

# Current ethical questions



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*Herdecke, West Germany, where Prof. Antje Jackelén was born*

**In this section, we spoke  
with Revered Professor  
Antje Jackelén about  
her decision to study  
theology.**

**Q. Have you always been interested in theology, and why did you choose this field in particular?**

Well, I always had a connection with the church. My father was engaged as a layperson in the church council. My parents met when they were teaching Sunday school once upon a time. So the church and faith have always been part of my life. It was a privilege to grow up with the biblical stories and with a congregation. While I was in confirmation class, I was quite interested in the Christian story, the gospel, and how you express faith both practically and intellectually.

When I finished school, I thought I was a little too young to go to university right away. So I spent a year doing practical work in Switzerland. But then I returned to Germany to study theology. And I think what attracted me, apart from my faith commitment, was the scope of what you can do within theology. I mean, it is history; it is the present; it is the future; it is literature; it is ethics. It is philosophy, psychology, sociology, and pedagogy. It's rhetoric, music—you name it!! Theology is relevant all over the place, and I think that attracted my curiosity.

**Q. Did you imagine one day you'll become the head of the Swedish church? Was this on your mind?**

I am more of a person of gradual development. It wasn't that one morning I woke up and said I'm going to be a priest. I did my theological studies in Tübingen in Southern Germany. Then I got a scholarship from the German Merit Foundation, for one year of study abroad. I chose to study in Uppsala. The rest of the story is that I stayed, finished my studies in Sweden, and was ordained in Stockholm for the diocese of Stockholm, where I served in parish ministry in the suburbs. Then the family moved to the south of Sweden where I served as a Pastor in the countryside and then in the city. In the mid-nineties, I started my doctoral studies as a part-time student, at first, and then full-time. I got my doctorate in 1999. Then I had a job at the university in the field of science and theology. I was the regional director for Europe for a religion and science course program which was hosted at Berkeley, California. That was a very formative period because I had a chance to organize and co-organize conferences on science and theology in various countries in Europe and see how the academic and congregational contexts interact.



## 1

## Theology career



*Lutheran School of Theology  
where Prof. Antje Jackelén  
was active in teaching.*



**In this section, we spoke with Reverend Professor Antje Jackelén about her career as a theologian, bishop and archbishop.**

**Q. So, how did your career progress after that?**

Then, I moved to Chicago and taught at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), which is a seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affiliated with the University of Chicago. Again, this was a very formative time.

You always learn an awful lot when you teach!

It was a very diverse community of teaching and learning at LSTC. The majority of the doctoral students came from all over the world, almost all continents, which made a very dynamic community. Also at one point, we received Muslim students, men and women, who wanted to study Christian theology to become good at interfaith dialogue. That was a new challenge! How do you teach about the Trinity if you have Muslim students in class?

**Q. How did you approach this course?**

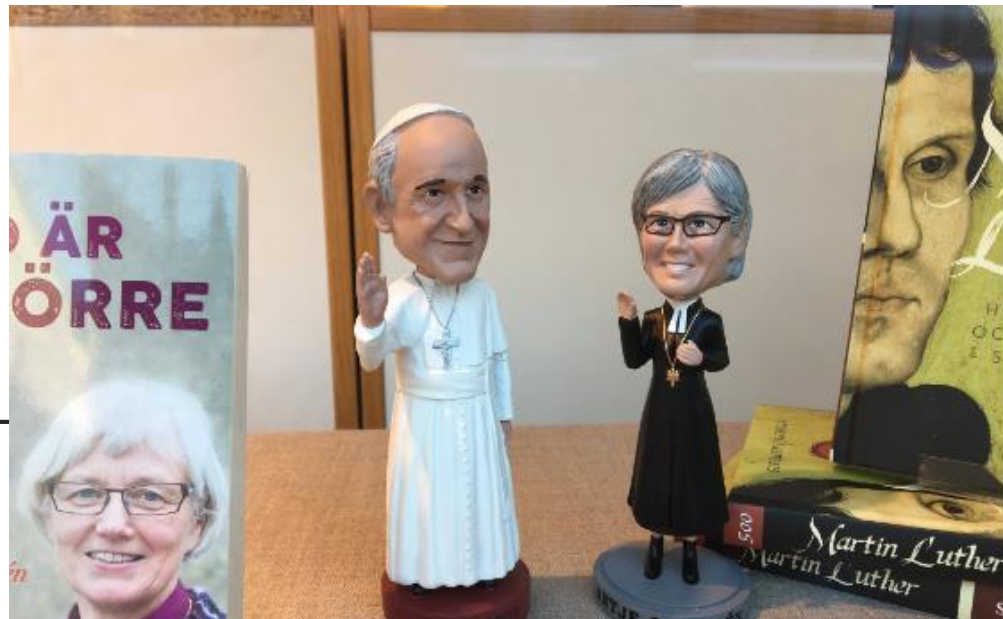
Well, of course, I taught the Trinity as I usually did. Yet, I had sort of an extra pair of eyes on myself. Now I was also looking at how we teach about the Trinity, with the perspective of a person who is a believer in

God the creator and has deep respect for Jesus as a prophet but does not see him as Savior. And who can relate to speech about the spirit, but cannot relate to the trinity. That Jesus is the son of God of course is a no-no, for a Muslim. Among the faculty, we wondered how we would manage when the arrival of Muslim students first was announced. We asked ourselves, how are we going to integrate them into our classes? Then one colleague said, "Doesn't the bible speak of the virtue of hospitality? This is the time to prove it! I found that very helpful.

**Q. That's an interesting story, so how did you progress to becoming a bishop?**

I was in Chicago for six years, and then I was elected bishop of the diocese of Lund which is the most southern diocese in Sweden, and succeeded the first woman who was elected bishop in the church of Sweden ever. I was a bishop for 7 years. And then I was elected archbishop, which I was for a little more than 8 years.

## The Pope, The Archbishop and tough decisions



*A joint commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation anniversary was held in Lund in 2016. (copyright @mucholirili on (X), formally Twitter).*

**Q. During your tenure as an archbishop, one of your goals was to pursue further unity between the churches. And to achieve that, you met Pope Francis twice: in 2015 in Rome and after that in Sweden. Can you tell us more about this?**

I have met Pope Francis more than twice—several times, indeed. The first time was in 2015, after I became archbishop. It was my first official visit to the Vatican. And then, the Pope came to Sweden in 2016. And that was a very important event in church history because it was a joint commemoration of 500 years of the Lutheran Reformation.

The Lutheran World Federation, the global communion of Lutheran churches, and the Vatican had agreed on a joint commemoration of the Reformation. They ended up asking whether the Church of Sweden and the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm, together, would be the local hosts for this commemoration. The real hosts were the Lutheran World Federation Church and the Vatican together. The big event happened in Lund on October 31, 2016, on the eve of the 500th anniversary. This joint commemoration set the tone for many commemorations around the world during 2017.

It started with a joint prayer service in the cathedral, expressing, on the one hand, grief, sorrow, and pain about all the consequences of the division of the church as well as all the sufferings of ordinary people, and on the other hand, gratitude for the gospel and the fruits of the Reformation. The service concluded with a

joint commitment. The pope and the leadership of the Lutheran World Federation together signed the five imperatives that are found in the study document “From Conflict to Communion” (2013), the fruit of decades of dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics. I warmly recommend these five imperatives to read, consider, and live by. This was a major event that, I think, shaped much of the commemoration of the Reformation around the globe.

To my knowledge, these commemorations were not celebrated as a manifestation of division but rather as a common celebration of the gospel of Christ. I think that is a very good development. The prayer service in the cathedral was followed by an event called “Together in Hope.” It focused on the common ministry to the world and the poor. The Lutheran World Federation and Caritas Internationalis signed an agreement to work closer together. This agreement has been fruitful.

It's really good to always think that we are united in prayer. We also need common work. We need to move on using both legs (so to speak): pray and work, ora et labora. Sometimes one leg is a little bit ahead of the other. I think right now the leg of working together is a little bit ahead of getting our theological acts together.



## 2

# The Pope, The Archbishop and tough decisions



*Is it time for unity between Churches*

**One of the main obstacles to church unity is the difference in theological dogmas between various Christian denominations. How do they define sin? Can the major churches have one stance regarding gender identity, for example? We delve into this topic with Archbishop Antje Jackelén.**

**Q. So would you support the Pope's decision to allow same-sex couples to receive blessings?**

I see what is happening in the Catholic Church now in light of what happened in the Church of Sweden in 1995. In Sweden, a new law allowed for the civil registration of same-sex unions. Then, the church discussed what to do about it. The main argument was, who are we not to allow blessings to pass through us to people who want to be blessed?

The blessings of people who want a blessing for their lives together were seen as part of pastoral care.

It seems to me that the pope might be reasoning the same way. We have a pastoral responsibility for the people whom we are called to serve. A pastoral responsibility is certainly not to withhold blessings for sincere love for people who want to live in a life-long relationship of love with each other. In the church of Sweden, we started to work actively on questions of homosexuality in the 1970s. That was a time when homosexuality was still registered as a disease.

That was taken away at the end of the 1970s, but already well before that, the church looked at these questions and worked theologically with them. I think that helped us make theologically well-grounded decisions when same-sex marriage was introduced.

## The Pope, The Archbishop and tough decisions



Is the Pope facing a *mutiny* because of his tough decision?

**Q. I just want to say the other point of view. The right-wing within various Christian denominations, including the Catholic Christian right in Poland, is saying that maybe this step could cause schism within the church. Could it be now that the church is allowed to bless sin? How do you respond to this?**

Jesus always made a difference between sin and sinners. He did not bless sin. He was very close to sinners. We are all sinners. We can't live without becoming guilty. That's just part of being human; that's why we are always dependent on repentance and forgiveness. But pinpointing homosexual behavior as such a sin is not something that is justified by the Bible. I mean, we all know that the verses that are said to be about homosexuality are hardly about stable, life-long homosexual relationships. If you take the Bible and mark with one color all the passages that are about caring for the poor, those who are in dire situations, and strangers, then, use a different color to mark all the passages that are about sexuality.

Guess what?

You get a lot more marks that are about caring for people and social justice (to put it that way) than about sexuality. So why is the church so obsessed with sexuality? And has often been very silent when it comes to blatant injustice against people. That is where the church should have spoken! I think the church needs to be self-critical. Why do we have such a special interest in identifying sexual sins and often close our eyes to greed and so on?

**Q. Are you trying to say that we are all sinners, so being particularly in a relationship that is not appropriate in the eyes of God doesn't necessarily mean we are not allowed to be blessed?**

Yes, we are all sinners—and at the same time justified, as Lutheran theology loves to put it. True love is never inappropriate in the eyes of God, who is love.

**Q. We see that the Swedish church offers huge support for people of different orientations. The church is quite intertwined with this community. There seems to be a big emphasis on contribution and celebration. Is it only because of pastoral care?**

You seem to be thinking about the LGBTQI community. Historically, the church has not treated this community well. We have not seen them as created in the image of God. Rather, we wanted to create them in an image that we thought was right. We did not behave like Jesus. Let them come to me, says Jesus!! That includes even LGBTQI people. I don't know about you when you grew up. But when I grew up, nobody talked about homosexuality. Homosexual people “didn't exist”; they were made invisible. So it took quite a journey to open one's eyes to the reality that this community is a solid part of humanity; it is said that homosexual people make up around 10% of the population. We still have lessons to learn when it comes to sexual orientation, gender, and gender equality.



# 3 Archbishop Antje, AI and the end of humanity



*Is AI the future or the end?*

**As an academic, Prof. Antje Jackelén's research focuses on the intersection between religion and science. We talked to her about the current, rapid AI development and whether she thinks it could be dangerous for humans.**

**Q. As a philosopher, how do you see humans' future with AI controlling our lives more and more?**

In a sense, nobody knows yet. We are experiencing a major shift in technology. We have been there before. I am thinking about industrialization, the technology of printing books, and so on. And every time, such major shifts have tended to cause some social unrest. Not least because technology leads to people losing their jobs. For sure, technological innovation has always created new jobs. But these new jobs do not go to people who lose their old jobs. So we are likely to see social unrest caused by this technology.

By the way, you might be familiar with Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. He talked about the three violations of human narcissism. The first took place when humans realized that the Earth was not the center of the universe. That was the cosmological violation. And then came Darwin's theory of evolution, which is sort of a biological violation because we were not simply the crown of creation coming from nowhere. We were related to other species. And then came Freud himself, who pointed to the power of the unconscious. Now we are not even bosses in our bodies and minds. So that was the psychological violation.

One might say that we are now up for a fourth violation: artificial intelligence may turn out to be an intellectual violation.

I find it helpful to go back to Nicholas of Cusa, the 15th-century sage. He was almost everything: a mathematician, a philosopher, a theologian, and a legal scholar. He distinguished between "ratio" and "intellectus." Ratio is the rational part of our mind, and we use it to calculate and plan. "Ratio" comes from the Latin "rator," which means to count. So that's what we do when we plan our everyday lives. Cusanus also speaks of the intellect. "Intellectus" is how we understand by getting insights and wisdom. It is the part of our mind that can also relate to that which we cannot know. AI is great at counting and calculating; it is also super at ratio. It's much more tricky when it comes to intellectus! Maybe there is a promise there that human beings can still be in charge. But who knows? The threats are also real. If it gets to the point where no human being is in charge any longer, this could mean the worst for the human species. So at this point, we do not know how the AI scenario will develop or how it will affect society and the whole of creation. AI can do a lot of good things, including helping us to create sustainable societies, helping the planet in times of climate change, and all that. It could also lead to the downfall of humanity (put it that way). We don't know yet what will happen, and we better keep alert, I would say!

**Thank you for this lovely conversation. It's eye-opening !!**

Thank you. Bye-bye





## Current Ethical questions

*Ethically questioning the world around us in pursuit of Truth*