Consensus or Conflict. To Exclude or to Discuss More Fully? A Plea Encouraging Christians to Embark upon Controversial Debates with Right-Wing Populists

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1. Consensus and Conflict

Dear brothers and sisters,

it is a great honour for me to speak to you here in Uppsala. I wish to thank you for inviting me! I am particularly pleased to be also in Sweden in the year following the anniversary of the Reformation. In the scope of the European Station Path, I had the opportunity to welcome the light blue truck in Västerås, to get acquainted there with Bishop Bengt Mikael Mogren, to participate in the wonderful youth service at Västerås Cathedral and to experience a cordial spiritual communion.

Today, you have invited me to talk about a very serious and difficult topic. How shall we as the Church deal with right-wing populism?

It is a field I have been able to gain some experience with, or rather had to, since the conflict taking place in Germany is a serious one. Obviously, I can only talk about my experience gained in Germany. What it means to you and your situation, you will have to find out by yourself. I think this is a special stimulus: to learn other experiences in order to newly evaluate your own experiences. And the next step will be to exchange opinions.

The title of my lecture is taken from a document issued by the *Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany* last August: "Consensus and Conflict".[1] This document encourages our Evangelical congregations in Germany to embark upon a substantive debate with people who feel some sympathy with right-wing populist positions. We suspect that there have already been divergent, right-wing populist positions among our population which had not cropped up so far in public discourse. The fact that they have emerged and new views are represented now – e.g. on family patterns, the coexistence of the nations in Europe or the climate change – requires a fundamental and objective discussion.

Professor Hans Joachim Schellnhuber of the *Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research* is one of the most distinguished scientists in his field. He even advised the Pope on his second, ecological encyclical »Laudato si'«. At the 2017 autumn synod of my church, he reported how shocked he was that he could not talk objectively about the scientific findings of climate research in the course of a chat show and about the urgent measures that have to be taken in order to avert a climate catastrophe. Moreover, his right-wing populist dialogue partner told him that there was definitely no man-made climate change. After some nightmarish few seconds, Schellnhuber accepted his new task to start arguing all over again. This little episode demonstrates a phenomenon that I take for a typical characteristic of our social debate today: In fact, reasonable action is urgently required. But, unfortunately, growing populist movements make us start from scratch by laboriously engaging in fundamental discussions. Even if it is a laborious dispute, it will become a special and important task for the Evangelical churches counting on the word and the power of information.

[1] "Konsens und Konflikt [Consensus and Conflict]. Politik braucht Auseinandersetzung [Politics Needs Dispute]. Zehn Impulse der Kammer für öffentliche Verantwortung des Rates der EKD zu aktuellen Herausforderungen der Demokratie in Deutschland [Ten Impulses by the Chamber for Public Responsibility of the Evangelical Church in Germany for Present Challenges of Democracy in Germany]." Published in Berlin in August 2017.

The document “Consensus and Conflict” encourages us to follow this path. The emergence of positions trying to take centre-stage is not *merely* assessed negatively but as “ambivalent” in the literal sense of the word, that is, as contrary and ambiguous. Thus, the emergence of those positions could ultimately - and I do add: likely after a longer course of conflict - contribute to strengthen a living democratic culture. However, the political culture will only be stimulated constructively if the destructive potential of certain structures and mentalities that are strongly present in the context of right-wing populist forces is “contained”, as the document says.

We will have to ask ourselves if we as protestant Christians are prepared to take the long way. Are we ready to listen to other basic positions in the discourse and to deal with them argumentatively? These positions differ from the ones many people associated with the Evangelical Church have so far understood as the common good of our society. We are confronted with for example:

- Other concepts as how to shape immigration policy
- Other concepts as how our nation shall regard its place in globalisation
- Other concepts of European policy
- Other concepts of forms of living that have to be promoted und supported

In our church, there has hitherto been a broad (ethically and theologically well justified) consensus concerning many of these topics. I do not want to give up these thoroughly justified positions, but, moreover, I want to actively defend them. Yet, I do not have to make the impression of decreeing or postulating by moralising the political discourse and restricting its liberty. This subtle distinction is an essential one: strongly introducing ethical-moral positions – yes, that is our mission! But we are not authorised to moralise the very discourse itself!

The document “Consensus and Conflict” finally initiates a constructive perspective:

- The reprofiling of positions that have hardly been represented before is a fundamental necessity for our democratic culture in order that voices and opinions can be expressed which have not been established clearly enough up to now.
- However, the necessary distinctions still need to be made: anti-democratic mentalities have to be differentiated from democratic contributions demanding an objective debate.

Now, I want to take the next steps with you and address the following topics:

- What is right-wing populism?
- Why is it a serious challenge to the Christian Church?
- Which theological approach is helpful and credible?
- What has to be considered methodically in the discourse?
- Is there a positive vision?

2. What is Right-Wing Populism?

In my view, right-wing populism is an attitude claiming that the true will of a people is not appropriately and legitimately represented by the present political system and its institutions, but it

takes new people's leaders to implement the political will of the people.[2] This right-wing populist ideology became almost eerily clear at Donald Trump's speech after his inauguration: Using a theatrical gesture, he maintained that he was the leader who would give the American people its rule back. Thus, he maintained that the United States of America, one of the countries of origin of democracy, did not have a working democracy anymore. In Germany, right-wing populism has spread later than in other European countries. It has formed a melting pot by founding the political party "Alternative für Deutschland" (AfD) for quite some time. In my view, this party clearly indicates that it lacks a basic acceptance of our social system. It uses a conspiracy theory and put the following statement in its party programme:

> "Behind the scenes a small and powerful elite within the political parties is secretly in charge ..."[3]

Our current party system is described as ultimately corrupt. Entirely in line with Donald Trump, the German people have to be given back its power first. "Only the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany can end this illegitimate state of affairs."[4] Our democratic institutions, expressing the will of the people according to the Basic Constitutional Law[5], are being severely criticised by officials of the movement whenever possible. Therefore, the Evangelical Work Group of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) rightly calls the AfD's criticism of the policy of our country a "distortion of the whole democratic system".[6] Right-wing populism tends to address fears and claims that current policies are incapable to solve the problems. That way it explains its own significance as a necessary alternative. The federal chairman of the party's youth organisation, Junge Alternative (JA), Markus Frohnmaier, made relentlessly clear what right-wing populism means and what the goal is: "When we come, then there is going to be a cleanup and a muck-out, then politics are going to be made solely for the people, for we are the people"[7]. – "We are the people" was the call of demonstrators against the communist-system of de German Democratic Republic and is now used be the right-wing-populists.

3. A Serious Challenge to the Christian Churches

The officials of right-wing populism in Germany assert that they have to defend the Christian Occident. The AfD often asserts to be the only remaining Christian party in Germany. It would be necessary to defend Christian thinking against the left-leaning, liberally politicised churches. The

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[2] Karin Priester: Populismus als Protestbewegung [Populism as Protest Movement]. In: Alexander Häusler (edit.): Rechtspopulismus als „Bürgerbewegung" [Right-Wing Populism as "Citizen Movement"]. Kampagnen gegen Islam und Moscheebau und kommunale Gegenstrategien [Campaigns against Islam and the Building of Mosques and Municipal Counterstrategies]. Wiesbaden 2008, p. 30. See also: Andreas Zick/Beate Küpper: Wut, Verachtung, Abwertung. Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland [Anger, Contempt, Degradation. Right-Wing Populism in Germany]. Published for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung by Dietmar Molthagen and Ralf Melzer in 2015.

[3] Programm für Deutschland [Manifesto for Germany]. Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland [The Political Programme of the Alternative for Germany], Stuttgart 01.05.2016. The AfD had been founded on 06.02.2013.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Article 20,2 of the German Basic Law: "All state authority is derived from the people. It shall be exercised by the people through elections and other votes and through specific legislative, executive and judicial bodies."

[6] Wohin führen die Alternativen der AfD [Where Are the Alternatives of the AfD leading]. Ein Faktencheck [Fact-Checking], Evangelischer Arbeitskreis der CDU [Evangelical Workshop of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany], June 2016, p. 7.

[7] Deutschlandfunk, 29.10.2015.

manifesto of the AfD inter alia refers to the "religious tradition(s) of Christianity"[8]. But the manifesto does not formulate any Christian reason. It does not offer a Christian view of humankind. The officials of the right-wing populist movement do not argue theologically when formulating what they think to be *Christian* characteristics: the rejection of homosexuality; a conservative family image; the protection of the unborn child that is postulated aggressively and in an ethically undifferentiated manner, including the insinuation that the churches do not or do not appropriately advocate the protection of life; the defence of the German Leitkultur; the undifferentiated and polemical rejection of Islam – as mentioned before, without even partially providing a theologically serious reason.[9] Obviously, this functionalisation of Christian faith in favour of an aggressive right-wing populist ideology particularly calls for a critique of that movement by the churches.

For us in Germany, there is another aspect: Throughout the history of the Evangelical churches we had once before a very similar theological-systematical debate with the nationalist movement of the German Christians in the 1930s. As a result, we as an Evangelical Church (as well as our Catholic brothers and sisters) are deeply sensitised, strongly objecting to a nationalist ideology trying to monopolise Christianity for itself. Some people may consider our determination to be morally strict, arrogant or even inspired by a particular missionary zeal that would involve the danger to represent an *ethic of conviction* paying too little attention to the real fears and needs of the German people. We are particularly strongly criticised when we as the Church plead for the refugees in our country and call for the ethical obligation to shelter those in need.

For the Christmas issue 2015 of the respected daily newspaper "Der Tagesspiegel" of Berlin, I wrote an article on Christmas Eve, looking back on the year 2015:

> *"The dignity of man is inviolable." This sentence has a special ring to it in our country. We have a "historical vulnerability" (Herfried Münkler; German political scientist). Apparently, the examination of our own history of guilt has made us sensitive. Groups of people in a pitiful state, being on their way in long treks, helplessly exposed to all being in charge – such pictures of evacuation, flight and expulsion are - connected with the imperative "never again!" - rooted in the collective German memory. Again, they appear when we see the pictures of people queuing in front of the barbed wire border between Greece and Macedonia.*

The historian Heinrich August Winkler quotes this passage of my Christmas article in his new book "Zerbricht der Westen?" (Does the West Fall Apart?) as an example for an ethic of conviction that is religiously founded and does not sufficiently consider the consequences of its action. It would be typically German to fluctuate between extremes, thus worrying the European neighbours. Somewhat sharpened by me now, his allegation is: We Germans would exploit the history of guilt in order to elevate ourselves above others with ethical rigorism. We would demand too much in the context of

[8] Programm für Deutschland, p. 47.

[9] In addition to the large number of day-to-day statements of AfD officials in the media that cannot be mentioned here in detail, see as an instance of the line of argument the documentation on the panel discussion with Anette Schultner during the German Evangelical Church Assembly in Berlin on 25.05.2017.
At that time, Ms Schultner still was the chair of the Federal association "Christians in the AfD". See Wolfgang Thielmann (edit.), Alternative für Christen? [Alternative for Christians?]. Die AfD und ihr gespaltenes Verhältnis zur Religion [The AfD and its Ambivalent Relationship to Religion], Neukirchen-Vluyn (North Rhine-Westphalia) 2017, pp. 165-192.

refugee policy and therefore isolate ourselves in Europe, finally producing a dark future by showing a morally excessive attitude.[10]

I do not think this is an appropriate analysis. By no means do we Christians in Germany fall into an ethic of conviction that is too little mindful of the consequences of its decisions when we call attention to the misery and neediness of people leaving their homelands, because they live under inhumane circumstances. My predecessor Wolfgang Huber pointed out that the practice of intercession in the Christian service always has been an element of Christian existence, commemorating *all* sufferers before God, although knowing that we will not be able to help all of them: "From the practice of intercession, Christians know that the circle of people they worry about will always be larger than the circle of people they can take care of."[11] This fundamental Christian attitude requests us not just to restrict responsibility to our own land. It is unfair to accuse us of representing a universalistic ethic and – ridiculously enough – of believing we could invite all needy people in the world. We do of course know that our human as well as our national possibilities to help refugees and receive them are restricted. Are the accusations that we adopt a thoughtless ethic of conviction anything else but a transparent manoeuvre in order to keep the misery of hard-pressed people at arm's length? The argumentation that we Germans are not entitled to deduce the sensitivity to human rights and the dignity of man from our own painful history of guilt denies us the right to learn from our own history. Each nation must be allowed to learn from its history. We in Germany too must be allowed to learn from the history of guilt connected with National Socialism and that we have an obligation to stand up for humanity in the sense of human rights and the dignity of man. Each country can and shall justify the obligation to humanity from its own historical experience. That will only turn into arrogance if nations present their history as the sole yardstick.

4. Which Theological Approach Do We Need?

Needless to say, it is not sufficient to refer to our history of experience. As Christians we have to be theologically credible. We will only convincingly assert ourselves in the current confrontation with right-wing populism if we present theologically well based and distinguished positions. A vague cultural Protestantism cannot trustworthily confront the vague cultural Christianity of right-wing populism.

In my view, the theological justification of human rights is one important pillar. After the Second World War, human rights were formulated due to the deep awareness that hatred always produces hatred, nationalist thinking ultimately sets the people against each other and that the verbal degradation of men and groups of people ends in discrimination, exclusion, contempt and persecution. Our country created a basic constitutional law that describes the dignity of man as inviolable. Equally, the European Community has developed as a peace project. Our church adopted human rights also in a theologically well founded sense[12], in Western as well as in Eastern Germany.

[10] See Heinrich August Winkler, Zerbricht der Westen? [Does the West Fall Apart?] Über die gegenwärtige Krise in Europa und Amerika [About the Current Crisis in Europe and America], 2. ed., Munich 2017, p. 121 f.

[11] Wolfgang Huber, Moralischer Impuls und rechtliche Differenzierung [Moral Impulse and Legal Differentiation]. Für einen erweiterten Blick auf die Debatte zu Flucht und Migration [For an Extended View to the Debate on Flight and Migration]. Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik, Volume 61, Issue 4, 2017, p. 248.

[12] See e.g. Huber, Wolfgang/Tödt, Heinz Eduard, Menschenrechte [Human Rights]. Perspektiven einer menschlichen Welt [Perspectives of a Human World], Stuttgart/Berlin 1977.

Not least because of a common understanding of human rights on both sides of the Berlin Wall the Wall came down in Germany. This year, on the 10th of December, we are going to celebrate a jubilee: 70 years have passed since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Admittedly, we will celebrate the declaration at a time when human rights are practically and theoretically questioned.

In my opinion, the second important pillar is the *Theological Declaration of Barmen 1934*. This declaration was created in the context of the conflict with nationalist populism in Germany in the 1930s. We cannot directly compare the present situation with the circumstances leading to the Barmen Declaration. But beyond the historical situation from which it originated, this declaration has until today a fundamental theological and systematical importance for the Evangelical Church in Germany. That is why it has been included as a confessional writing in the constitution of my church. In dealing with right-wing populism, which of the declaration's basic theological decisions are particularly important today?

Thesis I of the Barmen Declaration very clearly defines which principles constitute the Christianity of the Church. It is the orientation towards the person of Jesus Christ. Christian is what Christ does! It would be a sharp contradiction to this approach if Christianity were used as a discursive weapon to close off Europe. Those who use a vague Christian term to defend their national values and to exclude people because of their religion or their ethnic origin, those who do not want to deal with foreign ideas - cannot refer to Christian faith to express such an attitude.

Anyone who wants to orient himself (or herself) and his life towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be equally ready to compare his position with Jesus Christ. “How do I follow Jesus?” That was the question of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Many sentences of Dietrich Bonhoeffer unambiguously demonstrate that nationalist thinking cannot stand up to Jesus Christ. I would like to quote from his book „The Cost of Discipleship“, published in 1937:

> **“**When we love those who love us, our brethren, our people, our friends, yes, and even our Christian congregation, we resemble the pagans and the tax collectors. It is obvious, normal and natural but by no means Christian ... The love to those who belong to us through blood, history or friendship applies to both pagans and Christians ... Jesus does not have much to say about it ... Jesus does not have to tell us that we are to love our brethren, our people and our friends, it goes without saying.”[13] “Christianity is the ... extraordinary ... Christianity does not happen within natural circumstances but by going beyond them ...”[14]

Indeed, if we plead for refugees or the interreligious dialogue, this will be “Christian” in a specific way. However, if right-wing populists campaign for a marginalisation of Muslims, this will be unchristian.

Thesis V of the Barmen Declaration defends the claim of the Church to publicly express itself in order to remind the rulers and the ruled people of their responsibility before God. The Church “calls to

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[13] German title: “Nachfolge”: chapter »Der Feind - Das ´Außerordentliche`« [The Enemy – The ´Extraordinary`], pp. 120-129, here: p. 127.
[14] Reference as above, p. 128.

mind the kingdom of God, God's commandment and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled." The claim of the Church to be allowed to, even more, to be obliged to express political views has been increasingly denied by right-wing populists recently. They want an "apolitical" church: a church limiting itself to matters of an individual ethic and politically subordinating itself to a nationalist ideology. A church critically dealing with the nationalist ideology is defamed as being "politicised". At a theological level, we clearly and unmistakably object to this idea.

Above all, we have to oppose a movement intensifying fears and generating anger by putting forward our message of hope: the Good News of Jesus Christ! The Gospel arouses faith, gives hope and motivates us to charity: **Faith** means trust in God, trust in my fellow human beings, trust in me and my abilities, assuming responsibility in order to contribute to a successful development of our society even in challenging times. **Hope** means to counteract pessimism and to help to develop solutions and perspectives to our problems. **Charity** means to stand up for the weakest people, whether they already have been with us for a long time in our country or whether they had fled from their native land and came to us. In brief, this means: **Right-wing populism turns people into angry citizens; the Gospel turns people into courageous citizens!**

5. What Has to Be Considered Methodically?

If we try to embark upon an objective discourse with right-wing populists, we will face fundamental problems, since what - at least - I have considered to be a discourse is frequently and consciously undermined: Right-wing populists use untrustworthy communication methods that shall deliberately distort the open, fact-based discourse.

For me, it was a very enlightening experience to read a document of the AfD originally written and approved as a confidential communication strategy paper intended for the parliamentary elections for the *Bundestag* (German Federal Parliament) in 2017. Finally, it became public.[15] This strategy paper is entitled: "Reconditioning Democracy. Returning State Authority to the People."[16] The paper states that the AfD-party must be "politically incorrect very deliberately and systematically again and again." It should "not shrink from carefully arranged provocations". This did not involve the subject or solutions to problems, but a planned effect by provocation. The AfD purposefully counts on the reactions of the "old parties": "The more tensely and unfairly the old parties react on provocations, the better. The more they try to stigmatise the AfD due to provocative words or actions, the more does the profile of the AfD benefit." … "Many voters do not assume that the AfD will be able to solve the problems the party addresses, even if it participates in the government". With regard to the electoral success, it is not a matter "to submit and spread sophisticated elaborations and technologi-

[15] German title: Vertraulich! [Confidential!] Demokratie wieder herstellen. Dem Volk die Staatsgewalt zurückgeben. AfD-Manifest 2017 [AfD Manifesto 2017]. Die Strategie der AfD für das Wahljahr 2017 [The Strategy of the AfD for the Election Year 2017]. Bundesvorstand [Federal Board] GP/RE 2016-12-22". http://www.talk-republik.de/Rechtspopulismus/docs/03/AfD-Strategie-2017.pdf. The strategy paper was approved by a conference call of the AfD Federal Board on 19.12.2016. See merkur-online.de of 19.12.2016. Hereinafter, I report the statements of the paper according to "AfD Strategy Paper Provocation instead of Problem Solving", state: 23.01.2017, 15:06 hours. By Thomas Leif, SWR [Southwest Broadcasting] and Patrick Gensing, tagesschau.de.

[16] The author of this strategy paper is the regional chairman and whip of the Berlin AfD, Georg Pazderski.

cally advanced solution models on central issues that only specialists of the political class would be interested in and which would overstrain the voter. Answers that are too comprehensive bear the danger of getting bogged down in technical details." It would be "more important to touch the sore spot of the old parties than getting entangled in an expert discussion on proposals for solutions". - Accordingly, cheap propaganda is the declared goal, whereas an objective debate shall be avoided.

There is a further communication pattern: After a targeted provocation, the thesis is restricted and partially abandoned; or the party recalls that their manifesto does not include this provocation; or the party announces that it had just been an individual remark.

Thus, AfD officials achieve double media presence: firstly, by the thesis; secondly, by the discussion. The German sociologist Wilhelm Heitmeyer believes that by this means the set of values of our society is unnoticeably changed.[17] Constant repetition of misanthropic theses causes a normalising effect. Society gets accustomed to this process and many people do not realise that they take misanthropic statements steadily for normal terms.

Anyone trying to deal with the AfD has to know that the rules of fair communication are not complied with. There seems to be no need for an objective debate. Of course, members of other parties use populist conversational strategies as well. What is more, the AfD deliberately adopts them as a principle of its communication. In his farewell speech, the outgoing Federal President Joachim Gauck made quite clear that this is a fundamental threat to democracy:

> "Only if we adhere to facts, to the truth, we will be able to assess and – where necessary – to criticise power. We must not allow power to establish itself again without an argument that is based on truth. Let us instead defend democracy as a power that trusts the argument and allows us to be guided by it."[18]

Aggravating the discourse, right-wing populist try to shield themselves from objective criticism by using three arguments:

1. ***"The politicians of the AfD are properly elected."*** As a good democrat, you would have to accept them. – This is a purely formal argument, ignoring the complete self-conception, the aims and the methods of this movement's political action. From our German history (as well as from looking at the countries where populist are in power at the moment), we know that elected populists are nowhere near democrats, but get themselves elected in order to oust the institutions of a working democracy.
2. **"There must be many members in your church who vote for the AfD. How dare you to criticise this party?"** - This argument presumes that all has to be tolerated within the Church. This is not our understanding of the Church. Our church has a theological claim and is not afraid of conflicts arising in connection with the theological dispute over the truth.

[17] See Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Die schleichende Gefahr [The Insidious Danger]. Wie Rechtspopulisten die Normalität verschieben [How Right-Wing Populists Shift Normality], Tagesspiegel 03.02.2017.

[18] Joachim Gauck, „Wie soll es aussehen, unser Land?" [How Shall it Look like, Our Country?]. Speech on the occasion of the end of his term at Bellevue Palace on 18.01.2017, Bundespräsidialamt [Office of the Federal President] (edit.), p. 10.

3. The third argument says: **"As Christians, you should sympathetically deal with this young movement!"** It would still have to find itself as a party. – Anyway, the Church should not exclude those who feel appealed to by the new movement. - It should be stressed that we do not exclude people. However, we firmly distance ourselves from particular positions.
   For me, the fundamental distinction between person and work (or person and position) is a very important one. Our Christian view of human life requires me not to dislike people because I radically reject their positions – accordingly, I am not to dislike this person radically. I have to be allowed to come up with severe criticism, but I must not fully equate the objective opponent with his position. – This is the big, if not the biggest, problem in dealing with populists: They themselves are often not prepared to make this distinction. They want to be accepted together *with* their frequently misanthropic positions. We must not fall into this trap, but patiently emphasise that we exclude positions, not persons.

Entirely in line with this distinction, our church has furthermore legally defined the procedures for dealing with right-wing populists:

Already in December 2015 and in preparation for electing the parish councils in 2016, my church governing board has dealt with the question how to proceed in case AfD members want to participate actively in church bodies.
The constitutional order ("Grundordnung" or "GO") of the Evangelical Church Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia stipulates:

> "… the membership in or active support of a group, organisation or party pursuing misanthropic aims is not compatible (with the membership of a church council)" - GO, art. 19,1.

What does "misanthrophy" mean? We understand misanthrophy as an attitude disparaging persons solely on the fact that they belong to a certain group (determined by religion, culture, nationality, sexual orientation and so on), thus disregarding the principle of equality of human dignity and human rights and denying fundamental rights.

The AfD manifesto approaches the borderline between philanthropy and misanthropy by disparaging Muslims and challenging religious freedom. But from a legal point of view, this manifesto cannot be considered to be misanthropic.[19] In their public statements though, AfD officials constantly cross the red line. Since the manifesto is the basis of our legal decision, we cannot exclude anyone from a leading church position just because he is a party member of the AfD. If anyone publicly expresses himself in a misanthropic manner, there will be the possibility to exclude him from church offices. As soon as he or she reveals misanthropic and polarising tendencies as well as disparagement of our

[19] I would like to mention the chapter "Der Islam gehört nicht zu Deutschland" [Islam Does not Belong to Germany] as an example. Although the restriction of fundamental rights of Muslim fellow citizens is not explicitly demanded in this chapter, the general suspicion expressed ("Islam does not belong to Germany. Its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are viewed by the AfD as a danger to our state, our society, and our values.") as well as the restriction of Islamic life postulated actually result in a limitation of fundamental rights in the case of people belonging to Islam. Programm für Deutschland (see fn. 2), p. 49 and below, chapter IV.3.

social order or of people belonging to other cultures or religions in the proclamation of the gospel or by the method of leading the parish, we will make clear that we cannot tolerate such an attitude. Disciplinary measures will have to be taken. As a last consequence, our church law provides for a suspension from duties.

6. Our Vision: Making Europe Strong

Is there a positive goal, a constructive vision? Yes, there is. The spiritual community of churches in Europe! Some time ago, in 2001, the European Christianity formulated goals in the "Charta Oecumenica"[20]. Now is the time to definitely fill these goals with life. No longer are they fair-weather goals, but goals that have to be defended. I would like to remind you of some of these goals:

1. ***We contrast the message of reconciliation with the doubts about a bindingly unified Europe. Furthermore, we live the message of reconciliation in many European partnerships.***

By signing the Charta Oecumenica, the European churches have committed themselves to support "an integration of the European continent" and to "heighten Europe's sense of responsibility for the whole of humanity, particularly for the poor all over the world" (Guideline 7). Dear brothers and sisters, let us keep an eye on this goal today and defend it against those who want to seal off Europe!

2. ***Our culture of memory shows that we are able to learn from our history and are motivated to equally respect the dignity of man and human rights of all people today.***

The Charta Oecumenica emphasises the history of guilt of European Christianity. In particular, it mentions "schisms, hostilities and even armed conflicts" as well as the "abuse of faith and the church for political interests", all of these having "severely damaged the credibility of the Christian witness" (Guideline 3). Dear brothers and sisters, if we commemorate this mutual history of guilt, we will gain hope for the future. Let us offensively advocate this idea towards those who disparage the culture of memory!

3. ***We advocate the equal dignity of all people and maintain the interreligious dialogue.***

By signing the Charta Oecumenica all European churches have committed themselves to "resist any attempt to misuse religion and the church for ethnic or nationalist purposes" (Guideline 7). This is what they consider to be their task: "In view of numerous conflicts, the churches are called upon to serve together the cause of reconciliation among peoples and cultures" (Guideline 8). They stand up for "the absolutely equal value of all human beings" (Guideline 8). They want to "enhance Christian-Islamic dialogue at all levels", "to conduct" themselves "towards Muslims with respect" and "to work together with Muslims on matters of common concern" (Guideline 11). They know that "the plurality of religious and non-confessional beliefs and ways of life has become a feature of European culture" and undertake "to recognise the freedom of religion and conscience of these individuals and communities and to defend their right to practise their faith or convictions, whether singly or in groups, privately or publicly, in the context of rights applicable to all" (Guideline 12). Dear brothers

[20] CHARTA OECUMENICA, Leitlinien für die wachsende Zusammenarbeit unter den Kirchen in Europa [Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe], Strasbourg 22.04.2001.

and Sisters, let us defend these goals against all tendencies to defame the effort of a peaceful coexistence of different cultures and religions as an “ideology of multiculturalism”!

4. ***We are committed to people who had to flee their homelands. We support them to feel at home in Europe.***

Everyone being committed to refugee aid is aware of the problems of integration, surely does not trivialise anything, but she or he every day experiences how rewarding it is to help people belonging to other cultures to come into our society.
By signing the Charta Oecumenica the European churches have expressed their common will to contribute to solving a problem: “Together we will do our part towards giving migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers a humane reception in Europe” (Guideline 8). Dear brothers and sisters, this is our specifically Christian mission!

I am coming to the end.

Consensus or conflict – probably, there is no longer a *consensus* about this objective for Christianity in Europe, as it is written down in the Charta Oecumenice. But does that mean to abandon this objective? By no means! For it is a theologically founded and an ethically credible one. Those who have different ideas and bring them into the social discourse shall not be excluded as persons – but they have to live with the fact that their positions will be sharply criticised. The *conflict* is unavoidable. It is our mission to resolutely criticise right-wing populist positions while at the same time settling the conflict as objectively as possible.

Let us make use of the growing partnerships and the impetus we as protestant churches in Europe have been given by the anniversary of the Reformation in order to face this critical task together and with a joyful heart!

Thank you for your attention.