BOOK REVIEWS


The project RELIGARE (Religious Diversity and Secular Models in Europe) has come to an end as indicated in the very interesting book Belief, Law and Politics. What Future for a Secular Europe?, edited by Marie-Claire Foblets, Katayoun Alidadi, Jørgen S. Nielsen and Zeynep Yanasmay. This book also closes a series of publications born within the RELIGARE project, a series that contributes to the dynamic field of multidisciplinary studies of religion and society.

The editors of the book have chosen to take the final report of the project as the point of departure and have invited researchers from various disciplines to reflect and react upon the report. The result is interesting and inspiring, giving the reader a lot of food for thought. This project is built around law and politics, with a strong emphasis on sociological work and interviews, and aims at drawing conclusions that can serve with policy recommendations in the four fields that are studied; Employment, Family Law, Access to and Use of Public Spaces and State Support Mechanisms. As I am a researcher having a background in law, I recognize much of the mild and nuanced criticism that is put forth by for example Prof. Koen Lemmens and Dr Frédérique Ast. It is obvious that the remarks done by the invited commentators are engaging and potential points of departures for new research.

So what can one learn from the reactions put forth by the commentators and, of course, from the final report as such? A major lesson relates to how different fields with their own respective traditions can work together. When reading the book, it thus becomes clear that multidisciplinary research can be problematized from (at least) two points of view. First is the matter of how we actually do research together. Would it, with current attitudes and methodological understanding, at all be possible to attain a level of true interdisciplinary research that the existence of religion in today’s society demands? And second, one should ask how we could improve our ways of working together. As is underlined in the Report, the emergence of larger research programmes put forth new demands, especially when combining studies at the national as well as at the European level. In this book, it becomes clear that it has not been an easy task to combine the different disciplines. It is foremost in the recommendations that the reader can sense the presence of several researchers and different disciplines interacting and starting to "melt" their results together.

And this is also where I believe that we should start practising to think beyond our usual habits. Being a lawyer, I know that the tradition in my field to closely respect and follow the legal tradition of respecting the sources of law and the hierarchy of norms is not easy to leave and I would never recommend such behaviour. (That could lead to the assumption that religious freedom is a trump card to be used in a way that neglects
the delicate balancing that the simultaneous and sometimes interdependent realization of fundamental rights at local, national and European levels is today. To study religious matters being convinced of religion as a trump or as something that always is good would hinder us from finding the relevant questions and issues that need to be analysed.) But, it would be a great achievement to have a certain core level of each and every discipline that is involved so that at least layers of understanding from every field could be present and used in order to mirror the results from the other fields. That demands, however, that researchers are willing to work together in new ways which in turn leads to methodological considerations that are not that easy to solve. I do believe that the larger multidisciplinary research programmes should invest even more in studying the methodological aspects as these seem to increase in the future. More attention to the research processes could potentially also give better and/or clearer results that would be more accessible to and practical for social policy experts.

For all of us devoted to interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and comparative research the anthology *Belief, Law and Politics. What Future for a Secular Europe?*, is a very inspiring book. It also shows how fruitful it is to ask others to closely follow the research performed in a multidisciplinary setting and in order to manage the task of studying religion in a true multidisciplinary way, it seems to be a good idea to invite "the others" to mirror the results as they are found. This final report opens accordingly up for new great research questions and shows that even though many large scaled research programmes have started the last decade, there is still room for more multi and interdisciplinary research in the field of religion.

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This is a book whose strength is in the empirical parts more than on the conceptual level. It is written in Norwegian for Norwegians. This is somewhat surprising since the background is a Nordic project which 2009–2014 was led by sociologists at the Kifo Centre for Church, Religion and Worldview Research in Oslo, Norway. Inger Furseth was the project director of the program which involved many researchers from all five Nordic countries. NOREL was a comparative study about religion in the public sphere in the shape of a Nordic Collaborative Project (NORDCORP). It was financed by the Nordic governments (NOS-HS). The purpose was to present a follow-up of an earlier program which had in 1985 published "Religiøs förändring i Norden 1930–1980" (Religious change in the Nordic countries
1930–1980) and in 1987 "Religion och kyrka i fem nordiska städer 1930–1980" (Religion and church in five Nordic cities 1930–1980). The earlier research had received Nordic funding (NOS-S) and was led by professor Göran Gustafsson from Sweden. Although secularization theory in those days had a strong position in the sociology of religion, the Gustafsson project chose a theoretical frame that did not automatically see all changes in the social position of religion as proof of religious decline. Rather, it held that the secularization paradigm had made social sciences blind to the reality of existing religion and its role in society. The secularization paradigm was deeply rooted in sociological theory about modernization and social change. The follow-up project which started in 2009 took place in a period where several known sociologists of religion no longer claimed to believe in the decline of religion but in its new visibility due to globalization, massive migration, the Islamic revival and the explosion of internet-based media communities. Another difference between the CNRP and the NOREL project was that the latter is closely attached to the centers for church research that had been established in the meantime close to the Lutheran majority churches. The theoretical frame for NOREL has been "post-secularism" based on Habermas’s ideas about the role of religion in public communication, supplemented with more outspoken sociologists who propagated a "return" of religion.

The NOREL project chose to study some of the same public areas as the earlier project: State and religion, politics and media, while religion in civil society was a new perspective. The editor, Inger Furseth, has authored the introduction and the summarizing chapter as well as presented the theoretical frame for the common research problem. The authors of the empirical chapters seem, on the other hand, to have worked quite independently of the general frame emphasizing religious changes that occurred in the Norwegian state and in politics, media, and civil society, primarily between 1988 and 2008. But why a book about Norway presented in Norwegian instead of the promised Nordic results? The fate of the comparative Nordic report is not revealed to the reader. It is only said that such a book will come. A lesson from the previous Nordic project (CNRP) was the five countries share many similarities but also have national idiosyncracies bound to history and national developments before and during modernization. Northerners from different countries usually understand each other fine as individuals but they do not easily understand why the institutional arrangements create widely different paths for the religious changes. The reviewed work does not easily invite readers from other countries. Matters that are taken for granted by Norwegians remain puzzles to foreigners. Such examples are the lengthy process towards separation of church and state, which led to separation as late as 2012, the government dependency of religious and organized life-view groups for economic support, including the Church of Norway, the specific "religious" position of the secular Norwegian Humanist Association (Human-Etisk Forbund) etc. Such information is absent while the publication focuses on indicators of the public position of religion in the last thirty years. It is likely that contextual interpretations would have been helpful also to the presumed Norwegians readers. Some background and a sense of historical continuity is mainly given in chapter four in which the theologian Ulla Schmidt reports about changes in the relations between the Church of Norway and the state. Two thirds of the Norwegians belong to this church in spite of a long period of individual religious freedom. The Church of Norway is in the book often treated as any other
life-view community, but is of course present more widely in individual and collective Norwegian life than any other religious group in civil society today.

The chapter on religion in politics is written by Pål Ketil Botvar and Sunniva E. Holberg, religion in media by Knut Lundby and Ann Kristin Gresaker and the chapter on civil society, restricted to a survey among leaders of belief and life-view organization by Inger Furseth, Pål Repstad, Sivert Skålval Urstad and Ole-Ervin Utaker. The composition of writers indicates that the publication has helped to educate the coming generation of Norwegian sociologists of religion. The detailed empirical results sometimes give valuable information but are interesting mainly to experts in the same fields. For many readers it may be sufficient to read the introduction and the summarizing and discussing chapter by Furseth. In the final analysis there was little support for the idea about a post-secular turn or the return of religion, which in fact had never gone away. "Religion" is still a rather peripheral issue in the common public sphere. This result may be an indication of the soundness of the scientific methods used. Continuity is even today more typical of public religion in Norway than drastic changes. The disentangling of the old state church and the state has continued and the process is not finished. Also the establishment of new religions in the wake of weakening traditions, religious freedom, immigration, and the increasing presence of Islam, are processes that will have effects in the long run but are not at all restricted to Norway. The same processes are at work in the other Nordic countries. Norway is due to the national limitations of this book described as more unique than it is when it comes to religious change. A Nordic comparative publication from NOREL is urgently needed.

The hypothesis about society becoming post-secular in a general sense was not confirmed and probably was not well motivated even at the beginning of the project. It is somewhat surprising considering the intellectual heritage of sociological theorizing about socio-religious change.

Other conceptual choices that may call on objections is the definition of "religion". Are writings on astrology in some magazines really a question about religion? In what ways are the Norwegian "belief-and life-view groups" religious and in the same way as in the great world religions? It is not only from the point of sociology of religion that the lack of theoretical depth is disturbing. The concept civil society has in European history had many interpretations and has more often than not been used for ideological and political purposes. Moreover, actors in civil society in Norway and other Western countries are usually engaged in politics locally and nationally, they use the media of their choice and they are the citizens of a state. Nothing can stop actors in civil society from engaging in politics or in religion, voting in elections and taking part of any media they want. Thus civil society remains a diffuse descriptive term in the book. It is of course too late to criticize NOREL now, but the strength of this Norwegian book lies in the empirical chapters, which have restricted and precise goals. And religion is still there to study for sociologists.

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This volume sets out to explore the historical relationship between religion, worldviews and economic development and growth in Norway from the early 1800s to approximately the 1970s. The volume opens with a general introduction by the editor, Bjørg Seland, that outlines the main theme of the volume and provides a brief summary of its eight individual chapters. As is stated in the introduction, the volume generally aims to shed light on the question as to whether or not religion and religiously derived values might play a role in generating economic growth, or whether the reverse instead might be the case. While each chapter in some way or other addresses this general question, they are also intended to stand on their own as independent chapters.

The volume is divided up into two main parts, with the first part containing contributions focusing mainly on the relationship between religion and economic arrangements and practice in Norway in the 1800s and the second part mainly containing chapters focusing on various relationships between religiously motivated and guided values and economic practice in the 1900s. As such, the volume is strongly focused on a Norwegian historical context and mainly includes contributions by history scholars. The volume is therefore primarily intended for a Norwegian readership interested in pre-1950s relationships between religion and economics in a Norwegian context. The general introduction does, however, also situate the volume as a whole in relation to a broader interdisciplinary research field on religion, economics and political economy, engaging in particular with Max Weber’s work on the Protestant ethic.

The first actual chapter of the volume by Ole Riis provides a useful general historical overview of central themes in the area of religion and political economy. In addition to providing more detailed accounts of the work of influential early theorists such as Adam Smith and Weber, Riis also includes a more detailed discussion of the impact of the Protestant reformers on both contemporary and later political economic thought in the West. Riis then goes on to explore the character of the present-day global capitalist financial system, arguing for the urgency of rethinking its ethical foundations following repeated economic crises during past decades. Riis’ chapter clearly stands out from the others in that it also explores the relationship between religion and economics in a present-day context. As such, it is also the chapter that is most likely to attract the interest of a broader readership.

The second chapter by Ola Hommingdal Grytten explores the economic and religious activities of the Pietist lay-minister and entrepreneur Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824)—a central figure in the Norwegian industrialization process. This is followed by an analytically elegant chapter by Knut Dørum, focusing on the tensions that arose in the encounter between traditional communitarian values and the new values that were gradually ushered in by accelerating economic growth and development in Norway in the 1800s. The following chapter by Bjørg Seland explores the relationship between economic and religious activities in the life of industrial entrepreneur T.A. Mørland on the basis of an analysis of the writings of Mørland himself. As such, the chapter essentially provides a biographical "personal-portrait"-type of case study of one particular,
although both economically and religiously influential, historical individual. For his chapter, Oval Arild Abrahamsen explores the "myth" of the "southern Christian shipping entrepreneur", accounting for the strong connections between many successful shipping entrepreneurs and free-church circles in first half of the 1900s.

The second part of the volume opens with Andreas Hompland’s chapter on class struggle and the clash of values that occurred between industrial workers and labor unions on the one hand and capitalist proponents of a Christian work ethic on the other hand in relation to a workers strike in Kvinesdal in 1925. Continuing on the theme of class struggle, the following chapter by Nils M. Justvik in its turn focuses on the relationship between the labor movement and the free-church communities in two industrial towns in the southern Agder-region during the first part of the 1900s. The final chapter of the volume by Ingunn Folkestad Breistein also provides a biographical account of the economic dimensions of the missionary activities of Annie Skau in China and later in Hong Kong throughout the larger part of the 1900s in light of her own personal diaries and letters.

The contributions to the volume are all largely historical descriptive in character. While this suits the primary disciplinary anchoring of the volume as a whole, readers from other disciplinary backgrounds might at times wish for the contributions to engage with both past and present theorizing on religion and political economy in more detail. An assessment of an edited volume of this type will always partly amount to an assessment of the success by which the editor has been able to compile an interesting whole through the inclusion of chapters that, while standing on their own, also center on the same general theme and tie into and complement each other. *Gud og Mammon* is indeed a carefully compiled volume in this regard. The chapters are all generally well-written and cover a broad range of phenomena and cases which all clearly fit the general theme of volume. Given its strong historical focus, with the exception of Riis’ chapter, it comes as no surprise that the contributions that include some discussion on religion and general political economic thought all mostly draw on the work of Weber. When it comes to discussions on the protestant work ethic, there is thus considerable overlap between many of the chapters. In addition to a stronger focus on theoretical perspectives, it might also have been useful to include at least one chapter focusing on more recent developments such as, for example, the impact of the global proliferation of neoliberal ideologies and policies and the increasing push towards the privatization and outsourcing of public services. That said, the volume as a whole will surely be of interest to its primary, although presumably quite limited readership.

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BOOKS RECEIVED


