Protecting the Cross and Welcoming the Stranger:
A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Church of Sweden’s Refugee Work the Year 2017

Emma Sundström
19910917-2925
emma.sundstrom91@gmail.com
Abstract

Through the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)—and paying extra attention to the utilization of ideological squaring, actor descriptions, and lexicalization—this thesis aims to discuss the Church of Sweden’s “official” discourse regarding its humanitarian and social engagement with refugees and refugee issues the year 2017. Wherein, the author attempts to discuss what the collected material—from the internet-based function Support migration, and personal semi-structured interviews with Church personnel—can tell one about the Church’s views on its self-identity, social engagement, as well as ecumenical and interreligious relations, in an increasingly diverse Swedish society. Central for this thesis is how ideology functions, and how “us and them” divisions are constructed, within the discourse, regarding the Church’s refugee work. It can be argued that a key finding of this thesis is how the Church’s discourse generally sets itself against popular contemporary categorizations of refugees as threats, in addition to classic “us and them” distinctions that often serve to demonize the religious and cultural other—which have become observable within contemporary debates regarding refugees in the Global North. Instead, it could be argued that, at least regarding these issues, the Church of Sweden provides an alternative and critical voice in these matters. However, “us and them” divisions can still be observable. Where, for instance the “us” of the Church that is presented as a moral force in society—which has a responsibility to guard human dignity—is set in opposition against “them”, which are depicted as external marginalized voices which threaten both its mission and identity.

Keywords: refugees, religion, migration, CDA, discourse analysis, The Church of Sweden, faith-based organization, religion and social engagement, religion and humanitarianism.
## Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 5  
“Religion” and “Faith-based Organization” .................................................................................. 8  
“Refugee” ................................................................................................................................... 9  
Theory and Method .................................................................................................................... 10  
Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis .................................................................. 10  
Semi-Structured Interviews ....................................................................................................... 14  
Material and Demarcation ........................................................................................................... 15  
Literature Review and Background ............................................................................................ 18  
Literature Review ........................................................................................................................ 18  
The Church of Sweden: Identities and Activities ...................................................................... 23  
The Church of Sweden and a Shifting Church Identity ............................................................... 23  
The Church of Sweden and Refugee Work .................................................................................. 26  
Analysis ...................................................................................................................................... 29  
Support Migration ....................................................................................................................... 30  
Constructing an Ideological Squaring .......................................................................................... 30  
A Description of Actors, An “Us and Them” .............................................................................. 32  
Putting Refugee Work in Words ................................................................................................ 34  
Ecumenical and Interreligious Concerns .................................................................................... 38  
Interviews ..................................................................................................................................... 48  
Who “We” Are and What “We” Do ............................................................................................ 49  
“Us and Them”, Refugee Work in an Interreligious and Ecumenical Context .......................... 51  
Polarization Within the Church and the “Other” ....................................................................... 57  
Disruptive Religion and Others Weaponizing Christianity ....................................................... 60  
Concluding Discussion ................................................................................................................ 66  
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................... 70  
Bibliography and References ....................................................................................................... 72
Acknowledgements

I would like to whole-heartedly thank the personnel at both the Central Church Office in Uppsala and the Stockholm Diocese, as well as the Vantör congregation, who have assisted this thesis. I would also like to thank all the wonderful people involved with the women’s café in Högdalen. Finally, I wish to thank my supervisor Håkan Bengtsson, and Professor Kajsa Ahlstrand for their advice. Without all of you this thesis could not have been written.
Introduction

It may have been a few years, but many in Sweden still remember the chaotic atmosphere that enveloped the country, as the peak of the so-called “European refugee crisis” hit the small Scandinavian country of Sweden during Autumn of the year 2015. What many may not be as familiar with are the great, although largely unreported, efforts by religious actors in the wake of the crisis. Work which is still very much ongoing in many churches and congregations across Sweden. How an organization constructs its role in relation to a crisis can tell one a lot about the ruling ideology of said organization. What a group portrays as being the “us” in relation to “them”, and the characteristics applied to each group can also be very telling. This can also have consequences for the organization’s social and humanitarian engagement. It follows that this would ring true for religious organizations as well, such as a “people’s Church”\(^1\), like the Church of Sweden. Through discourse social actors negotiate their understanding of their self-identity, as discourse can be seen as being in a dialectic relationship with concrete material realities—discourse both shapes and is shaped by reality. Therefore, how a religious organization shapes its discourse, has real material consequences.

The refugee crisis, did not only bring with it challenges to the Church in regard to how it was to understand its role in this matter, but it also brought with it notable integratory, interreligious, and ecumenical challenges. While the year is now 2017 these issue are still as relevant as ever in a world where the demonization of the religious or cultural “other” becomes all the more frequent in contemporary debates regarding refugees and migration—and where religious organizations are likewise becoming all the more vocal actors in the public sphere, at least in regard to humanitarian and social engagement.\(^2\) Furthermore, this matter remains significant in regard to the academic study of religion and the humanitarian engagement with refugees, as well as for those studying the relationship between religion and social engagement. However, this is something which has remained largely understudied in contemporary research.\(^3\)

\(^1\) “Folkkyrka” in Swedish.


\(^3\) As there exists at present very little research on the subject of the Church of Sweden and refugees, or for that matter on the relationship between religion and refugees in the Swedish context.
Sweden, albeit a small country, has during the contemporary European refugee crisis taken in more refugees per capita than many other countries in the EU.\textsuperscript{4} In addition, the Church of Sweden has been one of the most outspoken advocates for the rights of refugees— working tirelessly to provide humanitarian aid and advocating for human rights both locally and abroad during this crisis. A concrete example of one of the many ways the Church of Sweden engages with refugee issues— besides providing emergency material aid in certain situations— is by providing places for meetings and conversation between Swedish citizens and the newly arrived, for instance by establishing various cafés. Café like the women’s café in Högdalen organized by the Vantör congregation right outside of central Stockholm.

Another noteworthy tool produced in the wake of the Church’s work with refugees is the \textit{Support migration} platform on the Church of Sweden’s intranet.

It is no exaggeration to say that religion, and religious faith, has a remarkable tendency to influence social engagement.\textsuperscript{5} Moreover, one cannot deny that faith-based organizations have provided substantial amounts of humanitarian aid and support in times of crisis— and the European refugee crisis is but one of many examples of this.\textsuperscript{6} Many of the world’s religions have throughout history called to humanitarian engagement, having arguably long been a major influencer on humanitarianism and social engagement.\textsuperscript{7} The European refugee crisis is an issue which will shape the future of Europe, and how countries— as well as religious organizations— choose to handle the situation will have lasting implications. How a religious organization, such as the Church of Sweden, through its discourse encourages, or discourages, social engagement and activism— as well as interreligious and ecumenical cooperation— is thus a subject matter of extreme interest. Therefore, this thesis aims to analyze the Church of Sweden’s discourse on the subject of refugees and the refugee crisis. Wherein, a special focus will be placed on how the Church— within the sphere of its refugee work— deliberates over interreligious and ecumenical relations, and how this relates to the Church’s views on its self-identity as a former state Church in an increasingly multicultural society. Put shortly, this would require a critical discourse analysis of ideology from a representational point of view. Where this thesis would employ an analytical framework to find out if the Church of Sweden,

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ager, 2015.
\end{itemize}
for instance, implements implicit and, or, explicit discursive strategies used to represent “us” with positive attributes, and “them” with negative ones— to see if the Church can be said to produce or reproduce unequal power relations within society through its discourse, or for that matter if it seeks to challenge ruling societal discourses.

Questions that come to the forefront in this matter relate to the creation of identity, and how the Church of Sweden through its discourse attempts to construct its own self-identity in relation to the cultural and religious “other”, that is the refugee, and how this materializes itself through discursive and social practices. In concern to the matters raised above— which are arguably relevant not only to the Church and its future work with refugees, but to the academic study of the relationship between religion and refugees, and faith-based social engagement as well— the aim of this essay will be to answer the following questions:

-What can the collected material— from the digital web-based Support migration and related interviews with Church personnel— tell us about the Church of Sweden’s official discourse on its humanitarian engagement with refugees the year 2017, and how “us and them” distinctions function in the discourse?
- And what can the above tell us about the Church’s ideological views on social engagement, interreligious and ecumenical relations, as well as its understanding of its own self-identity in the contemporary Swedish context as it is presented in discourse?

Understanding how ideology is embedded in discourse, is an important part of understanding the connection between discourse, identity, and power. An ideology can be defined as a system of beliefs, and those individuals who share these belief systems tend to form a collectivity of social actors—a church like the Church of Sweden could be seen as one example of this.8 Within a group that has a shared ideology, each of the individuals within it can be said to represent the groups shared belief system in social and discursive practices. The way these groups represent themselves before others denotes their social identity which is based upon their shared beliefs. Within society there can exist various types of groups with differing ideologies, and these ideologies can also function to organize or control a group’s discursive and social practices, as well as their interests, goals, and attitudes. Ideology can also control how a group relates to others, and those who are not part of the group itself— that

---

is to say how they choose to distinguish between “us” and “them”. One classic way group ideologies tend to represent themselves, is by for example positive self-presentation and the negative representation of others. This is usually done with the intention of strengthening and empowering the group itself, and in many cases this also serves to reproduce unjust power relations between various groups in society. For instance, one could imagine that within a country where one religious group is in majority, that group may make use of ideology, through discursive and social practices, to legitimize their dominance and disseminate their ideas and values, at the expense of other groups. This issue has relevance for the interreligious and ecumenical dimensions of the Church’s refugee work, and it also ties into the matters regarding the overt power asymmetry between the Church— and its connected staff as well as volunteers— and the refugees who they work with. However, it should be noted that not all ideologies are “negative” ones, and that there can exist positive ideologies, such as anti-racism and feminism, that seek to question traditional ideologies that serve to perpetuate hierarchies of dominance— and it would be interesting to study on which side of the spectrum the Church falls. It should however be noted that this essay will not attempt to give a full-fledged account of the Church of Sweden’s present refugee work, nor does it aim to expose the Church’s “real” beliefs in this matter. Rather the aim of this essay will be to gain a greater understanding of how the Church of Sweden through its discourse constructs and discusses the “us” in relation to “them”, within the intercultural and interreligious context of their refugee work.

“Religion” and “Faith-based Organization”

Still, before one embarks upon a study of the complex and multifaceted phenomenon we call “religion” it may be pertinent to first define the concept of religion, and how it will be defined for the purpose of this study. There are innumerable different definitions of religion— many with their own strengths and weaknesses— and as amusing it might be to attempt a full-fledged definition of my own, the author feels that considering the nature of my study it would be best to leave religion largely undefined. Nevertheless, to avoid this study from becoming a conceptual free for all, I would propose that the concept of religion for this thesis ought to be understood as a belief in— and adherence to— a doctrine or faith which

9 Ibid.
encompasses both transcendental and ethical dimensions. Religion can be defined as a cultural system of beliefs, symbols, behaviors, and practices that relate human beings to a transcendental order of existence, and serves to create meaning.

“Faith-based organization” is another central concept that will feature heavily in this study. In regard to the definition of “faith-based organization”, one definition that could be fitting in relevance to the focuses of this study—borrowed from the work of Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings—would be to define a faith-based organization as an organization “that derives inspiration from and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within a text”. Within the context of humanitarian engagement it would follow that faith-based organizations would derive their identity from their specific religious tradition, to aid their humanitarianism, even if the organization itself may not be an exclusively humanitarian organization. Using this definition, the Church of Sweden could clearly be categorized as a faith-based organization, even if this concept is usually used to refer to more explicitly humanitarian associations. It should likewise be noted that for this study the concept of faith-based organization will be used synonymously with the term “religious organization”.

“Refugee”

Within the contemporary discourse concerning the refugee crisis, and the focuses of this study, “refugee” is an additional central concept that may need to be further clarified and defined—partially due to the debatably loaded nature of the word. Within the current debate there exists a certain fluctuation between the utilization of the concepts of “migrant” and “refugee” to categorize those individuals who leave their countries of origin and seek asylum abroad. The concept of migrant is frequently utilized to denote persons who are considered to have freely migrated from their countries of origin out of personal convenience, and not due to compelling external factors. A refugee on the other hand is usually understood as a person who has been forced to flee out of fear of bodily harm, and possibly death, for a variety of different reasons. Both of these terms have explicit normative implications, as the concept of refugee more strongly constructs persons as being in acute need, and are therefore more

---

12 As one could argue that it aptly captures the essence of an organization such as the Church of Sweden, that both provides spiritual services, whilst also engaging in social engagement and humanitarian work. Clarke, G., M. Jennings, and T. Shaw, eds. Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular. 2008 edition. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. p.6.
entitled to, and deserving of aid.\textsuperscript{13} The utilization of, and distinction between, these different terms is by no means an uncomplicated matter in the context of the current geo-political and legal debate. However, whilst being aware of the politics surrounding these terms, I deliberately choose to use the term “refugee” in this thesis. The main reason for doing this, is—as argued by Mavelli and Wilson—is that refugee has “fewer pejorative connotations than ‘migrant’ and ‘asylum seeker’”, and that the concept of refugee arguably “enables the retention of a focus on the lived human experiences of being forced from one’s home”.\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless, it should also be clarified that the term refugee whilst socially constructed and oftentimes conceptually contested, is a word which usage has real effects on living persons. Moreover, one could also contend that using the label of “refugee” to categorize people who flee their homes may serve to reduce groups of people to being mere victims. Yet, while this paper acknowledges this issue, it will continue to use the term refugee to describe individuals who have migrated from their countries of origin and sought refuge abroad—however, while still keeping the mentioned issues in mind.

**Theory and Method**

The methods that have been chosen for this particular study, in order to approach the chosen subject for inquiry, are as follows: Critical Discourse Analysis, and semi-structured interviews. In the sections below we will further discuss and elaborate upon the aforementioned methods and their relevance for the study—as well as the selected theories that provide the framework for this thesis.

**Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis**

To study the discourse of the Church of Sweden it goes without saying that a discourse analytical approach would arguably be the most beneficial research method. The word “discourse” can be utilized in a variety of ways, and it might sometimes not be abundantly clear what it means. The academic understanding of the word discourse, as it is used within discourse theory, is simply put “a certain way to speak about or understand the world”.\textsuperscript{15} Discourse analysis falls into the category of qualitative empirical research methods. Within

\textsuperscript{13} Mavelli and Wilson, 2016. See chapter 1: “The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Beyond Conceptual and Physical Boundaries”.

\textsuperscript{14} Which is a central concern for this thesis. Ibid. See: chapter 1 “The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Beyond Conceptual and Physical Boundaries”. loc.425.

discourse theory there are innumerable different ways to define and utilize discourse analysis, and there exists many opinions of what constitutes discourse and how to best analyze it.\textsuperscript{16} Even if these different schools of thought may have varying opinions, there remain some central fundamental premises which are generally accepted within discourse theory as a whole.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite this overabundance of choice in regard to discourse analytical frameworks one could, however, argue that due to the specific subject matter of this study, regarding discourse, and the relationship between language and power, a critical discourse analytical method would be the most suitable. In this respect, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be viewed as a subgroup of Discourse Analysis. While there are many differences between the various CDA approaches, some similarities tend to remain. The five central ones being: the belief that social and cultural processes and structures have a partially linguistic-discursive character, a notion that discourse both constitutes and is constituted by the social world, a view that language ought to be analyzed empirically within the social context, an understanding that discourse functions ideologically, and an emphasis on the importance of critical research.\textsuperscript{18} One of its main criticisms of discourse analysis was the lack of development on the supposed link between language, power, and ideology; CDA sought therefore to develop theories and methods which could better serve this task.\textsuperscript{19} However, within CDA, method and theory become so interlinked that it would arguably be ill-advised to try and separate one from another when discussing CDA. Which is why it may be necessary to take some time to further expound upon the chosen model’s theoretical characteristics in order to properly explain this methodology.

Among scholars who utilize CDA as a research method, Teun A. van Dijk is one of the most renowned scholars within this field. Van Dijk’s framework for the analysis of media discourse distinguishes itself by calling for a thorough analysis of the structural and textual levels of media discourse, as well as for analysis and explanations on the levels of reception and

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. p.7-30.
\textsuperscript{17} For example, a critical stance towards “obvious” knowledge, an anti-essentialistic view of the world, a belief that there is a connection between knowledge and social processes, and lastly that there is also a connection between knowledge and social action. In addition, discourse can be said to both shape and be shaped by society, and power is practiced through the use of discourse. Machin, David, and Andrea Mayr. \textit{How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction.} London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 2012. [Kindle Edition]. p.4. See also: Winther Jørgensen, Phillips, and Torhell. 2000. p.66-70.
\textsuperscript{19} Machin, and Mayr. 2012. p.4.
production. Van Dijk basically perceives discourse analysis as ideology analysis, because according to him “ideologies are typically, although not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies”. In addition, ideologies can be said to “indirectly influence the personal cognition of group members” in their acts of comprehension of discourse, among their other interactions and actions. Furthermore, van Dijk chooses to label the mental representation of individuals during such interactions and actions as “models”—models that, according to him, “control how people act, speak or write, or how they understand the social practices of others”. Worth noting is that according to van Dijk these mental representations are often “articulated along Us versus Them dimensions, in which speakers of one group will generally tend to present themselves or their own group in positive terms, and other groups in negative terms”. Revealing and analyzing this contrastive dimension of “Us versus Them” has been a central aspect of van Dijk’s research. I would argue that if one is interested in the subject of demonization of the religious other by other religious groups, or of the construction of dichotomies through discourse, van Dijk’s approach is an appropriate fit. Some might, however, reason that other CDA approaches, such as the one endorsed by Norman Fairclough, would be a more suitable discourse analytical method for this type of study. Some of the discursive moves which mediate ideologies—and the dichotomies that can be said to stem from them—through text can be said to include things such as “actor description”, and “lexicalization”. The discursive moves mentioned above can both be explored and analyzed through discourse analysis, and the ones utilized for the future analysis will be elucidated upon further when needed.

21 Ibid. p.19.
22 Ibid. p.20.
23 Ibid. p.22.
25 As many for example believe that Fairclough’s approach is the most complete CDA methodological framework. However, I would argue that van Dijk’s methodology would be more suitable when one takes the aims of this thesis into account. The core reasons for its appropriateness being its emphasis on the dialectical relationship between the social world and discourse, and the prominence it places on the ideological function of discourse. See for example: Winther Jørgensen, Phillips, and Torhell. 2000. p.66, p.66-96.
CDA, while considered to be a trustworthy research method, has nevertheless received its share of critique. Such as being slightly unclear regarding the possible consequences of the distinctions made between discursive and non-discursive practices. Additionally, the boarder between discourse analysis and the analysis of social practices is not always made entirely clear.\textsuperscript{27} Another more practical issue with CDA is how one is to handle the dialectic relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive, because it is difficult to demonstrate exactly how this relationship plays out. Lastly, some may with good reason question whether or not this sort of theoretical and methodological approach may be too “political”, with too narrow of a scope. If you go looking for power, then that it what you will most often find. These are relevant concerns, and discourse analysis is a very specialized type of analytical tool—it can only give us specific kinds of information.\textsuperscript{28} These are very poignant criticisms of the method, and while noting these weaknesses—and attempting to address them within the study by keeping self-reflective—one could contend that the benefits of the method outweigh its weaknesses. Research is not a neutral activity, and a debatable benefit of CDA is that it is unabashedly open about this fact, and strongly encourages an explicitly political approach that seeks to be open about the subjective nature of research. In order to uncover prevailing sources of inequality and dominance in society CDA remains one of the most apt approaches.

Although this study takes a critical discourse analytical approach, and will discuss matters regarding hegemony and ideology in relation to power and discourse it does not intend to take the most critical approach to the material at hand.\textsuperscript{29} It will become our challenge, while utilizing a CDA framework, to balance discussions regarding the issues of hegemony and power, with an attitude of open-mindedness in consideration to the work that the Church is doing. Yet, this study will not just utilize a purely CDA based methodology, and will apply complementary qualitative methods. The complementary method chosen in this case being semi-structured interviews.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28} Discourse analysis can for instance tell us how specific actors construct an argument or what kind of statements actors try to establish as self-evident, but not for example what people “actually” believe.
\textsuperscript{29} As that may arguably be taking an excessively political outlook, which may risk distorting the material to fit a pre-established hypothesis.
\textsuperscript{30} Which will be utilized to strengthen the final analysis, discussions, and conclusion of this thesis. Largely by providing another dimension of the Church’s discourse, and gives examples of how the discourse is presented more on the individual ground level.
Semi-Structured Interviews

As argued by researcher Steinar Kvale in *Doing Interviews*, qualitative interviews remain a powerful methodological tool for qualitative research and a powerful method for gaining insight into the human situation— and it becomes a way for a researcher to explore how subjects understand and experience their world. Interviews are frequently used in combination with other methods, such as discourse analysis, and CDA can with benefit be used on interview transcripts— even if there may admittedly arise some issues. A “research interview is an interview where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee”, and by utilizing discourse analysis on the collected interview material, the focus will be on how the interviewing subjects through discourse constructs truth. As the talk has primacy, questions whether or not the subject truly portrays objective reality, or their authentic personal meanings— both of which being persistent objections in regard to the reliability of interviewing— are not great concerns. Interviewing comes with an assortment of both epistemological and ethical issues, as a qualitative research interview attempts to cover both the levels of fact and meaning— and entails an asymmetrical power relation. The power asymmetry of the interview work done for the purpose of this study, will attempt to be addressed by turning this into a more collaborative interview project. Whereby the subjects will have had the possibility to comment upon, and edit their contributions to the thesis before it is finalized, in order to even out this asymmetrical power relation. Issues concerning anonymity and the ethics of using interviews as a research tool for academic research pertain to the well-being of the interview subjects, as well as matters relating to the asymmetrical power relation between researcher and subject. Without going overly into detail it will suffice to say that the proper ethical precautions have been taken and the interview subjects will be presented anonymously. Even if the subject themselves did not ask to be presented anonymously, the author considers it still best to not present them using their full name, as it arguably suffices to state their position in the Church organization, and where they are located, and there exists no sufficient reason as to why their names should have to be presented in this paper for the sake of the thesis. The subjects have also been

32 Kvale, 2008. loc.290.
33 Kvale, 2008. See especially chapters 2 “Epistemological issues of interviewing” and 3 “Ethical issues of interviewing”.
34 Kvale, 2008. loc.521-534.
35 Kvale, 2008. loc.522, loc.682-879.
properly informed about the purpose of the study, and the proper permission to tape the
interviews has been attained. Moreover, all interview subjects have been sent copies of the
final thesis for approval— so that corrections and alterations can be made if necessary.\textsuperscript{36}

The interview format selected for this study has been a semi-structured one. A semi-structured
interview is a method of inquiry, which whilst it has a set of pre-determined questions that
serve as a structure for the interview and may prompt discussions, it combines this with the
opportunity for the researcher to further explore particular responses or themes as they emerge
during the interview.\textsuperscript{37} Therefore, one could say that a semi-structured interview more closely
resembles a conversation, rather than a one-sided interrogation— which is one of the reasons
it is so favored among scholars focusing on qualitative research.

\textbf{Material and Demarcation}

Ideologies need a medium to function, and mediums come in all shapes and sizes. Ideology
can arguably be mediated through all forms of media, as well as through social practices, such
as action and speech. While a group can be said to have a common ideology, the various
facets of that ideology can differ between members of that group. The Church of Sweden is
by no means a homogenous entity and there exists within its various members, congregations,
and dioceses several degrees of variations. So, due to the natural limitations placed upon this
kind of study, it would be a near impossible task to give a coherent account of the Church of
Sweden’s full views on these matters— moreover, it would arguably fall outside the
capabilities of our chosen theoretical method.\textsuperscript{38} Nevertheless, one could argue that it would
however be possible to gain a general understanding of what kind of views that the Church of
Sweden wish to present as self-evident and representative of their organization— and while
this may not give us the whole picture, one could contend that studying this particular subject
could be of great interest in relation to the issues at hand. Therefore, it would perhaps be more
advantageous to simply focus on the Church’s “official” discourse on the matter, that is to say
the discourse mediated by their official forums and representatives. “Official” in this sense
referring to the discourse mediated by the Church of Sweden’s official media sources, and

\textsuperscript{36} Kvale, 2008. loc.1117-1156.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Qualitative research methods, such as interviews, tend to utilize smaller sample sizes than quantitative
methods, therefore this could also be viewed as a somewhat limiting factor.
personnel, that serve to inform both the general public as well as those individuals associated with the Church.

Moreover, this study will choose to narrow the scope of this study to the period after the year 2015, as the Autumn of 2015 was as previously mentioned the height of the European refugee crisis in Sweden, and it has been after this that momentous changes were made in regard to governmental policies targeting refugees, and the larger Swedish society trying is still trying to work with the aftermath of the large amount of refugees, as well as deal with the changes that this will have on the national level. This is also where the Church of Sweden has some of its greatest work ahead of itself. The crisis did not simply disappear because Sweden and Europe started closing its boarders. The refugee crisis is still years after this event a prevalent concern locally and abroad. How the Church of Sweden views itself in relation to these issues, and how it chooses to tackle them, will be of great interest and importance to study. A prime example of an object which emerged following the height of the crisis— as a result of the increased engagement by the Church with the newly arrived refugees— was the Support migration function on the Church’s intranet.39

As of the year 2016 a function titled Support migration, has been added to the Church’s intranet which was put into development by the order of the Church council.40 Support migration is intended to be used as an aid by Church personnel, volunteers, trustees, and other individuals connected to the workings of the Church. This is not a website dedicated to lay practitioners or the general public, even if the intranet is not particularly guarded, and it is not that difficult to get access. The function serves as an informational hub relating to matters concerning migration and refugees, providing various forms of information, and has a didactic purpose. For instance, it provides texts which covers the official theological bases and framework that underpin the Church’s socially engaged humanitarian work with refugees in Sweden. Church personnel, and others connected to the Church’s refugee work can also use Support migration to contact others — either via email, telephone, or even the social media sites— for support. While there exist multiple interesting aspects of Support migration which could be viable subjects for further study, this thesis will choose to limit itself to the various internet-based texts which are mediated by the function. One could argue that a web-based function, developed with the specific purpose of educating those connected with the Church

40 Ibid.
Emma Sundström

on the matter of refugees and refugee work, would be about as official as it gets. Therefore, this thesis will choose to demarcate itself, in the textual dimension of this paper, to the various texts connected to Support migration.\textsuperscript{41} The critical discourse analysis of the more official textual facet of the Church’s discourse will later be complemented by a similar analysis of material collected through interviews with Church staff. To summarize, the source of the main textual material will be the Support migration website, which will be complemented with information gathered from semi-structured interviews.

Eight individual interviews have been conducted for the sake of this thesis. The interviews were all done in person with Church personnel and volunteers, from both the Stockholm Diocese and the Central Church Office in Uppsala, as well as from the Vantör congregation in the suburbs of Stockholm.\textsuperscript{42} The subjects for the interview were chosen on the basis that they actively worked pertaining to the Church’s humanitarian engagement with refugees. Another group of the interviews for this study were conducted at an interreligious and ecumenical women’s café organized by the Vantör church in the nearby Högdalen’s church.\textsuperscript{43} The women’s café was chosen, as an object for study as it is one of the refugee oriented projects driven by the Vantör congregation— even if many of the visitors are not refugees themselves. Moreover, as the project was set into motion the year 2014, it cannot be said to have come into being as a reaction to the peak of refugee arrivals during 2015. However, it has arguably become an important part of the Vantör congregation’s work with refugees and integration. Nevertheless, I would argue that it is a perfect example of the kind of refugee work organized by the various congregations of the Church of Sweden— as it serves to create a meeting place between individuals of differing cultural and religious identity— and thus it would be of great interest to interview some of the volunteers, personnel, and participants attached to the project. The same can be said for the other Church personnel from Uppsala and Stockholm.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Where a special focus will be placed upon those articles which concern interreligious and ecumenical issues.
\textsuperscript{42} The Central Church Office being Kyrkokansliet in Swedish.
\textsuperscript{43} As this thesis does not intend to give a national overview of the Church’s discourse of its refugee work, but rather a general outline of the more official discourse, and how it can look “on the ground”. Therefore, focusing on the Stockholm and Uppsala areas should be sufficient for the aims of this thesis. Even if the sample size of the interviews and the geographical focus remains admittedly limited, which entails that this study ought not to be viewed as a wholly comprehensive.
\textsuperscript{44} How many subjects a researcher “needs” for an interview based study, is difficult to answer — and as diffuse as it might sound, it depends. However, a rule of thumb could be said to be that one has the right amount of interviews when the researcher believes that they have enough material in which to base their conclusions. For this thesis, I would argue that eight interviews have been sufficient. Specifically, the interviews have been with two persons from the Stockholm Diocese, two from the Central Church Office in Uppsala, and the remaining four from the Vantör congregation in Högdalen.
A quick note regarding the material, is that the material from Support migration as well as the interviews, is all in Swedish, but translated into English for textual clarity and consistency. Some may consider this an obstacle for discourse analysis, as translation in itself is not an objective endeavor, and that important discursive elements may become lost in translation. One can agree that this is a poignant issue. The act of translation, much like the act of transcription, is subjective. As discussed previously, subjectivity in research cannot be completely avoided. However—much like the discussion concerning subjectivity in research—it should be noted that the author is aware of this matter, and has thus attempted to give as unbiased a translation as possible. As discussed previously, subjectivity in research cannot be completely avoided. Moreover, since the analytical focus of the text will be on things such as how actors are described within the discourse—rather than grammar or sentence structures—a thorough translation from Swedish to English should suffice to demonstrate the discursive themes that have been observed.

**Literature Review and Background**

In the sections bellow we will discuss some relevant contemporary literature on the subject of religious social engagement with issues pertaining to refugees, after which will follow a short background on the Church of Sweden, and it’s past and present work with refugees, before we start our analysis.

**Literature Review**

As stated by scholars Erin K. Wilson and Luca Mavelli, it “is hard to think of a time when both ´religion´ and ´refugees´ have been such prominent and controversial categories in public discourses around the world”. In recent years, religious faith-based organizations have worked tirelessly to provide humanitarian aid to those who need it, some of which who happen to be refugees. That is to say, persons who have been for various reasons forced to flee from their countries of origin. The humanitarian engagement of religious organizations across Europe in regard to refugees, is by no means some novel phenomena. For instance, the Church of Sweden has been engaged in refugee work for almost a hundred years, as argued by the scholar Kristina Hellqvist—wherein she contends that the commitment to help

---

45 Mavelli and Wilson. 2016. loc.185.
46 Ibid. See chapter 1, “The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Beyond Conceptual and Physical Boundaries”.
people who have been forced to flee their homes, has for a long time been a part of the Church of Sweden.\textsuperscript{47} Hellqvist further argues that the Church of Sweden’s humanitarian work with refugees, often occurred within an ecumenical— and one might even say interreligious— setting. The questions that come with working with refugees are therefore not new for the Church, argues Hellqvist, as the Church has a long history of working with these matters.\textsuperscript{48} However, as stated by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh in regard to the study of faith-based humanitarian engagement in the context of forced displacement “the multiplicity of casual and experience-based linkages between forced migration and religion, faith and spirituality have therefore been explored through a variety of lenses to date, and yet the extent to which religious identity, belief and practice may provide the underpinnings for humanitarian responses to forced migration, has largely remained understudied”.\textsuperscript{49} One might say, that what Fiddian-Qasmiyeh partially refers to is a lack of research regarding the ideologies that are imbedded within faith-based humanitarian organizations and influence their work— which might be seen as a concern.

At present there has been fairly little research done on the subject of the Church of Sweden’s work with refugees. Most of the existing written reports stem from internal reviews by the Church itself, and generally concerns summative reviews of the work done by local congregations, churches, or faith-based organizations— but even these types of reports are fairly uncommon. Some examples being the report Åter på flykt: Erfarenheter från de uppmärksammade och omskakande händelserna i Örbyhus i september 1995 written by Katarina Ottoson in 1997, Jan-Erik Perneman’s report Flykten valde oss: utvärdering av flykting- och invandrararbete i Visby/Gotland from 1994, as well as Främling i folkkyrkan by Christina Gustafsson and Katarina Hallefjord from 1999.\textsuperscript{50} What these older reports have in common is that they all discuss aspects of the Church’s previous work with refugees, but even if they surely are worthwhile reads for those who are interested in the history of the Church’s refugee work, they are not wholly compatible for the study at hand. For, they tend to generally discuss the refugee work done by the Church during the 1990’s, when this thesis intends to

\textsuperscript{47} Hellqvist, 2017. p.1. 
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. 
focus on the current work being done during the year 2017, after the European refugee crisis. Moreover, while these previous reports study the Church’s relationship with refugees, and may partially discuss refugees in connection with themes concerning identity, social engagement, integration, or interreligious and ecumenical relations, this is not their main area of interest. However, there likewise exist recently released reports that focus on the period after the Autumn of 2015, with the aim of studying the Church’s contemporary refugee work. These being: *Ett öppnare församlingsliv*, and *En tid av möten: Arbetet med asylsökande och nyanlända i Svenska kyrkans församlingar 2015-2016.*\(^{51}\) Another noteworthy text in this regard is the article written by Hellqvist, “*Kyrkligt engagemang för människor på flykt från 1930-talet till 2016*”, which aims to give a rough overview of the Church’s work with refugees historically.\(^{52}\) Other material that pertains to the subject of the Church and refugees, tends to be written guides, brochures, or reports intended to be used by the Church as an internal resource, or as policy documents when working with these types of issues.

While there exists a scarce amount of studies done on the matter of the Church of Sweden and refugees, there exists however far more material on the subject of religious—or faith-based—organizations and social engagement with refugees and issues pertaining to refugee rights. As previously stated, within modern history there has yet to be a time where the concepts of religion and refugees have been so reoccurring and accentuated within contemporary social and political debates as they are today.\(^{53}\) Some noteworthy texts on this issue include “Local faith communities and the promotion of resilience in humanitarian situations: a scoping study” by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Alistair Ager, “Faith-Based Humanitarianism: The Response of Faith Communities and Faith-Based Organisations in Contexts of Forced Migration” by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Helen McElhinney.\(^{54}\) Other relevant texts include the Religion and Global Migrations book series.\(^{55}\) Further noteworthy articles pertaining to

---


\(^{52}\) Hellqvist, 2017.

\(^{53}\) Mavelli and Wilson, 2016.


\(^{55}\) In particular, the books *Intersections of Religion and Migration* edited by Jennifer Saunders, Susanna Snyder, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and as well as *Faith, Secularism, and Humanitarian Engagement: Finding the Place of*
religious organizations and humanitarian engagement with refugees include Wilson’s article “Much to be Proud of, Much to be Done: Faith-based Organizations and the Politics of Asylum in Australia”— which focuses on faith-based organizations in Australia working with refugee rights and their utilization of faith-based hospitality to challenge public discourses—and “Un/settling Angels: Faith-Based Organizations and Asylum-Seeking in the UK” by Susanna Snyder. Generally speaking, there exists more research on religious organizations and refugees in the context of the Western world, but there still remain significant gaps. These various studies are great contributions to the overall global study of religion and refugees and usually focus on the more practical or theological issues involved with faith-based humanitarian aid to refugees— which however differs from this thesis’ particular area of interest. Nevertheless, there exists no shortage of work done on the subject of the European refugee crisis, religion, and discourse within the larger field of religion and refugee studies either. For instance, the book The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question edited by Mavelli and Wilson heavily explores the theme of religion in relation to the European refugee crisis— wherein many of the included articles discuss the issues that pertain to the contemporary discourse on refugees and religion. For example, a matter which is heavily emphasized by the various articles within the book is how the concepts of religion and refugees are used within contemporary discourse to justify existing hierarchies of power and oppression, in contemporary Western society. It is argued that within the various discussions connected to the refugee crisis, one can witness how discourses of “good” and “bad” seem to permeate the debate in regard to the categories of “refugee” and “religion”. In this one can observe a tendency within discourse to distinguish between good religion/bad religion and good refugee/bad refugee in relation to the crisis. Within contemporary discourse it would seem that good religion is the type of religion that gives aid


Mavelli and Wilson, 2016.
to refugees, whereas bad religion is the kind of violent religiosity represented by those militant religious groups whom many refugees are fleeing from. Respectively, good refugees are usually represented as women, children, or Christian refugees, while bad refugees tend to be represented as violent fanatical Muslim men. These discursive tendencies are argued to be extremely worrisome, not only because they present Muslims and refugees as either agency-less victims or violent perpetrators, but also because this type of discourse has debatably been used to partially justify the global communities apparent disregard to the plight of those fleeing their homes. In which states, and their sovereignty, seemingly take precedence over persons. One could even argue that this type of discourse also functions to demonize and dehumanize refugees, as well as their religious and cultural affiliations.

However, even if the articles in The Refugee Crisis and Religion do explore the subject of discourse, this analysis does not seem to incorporate a study of the faith-based organizations involved—even if they are mentioned as vocal actors, that have the power to facilitate great social change in this matter. For instance, researchers Alastair Ager and Joey Ager contend that “religion can be viewed as one of the most powerful sources” of societal critique, and that faith communities can work to challenge government policies on this matter. Similar sentiments are carried by the collected authors of Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism, where it is argued that religion carries within it “the seeds of radical social criticism and disruption”. Some religious organizations and groups have been particularly vocal on the matter of the refugee crisis, and this is according to Ager and Ager one of the crucial roles of “local faith communities with respect to forced migration: to keep alive the imagination of an alternative future for forced migrants and our response to their circumstances”. This sentiment is mirrored in their article “Religion, Forced Migration, and Humanitarian Response” from the book Intersections of Religion and Migration. However, they also maintain that “such deep-rooted principles” such as the ideal of welcoming the stranger “clearly do not always translate to matching actions”, as “religions have frequently

59 Ibid. loc.268-398.
60 Ibid. loc.185-427.
62 Smith, 2014. loc.269.
63 Ager and Ager, 2016a. loc.1232.
been mobilized to exacerbate xenophobia and community conflict”. After all, religious communities are diverse, dynamic, and complex networks. Nevertheless, they maintain that hospitality “has been a fundamental and intrinsically religious measure of morality since antiquity”, and that to give hospitality has often entailed the “recognition of the humanness of the other”—as well as that that religious organizations can function as a significant factor in humanitarian support to refugees. Religion can be viewed in this sense to be an extremely disruptive and powerful force within society, as it promotes an alternative narrative of how things ought to be, which can be used to criticize what is perceived to be an unjust state of affairs. Wilson and Mavelli would likewise concur with this notion, arguing that religious actors “form a key part of challenging and resisting” these “state attempts to cast migrants as unknown threatening others”. This disruptive and critical aspect of religion is something which has time and again been used to by religious groups and individual to fuel activism and social engagement, and it could be argued that the Church of Sweden may be no different in this regard. However, as previously mentioned the seeming critical discourse analysis of contemporary debates regarding refugees do not seem to greatly extend to the religious actors themselves. Yet, before we engage with the analysis of the material itself, it may be pertinent to first delve into some relevant background information regarding the Church of Sweden, in order to better understand the existing context of its refugee work.

The Church of Sweden: Identities and Activities
Due to the significance this thesis places on the Church of Sweden, it would feasibly be beneficial to first shortly situate the reader into the contemporary context of the Church and its refugee work by providing some background information, before delving into the analysis.

The Church of Sweden and a Shifting Church Identity
The Church of Sweden is an Evangelical Lutheran Church, and is the largest Christian Church in Sweden, as well as the largest Lutheran denomination in Europe, and one of the two largest

65 Ager and Ager, 2016b.
67 Smith, 2014.
in the world. The Church of Sweden is composed of 13 dioceses, roughly 3500 congregations, and 6.2 million members— which is well over half the Swedish population, even if most members are arguably not very active practitioners. Today it is a democratic and open national Church which stretches over the entire country of Sweden, and is known for its fairly liberal position on many theological issues, such as being accepting of homosexuality, and same-sex unions within the Church. The organization of the Church can be said to be decentralized in the sense that the local congregations are left mostly to themselves, and they are responsible for their own decisions and activities— even if they are an integrated part of the larger Church organization. Before the year 2000, the Church of Sweden held the position of state Church, and this is one thing among many which has brought many changes in the Church’s perception of itself, and its role within Swedish society. Moreover, the increasing rise of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity within Swedish society, due to among other things increased immigration, has also greatly affected the Church attitudes about the religious and cultural “others” within the congregations’ midst.

Since Sweden has in modern times changed from being fairly homogenous to becoming a much more interreligious and multicultural country, the Church holds at present in regard to its theology of religions an inclusive attitude in regard to other faiths. In practice, this entails that while they hold to their belief that their Christian belief is universal and absolute, they believe that there exists salvation and truth in other religions as well. At present, the Church of Sweden seeks to uphold good relationships with its neighbors of other faith traditions— and works to promote greater interreligious cooperation and dialogue. However, the bulk of the interreligious work happens in more urban areas, such as the larger cities Stockholm and Gothenburg, as these are more multi-religious and multicultural environments— even if this may be changing slightly due to the placement of refugees, wherein a congregation which did not previously engage in interreligious dialogue, may do so through its work with refugees. In Sweden, it is fairly safe to say that there exists no great social conflict between different religions, even if some frictions may emerge at times. It should be noted that Church policy

68 The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus being another of the two largest Lutheran Churches.
Emma Sundström emphasizes that anyone regardless of religious belonging can participate in the activities organized by the Church, as well as church services, if they wish to do so— and this is not uncommon. For instance, it is not rare for youths from other smaller denominations to have their confirmation education in cooperation with the Church of Sweden mixed with other youths that are taking their confirmation from the Church. The reason for this is said to be to enable youths from different backgrounds to meet one another.73

Yet with these societal changes, the position of the Church in Swedish society has changed as well. In the book *En bra plats att vara på: En antropollogisk studie av mångfaldsarbete och identitetsskapande inom Svenska kyrkan* the author Kristina Helgesson Kjellin contends that the position of the Church of Sweden as a majority church is no longer as undisputable. This is argued to be partially due to the decline in church membership, and partially due to changes in the religious landscape of Sweden, as Swedish society overall is becoming the more characterized by religious and cultural diversity.74 In *En bra plats att vara på* Helgeson Kjellin points to a variety of challenges that face the Church today, in regard to its work with diversity and inclusion, as well as its own self-understanding as a modern Lutheran church. Even if the Church still has a privileged and strong position within Swedish society, it now needs to start redefining itself as one Church among many, in a society where many may not be members of the Church, or any other religious body for that matter. Traditionally, membership in the Church has had a strong tie to national and cultural Swedish identity— where an emphasis has been placed on homogeneity— but this has now started to change, even if the Church can still be said to be rather homogenous.75 The organization of the Church has stated that it wishes to contribute to cross-boundary fellowship between people, work for increased integration, and utilize the potentials of diversity.76 In light of these issues, there has been made moves to make the Church a more diverse and inclusive space, for it to be a place for meeting others across traditional boundaries. At present it seems that the legacy, and self-identity of the Church is under serious re-negotiation in the modern and increasingly complex


74 Which can be translated to “A Good Place to be: An anthropological study of working with diversity and identity creation within the Church of Sweden”. Helgesson Kjellin, Kristina. *En Bra Plats Att Vara På: En Antropollogisk Studie Av Mångfaldsarbete Och Identitetsskapande Inom Svenska Kyrkan*. Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2016. Through the use of anthropological research methods, Helgesson Kjellin seeks to study the practical and the reflected work that the Church of Sweden does in regard to diversity. In the study, Helgesson Kjellin focuses on the congregation of Skärholmen, which is a suburban district located to the South-West of central Stockholm, which has a history of multicultural and multi-religious engagement.

75 Ibid. p.39-41.

76 Ibid. p.29.
contemporary global and Swedish context. Some would argue that this will be the only way
forward, if the Church wishes to remain relevant today.\textsuperscript{77} In short you may debatably claim
that the modern Church in Sweden is at present having a substantial internal debate regarding
its self-identity. In the daily face-to-face meetings with refugees, migrants, and the “others”
within society, one might aptly wonder— like Helgesson Kjellin— what happens to a Church
that chooses to let its walls crumble down.\textsuperscript{78}

The Church of Sweden and Refugee Work
As has been stated earlier in this thesis, working with refugees is by no means a new
commitment by the Church of Sweden.\textsuperscript{79} The issues and questions associated with the
European refugee crisis, and the large influx of refugees to Sweden during the Autumn of
2015, are not novel to the Church. The Church of Sweden has, stretching at least as far back
as the 1930’s, been involved with providing humanitarian assistance to those who have been
forced to flee their homes, having at times heavily criticized and protested against what they
considered to be overly harsh refugee policies instated by the government. Since the start of
the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, engagement pertaining to refugees and refugee work largely moved to
congregations in the more multicultural suburbs of the larger Swedish cities. During this
period, the Church had a fairly broad engagement with refugees and issues pertaining to
refugee rights. This in conjunction with the fairly large number of refugees arriving in
Sweden, led to a lot of new questions for the Church of Sweden regarding its humanitarian
engagement— as well as its position in Swedish society as a State Church.\textsuperscript{80} Most of the
refugee work done by the congregations tended to involve creating meeting spaces for asylum
seekers and the local populace. An example of this for instance being the organized Church
network “\textit{Framtiden bor hos oss}”— or FBHO for short— roughly translated into English as
“The future lives with us”.\textsuperscript{81} The network’s main focus involves working to help keep the
Church relevant in these suburbs, as well as in the multicultural and increasingly
economically divided society that exists in many places across Sweden, such as Högdalen—
and the aforementioned Vantör congregation is a part of this network as well.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid. p.31-46.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. p.13-29, p.229-243, p.245-256.
\textsuperscript{79} As the Church of Sweden has been socially engaged with refugee work since the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. See also: Hellqvist and Sandberg, 2017. p.18-24.
\textsuperscript{80} Hellqvist, 2017. p.4.
\textsuperscript{81} This network also featured heavily in Helgeson Kjellin’s study.
\textsuperscript{82} Hellqvist, 2017. p.5.
When the Church of Sweden was separated from the Swedish state the year 2000, it was a period of great transformation for the Church and many new changes had to be made. However, one of the more interesting changes in Church policy came with the implementation of “vistelsebegreppet”— roughly translated to “the concept of stay”— in the Church Order of the Church of Sweden. The Church Order is the legal framework which serves to establish common internal rules within the Church, despite the fact that the various congregations and dioceses are independent organizations within the Church. Nevertheless, in the first paragraph of the second chapter within the Church Order, it states that congregations within the Church of Sweden have a responsibility towards those who stay within the congregation’s domain.

According to Church historians like Sven Thidevall, the choice of implementing this concept of stay came about as a response to the reality that many people in Sweden lived within areas where their native home Church did not exist, as they often hailed from different faith traditions and denominations. The paragraph has been used by many to argue for the belief that congregations have a diaconal responsibility towards people who are only shortly visiting, such as undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers. During the end of the 20th century numerous individuals sought asylum in Sweden from across the globe, often fleeing violent conflicts or oppressive political regimes. It was also during the start of the 21st century that the amount of asylum seekers arriving in Sweden increased, and the Church of Sweden increased its engagement with these issues in response to this. While the Church of Sweden has their own offices for refugee and integration issues, it stands that many projects, articles, and reports regarding these matters have been developed in ecumenical cooperation with other churches— like with the Christian Council of Sweden.

Finally, with the escalation of the civil war in Syria there have been arriving large amounts of refugees in Sweden, from the years 2013-2016. However, after the peak of the European refugee crisis—and the following harsher governmental policies directed towards culling the flood of refugees— the Church of Sweden has been working tirelessly with providing humanitarian aid, and challenging policies that they view as infringing upon basic human dignity. The engagement of the congregations has grown in step with the amplified number of refugees. Resources have been mobilized, language cafés and fundraisers have been

---

85 Ibid. p.9-11.
organized, and finally many volunteers have been assembled. From a recent study released in 2017, by the Church of Sweden, it was stated that a significant majority—roughly 80% of the congregations in the study—of the Church’s congregations were engaged with refugee work. The previously referred to “Support migration” is one of the many tools produced by the Church in order to benefit its refugee work.

At present the Church argues for the necessity of their refugee work on a moral ground which is explicitly stated to stem from their religious beliefs and convictions—wherein they frame the issue in ethical terms. The position of the Church in issues pertaining to their refugee work are argued to be largely motivated by both human rights and Christian belief. Depending on what kind of congregation it is and in what part of the country, the social engagement with refugees by the Church can differ greatly. The work done by the congregations is often done in cooperation with various other social actors, organizations—both governmental and non-governmental—and religious communities.

The most common ways that local congregations work with refugees is through establishing places for meetings, such as language cafés. Places where people—for example local Swedes and newly arrived refugees—can meet one another. Congregations also support refugees by helping new arrivals with their language skills, informing them about the asylum process and the Swedish migration system, as well as general information regarding things like Swedish law. Other ways in which they work is by providing spiritual as well as psycho-social support to those who need it, assistance with the juridical process of seeking political asylum and by providing more material sorts of aid. Many congregations also choose to engage with refugee issues by taking an active stand against racism and xenophobia, as well as endeavoring to shape popular and political opinions.

However, while this section paints a rather positive picture of the Church’s humanitarian engagement of refugees, it should be noted that there remain some concerns with this type of work. While it is laudable that the Church is engaged with these issues, actions stemming from good intentions also need to be problematized. Some of the matters can be connected to

---

86 Hellqvist and Sandberg, 2017.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
the internal differentiations within the Church, wherein not all congregations may feel the same need to engage themselves with these matters and open themselves up to the “other”—even if the authorities within the Church may encourage these sorts of actions. Another notable issue is remarked upon by Helgesson Kjellin and concerns the power asymmetry between the Church and those who are the recipients of their aid. In this context the Church of Sweden—as well as its personnel, and other individuals who have strong connections to the workings of the Church—occupies a certain position of status in Swedish society. It can be argued that the Church is, generally speaking, a rather homogenous environment and has often been viewed as a representation of the majority society. The majority of Church personnel are ethnic Swedes, and often have a middle-class background. Moreover, there may arise issues apropos reciprocity, when there is always one party giving and another on the reviewing end. Giving aid is undeniably a central part of the Church’s humanitarian work. However, as Helgesson Kjellin argues this can be viewed as somewhat problematic when “the logic of God” and “the logic of Jesus”—with their emphasis on giving without expecting anything in return—clashes with dominant societal ideas regarding equivalence in relationships. In addition, some may argue that the asymmetrical power relation between those who are “powerless” in a certain situation—such as refugees—and those who have power might become reinforced in this manner. Furthermore, one could question whether or not such a system may function to perpetuate the political status quo. A political status quo where refugees and other vulnerable groups continue to be marginalized and disenfranchised. These issues connected to power, status, and hierarchies will remain relevant for the analysis ahead, and will be further explored in the later parts of this paper.

Analysis

A note of warning before we proceed with the analysis of the texts from Support migration and the interviews. While the forthcoming analysis may take a critical approach to the Church’s discourse regarding refugees, this should be viewed as constructive criticism. Views

---

90 As previously discussed, there exists a fair amount of congregations that have not involved themselves with refugee work.
92 Ibid. p.145.
93 Ibid. p.58-59, p.142-147.
94 Ibid. p.142-143.
95 Ibid. p.249-251.
96 Issues similar to these also appear in relation to the Church of Sweden’s interreligious and ecumenical work.
we agree with should be approached as critically as those we do not. However, it deserves to be emphasized that the Church of Sweden, its members, personnel, volunteers, and congregations remain a laudable organization in regard to their humanitarian aid and social engagement with these issues.

Support Migration

As previously discussed Support migration is an internal internet-based media tool for those within the Church of Sweden who wish to, for example, educate themselves about issues regarding refugees, and refugee work. As previously mentioned, the focus will be on articles that directly pertain to refugees, and the Church’s refugee work, with an emphasis on those articles that relate to the interreligious and ecumenical dimensions of their practice. Van Dijk’s approach to discourse analysis utilizes various different types of categories to describe various discursive moves which can further be identified and analyzed for a critical and “ideological discourse analysis”. Within this type of analysis there exists numerous different possible categories, but the one’s that will be utilized for the textual analysis of the studied material will be: “ideological squaring”, “actor description”, “positive self-presentation”, “negative other-presentation”, and ”lexicalization”. As contended by van Dijk, the categories he utilizes are not limited to any one type of ideology and its discourse, and they should be seen as “rather general resources that groups and their members acquire and use in order to account for and defend their ideas and social practices”. Such general ideologies then can be said to “form the basis of more specific group attitudes, which in turn may influence group members’ individual opinions, constructions or interpretations of specific events, as well as the social practices and discourses in which group members engage”. In short, what we will analyze is who is the “us” in contrast to “them” within the discourse, what these two categories are portrayed as representing, and how the relationship between them is constructed, in order to see what themes emerge.

Constructing an Ideological Squaring

“Ideological squaring” is a term utilized by van Dijk to describe a structure within discourse in which opposing groupings of structuring concepts are built around participants. Ideological

---

97 van Dijk, 2006.
98 Ibid. p.739.
99 Ibid. p.739.
squaring involves the use of oppositions, and while it may not explicitly label a certain group as “good” or “bad” in relation to another group, it often involves more subtly implied labeling through these contrasting structuring concepts. For example if terms like “free” and “just” are portrayed as connected to one group in a text, and is contrasted to another group which may be described with terms such as “restricted” and “partial”, this can be said to be a sort of ideological squaring.

While—as we will discuss further on in the analysis—the discourse observed throughout Support migration, arguably never explicitly glorifies the organization of the Church at the expense of the vilification of the refugee other, there does exists instances when a form of ideological squaring occurs. For instance, it is not uncommon that the Church is set in a structural opposition towards those “who have fled”.

When we meet those who have fled to Sweden we also meet people who belong to other religions. […] In the fundamental security that I rest in God’s hands, open me up to meeting other people. The first thing in the meeting is to listen to their stories and see their needs. Many come with trauma and loss, and need someone who will listen in order for them to carry on.

In this quote for example, while the structural opposition may not be overt, it is clearly observable. Let us take some time to unpack this paragraph. First of all, the “we” in this case can be argued to be understood as a unified and ideologically homogenous Church of Sweden put into contrast with “those who have fled”. In the sentence, when “we meet those who have fled to Sweden we also meet people who belong to other religions”, the beginning of a structural opposition is arguably observable. As this seems to construct a distinction between “we” and “those who have fled”, that is to say between the Church of Sweden as an ingroup and the supposed refugees, who happen to belong to other religions, as an outgroup. In the following sentences the ideological squaring between “we” and “those who have fled” becomes seemingly even more emphasized. The “we” is presented as “open”, willing to

---

102 Whether or not this statement accurately reflects the material reality is not of a major concern for CDA, what is of interest is what exactly the discourse attempts to portray as “truth” in this matter.
“listen”, “see their needs”, and in possession of a “fundamental security”.\footnote{Ibid. Translated from Swedish.} In comparison “those who have fled” “many come with trauma and loss”, “need someone to listen”, “in order for them to carry on”.\footnote{Ibid. Translated from Swedish.} This is but one example of many, but it shows a clear differentiation made between the Church and refugees, wherein, the Church of Sweden is represented as secure, steadfast, as well as willing and able to help those in need. Respectively, refugees become represented— even if they admittedly remain active subjects— as fleeing and in need. Therefore, one could claim that a kind of power asymmetry seems prevalent in this text. As previously stated, one could argue that while the ideological squaring witnessed here cannot be said to vilify refugees, it seems to instead put them implicitly in a relationship of dependence towards the Church. This is one of the observable trends in the discourse of Support migration on refugees, and their relationship with the Church. However, there also exist other interesting facets in this discourse, which we will continue to analyze by looking at how various actors are described, and what this can tell us about the ideological underpinnings of these texts.

A Description of Actors, An “Us and Them”

According to van Dijk, depending on the underlying ideology, actors in discourses are often described differently. In van Dijk’s own words we typically “tend to describe ingroup members in a neutral or positive way and outgroup members in a negative way. Similarly, we will mitigate the negative descriptions of our own group and emphasize the attributed negative characteristics of Others”.\footnote{van Dijk, 2006. p.735.} Therefore, it follows that through actor description ideologies become manifested and perpetuated in discourse. Actor description arguably occurs in most forms of discourse and Support migration as a medium of the Church’s discourse seems no different. Throughout the site positive presentations of ingroup members occurs frequently.

The Church’s refugee work is described using words such as “comprehensive”, “broad”, “multifaceted”, and it is stated that the Church’s engagement with people who have had to flee has existed within the Church “for a long time”.\footnote{Svenska kyrkan. Support Migration, “Det Gör Svenska Kyrkan.” Accessed March 6, 2017. https://internwww.svenskakyrkan.se/supportmigration/det-gor-svenska-kyrkan-for-manniskor-pa-flykt. Translated from Swedish.} Furthermore, it is stated that from its
theological grounding that the Church “wants to contribute so that people have a good start in Sweden, and a society where people from different backgrounds can live together”.  

Refugee work is also described as a “natural part” of the Church’s “diaconal mission”. As mentioned previously in the short discussion on ideological squaring, there exists no shortage of examples where the Church and its connected members are described in positive terms. In the discourse the Church tends to describe itself as open, welcoming, capable, knowledgeable, unified, and above all helpful—the Church seems also to represent itself as extremely respectful towards other religions, cultures, and ways of life. Moreover, it presents itself as an opponent against segregation, xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance. For example, in the section titled “Integration and unity”, it reads that:

The Church of Sweden wants to work towards a society where all people are seen, respected and taken into consideration—regardless of religion, gender, or cultural background. The congregation can work towards this goal by creating venues where people from different backgrounds and experiences can meet, get to know each other and work together. Another important task for the congregation is to work against xenophobia and racism.  

Moreover, the Church is portrayed as being capable of influencing social and political change which serves to give the Church a certain aura of power. See for instance in the quote bellow:

The Church of Sweden works for a legally certain and human asylum process, for people to be given a good start in Sweden and for a society where human value is put in center. [...] In those cases where the law or the practice of the law is inadequate the Church of Sweden has the possibility to go into dialogue with politicians and government bodies and to push opinions.

In the paragraphs following this statement links to various Church statements are provided, and also official demands and opinions regarding specific policy matters concerning refugees—and this also arguably functions to portray the Church as an influential social actor.

---

108 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
109 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
On the subject of refugees, and the most commonly utilized actor descriptions thereof, the term “people who flee” or “people who have fled” are generally the most prominent actor descriptions. Also “asylum seeker” and “new arrivals” are common terms, while surprisingly the term refugee is much less used. This is debatably an interesting use of terms to describe these specific types of actors, as it places what can be categorized as the personhood of the individual, before their alleged status as a refugee, with a focus on the activeness of the subject instead of simply using the term refugee. Whereby, some could argue that this reduces the individual to one specific category or label. Still, the terms like “people who have fled” or “new arrivals” are inadvertently embedded with notions of outsider-hood and vulnerability, even if they remain fairly neutral terms. However, while there arguably exists far fewer examples of the negative presentation of the other, in relation to refugees, there are some minor exceptions. Yet, while these exceptions can be found within the discourse it should be clarified that they are rare. It is well known that human beings have a tendency to sort and divide people into different categories, as well as sub-categories, and this frequently occurs within discourse. While “refugees” and “asylum seekers”, can be said to be a category there can exist sub-categories within them. For example, people who migrate “voluntarily” and “involuntarily” from their countries of origin. Men and Women refugees can also be viewed as different forms of sub-groups, even if the mentioned refugees are rarely divided into groups, such as the aforementioned good refugee/bad refugee division discussed in the literature review.

Putting Refugee Work in Words

As stated by van Dijk himself, the “most obvious and therefore most widely studied form of ideological expression in discourse may be found in the words being chosen to express a concept. […] That is, a negative concept of a group is represented in a model, and depending on context, the most ‘appropriate’ word is selected, in such a way that an outgroup is referred to and at the same time an opinion about them”. He adds that by following “the ideological squaring, this means that in general we may expect that, depending on context, outgroups will be described in neutral or negative words, and ingroups in neutral or positive

---

112 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
This is undoubtedly true in regard to many different discourses, and Support migration is arguably no different, as even here we will be able to observe lexical choices that serve to describe the ingroup in positive terms. For instance, in the title itself of Support migration one can clearly observe an ideological expression that paints this forum in a positive light. The word “support” has strong positive associations and it operates here to present this function as a supporting object. A help, if you will. Implicitly, this may be viewed as portraying a fundamental attitude that the organizational function wishes to promote in regard to the Church’s refugee work. The title of the function could have been almost anything, yet the term “support” is used and this serves an ideological purpose.

The “religious” dimension of the refugee work is also particularly highlighted, and the use of religious connotations of many lexical choices cannot be denied. Terms like “faith”, “our belief”, among others feature prominently. Moreover, the issue of humanitarian and social engagement with refugees is described in largely moral terms, which can be said to be presented in a theological moral framework. For example, on the page of Support migration titled “Theological foundation: This is why the Church of Sweden is involved with people who are fleeing”, it is stated that:

God calls us to witness, and to not turn away or close our eyes. As fellow human beings and Christians we have a mission to protect each other’s lives. As a Church there exists no doubt about why we engage ourselves with human beings who are fleeing. It is about our love for our neighbor. Here exists a theological framework—read and reflect.

Millions of people are fleeing oppression, violence, and misery. Now many come here to seek asylum and find a new everyday life. As a Church we welcome them. Christian faith rests on the belief that we are one universal humanity, and that we have a responsibility towards one another. The golden rule helps us to see the self-evident: in front of you stands someone who is just like you. “Do unto others what you would have them do to you” says Jesus.

Our task is to meet one another as fellow human beings. Like in other meetings there exists the possibility of dialogue and cooperation, but also the risk of distrust and conflict. As a Church we want to aid the possibilities and to meet the risks. We want to give the prerequisites so that we can continue to build a good society together. [---]

God has created the world with a diversity of people who are each made in God’s image. Faith lets us see the gifts and the possibilities for the task of living together as fellow human beings, even when it costs. We see

---

that we have a responsibility towards one another, and we are given power for the task. God is the God of renewal, not the solid state.\footnote{Svenska kyrkan. Support Migration, “Teologisk Grund: Därför Engagerar Sig Svenska Kyrkan För Människor På Flykt.” Accessed March 23, 2017. https://internwww.svenskakyrkan.se/supportmigration/teologisk-grund. Translated from Swedish.}

The utilization of lexical choices here leaves the reader no doubt about the Church’s stance on the matter of providing humanitarian aid and support to refugees. There is “no doubt”, and it is “self-evident”.\footnote{Ibid. Translated from Swedish.} God even “calls us to witness, and not turn away or close our eyes”.\footnote{Ibid. Translated from Swedish.} As “fellow human beings and Christians, we have a mission” to protect lives and in regard to those millions of people who “are fleeing oppression, violence, and misery”, it is maintained that “as a church we welcome them”.\footnote{Ibid. Translated from Swedish.} The traditional authority of Jesus is also referenced, in regard to the golden rule: do unto others, what you would have them do to you.\footnote{Ibid. Translated from Swedish.} Christian faith itself is argued to rest “on the belief that we are one universal humanity”, and the task of the Church then becomes to “meet one another as fellow human beings”, and faith then “lets us see the gifts and the possibilities for the task of living together as fellow human beings, even when it costs”.\footnote{Ibid. Translated from Swedish.} In these paragraphs there exists no room for argument, the theological foundation of the Church’s engagement with refugee and migration issues, is firmly grounded in the “love for our neighbor”.\footnote{Using Galatians 5:14, a reference from the Bible, to cement this point. Which is interestingly one of the only times Support migration makes any direct references to the Biblical texts.} Change and renewal are likewise argued to be a foundational element in the Church’s theological framework, “God is the God of renewal”. The notion that God is a god of change, and not an advocate for the immovable and unchanging solid state of things is an interesting aspect of the discourse, which could be seen as possibly connected to the contemporary discourse in regard to the role of the Church, wherein some social actors have voiced an understanding of the Church of Sweden as a guardian of an alleged Swedish cultural heritage—a role which they would like the Church to continue to play. This discussion regarding change and uniformity, will be later expanded in the analysis of the gathered interview material.

Within the discourse, one can observe a strong emphasis on what can be described as a sacred mandate of the Church to engage with these issues, which rests on a religious moral
framework which stresses universal humanity and love of one’s neighbor as its foundation. Calling upon higher authority, or an authority which is said to support their views, is a popular move to justify the specific inclinations of an ideology.\(^{124}\) This is also apparent in *Support migration* as well, wherein the authority of their religious tradition is heavily emphasized within the various texts. While not being overly critical, there does debatably exist some liberatory aspects of this text, where the stress on the vulnerability of the refugees is utilized by the Church in the discourse to strengthen their position as a saving force. The refugees clearly need help, therefore it is the self-evident duty of the Church to help them. However, there also exists a clear emphasis on a shared humanity, where the refugees are commonly categorized as “fellow human being”, a lexical choice which emphasizes unity and association. One could argue that by utilizing the term, “made in God’s image”, the innate sacredness and inherent worth of other human beings becomes accentuated. The key argument made here is that despite differences between people—be they refugees or native Swedes—the Church can through its faith see that we are all fellow human beings. Therefore, it is the self-evident task of the Church to do what it can to help, even if it may “cost”. Calling upon higher authority, or an authority which is said to support their views, is a popular move to justify the specific inclinations of an ideology.\(^{125}\) This is also apparent in *Support migration* as well, the authority of their religious tradition is heavily emphasized within various texts in *Support migration*. The divine mandate here it would seem is to help, to see others fellow human beings, and love your neighbor. Further down of the page, which goes into more specific details regarding the Church’s theological foundation, it is emphasized that the “love” referred to is not an “abstract” form of love but rather “concrete care” for the person sitting next to you.\(^{126}\) When one “looks away” one “stops being a fellow human being”, which in turn may lead to “feelings of losing one’s way, insecurity, irritation and aggression growing”.\(^{127}\)

The person who has fled here will meet things that she does not recognize, and the person who has lived here for a long time will experience that much is changing.


\(^{125}\) Ibid. p.735.


\(^{127}\) Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
Emma Sundström

This is why we need to build an awareness on the common will to create new things together. It is the needs of our fellow human beings that call us, and it is our common capacities that will lead us into the future.128

Here one can also observe that the discourse chooses to use words that once again stress communality. The distinction made between “the person who has fled”, and the “the person who has lived here for a long time”— arguably implied to be a Swede— is based largely upon the geographical and transitory aspects. The person who is described as having fled is arguably represented as an active subject coming “here” from the outside. Whereas the person who has stayed here is presented more passively, as they simply have stayed put living in Sweden. However, both will be affected by change, and the new turn of events that the arrival of refugees represents. Nevertheless, the “needs” of the person who has fled remains accentuated, as the “needs of our fellow human being” calls “us” to action. It is interesting that while stressing a common shared humanity despite differences, one simultaneously underscores the vulnerable position of “those who have fled”, in order to legitimize the Church’s justification for their refuge work— in a way that could be claimed to perpetuate an already existing power asymmetry between refugees and the Church. Even if one could say that the previously discussed lexical choices, and actor descriptions, may serve to emphasize the need of refugees, the discursive theme of a common humanity, is still very prevalent. Perhaps one could ascertain a certain tension between the discursive image of the refugee as a “victim” and a “fellow human being” with its own agency and worth, in contrast to the positive self-presentation of the Church— regardless, it would be compelling to continue this analysis onto the pages of Support migration that attend to the interreligious and ecumenical dimensions of the Church’s refugee work.

Ecumenical and Interreligious Concerns

The ecumenical and interreligious aspects of the Church’s work with refugees are heavily emphasized on Support migration, and here one can debatably observe themes similar to the one’s discussed in the previous sections, one can draw a parallel to the formerly discussed tension between otherness and sameness in this debate as well. For example, in the description of ecumenism on Support migration it is stated that:

128 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
Ecumenism strives towards the visible unity of the Church, and in the long-term many have a wish and ambition to share one table of communion. In practice it does not work like this, but the ecumenical dialogue continues and we recognize each other as siblings in faith.

But where does one draw the line between ecumenical hospitality and proselytization in the negative sense of the word? When do we invite in, without reflecting over that the invitee belongs to a completely different faith tradition? Where the invitee maybe feels foreign, or maybe is even denied the possibility to be Christian in their own tradition, what can we then do? Hospitality can sometimes mean to abstain from inviting in people to our own church and instead help contact representatives in Sweden from the asylum seeker’s own tradition.

People from different Christian traditions convert and it is the freedom of each human being to seek that tradition which answers their pursuit for communion with God. But in the strict sense the ecumenical conversation has failed when people convert. Today in the Swedish context ecumenical practice mostly entails working with being able to live together but from within different traditions, which is often expressed as unity in diversity. This also applies to our Christian brothers and sisters that come to seek asylum in Sweden.  

Here a clear emphasis is placed upon the inclusive, respectful, considerate, hospitable, and dialogue-building aspects of the Church. Here the discourse portrays an active stance against “proselytization”, which is contrasted against the more positive attribute of “hospitality” which the Church presents as connected to its ecumenical practice in regard to its refugee work. Unity is also a concept which is highlighted in this section. Terms that stress the commonality between the Church of Sweden and other Christian traditions are likewise frequently used. Such as in the above quote, “siblings in faith” and “our Christian brothers and sisters”. Regardless, it would seem that the Church presents itself as an organization which is responsible for the wellbeing of the asylum seekers, that might otherwise feel “foreign” or lost in the sense that they do not know themselves how to get into contact with representatives from their own Christian tradition. Hospitality then entails, not inviting others to the Church of Sweden, as this would be proselytization, which is arguably presented as something negative in this context.

Similar themes are also apparent in regard to the subject of interreligious encounters. In regard to the theological ground of “Meeting with another faith” this is what Support migration has to say:

---


When we meet those who have fled to Sweden we also meet people who belong to other religions. The golden rule calls us to meet them as we would like to be met ourselves. When we meet as fellow human beings it is in our common humanity we begin. The fundamental security that I rest in God’s hands, opens me up to meeting other people. De first thing in the meeting is to listen to their stories and see their needs. Many come with trauma and loss, and need someone who will listen in order for them to carry on. Religious faith can both bring people together, and make us distance ourselves. It is a difficult, but vital, art to be secure in one’s own faith without simultaneously rejecting that of another. This is not the same as disregarding one’s own tradition. Neither is it relativism or syncretism. There exists both similarities and differences between and within religions. The differences can be substantial, and both curiosity and an openness to criticism— and self-criticism— are necessary when we meet. [---] We need to be ready to discovery things that both bring us together and sets us apart. We will not let anything lead to us turn away from each other.  

What is especially fascinating here is that— while there of course exists lexical choices that serve to underline the differences between the Church of Sweden and other Christian churches and religions— the utilizations of grammatical and semiotic moves also arguably assists in partially erasing the “us and them” distinction between different faith groups. Where different religions become grouped together with the Church, as a unified “us”. For instance, in a paragraph relating to interreligious meetings it is stated that “We need to be ready to discover things that both brings us together and sets us apart. We will not let anything lead us to turn away from each other”.  

In addition, on a connected page specifically concerning the theological fundamentals for meetings across religious boarders Support migration states that:  

Respect is the most important key word in talks over religious boarders. There is actually only one approach which makes dialogue and real meetings impossible: respectlessness and arrogance. A good rule is to not compare the best of one’s own tradition with the worst of the other’s.  

What should one think when you meet people from a different faith?  
In dialogue there is room for everyone’s devout witness, but it is not an opportunity for proselytism (that is to say to mission towards the members of other churches or the follower of another religion). Dialogue is about mutual learning and immersion. It is about building trust and relationships and to mutually be a positive force in society. To flee entails for most to be in a position of vulnerability. Putting pressure, even subtly, on  

---  


Ibid. Translated from Swedish. My emphasis.
someone in that situation to leave their own faith is taking advantage of a position of power. If someone anyway, from their own, deeply established wish, chooses to convert, it should of course be respected. (…).

Religions are diverse
There exists both similarities and differences between and within religions. In talks with representatives of other religions both curiosity and an openness towards criticism are necessary, as well as a will for self-criticism, something which in turn demands a feeling of security. It is important to remember that the person I meet does not represent everyone that belongs to that faith. Religions are not homogenous but diverse, even internally.

Faith that unifies
As new in Swedish society, where religion and the practice of religion is often viewed as something strange and private, and where the ignorance concerning religion is prevailing, it can mean a lot to intermingle with and be given support and acknowledgement from other believers, even if they belong to a different faith tradition. Despite differences we can meet in an understanding that one’s relationship with God is important, even in everyday life. 133

Here in both these sections one can observe the similarities and differences between them and the previous ones, dealing with the ecumenical and interreligious dimensions of refugee work. Once again we have the emphasis on the “vulnerability” of the refugees and the responsibility the Church has towards those who visit, regardless if they are from another Christian denomination or from an entirely different faith tradition— wherein issues linked to proselytization and power asymmetry are made apparent. The issues concerning conversion are brought up once again, and it is basically claimed that proselytization within the context of the Church’s refugee work would be “taking advantage of a position of power”. 134 Once more, the implied “we” in this section is undeniably the Church, which interestingly enough takes a more subjective character in the phrase; it “is important to remember that the person I meet does not represent everyone that belongs to that faith”. 135 Here one can correspondingly ascertain discursive moves that present the Church of Sweden in a positive manner. In particular as an inclusive organization which is open to dialogue and cooperation across religious boarders and as an organization which promotes humility and respect in regard to the religious other, which are presented as positive characteristics.

134 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
135 Ibid. Translated from Swedish. My emphasis.
An interesting new facet of this issue which becomes apparent in this section of *Support migration* is how the Church of Sweden arguably emphasizes its connection to the Swedish setting, but simultaneously sets itself slightly apart. That is, in its presentation of Sweden as a non-religious country. Here the Church takes a tone of knowledgeable authority in regard to Swedish society. For instance, as they implicitly state that for someone who is “new in Swedish society”, the religious context in Sweden may be very different to what he or she is used to. As in Sweden “religion is often viewed as something strange and private” and the “ignorance concerning religion is prevailing”. Therefore, it would be beneficial for new arrivals to be able to meet with other believers—like the Church of Sweden even if they do not necessarily share the same faith—as the secular nature of everyday Swedish society is presented as being possibly disconcerting for those refugees that have a strong religious faith. Within the discourse the Church’s connection to Swedish society is underscored, but it is also set apart from it, as is it largely presented as a religious oasis in a largely secular society. The Church of Sweden is labeled as “believers”, among “other believers”, where “one’s relationship with God is important even in everyday life”, in contrast to a society where religion is seen as “strange and private”. Here the “us” in this situation is described as believers who are united through a “faith that unifies”, and the “them” are debatably presented as the secular masses. One could hold that in regard to the ideological dimensions of this particular text the “them” in this context could have been assumed to be the religious refugee other—as previous literature has shown to often be the case—but is instead the non-religious majority of Swedish society. Where they are in this text presented as ignorant and nervous in relation to religion, and religious believers. This may admittedly not be the most frequently reoccurring trend within the discourse, but it does exist and it is more commonly occurring in the interview material, which will be discussed in future sections.

Another interesting section in a similar theme concerns the matter baptism and conversion in the context of the Church’s refugee work, which is presented as a not entirely uncontroversial issue. It is stated that conversion and baptism “are intimately connected, as baptism can be labeled as the last step in the conversion process. From the side of the congregations one can never take a flippant approach to baptism, which becomes extra clear when it is an asylum-

---

136 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
137 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
seeking person who considers converting”. “Baptism” in itself is presented in Support migration a very serious matter, as it is described as entailing possible negative consequences for the converted individual, so there is an extreme hesitance observable in regard to this subject.

The religious landscape in Sweden is changing. The Church of Sweden is still the largest religious body, and most Swedes have their roots in the Christian tradition. But for many congregations their daily lives also involve meeting people from other religious traditions. The Church of Sweden’s monopoly status [...], does no longer apply, which of course effects how the sacrament of baptism is administered.

“Sweden” is presented as if in change, and so is simultaneously the Church of Sweden. While the Church “is still the largest”, and “most Swedes have their roots in the Christian tradition”, the Church no longer has “monopoly” on religion in Sweden—meeting people from other religions is now a fact of many people’s “daily lives”. Yet, the Church is still presented as the “largest”, even if its previous “monopoly status” no longer applies. Calling upon higher authority, or an authority which is said to support their views, is a popular move to justify the specific inclinations of an ideology. This is also apparent in Support migration as well, wherein the authority of their religious tradition is heavily emphasized within the various texts, especially in matters where there seems to exist some form of confusion— as many “Christians ask questions regarding how we Christians are to approach people with a different faith”. For example, in the statement: as “Christians we believe that the triune God is the source of all truth and love. We are called to love God over everything and our neighbor as ourselves. Therefore the great commandment is a guide for us in our discussions with people of another faith”. The emphasis is placed on the ideal that every person should have the “freedom to” from “the their own conscience” to choose their religious belonging, and this entails that no one should be “driven to convert” through “moral pressure or material

---


139 For example, it is stated that conversion “does not necessarily mean that one will be granted asylum”, and that it can have negative consequences for the convertor’s “family relations”. Moreover, there can exist danger for their lives if the converted are deported to a country where there is a religious persecution of Christians. This was another frequent theme during the interviews. Ibid. Translated from Swedish.

140 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.

141 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.


144 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
advantages”. Yet if someone out of “free will” chooses to convert one is not allowed to try and stop them. One of the concluding remarks from this section states that:

Fundamentally we should be happy that people seek out our churches. Of course the Church of Sweden welcome them into our community, both in the church service and other congregational activities. But we will be careful and show respect towards their prior religious belonging. As the Bishops wrote in their letter: “if the asylum seeker after mature deliberation wants to be baptized then we will with joy baptize”.  

Nevertheless, while meeting people with due love and respect out of fealty to the Christian tradition, it remains stated that the increased amount of “people who are fleeing” that “are coming to our country”, does bring with it “great challenges” for the “congregations”. Here a rare nationalistic facet of the discourse emerges, even if the Church still presents itself as welcoming, inclusive, and open. This can also be observable in the previously quoted claim that “we should be happy that people seek out our churches”. The line between welcoming others into the community of the Church and proselytization is also arguably presented as both thin and dangerous— something which was also discussed in the previous section regarding ecumenism and refugee work— and is presented as a possible danger in the Church’s refugee work.

On another section of the platform, which superficially deals with the more practical aspects of the possible ecumenical as well as interreligious issues and dimensions within the Church’s humanitarian engagement with refugees, the text asserts that:

All that you want people to do to unto you, that you shall also do unto them— the golden rule calls us to meet people as we in turn would like to be met. This also applies when meeting with people who have a different faith and different religious traditions.

Again the emphasis is also placed on “people”. However, in the following paragraphs of Support migration other categories do make an appearance, such as “Jew” and “Muslim”, yet

---

145 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
146 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
147 Ibid. Translated from Swedish. My emphasis.
148 Ibid. Translated from Swedish. My emphasis.
150 Here we have once again a reference to the “golden rule” in regard to meeting the religious other, which can seem to give the claim a certain aura of authority.
the categories are presented as either neutral or positive, and not necessarily negatively. To welcome in “homeless” practitioners from other traditions into one’s place of worship so that they can “administer their own prayer and worship is not unique, neither in Sweden nor out in the world”. To use the term “homeless” in this context could be seen as putting a somewhat negative spin on the realities of those who have come to Sweden and have trouble accessing a place of worship. Again, the need of fellow believers is presented as spurring the Church to action, and to for example offer Muslim asylum seekers a local where they can pray and worship is described as a “strong act of solidarity” from the Church’s side. Yet, “out of regard to all parties” it could be a “symbolically more neutral room than the church interior itself, for example a parish house”. This of course also “applies to other worshippers” as well, and not just Muslims. Here the utilization of the term solidarity is interesting, as the concept of solidarity has connotations to conceptions of comradery, and commonality— and it is arguably connected to the idea of hospitality as the Church is offering “homeless” believers a place for worship. “Respect” also becomes once again a central concept in this discussion, tied to the Church’s refugee work with those from other faiths.

In following paragraphs, Support migration discusses the various issues tied to interreligious practices, and asks the rhetorical question “can we pray and worship together, despite belonging to different religions?” The answer is implied to be yes— if one wishes to do so— even if it is not outright stated, and three different ways to approach this issue are explored. However, it becomes clear that one should tread with extreme caution. Here one can see clear lexical choices that serve to impress upon the reader the complicated issues that come with engaging the subject of interreligious worship— and the religious other is described as a “guest” to the congregation. Here the emphasis is placed on balancing between being loyal to what is unique to the traditions of the Church of Sweden with an inclusive mentality which aims to ensure that “all feel involved”. Praying together also entails that all participants have “approved each’s contributions and that you don’t use

---

152 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
153 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
154 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
155 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
156 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
157 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
158 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
deliberately provocative material”. While these types of practices, such as interreligious prayer, are not generally described as unusual—as “in practice it is not unusual”—it is “the priest who is responsible” so that “that which is included is not incompatible with our Church’s creed”. Nevertheless, here the cardinal rule is once again invoked “all of it must be handled in a respectful and locally grounded manner”. In addition, it is clarified that there “exists nothing which would hinder that youths from other religious traditions participate in the activities that lead towards confirmation”, and “in a society where cultures meet it is important to help youths to seek their identity in dialogue and interaction with—not in opposition to—people with a different faith. The foundation of the Church’s attitude towards interreligious dialogue and relations is to be true to itself, whilst still being open towards others. Here one can perhaps gleam a certain aura of protectionism, in the sense that staying true to the tradition is considered an extremely important and serious matter. Yet, the religious other is seemingly not portrayed as the direct threat, but rather the situation itself, as the integrity of the other is also endangered in a way.

In regard to “Christian migrants in Sweden” on Support migration the discussion regarding religious others has a similar character but takes an interesting turn. In the previous discussions regarding interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, the discourse gave an impression that interreligious relations in Sweden were relatively peaceful, even if such matters where to be dealt with due seriousness and caution. However, in regard to the asylum seekers themselves, interreligious relations seem a bit more strained.

Asylum seekers from different religions and Christian traditions live together at Migrationsverket’s asylum housing which can create tension and disagreements between people that belong to different religious groups, but also antagonism between people who belong to the same religion. Christians as well as Muslims and practitioners of other religions are not homogenous groups, and that is why friction emerges both within and across religious boarders.

Words like “tension”, “disagreement”, and “friction” imprint upon the reader the difficulties experienced by asylum seekers from various religious groups and traditions in keeping

Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
Ibid. Translated from Swedish. My emphasis.
Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
“Migrationsverket” referring to the Swedish Migration Agency. Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
relations peaceful. The tense climate at the asylum housing is implied to be caused by the reality that asylum seekers from various religions happen to be living together. “Religious persecution” is moreover claimed, on this page, to be one of the reasons that Christians in particular may be forced to flee. For example, despite it being stated that most Christians “that seek asylum in Sweden have fled from war and hopeless political life circumstances”, many Christians “also flee from religious persecution”.\(^{165}\) This is especially interesting in contrast to the previous mention of “religious freedom” in Sweden, which is described as the reason why Swedish law prohibits the registration of religion earlier in the section, implying that we in Sweden have “religious freedom” in contrast to those countries that “persecute” Christians on the basis of their religion.\(^{166}\) This could be seen as an implied form of negative other representation within this discourse, as asylum seekers and/or their places of origin are presented as more prone to intra— and inter—religious tensions and conflicts. In light of the issue of religious tensions in asylum housing, one may poignantly wonder if the solution could be to open houses specifically for Christian refugees. On another page of the site, which deals with “Current Questions”, and the theme “Insecurity and Harassment at Asylum Housing” this issue is discussed in particular. Regarding the question if the Church of Sweden wants special housing for Christian asylum seekers to open, it is stated that:

"Fundamental for the Church of Sweden is that it is serious and unacceptable that people are harassed at Swedish asylum housing. The situations that arise when different value systems and views collide have to be acknowledged, and people’s worries taken seriously. […] However we do not believe that housing systematically organized for example after religion is a good solution in this situation. That we have to work to find ways so that we can live together regardless of faith and background is not […] a subject for debate, but a fact. This is why we do not contribute to separate housing for Christian asylum seekers. […] We do not want to contribute to increased polarization and segregation in society. People other than Christians are harassed also, and with Christian values as a base we ought to not differentiate between people.\(^{167}\)"

The issue of harassment is noted as “serious” and “unacceptable” in the eyes of the Church of Sweden. When “value systems and views collide”, then the situation has to be taken seriously an acknowledged, as “we” must learn to be able to live together “regardless of faith and background”. However, even if Christians along with other groups of people are described as victims of harassment, “Christian values” are presented as anathema to an ideology which

\(^{165}\) Ibid. Translated from Swedish.

\(^{166}\) Ibid. Translated from Swedish.

would seek to differentiate between people for whatever reason. It is likewise implied that separate asylum housing could lead to “increased segregation and polarization”, terms that generally have very negative connotations in contemporary society. Other Christians can therefore not be treated preferentially by the Church as this would not only be unchristian, but may also have dire consequences. In this manner, one could argue that the Church of Sweden is shown here as a proverbial paragon of Christian values, and as a staunch opponent of segregation and polarization in Swedish society. The utilization of contrasting concepts here arguably also serve to construct an ideological square. Again the concept of “we” is used here to emphasize commonality between various religious groups. To “not differentiate between people”, or in Swedish “inte göra skillnad på folk” is a reoccurring theme in the Church’s discourse on Support migration and this theme also frequents the material gathered from the interviews. In Support migration the Church as an actor is arguably presented as a unified, large, powerful organization that has a religiously motivated mission and responsibility to help those in need. Those in need in this case being refugees. Generally, the discourse emphasizes the common humanity between those who flee, and the members of the Church, even if they are also presented as religious and cultural others, albeit mostly in neutral terms. The vulnerability of the refugees are emphasized, and the power asymmetry between them and the “us” of the Church is also highlighted in many places, mostly in discussions concerning interreligious and ecumenical work, and in discussions regarding conversion. But this is also arguably frequently used as a way to legitimize the Church’s refugee work. The helplessness of the new arrivals, is often presented in the discourse as a way to justify the Church’s engagement in these issues, as a way to strengthen the portrayal of the Church as a force for good in society and a standard-bearer for Christian values. While there exist few examples where refugees as actors are described in negative terms, secular Swedish society is in some small sections portrayed as an opposite to the Church whereas the commonality with other believers is far more accentuated. Segregation, xenophobia, and excluding others are likewise presented as concepts anathema to the Church and its work— as the Church is generally portrayed as a force fighting these issues, for the betterment of society.

**Interviews**

The interviews below have been conducted with eight different individuals who are all active participants in the Church’s work with refugees in different manners. Four of the interviews were with staff from the Stockholm Diocese and the Central Church Office in Uppsala, with
two from each. The last four interviews were conducted with four individuals who work at the Vantör congregation in Högdalen, a suburb in Stockholm, and are involved in the church’s Women’s café as well as other types of work regarding refugees, diversity and integration. The major differences between Support migration and the interviews is that while Support migration can be said to be an official channel, the interview subjects do not speak with the same formal authority on this matter. Because they do not speak for the Church in an authorized capacity during the interviews, even if some of them have fairly high positions within their own Dioceses. However, for the sake of anonymity I will refrain from stating their exact positions and job title within the context of the Church’s work with refugees. Moreover, the names of the subjects will also be pseudonyms in order to ensure the protection of the interviewees’ integrity as it has not been deemed necessary to use the participants full names in this paper.

**Who “We” Are and What “We” Do**

During the various interviews, the interview subjects may have differed from one another in regard to things such as geographical location, position within the Church, gender, and professional role. Yet, despite these differences all of their descriptions of the Church of Sweden, and what can be said to be the essence of the Church in light of its refugee work, are generally fairly consistent and run almost parallel to the descriptions of the Church and the Church’s refugee work found in *Support migration*. As stated by Kat, a woman who works with the Stockholm Diocese’s local engagement with refugees in the Stockholm area, the Church is the best “at creating spaces for meetings”, and that the “congregations have done a lot of work around the refugee issue”.168 “Congregations have always worked with crisis and processing so we are not novices at that exactly”.169 Even if she believes that it still may be “a little different for some congregations that have had a lot of people arriving”.170 Despite the fact that many congregations have had to “relate to new things”, Kat contends that “I think that many congregations have mobilized superfast”, they were “just like, ok, these are people, what do we do?”.171 She mentions that it was not hard to get volunteers as people felt “like

---

169 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
170 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
171 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
they had to do something”.172 On a local level she fully believes that “the Church has done amazing work”.173

Teri, an employee of Vantör’s congregation— who is one of many Church staff involved as a volunteer with the Women’s café in Högdalen— also highlights the inclusive nature of the Church and repeats the sentiment, expressed in Support migration, that the “Church of Sweden is open to everyone” and believes that this is a good thing that is appreciated by many.174 “People feel safe” when they come into contact with the church, and that her congregation especially aims to “work so that everyone feels welcome”.175 While she “sometimes notices” more conservative attitudes, she states that it is “rare for people to question the diversity work in Högdalen”.176 In general, Teri says, she is very proud of the Church’s engagement with refugees, “just see how we have worked with the refugee issues” and how the Church has worked to “mobilize, criticize and question” in regard to this matter.177

Kat also feels like she could not stress enough what great work the Church has done in regard to providing humanitarian assistance to refugees, yet bemoans the lack of attention the Church’s efforts were given in the press during the peak of the crisis.

There was not much written about the Church of Sweden, but the Church of Sweden did amazing work. We were at [the Stockholm Central Station] the entire time, and there were priests and deacons and congregations that stopped all regular activities and made beds in their churches, driving back and forth to [the Stockholm Central Station]. […] How people fast as lightning just started rethinking and said: we cannot have it this way, we have to do something. This is our mission, our absolute mission, to preserve human dignity in this crisis situation, or how to put it.178

For some, this de-emphasis on the religious or cultural origins of the refugees, in favor of the emphasis on their humanity, may seem like a surprise to some who have studied the contemporary refugee debate— as was discussed in the literature review— where refugees are often divided into various subgroups or sub-categories, such as Muslim, Christian, and the

172 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
173 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
174 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
176 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
177 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
like. However, here no such distinction is made, instead “they are people”, and the Church is argued to lean on the ideal that the Church does not “differentiate between people” in its absolute mission to “preserve human dignity”.\(^\text{179}\) Moreover, Kat contends that it is a great relief to have that model as a supporting pillar in this sort of work.

Don’t differentiate between people […] to have that as a bench-mark and to have that in one’s back, makes it so that one can choose in situations when there are those that say that they have no place here in the church, and they are standing there, and it is cold outside, and they miss their parents, and they have been out on the roads of Europe[…] It is such a relief to have that in one’s back, that I do not differentiate, welcome.\(^\text{180}\)

Here we can catch a glimpse of what can be viewed as a similar type of ideological squaring as observed in the previous section on Support migration. However, here the dynamic opposite to the Church, seems to be those who would differentiate between different types of people, by saying that some do not have a place in the Church. When put into contrast with one another, the Church itself is presented as open, helpful, and hospitable, while those who would turn away others come off as somewhat heartless. One could argue that what this example seems to present— which is but one among many like it in relation to this common theme— is that there exists another “other” in this discourse regarding refugees, that is not the refugees themselves, but rather marginal voices and forces within the Church of Sweden that are set against the Church’s work with, not only the refugees, but its quest for greater societal good. A theme we will discuss more in depth at a later point.

“Us and Them”, Refugee Work in an Interreligious and Ecumenical Context

Like Kat, Pete, an employee of the Central Church Office in Uppsala who works with interreligious dialogue similar sentiments are expressed. For example, in one part of the interview Pete describes how a partnership evolved between the Katarina congregation—which belongs to the Church of Sweden— and the Stockholm Mosque the autumn of 2015 in response to the increased demand of humanitarian aid for the large amounts of refugees that had been stranded at the Stockholm Central Station. This cooperation is later described as having become vital as after the boarders closed “the refugees could come no further”. When “people are here and need to get into society, learn the language, and get counseling”, so “that

\(^{179}\) Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
\(^{180}\) Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
is what people [the congregations] did”— adding, however that many of the volunteers did not previously have very strong ties to the Church.\textsuperscript{181}

About “roughly half” of the Church’s congregations in Sweden are said by Pete to have some sort of “interreligious work”. In other less urban areas, where meeting people from other religions is not as common, many congregations found themselves “faced with” interreligious issues, due to the increased number of refugees being sent to refugee housing in more rural areas. But this, according to Pete, instead spurred congregations and volunteers to action, “they went in and said: wow, this is important, we support this”.\textsuperscript{182} However, now when many refugee housing facilities are being emptied and “refugees are disappearing from these smaller areas, it can actually be a great sorrow”, “you lose the friends that you have made, and a meaning in one’s work that one has been given”.\textsuperscript{183} Nevertheless, even if Pete believes that the Church has found “a more equal way to work”, the fact that the Church has “more resources” than other denominations “is not unproblematic”. Yet he thinks that there exists an awareness regarding this particular issue, among others, that relate to the power asymmetry between the Church of Sweden and other religious traditions in Sweden, as well as newly arrived refugees.

I think that in most places there does not exists a clash between some sort of missionary zeal with the humanitarian effort, but this can exist in some places, where people haven’t yet processed these questions, and see that it involves to not in any way take advantage of these people. Even if it is unintentional, it is still taking advantage of people in a vulnerable position, and then it is not… it would be committing assault against people.\textsuperscript{184}

Like Kat, Pete also emphasizes that the Church is open to everyone, regardless of belief— and that this is a core value in the Church’s self-understanding.

You can see from the official direction that the Church of Sweden can be an important bridge builder in the local community, a meeting place. There are not a lot of meeting places today where people can meet across different types of boarders, in this way one can contribute to unity in the local community as well. Many congregations have language cafés for instance […] and those who are invited to the language café… you never ask what faith someone has, like do you have a faith? Or something like that, but rather you are welcomed in.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
[---] In the legal framework of the Church [...] it is very clear that the congregation has responsibility for everyone who reside in the congregation’s domain, regardless of who you are. [...] So it is not a club just for members of the Church, [...] this is an important part of the self-understanding of what the Church of Sweden is.\textsuperscript{185}

In a world where peaceful interreligious relations are threatened by “stronger political polarization” and “fear”, which makes some people “see others as threats” it becomes even more important to “stand against criticism and hate”, Pete maintains.\textsuperscript{186} Internal polarization within the Church is also seen as a future danger, as the Church of Sweden “mirrors such a large width of the population”, it “would be strange” if there didn’t exists “such streams” “within the Church” as well— but it is important to “stand against it”.\textsuperscript{187} It would be “especially serious” if “we fall into an us and them” in a majority church like the Church of Sweden.\textsuperscript{188} Nevertheless, Pete’s general perception is that most congregations in regard to their refugee work “want to be these bridge builders, and want to be actors in the local community, and want to do something good, and not become some sort of us and them”— to be a “bridge builder”, and “feel pride in being that”.\textsuperscript{189}

Another individual in the employ of the Central Church Office, Kristi, a researcher, echoes a similar sentiment when she remarks that— in regard to the Church of Sweden— “if you are big, then you have to be nice”.\textsuperscript{190} Here the scale of the Church of Sweden is also presented as an argument as to why it cannot afford to cut itself off from the other religious traditions in Sweden and only focus on itself— putting up walls around itself could be said to aid in xenophobia and segregation within Swedish society. As another church employee, Ann a priest from Stockholm, attests that “we are really really big, and we have to take the greatest responsibility to work with dialogue between religions”.\textsuperscript{191} A “responsibility” which it seems that the Church— as it is discussed by the interview subjects— wants to take to heart. The refugee work is generally described as something that has a strong interreligious and ecumenical emphasis. Instead of possibly damaging interreligious and ecumenical relations in Sweden, Kristi states that the refugee work “strengthens” the ecumenical work of the Church.
and that the “refugee work has been good for ecumenism”.

If you analyze the local churches’ efforts, then it is as you say, that the large migrant led faith communities also have much more limited resources, you can also have much more of a… Because you are a minority church you have more of a… take care of your members, take care of your own group kind of… Where the Church of Sweden’s diaconal work clearly does not have that profile. This can sometimes lead to other churches thinking that we take up too much space among their members that have a catholic or orthodox background. […] I have met that at some point, but it is my understanding that it is often very much appreciated, for instance in the Syrian orthodox church that the Church of Sweden has a lot of work there […] and that Syrian orthodox refugees are a part of language cafés.

In this part of the interview perhaps one could also deem a small form of ideological squaring taking place, where the hospitable inclusiveness of the Church of Sweden is clearly contrasted with the attitudes of other minority churches, who unlike the Church of Sweden more heavily emphasis the precedence of their own group, as they “have a more of a take care of your members, take care of your own group” kind of mentality— where the Church of Sweden’s work “clearly does not have that profile”. This could perhaps be linked to the aforementioned limited resources of other religious groups in Sweden where they do not have the same kind of material funds to spare. Nevertheless, this statement clearly highlights the welcoming nature of the Church, who does not care whether or not those who they help are members of their Church. Furthermore, this attitude of hospitality is described as being generally helpful in keeping good ecumenical relations with other churches, even if issues may arise when some think that the Church is “taking up too much space among the members of its own group”.

In more rural areas, Kristi comments, that in regard to refugees “you can see that it has become self-evident that people have come to the Church of Sweden”. She gives an example from a congregation in Teckomatorp, where “Syrian refugees started arriving in 2012 […]and then there were Muslim Syrian families from Syria that arrived one day. […] One day they came and knocked on the door of the parish house. Like what do we do? […] Yes, well we’ll go to the Church”.

193 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
194 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
195 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
196 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
197 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
I think that this is a pretty good picture, I think that many… [---] the picture I have is that many Muslims that have come from Syria have great faith in the Church. […] They used to live very close together Christians and Muslims in Syria, […] and had good interreligious relations. So, I think that plays a part in that you trust other believers. […] For many of those who have arrived from Syria have rather seen it as an asset that the Church of Sweden has been the actor. As opposed to, oh well it’s a church I guess we’ll go there anyway, but rather it has been something positive.198[---] Seen from a rural perspective it is the only holy space within a reasonable distance, the Church of Sweden, and so many people also go there. Many Muslims go there to pray their own prayers, because this is a place where people have worshiped God and one feels that this is a sacred place. […] Which is different from the larger cities where there is a greater religious offering.199

People from other religions and denominations therefore often go to the Church due to a lack of places where they can practice their own faith, partially due to having trust and “faith” in the Church.200 Here, these people can say their own prayers safely, as it is explained that there exists no desire from the Church to take this opportunity to convert them to Christianity. While it “is very clear in the diaconal work that it is not the goal for people to become members of the Church of Sweden, or for them to become Christian, or something like that”.201 Kristi states that the Church in general has been very careful to approach the matter of people converting. Moreover, as “the Church of Sweden defends dialogue between religions and such, […] conversion becomes almost a bit problematic, at least to some”.202 A similar attitude was aired by a Church employee from the Stockholm Diocese, Margaret, when she specified that “we help people because we are Christian, not because we want others to become Christian”, and explained that the Church of Sweden’s view on mission is very different now than it has been in the past.203 On that note Kristi thinks that there remains a certain “fear of being colonialist and orientalist, because Christianity has dominated so much historically”, and that this affects the Church’s view on mission and conversion in light of their work with refugees, as well their interreligious and ecumenical undertakings.204 Here one can arguably observe a tendency where the past historical actions of the Church and

---

198 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
199 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
200 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
201 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
202 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
Emma Sundström

Christianity are presented as problematic in the modern context, and anathema to the sort of work the Church does today.

Yet, despite the open and inclusive image that Kristi, among others, presents of the Church she admits to certain form of “tension” within the Church, for not everyone shares the same view of what the Church of Sweden should be and what role it should have, not only in regard to its refugee work, but in society at large.205 “It is not that there exists such an outspoken polarization, […] but there is a bit of it”, and “it is not certain that everyone thinks that this is a desirable development”.206 “It is a challenge”, for the Church of Sweden, in regard to how “one is to understand oneself as a people’s Church” in the present context, Kristi concludes.207 This slight polarization seems to be presented as being shaped between those who want the Church to be more open— “a Church for everyone in Sweden who wants to be a part of it”— and those who wish to see it stay more “Swedish”.208

In the discourse observed throughout the interviews, this type of description can be viewed as a type of ideological squaring. The Church, as an actor is described generally as an open, inclusive, respectful, and hospitable organization. Clear examples of what can be called positive self- presentation, and the lexical choices characterize this. Yet the lexical choices also debatably present an image of an internal struggle between different factions in the Church— where the refugees themselves seem to have become the ideological battlefield. In the discourse the refugees as actors are generally not described in explicitly negative terms, even if they tend to be presented as vulnerable and exposed individuals— which could be viewed as problematic. Still, the emphasis seems to be on a shared humanity, the refugees are first and foremost often discussed as fellow human beings, who have been forced to flee. Their religious, national, or ethnical belonging, is often discussed as an afterthought. As stated by the interview subjects, the Church “does not differentiate between people”. Yet, in the interviews, there seems to be forces within the Church who may question this attitude.

205 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
206 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
207 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
208 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
Polarization Within the Church and the “Other”

A coworker of Teri’s, Jo, who works as a coordinator in Vantör’s congregation, has a similar opinion. She thinks that the Church has done a lot of good work in light of the refugee crisis, and while not all congregations have had the same initiative she says that, “others work quite a lot”. Additionally, Jo raises issues similar to the one’s discussed by Kristi, regarding the questions the refugee crisis has raised for the Church internally.

What can the Church assist with? We think like that a lot, what can we assist with? What holes can we fill? For that which might not work in general. […] There are a lot of discussions about that, how the Church is to cover and fill up those areas where society has failed, or not. These are the kind of arguments that we get. […] Views that you have to live with and think about, what should we do? And what purpose should we serve? […] I notice it in the debate, I don’t notice it here with us as much, but it has happened here as well. […] You polarize, I would say that there exists a polarization of opinions regarding for example vulnerable EU migrants, and views regarding refugees. This is happening everywhere in Swedish society, and it is happening in the Church. […] Although, here it might not happen to the same extent. […] But then you get into a discussion where you have one side […] that say that this is not our mission as a Church, we should follow what our politicians say that we should do. But then there exists another pretty large phalanse in the Church, that think that this is not political, this is theological! We cannot walk past another person who is in need, because I believe in Jesus. It does not work, it is impossible for me as a believing Christian person to walk past a person in need, and this is not a puzzle that I have to assemble for the politicians, as the politicians think. I have to assemble my own ethical puzzle. Or maybe not assemble a puzzle at all, sometimes you might actually have to do things where it does not add up anywhere at all. You might have to state that no this does not add up, but it is not my task to assemble this puzzle, my task is to preserve and guard human dignity in some manner. […] I do think, however, that it is like the rest of Swedish society and the polarization that exists there, and maybe those other voices are heard even if they are not so many. […] It is difficult to capture these camps, but in the Church I still believe that there is a pretty large majority for this fellow human being perspective.

While there seems to be an understanding that the refugee crisis has opened for new questions within the Church of Sweden, this has brought with it some small amount of internal conflict between the “majority” of the Church who has a “fellow human being perspective” on things, and “those other voices” who are implied to follow “politicians” instead of helping “another person in need”. Here it would seem that the “other” in this sense is rather the marginal voices in the Church, rather than the refugee who is described as “another person in need”. Here the positive self-presentation of the Church and the negative other-presentation are observable.

---


210 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
but the “other”, the “them”, in this scenario, are not the religious and cultural other that is the refugee, but rather the ideological other within the Church itself. The lexicalization in this part of the interview has an undeniable militaristic character, in the sense that Jo employs words “phalange” and “camp” in her description of the different factions.

Even if one cannot deny that the refugees are also represented as the other in this context. The power-asymmetry between the Church and those who are aided by the Church’s refugee work is not lost to Jo either. In working with refugees Jo articulates that as “due to natural reasons, refugees are supplicants, and “that so very very many are arriving”, then “there has to be someone that reaches out a hand to another”— “but this becomes a very strong us and them”. Jo paints a rather self-critical picture of the Church when she contends that it “so easily becomes” that “we help them, and they are somewhere else, they are outside the boarders of the country, or they are at the language cafes”. “They are not here in the Church”, and “us the white middleclass church is stretching out its hand, if you want to twist it a bit”, “we still have a long way to go in working with these issues”. But, this power-asymmetry also applies to other religious bodies and organizations in Sweden. In regard to interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, Jo states that “we are hosts in the capacity that we might have more resources, but it is not that we decide everything”, “here we work together”. “We really try to emphasize that our religious dialogue work is not missionary, we do not want to proselytize, as some people outside the Church think. We do not want to deliver Muslims and baptize them, we don’t want that”.

Jo believes that the work the Church is doing is vital, and that opening the Church to those of other religions is necessary for integration. Especially, in regard to what she argues to be the “bad integration prerequisites” provided by a Swedish society that “views itself as secular post-Christians that have left all this behind”. Where, there exists an implied idea that “we will teach you to be free from your religion”, and “we will help you, so that you can throw your religion in the garbage and you can become liberated enlightenment people like us”. Stating that this is “the picture one gets, and it is extremely normative and condescending”,

---

211 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
212 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
213 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
214 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
215 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
216 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
217 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
“here we can talk about people who want to deliver the world!”.\textsuperscript{218} The secularism of Swedish society here being described as an obstacle for integration and it is put into contrast with the more accepting attitude of the Church, which is more respectful of religion. During the interview, the women’s café in Högdalen is offered by Jo as a good example of what the Church’s work with integration and refugees can look like. While many of the patrons come from various religious backgrounds, she says that “we don’t talk about religion […] we talk about other things”, like “how it is to be a new arrival in Sweden”.\textsuperscript{219} But she contends not everyone is pleased about these type of meetings.

This is something that those right wing people get really angry over. One of those things that right wing Christians, but they are often right-wing atheists as well. […] The only time that really conservative forces get concerned about the Church is when they hear about religious dialogue. Then they get really angry, because then they think that the Church should just be Swedish, and this is our Christian tradition, and that you are denying your religion, you are denying the Christian religion, and so on. […] We are not, like, hiding our crosses in the church, as it is sometimes said, because we sometimes choose to not talk about religion. This depends on where you are, we are at a women’s café, not in the church. […] Here the meaning is not to proselytize, […] here the purpose is for us to meet and learn from one another. […] In our world it is pretty simple, but it gets…\textsuperscript{220}

On a similar note, Jo also recalls the harassment aimed towards the Stockholm Bishop Eva Brunne, who is described as having started the “don’t differentiate between people” campaign in the Church. “She has been called Muslim-whore […] and people have said that she wants to draw crosses towards Mecca, and that she wants to carry all of the crosses out of the churches, and this is still going on in social media, I found out yesterday”.\textsuperscript{221}

People are angry at the “don’t differentiate between people” campaign, these racists, if we are to talk frankly they are racists and they do not think that we should have anything to do with Muslims. They think the Church is a sellout, that is selling itself out to the Muslims. So, it is almost kind of like a conspiracy theory about the Muslims taking over, and you know the whole islamophobia package and all that.\textsuperscript{222}

These attitudes can according to Jo be found both within and outside the Church. “So, there exists a discourse that the Church of Sweden does not protect the cross”.\textsuperscript{223} “This has been

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid. Translated from Swedish. \\
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid. Translated from Swedish. \\
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid. Translated from Swedish. \\
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid. Translated from Swedish. \\
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid. Translated from Swedish. \\
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
Emma Sundström

rather internal” but she says that it started with the “my cross” movement, that the Church leadership set itself against the campaign because it was argued to have used the cross as a tool for polarization. “The Church of Sweden’s highest communications manager went out and said that I cannot stand behind this type of treatment of the cross, when it is being used to polarize”.224 “The whole discussion was about how we have to stand up for all the Christians that are being tortured and persecuted in the world, and that is reasonable, but Antje Jackelén’s answer to this was that we help people not because they are Christian but because we are Christians”.225 The center of this issue seemed to rest on whether or not the Church should give preferential treatment to fellow Christians as opposed to those from other religions, and guard the cross from foreign interference. “People have been very angry because they think that Christians are being persecuted, and it is true that Christians are persecuted, but this is wrong, you end up off the mark”.226 “Then you just get, we help our own, and that is not what this is about, […] in every given situation we have to look where people have it tough, and in Sweden it is not Christians who are being persecuted, anyone can see that”.227

We are a Church that says that everyone is welcome and we do not compromise about that. If you want to come to the church then you will not be treated in any condescending manner […]. You should not have to hear that homosexuals are worth less than anyone else, even if it is from someone who is from a different culture. No one can say that, so then you cannot be in our church […], you can say it somewhere else, but you cannot say it in our church. […] So much we can decide over our own church building. Here you have an “us and them”, […] there we reserve the right to be an us actually, because this is our Church, we are the Church of Sweden and we have these fundamental values. […] We welcome everyone, this is our most important role, that everyone is welcome, and no one should be made to feel aggrieved over their sexual orientation, or their religious belief, or anything at all. This is very important! 228

Disruptive Religion and Others Weaponizing Christianity

In regard to the Church’s refugee work specifically, Jo also discusses another aspect of the portrayed internal conflict within the Church, which ties into the Church relationship with secular power and authority.

---

224 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
225 Ibid. Translated from Swedish. Antje Jackelén being the Lutheran Archbishop of Uppsala and the Primate of the Church of Sweden.
226 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
227 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
228 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
We discuss this very much, because sometimes you might end up outside the law, [...] it is a pretty fiery question [...]. How much is the Church an extension of the law that we have in Sweden? And how much the Church is an alternative to it? [...] How mischievous can a Church be? Is also a question. Like, what happens.... Where are the boundaries? These are really difficult demarcations and we can of course not do whatever we want [...] but there are times where you might have to stand up for human dignity before the law. For example, if the law is going to heck, and almost everyone thinks that this is not good, like you cannot do this to people. [...] Which is happening right now with unaccompanied refugee children from Afghanistan. [...] this is not ok for any Christian, it cannot be like this. [...] Then we have to hold our politicians accountable, and maybe we might have to go on the frontline, together with many others in civil society, and say that children cannot be treated this way. [...] Then maybe you could affect the political, even if this is a theological thing. It has a theological base but it of course affects politics. We have an enormous power to influence, and if we do not raise our voice, and say what we think, then we are wretches. [...] This is very important, it is a theological necessity, I think, it is a consequence of faith, which cannot be any other way. [...] The Church is amazing, there are so many strong forces that will be there if the politicians need to be put in their place, or we need to vote in other politicians. [...] What I am afraid of is that the Church fails to be this force that I hope the Church will be, that stands against xenophobia, I am afraid that the Church will fail that challenge [...]. We had the Second World War, Germany, where the Lutheran Church did not stand up for anything. This could happen, you can get scenes and pictures in your head of that reality. Maybe we would meekly go along, and not defend human dignity, which is so important.

In this interview, the emphasis on the theological basis of the Church’s work is a reoccurring theme, and it would seem here in the discourse that the theological is set in direct contrast against the political and secular, where the Church is presented as a defender of human dignity, even if the future reality of this is portrayed as being threatened, as the future is unsure. Working for human dignity and against xenophobia is presented as an extremely challenging task, and the future of the Church’s role in these sorts of matters is far from certain.

In the majority of the other interviews, as well as the one with Jo, the interview subjects often mention that while they notice an internal polarization within the Church, they tend to imply that the other side is much rarer voiced within the Church, at least from their own experiences. Another emerging theme revolves around what the subject seems to present as the weaponization of the Church and Christianity by marginal voices in the Church—like the “my cross” debate discussed by Jo—to support xenophobia. A notion which is articulated well in an interview with Ann, a priest in Vantör’s congregation.

229 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
There are those who would use the Christian Church and the Church of Sweden to attack Muslims. We had a gang, […] who would sit during café hours and yelled, were really horrible to Muslims, and we tried to handle this in different ways. Then when we were going to have our service, […] no, they did not want to join the church service. […] It is that you use it to pummel another religion, but not because you yourself are especially… active. […] I do not know if they are members or not. […] Both towards Muslims and us as well. Like, you are not a real Christian […] kind of like that. […] We never ask what creed you belong to when someone comes in for spiritual counseling or for a church service. You are welcome as an atheist or Catholic, or Hindu, or whatever you want, and that is always how we have received people. You just have to look at Jesus parable about the good Samaritan, we do not walk past someone who is down. […] I have done a lot of things within the Church of Sweden, and we have never asked if you are a member? Or do you call yourself Christian? There could have been many different religions that have gone through there, and that is absolutely ok. […] There are so many descriptions of the Church of Sweden that I do not recognize myself in. I do not recognize the Sweden Democrats description of the Church, and what the Church does. It is some sort of medieval picture that they hold on to. The Church does not look like that today, as some sort of preserver of old traditions, which are who’s? […] The Church is much more in its time and is developing. It has always helped refugees, and it has always been central to take care of exposed people.

The conception that the Church is doing a great deal of beneficial work in regard to providing humanitarian assistance to refugees in Sweden, and as a vocal socially engaged actor in regard to refugee issues, has been mirrored by all of the interview subjects. Where the Church greatest resource in its struggle with these matters seems to be its ability to create spaces where different people can meet with one another across traditional religious, cultural, and ethnical boarders. The efforts of the Church, and its various congregations are both praised and highlighted, and the Church’s “mission”, “task”, or “role” are often highlighted as foundational for the Church’s social engagement with these issues. That the Church is out there and working hard, that it is an engaged actor in society, is similarly highlighted in all the interviews.

While the Church is presented as cooperating with other actors in civil society, the Church is still in the discourse presented as entirely separate, and the relationship is not always described as friction-less. Kat from the Stockholm Diocese claims that while it is good that the Church has a cooperative relationship with the government, it is a “benefit” when working with refugees is that the “Church is not a part of the government body, as many refugees are

---

afraid of the authorities”.231 “So, it is a benefit to be a Church when meeting an Afghani boy, or a Syrian mother”.232 “We listen, […] we have our Christian mission to protect the person, […] we try not to be so political, but we have to react when human dignity is being infringed upon”.233 Also, the Church “tries to have positive relations with policymakers […] we try to be an active conversation partner, […] but it is also our mission to examine structures and examine power, and to defend our issues”.234

Sometimes it can be a little bit difficult for a congregation that new groups arrive […] and some more introverted groups […] get a bit anxious […]. This is one of those usual issues between the old and the new, and that. There I think that some congregations have had to work with this […] with diversity, and treating everyone equally, and that there should be space for everyone. I think many have to wrestle with that.235

Nevertheless, Kat maintains that “many congregations felt a deep responsibility when there was a crisis”. As, according to her, the Church is an organization that is often “galvanized” when there is a crisis.236 “After all, we have knowledge about how to take care of our fellow human beings”.237 A lot “of the work that we do with asylum seekers and new arrivals, it because you want to protect human dignity, this is our mission, our absolute mission, we are almost forced to do this”.238 That the Church has a “policy that we are open to everyone”, is contended by Kat as vital part of the Church’s work as, “without being able to say that, you would get into discussions about who has the right to be in the Church”.239 Such as, “shouldn’t the Church protect Christians first?”240 “The Church has been very criticized for being too quiet in regard to the persecution of Christians and so on”.241 Kat holds that the Church does “much” to help “other Christians”, but the reason they choose to not make a differentiation is due to them “trying not to polarize”.242 However, “sometimes you meet rather old-fashioned descriptions of the Church”, “but you don’t encounter them very often actually”.243 Many Swedes are according to Kat are “very bound by tradition”, and the

232 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
233 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
234 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
235 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
236 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
237 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
238 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
239 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
240 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
241 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
242 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
243 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
Emma Sundström

Church “has a relative high standing”, she concludes that “it would be good if this image gets live on despite crises that the Church may have”.244

Like many of the other interview subjects, Mona, an assistant deacon at Vantör’s congregation speaks very highly of the Church’s work with refugees, and believes that the café is a good example of what the Church’s refugee work can be.245 Mona states that through her work in Högdalen, and the women’s café, she feels “that she has gotten much support from the Church”.246 According to Mona the café started the year 2014, as a way to “take care of new arrivals”, or “all those who came”, and “help them integrate”.247 In regard to the women’s café specifically she states that the encompassing attitude of “respect and caring” is what characterizes the café in itself, and that all “we welcome everyone”, “regardless of religion”, and “it is not about turning anyone Christian”.248 She thinks it is a good thing that the environment is so welcoming and open-minded, as back in her home-country in Africa she explains that “if a Muslim ever went into the Church, they would get reported”.249 Therefore, she thinks that it is a god thing that the Church is so open, and works to help people, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Like many of the other interview subjects, Margaret is very critical of “those people who just want to close, close, close” up their boarders and thinks that “it is interesting” that “we” the Church of Sweden “has gotten criticized because we support other Christians to little”.250 In response to these claims, and gives her own take on why the Church of Sweden takes it upon itself to engage with these issues, she refers back to what she considers to be the “tradition” of the Church of Sweden.

A tradition we live with within the Church of Sweden is that God created us humans with many different abilities, and that we have both rights and obligations. But when you get into such a vulnerable situation, it is also an obligation for us that have resources to help those who are exposed.251

244 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
245 Mona works for the Church of Sweden even if she is not an official member, being a Presbyterian.
247 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
248 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
249 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
251 Ibid. Translated from Swedish. My emphasis.
Emma Sundström

If “we” have the means then “we” must help— as that is what the tradition demands of the Church— seems to be a common argument used to legitimize the Church’s refugee work, as well as their overall attitude of inclusion. Perhaps it is as Margaret from the Stockholm Diocese explained, that the Church of Sweden: “sees people as rights holders”.

That the Church welcomes all who want to come, or needs help. In the discourse observed throughout the interviews, the Church is clearly separated from the state and secular society. The government, and secular society, cannot be trusted to properly guard human dignity, therefore this role must be filled by the Church. However, within the discourse one can also observe what seems to be understood as a quasi-internal conflict within the Church. Quasi-internal in the sense that the views of the “other” side within the Church, are presented in the discourse as marginal voices, where the integrity of their Christian beliefs seems to be questioned. They are arguably represented as xenophobes that largely use the Christian faith to justify their racism. Here we can refer back to what van Dijk would call negative other-presentation. In most contemporary debates regarding refugees, the negative other-presentation is usually of the refugees themselves, where they are largely portrayed as threats. Here, the “threats” are arguably presented as the hidden racists within the Church, who would have the Church ignore its mission. It is implied that the “others” within the Church either think that secular law, the nation-state, or misguided religious fidelity, take precedence over the Church’s fundamental mission to protect human dignity, and not differentiate between people. To the “others”, it would seem that protecting the cross— or being a “real Christian”— entails giving preferential treatment towards other Christians, and building up a protective wall around the Church, so that the Church can remain an unchanging protector of Swedish cultural heritage. In the discourse it would seem that these voices are marginal, and their place in the Church of Sweden is presented as questionable, as well as their Christian belief.

Presenting them as racists, xenophobes, or aiding in greater societal polarization functions to delegitimize them as representative of the Church. Instead, it would seem that the Church of Sweden protects the cross, by welcoming the other, and working towards greater inclusion in society, by trying to tear down walls. The cross does not polarize, instead it is debatably viewed as a dissolver of the traditional boarders that separate people.

---

252 Ibid. Translated from Swedish.
253 Bearing to mind Jo’s statement on “right wing atheists”, and Ann’s story of the in Högdalen who only go to the Church to harass Muslims, but leave before the service.
Concluding Discussion

To tie this analysis back to the central questions of the thesis as they were presented in the introduction of this paper. What can the collected material— from the digital web-based Support Migration and related interviews with Church personnel— tell us about the Church of Sweden’s official discourse on its humanitarian engagement with refugees the year 2017? How does “us and them” distinctions function in this discourse? Then, in turn, what can this tell us about the Church’s ideological views on social engagement, interreligious and ecumenical relations, as well as its understanding of its own self-identity in the contemporary Swedish context as they are presented in discourse?

Between Support migration and the collected interviews, one can both see the similarities and the differences between the discourse on the Church of Sweden’s humanitarian engagement with refugees. “Us and them” differentiations feature heavily in both, but is often discussed that the Church wishes to avoid making “us and them” distinctions in their practice, even if it may at times be unavoidable. However, the traditional use of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation in discourse to highlight the distinction between an ingroup and outgroup, which often serves to vilify the outgroup, is not entirely prevalent, even if there exists a made distinction, commonality is a frequent theme. While there may exist differences the Church is presented as “not differentiating”, that we are all fellow human beings, or fellow believers, and this is presented as an ideological and theological foundation for the Church’s humanitarian mission. The main difference between Support migration and the interviews is that the interviews give a more splintered internal perspective of the Church, where aiding refugees and welcoming everyone, is not a self-evident matter for everyone. Whereas, Support migration presents the whole of the Church as far more unified and in agreement.

By analyzing the utilization of discursive moves— such as ideological squaring, actor descriptions, and lexical choices— in the collected material, one can discern some interesting themes in the Church’s discourse on its refugee work. Where “us and them” distinctions abound, yet the most emphasized one is perhaps not the most expected. An “us and them” mentality that seeks to differentiate between people, or value some over others, is arguably not only presented in the discourse as a large threat towards the Church and its work with refugees, but as a perversion of the Church’s core beliefs. The construction of the Church as an “us” in regard to its discourse on refugees, has the self-identity of the Church being
generally presented as steadfast and self-evident in regard to aiding refugees, even if the interviews describe a slightly different picture. Regardless, what is interesting in this discourse is that while the Church is presented as standing above “us and them” divisions, it seems to also construct various ones through its discourse. For instance, by differentiating itself from what is presented as being marginal malignant forces within the Church, the secular Swedish society, and the political sphere. The forces within the Church that are discussed as questioning the ruling belief that the Church ought to be an inclusive force in society are presented as the “other” in this context—and they are generally on the receiving end of negative other-presentations—admittedly more so in the interviews. While the refugees are of course presented as a “them” in the discourse, the emphasis of a shared humanity that they fundamentally are people is far more common than the anonymized marginal voices within the Church. Even if the frequent portrayal of refugees as victims is arguably not entirely unproblematic. An interesting paradox here, is that by stating that “we” try to avoid “us and them” categorizations, “we” are put into contrast with “them” who do differentiate and threaten the Church’s core values and mission.

Another interesting facet of this discussion is the tendency to underscore the familiarity and commonality between believers regardless of religion—at least within the context of the Church’s interreligious and ecumenical work—where religious believers are presented as having more in common with each other than with secular Swedish society. Due to the secular nature of Sweden being portrayed within the discourse as practically hostile towards religion. The responsibility of the Church then is to become an inclusive organization, that allows people to meet one another across traditional boarders, such as culture and religion. If a fellow believer has no other place to worship, the Church must be open to him or her. Moreover, it is argued the Church should be a place that welcomes everyone, as the country of Sweden is becoming more and more characterized by diversity and segregation, there needs to be a place where people despite differences can meet with one another—where people can come together and build a better society. The Church of Sweden as the biggest denomination with the most resources it is claimed that they have the biggest responsibility to dialogue with other

254 However, this tendency can be observed in Support migration as well if one recalls the discussion regarding the negative mind states that come with not being open and willing to help others. As Support migration states that when one “looks away” from a person in need “one stops being a fellow human being”. The love of neighbor that the Church professes is maintained as being not an “abstract” love but rather a “concrete” and lived practice. See: Svenska kyrkan. Support Migration, “Teologisk Grund: Därför Engagerar Sig Svenska Kyrkan För Människor På Flykt.” Accessed March 23, 2017. https://internwww.svenskakyrkan.se/supportmigration/teologisk-grund. Translated from Swedish.
faith traditions in Sweden, as well as to safeguard human dignity, and engage with social issues.

The concept of “responsibility” is arguably also central for the Church’s self-understanding regarding its refugee work, which is especially stressed when it puts itself into contrast with political power. Within both Support migration and the interviews, the “mission” of the Church to “protect human dignity” is often put into contrast with the political sphere. When human dignity is under attack it is discussed that the responsibility of the Church is then to question, criticize, and struggle against political power. Politics cannot be trusted to guard human dignity—as many policymakers are presented as disregarding the vulnerability of refugees—so then this becomes the divinely mandated responsibility of the Church. The Church therefore can be said to present itself through discourse as having an alternative moral and theological framework to secular power, and promotes an alternative understanding as to how one ought to look at these issues. To refer back to Jo, who argues that the Church’s humanitarian work is mainly theological and “not political.” These are arguably some of the things that the Church through its official discourse tries to establish as self-evident.

That religious groups and organizations can provide an alternative narrative to ruling contemporary discourses regarding refugees is not novel. As has been previously noted by scholars such as Ager and Ager, religious organizations involved with humanitarian engagement often provide an alternative and critical narrative towards social issues, often stated to be grounded in a religious moral framework. This has been observed in many studies concerning religious organizations’ social engagement with refugees, and issues pertaining to migration. The deep resources of religious traditions can be a powerful tool in order to question and change ruling discourses on refugees, that often serve to portray refugees as a threatening religious and cultural other in relation to various nation-states—particularly in the Global North. In both Support migration and the collected interviews, the centrality of the religious tradition as a basis for the Church’s refugee work, is a reoccurring theme.

255 A responsibility which also entails respecting other religious groups in Sweden, and not taking advantage of the Church’s privileged position.
Emma Sundström

However, while it is important to study religious attitudes and resources in regard to humanitarian engagement with refugees, I would argue that it is also interesting to study how religious organizations understand themselves in regard to their refugee work, and what other aspects can come into play. Religious organizations are not homogenous groups, and the discourse of refugee work is often negotiated in light of other issues. Working with refugees does not stand separated from other questions that pertain to a religious organization’s understanding of itself, and its ideology. While religious traditions may have the potential to be powerful resources as a questioning narrative to contemporary discourses regarding refugees—as we have observed within the discourse of the Church of Sweden—the interplay between discourse, religious resources, and social engagement is arguably a far more complicated matter than many contemporary researchers might give the impression of.

Religious organizations and their ideologies are not negotiated in a vacuum. The social context, and contemporary issues, also feature in the construction of the Church’s discourse on refugees, as well their self-understanding in relation to their refugee work—at least as it is mediated through discourse. The official discourse of the Church of Sweden seems to both legitimize and promote the Church’s refugee work using its religious tradition as a resource—with an emphasis on a shared humanity and universal commonality between all people regardless of religion, culture, or ethnicity—where the vulnerability of the refugees is used as a justification for their engagement. Yet, tensions still seem to remain, wherein, marginal xenophobic forces are presented as small but noticeable voices that threaten the vision of the Church of itself as an inclusive protector of human dignity, as a force for good in society, and a bridge-builder.

In addition, like the Australian faith-based organizations studied by Wilson, it would seem that the Church of Sweden—at least from their official discourse—seeks to negotiate its interactions with refugees of different faiths by recognizing the benefits of an attitude of openness, and combining this with an awareness regarding the issue of being seen as proselytization in a context characterized by a distinct power asymmetry.\(^\text{258}\) A danger that has also been heavily emphasized by scholars such as Helgesson Kjellin and Elizabeth Ferris.\(^\text{259}\) As we have seen throughout the analysis, one could argue that the same negotiation can be

\(^{258}\) Wilson, 2011. p.555.

\(^{259}\) Wherein, Ferris especially underscores the possibility of a potential disjuncture between a religious organizations modes and motivations on one hand, and international humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality. Ferris, 2011.
observed throughout the analyzed discourse of the material from the Church of Sweden. From our analysis of the texts from Support migration, and the interviews, one can observe the same balance between faith and the primacy of one’s own tradition, set against attempted neutrality and respect for the traditions of others—as well as the very real concern of proselytization and taking advantage of people who are in a less privileged position than oneself.

Through discourse, the Church of Sweden is presented as a religious organization that aims to be inclusive, impartial, and welcoming to all. Yet, there are also some elements of both its tradition and organization that seem to cause friction with this approach, some being fundamentally theological, others more social and political in nature. One could claim that this could be tied to a contemporary negotiation of the Church’s self-identity, as it portrayed in the observed discourse—and which has also been observed by scholars such as Helgesson Kjellin. A negotiation between those who believe that the Church should be a prophetic, inclusive, and socially engaged activist voice in society, and those who wish that the Church ought to first and foremost keep itself “Swedish”, stay out of politics, remain unchanging, and give more preferential treatment to other Christians.

Conclusion

The Church is at present one of the largest humanitarian actors involved with refugee work in Sweden, and its engagement with these issues cannot be ignored. As aptly stated by Ager and Ager, we need to “engage with greater awareness of the role of faith—both liberal materialist and religious—in addressing a range of issues of core relevance to the field: the clarification of core humanitarian values, the retention of a human rights framework able to define and protect human dignity, and appropriate means of addressing religious experience and well-being in the course of humanitarian programming”. These points are well made, and there is a clear case to be made for the inclusion of more faith-based humanitarian organizations, as well as religious frameworks, within the field of humanitarian aid and social engagement.

However, I would further contend that a similar argument could be made for the importance

of intra-religious discussions regarding matters concerning the clarification of core humanitarian values, and humanitarian moral frameworks, in light of contemporary global issues—like the European refugee crisis. Furthermore, it could be argued that there exists a need for greater scholarly engagement regarding faith-based and religious organizations’ internal deliberations relating to these issues, how this takes shape in discourse, and how it ties into matters connected to identity, power, and ideology. The need of future research regarding the Church’s engagement with refugees is palpable, and there exist many gaps. Concerning the particular interest of this study—the Church of Sweden’s discourse on refugees—an idea for future research could be to expand this study to see how the discourse differs in other parts of the country, and if the Church as an organization is as unified as it presents itself.\textsuperscript{261}

Nevertheless, at present the discourse depicts a fascinating internal debate within the Church, which concerns the very identity and self-understanding of Church of Sweden as a modern Lutheran Church in a country that is becoming all the more characterized by diversity, and a context where polarizations and “us and them” distinctions are becoming increasingly prominent. A question for the Church in these modern times seems to have become: how does one protect the cross? That is to say, how does one stay true to one’s understanding of the Church’s identity in today’s world, and in a changing Swedish society? Does one protect the cross by putting a wall around “our” Church, or by welcoming “them”, the stranger? While hospitality may be in question in many parts of Europe, and in many contemporary social and political debates, it might be of some relief to hear that it is not generally being questioned by the majority within the Church of Sweden—and that the Church instead through discourse seems to question ruling narratives that demonize the other, and justify the present state of affairs. In light of the previous discussion regarding the Church’s discourse, it would seem that the Church of Sweden wishes to affirm that when someone needs help, “\textit{we don’t differentiate, welcome}”.

\textsuperscript{261} As this study focused mainly on the Stockholm and Uppsala regions.
Bibliography and References

Publications


Emma Sundström


Internet-Based Resources


Interviews


“Jo”. Interview by author. Personal Interview. Stockholm, 2017-03-16.

Emma Sundström

“Margaret”. Interview by author. Personal Interview. Stockholm, 2017-01-12.