

Theorizing on responses to religious pluralization

Pål Repstad

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Points of departure

- * Increasing religious pluralization in all the Nordic countries
- * Different degrees of polarization among the Nordic countries, in the media, in political life, and (possibly) on the local level
- * This opens up for comparative studies: can we explain the differences in handling religious pluralization?

Responses to religious pluralization

- * Open conflicts with elements of violence and threats
 - * Tensions, but of a verbal nature
 - * Indifference, parallel cultures and structures
 - * Active co-operation, dialogues, hybridization
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- * Often a mixed picture, e.g. differences between popular and elite level

Disciplines

- * Peace and conflict studies
 - * Converging lines of conflicts or not?
- * Media studies
 - * Enlightenment or exchanges of caricatures?
- * General sociology and social psychology:
 - * A theory of schismogenesis (Bateson/Brox)
 - * The contact hypothesis (Allport)
- * Sociology of religion: The role of religion in conflicts

A theory of schismogenesis

- * ... or how to escalate conflicts (Bateson, Ottar Brox)
- * Competition of expression = competing about who can find the strongest or most clear expression of certain established values or standpoints
- * Symbolic markings instead of testable, rational statements
- * Statements more messages to one's own camp than rational arguments directed to others
- * Compromises seen as lack of principles

The contact hypothesis

- * The social psychologist Gordon Allport (1954)
- * Premise: Conflicts are due to prejudice and negative stereotypes (book: *The nature of prejudice*)
- * Strategies: information, education, increased contact
- * Main hypothesis: The more contact, the less conflict
- * Important: Accidental contact vs. true knowledge
- * With true knowledge, stereotypes are nuances and negative attitudes dissolved

Criticism of the contact hypothesis

- * «True knowledge» is a vague term. Tautology?
- * Pettigrew: The contact hypothesis ignores macro-conditions and structural inequality/assymmetry
- * Despite weaknesses: increased contact may nuance stereotypes against minorities, and give room for new relations

Conflicts – always negative?

- * Intellectual conflicts can be enriching
- * Emotional conflicts can be damaging
- * In the empirical world, the two are often intertwined

- * Conflicts can open up for more justice and symmetry (often ethical dilemmas about ends and means: conflicts can also damage innocent people)

Religion's role in conflicts

- * In all(?) religions, a potential for raising or lowering the intensity of conflicts:
- * *With God on our side versus We're all God's children*
- * Religion's general function of legitimation and sacralization: often a conservative and differentiating function, but religion can also sacralize change and dialogue

Religion in the public sphere

- * Three ideal types:
 - * 1) A secular public sphere (may lead to marginalization and religious extremism)
 - * 2) One dominant public religion (oppression of minorities)
 - * 3) Plurality of world-views in the public sphere (Represented on what criteria? History? Numbers?)

There are religions and religions

- * Are all religions similar with respect to conflicts?
- * Huntington: Clash between civilizations
- * Bruce: Islam as a monotheistic, conflict-oriented religion (In *Religion and politics*)
- * More fruitful: Woodhead and Heelas (2000):
 - * Religions of difference
 - * Religions of humanity
 - * Spiritualities of life

Aestheticization of religion

- * A general working hypothesis in RESEP (to be modified...):
- * Religion becomes less cognitive, dogmatic, proposition, and more narrative, emotional, experiential, multimodal, symbolic, expressive

Why these changes?

- * A way of handling pluralization of world-views coming close to home (nicer to gather in common wandering than beating each other with dogmatic statements)
- * The competition thesis: Increased pluralization means increased competition, and hence, increased creativity and sensual appeal
- * A general visual or multimodal turn in society

Consequences for peaceful co-existence between religions

- * Two competing hypotheses:
- * A more sensual and expressive religion will facilitate peaceful religious co-existence, since religious people will become more open and less preoccupied with spreading one truth
- * An aestheticization of religion will weaken religious knowledge, and people may become victims of media's and some politicians' stereotypical pictures of «the others»

Why all this theorizing?

- * Seeking tools of interpretations to make sense of factors and mechanisms facilitating or hindering conflicts with a religious dimension