

Principles for the Bernese policy on religion



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Dates:

Received: 10 Apr. 2024
Accepted: 02 July 2024
Published: 14 Aug. 2024

How to cite this article:

Inniger, M.G., Vorster, J.M. & Rheeder, R., 2024, 'Principles for the Bernese policy on religion', *In die Skriflig* 58(1), a3083. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3083>

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Traditional confessional-based state policies on religion only address the relationship between the state and the state-recognised churches. In view of the changing religious landscape, these policies suffer from a loss of relevance. By ignoring other churches and religious communities and the non-denominational part of the population, unadjusted policies may in the foreseeable future represent a social minority. They fail to meet today's demands for an inclusive policy. This article illustrates this fact, using the policy on religion of the Swiss Canton Bern as a case study. Due to the lack of inclusiveness, the policy creates challenges and leads to key questions. The Canton Bern treats churches and faith communities unequally. The state ignores relevant growing churches, religious communities, and the needs of their members, while it gives preferential treatment to the recognised churches. The legal foundation of the policy of the Canton Bern furthers asymmetries between privileged and ignored groups. This hinders the healthy development of ecumenical and interreligious processes and irritates social cohesion and religious peace. The urgency of policy revision is evident. The very principle of these discrepancies must be reconsidered.

Contribution: This article argues that the Canton Bern should approve democratic principles to follow when revising its policy on religion. These principles should be aligned with human rights and constitutional requirements. Firstly, the article outlines what is understood under principles. Secondly, the current practices of the Bernese policy on religion are presented, arguing that these practices are merely procedures that do not follow any overall principles. The article then argues that some current Bernese practices would be connectable to a future principle-based policy on religion. This is followed by the expert's recommendations for imperative principles for a timely Bernese policy on religion. As a study from a Christian-Reformed viewpoint, this article also considers the relevant theological-ethical principles for societal, ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue of the Swiss Reformed context. The main contribution of this article is to recommend a set of seven principles that support the development of a fair, progressive, and peacebuilding Bernese policy on religion.

Keywords: changing religious landscapes; confession-based policies on religion; inclusiveness of policies on religion; non-discrimination; religious peace; social asymmetries; theological-ethical principles.

The need for principles for the Bernese policy on religion

This publication series considers the effects of changed religious landscapes on confession-based policies on religion.¹ The study makes evident current challenges related to the confession-based policies and the need for the revision of the outmoded policy. The intention of this overall study is to academically accompany the revision process of the policy on religion of the Swiss Canton Bern, which has been chosen as a case study.

The first article (see Inniger et al. 2020) outlined problems related to confession-based policies on religion due to changed religious landscapes. The religious landscapes in the Swiss and in many European contexts are still Christian, but also plural and secular (Weller 2005:71). However, governments experience that state-recognised and -privileged churches are decreasing in size, while the non-confessional population and the unrecognised churches and religious communities are growing. As a result, the policy no longer represents all churches and religious communities. It is obvious that the state treats recognised and unrecognised churches and religious communities unequally. The awareness of government responsibility has increased, for example to define the attitude of the state to religion, or to explain why the state has a relationship with some religious communities while ignoring others. The state's responsibility regarding many practical fields of a religiously diverse society is also obvious, for example regarding issues

1. Confession-based policies reflect the fact that a state has a relationship with preferred confessional groups to which it grants privileges (Portier 2017:212).

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of education, tax systems, burial fields, or chaplaincy in public institutions. Governments are becoming aware that unadjusted state policies result in further asymmetry between privileged and disadvantaged groups. By following their traditional strategy, governments hinder social cohesion. They may even frustrate religious peace (Inniger 2021). Matters of state neutrality, discrimination, and ignorance, based on the current policy, have developed into burning issues. The first article showed that some states have amended their policy on religion towards more inclusiveness (Inniger 2018:23–24), while other states have not yet adjusted their policies. The latter are not able to answer current key questions that confront politics and society.

The second article (see Inniger et al. 2021) illustrated the findings of the first article in relation to the policy on religion of the Canton Bern, which serves as the case study. The demographic and socio-religious changes in society and the challenges related to the Bernese policy were outlined by the means of key questions that addressed the general relevance of religious communities, issues of social cohesion and religious peace, the emergence of social asymmetries, and the legal framework. In view of today's religious landscape, the Bernese legal foundations for its policy on religion are outmoded. The Bernese policy tends to be exclusive and unfair. The Canton Bern continues to further smaller religious communities who are included in the state's consideration and privileges, while it ignores growing religious communities and their members. The booster-effect as well as the anti-booster-effect of the Bernese policy on religion were presented respectively (Inniger et al. 2020:6). A revision of the Bernese policy on religion is necessary.

However, a policy revision should follow a set of principles. The intention of this third article is to specify principles to follow when revising the outmoded policy.

Principium means a basic rule as guideline for a strategy or a policy. Principles, usually a set of values, are obligatory elements in the management of a government and legal system, which are essential requirements as a foundation for policy-making (Duden 2023; Pediaa 2023; Wortbedeutung.info 2023). Principles are preconditions for establishing a state policy on religion. Doe (2011:237–264) shows that the European Union's attitude towards religion is based on several principles, for example on the principle of religious freedom, equality of religions, and non-discrimination. Doe (2011:263) mentions that these principles in the context of the European Union express basic democratic values.

This article defines principles to be followed by the Canton Bern when implementing a timely policy, and when adjusting the corresponding legal conditions. When developing a new Bernese policy on religion, principles followed, should consider human rights and constitutional requirements. Moreover, principles should be based on democratically developed parliamentary decisions because they must stand firm as generally valid in the policy building process to come.

When considering the current Bernese policy, no principles that correspond with the human rights and constitutional requirements (Inniger et al. 2021:8) can be identified, but rather practices. The Bernese parliament has not yet discussed such principles to follow in its religious political debates. The government has even rejected a policy revision aimed at including a principle-based strategy (Dütschler 2018; Inniger 2018:29–30; Marti 2018). No principles exist for the Canton Bern. This contrasts with the Canton Solothurn (2019), where government and parliament have decided to take new steps with the policy on religion based on today's requirements and based on the principles of inclusion and equal treatment; also, by promoting social coherence and religious peace (Inniger 2021). A parliamentary debate on principles for future religious political strategy is necessary. This debate should lead to sustainable decisions regarding principles that consider human rights and constitutional requirements. Without resolved principles, the Canton Bern proceeds too aimlessly with its strategy. Regarding the upcoming religious political debates, the Canton Bern is vulnerable to inconsiderate interventions or to steps that do not correspond to human rights and constitutional requirements, or that continue to promote asymmetries and discrimination, which generally do not serve the common good of society.

The main aim of this research was to identify relevant principles that will help transform Bern's policy on religion into a principle-based policy that fulfils today's requirements by becoming fairer and more inclusive. To succeed in this goal, the first research step was to examine whether the current policy on religion of the Canton Bern contains any possible links with a future principle-based policy. Furthermore, a second step in the search for possible principles was undertaken by interviewing experts of civil society, politics on religion, government staff, and academics. By means of a qualitative research method, specifically one-to-one interviews with open questions, I hoped to achieve my goal of identifying the principles that experts consider relevant.² Considering the results of the first two steps, the third step was to formulate theological-ethical principles that are identifiable in the Swiss Reformed context. By evaluating the documentary sources, it was considered how the Bernese Reformed Church will respond to the further development of the Bernese policy on religion given its established positions. There is good reason to assume that the Bernese Reformed Church will implement its theological-ethical principles in the revision process for a new state policy on religion. The contribution of this research is, because of these three research steps, the presenting of seven principles. If the Canton Bern takes these seven principles into account when

²According to Bortz and Döring (2006:95–136, 295–350), one-on-one interviews allow a researcher to identify research topics such as these principles. The technique is to gather the expert's knowledge and opinions by using the qualitative and interpretative method of personal interviews with open questions (Bortz & Döring 2006:296–299) that refer to the subject of this research (2006:308–309). Carrying out these informal interviews, after which the participants validate the information by revising the written version of the text (Bortz & Döring 2006:296), helped to collect sufficient valid information. In the same way as in previous field work connected to this study (Inniger et al. 2021:4), the audio-recorded interviews, for which the Canton Bern gave its permission, were documented as validated written summaries. The data were managed by the researcher under the supervision of the North-West University, South Africa, considering the ethics code of the Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation programme (TRREE 2017).

establishing its new policy, it is possible to evolve to a more fair and more progressive policy – a policy that contributes concretely to social peace.

Bernese practices

The religious political practices of the Canton Bern display five trends. This section indicates these practices and explains why they cannot be seen as fundamental principles. It considers whether these practices hold possibilities for a future principle-based policy on religion for the Canton Bern.

Tradition

The Canton Bern supposedly considers tradition in its current practice (Canton Bern 2023a:Art. 29; Ecoplan, Advocate 2014:3, 13; Inniger et al. 2021:2). The term *tradition* has, however, never been defined for this practice. Without explanation, traditional Christian churches³ are excluded from the Bernese state policy on religion (Livenet.ch 2007) without receiving reasons for why they do not correspond to the state's concept of tradition. Younger churches⁴ and religious communities⁵ are also rejected from inclusion with the argument that they are not traditional (Cattacin et al. 2003:20–22). There are no criteria that define the point at which they would correspond to the Canton Bern's concept of tradition. Such a concept does not exist. The Bernese reference to tradition as a basis for inclusion or exclusion in its religious policy is problematic. Firstly, some of the unrecognised Bernese Christian churches have a longer tradition than some recognised churches. Secondly, the use of this presumed criterion of tradition is vague because there is no indication how many years a group must be in the Canton Bern to be considered as traditional. In addition, the use of this criterion is not expedient because younger groups are growing rapidly and becoming highly relevant to the state.

The vague use of the term *tradition* can also be seen in how the Canton Bern deals with the issue of the historical legal titles (Canton Bern 2023a:Art. 29) on which the Bernese Reformed Church insists. At the request of the parish priests, the Canton Bern took over the local properties of the Bernese Reformed Church as state assets by decree in 1804 (Canton Bern 2023a:Art. 29). This was a time when 100% of the population belonged to the Reformed Church. For more than 200 years, the Canton Bern has paid in return the salaries of the parish priests of the Reformed Church even though only 46% of the population belong to the Reformed Church today. The new Church Law of 2020 continues to argue for the payment of the salaries for the Reformed clergy based on these legal titles from 1804 (Canton Bern 2023a:Art. 29). When interviewed on 27 November 2019, Koepfli stated that there was no parliamentary majority that was willing to take a critical socio-historical look at the matter of the historic legal titles. The fact is that, in 1804, the Canton Bern acquired property

3.For example, the Lutheran, Anglican, Orthodox or free Church.

4.For example, younger Christian free churches and numerous Christian churches stemming from migration.

5.For example, the Muslim, Alevi, Buddhist, or Hindu communities.

that belonged 100% to the population, but today, it returns only 46% of the proceeds to society. Would it not be fair to consider this property, which belonged to everyone in 1804, as a heritage that still belongs to everyone today?⁶

To conclude, if the term *tradition* is not defined and explained, it is not appropriate as a principle for a policy on religion. From this study's point of view, even if the term is defined, tradition is not an appropriate and expedient principle.

The inclusion of additional religious communities

The Bernese Reformed Church never had to ask to be included in the policy of the Canton Bern. The state and the Reformed Church have always been intertwined. Since the Reformation, these bodies have been more or less identical (Inniger et al. 2021:2). However, today the church members, who just after the Reformation made up 100% of the population, are only 46%. Over time the Canton Bern started to include additional churches and religious communities in their policy. Towards the end of the 20th century, two Jewish communities were included, and long before that the Catholic and the Christ-Catholic churches were also included. Interestingly, the Church Law of 2020 legitimates the inclusion of the Catholic and the Christ-Catholic churches and their preferential treatment by considering the 'historical prerequisites' (Canton Bern 2023a:Art. 29).

The historical requisites for including some traditional churches while excluding other traditional churches and religious communities are not explained anywhere. Why does the prerequisite of historicity not apply to the other traditional churches that have been around for a long time? The Canton Bern included the Jewish communities in Bern and Biel in the policy of 1997. But why did the Canton Bern lay the legal foundations for admitting the Jewish communities in 1997, and then, a few years later, declared to the free churches that they could not be admitted due to a lack of legal foundations? Why have two Jewish communities been included in the state-religion family, while other non-Christian groups remain ignored? Did the state include the Christ-Catholic Church, which is smaller than many free churches, for political reasons, for example to limit the influence of the Catholic Church in the mainly Protestant canton? The basis for inclusion is as blurred as the basis of tradition. If this criterion is blurry, and if the Canton Bern does not develop the constitutionally promised law of recognition (Inniger 2018:21) that rules the inclusion of additional churches and religious communities, the practice of inclusion is not a fundamental principle – rather an inclusion for chosen groups.

The practice of inclusion can link to a principle-based policy if – in the same way as in other contexts – all religious communities in principle can be included in the policy.

6.Historically accurate, one could ask also how the Reformed Church acquired this property, and who was the original owner.

Social importance

Another current practice of the Canton Bern is to support the Reformed, Catholic, and Christ-Catholic state churches and the two Jewish communities based on their social importance for the whole of society (Canton Bern 2023a:Art. 29). According to the current Church Law, the Bernese state recognised churches 'contribute to the solidarity of the community, to the promotion of fundamental values, to peace among religions, to religious education and to the safeguarding of culture' (Canton Bern 2023a:Art. 3). Their social importance was neatly substantiated by a comprehensive study financed by the Canton Bern (Ecoplan, Ad!vocate 2014). This study also confirms the social importance of churches and religious communities that are unrecognised by the state (Ecoplan/Ad!vocate 2014:68–71).⁷

Göransson's thesis (2014) that all churches and religious communities are 'contributors of society', and that the state should 'contribute to all contributors' is so obvious that the Bernese government, in 2015, aimed to promote the relevant contributions of the unrecognised churches and religious communities to the common good in its guiding principles for a future policy on religion (Canton Bern 2015a:18). The government commissioned an expert to evaluate and confirm the social contributions of the unrecognised churches and religious communities to the common good. However, the state only granted minimal resources and funds to this expertise (Inniger 2017). The expert opinion of 2017 has even not been published. Only a summated version was published in 2018 (Inniger 2018). Based on the evaluation, both versions confirmed the social importance of the unrecognised churches and religious communities, and the fact that they relevantly contribute to religious peace (Inniger 2018:15–18).

State support for the Bernese churches and religious communities that have gone unrecognised so far would be the logical consequence of the government's intention of 2015 of the results of current research (e.g. Göransson 2014; Van Bijsterveld 2018:21), and of the result of the two expert reports of 2017 and 2018. The principle of contributing to all contributors of society could easily be adopted in the same way as, for example, in Sweden or Hungary. Unfortunately, up to the present day, state funding remains a selective privilege in the Canton Bern. State funding for social importance is not a principle, but a practice that rewards some chosen groups while other groups continue to work for the common good – 'for God's wage'.

The practice of state funding for social importance cannot be seen isolated from the practice of conferring state recognition. If the recognition law, promised by the constitution, remains absent, and many churches and religious communities remain ignored by the state as a result, the remuneration for all contributors of society, envisaged by the government in 2015, remains absent. It is precisely the practice of conferring

7.The Ecoplan/Ad!vocate report hereby refers to the FAKIR study corresponding to the study of the National Research Program 'Religions, the State, and Society' which considers the services, benefits, and financing of religious communities in Switzerland (Marti, Kraft & Felix 2010).

state recognition that involves state privileges and state funding (Portier 2017:212). In today's practice, no funding is possible without state recognition. It is obvious that the Bernese policy on religion brings state-unrecognised churches and religious communities into a vicious circle. 'For whoever has will be given more',⁸ and those who have never been in the state's favour, and therefore have fewer resources, must learn that their social importance is – due to the lacking state support – too small to be rewarded.

State recognition and its effects

As mentioned above, the Canton Bern grants to the three state churches and two Jewish communities the status of recognition under public law. This practice – originally an act of separating state and religion – is today a 'privilege that involves preferential treatment and social recognition' (Inniger et al. 2021:7). The drafting of the constitutionally promised law of recognition (Canton Bern 2023b:Art. 126), which should enable and rule issues of state recognition, and the inclusion and corresponding privileged treatment of additional churches and religious communities, was rejected in 2015 (Inniger 2018:4). As a result, today's state recognition cannot be seen as a state principle – rather it is a privileging practice of the state for chosen groups. It furthers in a discriminatory way the unequal treatment of religious communities and their members, and it hinders the fair and equal consideration of all religious communities as contributors of society.

State recognition implies privileges, state funding, and social recognition. Due to decades of government support, favourable tax treatment, collection of church taxes by the state, the allocation of all company taxes,⁹ inclusion in state consultations, access to institutions, university training and continuing education for ministers, and social recognition, state-funded churches are highly privileged. Their recognition under public law and the corresponding state funding, boosted their social importance immensely. By contrast, a church, or a religious community, denied the right of state recognition, implicitly lacks both the state support and social recognition. Even if their social contribution is considerable (Inniger 2018:13–18; Inniger et al. 2021:5), their social importance is, due to a lack of state support, less relevant than the social importance of the groups that have been funded by the state for decades. They are denied this boost from the state. As a result, they are subject to an anti-booster effect due to the lack of state recognition, privileges, and funding. The argument that the overall social benefit, offered by the unrecognised groups, are lower than those of the state-supported groups (Cattacin et al. 2003:22) does not consider the cause-and-effect relationship. The limited effectiveness of the social contribution of churches and religious communities that are not recognised by the state cannot be used in good conscience as an argument. Their contribution is smaller because they do not receive support

8.Matthew 13:12. All quotations of the Bible are given from the translation of the New International Version (Bible Gateway 2023).

9.Even if the owner of the company belongs to an unrecognised non-Christian religious community.

from the state. They are underprivileged excluded groups. The state policy itself brings about two classes of religious communities (Inniger et al. 2020:6; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2009: 225–257) and puts in motion the dynamics of a vicious cycle.

The Bernese state policy treats recognised and unrecognised communities differently. It must accept the reproach that their practices promote social asymmetries (Inniger 2018:1); thus, it does not support social cohesion and religious peace (Inniger 2018:14). The unrecognised groups remain brushed under the carpet of society (Inniger et al. 2021:6). In Sweden or Hungary, for example, it is of vital interest of the state to also recognise and support young and low-resource groups (Constitution of Hungary 2011, 2018; Göransson 2014; Inniger et al. 2020:5; Sweden 2018a, 2018b) to enhance their social effectiveness.

Offering state recognition has the potential to be a principle if it is open to all religious communities. This would imply benefits for the religious communities, for the state, and for society itself.

Monitoring – control or support?

The expert report of 2018, commissioned by the Canton Bern, presented as the first theoretical option that the Canton Bern abandon its relationship to religion and religious communities in general. A second option was that the Canton Bern maintains the status quo of the current state church policy. The last option was that the Canton Bern maintains the status quo of its state church policy but with the addition of a current and inclusive strategy and policy on religion. Based on the insights gained during the unpublished evaluation of Inniger (2017), and given the recent research and models of other countries, the expert recommended the last option, namely, to establish a new policy based on principles that are compatible with human rights and constitutional requirements.

The responsible state department pushed for an additional option, namely, to continue with the traditional state church policy and, as the only additional activity, to monitor the religious political landscape and the unrecognised groups.¹⁰ Their option negated any inclusion or support of the unrecognised groups. As a result, this option, brought in by the state department but not recommended by the expert, was in the final version of the expert's report as option 3 (Inniger 2018:29), while the option recommended by the expert, became option 4 (Inniger 2018:29–30).

When the Bernese government made its decisions, it decreed to follow option 3 of monitoring state-unrecognised groups (Dütschler 2018; Inniger 2018:29; Marti 2018). Marti (2018) describes the governments' decision that developing option 4, with a new principle-based religious political strategy, as too radical for the Canton Bern. According to Marti (2018), the responsible minister, Evi Allemann, claimed that it was too early for a strategy or for measures to be taken. The government

¹⁰The word *monitoring* implies, among others, the meaning of observation, control, and surveillance (Duden 2023).

then opted, according to Marti (2018), to concentrate on simply monitoring the situation. This monitoring option was officially implemented in 2020 as a new practice.

Although the government decided on option 3, the new practice of the Canton Bern today, includes some elements of the recommended option 4. As the Canton Bern started with a process of creating a map of churches and religious communities (Canton Bern 2023c), it also started building new contact between the state and the unrecognised groups, and it started taking note of the needs of these churches and religious groups. The Canton Bern today even tries to strengthen the dialogue with religious communities to identify unequal treatment, and to examine funding possibilities for projects to promote the non-recognised churches and religious communities (Canton Bern 2023d). The current Bernese practice is reinterpreting option 3 in convergence with the recommended option 4 of establishing a policy that reduces structural inequalities based on religious affiliation (Canton Bern 2023d).

This reinterpretation of the practice of monitoring into a practice of dialogue could be a good starting point for developing a principle of dialogue and empowerment. However, what remains problematic today is that, despite all efforts, the state-recognised religious communities remain included and privileged, and the unrecognised religious communities remain excluded. Even if ignored churches and religious communities are now invited onto a cantonal map of religions, these churches and religious communities do not get any added value by this action. They do not experience the Canton Bern as developing a practice of dialogue and empowerment, or rather a practice of observation.

Interim assessment

Certain elements of the current Bernese practices are hardly in line with the human rights and constitutional requirements in terms of state neutrality, equal treatment, inclusion, participation, minority rights, and non-discrimination. Other elements, if principally realigned to a policy for all, include aspects of a principle-based policy of religion.

The practice that supposedly takes tradition as the criterion to measure whether a religious community should be included or excluded, will always be frustrating if the term is not defined and if inclusion and exclusion are not adequately explained, also regarding the historical legal titles. The practice of including additional churches and religious communities could develop towards a principle of inclusion if it is a policy for all. Likewise, the practice of remunerating the social contributions of the state churches could become a fair principle provided that the policy is open to all. The practice of recognising religious communities is also an adequate starting point if the parliament opens this practice to all religious communities. The overall practice of including, funding, and recognising certain groups should be generalised towards a generally and principally implemented policy of including, founding, and recognising.

This study recommends the rejection of the terminology and practice of monitoring. Only if the practice of monitoring is developed into a principle of dialogue and empowerment, it can be an appropriate basis for a new principle-based policy. This principle of dialogue and empowerment should demonstrate that the state wants to treat all religious communities fairly and that it aims to compensate all of them equally for their contributions to the common good. The new trend of the Canton Bern of networking and dialogue are promising, but without parliamentary commitment, principles, legal basis, and adequate funding, this approach seems too vague in view of the rapid sociological changes in religion and the asymmetries that are so structurally ingrained. The current Bernese policy does not include principles; it includes practices that have the potential to become elements of a future principle-based policy on religion.

Fundamental principles put forward by experts

The fieldwork for this study makes obvious that experts recommend that the Canton Bern considers fundamental principles for the establishment of a redesigned state policy on religion.

Their first recommendation is to establish a principle, based on the approach and the method of policy building. Moreover, the principle of state neutrality, equal treatment and non-discrimination, and the inclusion of minorities are recommended fundamental principles based on human rights and constitutional requirements. These fundamental principles were in unison, presented by the experts as the principal benchmarks for the further development of the Bernese state-religion relationship. When interviewed on 29 July 2019, Jost stated that the Canton Bern, as a democratic state, has little scope regarding human rights and the constitutional demands when revising its state policy on religion. The human right standards (United Nations 2023) oblige the Canton Bern to adhere to – besides the right of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Art. 18) – the right to participate and the right of being included (Art. 27). Being excluded from funeral services or pastoral care in public institutions equals a violation of human rights. Questions arise about discrimination when it comes to issues of funerals and pastoral care, but also in terms of unequal treatment regarding taxes, training, and funding of clergy, or inclusion in state consultations (Art. 2 & Art. 7). The Canton Bern is of course also tied to its own constitutional foundations. According to the National Constitution (Swiss Confederation 2023), the Canton Bern cannot refuse to take responsibility for religious issues (Art. 72). In addition, the Cantonal Constitution (Canton Bern 2023b) states that the Canton Bern has the task of guaranteeing freedom of faith and conscience as well as equality under the law and protection against discrimination (Art. 10 & Art. 14), considering the needs of minorities (Art. 4) and respecting human dignity (Art. 9). Furthermore, the constitution stipulates that the Canton Bern should establish a law that rules the recognition of additional religious communities in a transparent manner (Art. 126).

The principle of learning and expertise

The principle of learning and expertise is addressed by Leutwyler and Tunger-Zanetti who stress in respective interviews (29 October 2019 and 29 July 2019) that the method of policymaking must be oriented towards process-openness, process-orientation, trying, error and learning, and taking in account available expertise. When the Canton Bern redesigns its relationship to religion, it should do this by considering this process as a dynamic one of learning, together with all stakeholders, according to Leutwyler (2019 interview), and as a process of listening to the advice of experts, according to Tunger-Zanetti (2019 interview). This process should take in account the insights of recent research and the experiences of other states and cantons. Leutwyler and Tunger-Zanetti mention that this policy should be based on principles developed in a sense of dialogue with all stakeholders, especially with these churches and religious communities that had so far been ignored by the state. When revising the Bernese policy on religion, the principle of learning and expertise should be expanded towards the learning aspect. Insights from recent research into today's religious landscapes and the related implications for the state-religion relationship should be considered. Likewise, the experiences and best practices of other cantons and states should be considered.¹¹ Koelbing, in an interview on 28 June 2019, defines the expertise of Inniger (2018) as a scientific basis that should be considered. This expertise describes the changed religious landscape and its challenges and related key questions regarding the further development of the relationship between state and religion. Referring to Inniger (2018, 2020, 2021), the following insights of research are relevant regarding a policy revision in the Canton Bern: Cobb (2015:3) substantiates why it is imperative for governments to address issues of religion and spirituality, and why they must take seriously all that is beyond the material and mundane of human and community existence. Göransson (2014) and Van Bijsterveld (2018:21) emphasise that religious communities are not only a private matter, and that their potential should be taken seriously, because it can support the goal of the state. Schuppert (2017:127–136, 171–172, 185) explains that religious communities are not to be underestimated as governance actors. He recommends that governments consider them as such and address them in partnership. It is also well accepted by researchers that religious policy today must be implemented in an inclusive, pluralistic, and universalistic sense, that old and new, large and small churches and religious communities must be treated equally (Heckel 2009:380–381), and that governments should not, by their practices, create a two-class society among churches and religious communities (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2009:225–257).

The approach and method of policy redesign cannot be random; rather using the method of approaching a fair, progressive and peacebuilding policy as a principal. It must be defined as a method of learning and considering expertise.

11. Compare Inniger et al. (2020:7), who refer to more contemporary and inclusive models of state policy on religion: Learning processes, insights, positive experiences and models of other national or cantonal settings of policy on religion (Constitution of Hungary 2011:Act CCVI:5, 2018; Sweden 2018a, 2018b) could enrich the development of the Bernese policy on religion.

The principle of state neutrality

With reference to obligations towards human rights and the constitution, the experts mention the three principles of state neutrality, equal treatment and non-discrimination, and the inclusion and participation of minorities. Regarding the principle of state neutrality, the former Director of the Bernese Department of Justice, Communes and Churches, Christoph Neuhaus, gave clear advice in 2015. He stated that the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion requires the state to be neutral in religious matters. He explained that the state may not benefit or discriminate against any religious group (Canton Bern 2015b). In the same way, Reber (interviewed on 01 October 2019) places the imperative of state neutrality regarding religion at the centre of his call for a new Bernese policy on religion. Engi (2017:16; also, in an interview on 30 October 2019) adopts the same approach when he draws the attention to the fact that the term *neutrality* originates from *ne-uter*, which means 'neither of them'. The principle of state neutrality regarding religious policy is imperative.

The principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination

Human rights and constitutional requirements offer clear advice regarding the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination. In terms of the Cantonal Constitution (Art. 10), both equality under the law and protection against discrimination must be guaranteed. The constitution prohibits discrimination generally and based on religion *expressis verbis*.

However, the Canton Bern does not, as a neutral state, treat all religious groups equally; rather it discriminates against some groups and their citizens (Inniger 2018:21). By describing the unrecognised and underprivileged churches and religious communities as churches and religious communities 'under private law', the Canton Bern euphemises the fact that the state does not treat them equally and that the state policy is driving a wedge between the two classes of religious communities by enhancing inequalities between state-recognised and state-unrecognised religious communities (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2009). The discriminatory potential of its (non-)recognition policy is a challenge for the Canton Bern (Inniger 2018:21).

Among the experts, Jost, in the interview on 29 July 2019, comments that the Canton Bern must adhere to the principles of equal treatment based on the Cantonal Constitution. Koelbing, in the interview on 28 June 2019, says that a vision with more justice is needed for a future policy on religion. The principle of equal treatment and equal rights must become the guiding principle. In this context, Koelbing argues that now it is time to share resources. Jost also states that equal treatment is a fundamental principle that also applies to the policy on religion in the Canton Bern. Tunger-Zanetti, in the interview on 29 July 2019, likewise stresses the importance of the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination. Engi, in the interview on 30 October 2019

cites the same concern with the term fairness, and Stähli with the term equal chances in the interview on 24 September 2019. It is not surprising that Schmid, in an interview on 09 January 2020 also *expressis verbis* mentions the principle of equal rights, equal treatment, and non-discrimination. By considering the legal foundations and the experts' opinions, the Canton Bern should, in its future policy on religion, implement this fundamental principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination.

The principle of inclusion

Human rights and the constitutional requirements offer in the same way guidance regarding the principle of inclusion. Human rights include the right to participate and the right to be included (Art. 27), and the Cantonal Constitution stresses the consideration of the needs of minorities (Art. 4).

The Canton Bern, however, has an excluding two-class religious system. The trend is that traditional Christian groups are included (not all!), and non-Christian groups are not included. All communities that are not recognised by the state are disadvantaged. They have fewer resources, less access and less social recognition. For minority religious communities, it is especially hard not to have any chance of attaining recognition under public law, as the Canton Bern refuses the establishment of the constitutionally promised recognition law. Citizens feel this exclusion: non-Christian patients in hospitals, for example, often have no chance to be visited by a chaplain of their faith and rite, and non-Christian families are not assured that they can bury their family members according to the rites of their religion. A Muslim citizen, for example, who belongs to a Mosque community, has no Imam that is trained at state university or paid by the state, with all the corresponding benefits of social recognition. If Muslim citizens have a business, they will have to pay their legal business taxes for a Christian state-recognised church.

Since the year 2020, the excluded religious communities have been objects of the state's monitoring programme. This leaves the uncomfortable sense that one is being monitored as a group and as a believer, even if the responsible department tries to deal with this difficult situation in the best feasible way by applying the recommended option 3, but enriching it with the recommendations of option 4 (cf. page 5). However, if the state department responsible, allocates funding for a project that promotes the inclusion of non-recognised religious communities in pastoral care in public institutions, they have no budget for projects that promote inclusion and participation; rather they have to take this money from a budget that is called 'budget for the prevention of radicalisation'. Religious communities that are not recognised by the state and their members experience exclusion (Inniger 2017); sometimes they are even suspected to be dangerous. There is something misanthropic about the idea of monitoring.

Stähli (in the 2019 interview) confirms this statement by strongly recommending that minority churches and religious communities should be included in the state policy on

religion. He reminds the state of fairness in this regard. Koelbing (in the 2019 interview) calls on the state to give all groups the same chances. Götting, in an interview on 08 August 2019, says the same, not least because churches and religious communities, ignored by the state, will identify better with the state and its fundamental values if they are respected by the state and receive equal treatment to the large churches.

Interim assessment

The experts comment that the Bernese state policy on religion should – during its process of renewal – be aware that the state, all churches, and religious communities and society are in a shared learning process when designing a new policy, and that the expertise of other countries and research should be included. Moreover, it should consider state neutrality, equal treatment, and non-discrimination and the inclusion of minorities as fundamental principles that will guide this process.

Theological-ethical principles of the Swiss Reformed Context

This article takes a Reformed perspective. In search of principles for the establishment of a fair, progressive and peacebuilding policy on religion, this study presents proven theological-ethical principles for ecumenical, interreligious, and societal dialogue that are established in the Swiss Reformed Church (Inniger 2016:38–63). Should the Bernese Reformed Church contribute to the process of establishing a new state policy on religion, they will bring themselves in and apply in this process their own theological-ethical principles as presented below.

Commitment to dialogue

As shown (Inniger 2016:49–51), commitment to ecumenical, interreligious, and societal dialogue is a characteristic of Swiss Reformed churches. This commitment evolved from the Swiss Reformed involvement in the dialogue programme of the 6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver (World Council of Churches 1983). The commitment of this assembly, including the commitment to societal justice and peace, strongly influenced Swiss Reformed churches in their societal, ecumenical, and interreligious statements and activities (Evangelical-Reformed Churches of Switzerland 2023a). The Swiss Reformed commitment to this dialogue, theologically substantiated and justified by experts (Bernhardt 2007) and publicly expressed by the signing of the Charta Oecumenica in 2005 (Evangelical-Reformed Churches of Switzerland 2023b), entails sharing responsibility for the common interest of including all citizens, seeking to understand each other, standing up for the rights of minorities, standing up for equal treatment, and for dialogue with all religions and worldviews. This commitment always involves respect and inclusiveness, and it aims to contribute to peace and justice and the strengthening of human rights. It is *expressis verbis* mentioned in the Church Order of the Bernese Reformed Church (Reformed Churches

Bern-Jura-Solothurn 2023:Art 82–84). The Swiss Reformed commitment to societal dialogue is here considered as a valid principle.

Emphasising unifying commonalities

Furthermore, Swiss Reformed churches emphasise that all humans are considered as one, united by timeless common attributes and features, regardless of historical circumstances and cultural peculiarities (Bernhardt 2007:42–43; Inniger 2016:42–45). Emphasising on unifying commonalities during concrete societal, ecumenical, and interreligious processes and interactions is a Reformed principle. Drafting a timely and inclusive state policy on religion is such a societal, ecumenical, and interreligious process; policies on religion embraces all groups and citizens, because all groups and citizens belong to the same society – they have unifying commonalities.

The Bernese Reformed Church will agree to the state's all-inclusive approach on policy issues. It will agree that today's challenges, related to state-religion issues, are common social challenges and the common responsibility of all societal forces. Seeing unifying commonalities among people is consistently reflected in the statements of the Bernese Reformed Church (Reformed Churches Bern-Jura-Solothurn 2001:2ff.). The Bernese Reformed Church promotes tolerance among all groups of society and advocates for religious communities to be granted the necessary space in Bernese society to practice their faith, to live their religion freely, to participate in politics and society, to promote the integration, and to practise their funeral rituals. From a Swiss Reformed point of view, the principle of unifying commonalities is relevant to policy building.

Respect

When contributing to a timely state policy on religion, the principle of respect can also be adopted from the Swiss Reformed perspective. As shown before (Inniger 2016:46–48), this principle is based on an attitude of recognising groups or persons of another faith or life stance as an equal and 'equivalent You' (Bernhardt 2005:92–99) based on the idea of human likeness to God (Gn 1:27; 5:1). In accordance with article 18 of the human rights, the Swiss Reformed Church sees respect as a logical consequence of human dignity. The Swiss Reformed Church is principally committed to respecting, promoting, and supporting human rights, and to prevent and defend against discrimination in all its forms (Evangelical-Reformed Churches of Switzerland 2023c). Considering the principle of respect, the Bernese Reformed Church firmly holds fast that all other religious communities must respectfully be granted the necessary space in Bernese society; it even emphatically states that the Bernese Reformed Church wants to promote social peace (Reformed Churches Bern-Jura-Solothurn 2001:2ff.). On this basis, the principle of respect is a given in the Reformed context when it comes to the state's efforts to design a fair, timely, and peacebuilding policy on religion.

Empowerment for other groups

In the Swiss Reformed context, empowerment is a principle. According to Swiss Reformed perspectives (Inniger 2016: 49–51), God's promise of strengthening, fulfilment, and empowerment is central.¹² The upliftment of people and communities, especially of those who live rather on the edges of society,¹³ is a basic premise of Swiss Reformed ethics. In this regard a fulfilled life¹⁴ of a believer or a religious community is of course not limited to state-recognised flourishing churches. According to Bernhardt (2007:37), God's domain of love and power is not limited by the borders of Christian churches (Inniger 2016):

This means that every human being regardless of nationality, religion or gender must be granted the possibility of living a fulfilled life, and every citizen in a nation must have the option of living according to his or her convictions, life stance or religious affiliation. (p. 49)

Routed in this biblical-theological attitude, Swiss Reformed churches aim to support all religious communities so that they can unfold and have enough space in society (Reformed Churches Bern-Jura-Solothurn 2001:4). From a Reformed theological point of view, especially religious minorities should be given access to the same resources as religious majorities. Regarding the design of a new, fair, and inclusive policy on religion, it is a Swiss Reformed principle to empower other groups and people – also because of equality (Inniger 2016:51–52).

Building Bridges

It has been shown (Inniger 2016:52–55) that the approach of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams (Berkley Center for Religion 2023), to dialogue by building bridges, mirrors exactly the 5th Swiss Protestant principle of dialogue. This principle must be present during the redesign of the Bernese state policy on religion. Where Swiss Reformed churches are involved, they aim to build bridges, be it in societal, ecumenical, or interreligious dialogue. The Bernese Reformed Church will help to build bridges in the process redesigning a policy on religion for all Bernese society. The Bernese Reformed Church (Reformed Churches Bern-Jura-Solothurn 2001:3) considers that religions have the best potential to build bridges; they see all dialogue between different communities and people as building bridges. The Swiss Reformed researchers, Mathwig and Stückelberger (2007:54), state that building bridges between different religions requires solidarity and a sense of justice. Bridges between religions can only be built where conditions and relations are just (Mathwig & Stückelberger 2007:18).

Interim assessment

In the search of fundamental principles to which the Canton Bern should adhere when redesigning a state policy on

12. 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you' (Ac 1:8a).

13. 'He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble' (Lk 1:52).

14. 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (Jn 10:10b).

religion, the theological-ethical principles for societal, ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue of the Bernese Reformed Church are relevant, as this Bernese majority church will support this process. If principles for societal dialogue that are valid in the context of Swiss Reformed churches are included in the set of state principles, the support will be even more significant. These Christian Reformed principles – explicated, presented, and proven at an earlier stage (Inniger 2016) – are now considered with reference to designing a policy on religion.

Recommendation of seven principles

In this closing chapter, this study recommends a set of seven principles that can guide the Canton Bern when drafting a fair, progressive and peacebuilding policy on religion. If these principles are followed, the key problems with which the Canton Bern has been confronted (Inniger et al. 2021:4–9), can be addressed. No principles can be derived from the current practice of the Bernese policy on religion because none exist. The set of seven principles – outlined below – has been compiled by considering the recommendations of the experts and the Swiss Reformed theological-ethical principles for societal, ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue.¹⁵

Principle 1: Commitment to a new policy

The set of principles for a timely, more inclusive policy on religion should be founded on the clear commitment to a new policy. It is necessary to establish such binding commitment. This commitment, which must be rooted in processes of a liberal democracy, increases in importance if it is embodied at the level of a principle. Without such principal commitment, religious political efforts will proceed in a manner where intention, goal and strategy are just as uncertain as the orientation of day-to-day actions. Like a ship needs its leading flag at the helm, the Canton Bern needs this commitment to show the way. This commitment includes the main stipulations of this new policy and a convincing justification that shows that remaining issues (Inniger et al. 2021:4–9) can be tackled with this policy. In a liberal democracy, such principal commitment must be recognised in parliament at the beginning of the process of establishing this new policy. The Canton Solothurn can serve as a role

15. This set does not include the principle of unifying commonalities and the principle of respect – both characteristic of the Swiss Reformed tradition regarding societal, ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue. Seeing all people in society considering unifying commonalities is a matter of course as well as the principle of respect. The set of principles proposed here, does also not include tradition as a principle. There are reasons for this: The term *tradition* is not defined, and if it is not defined to whom and with what interests will the defining power be given? This study can generally not see any meaningful approaches for a fair, progressive, and peacebuilding policy in the current practice of recognising religious communities based on tradition. In fact, this very practice blocks today's developments. Deciding on a principle that religious communities receive state recognition and money because of their age, puts all younger religious communities in a corner of no chance, while the long-established religious communities sail in safe waters. Further, it is obvious that precisely small, financially weak, and young religious communities need support, access, networking, and inclusion to run as contributors of society in the long term and with well-trained personnel and with enough structural resources (Göransson 2014). Hungary (Constitution of Hungary 2011 Act CCVI:5, 2018) and Sweden (Sweden 2018a; 2018b) have a progressive policy on religion which includes young and small groups because this gives them the chance to be useful contributors to the common good. Issues of the historical legal titles have been left untouched in this section. Historical issues will be included within the next two publications.

model. The government and the parliament of this canton decided in 2019 to be committed to a new religious political strategy, expressed in the project 'State and Religion' (Canton Solothurn 2019). States like Sweden and Hungary can also serve as models. The Bernese Reformed Church will support this principle because it corresponds with its commitment to societal, ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue. In fact, this first principle is inspired by the Reformed tradition.

Principle 2: Learning and expertise

The second principle is the principle of learning and expertise because the methodology of drafting a fair, progressive, and peace-building policy on religion for the Canton Bern cannot be arbitrary. Issues of the methodology are principal. Only a methodology that takes a considered path is promising. Strategy formation and the development of a new policy on religion must necessarily be a process of shared learning that involves all stakeholders. Neither the state nor the recognised churches can create a policy for the unrecognised churches and communities; that would equal another asymmetry. A process of shared learning implies that the state takes a grassroots and process-oriented approach to policy development; it will meet and include the unrecognised churches and religious communities at eye level, exactly as the state-commissioned expertise has initiated and recommended (Inniger 2017). The strategy formation and the development of the new policy on religion must bring experts to the table. It is equally relevant what scholars who deal with the further development of today's religious policy say, and to consider the religious political processes, for example in Sweden and in Hungary in the last 30 years and in the Canton Solothurn in the last 3 years. The involvement of the new policy should not only consider value-oriented principles but also the methodological principle of shared, inclusive learning and involvement of experts.

Principle 3: State of neutrality

State neutrality, prominently supported by the former Bernese Minister for Churches, Christoph Neuhaus (cf. page 7), and by the experts, implies that the Canton Bern must be neutral about religion and religious issues. Since state neutrality regarding religion, religious issues, and religious communities is far from being a reality in the European context (eds. Madeley & Enyedi 2003:18), it must be mentioned as a mandatory principle. In the light of human rights and constitutional requirements, the Canton Bern has no leeway at all in this regard. State neutrality in religious issues has the importance of a principle when revising the Bernese policy on religion.

Principle 4: Equal treatment and non-discrimination

Similarly, the Canton Bern has no leeway with regard of issues of equal treatment and discrimination. A religious policy that aims to be fair, treats all groups and citizens equally. Human

rights and constitutional requirements demand equal treatment and non-discrimination. This is a state principle when establishing a fair, progressive, and peacebuilding policy on religion. The constant marginalisation of unrecognised churches and religious groups with respect to resources, accesses, and inclusion is discriminatory. A modern liberal state can, when establishing a fair policy, not say that 'if possible' it will treat groups and citizens equally, and 'if possible' it will not discriminate against any person or group. Equal treatment and non-discrimination are constitutional and principal. They are a non-negotiable principle when the state's religious policy is being reformulated.

Principle 5: Inclusion and empowerment

Social cohesion and peace, and the inclusion of groups, especially minority groups, are clear concerns of human rights and constitutional requirements. As the attitude of inclusion and empowerment is intricately connected to the Reformed tradition, inclusion and empowerment are recommended as principles. Inclusion and empowerment relate to issues of justice, social equity, equal footing, and being given the chance of playing a meaningful, constructive, and participating role in society. For small, young, and not yet established churches and religious communities this principle is especially relevant. The policy on religion of Sweden clearly states that weaker communities should especially be included in the principles and supported to enable the faith community to contribute to the development of society and of democracy (Göransson 2014).

Principle 6: Dialogue and building bridges

Due to the previous decisions of the Bernese government, it has not yet been possible to draft a policy on religion in the Canton Bern that includes a systematic respectful dialogue with all churches and religious communities. It is not yet possible to build bridges sufficiently, especially to build bridges between state-recognised and non-recognised churches and religious communities. However, from a Reformed point of view, the societal, ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue and activities of building bridges are at a principal level. This study therefore recommends a systematic, respectful, and all-inclusive dialogue at eye level, and building bridge activities for the benefit of religious peace as an imperative principle. The responsible department of the Canton Bern has, exactly in this sense, begun to convert the irritating terminology of monitoring into the terminology of dialogue and empowerment. This activity must be on the principal level.

Principle 7: Knowing, acknowledging, and recognition

A summarising principle is that the state knows, acknowledges, and recognises all churches and religious communities. Religion always has – besides its individual perspective and relevance – a social perspective and relevance. All religious communities are governance actors (Schuppert 2017:136–137). Based on the insights of this study, and based on the results of the compiled interviews, knowing,

acknowledging, and recognising religious bodies are important activities in the state-religion relationship. These activities are recommended as a principle. The opening of religious law to all, recommended by Heckel (2009:380–381) and successfully practiced in other countries, makes this mutual knowing, the respectful acknowledging and, in the end, state recognition possible.

Conclusion

The previous articles (Inniger et al. 2020, 2021) showed how changing religious landscapes affect confession-based state policies on religion and how these changes are expressed in the context of the Canton Bern. This article at hand has demonstrated that the current religious practice of the Canton Bern may have the beginning of a fair, progressive and peacebuilding policy, but today's practices are not based on principles. Further, it presented expert opinions on fundamental principles for a new policy and Swiss Reformed influences on such principles. This article contributes with the presentation of a set of seven principles that can guide the Canton Bern towards a fair, progressive, and peacebuilding policy. The state's commitment to such new policy must be principal (principle 1) as well as a methodological procedure of learning and consulting expertise when establishing this policy (principle 2). Furthermore, the principles of state neutrality (principle 3), equal treatment and non-discrimination (principle 4), inclusion and empowerment (principle 5), dialogue and building bridges (principle 6) as well as the principle of knowing, acknowledging, and recognising all religious communities (principle 7) are proposed as relevant. The next article of this thesis on state-religion issues in the Swiss Canton Bern proposes the design of a new concept for the Bernese policy on religion based on the set of seven principles as presented here.

For indexing purposes

The traditional confession-based Bernese state policy on religion is no longer serving its purpose. The loss of members among the state-recognised churches is obvious as well as the growing religious diversity and the growing population with no specific religious affiliation. As a result of this development, the Bernese state policy on religion raises questions with respect to the responsibility of a modern state regarding religious issues, the social relevance of all religious communities, state neutrality, equal treatment, non-discrimination, and the commitment to social and religious peace. In this article, seven principles, recommended based on expert opinions and of Reformed ethical-theological foundations, prepare the ground for a fair, progressive, and peacebuilding policy on religion.

Acknowledgements

This article is partially based on R.P.'s thesis entitled 'Recent challenges regarding religious policies in European countries with state-recognised churches. A case study on the Swiss Canton Bern from a Christian perspective' towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the North-West University, South Africa with promoters Prof. Dr. J.M. Vorster and Prof. Dr. R. Rheeder.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

M.G.I. is the main author of this article. J.M.V. & R.R. contributed as the promoters of the PhD, on which this article is based. Both R.R., and J.M.V. edited this research article.

Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to the North-West University Research Ethics Regulatory Committee and ethics consent was received on 1 September 2018. The ethics approval number is NWU-00645-18-A6.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

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