



Churches Building Peace - Between Expectations and Experiences

Monday 24.9.2018, at 8.30am – 4pm

Venue: Bullankulma, Bulevardi 16, Helsinki

The objective of the seminar is to gain a profound understanding of the roles, possibilities and limitations of churches in conflicts and peacebuilding. The integral nature of the church in the society opens up possibilities but also sets limits. In many contexts in Africa and Asia, church leadership has a capital of trust, and there is an expectation of positive action, not only from membership, but from society at large. But can the church leaders separate their role as leaders of a specific group from building peace and reconciliation for all? Church is an organization embedded in the social, political and economic relationships and structures, and this embeddedness, as recent research shows, can act both an opportunity for peace as well as a limitation.¹

In the past years, the role played by religious leaders in the field of peace building and development has been recognized. While it is true that churches and their leaders can have an important role in peace processes, they may at the same time have restrictions, or act as restrictors and be active part of the conflict. Church as a local institution is not free of local nor global power sharing and power dynamics. The multi-dimensional role of the church in the society can make the church a meaningful contributor to the resolution of the conflict but also a supporter or an engine of a conflict in another context.

¹ Henni Alava (2017). "There is Confusion": The Politics of Silence, Fear and Hope in Catholic and Protestant Northern Uganda.

Can we then at all draw conclusions about the role of churches in peace building? How theological perspectives on peace can or should be understood in different contexts? Can the church, including in Finland, be expected more of, due to its teachings, ethical ethos, spirituality and practical expressions of faith that originate from the Scriptures? How the Scriptures and their different interpretations are present in processes of peace and conflict? Are there practical lessons learnt that can be transferred to somewhere else? The perspective of global church is yet another angle to study the role of the church in peace building.

In this seminar we are looking at the examples from Zimbabwe, Uganda, Colombia and Palestine. Through these examples, we seek to understand the complexity of churches in peace building. The speakers of the seminar are researches, church leaders and members who have participated in national peace processes or have profound experience in the role of churches in peace and reconciliation. The seminar introduces different views and perspectives, as well as practical examples, theory and critique on the issue of churches in peace building.

