

Nils Ivar Agøy: *Kirken og arbeiderbevegelsen. Spenninger, skuffelser, håp. Tiden fram til 1940*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget 2010, 676 S.

The July 22, 2011 terrorist attacks on the Norwegian government and the Labour Party and its youth organisation make it hard to give an impartial review of a book which deals with the history of the Norwegian Labour Movement and its relationship with the Church. Photographs from inside the Cathedral of Oslo filled with grieving people of all generations, youths lighting candles for dead friends and a sea of flowers outside, have made an impact which may affect this review. Furthermore the reviewer grew up in working barracks in Oslo and has for the last few decades been employed as a teacher and researcher at the University of Oslo.

Nils Ivar Agøy, author of the book, is Professor of modern history at the high school in the county of Telemark. He is educated as both a historian and theologian. To many he is better known as one of the founders of a Norwegian Tolkien Society. He has translated several of Tolkien's books into Norwegian. But he has also written books about Norwegian nationalism and modern war history.

The general subject of Agøy's latest book is the relationship between religion and politics; more precisely the relationship between the Church and the Labour

movement from the second part of the 19th century to 1940. Although this is a chapter of modern Norwegian history, it is also part of the European and global history of the relationship between the Church and Christianity on one side, and, socialism, social democracy and social Christianity on the other.

The author and some reviewers claim that there has been little study of this subject so far, except, as part of other research such as diaconical, historical and political studies. We know quite a lot about the relationship between the Church and the Labour movement, cf. for example Professor Slagstad's book about the national strategists (Oslo 1998) and Professor Aukrust's doctoral thesis: a study of the Church and the Christian social work in Norway to 1914 (Oslo 1990), both mentioned in Agøy's bibliography. The innovation for his book is first of all a presentation based on a meticulous and exhaustive study of written sources and archives.

The book consists of an introduction and a division into periods which constitute the three main parts: the 19th century, the period 1900 - 1918 and the period 1918 - 1940. At the conclusion the author

gives an outlook and reiterates some of his perspectives. The presentation and the author's interpretations of this vast amount of material are an impressive effort and an admirable research of the sources. As such this book will be a corner stone for further and more limited studies of the history between the Church and the Labour movement.

The second part of the 19th century is a starting point because this is when the industrialization and urbanization in Norway gained momentum. At the same time the first Labour associations (*thranittene*) were created, but struck down by the authorities. The Christian religion however, was important from the very beginning in supporting their demands for justice and social reforms. Towards the end of the 19th century the social quest, which already was important in other European countries, became one of the most debated subjects among theologians and Lutheran pastors in the Church of Norway.

However, what went wrong, and what differences does history show during the period to 1940? Why did the relationship between the Church and the Labour movement become like a roller coaster? Those are the main questions in the following chapters of the book. To find an answer to such questions we have to follow Agøy through more than 1000 footnotes and references which he uses as

justification of his interpretations and perspectives. This is something any historian appreciates; but at the same time it is easy to lose the different perspectives which keep the presentation together. This makes the book more like a reference book, to a magnum opus, rather than something from a reader who is writing history. This criticism is of course refuted to a degree by the last chapter with its outlook, summary and perspectives.

This reviewer thinks that a hermeneutic reflection of the author's own viewpoint in the opening chapter would have been appropriate. It seems that he is quite sympathetic to what may be called social Christianity, as well as to a conservative theological wing of Church.

The problem for the Labour movement's relationship to the Church has been, as far as I understand Agøy's arguments and texts, the minor socialist groups, elites and atheistic leaders. They have been ruining possible alliances between the Church and the Labour Movement although both groups have wanted to improve the living conditions of the working class.

Secondly Agøy is obviously biased when he deals with matters linked to the Norwegian Church conflict. The conflict, which is similar to conflicts in other countries, started at the end of the 19th century. A sharp disagreement about how

the Church should deal with modern culture and science (especially the historically critical study of the Bible and dogma) arose. There was noticeable influence from German Protestant theology (Ritschl, Harnack, Kaftan). The conflict also concerned theology as an academic study not subject to Church office (The Roman Church), dogma (Protestant Orthodoxy) nor to a personal conversion (theologia regenitorum and Pietism). This conflict was institutionalized with the establishment of a private theological faculty (1907-08) in bitter opposition to the University and its academic theology.

Agøy, who himself was educated by the private faculty, has labelled, for example, Professor Mowinckel (1884-1965), who is still internationally, the most famous Norwegian theological researcher, as „ultraliberal“ (p. 583). What does such a label mean? Furthermore he plays down the harshness of a suggestion by Bishop Jens Tandberg of Oslo and former leader of the Board of Trustees of the private faculty who, in January 1920, wanted to keep a thanksgiving service for the liberation of Finland. This suggestion was rightfully interpreted as support of the „White“ (bourgeois) side in the cruel Finnish civil war.

The author also tries to rehabilitate the reputations of two of the professors at the private faculty, Karl Vold and Ole Hallesby, who were seen as hostile to socialism and

the Labour Movement. He describes Professor Vold as sympathetic towards ideas of the Labour Movement, while politicians from the Labour Party thought of him as an enemy of the party. For this reason it is hard to understand the author's attempt to reinterpret and excuse a book of ethics written by Professor Hallesby (1928). Leaders of the Labour Movement called it a text book of strikebreaking. Even Hallesby's colleague, Professor Vold, was repulsed by some of the points in this book of ethics, such as an ardent defence of the death penalty. Nor should it be forgotten that Hallesby, at the annual gathering of leaders of Christian organisations (Geilomøtet) in 1934 declared that God should be praised for Hitler and Hitlerism. It must of course be recognised that during the German occupation he took part in the resistance against the Quisling regime and the occupants' brutal rule.

From one perspective this is an impressive book based on meticulous studies and primary sources. For that reason it is primarily of interest to historians, Church historians and other researchers with a special interest in the subject and the epoch. But to be of interest to the general public, a more rigorous editing and shortening of the text would be recommended.

*Dag Thorkildsen (Oslo)*