

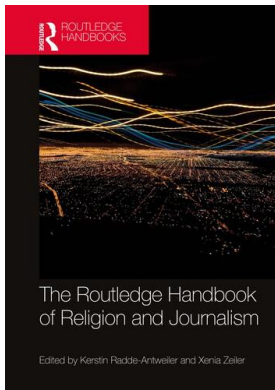
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Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, Xenia Zeiler

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Henrik Reintoft Christensen

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3

RELIGION AND JOURNALISM
UNDER SECULARIZATION*Henrik Reintoft Christensen***Introduction**

Etymologically journalism is secular. The term secular is derived from the Latin *saeculum*, which among other things means *century*, *our time* and *this world*. In canonical law, it came to represent clergy who went out into the world. A secular priest was not an irreligious person, but a religious person out in the world delivering the message to the masses. In this respect, journalism is secular. It is out in the world, observing, reporting, and delivering messages to the masses. Journalism is also secular in a more modern sense of the term where it denotes the marginalization of religion and the rationalization of society. Journalism does not necessarily show deference to religion and does not treat religion differently from any other topic. However, it is also possible to argue that journalism has a religious dimension or perhaps even religious roots. In one of his aphorisms (1803–6), the German philosopher Hegel compares the reading of newspapers with prayer (Stewart 2002, 247). Reading the news is the modern substitute of the pre-modern Morning Prayer. In his secularization theory, Peter Berger notes that Christianity is a self-secularizing religion, meaning that secularization is a process with religious origin (Berger 1969). Similarly, Émile Durkheim argues in his seminal work on the elementary forms of the religious life that our capacity as humans to think about the world politically (i.e., with regard to relations and power) and scientifically (i.e., with regard to causes and effects) can be attributed to the way religious thought has helped the human species think about the world and our role in it (Durkheim 1912, repr. 1995, 418–448). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the similarities and differences between religion and journalism under secularization. The aim is to show how secularization has shaped both, how journalism in some ways is also prone to secularization and finally to show that recent post-secular trends are changing them again.

In order to examine this, the chapter first places religion and communication in human history drawing on the theory of Robert Bellah arguing that the binary distinction in different types of religion is important for understanding the relationship between religion and journalism. Following this, the next sections take a closer look at the early modern period and how some of the Enlightenment philosophers set the stage for the development of journalism and religion under secularization. The final section discusses religion and journalism under secularization arguing that from the sacred/profane perspective journalism can be perceived

as religious, whereas it is more difficult from an immanent/transcendent perspective. The chapter closes with an example of a religiously informed journalism; a Buddhism-inspired mindful journalism that wants to reclaim some of its lost authority. This outline shows that the chapter takes its point of departure in a European Enlightenment context and American journalism history context. Although ideas from the Enlightenment and the development of journalism has since spread, it is worth noting that my argument is based on that perspective. The fact that Buddhism is used to rethink journalism does not happen in spite of a European or American development but because of it.

Religion and communication in human history

Robert Bellah started working on his history of religion in the beginning of the 1960s. In the course of the evolution of human society, religion has become increasingly complex (internally) and autonomous (externally). On this background, Bellah (1964, 361 and 2011) suggests that the history of religion can be divided into a number of ideal-typical stages: the tribal, the archaic, the axial, the historical, the early modern and the modern stage. The historical religion type, which includes Christianity, is important for the present discussion. Religions of this type develop in the Axial Age and differ from the archaic religions on several accounts. They break with the cosmological monism of archaic religion and operate on a dualism distinguishing between this world, which humankind needs to be freed from, and a transcendental realm, which is attainable through salvation (Bellah 1964, 366). The primary distinction in the archaic religion was between sacred and profane, whereas the primary distinction in the historical religion is between immanent and transcendent. Additionally, the demythologization of religion and the ascension of man begin with the historical religions:

man is no longer defined chiefly in terms of what tribe or clan he comes from or what particular god he serves but rather as a being capable of salvation. That is to say that it is for the first time possible to conceive of man as such.

(Bellah 1964, 366)

The early modern type of religion (for example, the Protestant denominations emerging from the Reformation) is characterized by the collapse of hierarchical order in this and the transcendent realm. The de-mythologization continues, and religion becomes a relation between the individual and God. This type of religion breaks with the mediated system of salvation and declares it available for everyone (Bellah 1964, 368f). Bellah credits Kant, Schleiermacher and the development of liberal theology for forcing religious thinking to ground itself in the human (and not divine) condition. It is not a return to a pre-historical monist cosmology, but the realization that our world is “infinitely multiplex” (Bellah 1964, 371). “However much the development of Western Christianity may have led up to and in a sense created the modern religious situation, it just as obviously is no longer in control of it” (Bellah 1964, 372). In the modern type of religion, the individual works out his or her own search for meaning, and the established religions can only provide a supporting environment for this search without imposing their answers on the individual. In the modern stage, the primary distinction shifts from immanent/transcendent to religious/secular. “And it will be increasingly realized that answers to religious questions can validly be sought in various spheres of ‘secular’ art and thought” (Bellah 1964, 373). The emergence of new religious movements, available not only for the elite but also for the general population, is a recent development, and membership will be increasingly open and flexible. In his reply

to Bellah, José Casanova (2012) argues that the category of religion is ambiguous because there are different classificatory schemes at play. The primary distinctions – sacred/profane (in archaic religion), immanent/transcendent (in historical religion) and religious/secular (in modern religion) – point to different structures of meaning and reality (Casanova 2012, 191). These distinctions are not structurally synonymous.

The sacred tends to be immanent in pre-Axial cultures. The transcendent is not necessarily “religious” in some Axial civilizations. The secular is by no means profane in our secular age.

(Casanova 2012, 214)

These distinctions will be relevant for the concluding discussion of the role of journalism in the modern stage.

One of the major factors behind the Axial Age was the emergence of writing. Writing, numeracy and central governments existed prior to the Axial Age, but according to Merlin Donald (2012, 72), these developments set the stage for the Axial Age and “led eventually to a more specialized division of cognitive labor.” With writing, the technology of thinking and recording facts changed human society radically. Ideas could be stored, retrieved and refined to a greater degree than ever before (Donald 2012, 73). It is no coincidence that Bellah identifies a new type of religion (early modern religion) at the time printing was invented (see Eisenstein 1979). This revolutionized the ability to record and access the reflections of individual thinkers as their thoughts could be disseminated at low cost and in the vernacular.

From a media perspective, modern religion also owes in part to development of electronic media. The media researcher Niels Finneman (2005) draws on the works of Walter Ong, Elisabeth Eisenstein and Joshua Meyrowitz in his elaboration of five types of societies in which certain communicative media dominate: oral, written, print, electronic, and digital media societies. It should be noted that neither Bellah’s nor Finneman’s theories are inherently deterministic. More complex religion or media does not preclude less complex forms. The development of new forms has more to do with affordances and possibilities than with certainties and inevitabilities. “Nothing is ever lost” is Bellah’s (2005, 72) general principle. Tribal religion still exists and can even exist *in* later forms of religion, just as spoken language has not become obsolete. Today, all earlier forms exist alongside each other. For an understanding of contemporary religion, archaic, historical, early modern and modern types of religion are important. For an understanding of journalism, developments in the early modern and modern periods are also important. In the next section, we take a closer look at the Enlightenment project in relation to both religion and journalism.

The religious and enlightenment roots of journalism and secularization

Secularization is a modern concept that acquires one of its academically most pronounced expressions by Peter Berger (1969, 107) in his well-known definition: “By secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the religious domination of religious institutions and symbols.” The modern project is in many ways a secularizing enterprise, but to understand this it is relevant to present the moral and political revolution heralded by the Enlightenment philosophers. The view of the role of Christianity in society changed, and the idea of informing the citizens of events and publishing their opinions became a natural norm in society in part because of their writings. Ideas like

the social contract, and the separation of powers, and various freedoms have their origin in the works of seventeenth-century thinkers like Hobbes and Locke, and eighteenth-century thinkers like Montesquieu, Rousseau and Kant, Robert Bartlett writes that

each of the philosophers of the modern project devoted a good part of his writings to the discussion of the relation between religion and politics with a view to preparing, as each saw fit, the specifically modern orientation.

(Bartlett 1996, 286)

A considerable portion of Hobbes's *Leviathan* focuses on Christianity and addresses the problem of Christian politics. Locke's first treatise is a Biblical criticism, and his *Letter of Toleration and the Unity of God* addresses how he thinks popular sovereignty should secure life, liberty, health and property, i.e., what he calls "worldly goods" (Locke 1689, 9). Through their writings, we get a sense of the importance attributed to religion and belief in relation to political life in the pre-enlightenment (pre-modern) era. In many ways, the modern project was the subordination of everything religious to such an extent that political administration of society could refer to rationales that take as their point of departure accounts based on so-called worldly things like philosophy, natural sciences and economy and not other-worldly things like theology, sin, and salvation. Bartlett argues that the Enlightenment philosophers had two scenarios for religion. The first scenario is the one found in, for instance, the writings of Montesquieu and Jefferson. In this scenario, politics could be freed from religion if religion was removed from public life and relegated to the unpolitical private sphere (Bartlett 1996, 288). The other scenario, which can be found in, for instance, Rousseau's elaboration of the social contract, is the subordination of religion to politics in a civil religion. Religion is placed under political control, but it is still important that every citizen have a religion because that is a necessity for being a good citizen. At the end of his book on the social contract, Rousseau argues for the civil religion and for the exchange of opinion:

The subjects then owe the sovereign an account of their opinions only insofar as the opinions matter to the community. Now, it matters very much to the community that each citizen should have a religion that makes him love his duty; but that religion's dogmas are no concern of the state's or of its members' except insofar as they involve morality and the believer's duties towards others. In addition to all that, a man may have any opinions he likes without that being any of the sovereign's business. Having no standing in the other world, the sovereign has no concern with what may lie in wait for its subjects in the life to come, provided they are good citizens in this life.

(Rousseau 1762, 72 in the version prepared by Bennet)

In many ways, these writers herald a new role for religion and pave the way for the development of a free press. Their reflections on the consequences of the social contract that citizens enter with one another did not only reinterpret the role of religion, but also law and freedom. Similar to Bartlett's argument for a new (modern and secular) idea of government, the journalism researcher Helle Sjøvaag (2010, 878) argues that the establishment of the free press builds on arguments that were "originally constructed in favor of religious freedom and the ultimate obtainment of truth." The press was important because it was responsible for making opinions available to the public. As seen in the above quotation from Rousseau the subjects owe their sovereign an account of their opinions. Sjøvaag argues that Kant aptly illustrated this in his idea of freedom of the pen.

To try to deny the citizen this freedom does not only mean, as Hobbes maintains, that the subject can claim no rights against the supreme ruler. It also means withholding from the ruler all knowledge of those matters which, if he knew about them, he would himself rectify [...] to encourage the head of state to fear that independent and public thought might cause political unrest is tantamount to making him distrust his own power and feel hatred towards his people.

(Kant 1793 in Reiss 1970, 84f)

Sjøvaag writes that the modern press has inherited this enlightenment ideal. The social contract between the press and the population explicitly demands that the institutions of the press are obliged to make public the unintended consequences of legislation, and law-makers are obliged to correct them when they learn about them (from the press). The press becomes the medium through which the public and the legislators communicate because society has become so complex that citizens need journalists to fulfil their part of the social contract (Sjøvaag 2010, 880). She sees this most clearly in investigative journalism. Here social morality forms the basis for journalism, a morality established by the citizens and the press: “Journalism participates in the establishment and maintenance of this moral order by exposing transgressions” (Sjøvaag 2010, 883). This leads to a paradox within journalism because the social contract implies that journalism expects or even demands a response from their audience. However, by “encouraging audiences to fulfil their contractual obligations, journalists are in breach of their own” (Sjøvaag 2010, 884). Then journalism is no longer a medium – it is no longer objective.

Although this account in some ways pits religion against the right to free expression, it is worth noticing that the right to free expression was often sought on religious not secular grounds. Doug Underwood (2009, 19) writes that “many of the early advocates of freedom of the press were preachers and proselytizers whose religious seal [...] placed them solidly in the traditions of the world’s first ‘journalists.’” In fact, Underwood (2009, 21) argues that many elements of modern journalism such as “outspoken columnists, investigative reporters, and editorial champions of social causes” are part of a long tradition going back to the Hebrew prophets. They told the Israelites unwelcome truths, held them accountable for upholding the standards of society or gave them hope in times of hardship. For this reason, he speaks of prophetic journalism.

Underwood’s argument is that if we can trace this back to the Hebrew prophets, then the Enlightenment thinkers cannot be the only reason for the development of journalism. The development of the capitalist system is important because it put pressures on the publishers.

Enlightenment skepticism, the rise of science, and the substitution of colloquial languages for Latin contributed to the weakening of the religious role that once monopolised the uses of writing. But the commercial pressures that were unleashed with the invention of printing was enormous, and they did much to undermine the original religious purpose of the employment of the printed word and to turn the venture toward commercialism and profit making.

(Underwood 2009, 34)

In many ways, the development of the journalistic ethos mirrors the development of the capitalist spirit described by Weber. The capitalist spirit has its roots in a certain Protestant ethic but once the religious energy necessary for the capitalist spirit to take off has been used, the auxiliary power of religion is jettisoned, and the capitalist spirit is ready to fly on its own.

The same goes for the development of the press and the journalistic ethos. It too has religious roots, but at some point, the religious energy is no longer required for the freedom of the pen to work on its own. The only difference between the two developments seems to be the fact that journalism does not fly on its own, but by means of the capitalist spirit. The production of news became a lucrative business.

In any case, regardless if journalism has religious roots hailing from the time of the prophets, the Enlightenment marks an important shift from the historical to the early modern stage. This implies a shift in the perception of the role of religion in public affairs, diminishing its direct influence on government while at the same time formulating ideas that encourage the exchange of public opinion for the sake of a better society. Slowly the press became an institution of increasing importance in society while religion slowly became less important. Underwood (2009, 42) argues that in “American journalism, we can think of the nineteenth century as the period when the voice of morality was appropriated from the church to the editorial page.”

The diffusion of the news paradigm

In this section, I take a closer look at the diffusion of the modern news paradigm and its guiding principles, primarily objectivity because the objective and scientific approach to reporting is critical toward the revelation knowledge found in religion. The modern press developed in the USA and spreads to Europe. In their edited volume, Høyer and Pöttker (2005) are interested in the diffusion of the news paradigm from 1850 to 2000. In his introduction, Høyer (2005, 9) argues that the paradigm originated in the USA in the mid-nineteenth century and was fully developed after the Great War. He and most of the other contributors to the volume are not interested in religion. From a journalism studies perspective, journalism and the press jettison religion at this point and become a social institution in their own right. Høyer (2005, 11–13) argues that the elements in the emergent news paradigm are: the event, the news criteria that turn events into news, the interview as a tool of getting information from sources, for example the inverted pyramid structure of news reporting and journalistic objectivity. In their contributions, Michael Schudson (2005) and Harlan Stensaas (2005) examine the emergence of these elements. Schudson is particularly interested in the emergence of the objectivity norm and argues that it developed in American journalism before spreading to Europe and elsewhere. He is skeptical toward the economic and technological explanations of objectivity. The economic explanation holds that “objectivity emerged at the point where newspaper proprietors saw opportunities for commercial success” whereas the technological explanation focuses on how the impact of new technologies “specifically the invention of the telegraph, placed a premium on economy of style, brought about reporting habits that stressed bare-bones factuality” (Schudson 2005, 20). He acknowledges that both are important preconditions for the emergence of objectivity but he emphasizes the emergence of journalism as an occupational culture as equally important. Part of the occupational culture emerged in reaction to the rise of the public relations professionals because journalists felt a need to distinguish themselves from this new profession and their biased and non-objective communications. Here,

objectivity seemed a natural and progressive ideology for an aspiring occupational group at a moment when science was god, efficiency was cherished, and [...] partisanship a vestige of the tribal nineteenth century.

(Schudson 2005, 29)

The public relations professionals, the invention of the interview and other practices helped journalists identify as a group, which facilitated the creation of corporate coherence and occupational pride. By the 1920s, a self-conscious ethic of objectivity had emerged. Schudson (2005, 34) concludes that regarding its emergence, “there is no magic moment” when it came into being. It was a slow process and the result of several social conditions.

Stensaas is interested in the emergence of not only objectivity but also the attribution of facts to experts and the invention of the inverted pyramid structure in news writing. He uses content analysis to examine six American newspapers in a 90-year period from 1865 to 1954 and concludes that objectivity was well established after 1880s although it was not explicitly formulated as an occupational ideal until 1920s where it became an industry standard (Stensaas 2005, 41). Stensaas then discusses various explanations for this development, and similar to Schudson he discards the economic and technological factors, but he is also critical of the public relations explanation and the occupational standard explanation mentioned by Schudson. Instead, he focuses on two developments that take place not only in journalism but also in society in general: the rise of science and secularization. Similar to Schudson he argues that there is no single or immediate explanation behind the development of the journalistic ideology and the emergence of the news paradigm.

It results instead from a basic shift in Western culture and thought which came about within the same time frame [...] the point is that until the closing decades of the nineteenth century Western culture and thought was based on Christian ethics and presuppositions.

(Stensaas 2005, 46)

The shift from the authority of religious knowledge to the authority of scientific knowledge had major implications for society as well as journalism as it was important for the rise of objectivity (Stensaas 2005, 48).

The shift did not only have implications for the way news writing became formatted, but it also had implications for the actual content of the news – especially with regard to religion. Richard Flory (2012) shows that the coverage of religion declines significantly between 1870s and 1930s. The coverage of religion dropped by more than 50% of all news and by almost 90% of front-page news in this period (Flory 2012, 49). Additionally, the news was also decreasingly favorable to Christianity. From 1905 to 1931, the share of favorable stories decreased from 78% to 33% (Flory 2012, 50). Similar to Stensaas, Flory argues that the shift from traditional religious authority to scientific authority is the main reason. Like Schudson, he argues that the efforts to professionalize journalism along scientific and rational lines are also important. Flory has examined the professional journals within journalism at the time, and he demonstrates how journalism conceived of itself as the modern replacement for religion. Flory (2012, 59) concludes that “it was the responsibility of journalism to provide the information (truth) by which an adequate ‘philosophy of life’ could be constructed.” From having religious roots, modern journalism developed in response to a shift that specifically entailed the diminishing role of religion in society and took upon itself a role religion used to have. In many ways, modern journalism functions according to values that are opposed to those values that are perceived to govern religion. Consequently, it is relevant to examine in closer detail this historical development of secularization and the academic specification of a theory of secularization.

The secularization paradigm

With regard to religion, Europe is often described as more secular than the USA. The classical texts by Weber and Durkheim deal with the consequences of modernity. For Weber it is the transition from the early modern to the modern stage that is of particular interest. The iron cage of rational modernity had led to the disenchantment of the world.

The fate of our times is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’ Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.

(Weber 1918, 15)

For Weber, religion was no longer a force in public life, but had been relegated to the private sphere. For Durkheim, who argued that what binds people together in a society, i.e., collectives larger than kinship or families are the moral of that society. In the pre-modern society, moral, culture, religion, and society overlap and the origin of them are coterminous. Originally religion was moral was culture was the ideal society that the individuals constantly strive to establish. In the pre-modern society, that ideal had to be activated and enacted on a regular basis or it would erode. In the modern period, the challenge was to identify what kind of moral could integrate the secular society.

If today we have some difficulty imagining what feasts and ceremonies of the future will be, it is because we are going through a period of transition and mediocrity. The great things of the past that excited our fathers no longer arouse the same zeal among us, either because they have passed so completely into common custom that we lose awareness of them or because they no longer suit our aspirations. Meanwhile, no replacement for them has yet been created [...] In short, the former gods are growing old or dying, and others have not been born.

(Durkheim 1912, 429)

Oliver Tschannen (1991) has examined some of the most influential works on secularization. He argues that it does not make sense to talk about a secularization thesis, but of a secularization *paradigm* with many similar but not identical theses. He examines the works of Thomas Luckmann, Peter Berger, Bryan Wilson, David Martin, Richard Fenn, Talcott Parsons and Robert Bellah. They have all formulated different secularization theses, which are not compatible at a theoretical level, but show considerable similarities at a paradigmatic level (Tschannen 1991, 396). Analyzing these similarities, he finds a common paradigmatic narrative in the theories, which focuses on three core elements: institutional differentiation, rationalization and worldliness. These elements are emphasized to various degrees in the different theories, but they all agree that functional differentiation is most important. Tschannen (1991, 412f) concludes that none of the theories imply the actual disappearance of religion only its transformation into invisible, private, civil or general religion.

Although secularization theory often is less applicable in the American context than in the European, several of the above scholars are American. More recently than the theories of Weber, Durkheim and the theories of the 1970s, Mark Chaves (1994) has worked on the concept of secularization. He relates it explicitly to religious authority and argues that it is better understood as the “declining influence of social structures whose legitimation rests

on reference to the supernatural” (Chaves 1994, 756). With regard to religious authority, he defines it as

a social structure that attempts to enforce its order and reach its ends by controlling the access of individuals to some desired goods, where the legitimacy of that control includes some supernatural component, however weak.

(Chaves 1994, 755f)

Expanding on Dobbelaere’s three dimensions of secularization, Chaves (1994, 757) argues, furthermore, that secularization on the societal level means the “declining capacity of religious elites to exercise authority over other institutional spheres” and at the individual level as the degree “to which individual actions are subject to religious control.” It is important to note that control concerns the access to certain religious goods, which the religious authority controls. The exact nature of these goods is highly contingent. No good is inherently religious and goods can be both: worldly or transcendent, psychic or material, collective or individual. Western societies are secular at the societal level if religion does not have any authority even if individuals hold religious beliefs – this includes individuals in public office. In this way, he emphasizes the distinction between external influence and power vis-à-vis internal beliefs and sentiments. Furthermore, he argues that cultural authority is the capacity to define social reality in certain settings (Chaves 1994, 762). He mentions doctors and accountants but explicitly emphasizes that it can be extended to other profession, for example journalism.

Although religious vitality is often less applicable in the European context than in the American, Grave Davie uses the term vicarious religion to describe the situation for religion in Europe. Vicarious religion is “religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly approve of what the minority is doing” (Davie 2006a, 22). There are a number of ways in which religion can operate vicariously: Rituals are performed vicariously, church leaders and churchgoers believe and embody moral codes vicariously and, finally, churches can offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies.

Could it be that the churches offer space for debate regarding particular, and often controversial, topics that are difficult to address elsewhere in society? The current debate about homosexuality in the Anglican Communion offers a possible example, an interpretation encouraged by the intense media attention directed at this issue [...] Is this one way in which society as a whole come to terms with profound shifts in moral climate? If [this] is *not* true, it is hard to understand why so much attention is being paid to the churches in this respect. If it *is* true, sociological thinking must take this factor into account.

(Davie 2006a, 24, emphasis in original)

I would argue that Davie in some ways either confuses church and media or at least mixes them. The intense media attention is probably a better example of the reporting of transgressions that we need to rectify (see Kant above) than it is an example of the churches offering space for an unresolved issue. However, she is probably right when she argues that

(l)arge sections of the European media are, it seems, wanting to both have the cake and eat it too: pointing the spotlight at controversies within the church whilst maintaining that religious institutions must, by their very nature, be marginal to modern society.

(Davie 2006b, 26)

The concept of vicarious religion is relevant to my discussion, but before turning to this, Davie's blending of church and media is a reminder that this presentation of the diffusion of the news paradigm and the elaboration of the secularization paradigms have been presented as two separate trajectories. However, it is worth noting that even as journalism and the press jettisoned explicit religious values and sentiments, Stewart Hoover have argued persuasively for the existence of an implicit Protestant logic in American culture (2017). The

Protestant cultural articulations are intended to be implicit, subtle, and banal as well as subjective and lived [...] Simply put, what appeared at mid-century to be secularism might instead have been a tacit, Protestant presentation of itself as the generic, banal, and implicit moral structure of the culture.

(Hoover 2017, 2989)

As part of the shift from the early modern to the modern stage, Protestantism retreated (and had sound theology to back this) from an explicit role in the public sphere and instead focused on perfecting the domestic sphere, but the public sphere remained implicitly Protestant. In this regard, both secularization and journalism have religious roots, and it is also possible to argue for an implicit Protestantism even as explicit references to religion is no longer evident.

Religion and journalism under secularization

This section discusses the consequences of the journalistic appropriation of moral from the church and the lessons learned from secularization with regard to journalism. I argue that ideas from both vicarious religion and secularization theory have some similarities with the development of journalism, and in the last section I discuss some of the ways in which both religion and journalism try to reclaim some relevance and significance in society.

Moral appropriation and vicarious critics

The first aspect I would like to address is the vicariousness elaborated by Davie. Although she does not use the term social contract, I argue that vicariousness rests on a social contract between the active and passive religious, and the content of this contract focuses on the ways an active minority believes and practices on behalf of the passive majority. In her conclusion, she points out that vicariousness has its limits. At some point, the contract will be broken. Either the active minority will no longer accept the free riding of the majority at the same time as they make demands (for same sex marriages, female pastors, pluralism or even syncretism) or the passive majority stop supporting the minority because they no longer accept how they believe or behave on their behalf. She speculates that vicariousness will continue until mid-century, but then it will increasingly work on a market model (Davie 2006a, 34). Religion might not be the only sphere in which we can find vicariousness. Although Sjøvaag does not use the term vicariousness, she argues that the social contract between journalists and public is a dynamic similar to vicariousness. In order to sustain the democratic order, the social contract demands that the citizens speak up against misuse of power and since society is very complex, "citizens need journalists to fulfil this contractual obligation on their behalf" (Sjøvaag 2010, 880). This probably has its limits as well. Similar to the limits of vicarious religion, the minority (journalists as active critics) and the majority (citizens who acknowledge that the journalists are critics on their behalf) might break the contract.

Sjøvaag (2010, 881) writes that if news becomes business then it will only provide the audience with more of what they want and probably less of what they need. In such a situation, citizens might become dissatisfied with journalism. The Eurobarometer surveys have measured trust in media and shown, on the one hand, that trust in the printed press (which tend to work on a market model) is lower in the UK than in most of the rest of Europe and, on the other hand, that trust in radio and television (which tend to be national public service corporations) is higher. Overall, the trust has decreased in the period between 2001 (Eurobarometer 55) and 2015 (Eurobarometer 84).

Additionally, the advent of digital media has made it easier for the public, the citizens, to make and disseminate their own news, which can provide alternative accounts of society. On the other hand, Sjøvaag also argues that journalists can break the contract and start publishing more subjective news, which explicitly call for action. This departure from the ideal of objectivity can be found in, for instance, the so-called *journalism of attachment*. It is possible that these two developments could reinforce each other when the mainstream media is perceived to produce fake news, which spurs the establishment of alternative news sources that tell true story. This battle is well known in the history of religion where dominant belief systems prosecuted heresies – or fake religions – in both the Catholic Church (the inquisition) and in Protestant churches (consistories in Calvinistic churches and superintendents in Lutheran churches). Today, true salvation is no longer at stake but true information. The mainstream press might have appropriated the morals from the church during the nineteenth century, but today there exists a skepticism not only (and perhaps less) toward the moral of the church but toward the press. In that regard, it is perhaps possible to argue for a secularization of journalism.

Decline of authority and the secularization of journalism

Because secularization and differentiation are historical processes evolving out of concrete cultural, social and political struggles, Chaves' understanding of secularization as the declining authority of religious elites might be extended to journalism. Naturally, journalists are not religious authorities, but I would still argue that the notion of secularization is relevant and that we (from a certain point of view) can speak of a secularization of journalism because it is fruitful for understanding the development I have sketched in this chapter and for understanding the role of journalism in contemporary society. Chaves made authority the focal point of his theory and argued that authority is related to the control of some good. So far, I have shown a number of similarities between religion and journalism, but also how journalism at some point appropriated the role of the church as the moral voice in society. The journalist and the newspaper are "a moral teacher, a preacher, a social critic and reformer" as Flory (2012, 58) quotes an editorial from the *Journalist*. Apart from appropriating the moral, it also perceived of itself as the replacement of religion. The emergence of an occupational identity is a first step toward claiming some kind of authority. The question is then what good they control and I propose that they control information. Not any kind of information though. Not the information necessary for the salvation of the soul. That is still the prerogative of the religious elites of the historical religions. Neither is it the information concerning the restoration of the body, which is the prerogative of medical elites (or those religious elites that channel healing energies). Journalists are instead controlling the information of the mind, the information necessary to be an engaged citizen concerned with the social contract and the preservation of a democratic social order. Journalism controls the information that help citizens counter or work against the constant

risk of societal erosion. In a Durkheimian sense, the appropriation of moral literally means that journalism is the new religion in modern society. It is in the reporting of society that citizens come together and celebrate (discuss) the ideal society that they want. The secularization of journalism then entails the declining authority of journalism to control the production of information that is concerned with the state of society. Similar to traditional religion, the traditional mainstream media have witnessed an increasing pluralization of suppliers whether we call it religious diversity or media diversity. The individual (believer or citizen) has more choice than ever and it is reasonable to see part of this proliferation because of the development of digital media. Bellah argues that the consequences for religion in the modern religion stage are increased individualization and search for meaning. Similarly, Finneman argues that the transition to the latest type of media society, the digital media society, has consequences, too. The Internet is a medium for both private and public communication; it brings private corporations, public institutions, interest groups and individuals into the same platform, which brings about new opportunities. We are still listeners, readers and viewers as in previous media societies, but we are also increasingly writers, printers and producers (Finneman 2011). We are part of the audience and we have our own audience. This development also implies the possible decline in the authority of traditional elites (religious, media and other authorities) and the emergence of new elites and new genres with a changed relationship to their audience: religious elites on YouTube or the rise of civic journalism. It is no surprise therefore that both groups are trying to reclaim authority in different ways.

Conclusion: reclaiming authority and de-secularizing religion and journalism

Studies of public religion (i.e., religion trying to be relevant on a societal level) or religion in public institutions (i.e., religion trying to be relevant for the individual patient, inmate, soldier or student) have documented the ways in which religion is trying to reclaim authority. However, religion has also been used to reclaim journalist authority, for instance, in the idea of Buddhist journalism (Gunaratne, Pearson and Senarath 2015). In his introduction, Shelton Gunaratne argues that the world needs

a different breed of journalists who could bring about amity and sanity in the world community. Their task would be to foster a new genre of journalism, which we would identify as mindful journalism.

(Gunaratne 2015, 1)

These journalists should help others overcome suffering, but if journalists do not understand the cause of suffering (according to Buddhist teaching) they cannot help overcome it. Consequently, they argue that there is a need for a Buddhist inspired mindful journalism because the established news paradigm is too dependent on capitalism and emphasizes individualism.

With the separation of church and state and the onset of colonialism and industrialization, the Judeo-Christian values became increasingly secularized, with heavy emphasis on individualism.

(Gunaratne 2015, 4)

In contrast to the traditional news production, the aim of the mindful approach “is not profit making but truthful reporting” (Gunaratne 2015, 5). Mainstream journalism should embrace the mindful approach because it offers a

“logical moral framework” which is necessary as traditional journalism has lost its “moral compass”, and because both journalists, sources, and society will benefit from the mindful “ethical and reflective truth-seeking and truth-telling.”

(Gunaratne 2015, 6)

Gunaratne (2015, 9) then concludes “that the Digital Revolution has throttled traditional journalism into its *jaramarana* [sickness and death] stage.”

The mindful journalism approach is an interesting attempt at reclaiming journalist authority through religion. It should be noted that it is important for the authors to stress that

because the Four Nobel Truths have nothing to do with divine origin or inspiration and are only a set of verifiable statements discovered by an enlightened human being to alleviate human suffering/dissatisfaction, they are worthy of empirical testing by journalists.

(Gunaratne 2015, 1)

Mindful journalism is suggested as an approach that can alleviate the suffering of journalism, which is the result of the secularization of journalism. This approach is literally an attempt at de-secularizing journalism. Bellah argued that religion in the modern religion stage could only offer a supporting environment for the search for meaning. The mindful journalist has the same functions through seeking the truth and reporting it to the public. While they argue that mindful journalism is not dependent on a transcendent dimension, and even if we agree that Buddhism has nothing to do with this, then it is still possible to understand the mindful approach along another religion binary, that of sacred/profane. Mindful journalism agrees that at its basic, journalism holds sacred the social contract and although it had religious roots, they have long been abandoned. This does not mean that journalism became independent as it came to rely on capitalism instead. From a sacred/profane point of view, journalism is not just similar to religion. Journalism and religion are the same. In that vein, what Gunaratne et al. are suggesting is a return to a golden age before journalism was corrupted by greed and profit making: a motif well known from the history of religion.

While the similarities are in themselves interesting, few would argue that journalism is a religion, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century journalists notwithstanding. However, I have shown that the reason we would refrain from describing journalism as a religion has more to do with our inherited concept of religion observing the world with the immanent/transcendent binary. Journalism is concerned with the *social collective* found in the archaic religion and not with the divine transcendence found in the axial religions. What both religion and journalism face is the radical individualism of the modern stage in which sacred or transcendence is no longer obligatory. The mindful approach to journalism seems to argue that there exists a privileged point of view from where society can be neutrally and truthfully observed which seems unlikely. That the solution for journalism is better journalism can at best be only a small part of such a project. The evolutionary stages of religion presented by Bellah and of media presented by Finneman show that the problems are not confined to journalism, but are part of what constitutes modern society. They involve the inherited

legacies like secularization and commercialization and new technologies like the Internet and social media, which have all changed religion as well as journalism. The perceived need for such Reformation of journalism is perhaps the prime religious trait reminding us of the similarity in fighting false prophets and fake news in the search for truth.

Further readings

- Horsfield, P., 2015. *From Jesus to the Internet*. Malden, MA: Wiley and Sons.
Horsfield's book is a thorough examination of the many ways in which different media have influenced the evolution of the Christian religion from the gospels to the digital age of today.
- Knott, K., Poole, E. and Taira, T., 2013. *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred*. London: Routledge.
Knott, Poole, and Taira examine the British media representations of Christianity, Islam, Atheism and popular beliefs.
- Kühle, L., Borup, J. and Howerd, W., eds., 2018. *The Critical Analysis of Religious Diversity*. Leiden: Brill.
Increasing religious diversity challenge the way we (as citizens, academics, journalists, teachers etc.) think about religion. This volume explores how researchers can improve the way they conceptualize religion and society.
- Mitchell, J. and Gower, O., eds., 2012. *Religion and the News*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
Mitchel and Gower have edited a volume with contributions from both academics, religious actors and media practitioners in an examination of the role of religion in the news in a British context.
- Winston, D., ed., 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media*. New York: Oxford University Press.
The handbook explores the many ways in which religion interacts with the news from various disciplinary perspectives. It examines coverage of religion in different media and of different religions in the American context.

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