, who insist that the poor have an epistemic privilege in describing what justice as liberation from oppression means (see Jarl 2000, 176 ff.; 189 ff.).

Göran Collste, professor emeritus of Applied Ethics at Linköping University, was one of the researchers in the project on ethics and economics. As the Director of the Centre of Applied Ethics in Linköping, he made important contributions to the analysis of ethical problems related to the huge gap between rich and poor in the present world order. There is a widespread poverty and a global inequality, which makes it necessary to develop a theory of justice that is relevant for human relations across the national borders. In his research, Göran Collste has proposed two different theories of global justice.

In his study *Globalisering och global rättvisa* (Globalization and Global Justice) Collste is inspired by the egalitarian theory of justice proposed by John Rawls. However, he does not accept Rawls's idea that a theory of global justice should not include "the difference principle". He argues that this principle should be applied to the global world order, which means that we should strive for an equal distribution of welfare in the world, unless an unequal distribution is to the benefit of the least advantaged (see Collste 2004, 165 f.).

In his later study, *Global Rectificatory Justice*, Collste proposed a different theory of global justice. Here justice is understood not as a distribution of social goods but as a correction for past misdeeds. Collste refers to Aristotle, and his important distinction between distributive and corrective justice, and he regards rectificatory justice as an intermediate between loss and gain, a way to compensate for the consequences of harmful acts. He argues that colonialism in many ways was harmful for the colonized, and therefore states in former colonial powers have an obligation to carry out rectification for previous misdeeds (see Collste 2015, 16; 29 ff.; 84 f.; 127 f.).

At the Centre for Applied Ethics at Linköping University, there is an ongoing research in various fields of great relevance for Christian social ethics. The centre is interdisciplinary, and both theologians and philosophers have been involved as researchers. Research projects at the centre cover different issues in applied ethics like medical ethics, animal and environmental ethics, ethics of technology, political ethics, ethics and migration, and global justice. Since several of these issues are also dealt with at the theological faculties in Uppsala and Lund, there has been a close cooperation between these faculties and the Centre for Applied Ethics.

Of particular importance has been the cooperation regarding research on work ethics and the relationship between ethics and economics. The new Director of the Centre, associate professor Elin Palm, wrote her doctoral thesis in philosophy on *The Ethics of Workplace Surveillance* (see Palm 2007). She has later published several articles on globalization and migration, forced migration, information ethics, and the ethics of surveillance. Lars Lindblom, who is a researcher at the Centre for Applied Ethics, has published on ethics of work, business ethics, and theories of social justice. Johanna Romare, who is university lecturer in ethics, wrote her doctoral dissertation on ethics and economic action. Taking the neoclassical *homo oeconomicus* as the starting point, her aim of the thesis is to discuss the assumed antithetical relation between ethics and self-interest (see Palm 2018; Lindblom 2018; Romare 2014).

4 Sustainable development and global ethics

One important area for Swedish social ethics research is environmental ethics. At Lund University, Anders Melin published several studies in this field. One of his publications is *Living with Other Beings*, where he gives a virtue-oriented approach to the ethics of species protection (see Melin 2013). An ongoing research project is “Energy and Justice”, which analyzes the complex moral choices involved in energy policy-making. The choice of energy systems gives rise to ethical conflicts not only within present generations but also between current and future individuals. Melin’s theoretical starting point in this project is the capabilities approach as developed by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen.

Another researcher in environmental ethics is David Kronlid at Uppsala University. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on *Ecofeminism and Environmental Ethics*. This study gives a critical analysis of ethical

theories elaborated by Karen Warren, Sallie McFague, Chris Cuomo, and Carolyn Merchant. An important characteristic of ecofeminist ethics is its “double nature”, rooted in both feminism and environmentalism. Kronlid argues that this double nature results in a foundation that gives ecofeminism as an environmental philosophy a unique potential to handle some of the theoretical tensions of environmental ethics (see Kronlid 2003, 168 ff.).

Lars Löfquist wrote his doctoral dissertation on *Ethics Beyond Finitude*, where he gave an evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks of different theories about our responsibility towards future generations. Löfquist's main concern is whether these theories can handle moral pluralism and if they can provide future generations with a moral status that is independent of our own interests and beliefs. The study also includes an analysis of the ethical implications of methods used in the management of high-level nuclear waste (see Löfquist 2008).

The professor of philosophy of religion in Uppsala, Mikael Stenmark, has also done research on environmental ethics. His study *Environmental Ethics and Policy Making* is an investigation of the idea that sustainable development should be transformed into a global ethic. The aim is to identify more precisely the values on which the notion of sustainable development is based. Stenmark demonstrates that the ideal of sustainable development implies a kind of anthropocentric environmental ethic, even if it includes the idea that we have moral obligations not only towards people now living but also to future generations. Then he investigates biocentric and ecocentric alternatives to this position and how they might have practical consequences for environmental management and policy making (see Stenmark 2002, 27 ff.; 57 ff.).

As a result of a Nordic conference, a volume on *Sustainable Development and Global Ethics* was published. It contains articles on environmental ethics, global ethics, and moral responsibility towards future generations with contributions by among others Desmond Mc Neill, Christien van den Anker, Nigel Dower, Mikael Stenmark, and Göran Collste. Three basic problems are discussed: (1) How should we understand the meaning of sustainable development? (2) In what sense is sustainable development a moral ideal within a global ethic? (3) What is the meaning of global ethics, and is a global ethic desirable or possible? (See Grenholm/Kamergrauzis 2007)

Problems concerning global ethics have also been dealt with in some doctoral dissertations. At Lund University Dan-Erik Andersson, who

now is Assistant Professor of Human Rights Studies, wrote his doctoral thesis on global ethics, where he gave a critical analysis of Hans Küng's "Projekt Welthethos" (see Andersson 2006). Elisabeth Gerle, who is adjunct professor of ethics at Lund University, wrote her dissertation on two major projects that deal normatively with global issues. Her aim was to propose some moral principles that are relevant for a model of global ethics. Gerle argues that our ethical responses to global issues facing humanity and the earth need to be both universal and particular, taking suffering and vulnerability as points of departure (see Gerle 1995, 198 ff.; 226 ff.).

Global ethics was also the theme of a later dissertation in Uppsala, written by Jenny Ehnberg, who now is a researcher at the Church of Sweden Research Department. This study scrutinizes theories of global ethics proposed by political philosophers Martha Nussbaum and Seyla Benhabib, and theological ethicists David Hollenbach and William Schweiker. Ehnberg concludes that in order to meet the challenges of globalization we need a theory of global justice and human rights that is inspired by critical theory. Her thesis is that a tenable global ethic needs to be communicable, but she does not accept an epistemological universalism (see Ehnberg 2015, 244 ff.).

5 The future of theological social ethics

Swedish research on social ethics covers a wide field. We have seen that it is often inspired by the tradition of Christian realism, with a critique of both liberal Protestantism and new traditionalism. There is also a critique of traditional Lutheran social teaching. Theological ethicists often use philosophical methodology and have critically studied various theories within political philosophy. Main research areas have been theories of justice, human rights, ethics and economics, global justice, environmental ethics and global ethics.

What are the challenges for future research on Christian social ethics? In which spheres should social ethical research be intensified? From my perspective, three problem areas are of particular interest. The first one is research on human rights. As Elena Namli has clearly demonstrated, it is important to discriminate between human rights as a moral and political vision, and human rights as legal conventions. But it is equally important to keep sight of the role played by moral beliefs within the

legal sphere. A critical examination of legal positivism and alternative theories of the relationship between law and morality is therefore necessary. This is also the theme of Namli's ongoing research project on theories within legal philosophy.

In her research on human rights Elena Namli has also argued that in order to take issues concerning global justice seriously, it is necessary to incorporate perspectives from non-Western cultures. Liberalism has been important within the human rights discourse, but this tradition should not have a monopoly in the field. Therefore, we need more research on post-colonial critique of Western liberalism and non-liberal critical perspectives on human rights and global justice.

A second problem area concerns the relationship between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish social ethics. Teresa Callewaert (2017) has written an interesting dissertation, based on a comparison of different formulations of Christian and Muslim social ethics. Her main interest is their perspectives on the concept of justice and the role of religious ethics in political discourse. Callewaert argues that religious ethics, both in Christian and Muslim traditions, can give substantial contributions to a critique of prevailing power structures and a deeper understanding of what justice means (see Callewaert 2017, 331 ff.).

This is an area where further research would be important. In our contemporary multi-cultural society, Christian social ethics could learn a lot from a dialogue with Muslim and Jewish ethics. Elena Namli recently co-published an introductory in theological and philosophical ethics, which covers a penetrating presentation of ethical themes not only in Christian but also in Jewish and Muslim traditions (see Namli/Grenholm 2019, 179 ff.; 203 ff.). However, it is quite clear that we need more research in comparative religious social ethics.

A third problem area for future research concerns the role of religion in the public sphere within a post-secular society. "The return of religion" means that even in a highly secularized society like Sweden various religious traditions make important contributions to public political discourse. But under what conditions would these contributions be relevant in a pluralist society where secularization implies that most citizens find religious traditions to be utterly strange? These problems are examined at the Church of Sweden Research Department. They have published a book on the role of religion in the public sphere, with several interesting articles on the return of religion and the post-secular society. Currently, they are pursuing a research program on public

theology. The idea is to investigate different kinds of problems within contemporary society from the perspectives of various theological disciplines (see Stenström 2013).

Ethical research in Sweden has always been conducted in broad international cooperation. Of particular importance have been the close relations to researchers in the Netherlands, Austria, Russia, Great Britain, USA and the other Nordic Countries. Swedish ethicists are often members of The Society of Christian Ethics in the United States and contribute to the annual meetings of this society. However, the society that is most important for researchers in social ethics is of course Societas Ethica, the European society of ethics. Professor Göran Collste at Linköping University was the President of this society from 2012 to 2015, and Swedish ethicists have always participated in the annual meetings of Societas Ethica. Currently, Jenny Ehnberg is a member of its board as the executive editor of the international journal “De Ethica”, that is published in cooperation with Societas Ethica. From a Swedish perspective, Societas Ethica would be the most suitable platform in order to strengthen a European cooperation between researchers on Christian social ethics.

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