

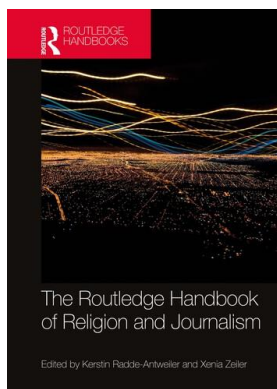
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### The negotiation of religious authorities in European journalism

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# 7

## THE NEGOTIATION OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES IN EUROPEAN JOURNALISM

*Teemu Taira*

### Introduction

The sociologist of religion Grace Davie suggested a couple of decades ago that

disproportionate numbers of those who have little or no interest in religion (in both a personal and professional sense) are present in the circles which dominate the media. Such dominance may, moreover, be one (possibly the principal) reason for the persistence of dismissive attitudes to religion in modern Europe.

*(Davie 2000, 104)*

This idea implies that the work European journalists and other media professionals do may have serious consequences for the role and status of religious institutions and religious authorities. It reiterates the more general argument that the media, with their increasing power and prominence, “constitute[s] a fundamental challenge to authority through their ubiquity and social location” (Hoover 2011, 617). Although these statements are mainly plausible and seem to echo religious people’s sentiments in Europe quite well, they offer only a partial truth about the complex relationship between religion and journalism. This chapter examines the relationship within the European context in detail, focusing on the question of authority: How is religious authority conceived, configured and negotiated in European journalism? Is it simply the case that antireligious journalists and journalism’s structural properties reinforce the decline of religious authorities or is the relationship more complex?

The problem thus defined, it is worth clarifying the key concepts: religion, authority, journalism and Europe. The aim of this chapter is not to discuss the category of religion; it simply takes the social constructionist understanding of religion as its starting point. Religion is what is constructed as such in a particular social, cultural and linguistic context. This means that whatever is an established part of culturally and linguistically bounded discourses about religion may be material for this chapter, although it should be noted that journalists are one of the most powerful actors in deciding what counts as *religious* in European societies (Taira 2013, 487–489). Authority refers to positions in which certain speakers “command not just attention but the confidence, respect, and trust of their audience, or – an important proviso – to make audiences act *as if* this were so” (Lincoln 1994, 4). Hence, religious

authority is not limited to assigned institutional roles, although these make authority structures more stable and predictable. Journalism as a term is often associated with print and, to some extent, with radio and television. This chapter concerns print but, in the current media sphere with new technologies, there is no point in limiting ourselves to the press, radio and television. A slightly more open understanding of journalism is needed so as not to exclude digital media platforms.

Another key term here is Europe, which needs two clarifications. First, the chapter will selectively discuss studies and findings from different parts of Europe; however, it cannot cover the whole of Europe equally. The emphasis is on North-West Europe, particularly Britain and the Nordic countries. Second, in times of a globalized media sphere, the boundaries of European journalism cannot constitute simply Europe geographically defined. It is impossible to think about European journalism without paying at least some attention to the *diasporic intensification* of the media – technologies that enable geographically dispersed groups to have an influence on a more focused area.

The theme of authority in religion and the media has been explored in many different ways. Many previous studies ask generally what happens to religious authority in the media age (Hoover 2017) and various scholars see the news media as detrimental to religion (Marshall, Gilbert and Ahmanson 2009) or moderately supportive of major denominations (Silk 1995, Knott, Poole and Taira 2013), while others explore the ways in which religion-related news production could be better (Buddenbaum 1998, Mitchell and Gower 2012). Other scholars ask whether there is a shift from the authority of religious institutions to media and television, in particular (Goethals 1981, 1990, Morris 1993)? Does the media institution's logic diminish religious authority (Hjarvard 2011, Hjarvard 2012, Hjarvard 2013, Hjarvard 2016) and do the media create new authorities on religious matters? Do digital and social media platforms challenge traditional religious authority by opening the space for unorthodox religious authorities or affecting the democratization of organizational structures (Eickelman and Anderson 2003, Campbell 2007, Turner 2007, Shirky 2008, Cheong 2013, Piela 2013) or do they challenge the secular media (Herbert 2011a, 2011b)?

Much of the research on religion and authority in the media context has been about the USA and/or the media sphere, in general (Clark 2012, Cheong 2017). This chapter, however, addresses Europe and journalism more specifically. It proceeds by first considering three key concepts and approaches in thinking about religion and authority in European journalism. These are the mediatization of religion, publicization of religion and mediation of religion. Together these provide a map of key debates and arguments about the topic. Two case studies will then be introduced, first focusing on Britain and second on Finland and other Nordic countries. Their implications for the key approaches will be discussed. In the concluding section, some further challenges for the examination of religious authorities in European journalism will be explored.

### Mediatization of religion

*Mediatization*, particularly as outlined by Stig Hjarvard (2011, 2012, 2013, 2016), implies that media has emerged as a semi-autonomous institution, to the logic of which other institutions have to accommodate themselves. Furthermore, the media increasingly becomes part of how other institutions operate. Mediatization of religion, therefore, means that media logic begins to direct and control religious institutions and the knowledge people have of them, and that religious institutions re-organize themselves so that they try to make use of media in their activities for their own benefit.

The main issue regarding authority is that religions, according to Hjarvard, are losing their authority for *secular* journalism: “the mediatization of religion involves the decline of institutionalized religious authorities (and the rise of media as authorities)” (Hjarvard 2012, 24). Rather than transmitting religious message, journalism is a key player in the production and framing of religious issues for a wider public. Therefore, journalism on religion is considered a secularizing force in European societies and even “an integral part of secularisation” (Hjarvard 2011, 119). The outcome of the process is “a new social and cultural condition in which the power to define and practice religion has been altered” (Hjarvard 2013, 83) and the media even take over many of the functions religious institutions and authorities used to have. Furthermore, Hjarvard (2016, 12–14) argues that the media create some space for new religious authorities beyond traditional religious institutions through popular media culture, mainly fictional films and television series, but this has very little to do with journalism as such.

While Hjarvard’s thesis is meant to be pertinent to all contexts in which modern mass media operates as semi-autonomous institution, it is assumed to apply particularly well to Nordic countries, which have exceptionally high newspapers readership, stable role for public service media and well-integrated publics (Syvertsen, Enli, Mjøs and Moe 2014).

### **Publicization of religion**

If mediatization of religion has been linked to secularization, the second key concept, *publicization* of religion, has been closer to theories that question and challenge secularization, or at least some parts of it. Publicization of religion has been outlined by David Herbert (2011a, 2011b) by refining and updating the work of José Casanova (1994).

Casanova (1994) suggested that the classic secularization thesis is in need of revision. He differentiated three moments or secularization sub-theses. First, secularization is related to differentiation of society, meaning that religious authority is in decline because religious institutions are losing control of other spheres of society. Second, secularization refers to the decline of religion according to which less people entertain religious beliefs and interest in practicing religion. The third sub-thesis argues that religion is becoming more privatized, thus exercising less authority in public matters. Casanova more or less accepts first two sub-theses but challenges the third. He suggests that rather than becoming increasingly privatized, religions are gaining more public presence as rational conversation partners in society. They do not gain authority by referring to the will of God or their own status but their authority is evaluated based on how well they convince others about their contribution to the public good. Casanova calls this process *deprivatization* of religion.

Casanova however studied mainly Catholic countries and he did not theorize the media’s role in arguing for the public role of religions. Herbert (2011a, 2011b) has focused on the media and his idea of religious publicization is a process in which religious symbols and discourses have a heightened public presence because of rapid development and dissemination of media technologies. It does not necessarily mean that religions are more vital or influential but it does create space for increased visibility. This publicization process has implications for religious authority. Contrary to the neo-secularization theory, which argues for the decline of religious authority, Herbert sees that authority is reconfigured in a more distributed form but is not necessarily diminished. The question, then, remains what kind of evidence there is for the changes in authority and how it applies to journalism.

Herbert suggests that *diasporic intensification* – the strengthening of ties across diaspora communities – made possible by new media technologies may change authority structures

within particular traditions to more popularized and democratized styles and forms. Furthermore, the changes in media technologies enable communities to mobilize religious discourses in the public sphere, which means that religion is becoming more public and possibly a relevant part of public discussion. It remains an open issue how these possible consequences affect journalism. The strength of the theorization, however, is both in offering a framework to think about the question of religious authority and journalism within the context of new media technologies and in providing one possible counter-narrative to views that assume a simple decline of religious authorities in an increasingly mediated world (see Cloete 2016, Turner 2007).

### Mediation of religion

The third key concept highlights yet another aspect in the relationships between the media and religion, in general, and journalism and religion, in particular. *Mediation* refers to a process in which some medium is used in transmitting messages. In the context of religion and the media, this concept facilitates studying how religion is mediated, but it does not theorize a long-term process of change as such. Mediation of religion takes a much more cautious stance on the relationship between religion and journalism: Rather than offering a theory, it provides “an epistemological starting point from which the formative role of media [...] as a constitutive part of religion can be acknowledged” (Meyer 2013, 13). Religion is mediated, even hyper-mediated in multiple ways, but the development of modern mass media is neither the starting point of mediation of religion nor as crucial a factor in diminishing religious authorities as the mediatization thesis implies.

The mediation perspective sees authority as neither located in some semi-autonomous media institution as such nor as reconfigured by religious actors with the help of new media technologies. Instead, authority is dispersed and fragmented so that the mediation changes and challenges both the traditional media institution (secular journalism, for example) and religious institutions. The mediation of religion approach has many proponents, but in this context, it primarily offers an alternative standpoint to the mediatization thesis as it is said to capture the “heterogeneity of transformations to which media give rise” better (Couldry 2008, 48). (See also Hoover 2011, Morgan 2011, Meyer 2013).

If the mediatization thesis argues that the media – and *secular* journalism in particular – shape the core elements and practices of religions, the mediation perspective suggests that religions have always been mediated in multiple ways. Therefore, the mediation thesis implies that mediatization overestimates the revolutionary role of the modern mass media, and its rationale is in exploring the multiple ways in which religious authority is mediated in and through journalism.

The next two sections take two case studies as examples of the theoretical standpoints introduced and examined here. Both are based on the analysis of European journalism, with a particular focus on newspapers. The first deals with British media and the second with Finnish and Nordic media.

### Negotiations of authority during the papal visit to Britain

In the study of British media portrayals of religion Knott, Poole and Taira (2013) showed that the mainstream newspaper and television coverage of religion has increased both in absolute numbers since the early 1980s and in relation to other similar themes. This increase pertains unsurprisingly to Islam but also to Christianity. Their case study of the media coverage of

the papal visit to Britain in 2010 offers a particularly illuminating example of how various voices and actors, religious or otherwise, negotiate their role and position in the media in religious matters, thus highlighting how *secular* journalism can maintain debates that involve conflicts and offer relatively strong support for religious authorities at the same time.

In September 2010, Pope Benedict XVI made a state visit to Britain. The media analysis covered all the most relevant daily newspapers, key websites and selected television news, reports and documentaries during the visit. One of the findings was how the media narrative changed from serious doubts concerning the visit and the character of the Pope to an evaluation that saw Ratzinger as a “shy and thoughtful” man, rather than a conservative and rigid “God’s rottweiler” (Knott, Poole and Taira 2013, 159). The criticism that prevailed before the visit diminished significantly after the arrival of the Pope. It did not vanish completely – the demonstrations were covered in the press – but the journalists did not show much support for the criticism, except to those who had been victims of Catholic child abuse. Furthermore, the most vocal atheist and secularist critics, such as Richard Dawkins, were ridiculed in the press.

The visual coverage told the same story. The analysis of more than 600 newspaper photographs of the Pope and other aspects of his visit, including front-page photographs of Pope with his hands spread wide and surrounded by a cheering crowd, concludes that the visual coverage supported the overriding narrative of a visit that was successful in overcoming people’s misgivings. It is true that “the media constitute an additional challenge to religious authority through their provision and mastery of images and image culture” (Hoover 2011, 618), but if this is taken as an example, the image journalism does not necessarily erode religious authority.

The media discussion was not limited to the Pope, his critics and journalists, covering a wide variety of religious authorities from many traditions (Anglicans, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, and so on). Although the Pope’s speeches did not address interfaith issues in particular, journalists highlighting the so-called *marginalization of Christianity* framed the visit as an interfaith event and supported that narrative by giving space to a variety of religious authorities who told the audience how and why the Papal visit to Britain was significant for all people of faith.

The papal visit is just an example of how religion is dealt with in British journalism, but it also highlights a number of more general aspects. Knott, Poole and Taira (2013) found that three key aspects – the marginalization of Christianity, the discourse on religious diversity and suspicion expressed toward atheism and criticism of religion – were not limited to this case, but were dominant topics in the random sample of British newspaper and television journalism around that time. Other studies seem to confirm their findings, even when disagreeing in details concerning the interpretation.

For instance, Robin Gill’s (2012) longitudinal study of religion in British newspapers shows that the overall amount of material deemed hostile in the religious content had increased. However, most of this increase pertains to Muslims in tabloids and most right wing and conservative broadsheets. The same papers are predominantly supportive of the Anglican Christianity and very critical of (what they consider left wing) atheism and secularism: “The 2011 survey of newspapers detected little or no hostility towards mainstream Christianity or to the Church of England in particular” (Gill 2012, 58).

The stereotypical and even demonizing representations of Islam in the British media have been demonstrated by many studies (Poole 2002, Poole and Richardson 2006, Petley and Richardson 2011), but it would, however, be incorrect to suggest that journalists are not supportive of religious diversity as long as it is within the boundaries of *acceptable*

*diversity*. Furthermore, some studies focus selectively on the most problematic examples rather than the overall changes in religious authorities in journalism. For instance, Petley and Richardson (2011) paint a bleak picture of the British media's Islamophobia, but their examples are almost exclusively from tabloids and conservative right-wing papers rather than more liberal or left-leaning papers.

Although it is true that journalists tend to be less religious than the rest of the population, British journalists do not embrace activist atheism and secularism (Knott, Poole and Taira 2013, Kettell 2015, Taira 2015, Aston 2017). Journalists do not necessarily favor any one religious viewpoint or hand authority to religious people, but do often reject the views expressed by celebrity atheists and secularist organizations.

In addition to *secular* news journalism, religious broadcasting is one of the key factors in producing and distributing information about religion in the public sphere. Studies dealing with British religious broadcasting (Viney 1999, Hunt 2011, Knott, Poole and Taira 2013, Wallis 2016) all point out the slightly diminished role of religion in publicly funded and commercial journalism. The main changes have been that devotional content in religious broadcasting is considered old-fashioned, although it is not entirely absent. Religious programs are rarely broadcast during primetime and the conversational style that takes religious diversity as its starting-point dominates religious broadcasting. Journalists and other media professionals lean toward an individualistic and *seekership* approach but the leaders and institutions are still in the pole position when programs are designed. Criticism of religion is rare in religious broadcasting. Overall, if anywhere in *secular* journalism, it is in the religious broadcasting slot of the publicly funded mainstream media where religious authority still has a special place. Although it covers only a small part of the journalistic field, the public broadcasting system remains the norm not only in Britain but also in Europe more generally (see Davie 2000, 105–107). However, as the example of the papal visit demonstrates, the media presence of religious authorities is not limited to religious broadcasting, religious voices being taken seriously in journalism more generally, albeit their authority is not equally distributed among different traditions.

### **Liberal – not antireligious – journalism: the case of Finland**

Another case study deals with religion in Finnish (and Nordic) media. Finland, like other Nordic countries, is a Christian but increasingly secular and religiously diverse country. The quantitative content analysis of religion in Finnish journalism (Taira 2019) shows that the number of religion-related editorials in the most popular and influential newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* was quite steady from the 1960s to the 1990s, but has almost tripled since then (from the annual average of 31 in 1988–1994 to 84 in 1996–2010). Much of the overall increase pertains to Islam. For example, the annual average of Islam-related editorials in *Helsingin Sanomat* since 1990 has been 35 whereas between 1946 and 1990 it was four. In readers' letters, the Lutheran tradition still dominates. In the 2010s, about 60% were about Lutheranism, but there is evidence of increasing diversity there too: In the 1970s and earlier the proportion of Lutheranism among all religion-related readers' letters was between 75% and 85%.

The increased visibility is not primarily about religion gaining more authority but religion often being seen as a local or global problem to be dealt with. This is often related to conservative Christian groups and Islam. However, journalism about Islam is not simply about security issues, terrorism and difficulties in assimilation. For example, images about Ramadan in the past 25 years show how journalism participates in familiarizing the



unfamiliar. The photographs in newspapers focus on food, home and the happy family. Islam is divided into *good Muslims* – those who are not fully like *us* but spice up *our* society with some exoticism – and *bad Muslims* – global terrorists who do not support *our* democratic values. Those who come to be labelled as good Finnish Muslims, are heard in the media more often than before, although they are perhaps more exposed to criticism than other religious authorities. This is probably because journalism is not supportive of any religiously conservative views. In accordance with the (relatively) liberal values prevailing in society, journalists tend to support the right of the individual to choose his or her religious tradition and its precise form. Religious conservatives may not always be satisfied with this journalism, but when the relationship between the established Lutheran church and mainstream journalism is explored, it is difficult to talk about an antireligious media.

Empirical studies focusing on recent media coverage of religion in Finland (e.g., Niemelä and Christensen 2013, Taira 2014, Sumiala, Hokka, Valaskivi and Laakso 2017) have demonstrated how representatives of the established church are regularly given space and a voice in the *secular* media, both as representatives of the Lutheran church that partly functions as a public utility and discussants concerning the common good. Thus, the Finnish case adds some critical nuance to Hjarvard's argument about mediatization being a secularizing force in society. This is evident in the analysis of overall media coverage, but it is highlighted in cases dealing with sexual minorities and female pastors. It is suggested that the media want to *liberalize* the church and in that process support the *liberal* strand of the church against atheist critics of religion while keeping its distance from religiously conservative views at the same time (Moberg and Sjö 2012, Taira 2014).

Swedish findings are similar. Alf Linderman (2017) argues that the media highlight an individual as an authority in religious matters. Religion is not frowned upon; rather, it functions *vicariously*. People are happy when others believe and perform rituals, although they may not need such services themselves, at least not regularly (Davie 2007). In the media context, this means that people want religion to be aired on public television channels and covered by news production, although they may not be interested in following the services themselves (Linderman 2017). This applies primarily to the dominant denominations in all Nordic countries. However, journalistic self-understanding is changing slowly toward the recognition of diversity of convictions and identities, including the non-religious ones. Thus, the traditional roles of the dominant churches are not taken for granted. Rather, they are constantly discussed and debated in the media. In some cases, this makes religious people more willing to engage with interfaith activities, because this may provide better resources to defend their position in mediated debates (see Liebmann 2018).

As in the British case, atheism and secularism do not get direct support from Finnish journalists. Although the general image of the non-religious journalist prevails, those journalists who often write about religion on the Finnish media are typically members of the Lutheran church and the content of their writing reflects the approach that sees religion – at least the established church – as a force for good in society. It is not uncommon that media professionals reveal secularist attitudes but, as in Britain, journalists rarely attack the established churches in concert with atheistic and secularist organizations. On those occasions, the positive aspects of the major denominations are highlighted much more commonly. In a word, journalists criticize the Lutheran church in order to make it more liberal, not in order to make people leave the church (Taira 2015, 2017a).

Most Finnish studies about religion in journalism have produced similar results. Their main message is that the Lutheran church gets its own voice heard on the media and that journalists have a largely positive attitude toward it. The Finnish Orthodox Church is less



visible on the media, but its treatment is also quite positive. This does not exclude negative reporting whenever hypocritical behavior or financial misconduct is revealed, for instance, but this is considered the normal task of journalists who write about appreciated and resourceful churches. This is also understood by the churches in that powerful institutions accept that their doings and wrongdoings are sometimes investigated minutely.

Studies about religion in journalism in other Nordic countries are largely in support of the main findings (Axner 2013, 2015, Niemelä and Christensen 2013, Lövheim and Linderman 2015, Lövheim 2017, Furseth 2018). Axner's (2013) study focuses on the presence of religious actors in Swedish newspapers, one of the main findings being that the Church of Sweden dominates and its representatives contribute to public discussion about the common good in general, not just about what concerns the church directly. Jews have a strong newspaper presence because of their long history in Sweden, whereas the presence of Muslims is often about assuring the public that they are loyal to Swedish values. Minorities – particularly those who are not easily accepted as part of society – are rarely taken seriously in more general discussion about the common good.

Lövheim and Linderman (2015, 34) sum up the question of authority such that all religious authorities tend to adjust themselves to the format and agenda of the medium in question when they enter a public mediated debate. In that sense, media and journalism have significant roles but this does not mean that they oppose all religious institutions and traditions. The majority (59 of 104) of newspaper editorials took a secularist position and wanted religious issues to remain in the private sphere beyond politics, but a significant minority expressed a more positive attitude toward the public involvement of religions, particularly in their liberal forms (see Lövheim 2017). Furthermore, Scandinavian readers expect the media to be critical of religions, but they also want the media to facilitate dialogue between religious groups in order to relieve tension (Lundby, Hjarvard, Lövheim and Jernsletten 2017). Hence, Nordic examples suggest that although journalists have moderately secularist preferences, the increased visibility of religions and religious issues have not led to an antireligious media. Rather, Nordic journalism provides space and even moderate support for liberal religious authorities, particularly for those based on dominant and established communities.

### Implications

The cases demonstrate that the thesis concerning *mediatization of religion* is a very relevant framework but its testing has not provided unambiguous support for the thesis. The decline and diversification of religious affairs correspondents is an obvious example of the re-negotiation of religious authority. They used traditionally to be pastors but such positions have been increasingly filled by journalists who just happen to be interested in writing about religion. In some cases, they belong to minority religions but even for papers with influence and prestige, hiring no one as religious affairs correspondents has become normal. This development supports the mediatization of religion thesis, but it is only a small part of the picture. Other factors cast doubts on it.

Hjarvard (2016, 14) uses the examples of mainstream newspapers where religious arguments presented by religious people are considered ineffective and outdated. Religious authorities have to use secular and rational language instead. This is certainly the case, but it narrows down the question of authority. Religious organizations and leaders have many other means to affect society through the media. Journalism requires some other justification than the will of God, but this does not mean that journalism would not accept religious leaders as relevant authorities on societal and moral matters in public discussion.

In fact, journalists tend to support the role and status of established churches, often writing approvingly about religiosity, and religious leaders are heard in the media. There are forms of cooperation and areas of agreement between religious authorities and journalists that should be taken into account, rather than focusing on the absence or ineffectiveness of religious arguments (narrowly understood) as such.

Although authorities of religious institutions and groups are changing, their strategies and tactics based on the media's ability to deliver the information about religion, the journalistic content is far from hostile toward religion as a whole. Furthermore, those who criticize religions and try to diminish its authority do not get much support from journalists where the dominant denominations are targeted. Thus, the assumed theoretical connection between mediatization and secularization needs qualification. Journalism has a relatively positive attitude to religion as long as the form of religion does not violate the prevailing values of the media professionals and surrounding society. Religious authorities, especially those in the dominant churches, are in a relatively good position to get their message through in the media. Sometimes they are invited as writers and columnists and on opinion pages. Rather than linear secularization through mediatization, it seems to me that it is more appropriate to suggest that mediatization of religion means liberalization of religion. Christianity, particularly its liberal form, still holds a position of cultural centrality in relatively secular Europe, even when journalists do not share its beliefs and doctrines, thus offering – jointly with the media – the “dominant normative frame into which old and new religions have to fit” (Meyer 2018, 336). The media may mediate secularization and even in some contexts reinforce it as an unintended consequence, but it has not been demonstrated beyond doubt that the media and journalism are integral components of secularization. The evidence suggests otherwise, even in relatively secular Europe.

The *publicization of religion* thesis derives initial support from the quantitative findings of the case studies since there are more stories about religion in the media, and public sphere and people, journalists included, are more aware of the presence of religion in society. However, there is little that would suggest religions being more authoritative than they were (see Axner 2015, Knott, Poole and Taira 2013, Hjelm 2015, Taira 2015). While new religious authorities emerge because of the changes in media technologies and they may have some influence in negotiating the role of religion in society, it has not significantly affected mainstream journalism about religion or the public sphere more generally (Lövheim and Axner 2015, 50). It is still the case that the most appreciated and valued platforms are occupied by leaders of religious communities. The representatives of established or dominant denominations are most likely to be heard on such venues. It is more difficult for minorities and their strategies vary, depending on how acceptable they are in the surrounding society and how willing they are to cooperate with journalists (e.g., Axner 2013, 2015). The authority of atheists and secularists has not increased either. It is rather that journalists are willing to maintain a somewhat polarized discussion without giving an authoritative voice to any party involved (Taira 2015, 122).

Because the *mediation of religion* thesis is different in nature, it is more difficult to evaluate its implications for the debate on religious authority in European journalism. It can still be suggested that if the evidence in support of the other two theses is imperfect, it is tempting to abandon them and remain content with the general idea of the complexity of religion-related mediation which highlights the importance of the media but does not assume a linear or unilateral process from the less mediated era to the hyper-mediated one or predict the consequences of mediation for religious authorities. However, as there is little evidence of religious actors being able to bring masses of new members to their communities through the media

or otherwise gain authority in society more generally, particularly in Europe, it is worth suggesting that the impact of the *secular* media is not insignificant (Hjarvard 2011, 132).

The debate has focused on traditional mainstream journalism rather than micro publics generated by religious media influencers in national and cross-national settings. One of the current questions is whether the development of digitalization and new media technologies will change the role and situation of religious authorities in *secular* journalism. Cheong (2013) suggested that the Internet can simultaneously empower and challenge traditional religious authorities, but the question of what it does to traditional journalistic authorities in the religious context is also relevant.

One of the weaknesses of the mediatization of religion approach has been its development as a theorization of the media institution. Although this has provided it with some clarity in terms of argument, it may rely too much on the era that preceded the development of social media technologies when journalism's dominant image was based on communication from one to many. Conversations on the mediatization of religion have tried to address the relevance of social media but it remains the case that many of the claims originate from thinking about mass media journalism without the social media revolution that has changed communication into a more multi-centered process.

In contrast to that, the publicization of religion approach was developed in close connection with the development of new media technologies and social media. However, it may rely too much on the promise of social media to do more than enhance bonding; it assumes that the social media function as bridging tool between religious authorities and journalism. While this may well be the case in some contexts, it remains to be demonstrated more generally.

From the point of view of a mediation approach, the social media are just another example of multiple mediations. The social media increase and naturalize the role of media technologies in religious contexts but, in relation to journalism, a mediation approach would guide us to explore how religious authorities use various media to get their message through to journalism and also to people in general, sometimes without the mediation of mainstream journalists.

Cheong points out that early digital religion studies emphasized the logic of disjuncture and displacement of religious authorities, meaning that the Internet replaces traditional religious authorities. More recently, however, scholars have highlighted the logic of continuity and complementarity, suggesting that authority is sometimes co-constituted by traditional and new actors but also that traditional authorities – having learnt to utilize new media technologies – have more resources to integrate the best of both worlds and thus preserve their authority (Cheong 2013, 74–82). The same applies to the power of journalism. Although the Internet and social media have revolutionized the platforms of journalism and raised questions of financial sustainability for the print media, traditional media houses are authoritative actors in the era of social media as well. People who are keen on seeking detailed information about religion on the Internet may well find mainstream journalism somewhat irrelevant, biased and untrustworthy when it comes to religion, at least compared with the opportunities offered by direct communication on social media. However, a large proportion of the population who are not interested in spending their time in finding out what goes on within religious communities, receive their information through the news production of large media houses. In this sense, traditional journalism is still relatively powerful and authoritative, although it has to adjust to the changing media environment (Taira 2017b).

One useful way to connect the analysis above to the classic view of authority is Max Weber's (1964) threefold classification of ideal types: Authority may gain legitimacy by

reference to a tradition or custom (as in organized religion), by adhering to rational-legal procedures or by personal charisma (as in new religious movements). This is typically transferred to religion and journalism so that secular journalism is closest to the rational-legal authority that marginalizes other ideal types. However, the authorities of organized religions, especially representatives of established churches, are present in the media as regular contributors or as expert voices sharing their views on values, ethics and the common good. Surely, this counts as some sort of authority by reference to religious tradition and custom even when religious arguments as such are not highlighted. Furthermore, if journalists and the media like celebrities and personalities (Royle 2012, 158–159), personal charisma operates as one type of authority in religion-related journalism as well. Moreover, although journalists are often critical of non-institutional New Age type beliefs and practices, symbols and the ideas associated with them are often presented as facts or interesting fictions in weekly or monthly magazines that cover charismatic celebrities (Kraft 2017, 70). Although authority based on religious tradition and religious charisma cannot be said to dominate the field, it would be short-sighted to ignore their presence in journalism.

### Conclusion and future challenges

Future challenges in the study of religion and journalism in relation to the question of authority are twofold. First, the main future challenge is to provide conceptual clarity for the key approaches, so that they – or at least some aspects of them – can be tested in different contexts. At the moment, different concepts and approaches have proven inspirational in tying isolated studies into theoretical frameworks, thus generating lively theoretical discussion among scholars. This, however, has not yet turned into the accumulation of empirical evidence that would make us affirm, develop or abandon the key approaches based on something other than their theoretical sophistication. It may not be necessary to achieve full agreement on all details, but better understanding of the conceptual differences – what counts as evidence of authority and how it relates to theoretical narratives about religion and journalism in Europe – should facilitate the debate, further the research and add nuances to prevailing theoretical narratives.

Second, rather than investigating how digitalization and social media affect the negotiation of religious authorities, one of the future challenges is to reflect on the convergence between religious authorities, traditional journalistic platforms and more recent (social and digital) media forms (Meikle and Young 2011, Taira 2017b). In other words, creating and establishing fully separate subfields such as *religion in the printed press journalism* and *digital religion* (Campbell 2013) is probably not the best way forward, because deep understanding of their complex interaction and their dialectical relation is needed. This should help us to remember that the European context is more diverse and more global than ever before.

### Further readings

Axner, M., 2013. *Public Religions in Swedish Media: A Study of Religious Actors on Three Newspaper Debate Pages 2001–2011*. Uppsala: Religion and Society Research Centre.

A thorough empirical exploration of religious voices and their authority in printed press.

Herbert, D. E. J., 2011. Theorizing Religion and Media in Contemporary Societies: An Account of Religious “Publicization.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(6), 626–648.

Presentation of the idea of religious *publicization* and a useful analysis of the relation between changing media and secularization.

Hjarvard, S., 2013. *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. London: Routledge.

Substantial presentation of the theory of mediatization, including a chapter on the mediatization of religion.

Knott, K., Poole, E. and Taira, T., 2013. *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred: Representation and Change*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Comparative and longitudinal study of representations of religion in British journalism. It discusses and tests various claims made about the relation between religion, media and society in Europe.

Taira, T., 2015. Media and the Nonreligious. In: Granholm, K., Moberg, M. and Sjö, S., eds. *Religion, Media, and Social Change*. London: Routledge, 110–125.

This chapter theorizes the authority of atheists and nonreligious people in the media and argues that the mainstream media opposes antireligious atheism.

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