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Religion and Society: Effect – Counter-Effect and Social Responsibility in Western Europe[32]

The task before me is to reflect on a set of interconnected questions. How religious and religiously diverse our Western European society is? How religiously free are the citizens of these different societies? And what kind of impact does secular culture have on religion? How do the different religious communities express social responsibility? What is the prospect of interreligious dialogue and interreligious cooperation in this context? What is the issue in the larger context? What is the social responsibility of a given state and society towards religious communities, and, on the other hand, what is the social responsibility of religious communities towards the state and society in the Western European context?

Well, I speak to you as a social scientist here, so I will introduce you, a little later, to a definition of religion that is widely accepted as such in social sciences. I have a non-normative standpoint towards religions, as is common in my discipline, and I want to stress here again that available data do not allow for exact answers to the questions posed above, but rather suggest trends and tendencies.

I thank the organisers for having invited me to stand in for Marie Claire Foblets, coordinator of the RELIGARE Project, some of you are familiar with, which was funded by the European Commission and came to conclusion in January 2013. The RELIGARE project was hosted by the Law Faculty of the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium, and focused on religious diversity and secular models in Europe. Since the beginning of 2012, Professor Foblets is also the director of the new Department of Law and Anthropology at the Max Plank Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, in Germany. I have been senior researcher of this Institute since October 2006, first as a member of the project group Legal Pluralism Working on Religion in Disputes and then as a member of the new department with the main responsibility to help develop the research strand law and religion.

Law and religion in fact constitutes one of the three broader thematic research areas at the Department. In the view of my responsibility to help to develop this research strand, I participated in a couple of international events organised by the RELIGARE team, and for this paper I could also draw on the draft for the final report, which was presented to the European Commission in May 2013. The different international research teams of the project analysed relevant legal sources from ten countries, covering

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Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, the UK, Spain, Bulgaria and Turkey. The legal analysis concentrated on four areas of social life: religion and employment, religion and family life, access of religion to public space and different forms of state support to religion. This analysis was supported also by sociological research, but all the RELIGARE research teams were particularly concerned with two inadequacies in the laws dealing with religion:

(i) Firstly, with the importance that the discussion on the scope of the protection on the freedom of religion and belief has assumed in legal proceedings in the past few years, not just in Europe but also at UN level. An increasing disparity of the modes of legal regulation of religion has become apparent throughout Europe, whether in legislative responses or in case law. This increasing disparity has undermined legal certainty.

(ii) Secondly a number of recent court decisions both on the European and on the national levels have attested to a tendency to consider freedom of religion and belief not as an individual human right but as a group issue. Majority religions tend to perceive themselves as cultures and claim protection on the basis of reference to a common past and mainstream norms and values. Such culturalisation of religion, however, turns a debate on individual religious freedom into a debate on the protection of a group culture in which individual human rights are subsumed under collective interests. Now this goes against the very core of human rights.

The RELIGARE project can help us find answers to the question of how religiously free the citizens of Western Europe's societies are and of what kind of impact the secular culture has on religion. However, in order to come to grips with the question of how religious and religiously diverse Western European societies are, we need to draw on different kinds of research, some of which was already presented this afternoon.

I will also draw your attention in that context to Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, who – in 2004 – published their discussion and analysis of both the European Values Study and the World Value Survey. Their point of departure was the following theoretic predicament: "In contrast to conventional wisdom in the social sciences which has predicted a progressive decline of religiosity in modernizing societies, religion and belief have not seen a decline in the modern and post-industrial world, at least not on a global scale." The authors, therefore, set out to update the secularization theory, and did so by modifying this theory and grounding it on their general observation that, "Societies where people lives are shaped by the threat of poverty, disease and premature death remain as religious today as centuries earlier. In rich nations, by contrast, the evidence demonstrates that secularization has been proceeding since at least the mid-20th century. But at the same time fertility rates have fallen sharply. So that in recent years population growth have stagnated and the total population is starting to shrink. The result of these combined trends is that rich societies are becoming more secular but the world as a whole is becoming more religious."

In the second step, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, link this observation to what they call 'the existential security axiom' which highlights the social responsibility aspect of religious communities towards their members, I think. The more vulnerable a population is due to poverty and all that comes with it, the more religious in the sense of membership in an institutionalized religion and participation in its activities it is, regardless of what the religion maybe. This axiom bears upon the vexing paradox as to why in matters of religion the USA has remained strongly religious, although it is rich and so forth. In other words: why Europe – as Grace Davie has put it – is such an exceptional case, when we consider a continuous disenchantment of the public space in Europe.

The obvious answer confirming the existential security axiom would of course be that social security is much higher in Western Europe than in the USA. In other words citizens of Western European welfare states can afford to release the familiar ties with the traditional religious, solidarity groups of Western European societies that are the Catholic Church, different protestant churches and Jewish communities.

Now I also want to revisit with you projects carried out in contemporary societies, especially in Western Europe and North America, which state that traditional forms of religion, particularly Christianity are giving way the holistic spiritualities, in form of new religious movements, as well as individualized life spiritualities. A well-known example is the Kendal Project by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead that was carried out from 2000 to 2002, mainly in the old English town of Kendal, in Cumbria, the English Lake District.

My own research on detraditionalisation and new forms of religiosity in contemporary Dutch society, which I carried out from 2001 to 2006 at the Meertens Institute, a Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences Institute in Amsterdam, confirmed all the trends described by Heelas and Woodhead. I was furthermore able to draw on the surveys and reports by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research, which had been carried out between 1966 and 2000. These surveys and reports underscore the waning of traditional religious authority in the Netherlands, that is to say, the authority of the different Protestant denominations and the Catholic church, and the parallel emergence of both institutionalized and non-institutionalized alternative spiritualities. While this trend has been developing since the beginning of 20th century, it has accelerated in the Netherlands since the 1960s.

In terms of my own project, I detected two trends: (1) an increasing impact of both collective and individualized alternative – and to a certain extent traditional – spirituality on the workplace, and (2), an increasing popularity of neo-pagan spirituality and groups, parallel to the emergence of the fantasy hype triggered *inter alia* by the publication of the Harry Potter books, the release of the Harry Potter films, The Lord of the Ring movies, and so forth.

I explored these two tendencies with in-depth field work, investigating for instance the activities at a former monastery of the Congregation of the Brothers of Our Lady Mother of Mercy, commonly known as the 'Fathers of Tilburg'. At the end of the 1990s, the monastery had turned into a spiritual management institution, offering management training to state institutions and private clients. The training was provided by organisational psychologists as well as management specialists with a business administration background. The spiritual background of the trainers covered catholic spirituality, Sufism, Zen meditation, landmark and other spiritual movements.

My research at this financially quite successful venture—among its clients were several Dutch ministries, a police department, Shell and others— confirmed the contentions by Heelas and Woodhead that the spiritual revolution and the subjective turn had by now already reached traditional religious congregations. Moreover, it supported the provocative thesis by Jeremy Carrette and Richard King of the 'silent takeover' of religion by the forces of the market. In their book *Selling Spirituality*, Carrette and King in fact examined the growing commercialization of religion in the form of the popular notion of spirituality as found in education, health care, counselling, business training, management theory and marketing.

Lastly, there is more qualitative research on diasporic religious communities in Western European societies. The respective literature informed by this research tends to flag the conflicts between migrant believers and their host societies, which have been caused by the visibility, in the public space, of aspects of the migrants' religiosities perceived as extreme or alien by a significant number of members of the host society. What immediately comes to mind is the 2004 ban on Muslim head scarves and Sikh turban in French schools and the 2009 ban on Minarets in Switzerland, the 2010 burqa ban in Belgium and the 2012 ban on male circumcision by the District Court of Cologne, which is meanwhile superseded by a new bill, passed by the German Supreme Court in December 2012, that keeps male circumcision legal.

Another case in point from Germany is the example of the Hindu Tamil Temple that today is located in the industrial outskirts in Hamm in Westphalia. For the festival of the Goddess Sri Kamadchi Ampal, taking place there annually in June, some 15.000 Tamil Hindus from all over Europe visit the temple. In the mid-1990s the temple was still located in a residential area. However, the procession accompanying the festival of the Goddess, during which the local surroundings were blessed, caused such irritation among the locals that the temple had to be temporary closed down and to be shifted to its present location in the industrial area with no residential atmosphere there.

In comparison to the research highlighting conflicts between diasporic religious communities and the host societies, there is a considerable lack of knowledge about success stories, that is to say, about cases where there have

not only been no conflicts between diasporic religious communities and the host societies but where there are even strong indications for harmonious relations between the former and the latter.

If you recall, the Minaret ban in Switzerland came about because it was said that minarets are so culturally alien. It is quite surprising then that culturally equally alien Buddhist temples do not seem to stir any hostilities in Switzerland. Following the futile 1959 revolt against the Chinese annexation of their homeland, scores of Tibetans fled their homeland. In the early 1960s, Switzerland offered asylum to some 2000 Tibetan refugees and also later on to other Buddhists from Sri Lanka and Thailand. The Tibetans, especially, found a congenial environment in the Swiss Alps, and their religion and culture met with a growing interest from Swiss society at large. In 1968, the Monastic Tibet Institute was founded in Rikon near Zürich, catering not only to the spiritual needs of Tibetans refugees but also to an increasing number of Westerners. A similar case in point is the Thai Buddhist Wat Srinagarindravararam in the Swiss village of Gretzenbach, which is also very conspicuous from afar because of the huge Pagoda, the central building of the temple complex.

What religion is and not is, is a highly contentious issue from the perspective of different religious traditions. Definitions by social scientists tend to be broad and inclusive, beyond what theologians tend to expect. In the book *Religion and Disputes* that I co-edited with some colleagues of the project group Legal Pluralism at my Institute, and that was published with Palgrave Macmillan this year, we defined religion as an analytic category that refers to a specific kind of *Weltanschauung* (world view) that consists, firstly, of a more or less explicit sacred cosmological order against which all phenomena are interpreted, and, secondly, an escatological order that describes how to lead a good life, and what to expect in the afterlife." This definition — and other social scientist have advanced very similar definitions — is broad enough to accommodate all the religious developments I have so far introduced here.

With respect to the legal regulation of religion in Europe, I want to state what should be obvious, namely that law is not only an instrument for conflict resolution, it also helps constituting difference by identifying sameness and alterity through the stipulation of legitimate qualities, powers and constraints of individuals and collectives. Law thereby serves as a weapon with which to mobilize or neutralize identities of self and other. Identities, including religious identities are, hence, by jurisdiction positioned in a particular way in a given socio-political field. This underscores the fact that religious identities are by necessity always enmeshed in secular, if not to say profane, power plays and concomitant identity positioning and never only a matter of subjective choice of belief.

How then to measure religiosity? Let us first take a look at the statistics we have. With regard to religious diversity, we would assume that the numbers are contingent on factors like whether a given country had colonies, if so

whether the kind of relations retained with the former colonized societies are still close or not, whether a given country has accepted asylum-seekers in large numbers compared to the size of the autochthonous population, whether a given country provides for a large number of labour migrants and their spouses and naturalised children, and—to do justice to Norris' and Inglehart's 'existential security axiom'—whether the given country still has a well-functioning welfare system. It is noteworthy, and quite surprising, though, that we do not have any exact numbers. Neither the census in Belgium nor those in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark and Spain include religion. The British census does include religion but only since 2001. And we do have some data based on Church Tax collected by the state in Germany and in Italy. In Germany we furthermore have REMID (Religion Studies Media and Information Service), an NGO in Marburg that already since the mid-1990s publishes quite reliable data on membership in church organizations.

The latest statistics date from 2013, which I can present here in a rough overview. The German population now counts almost 82 million people; the Roman Catholic Church has about 24.5 million members. There are different sub-denominations listed under Catholicism. Protestantism has a membership of a little more than 23.5 million. There are about 600,000 Orthodox, Oriental and Unitarian Christians. Judaism has 101,000 adherents. There are some 4 million Muslims in Germany, about 45,000 Hindus, and ca. 270,000 Buddhist comprising ca. 130,000 German converts and some 140,000 migrant Buddhists. Then, there are of course several New Age movements, regular Freemasonry, esoteric counselling organisations, yoga associations, and so forth.

What do these data tell us? They tell us no more and no less, how many people value, for whatever reason, membership in a given religious or spiritual community. They do not tell us anything about their religious beliefs or their religious practice, the basis — most religious people would agree — of true religiosity. In order to come to grips with these dimensions of religion, social scientists tend to include questions such as: 'How frequently do you attend religious services?' 'How frequently do you pray outside of religious services?' 'How important is religion in your daily life and so forth?' Norris and Inglehart, for example, provide statistics on the trends in religious participation. In 1981, 82% of the total population in Ireland was still participating in religious service once a week or more often, in 2001 only 25%. In 1981, still 40% of the total population in Spain was participating in religious service once a week or more often, in 2001 only 26%. In 1981, 11% of the total population in France was still participating in religious service once a week or more often, in 2001 only 8%. In 1981, still 19% of the total population in Western Germany was still participating in religious service once a week or more often, in 2001 only 16%, etc.

Participation in religious service must of course be balanced with religious prayer or meditation at home, because illness, physical handicaps, frailty, and so forth, can prevent people from participating.

It is difficult to correlate all the afore-mentioned sociological surveys let alone combine them with qualitative data. But let me once again stress here the important trends that mark religious life in Western European societies:
(i) Decline of membership in religious communities;
(ii) Pervasiveness of the 'subjective turn', even among members of religious communities;
(iii) Increase in non-institutionalized, syncretistic, alternative spirituality, emergence of new religious movements, parallel to the 'subjective turn'. There is furthermore a growth of cultural curiosity, you could say, for the other, and therefore also some interest in conversion, which — along with the increasing presence of diasporic religions — has led to an accelerated pluralisation of religious or spiritual life orientations. In short, people in Western European societies have become less visibly religious while subjective spirituality has become more pervasive.

How religiously free are people? In order to get at the degree of religious freedom (in the sense of freedom of conscience as well as freedom from religion) in Western European societies, we have to take into account the RELIGARE report, four models of state-church relations, their mixings and their variations. First of all there is the Selective Cooperation model involving conditional religious pluralism. Secondly, there is the Konkordat (concordate) model applicable to states that have signed an agreement or a treaty involving recognition and certain privileges with the churches and established religious communities. Thirdly, we have the Laïcité-model claiming a strict separation between state and religion. Fourthly, there is the State Church model applicable to states with established majority churches. But what is at issue in the relationship between the state and the religious communities living in its territory? There is first of all the issue of religious holidays. If at all, Western European states recognize only Christian holidays. Another issue is state support for religious communities in form of state salaries for priests, religious teachers, or tax benefits, and so forth. A further point of contention between the state and religious communities is state recognition of religious marriages and divorces. What immediately comes to mind in this respect is the Islamic Talaq where the husband can unilaterally divorce his wife by saying three times 'I divorce you'.

Another issue, on which we already touched upon, concerns religious identity markers at the workplace (the problem of corporate dress, space for worship during office hours, etc.). This issue frequently involves discrimination against foreign identity markers, which is also the case where religious identity markers in the public space are concerned. For instance, some German Länder (autonomous regions) prohibit teachers to wear "foreign" religious identity markers, like the Islamic veil, but the prohibition does not apply to Christian symbols. Another case in point is the Lautsi vs. Italy case, which was brought before the European Court of Human Rights. In 2011, the ECtHR ruled that the display of crucifixes in the classrooms of Italian state schools does not violate the European Convention

on Human Rights. Even in Laïcist France, bank holidays usually fall on Christian holidays.

Some major findings by the RELIGARE project involve some surprising observations, for instance, that representatives of religious majorities are not necessarily staunch defenders of the status quo, or turn a blind eye to what they also describe as an unfair situation. Members of religious minorities tend to accept their faith and the various limitations they face. They often negotiate without invoking legal equality standards. In Denmark, for instance, the chief Rabbi sends annual letters to school authorities, in which the Jewish holidays are listed together with the request not to schedule exams on those days. Secularists do not necessarily reject or downplay what they perceive as legitimate needs of religions but want to make sure that policies do not leave the non-religious holding the short end of the stick.

Socio-cultural and demographic changes in European societies show that the financing of religious and philosophical organizations poses a key challenge to constitutional arrangements and legal regulations of state support of churches as they had been elaborated in the past. A good case in point is again Germany where formal affiliation to the traditional churches is dwindling. This trend makes the collection of church tax via the state apparatus an embarrassment in terms of legal equality standards. In all ten countries investigated by the RELIGARE research teams, the state indirectly funds religious communities through tax benefits and tax exemptions for their charitable, spiritual, educational, or social activities, thereby acknowledging the fact that the religious communities do take responsibility for the larger society in different ways. With this I would like to conclude my presentation.