The project with the working title *A Political Church? A Critical Study of Deliberative Democracy and the Political Contributions from Theology* seeks to investigate what possible contributions theology can give to a tenable model of democracy.

The role of the Church of Sweden has changed, in the last decades the church has gone from being a state institution to finding itself in a situation where it is one actor amongst many in the civil society. The active position that the church has taken in questions concerning refugee rights, sustainability, human rights and peace can be seen as part of the endeavor to find a somewhat new role in society. However engagement in these issues by the church haven’t gone without criticism. Many have questioned it claiming that it amounts to a form of political engagement irreconcilable with the church’s identity. At the same time, the Church of Sweden has a democratic organization with open elections of representatives to the different levels of church governance. Politics is in this sense built into the church’s infrastructure. A central question is what the Church of Sweden’s identity as a “national” church can mean today. The Church of Sweden has long had a dominant role in Swedish religious life and a majority of the population in Sweden belong to it. However the idea of a clearly distinguishable “people” is problematic both from a theological and from a democracy theoretical perspective. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Further, we are now facing a global situation of growing adherence to forms of political speech that question the usefulness of democracy. Both populism and the idea that society should be governed by technocrats challenge the value of democratic processes and practices, and thus, the democratic identity of modern societies.

Can these challenges be met? Deliberative democracy arguably offers an alternative vision of democratic rule. This model of democracy puts emphasis on the role of deliberation or conversation between citizens, accordingly politics is a practice where citizens can reason together and where it is the better argument that holds final force. In this model civil society is seen as a central arena as it is the forum for the will and opinion formation so central to democratic rule.

The idea of the return of religion has received much scholarly attention in the last decades. Today it is not so much a question of whether religion does play a role in politics, rather it is assumed that it does and the question instead becomes in what ways? Several researchers have also suggested that religious traditions can play a central role in work to strengthen citizen’s democratic engagements. The religious traditions offer various visions of the common life of society which can be scrutinized for possible contributions to democratic practices.

Based on these considerations this project seeks to investigate what possible contributions theology can offer to a model of deliberative democracy. As part of this endeavor the project will also conduct a critical analysis of deliberative democracy from a theological perspective.

1. It is important to underline that the question of theology’s engagement with politics, and democracy in particular, is not unique to the Church of Sweden or even Christianity or the Christian traditions. The focus of this project is not the Church of Sweden per se, rather it is the systematic theological reflection of different religious traditions of what democracy might mean in from a religious perspective. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)