Invitation for Open LWF Seminar: Politics of Reconciliation and Forgiveness in Public Theology Perspective

Date: Friday 20. November 10:15-14:00

Venue: 1483-228, Institut for Kultur og Samfund, Afdeling for teologi, Aarhus Universitet (room will be communicated directly to registered participants).

Organizers: Research Unit for Public Theology (https://cas.au.dk/en/public-theology), Department for Theology, Aarhus University, and Interchurch Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (www.interchurch.dk).

Language: Lectures English with Danish abstracts; questions and discussion possible in Danish. Foredrag på engelsk med dansk resume; spørgsmål og diskussion mulig på dansk.

Questions: Please write to Jonas Adelin Jørgensen at jaj@interchurch.dk

Registration: To sign up for the seminar and sandwiches, please use this link: https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/BLqNCn327L

Public theology is theological engagement in words and/or deeds in questions with significance for all members of society. Reconciliation and forgiveness are simultaneously important social practices and fundamental theological concepts. This open seminar invites participants to learn about and discuss politics of reconciliation and forgiveness in a public theology perspective. In the international Lutheran networks and dialogues including the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), public theology has in recent years become a new and important area of deliberation across contexts and churches, and the seminar invites into an exploration in the nexus between these spheres.

10:15-10:30 Welcome by Jonas Jørgensen and Ulrik Nissen

10:30-11:15 **Prof. Dion Forster (University Research Chair in Public Theology and Ethics, Vrije Universiteit, NL/ Extraordinary Professor, Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University): *Public Theology and the Politics of Reconciliation in (Post-) Conflict Societies: Is It Time to Give Up on Forgiveness?***

Public Theology offers a mode of theological reasoning that is both critical and constructive explicating (focusing upon) how and where faith and public life intersect. It asks how public questions and conflicts invite renewed theological reflection, and how the resources of faith traditions can contribute to a deeper understanding of social challenges and more constructive forms of public engagement. Using debates on forgiveness and reconciliation in South Africa more than three decades after the end of political apartheid as a case study, this lecture explores whether forgiveness remains a credible public and theological resource for justice, healing, social transformation and reparation.

11:30-12:00 **Prof. Claudia Welz (Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion, University of Aarhus, DK):** ***Forced to Forgive and Be Reconciled at any Cost? On Difficult Emotions, Ethical Dilemmas, and Religious Resources for Peaceful Coexistence***

This lecture takes its point of departure in Dion Forster's distinction between poisonous forms of forgiveness and the Christian call for healing forms of forgiveness. In a second step, the question of whether there are cases in which victims may refuse to forgive their perpetrators is discussed by presenting Simon Wiesenthal's dilemma: While imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, he was taken to the bedside of a dying SS soldier who wanted to obtain absolution for his crimes against the Jews – from a Jew. What would you have done in his place? The answers given by Christians like Desmond Tutu, Jews like Jean Améry and Primo Levi, and the Dalai Lama, a Buddhist, call attention to the possibility and the limits of forgiveness. Can resentment and irreconcilability be morally justified? In a third step, Aleida Assmann's and Avishai Margalit's work on the ethics and politics of memory comes into focus to illuminate what can be done if it is impossible to follow the imperative 'forgive and forget.' In conclusion, religious resources for peaceful coexistence are unearthed in view of Israel/Palestine today.

12:00-12:30 **Assoc. Prof. Ulrik Nissen (Associate Professor in Ethics and Philosophy of Religion, Aarhus University, DK):** ***Bridges and Barriers: Navigating Reconciliation from Near and Far***

Drawing on the work by Dion Forster and others, the lecture reflects on the potentials and limits of reconciliation in a societal context. Briefly analyzing historical cases from Danish history in relation to Greenland, the lecture discusses the societal significance of official recognitions of past atrocities for a reconciliation. As part of this, the question is raised, how can public theology play a role in societal reconciliation?

12:30-13:00 Q&A / Jonas Jørgensen, Interchurch Council of ELCD

13:00-14:00 Sandwiches