

Abstract of the thesis *'Rights and Values – Interpretive Repertoires in a Norwegian Debate about Religion and Governance'*

Debates about the role of religion in society and the governance of religious diversity can, at times, have the appearance of actors communicating at cross-purposes. Up until now, few studies have focused on this aspect of communication about religion. This thesis addresses how divergent understandings of religion can be an underlying factor in such debates. I have selected the consultation process related to the Report from the Norwegian Faith and Worldviews Commission in 2013 as a site for a study of this phenomenon. Applying a discursive approach, based on Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell's discursive analysis in social psychology (DASP), I investigate the language use in the consultation statements that were submitted from a broad range of stakeholders. The question I put to this documentary material is: *How do actors in the public debate articulate their positions on the governance and legislation of religion and how are these rhetorical positions connected to understandings of religion?*

The result of the discursive analysis confirms that Potter and Wetherell's concept of interpretive repertoires is useful for understanding how actors construct religion in their statements. The DASP analysis reveals that the debate is rhetorically structured through two dominant interpretive repertoires, namely 'religion as values' and 'religion as rights'. The analysis demonstrates that the use of different interpretive repertoires in the rhetorical constructions of religion is connected to, but do not entirely determine, differing positions on a range of publicly debated topics. This thesis identifies several such topics where the two main interpretive repertoires are found, and rhetorically structure the debate: the role of religion in the public sphere; the justification of the public funding of religious and worldview organisations; equal treatment and differential treatment; legislation of religious and worldview organisations and the role of the Church of Norway.

I found that when religion is articulated mainly as an individual right to religious freedom and practice, emphasis is placed on equal rights for religious and worldview minorities, neutral public institutions and a rejection of religion as a common good. Public funding of faith and worldview organisations is either rejected or accepted justified in a juridical argument for the facilitation of religious practice. In contrast, when religion is articulated as a value, it is understood as a phenomenon that contributes to the common good in society and as an integrated part of life. Public funding is supported in this understanding justified in an ideological argument of promoting the social value of religion. The community role of religion is advanced as well as the cultural dimension. Furthermore, in both the major interpretive repertoires, the constructions of

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religion are found to be closely connected to expressed attitudes towards the majority church, the Church of Norway. An acknowledgment of the existence of these interpretive repertoires and their use as discursive resources is helpful in order to understand debates over the role and recognition of religion in the public sphere.

Broadening the discussion, I draw upon Nordic and European research on the role of religion in the public sphere and on the governance and legislation of religious and worldview organisations. I discuss how the results of the analysis support or complement theoretical perspectives regarding vicarious religion and public utility, religion in public institutions, the private-public divide and religious dialogue. Furthermore, I discuss how the concept of interpretive repertoires offers an added perspective on how to compare Norwegian and European development in the legitimacy of public funding and the balancing of conflicting rights.

This thesis contributes to the field of religion in the public sphere by applying the analytic perspective of interpretive repertoires to understand underlying factors in public debates related to politics of religion. The finding of two dominant and structuring repertoires in the Norwegian debate enables alternative understandings of contested issues in this field. Furthermore, these interpretive repertoires were connected to substantial positions in a structuring, but not determining manner, which adds to their analytical value. Finally, I have made a methodological contribution in applying a discursive approach from the field of social psychology on public documents in a sociology of religion project.

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