

Churches as Places of Worship, Cultural Heritage, and National Symbols

Centralism, Autonomy, and the Hybrid Nature of Church-State Relations in Denmark

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Introduction

In 1694, Robert Molesworth, who had earlier served as British ambassador to Denmark, published a book about Denmark and the Danes: *An Account of Denmark as It Was in the Year 1692*. Much of what he wrote was discussed and contested in Denmark, but there was one point that the Danes apparently found to be justified—namely, that no Dane stood out among the others. According to Molesworth, all were mediocre and all held the same opinions: “A certain equality of Understanding reigns among them: everyone keeps the ordinary beaten road of Sense, which in this country is neither the fairest nor the foulest, without deviating to the right or left” (Molesworth 1694: 235; Olden-Jørgensen 2005). Very similar judgments are also to be found in recent studies: Danes are described as a tribe where all are alike and where people from outside can only be admitted once they have acquired the same unspecified Danish way of thinking and behaving (Mellon 1992; Jespersen 2011). The traditions upheld by the homogeneous Danish population in the last half of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century have not lost their relevance in spite of the challenges of immigration from other cultural spheres (Østergaard 2012). Part of this well-established Danish self-concept is the idea that real Danes maintain middle-of-the-road positions while combining seemingly quite opposing qualities; they are both exclusive and inclusive, royalist Republicans and atheist believers in chosen values (Hauge 2013: 43–8).

The Danish Royal House is more than a thousand years old, and Christian culture within Denmark has a similar age. Both have been quietly, thoroughly, and deeply incorporated into traditional Danish identity, and as a

consequence all church buildings of the Danish Lutheran state church are officially regarded both as the setting for Christian ceremonies and as national heritage.

This double role assumed by Danish churches is a central topic of this chapter, which discusses the relationship between the cultural preservation of Christian churches in Denmark and their use as religious buildings and explains the historical background to the Danish legislation concerning churches and the present-day practical consequences of that legislation. In particular we aim to show how a peculiar hybrid administrative structure regarding the management of the church buildings of the Danish state church goes hand in hand with a specific idea of the nation that has its roots in the nineteenth century. Such a *longue durée* historicization of a church-royalty-state relational nexus that incorporates discourses and affects of nation and heritage prepares the ground for understanding the complex engagement of religion and heritage in Denmark and, even further afoot, in Europe.

Danish Churches and Christianity

Denmark has been a Christian state since the second half of the tenth century, for the first approximately 575 years as a part of the Roman Catholic Church and since the Reformation in 1536 as a Protestant Lutheran country. The huge role that the medieval Catholic Church played, religiously, politically, and also culturally is well-documented, but as is evident from the analysis below, the Danish Lutheran Church had an equally far-reaching yet different impact on the lives of Danes and the Danish way of thinking. The national and later social revival in nineteenth-century Denmark unfolded in concord (and sometimes in conflict) with Christian revival movements. Even in modern Danish society, which in many ways seems secularized and which in recent decades has come to include many people with other religious and cultural backgrounds, a culture based on Christian values and traditions is encapsulated in several aspects of daily life, institutions, social conventions, philosophy, and ethics (Østergaard 2012; Holm 2017).

Most of the Danish church buildings originate from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They were built after approximately the same model, consisting of a chancel and a nave, a porch and maybe a tower, a vestry and one or more chapels. Yet no two of them are identical, since they have all been influenced by their surroundings. Their building materials depend on geological and climatic conditions, and their design and furnishings have been decided by the people who have used them and been responsible for their embellishment. In spite of all the resemblances between the many originally Romanesque churches, there is a great difference in appearance between a

granite ashlar church like Hover on the windswept fields of Western Jutland, with no tower and with a flat wooden ceiling, compared to a neat, white-washed church like Herfølge, situated in a rich agricultural district in East Denmark, gothicized with brick-built bell tower, vestry, vaults, and corbie-step gables. Besides that, the interior of each Danish church is typically a mix from various periods—for example, with a font from the thirteenth century, an altarpiece from the fifteenth century, a pulpit from the seventeenth century, benches from the nineteenth century, and an organ from the twentieth century. All old churches stand as living testimony to local history, mirroring it in their walls, mural paintings, furnishings, and memorials to the dead.

From State Church to the Danish People's Church

The Lutheran Reformation in Denmark was carried through in 1536 on the initiative of King Christian III (1534–59), who had become a follower of Luther's beliefs since, as a young duke, he had witnessed in person how Martin Luther stood firm at the Reichstag in Worms in 1521. King Christian imprisoned the Catholic bishops and confiscated their estates; he appointed so-called superintendents to be the new heads of the old dioceses and assigned to them the duty of establishing a true Lutheran church order in the dual monarchy of Denmark-Norway. All in all the Danish Reformation was a rather peaceful and gradual change, which nonetheless had a great impact on Danish society. Denmark remained a stable Lutheran state and played a leading role on behalf of the Protestant countries on the European religious and political scene during the reigns of Christian III's son, Frederik II (1559–88) and his grandson, Christian IV (1588–1648) (Lockhart 2007: 58–82).

The king himself was also the head of the church, and there was no leading religious figure, such as an archbishop, who could talk on behalf of the new Danish church. After the Reformation the clergy were state appointed, and for centuries they acted as representatives of the state and as living channels of information who could reach each and every parishioner in the realm. Official announcements from the state to its citizens were read from the pulpit during Sunday services, and the churches accordingly came to occupy a position that included functional ties to the state. Since the state upheld a strong church discipline and made it an obligation for all citizens to take part in Sunday services until the second half of the eighteenth century, the churches became the rallying ground and natural focal point of life in the parishes.

After the introduction of absolutism in 1660, the Danish kings ruled as representatives of God and with a clear obligation to support and consol-



Figure 3.1. Almost all Danish churches have a flagpole, and the Danish flag will wave at each service. Aggersborg Church, Jylland, 2019. © Ulla Kjær.

idate the Lutheran churches. The democratic Constitution from 1849 introduced freedom of worship but upheld the bond between the state and the Lutheran Church, which then acquired the name “the Danish People’s Church” (Den danske Folkekirke). The significance of the descriptive *folke* (i.e., the people’s) in the name of central Danish institutions like the public school system (Folkeskolen), the public libraries (Folkebiblioteker), and the parliament (Folketinget), in parallel with the national church (Folkekirken), reveals how closely people, nation, and state are symbolically coupled in Denmark (Korsgaard 2004: 13). Successive democratically elected Danish governments have always included a minister of ecclesiastical affairs. Section 66 of the Constitution states that a constitution for the church will be arranged by law in the future, but this has never happened. On the official English homepage of the state Church of Denmark, the relation between church and state is explained in these words:

As “official national church” the Danish monarch is the supreme authority when it comes to organization, liturgy etc., whereas the national parliament (*Folketinget*) is the de facto deciding body with regard to church legislation. Thus, when female theologians were allowed to join the clergy, it was the national parliament

that took the decision. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is not regulated by a synod (a national church council) as is the case with most other Lutheran churches.¹

The church assumes a special role in relation to all Danes, whether they are Christians, Muslims, agnostics, or atheists, since the registration of all births takes place by means of the health authorities reporting them directly to the home parish of the mother, where the administration digitally records the information on behalf of the state. Only in the southern part of Jutland, which belonged to Germany from 1864 to 1920, are the records of births kept by the local civil municipality as a continuation of German administrative practices. In a similar way all deaths must also be recorded through the parish of the deceased.

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark

About three-quarters of Denmark's population of almost six million have been baptized in a Danish Lutheran church and are thus counted as members of the Church of Denmark, even if many of them could be described as "passive members," since they are not outwardly practicing. They remain members until they actively choose to sign out.² The members are spread out over 2,158 parishes, each of them with at least one church, but in some cases more, so that Denmark has all in all 2,339 Lutheran church buildings. A little over 70 percent are medieval and were erected before the Reformation in 1536. There are also about 2,100 churchyards, most in close proximity to the churches.

Within the last hundred years all the churches of the Folkekirke have become self-governing. All of them are managed by the parish council as representatives of the church members in the parish. Each parish council consists of between five and fifteen members, who are elected every fourth year by all members of the congregation over eighteen years of age.³ The parish council manages the daily activities of the churches and acts as employer of all staff (organists, sextons, churchyard administrators, etc.), except for the pastors. It also elects a warden for each church, with the task of tending to the church building, the churchyard, and other buildings owned by the church. The Danish parishes are grouped into 107 geographically defined deaneries, each managed by a dean (*provst*), who usually also serves as a pastor in one of the deanery's churches. The dean is the head of all pastors in the deanery and must supervise the discharge of their duties. The dean must also secure a fair distribution of the economic resources and a proper economic administration in each parish council. In each deanery there is

a board of four to eight members elected from the parish councils, plus a pastor and the dean. These deanery boards are required to approve many categories of decisions taken by the parish councils, especially those with economic aspects, but in some cases also decisions concerning the physical surroundings of the churches.

The deaneries are grouped in dioceses: one semi-independent diocese that covers Greenland, which is a self-governing part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and ten within Denmark proper, each of them with its own cathedral. Each Danish diocese is managed by a bishop, who is democratically elected by all the pastors and all members of the parish councils in the diocese. Together with a representative of the state (with the symbolic title *stiftsamtmand*), the bishop constitutes the head of the diocese (*stiftsøvrighed*). Each diocese is thus a construction involving church and state, officially on an equal level. All administrative matters concerning the churches of the diocese are run by a diocese administration managed by an assistant secretary. This administration on behalf of the bishop is the authority in a range of church matters, such as applications from parish councils concerning restorations or permanent changes to or within the churches. Each diocese has its own board managing the funds of the churches and the pastors, composed of a broad representation of laypersons from the parish councils, pastors, one dean, and the bishop, and they elect their chairman and deputy chairman from among the representatives of the parish councils. Every year the condition of the churches and their surroundings is subject to inspection by the warden and members of the parish council together with a building expert, and every fourth year the dean, again with a building expert, also takes part in the inspection. When a parish council faces a costly task like a major renovation, the diocese board may grant a loan from the fund based on income from the sale of burial plots in churchyards, among other things.

According to the Danish Constitution, the monarch is the supreme authority over the Lutheran Church, but in fact it is parliament that decides all aspects of legislation concerning the Folkekirke. The minister of ecclesiastical affairs acts as the real administrative but not theological authority over the Danish Lutheran Church. The ministry can be considered to be part of the church organization, which is run not by theologians but by laypersons, and could be compared to the parish councils, which similarly consist of laypersons who are willing to work for the good of the church. The minister decides the overall economic framework of the common fund (*Fællesfonden*) of the Folkekirke, which is otherwise managed by the bishops and which pays all salaries and wages in connection with the operations of the churches. The primary income of this fund comes from taxes (*kirkeskat*) collected within the national tax system and paid by all those who are officially members of the state church. In addition to this, however, the state also provides a grant

that comes from the general taxation paid by all Danes, which contributes to wages as well as to repairs and renovations.

In short, the management of the church buildings of the Folkekirke is done through a hybrid interwoven structure involving both (religious) church and (secular) state authorities, with simultaneous grassroots self-governance by local congregations and top-down oversight and funding on behalf of the central state.

Among the challenges confronting the Folkekirke is the fact that there is a very uneven relation between the distribution of churches and the distribution of the population. One-third of Danish rural parishes have under five hundred congregation members, and several hundred parishes have under two hundred members. Some urban parishes have several thousand members, and a few have more than twenty thousand members. On the other hand, some of the largest Danish towns have a comparatively low level of membership of the church, partly due to a high number of inhabitants with a non-European background. In this context, a handful of nineteenth- and twentieth-century churches in Copenhagen have been closed down and sold for other purposes. There has been discussion about whether churches in the smallest rural parishes should also be completely closed down, but that has proved extremely difficult (Kjær 2014). If a medieval church were to be taken out of religious use, it would automatically be listed as a historically important building under present-day heritage protection. It would therefore have to be preserved with the obvious next question: what could such a large stone building in a neighborhood with a few hundred inhabitants be used for—except as a church? In such areas the church building is typically of huge importance to the sense of identity of the community. A few churches have received the status of “occasional churches” (*lejlighedskirker*). They remain part of the Danish Lutheran Church and can still be used for baptisms, weddings, and funerals, but no regular services are held, except possibly for Christmas, so they are taken out of daily use, while their physical maintenance is upheld.

Danish Churches as a Special Category of Heritage

Chapter 2, §4 in the Danish law for protection of historic buildings states that “buildings older than 1536 are without any further decisions automatically protected by this law.” But §5 adds that this law does not concern church buildings “as long as they are subject to the law concerning the Danish People’s Church.” This means that in contrast to all other medieval buildings in Denmark, the medieval church buildings—some 1,750 of them—are not listed as protected buildings under the legislation for cultural heritage, be-

cause they are defined as being in living use in accordance with their original purpose and because they are deemed sufficiently protected by the church organization itself. Considering this in an international context, it is an unusual circumstance that calls for explanation.

In the first law for the protection of historic buildings, issued on 12 March 1918, there is no mention of the churches being exempt from the law. Nonetheless, no churches and only a few rectories were entered on the first lists of protected buildings. There was a historical reason for omitting the churches: they were already covered by a protective law with its own history. Since the High Middle Ages, the congregations had paid tithes so that the churches could serve as suitable spaces for religious ceremonies. After the Reformation, the king took over most of the former ecclesiastical estates, including the churches, and during the following centuries these buildings, or more precisely the rights to manage their economy, were to a large extent sold to private persons. Most “church-owners” were diligent in keeping up their churches with repairs, new furnishings, and in many cases new sepulchral monuments for themselves and their families. Some, however, collected the tithes and lined their own pockets, neglecting the churches. A financial cri-



Figure 3.2. Aastrup Church, the island of Falster, Denmark, 2012. The medieval church in the middle of its neat and well-maintained churchyard.
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sis in the first half of the nineteenth century made it tempting to cut down expenses on preservation of the churches, and some owners even started selling church furniture at auctions, where it was bought by private persons looking for reusable materials. But at the same time, an understanding of the importance of these buildings and the need for their protection developed, as part of a growing Romanticist nationalism (Iversen 2015).

Since the end of the eighteenth century, there had been an ideal of a functional art with local roots that could help improve society. Artists began to take an interest in the traditional styles of their region, which in northern Europe first of all meant the Gothic style. Gothic signified church architecture; it was the magnificent style of the ancestors and was mimicked in architecture in such a painstaking form that veritable pastiches came to be created (Sværke 2010: 79–81; Salling 1975: 97–98, with fig. XXXIII). The idealization of the medieval style became trendsetting for contemporary, often somewhat romantic restorations. Many architects were ideologically inspired by the French architect Viollet-le-Duc, whose ideal of a restoration was the re-creation of the building in its original, perfect shape. On the one hand, such a restoration demanded careful archaeological investigations to find out what the building originally looked like; on the other hand, it was a question of revealing and revitalizing the nature and spirit of the building (Kryger 1977).

In Denmark such thoughts about restoration were launched by the first art historian of the country, Niels Lauritz Høyen (1798–1870). On his travels through Denmark in the years 1829–33, he systematically examined churches but also manors and town houses. He noted a prevalence of decay and became a zealous advocate for the restoration of historical monuments. In the mid-nineteenth century, conditions had become favorable for implementing such ideals; national finances had improved, democracy had been introduced, and nationalism was on the upsurge. Restorations thrived, and Høyen had huge influence through his position as professor of art history at the Danish Academy of Art and Architecture. He was a gifted and inspired man, but his views on art were so colored by nationalism that this affected his professional judgment. His stylistic classificatory model was influenced by the then common European tendency to look for defining traits of each nation and thus contained strong elements of national historical ideology. In his stylistic chronology for medieval Danish architecture, Høyen preferred to focus on the Romanesque style that constitutes the core of most Danish churches instead of the international Gothic style (Agerbæk 1984: 467–70).

Partly inspired by Høyen, a wave of church restorations swept over Denmark in the second half of the nineteenth century, typically on the basis of careful architectural and stylistic studies seeking to re-establish the style of medieval churches that had over time lost their original appearance as

a result of repairs and renovations. The method meant that many historically important details and, in some cases, whole elements were replaced by well-intended but sometimes erroneous or non-original reconstructions aimed at creating more “historical” church buildings (Smidt 2018). A glaring example is Viborg Cathedral, which in the years 1863–76 was torn down and re-erected in a style that imitated the famous Romanesque cathedrals of the Rhine area, which Høyen assumed to be the source of inspiration for Danish medieval church buildings (Velle 1981a, 1981b). In Roskilde, Steen Friis, the churchwarden of the cathedral, tried to secure money for his own church but complained that Høyen spent all available funds “for the copy of the old cathedral in Viborg for which he so recklessly and baselessly seeks money to execute” (Kjær 2013: 319; Kjærbøl 2005). The painter Joakim Skovgaard, who was given the task of decorating the new cathedral, gave precise expression to the consequences of Høyen’s ideals in a letter to his brother Niels in 1874. He wrote that that day he had had to draw a Lamb of God, and it had not been an easy task since the lamb should be from the twelfth century (Velle 1987: 8).

The discussion preceding the restoration in Viborg became one of the reasons for the issuing of a new revised law about yearly inspections of churches, passed on 19 February 1861. In this law, churches were for the first time considered both as houses of Christian worship and as historical monuments (Smidt 2018; Agerbæk 1984: 365; Madsen 1983: 87). Any defects of the buildings or the furnishings should be repaired, and it was stressed, quite in the spirit of Høyen, that a restoration should as far as possible restore the building to its original style. If an inspection did not give an appreciative evaluation of the style of the church, then that was not a sufficient cause for changes. If defects were not repaired, it was possible to fine the responsible persons. The law was thorough and included guidance from the ministry with occasional advice from the National (then Oldnordisk) Museum, leading to the conclusion in the aforementioned law of 1918 that church buildings were sufficiently protected by the church authorities. This concept was maintained in the revised law of church inspections from 1922, when the great majority of Danish churches became self-governing under the local management of parish councils, as is still the case today. Thus, the management of the heritage of the Folkekirke remains the responsibility of the ecclesiastical authorities at various levels.

The National Museum and the Churches

In 1807 the king approved a Royal Commission for the Keeping of Antiquities (Den kongelige Kommission til Oldsagers Opbevaring), the humble

beginnings of the later National Museum of Denmark. The commission took an interest in various remains from the past, including church furnishings from the Catholic times and other church monuments. The focus was mostly on objects that could become part of a museum collection. Later the new museum would also become engaged in the preservation of historic monuments throughout the country. On 20 March 1848, curator J. J. A. Worsaae from the Oldnordisk Museum in Copenhagen (after 1892 the National Museum of Denmark) was tasked with surveying the protection and preservation of the most important antiquarian sites and objects of the kingdom and the duchies of Schleswig, Holstein, and Lauenburg: stone settings, megalithic tombs, barrows, runic stones, castle mounds, ruins of castles and palaces, old churches, and similar architectural monuments. A supplementary decree stated that he should inform the rural deans as to which church objects were worth protecting, so that they could be taken into consideration during church inspections.⁴

Worsaae, however, had no possible means of securing the preservation of all these monuments, including churches. In January 1861 the librarian G. Burman Becker sent Worsaae a newspaper article he had written under the heading “vandalism,” to inform him of recent paper advertisements of three auctions selling furniture, fixtures, and paraments from Ørum Church in Sønderlyng district [*herred*] in Jutland. The objects would be sold to private persons, who would reuse the materials for various purposes without any thought of conservation.⁵ When you read such advertisements, Becker wrote, you clearly see how erroneous the common notion is that a person who has acquired the right to receive the tithes for a church should also have the right to dispose of its decorations and fixtures: chalice and paten, baptismal font, etc. You also realize, he continued, how badly the maintenance and continued existence of medieval monuments are protected. Worsaae only had 300 rigsdaler a year to spend on antiquarian protection, which was quite insufficient. Besides, the curator who had once been a representative of the absolutist king was now merely a common public servant. Therefore, it was necessary to make a revision of the law so that more staff could be employed for inspections all over the country. Experts from the museum began to travel all over Denmark on antiquarian inspections, and an important part of the task was to visit and describe all churches (Kjær 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). Through the years the museum has established a very solid knowledge of the material state of Danish churches (Møllerup 1908: 98–100).

Currently, the National Museum has a statutory obligation to act as consultant for the Danish dioceses with regard to the preservation of the cultural heritage in the churches of the Folkekirke (excluding non-state churches), and the National Museum works with Folkekirke churches on several levels. Important parts of the museum’s medieval and Renaissance collections

originate from churches. The archives of the museum contain information about all Danish churches and document all restorations and investigations covering more than one hundred years. Since the 1930s, the museum has published a systematic topographic documentation of each Danish church in the shape of the huge work *Danmarks Kirker*, which is now also digitally accessible. The museum has been the leading force behind the uncovering and restoration of mural paintings since the mid-nineteenth century and of church archaeology since the 1950s. Due to these basic activities, the National Museum holds a unique position with regard to all information and tools for transversal and in-depth studies of Christianity and the Christian institutions in their interaction with other elements of Danish society, where the church buildings serve as obvious indicators of tendencies at different times—albeit only for the buildings of the Folkekirke.

Protecting Religious Heritage: Inspectors and Curators

As previously mentioned, each local parish council has the responsibility for managing its church, including the protection of its cultural heritage. The law concerning the Folkekirke's church buildings and churchyards aims (1) to promote its church buildings as the best possible framework for services and other ecclesiastical activities of the congregation; (2) to ensure that there is enough space for burials in the churchyards and that they are well-kept; and (3) to secure that the cultural assets connected to church buildings and churchyards are not depreciated (Kirker og Kirkegårde 2001). It is the representatives of the Folkekirke, that is, the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs and the dioceses, who have authority to decide whether the plans of a parish council for changes or restoration work on their church may be realized. But since the churches are considered to be historical buildings with great heritage value, the Ministry of Culture has since 1922 supported the work of the churches by placing the royal building inspectors and the experts of the National Museum at the disposal of the dioceses as professional consultants (Kjær, Søndergaard, and Trampedach 1998; Trampedach 2018). The advice of the building inspectors and the museum curators or conservators is therefore provided to the individual churches without charge.

The royal building inspectors are appointed on fixed-term state contracts and are attached to one or more dioceses, while the National Museum is a permanent adviser for all dioceses, covering all of Denmark as its field of responsibility, particularly concerning matters of conservation. Mural paintings and old church furniture demand special treatment, and specialists with the required technical knowledge are few in number. As incompetent treatment could have disastrous results, the responsible parish councils are in

high need of professional assistance. The church laws therefore state that any restoration of mural paintings and furniture older than a hundred years can only take place through the National Museum and sanctioned by the diocese authorities. Such a case will typically begin with the emergence of a proposal in the parish council for a change, a repair, or a renovation. The proposal may spring from observations during the yearly inspections of the church, or it may come from a meeting in the parish council, to be followed by meetings involving the parish council, representatives of the diocese, the royal building inspector, and one member of the National Museum's staff. The parish council or the architect in charge of a project can ask for a visit by a professional conservator from the National Museum if the project involves restorations of mural paintings or furniture, new whitewashing, or changes involving the relocation of furniture or new colors. Such a visit will result in a report describing precisely how the mural paintings or the furniture must be treated from a conservation viewpoint. The report will be used as the basis for inviting tenders from experienced craftspeople and professional conservators (Trampedach 2018: 132).

When a detailed project is available, it must be sent to the diocese authorities for approval via the deanery, which is responsible for the distribution of local financial means. The diocese authorities will ask the opinion of their advisers, primarily the royal building inspectors and the National Museum. If the project concerns purely antiquarian heritage, only the National Museum must be consulted, while the museum will not be involved if the project concerns a church that is less than a hundred years old. The Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has appointed some special consultants with expert knowledge about specific topics: churchyards, organs, bells, and heating, climate, and energy matters. If a project involves a plan for new art in the church, a committee appointed by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts is consulted. When the answers from all these consultants and advisers are at hand, the diocese will decide if the project can be approved directly, if it can be approved conditionally subject to some changes, or if it must be rejected. In spite of occasional situations of conflicting interests, in most cases the system succeeds in establishing a solution that is acceptable for all parties involved. Parish council, architect, craftspeople and conservators, church authorities, and the advisers and consultants collaborate to achieve the best possible treatment of the Danish churches and their mural paintings, furniture, and sepulchral monuments, and this has proved to be effective; although the churches are not protected by heritage law, they are in excellent condition, in line with their national importance.

The decisive principle for the National Museum is that the churches are not museums, but living houses of worship, which must be able to function as religious venues at the same time as they contain important traces

of the past. When considering a change, the parties deliberate whether the new initiative is in accordance with what can be described as the “genius loci”—an expression originating in classical antiquity, meaning the “soul” of the place (Vadstrup 2018: 3). It is easy to dismiss something as being in bad taste or old-fashioned, but often it is only after the thing in question has been removed that people realize that a feature of value has gone. The National Museum strives to avoid such scenarios. In most cases old and new form a synthesis intended to inspire a deep awe, both religious and historical, in visitors to the churches. In other words, the management of the church buildings is predicated on a hybrid, religious-cum-heritage governance.

Danish Churches and the Danish People

The strong historic bond between the Folkekirke and the Danish state—whether as an absolutist kingdom or, after 1849, with a democratic government—is only one of the explanations for the unusual societal position of Danish state churches, going well beyond traditional religious significance. In comparison with other related European countries the churches in Denmark still maintain a remarkably strong position among the Danish population, due to the fact that daily church life encompasses cultural as well as religious activities. Following on from Denmark’s nineteenth-century spiritual and national revival movement, personal and local identities have continued ever since to be connected closely to church and nation.

One of the constituent factors is the long tradition of historical research involving Danish churches or at least some of their elements. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century antiquarians, such as the medical doctor and collector Ole Worm (1588–1654), would typically contact pastors in parishes all over Denmark in order to gather information concerning historical monuments (Jørgensen 1970, IX–X). The bishops and pastors were an obvious choice since they were educated people with knowledge of their local area and because of their previously mentioned status as state officials. Later antiquarian researchers used the same method (Jørgensen 1970: XXI–XXIII). In 1754 all Danish pastors were asked to supply answers to a detailed questionnaire from the architect Lauritz de Thurah for a planned topographic-historical description of Denmark, and the answers were incorporated into another large seven-volume topographic *Danske Atlas* by the bishop and historian Erik Pontoppidan (published 1763–81) (Weilbach 1924: 181).

In 1807 the newly established Royal Commission for the Keeping of Antiquities, the cradle of the National Museum, sent out questionnaires to all parish pastors in Denmark asking for information about historical remains in their parish, including runic stones, all sort of inscriptions in churches,

all medieval pictures, and remains from the Catholic faith (Adamsen and Jensen 1995: 10–14). In some parishes the pastors read the questionnaire aloud from the pulpit to involve the parishioners in the antiquarian pursuit. The pastors' answers were incorporated in the still active antiquarian-topographic archive of the Danish National Museum, where all information is organized by parish. Even the prehistoric monuments and finds of ancient artifacts in Denmark were listed, until around 1984, in the so-called parish description (*sognebeskrivelsen*) kept in the Prehistoric Department of the National Museum, based on systematic surveys in the years 1873–1930 by the staff of the National Museum. An antiquarian system based on parishes seemed logical because the parishes with their medieval churches had been the most stable historical and administrative structures in Denmark.

The fact that the parish was for centuries the framework of historical-topographic studies went hand in hand with the equally old scientific acknowledgment that the churches themselves were sources of Danish history in the shape of inscriptions, pictures, gravestones, and epitaphs, that is, elements with inscriptions or heraldic information. The growth of nationalism and Romanticism in the nineteenth century spurred an interest in art-historical and architectural studies, giving the churches an enhanced scientific importance and drawing scholarly attention to the church buildings themselves as well as their furnishings. This scientific interest in churches combined with a much broader, popular movement peculiar to nineteenth-century Denmark: a steadily growing national awareness against a somber political background. After defeat in the Napoleonic Wars in 1814, the Danish king had to cede Norway to Sweden, and after the war against the combined forces of Prussia and Austria in 1864, Denmark lost the duchies of Schleswig-Holstein, including a large Danish population. The Denmark that remained was a small country with a very homogeneous population.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, artists and writers had worked to awaken an understanding of specifically Danish values, Danish landscape, and Danish history. An important figure was the author Bernhard Severin Ingemann (1789–1862), who in 1824–36 published a series of historical poems and novels dealing with Danish medieval history. His purpose was to raise the spirits of the Danish people with the help of national history. The poetic prologue of the first book, *Valdemar den Store og hans Mænd* (Valdemar the Great and his men; 1824), describes how Denmark had seemed to be on the edge of destruction once before but had arisen. It was possible to be inspired and uplifted by history (Ingemann 1824). The books were extremely popular and widely read, and they spread Ingemann's view of Denmark as a nation based on the Danish people, regardless of class and rank (Martinsen 2012). And since their plots made the Middle Ages come alive, they awakened an interest in historic monuments from that pe-

riod, primarily the medieval churches that were to be found close at hand by readers all over Denmark.

Even more important for promoting historical and national awareness was the inspiration from the Danish pastor, poet, historian, and politician Nicolai F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872). Grundtvig was a spokesman for enlightenment, but in his own fourfold interpretation: individual enlightenment, enlightenment for the people, the enlightenment of life, and Christian enlightenment. Individual enlightenment was a question of raising the spirits of each person by awakening fantasy, curiosity, and an understanding of the historical perspectives of his or her life. The next step was the enlightenment of the people, aiming at establishing a sense of belonging to a community of Danes living in Denmark. The enlightenment of life implies an even broader view, making us citizens of the world, while spiritual enlightenment entails experiencing the light of Christ.⁶ The first two of these types of enlightenment were furthered by the establishment of so-called high schools (*højskoler*) for ordinary young Danish men and women. In these schools, which had no exams or tests, the teachers taught history, old Norse mythology, and other subjects that could open the eyes of the pupils to broader perspectives in their lives, side by side with practical subjects like gymnastics or woodwork. The aim of Grundtvig and his followers was to change the self-understanding of the rural population as expressed in the first motto of the high schools: “From peasants to a people” (*Fra almue til folk*) (Korsgaard 2013: 23–24). The work succeeded, as the ideology of these high schools not only flourished among farmers, but became influential at other levels of society too, and helped “conquer” Danish history and its historical monuments from the educated elite and make them a kind of common possession.

The texts from the songbook used in high schools, and in many other situations where Danes gather together, reflect this understanding of Danish identity, nature, and history. The first edition appeared in 1892, the nineteenth and most recent in 2020. The poet Jeppe Aakjær (1866–1930) wrote in his *The Song of History* from 1916:

Just as the deepest well has the clearest water / and the best drink comes from
deeply hidden springs / so is the heritage of the family of child and man / strengthened
by the heritage of the people and its deep and strong memories. / Your own
day is short, but that of your stock is long; / place your ear humbly at its roots;
thousands of years carry sound in tears and songs, / while the new growth beckons
towards eternity! – We seek the traces of our stock in objects large and small /
in the stone axe unearthed after the plunging plough / in the treasure finds, coarse
and rude, from the peat-bog, / in the ashlar of the church, laid by strong hands.
(*Folkehøjskolens Sangbog* 2020: no. 505)

Interestingly, in historical terms this is a very early expression of “heritage of the people” (*folkets arv*) as being the property collectively of the nation, understood as a homogeneous people. Put simply, the nineteenth-century territorial contraction of Denmark evoked a strong sense of a unified and homogeneous nation undivided by class—a people who were the rightful heirs to a common material history, as evidenced and promoted in literature, song, pictorial media, and schools.

So the Danish churches are not only interesting historical sources, but they are still to the large majority of the Danish population a part of their family history. They are primarily seen not as aristocratic buildings but as something created by the Danish people for the Danish people, construed as the collective owners of this cultural heritage. And it is in the churches that one can meet the spirit of one’s ancestors most directly. This sentiment has been popularized in many postwar publications, which extol the place of the village church as “the fixed center of the life of the village and of the whole parish” (Hastrup 1941: 9; cf. Exner and Finsen 1961: 14; Smedegaard Andersen 2013: 15; Fischer Møller 2013: 5). The statement is still valid. A comprehensive statistical survey from 2020 asked the respondents for their main motivations for being members of Folkekirken. The five most important arguments for membership were (1) I am a member because my parents had me baptized (65 percent), (2) I want to preserve the historical church buildings (60 percent), (3) I wish to have the right to use the services of the church if I want to (60 percent), (4) I want to support the Christian cultural heritage (58 percent), and (5) Being a Danish citizen I consider it a natural thing to be member of Folkekirken (51 percent). Only 43 percent answered that they were motivated by Christian faith (Poulsen et al. 2020).

Conclusion

Denmark has an unusual but efficient system for preserving its church heritage, at least with regard to the buildings belonging to the Danish state church. The Folkekirke is entwined with the Danish state, as the Danish monarch heads both church and state and as the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs of the Danish government exercises authority over certain nontheological aspects of church administration. Via the church taxes that it collects from all official members of the Folkekirke (i.e., three-quarters of the population), the state also bankrolls salaries, operations, and maintenance of the churches. But the flow of decision-making is more complex than this top-down governance model might suggest; it is combined with a grassroots governance predicated on the autonomy of local congregations, which exer-

cise substantial authority over the parish churches. Furthermore, all older church buildings of the Danish Lutheran Church are considered cultural heritage and hence are subject to oversight from experts of the Ministry of Culture and the National Museum, who act as advisers regarding heritage aspects. While all Folkekirke churches dating from more than one hundred years ago are considered cultural heritage, their preservation is mostly funded from the religious stream of state funding for the Folkekirke. Hence, the advice of heritage experts has limited scope, predicated on the idea that churches are living places of worship as well as cultural venues, where the local congregations enjoy primacy.

Church buildings embody something of real value to most Danes intellectually as well as emotionally. The great majority do not attend churches for weekly services, but occasionally they participate in baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals, the important turning points in human life. Such emotionally laden moments tie most Danes and their churches together.

In addition to this, the parish churches act as the material reminders of common history and culture. This situation is an outgrowth of a specifically Danish Romanticist nationalism stemming from the nineteenth century, in which the nation came to be construed as homogeneous and unified.

Although the pattern of use of Danish churches shows the internationally recognizable development from obligation to individual choice, there is no obvious difference between younger and older age groups as consumers of what Danish churches have to offer, as one might have expected. It seems that all age groups seek cross-generation connections, cultural values, and personal experiences in their use of churches. To paraphrase Grace Davie's characterization of European religiosity as "believing without belonging" (Davie 1994), it is considered quite acceptable to "belong without believing" (Leth-Nissen 2018), thereby emphasizing the—perceived and enacted—singular unity of people, nation, state, and church in Denmark.

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NOTES

1. <http://www.lutheranchurch.dk/faith-and-church-order/church-order/organisation-and-management/> (accessed 17 August 2019).
2. <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/befolkning-og-valg/befolkning-og-befolkningsfremskrivning/folketal#>, <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/kultur-og-kirke/Folkekirken/medlemmer-af-Folkekirken> (accessed 19 August 2019).
3. <https://www.Folkekirken.dk/om-Folkekirken/organisation/sogn> (accessed 19 August 2019).
4. Kommissionen for Mindesmærkernes Bevaring. The National Museum of Denmark, Antikvarisk-Topografisk Arkiv, Kasse IV, p.133.
5. *Dagbladet*, 30 January 1861.
6. U. Jonas, “Grundtvigs mange oplysninger,” 2014, www.danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/grundtvigs-mange-oplysninger (accessed 19 August 2019).

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