

Interrogating evil: responsive and critical engagements with church, ideologies and personhood after July 22.

The roundtable seeks to explore the relationship between Christian ideologies and evil.

The demand for responsive and critical engagements in society as a whole.

- what can we learn from July 22 as it pertains to the nature of evil?
- Does this bring to bear on the church's self understanding or the Christian ideologies?
- human personhood after July 22
- what does it mean to be fully human after July 22?
- what are the various ways in which we can act with a critical and responsive voice interrogating evil after July 22?

The contribution from senior minister Elisabeth Thorsen, Oslo Cathedral:

For us who is working, in the cathedral, July 22 taught us about the importance of being what we are.

Let me explain: When everything seemed to be shaken, we understood that the best thing the church could do, was just to be there. Stand there. Firm - and open.

We agreed to do what we always does, only more of it.

More open church, more services, more concerts, more cooperation, more silence, more cancelling.

In every difficult question or case, I focused on "sinking in my own belief" - rooted in the base of the belief of the church, all the time knowing: I am here because I need it. I am here to share the prayers, share the sorrows, share the comfort we might find. As a community we were eager to think and act as a big, inclusive WE, not a smaller US versus a larger THEM.

In our practice then, we experienced the durability of the liturgy. In many ways, it was surprising how our common liturgy could communicate so open and wide. There was a strange sense of newness in the old confession of sin, in KYRIE. In VERBA (the words of the celebration of eucharist). The power of the tradition of church music and church candles felt *real*. Every word felt stronger. Every perspective more urgent in a way.

For me "after July 22" correlated to many other "afters" of great(er?) importance. Like after Holocaust, after Hiroshima, after medieval pogroms, after Babylon. Our staff tried to stay open for what there was possible and trustworthy to say also after this "after". Recognizing that sustainable hopes tend to come "after". Some times these hopes come as wisdom, some times they come as empathy or faith. As humility. Or love. Some times the church has to remain in a kind of silence to receive these things coming. Some times the church can nourish them along.

In this time of crises, I experienced the church and its theology, to be like a prepacked lunch (matpakke). What we had in our packages was what we earlier on, had found along the roads of our life. Like Askeladden of the fairytale, like a pilgrime

on his/her own way to heaven, we had to stop up and share of what could sustain our own life, share what gives life to me, to us.

Was it evil that came to our little country on July 22? Was it madness? Was it both? These are big questions. Issues that need to be handled by advocates, lawyers, philosophers. And theologians.

As a church we handle evil as something to forsake. Something to keep away from ourselves - when it is in our power to do so. We also confess that evil is a part of life. Of our own lives. And through time, I think we have learned to focus on ourselves in this question. Not condemn others. The hollowness in systematically transference of blame by religious societies belong in our common consciousness.

As a church we also represent a law. A law of signs, but also a law of prohibitions - as describes in the ten commandments. So we preach that killing is wrong. And we try to create a deeper sense of *why*: That also the commandments are related to a love for life. Thus, we try to interpret the terrible pain in losing our beloved ones. We try to shed light on the perspective that our common humanity is at stake whenever we meet violence, killing and terror in our midst - because we then are so stretched considering values, personal strength and the capability to see the reality as it is. And to be true to ourselves as we truly are.