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## In Memoriam: Knud Jørgensen (1942-2018)

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The Danish missiologist Knud Jørgensen passed away in December 2018, leaving behind a remarkable legacy of impact. Born and raised in Denmark, he ended up in Norway, if ever Knud “ended up”. However, he married here, and this is where his family lives. Thus, we also consider him a Norwegian.

Knud had a huge impact both on individuals and on whole movements. Calling him an “influencer” in this age of bloggers seems rather unfair to him, but he was an influencer in the honourable sense of the term. Hardly any Norwegian missiologist and mission leader had a similar national and global network. He might have been selective, and those who were not part of his network might have considered him somewhat unattainable. The significance of Knud’s network was the breadth and width of it. He had friends in a variety of ecclesial and theological camps, and he was a globalist of great dimensions.

I had the advantage of knowing Knud personally, and he had significant influence on my own life and ministry. When taking up demanding roles as mission leader, I invited him to become my mentor, and we ended up fifteen years later being one another’s ‘alongsiders’. Now, as he has departed to be with the Lord in glory, I owe him my deep gratitude for what we shared over these years, very often during a long breakfast. He meant a lot to me, not because I always agreed with him, but because in his direct style of communication he also shared deep knowledge

and wisdom, and he cared about my well-being. As years passed away in our profound relationship, I saw more of his own vulnerability. That deepened our friendship and fellowship.

As he turned 65 in 2007, colleagues and friends globally wrote a voluminous festschrift, consisting of essays from a wide range of contributors.<sup>1</sup> It had to be voluminous. Otherwise, it would not reflect Knud’s own enormous productivity. He was a full-time scholar relatively few years of his life. Most of his time, he was out there in different kinds of ministries and leadership roles as part of mission. We must read the bibliography in his festschrift in light of this. But even more impressive is his literary production from 2008 onwards until 2018. His contributions as co-editor of the 38 volumes *Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series* have been decisive,<sup>2</sup> but he also wrote a number of other missiological books and articles during this same period.

This is quite strange, actually, since Knud in this phase also struggled with his own health issues. The last years of his life he had a growing caregiving responsibility for his dear wife Eva. However, he always said that living an active life was medicine to him. Thus, at the age of 74 he took on the duties of leading Egede Instituttet (a Norwegian research institute for missiology).<sup>3</sup> He held that position to the end of his life.

From his years as a theological student and onwards, Knud also did a substantial amount of media work. This combina-

tion would mark many years of his ministry, both as a missionary with Radio Voice of the Gospel in Ethiopia, with Lutheran World Federation in Geneva and with International Mass Media Institute in Norway. His dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary (California) reflected his engagement with media as mission.<sup>4</sup> At Fuller he also worked a lot with leadership issues for church and mission. Later he went back to Ethiopia to serve with Norwegian Church Aid.

In Norway, he served in mission leadership roles, first as Principal at a typical evangelical (and Lutheran) mission outreach centre and later as Director of the dialogical Danish-Norwegian organisation Areopagos, before serving as adjunct professor at MF (Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society) in Oslo.

Knud Jørgensen embraced and brought with him impulses from many different contexts and settings. As a missiologist, he was deeply involved in the issues of contextualisation. He had a concern for social involvement, with deep sympathies for the radical evangelicals in Latin America. He studied the church growth movement, and though he was very critical of parts of that movement, he took advantage as a missiologist and strategist from what he found sound and healthy.

His encounter with the East-African revival movement gave him a lasting understanding of the necessity of charismatic renewal within the church and of the reality of the realms of spiritual conflict. Opening up to this wider understanding of reality, he was an important theological tutor for the leadership of the charismatic Oase movement in Norway for many years. He gained the confidence to give them both legitimacy and healthy corrections.

Knud Jørgensen owed allegiance to the

wake-up calls to the mainline churches from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the 1930s. He appreciated the radical challenges to the European churches from Lesslie Newbigin. His at times very harsh critique of the Constantine church paradigm goes back to the influence of these leaders. As *The Gospel and Our Culture*-movement appeared at the millennial turn, he embraced the concept of Missional Church thinking.<sup>5</sup>

Knud and I had a common interest in and understanding of Bonhoeffer, considering him a prophetic voice when preaching about the cost of discipleship and the cross of Christ. We also shared much of Newbigin's critical analysis of the European culture and its spiritual poverty. Lastly, both of us appreciated the impulses from Darrell Guder, with its more dynamic understanding of the missional church.

However, although we had very much in common, I also challenged Knud on these issues, as well as in other areas. On Bonhoeffer, we had no disagreement. Agreeing on Newbigin's sharp analyses, I seemed to be less sure about his synthesising skills. Maybe we had our hottest discussions on the missional church issues. I was somewhat concerned that the missional church movement, as had happened with much of conciliar missiology, would lose its evangelistic and Christological edge. Knud constantly challenged me when we discussed issues of integral mission. Both of us had a holistic understanding of mission, but he questioned my insistence that proclaiming the Gospel always needs to be a priority in mission.

One of our discussions became public in *Luthersk Kirketidende*, after he wrote an article in *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* in 2006. The issue was how important the Biblical understanding of the eternal

judgement is as motivation for mission.<sup>6</sup> It turned out that our disagreement wasn't that wide, but at the same time we touched upon the questions where I found both the conciliar movement and parts of the missional church movement too weak. This was an area where we saw things differently. He wanted the evangelical movement to open more up to the conciliar movement, while I was far more hesitant.

Knud was involved with the Lausanne Movement since 1974, when he was asked to join the first *World Congress on Evangelization* as a radio reporter. He had a lifelong love to, and involvement with, the Lausanne movement thereafter. Geographically it is only a short way from Lausanne to Geneva. However, the evangelical movement has traditionally found the way from Lausanne to Geneva very long, and a number of evangelical leaders have hesitated to walk that way. Knud did not hesitate. During the last two decades of his ministry, one of his main goals was to make these two movements talk to one another. Being an influencer with a global network of mission leaders and missiologists, he was a contributor to the improved relations that exists between these movements today.

Knud's dream about bringing together the evangelical and conciliar movements explains his initiative and involvement connected with the centennial celebration of Edinburgh 1910. His great contribution to the *Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series* testifies to this engagement. Starting out planning it in 2005, he worked for 13 years in a key role. He was not only co-editor of the series. He was also co-editor of a vast number of the volumes. The series, volume by volume, consists of voices and contributions from the entire church family. He had no naïve

idea about creating an artificial unity of contradictory viewpoints, but he was eager that we should all lend our ears to each other.

When Knud became director of Areopagos in 1998, some of us considered that a daring leap. The former Nordic Buddhist Mission hardly was an evangelical organisation. The emphasis was on dialogic mission and the search for bridgeheads in mission in the spiritualities of our times and cultures. He saw this new leadership role partly as an opportunity to redirect Areopagos, so when the Norwegian Council for Mission and Evangelisation NORME (connected internationally both with the Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance) came into being as an evangelical umbrella organisation in 2001, it was his firm conviction that Areopagos belonged there.

Let me share one anecdote from Knud's years in Areopagos. He was invited to have a mission lecture at the last ordinary General Assembly for Santalmisjonen (merged into Normisjon since 2001). Formerly he had been Principal at their missionary outreach centre. Coming to the General Assembly this year, he represented a very different organisation. While Santalmisjonen had its supporter base in local communities and thousands of mission friends and donors, Areopagos hardly had any people on the grassroots level. However, they had just recently sold properties in Hong Kong, ending up with a capital of hundreds of millions Norwegian kroner. Introducing Knud as speaker, the General Secretary of Santalmisjonen asked him, "How can I get all your money?" Knud's quick answer was, as he saw 1500 people sitting in the hall, "Give me all your people, and I will give you all my money".

During the late years of his ministry,

Knud Jørgensen became convinced that the most important issue in contemporary missiology probably is the theology of religions. He was rather concerned about the widespread tendencies to weaken the uniqueness of Christ. On these fundamental issues for theology and mission, he was a clear evangelical. This was his sharp reaction also after the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, in Tanzania in March 2018. He was concerned about the absence both of the cross and the uniqueness of Christ, as the one dying for our sins, in the understanding of discipleship. This time Knud expressed his concerns publicly,<sup>7</sup> while he often had tried to hold

back in public but uttering sharper words in private and smaller groups.

For years, he encouraged me to work on the fundamental issues in missiology, after leaving my mission leadership position. In his opinion, there were sufficient studies available on the “how to” in mission. We now need, more than ever in Europe, to explore the most essential issues. Approaching 60 years of age, I now finally have the possibility of digging deeper into missiology from an academic viewpoint. Without Knud’s encouragements, that would never have happened. I miss him, but I am truly grateful that he always dared to challenge me, in love.

#### Noter

1. Tormod Engelsen, Ernst Harbakk, Rolv Olsen and Thor Strandenæs (eds), *Mission to the World: Communicating the Gospel in the 21st Century* (Regnum/Egede Instituttet, Oxford 2007).
2. See <http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/>.
3. See <https://www.egede.no/>.
4. Knud Jørgensen’s dissertation in 1986 carried the title *The Role and Function of the Media in the Mission of the Church (with particular reference to Africa)*.
5. This movement has often been seen as having its origin in the influential book edited by Darrell Guder, *Missional Church. A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1998).
6. Knud Jørgensen, “Steps into a Pluralist World Commitment and Accessibilism” (*Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* 3-4 2006, s. 255-268); Rolf Kjode, “Misjon og fortaping” (*Luthersk Kirketidende (LK)* 3 2007, s. 75-78), Knud Jørgensen, “Misjon og fortapelse” (*LK* 5 2007, s. 144-146) og Rolf Kjode, “Fortapinga - og det vi ikkje veit” (*LK* 8 2007, s.252).
7. See Knud Jørgensen, “The Arusha Call to Discipleship (2018): A Report from Arusha”, also published in this issue of *Theofilos*.