

14th Theological Discussions between Russian Orthodox Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
St. Petersburg, September 18th -24th, 2008

Abstract

The delegations of the discussion on doctrine noted at the beginning of the discussion that the context of Russian Orthodox Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the circumstances and historic backgrounds of Finnish and Russian societies and the position of the churches and their possibilities to influence in their countries are different. However, we can note that the churches' theological views on human value and human rights and right to religious education are close to each other.

I Human rights

1. Each human being is created by God. God has given us all reason and conscience. That is why people have the ability to distinguish between good and bad (Genesis 2:7 Proverbs 20:27). The value of a human being is based on his being unique and irreplaceable as a creation of God. God created humankind in his image and according to his likeness (Genesis 1:26) – not to be slaves but free servants of God. God has given people the task of cultivating and cherishing the creation and of loving God more than anything else and his neighbour like himself. He still has this same task.
2. God's incarnation in Jesus Christ expresses God's love for the world he created and for the humankind (John 3:16). In the incarnation, Christ combines his divine nature with human nature and makes salvation possible. As an image of God, a human being is called to act according to love and mercy. When following Christ, the incarnated God, who has suffered for people, you are to make the sacrifice of loving your neighbour. (Phil. 2:5-11).
3. Both rights and duties are involved in being a human being. Based on creation, all people must be treated with respect and according to their human value. Human rights are inalienable rights that belong to all people, and societies must secure the implementation of these rights.
4. When implementing human rights and freedoms, Christians must follow the example of their Lord and be faithful to God's commandments (Mark 10:29-31) that obligate them also to be responsible for their neighbours and the society.
5. Freedom of religion is a basic human right. The special duty of the state is to create prerequisites for the practice of religion both in private and in a community.
6. It is important for Christians to be able to confess their faith in society and implement faith and love in different sectors of society (Gal. 5:6).
7. If legislation in society interprets citizens' basic rights in conflict with the word of God or prevents them from being implemented, the Church and Christians must, following the instructions of the apostle, obey more God than people (Acts 4:19-20, 5:29).

8. In addition to freedom of religion, human rights include right to life, basic social, political and economic rights, for example freedom to assemble and to organise, freedom of speech and right to work and subsistence. The task of the Church is to defend the human rights of all people and to emphasize, in addition to the rights, also the importance of fulfilling one's duties according to the principle of reciprocity (Matt. 7:12; Rom. 13:8).
9. Our Churches are to continue the discussion on human value and human rights. Also the issue of power and use of force was brought up in our discussions. It is good to examine these issues closer in our next discussion on doctrine.

II "Religious Education and Teaching of Religion from a Christian Perspective"

1. Our Saviour considered children as an example of faith, gave them a very special place near him and called for us to be like children (Matt. 19:13-15; Matt. 11:25). According to Christ's example and following his commandment (Matt. 28:18-20), our churches are to take care of the Christian education of children in the spirit of the gospel.
2. The goal of Christian education and teaching based on Christian anthropology is to help us to create the right kind of relationship with God, our neighbours and environment (Deut. 6:20-25; Psalms 78:2-7). Relaying a body of knowledge is a part of Christian education, but its goal is especially the overall development of a child's personality (Prov. 3:13-18).
3. God has given us conscience, the ability to distinguish between good and evil (Rom. 2:14-15). Due to sin, understanding these may easily become blurred and that is why a human being needs guidance given by the word of God. Christian education is based on the values of the gospel and it strives to rouse and enhance the voice of conscience in us (Eph. 6:4).
4. The church must have the right and possibility to actively participate in creating and assessing the value base of society also at the stage when an individual's value system is being formed – in his childhood and youth. Each child has the right to have answers to the big questions about God, origin of the world and meaning of life. Our churches are aware of their responsibility of getting the growing generation acquainted with the answers that Christian faith offers to these basic questions of life (Eccl. 12:1-7).
5. Each culture has been influenced by the religious traditions involved in it in history. The message of Christianity has significantly impacted the development of cultures in two millennia. Teaching of religion in schools helps children and youth to be aware of the Christian roots of our society.

6. Christian education and teaching signify a process of relaying the Christian world view, tradition, ethics and lifestyle. Tradition is one of the basic principles in the development of civilisation and culture. Tradition is not a stagnant state but a creative process. Relaying the Christian tradition creates and upholds a safe atmosphere of hope that supports children in the development of their personalities. Knowing and adopting one's own tradition gives a firm basis for respecting other people's traditions (Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 10:17-19).
7. Freedom of religion is a basic human right. Each child has the right to teaching of religion that corresponds to the child's own religious tradition. Knowledge about religion cannot be taught in schools completely impartially because the teaching always reflects some world view and value system. Accepting teaching of religion in the curriculum does not lessen the non-religious character of school. A distinction must be made between the ecclesiastic baptismal teaching and the school's teaching of religion. School children should have the possibility to obtain profound knowledge about their own religious tradition and basic information about other traditions.
8. The educational goals of a public school and Church can be in harmony with each other. In many European countries, such as Finland, schools offer teaching of one's own religion in the spirit of positive freedom of religion. Getting to know religious traditions is in line with this principle.
9. Christian education supports the ethical values of society in the spirit of responsible freedom and creates the prerequisites for the encounter of religions and different value systems. The duty of Christian churches is to be actively involved in solving intercultural conflicts and support reconciliation between and peaceful coexistence of cultures.