

# **Theses on the recognition of people of different religions in a multi-religious society**

## **Preface – Christianity’s demand for freedom and liberal thinking**

In his famous letter concerning toleration from 1689 John Locke begins his battle for religious freedom and other human rights by asserting that Christianity calls for ‘charity, meekness, and good-will in general towards all mankind’. Open-mindedness to those of a different religious persuasion “is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in so clear a light.”<sup>1</sup>

Christianity has not always been linked to the demand for freedom and open-mindedness to the faith of others, but Locke is right that Christian faith, according to the gospels, can only be embraced in freedom, and that Christians must therefore work for all people to enjoy the same freedom that the Christian faith demands. Jesus set people free. There is no room for coercion when it comes to the faith as we know it from the preaching of Jesus Christ.

To be Christian is to be set free in the belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind. Anchored in faith in Jesus Christ, Christians must show open-mindedness and thus allow other people the same opportunity for freedom of faith that they themselves enjoy: this is the essential starting-point for the following theses.

### **Theses addressed to the whole of society**

1. In word, action and attitude all people at all times shall be recognised as equal and equipped with all individual freedom and citizen rights. Freedom of religion is a basic value and precondition for all other human rights. Everyone has the freedom and the right to think, believe and speak.
2. People’s right to live in accordance with their faith and convictions must be respected, including their freedom to express their distinctive cultural and religious features and values, which find their expression in, for instance, specific food habits, different dress codes and a different day, year or life rhythm. At the same time everyone must contribute to advancing the integration of new citizens into Danish society whatever their cultural and religious background, so that the spirit of community is promoted among all citizens and the development of parallel communities is avoided.
3. Freedom of religion implies that there must be no obstacles to prevent differing religions from exercising their opportunities, for example in relation to training religious leaders or establishing meeting-places and burial grounds. It is important that the state and society treat people of different religions in such a way as to demonstrate that they are recognised as fellow-citizens who are expected to be able to contribute to the joint community.
4. In communicating about religion in society there is no room for speaking with two voices. What is said to some should be able to be heard by others with impunity. Mankind’s belief in God (religious faith) must always be respected, but the varying images of God and theology must always be open to discussion.

### **Theses addressed to the Church**

5. As Christians we must recognise all other people – of whatever religion or faith community – as people created in God’s image and therefore as fellow-beings for whose welfare we have a joint responsibility.

6. As Christians we must – in keeping with “the golden rule” – recognise people of other religions as they are, by working to give them the same freedom and opportunities that we wish for ourselves in our society, and the same freedom, rights and opportunities that we wish for Christians in societies dominated by other religions.

7. Since as Christians we regard the gospel as a message to all people, we wish to be able to talk to other people about their faith and our faith and to communicate the gospel to them. At the same time we must acknowledge that people of other religions with a universal message also have the right to communicate their message to us.

8. As Christians we find assurance in the Christian faith and regard Jesus Christ as the true path to fellowship with God. In the meeting with other religions we must be open to criticism and reflection on our own religion just as much as we must relate critically to other religions.

### **Theses addressed to people who belong to other religions**

9. People of other religions must, as Danish citizens, respect the legal basis of society, including freedom of religion and other human rights and the democratic rules, and they are expected – on the basis of their religious commitment – to make a contribution to the common good of society.

10. Just as people who belong to other religions have the right to share their faith with Christians and to work for conversion to their faith, so must people who belong to other religions also accept the Christians’ right to share their faith with them, and the right of all to change religion without being exposed to persecution or other reprisals.

11. Just as people who belong to other religions have the right to express themselves critically about Christianity, so must people of other religions accept that their religion is exposed to criticism, provided such criticism falls within the framework of the law.

12. Those rights which religious minorities in Denmark enjoy or are fighting to gain they must also help to acquire for other religious minorities, for example Christians, in countries where their religion is in the majority.

Adopted by the Committee of the **Danish Mission/Missionary** Council on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007

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<sup>1</sup> John Locke: A Letter Concerning Toleration (1689)