
It is an event in the Nordic RE milieu every time a scientific publication of the magnitude of Heidi Leganger-Krogstad’s book *The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Education* is published. Leganger-Krogstad is a professor of religious education at the Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo, and the book is a slightly revised version of her doctoral thesis from 2009. Since over half of the book consists of a total of nine previously published articles, it could have been a fragmented work; however, this is not the case due to a thorough and convincing «packaging» of these articles in the form of a lengthy introductory chapter and a final discussion section, where the main research questions are convincingly concluded. Leganger-Krogstad’s research field is thus simultaneously contextual and intercultural religious education, and the book deals with the role of religion in the understanding of the multicultural reality of today’s Norwegian school. Leganger-Krogstad’s main objective is to «explore the religious dimension in intercultural education.» The dissertation is theoretically and article based, where the following research questions are answered: (1) How can cultural competence in the worldview differences embedded in religion contribute to intercultural education in school and two dialogues in RE? and (2) On what terms can a contextual religious education in Norway be developed?

One of her most important results obtained from extensive empirical evidence is that religion plays a dual role in school as both a basis for a great number of differences in thought patterns and perceptions of reality and contributor to mutual understanding and dialogue across religious and hence cultural divides.

Unlike most other previous research completed in the field, Leganger-Krogstad has not focused on Islam and the multicultural diversity which may in particular be found in the country’s large cities. Instead, she focuses on the «old» cultural minorities, the Sami and the Kven. Previously, the author held a position at Finnmark University College in the very northern part of Norway, and received several research results from her studies of the cultural and religious challenges found in this part of Norway. Her research shows that Norwegian schools operate with a form of tacit knowledge as specified in a given Western reality; moreover, they convey certain values on this basis, unless these values are made explicit to students and parents alike. Thus, it may be difficult to find room for a basic acceptance of diversity which, according to Leganger-Krogstad, is a prerequisite for understanding and dialogue across cultural affiliation. She argues in this connection that the management of religious and cultural differences is something that belongs to the curriculum on a collective level and not merely at the individual level. This is also due to the fact that differences cannot be regarded as just individual differences, but variations that emerge at the group level in society. Herein lies a challenge for the Norwegian school system which is only taken seriously to a minor degree, according to Leganger-Krogstad’ research. However,
and somewhat surprisingly, she neither elaborates upon nor discusses various ways of dealing with these differences and this diversity in light of multicultural theory. Rather, the multiculturalist position is located precisely in group thinking and promotion of cultural and religious differences in society. Unfortunately, it is at times difficult to understand Leganger-Krogstad’s positions. For example, while she reveals the tacit knowledge inherent in the culturally hegemonic Norwegian public school (so that students and parents from minority backgrounds will gain a better understanding of this knowledge), she does not thoroughly discuss the limitations of the cultural traits which should be acceptable in Norwegian school and which should not be there.

In her concluding remarks, Leganger-Krogstad states that «Cultural differences are often explained by historical tradition, and intercultural understanding is a knowledge-based attitude and ethos. Education should provide knowledge about religions’ and worldviews’ traditions as well as the diversity found within each of them.» My guess is that several people working at different levels in the educational system would nod affirmatively to this statement, as the internal diversity of the various religious and ethical traditions tends to disappear in both textbook representations and other books. This omission means that the representatives of these traditions recognize neither their own tradition nor what religion means to them on a personal level. However, it is important to avoid a static understanding of the concept of culture, where different cultures are simply understood as a form of columns lined up next to each other; indeed, cultural and religious diversity is more complex than this oversimplification. Leganger-Krogstad’s book contributes to the reader’s gaining a wider understanding of how the various multicultural challenges should be handled in the contemporary Norwegian school system. The empirical material presented in this thesis is extensive, and the theoretical discussion provides readers with new, relevant perspectives on a challenging research field. Overall, Leganger-Krogstad’s book provides much needed knowledge in religion research.

Olav Hovdelien
Associate Professor, PhD
Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences
Norway


This small book contains the plenary lectures and responses from the 10th Nordic Conference on Religious Education (NCRE) held at Umeå University in Sweden in 2009. The reviewer was a participant at Umeå and has read the book with a high level of interest. So, in what ways and why is the book – and the conference – relevant to a wider group of readers? Naturally, the edited version shows slight variations from the conference program. The sequencing of the published contributions is interesting not least because it gives the final voice to a South African socially active education scholar.
The book has three main parts. The first, called Societal Changes Posing New Questions, opens with a historical exploration and explanation of the Nordic democracies by the Swedish education researcher, Erik Amnå. Underlining the degree of homogeneity in these societies during their development into modern nation-states, Amnå states some obvious current challenges of learning for the Nordic democracies due to growing plurality as a result of economic and cultural globalization processes. Using a particular case as an example – the question of possible Swedish training of imams – Amnå maintains the present impartiality of the state: Sweden provides a program of tertiary education within its public academic institutions which faith organizations are free to make use of or not. Amnå’s respondent is South African Catherine A. Odora Hoppers, whom the reviewer remembers as being the most spirited speaker at the conference.

As well as responding to Amnå, Odora Hoppers gave a plenary lecture which constitutes the book’s third main part, called Towards the Future. Odora Hopper’s texts may be read as two sections of one argumentative strategy. She blames the colonizing Western powers for the present societal problems in Africa. Further, she does not see the export of Western liberal democracy as the solution for developing countries. Instead, she offers us the African Ubuntu-philosophy which leaders as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu drew on when contributing to providing a legal basis for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission following South Africa’s birth as a nation liberated from apartheid: Ubuntu goes ‘beyond vengeance’, it is not based on the competitive rationality of the individual, but on the building of community and society with hope and actions for reparation and therapeutic wholeness.

Whilst more voices from South Africa are represented in the book, I turn to the contribution made by the gender and international development specialist on education, Madeleine Arnot, working in Cambridge, UK. Her text, called Global Citizenship Education and Equality: Gendered Hegemonies, Tensions and a Global Ethic, takes as a starting point curriculum development in culturally diverse societies, focusing on values of empathy and global solidarity. Arnot is quite clear in her statements about male hegemonic power. Her analyses of the technological, juridical, cultural and personal changes taking place within the intimate sphere of sexuality, partnership and reproduction are interesting and convincing. With the onset of cultural globalization, such changes in ‘the North’ soon influence ‘the South’. Arnot’s line of argument regarding the ‘cultural export’ from North to South shows similarities with the voice of Odora Hoppers. Both are conscious about the importance of perspective. However, Arnot is more forceful when it comes to presenting discursive contributions from ‘third world women’. The voices she presents, some pessimistic and others more optimistic, regarding ‘gendered ethics for global citizen education’, seem trustworthy. Odora Hoppers’ discussion is less convincing due to simplification. She hardly listens to the particular Northern European voice (Amnå) but uses generalizing terms such as ‘liberal democracy’.

The book’s second main part, Religious and Moral Education in Changing Societies, contains the lectures by John Valk, Sven Hartman and Christo Lombard. These authors present and compare curriculum development at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education in Canada, Sweden and South Africa (and Namibia), respectively. Sven Hartman’s contribution covers his empirical research results since the 1970s and interpretive
comparative reflections showing his ‘trajectory’ within the Nordic community of researchers on religious education and values. In Hartman’s opinion the curriculum terms of ‘vital question’ (Swedish: *livsfråga*) and dialogue are central. There are no responses to the plenary lectures placed in the second and third part of the book.

Preceding the three main parts are two more texts, a foreword by the British religious education scholar, Robert Jackson, and an introduction by the two editors. Both texts, regardless of overlap, are well worth reading because they provide a historical and contemporary contextual framework for understanding and evaluating the contributions. Jackson, being the leader of a successful team of religious education researchers at the University of Warwick, UK, and a long-standing ‘patron’ for his Nordic colleagues, emphasizes the fact that the Umeå session represents an international broadening of the NCREs, which go back to 1977, because of its choice of theme and its plenary contributors and audience (including a conference website in English).

I agree with Jackson that religious education research needs to be globally oriented, and I appreciate the emphasis on global ethics regarding social justice and gender questions which the editors (who with a third colleague were co-responsible for the conference) chose. Quite often, Northern and European religious education research has concentrated on the challenges for religious education as a school subject because of secularization processes and increasing religious and worldview diversity. Such themes were not totally lacking at the session in Umeå. They are present in the second part of the book as well as in the plenary lecture given by the researcher of religious and Islamic studies, Dan-Paul Jouza, who from 2006 to 2009 was a project leader in Germany of the REDCo-project. The complete title of this project is *Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries*, including religious education researchers from eight European countries and coordinated by Wolfram Weisse, professor of religious education at the University of Hamburg. Jouza’s text in the book is strictly empirical, referring more to the quantitative and less to the qualitative data of the project. He has chosen to highlight the data provided by Muslim students in comparison with Christian students and students of no religion. One of Jouza’s conclusions is that Muslim students tend to consider religion more important in their lives as well as in school and society in general. In his response, Norwegian researcher Geir Skeie (also a REDCo-member) has given interesting interpretations of Jouza’s findings, emphasizing the Norwegian data and primarily applying approaches in the sociology of religion. Findings and discussions from the REDCo-project certainly deserve a place in the first part of the book.

This book is important and relevant to researchers and lecturers in several fields of the social sciences and humanities. It reminds those of us working in religious education that we have global responsibilities. The book is a gold mine of references and offers insight which can be drawn upon in further research and practical work. It also gives us an opportunity to reflect on choices which have to be made when arranging academic conferences. Personally, I would have preferred that the plenaries had included another lecture emphasizing particular social justice challenges in our Northern schools where the relevance of religious education could have been discussed. However, I would like to congratulate Karin Sporre and Jan Mannberg for getting this collection of lectures and responses published within a year after the con-
ference. It is also impressive that by 2010 a selection of the collegial papers from the conference, edited by K. Sporre and G. Svedberg, were available on the Internet (http://www.use.umu.se/digitalAssets/49/49226_working-papers-in-no7rev.pdf).

Elisabet Haakedal
Professor in Religious Education, PhD
Department of Religion, Philosophy and History
University of Agder, Norway


No book has been more influential in the USA than the Bible. Its unprecedented impact on American history and culture and its fundamental importance to the lives of millions of Americans is widely known and scientifically discussed, with Setzer’s and Shefferman’s anthology The Bible and America (2011) as a new and different contribution. Its novelty lies primarily in the broad display of primary sources from the 17th century to the present, covering a wide range of topics where the Bible has played and still plays an important role in the USA. Compared with the valuable, but voluminous, six-part series The Bible in American Culture (1982–88), this book is more accessible to many readers, and compared with the classical The Bible in America: Essays on Cultural History (1982), it also covers recent decades and thus new topics and research.

The anthology is based on three general assumptions that are fairly uncontroversial: the ubiquity of the Bible in American culture and history, the mixed use of Biblical interpretation by different groups, and the predominance of Protestant and Puritan interpretations of it. The structure of the book and the selection of the primary sources are derived from these assumptions that safeguard diversity, but also limit it to a certain extent, giving priority to the Christian tradition and not the Jewish one, and to traditions originating from Protestantism rather than from Catholicism or Orthodoxy. Due to the dominant historical approach that characterizes the presentation, however, this is a natural choice.

The introductory chapter discusses the intriguing «American biblical paradox», stating that the USA is a secular republic with a public discourse heavily influenced by biblical ideas and language, and the characteristic «American exceptionalism», the idea that America fulfills the biblical prophesies as a chosen people, establishing the promised New World on earth. These two phenomena are explored in different ways throughout the book.

The anthology is organized in five chapters, each presenting fields of activity in the USA where the influence of the Bible is highly visible; in missionary work, civic matters and social debates, among different minorities and in artistic expression. Each chapter starts with a short introduction summing up important aspects of the primary sources that, mostly in chronological order, constitute the bulk of the chapters and closes them. The combination of introductions and primary sources makes the book useful to two target groups, readers looking for a brief and general introduction to the topic «the Bible in America», and readers who want to study the topic more closely. The first group can concentrate on the introduc-
tions, and the second group can read the whole book. To many European readers being less familiar with American history and the authors of the primary sources than most American readers, it is a good option to read the introductions in combination with some of the primary sources. Hence the anthology may serve as a kind of reference book.

The first chapter discusses how and why the Bible has become widely spread in the USA. The second addresses the role of the Bible in American political life, focusing on the abovementioned «American biblical paradox». The third chapter illustrates how the Bible has been used in great American public debates on slavery, racial segregation, evolution, feminism and sexuality. The fourth chapter shows how the Bible is used in new ways by people who reject traditional interpretations and are trying to restore its relevance by «reading in the margins», thus discovering the «true» words of God - often behind the lexical words. Some readers do this by focusing on how marginalized people are treated in the Bible. Others introduce a prophetic corrective to traditional interpretations, whilst a third group argues that the Bible has been misunderstood to such an extent that withdrawal from society is necessary. This chapter contains among others texts written by gays, Pentecostals, Shakers, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. The fifth and last chapter shows how artists have been inspired by and used the Bible. This chapter has pictures as primary sources as well as texts.

All in all, the anthology provides an impressive amount of varied primary sources as well as brief yet instructive introductions. Each chapter also has a comprehensive reading list, suggesting further research. While it lacks a concluding chapter, I regard the book as a valuable source for anyone wanting to study biblical influence on American culture, both current and past.

Helje Kringlebotn Sødal  
Professor, PhD  
Department of Religion, History and Philosophy  
University of Agder, Norway


To begin with the conclusion: this book on religious leaders in Norwegian religious communities is a truly good book. It is well written, well edited and filled with information, analysis and interpretations of different patterns of authority within the Norwegian religious landscape. I greatly enjoyed reading it. It begins with a fairly long introduction (19 pages) which walks the reader through discussions on authority (Weber and Sørhaug), religion and secularization in Western Europe (mostly Grace Davie) and capital (from Bourdieu). The presentation of the perspectives consistently includes references to the eleven chapters in the book: when rational-legal authority is discussed, we are told that this kind of authority is particularly relevant in relation to the Catholic Church as discussed in the chapter by Else-Britt Nilsen and so on. The introduction not only works
Chapter 1 by Cora Alexa Døving concerns authority among Sunni Muslims in Norway. The authors have been given the freedom to frame their chapter the way they deem relevant for their empirical case, and Cora Alexa Døving perhaps unsurprisingly begins by discussing the representation of the imam in the press. The image of the imam painted by the press is ambiguous: he is held responsible for his followers’ set of problems but is simultaneously expected to be their ultimately problem-solver. Working as a stepping stone to the often discussed question of how the position of the imam is changing in the West, Døving presents the weekly schedules of six Norwegian imams. After presenting results from a pilot study of 19 ‘ordinary’ Muslims, she concludes that the so-called new Islamic leaders, whose authority is founded by their role in the media (particularly the Internet), she suggests that the authority of the imam appears to have decreased as access to ‘dogmatic’ authority is democratized and individualized; however, it may have increased in relation to ritual leadership.

Chapter 2 on Shia Muslims is written by Kari Vogt. While discussions on Muslims in Europe often take little notice of Shia Muslims, the differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims are significant, and, regarding issues of authority, quite fundamental. Shia Muslims are expected to follow a marja, a global Shia authority often located in Iran or Iraq. The local imam (maulana) is in this way a mediator to the marja, offering advice in relation to the individual’s choice of marja and the Risala (message) of that marja. As Vogt emphasizes, there are changes taking place in the West, but these changes are different, relating for instance to the payment of Khums (religious tax paid by Shia Muslims on top of zakat). For instance, some marjas leave the entire Khums with the local mosques, while others leave 30 or 50 percent.

Chapter 3 by Berit Thorbjørnsrud is a fascinating description of authority within the Orthodox Church in Norway. Life in diaspora is challenging to authority due to the existence of parallel jurisdictions within the same geographical area (six in Norway: Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Rumanian and two referring to the patriarch of Constantinople). This situation tends to lead to conflict rather than cooperation. Norwegian laws on religious organizations also cause problems. In a situation of conflict, the priest is powerless, as a new board cannot be elected prematurely according to Norwegian law. Failure to comply means public funding will cease. Moreover, the priest’s authority within the Orthodox tradition is fragile; while they are believed to carry on the work of Christ, the question may quickly arise whether the priest is in fact worthy of this immense responsibility.

The Catholic Church is discussed in Chapter 4 by Else-Britt Nilsen. The Catholic Church has witnessed an enormous growth in the last decades, an increase which has simultaneously changed it from being a relatively homogenous religious organization with a solid percentage of ethnic Norwegian members to a predominantly immigrant-based and very diverse church. Issues of authority refer not only to general trends of individualization and secularization but also to conflicts between a democratically elected board and the priest. The ambivalence surrounding authority is evident in Church issues relating to the Eucharist. There are many Catholics living a life in conflict with official Catholic doctrine,
but can and will their priest dare to publically deny communion to anyone unless they are obviously unfit (for instance, drunk) to receive it? Though the word ‘powerlessness’ is not something the interviewed priests would generally use, they express a good amount of frustration connected to the challenge of being and representing religious authority in a late modern society.

Chapter 5 is by Pål Repstad and covers issues of authority among Pentecostals in Norway. Unlike the Catholic Church problems of authority are innate in Pentecostalism due to its emphasis on the importance of subjective experiences; at the same time, this church emphasizes strong leadership. This topic has become even more controversial due to Pentecostalism’s typically being a religion of difference, a religion with an emphasis on the differences between the creator and the created, and as such it often upholds strict codes of behavior. Pentecostalism has moved from having a sectarian position to a more denominational stand, becoming more active in ecumenical and leadership areas. It has also become more enlightened in general, a development which tends to lead to relaxation of strict norms, something which may again change the balance of different authoritarian forces.

Smiths V enner, or ‘Friends of Smith’, is discussed in Chapter 6 by Steinar Moe. Smiths V enner is a Christian movement founded in Norway at the turn of the century which spread worldwide from the 1930s to the 1970s. It is currently present in 65 countries and has 30–35,000 followers. It has been a firm belief in Smiths V enner that it is not a church or any manmade organization, but rather a free association of friends, a spiritual brotherhood. Despite this idea a comprehensive organization has evolved which is more connected to personal authority than in many of the other cases presented in the book.

Chapter 7 on Judaism in Norway by Nora Stene is called ‘Authority and its Limits’. Initially, this title is surprising: The rabbi of the Oslo Synagogue answers the question of whether religious leaders are included in Norwegian society affirmatively. There is plenty of room for religion in the public sphere (including a very positive press), and the rabbi’s services are requested among members of the Jewish congregation. Digging deeper into this matter, Stene finds that individuals make requests of the rabbi primarily when seeking his knowledge of Jewish law and not family counseling or any kind of social work to any great degree. The direct influence of the rabbi on the members’ lifestyle is therefore limited, something which is perhaps demonstrated by the concept of vicarious religiosity: The orthodox rabbi upholds the status of being a Jewish orthodox congregation on the on behalf of a less strictly observant membership.

One central aspect of the understanding of authority and leadership among Sikhs in Norway, as discussed by Vilde Reichelt in Chapter 8, is that Sikhism encompasses strong ideas of egalitarianism. This has, however, not prevented authority structures to develop. One particular aspect of this is the relationship to leadership in Amritsar, the authority of which is questioned in youthful Internet communities in ways similar to how young Muslims debate authority.

Next, authority among Hindu congregations in Norway is discussed in Chapter 9 by Knut Jacobsen. According to Hindu tradition, Brahmins are the mediators between humans and gods. They know the language of the gods and bring wishes and requests from average people to the gods. This understanding of religious competence is not shared by Norwegian authorities, who require that Brahmins have institutionalized knowledge (for instance, pos-
sessing a master’s degree) in order to issue work visas to them. These different understandings of religious expertise have led to a true crisis of authority among Hindus in Norway, as it complicates their recruitment of Brahmns enormously.

The problems of the Church of Norway, as described in Chapter 10 by Jan-Olav Henriksen, are in many ways different from the issues covered in the other chapters. Being a majority religion, it is not so much the government’s lack of a good understanding of structures of religious authority which poses a threat to religious authority for the Church of Norway but more the fact that the foundation of power within the Church itself is diffuse and widely distributed. For instance, a certain amount of authority is invested in its bishops, some in its different councils, some at the local and some at the national level. The era of the ‘big chiefs’ (strong leaders within the church) is over, although the media to some extent continues to attribute a great deal of power to its bishops. More than any of the other chapters, Henriksen’s writing relates the general threat made to authority posed by individualization and secularization.

Religious dialogue is the topic of the final chapter by Oddbjørn Leirvik. Emphasis is on how certain developments - for instance, the newly established cooperation between Christians and Muslims in the Kontaktgruppa as well as a new educational initiative for religious leaders - have contributed to creating a common professional identity among Norwegian religious leaders. Regarded from a power perspective the new relations translate into the need for religious leaders to create alliances in an unpredictable and everchanging pluralistic society.

The aim of the book is to contribute to the academic study of religion as well as to the public debate on religious leaders. While this always represents a challenge, the book appears highly successful in this endeavor. This is, however, probably related to my above-mentioned remark I have regarding the book, namely the fact that it is not written in English. The usage of ‘local’ languages is almost the rule in publications on religion in European societies, something which strongly hinders comparisons as well as developments of theories on religion in Europe. My suggestion to the editors is therefore that they write up the book’s conclusions as an English-language article. This will also allow the differences and similarities of the various cases to appear even more clearly: While questions surrounding religious leaders and authority in late modern Europe are multidimensional, they are certainly not incomparable between different religious groups, a fact this book has clearly demonstrated.

Lene Kühle
Associate Professor in Sociology of Religion, PhD
Department of Culture and Society
Aarhus University, Denmark