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00.01	30/04/2021	DRAFT	Draft prepared by Francesca Cadeddu (FSCIRE, Bologna), Luca Ferracci (FSCIRE, Bologna), Jaap Geraerts (IEG, Mainz), Ventzislav Karavaltchev (University of Sofia), Mathijs Lamberigts (KU Leuven), Denis Pelletier (EPHE, Paris), Herman Selderhuis (TU Apeldoorn), Marcello Verga (University of Florence)
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STUDYING RELIGIOUS HISTORY IN THE AGE OF CULTURE OF RIGHTS AND OF BIG DATA

1. The Procedure followed

Initially the workshop as programmed in WP7-D7.3 should have been organized in December 2020. The idea at the time was to have a physical meeting in Leuven in the presence of representatives of both the political and journalistic world. Because of the Corona-crisis, the workshop was postponed. It was decided to change the procedure, for there was no guarantee that a physical workshop could be organized.

Thus, the procedure followed, run as following:

First all members involved in WP7-D7.3 were asked to offer their expertise in a specific area by submitting a text of about 4 to 6 pages (for the names: see the bottom of the position paper). They were expected to submit their texts before March 31, 2021. All members except one offered such texts.

On the basis of these texts, the coordinator of WP7-D7.3 (KU Leuven) wrote a first draft, entitled *Studying Religious History in the Age of Culture of Rights and of Big Data*.

This first draft was sent to all the members involved in WP7-D7.3 and several observations and critical remarks were made. All were integrated in the text which was approved and sent to journalists with proven expertise in religious issues both on an international level (Elisa Di Benedetto, Co-Managing Director, The International Association of Religion Journalists) and a national level (Emmanuel Van Lierde MA, editor-in-chief Tertio), a politician (Prof. Dr. Koen Geens, KU Leuven, former Minister of Justice and of European Affairs, Member of the Belgian Parliament), and an expert in artificial intelligence (Prof. Pacillo, Unimore, Modena e Reggio Emilia).

On May 20, from 4 to 6, a webinar took place. The focus was on the interventions of the politician, journalists, and the expert in AI. Furthermore, the TNA grant holders were invited to the webinar and about 30 participated actively in this webinar.

The texts as prepared by the invited speakers and discussed in the webinar were integrated in the position paper.

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2. The Position Paper

2.1. Preliminary Remarks

"The culture of rights is one basic 'rationale' of the European Union and its roots go back to the philosophical, legal and theological debates caused by religious wars and conflicts from the end of the 15th century on (namely from the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492" (Quote from WP 7.3: "The culture of rights and religious issues").

Historical maps of Europe reveal that the geographic divisions of Europe have been constantly changing. Maps about (religious) wars confirm, throughout history, the impact of wars on both the number of people in a given region and their religious belonging. People often discover great ideas contributing to human culture when being confronted themselves with suffering and exile. John Locke wrote his *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* while living in exile in the Dutch Republic. His letter on tolerance was written immediately after his politically inspired return to England in 1689. Personal situations do matter in people's reflection on this matter.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights was solemnly promulgated on December 10, 1948. Both Locke's letter on tolerance and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights were results of reflection on periods of war and violence. However, ideals such as egality and liberty, the key words of the French Revolution – fraternity was only officially added during the revolution of 1848 but did not play a role at the time of the French Revolution – did not offer any guarantee with regard to peace, respect, and justice, and the impact of the French revolution on the life of the Christian denominations and the Jewish religion has been object of numerous historical studies with *different* outcomes.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights is the direct result of reflection on the drama of World War II. It has been signed and ratified by over 150 countries. It explicitly states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. All human beings are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood (art. 1). The promotion of a culture of rights, thus including economic, social and cultural rights, is indispensable for the human beings' dignity and the free development of one's personality (cf. art. 23). "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, *religion*, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." (art. 2).

The above-mentioned articles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights offer the foundation and the background for what was called by the former EU president Barroso a culture of rights. We define culture as a human creation, thus characterized by search and change. Human rights belong to our culture, are a construct within our culture, and are constantly object of concern and debate. We are very well aware of the fact that the rights-claims are constantly growing, something which must also be reflected in the growth of duties and responsibilities, if one wants to avoid a simple promotion of individualism. Self-development and autonomy without reference to societal responsibility and engagement may result in a growing weakening of the social fabric. Is there still place for heteronomy? The declaration on human rights initially was offering an ethical framework (a kind of commitment in respect for the other), but is becoming more and more part of a law system.

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In this paper, we take religion as an important testcase in the discussion on freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. We discuss them in the context of a historical framework because we think that concrete historical examples will help us to better understand the complexity of a phenomenon like religious rights always being situated in a political and societal context.

2.2. Introduction

The starting point of this position paper is the idea that the job of historians of religion and religious life (in its broadest sense) must take into account seriously the beliefs of human beings: religions or the opposition to and refusal of them are incarnated in the concrete lives of concrete human beings – the historical and the contextual are not merely places where religious truth is revealed or not, but are also intrinsically contributing to the way this happens - and these human beings have the right to be respected in their beliefs and the duty to respect the positions of others. In fact, historians of religion and religious life, like sociologists, do not focus on abstract concepts of *the Church*, *the Synagogue*, *the Mosque* as a kind of meta-concept, but are often dealing with churches, synagogues, mosques and the like in concrete historical or social contexts, considering them as results of behaviors of faithful people.

In what follows, we will focus on the meta-challenges historians of religion are confronted with in their research. Historians, living in the present, deal with the past, being convinced that this past, described in terms of evolution of humanity, can be understood and interpreted today. This is, as it were, an act of faith that drives all research in humanities and social sciences. Reporting on the past, historians offer a story that cannot be separated from the historian and from the questions the historian is asking (or not) in his/her research. Historians offer a narrative – even a hypercritical approach results in a narrative! -, based on documents available to them: collecting and selecting documents is part of the construction of the narrative and is in itself *métier d'art*. Historians of religion, like all historians make use of imagination in order to understand the object of their research in its own historical context and the language used will be analytical, synthetic, metaphorical, analogical and the like: there does not exist one *all-encompassing literary genre*, as the many monographs (with different outcomes) on one and the same person prove. Historians, aware of the fact that they are all involved in concrete contexts, will do their work with sympathy and humility (one has to accept the limits of the sources available – both in their limitations and in their abundance -, of the intellectual qualities one his gifted with, ...): they aim at discovering the ([un]consciously hidden) motives and agendas of the subject they study, thus starting a (fictive) dialogue with their subject. Attitudes towards religion have an impact on one's research: simple and superficial solutions are to be avoided (separation Church-State, reduction of religion to the private sphere, for being of no importance; human rights as a once and for all fixed result and the like). The narrative we propose is defined in terms of dialogue and respect – taking into account the inter-temporal aspect (decisions with regard to rights will not necessarily taken at the same time in different countries/continents) - , thus deliberately arguing that doing (religious) history is also an attempt to serve society with correct information in a given context. Doing research on religious history also has to take into account that religions aim of offering the gifts of wisdom, engagement and freedom.

We are well aware that the work of historians like that of sociologists has been complicated in this time of new social media, in which aspects such as scale, speed, and time play an important role. In fact, the amount of sources these media generate, changes the scale of research questions in the domain under

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consideration: the role of religion in the public space. Historians are very well familiar with networks and transboundary exchanges, but the source material as preserved concerning our past, overwhelming as it may be, was more easily to "control" than the sources, now created through social media. Indeed, the clash of civilizations is no longer simply a physical clash within the borders of a country, it is also a virtual clash on the internet and in social media. Is there still space for a polite and courteous debate?

In this paper, terms such as history of religions and religious history are considered as covering the same subject. Ideological attempts to distinguish them in order to give a more "scientific" outlook to the work of a specialist of history of religions (Dubuisson, 2020) do injustice both to the subject of one's research and to the researcher (cf. Dubuisson's critique on Mircea Eliade), using "un ton plus proche de l'invective" (Borgeaud, 1995, discussing Dubuissson's *Mythologies du XXe siècle*). Whether the shift from church history to religious history – in the beginning of the third millennium a hotly debated issue in the Netherlands - had an impact on the change in attitudes (Geraerts, 2017) was (Snel, 2003) and still is a matter of debate (Krumenacker-Muntzer, 2020). However, one cannot deny that new research questions and the impact of methodologies coming from other domains (social history, literary studies, anthropology) resulted in the discovery and appreciation of the variety of opinions and attitudes.

The decrease of impact of one's confessional background – often because of disinterest in the confessional - on one's views as an historian does not mean that current scholarship on religious history can be considered as exempted from new ideological presuppositions. Furthermore, within the context of religious studies, like in all other studies in humanities and social sciences, a scholar is always indebted to the demands of his/her discipline. Moreover, material available in these disciplines are, in a certain sense, already ranked: some authors are considered to be more authoritative than others and thus receive more attention in scholarship.

It is evident that the transboundary approaches in the study of religious histories reveal that in the history of cultural rights the definition of rights when put in concrete contexts depends on local situations. In other words, while there may exist a "theoretical" meta-idea about cultural rights and about the culture of rights, this position paper makes clear that concrete people in concrete circumstances determine how rights are to be understood: both religious and non-confessional communities influence in a (often) decisive way what kind of history will be told and taught to people.

Researchers, involved in religious studies, are more and more aware of the fact that global modernity engenders dynamic diversity (Dawson, 2018), a phenomenon which is not new, for historians of religions and religious life always had to cope with dynamic diversity.

2.3. The (Accessibility of) Sources

Historians doing research based on archives are often confronted with legal restrictions concerning the access to sources. There are many arguments pro and con the sometimes arbitrary rules, even although these rules are meant to protect one's privacy, a fundamental right indeed. However, since the beginning of the third millennium, historians, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, scientists of religion are confronted with a new phenomenon. Expressions of personal opinions about one's own life or societal events on Twitter, Facebook, Linked-in, … (in fact also sources for historians) are inviting people to look

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into the inner room of these people's lives. The new information era has already resulted in theoretical and practical discussions about the preservation of what is posted in the new media.

The Mila-case in France has made clear that there exists an overwhelming amount of material, produced by many people – often anonymous – which is in danger of being lost. In this case, a specific statement creates in a very short period of time a huge number of positions by a huge crowd of participants in a debate.

On the one hand, researchers are often confronted with a lack of accessible sources, on the other, they are inundated with a mass of sources, let it be on a specific item. In the latter case, the interesting point is that a person shares her personal opinions with a broader (uncontrollable) public and that a personal position thus becomes subject of national and international debate and dispute.

In the Mila-debate, the principle "freedom of speech", an essential part of a culture of rights, shows, in all its validity, that a culture of rights has its limits. Freedom of speech is not the same as right to insult. No one can approve the hatred-messages against Mila. But what about Mila's statement that she hates Islam, not Islamic people? As is mentioned in the introduction, religions are lived by concrete human beings. Without these concretely believing human beings there is no Islam. In a sense one may claim that it is not possible to hate Islam without hating Islamic people. Moreover, concrete people believe in the dignity and validity of the Islamic faith and moral principles and try to live accordingly. The often promoted and defended separation of Church and State de facto is problematic. One does injustice to faithful when claiming that one can separate belief and believers. Furthermore, the principle of freedom of speech is a coin with two sides: if one has the right to say that she hates Islam, another person has the right to say that he/she is profoundly shocked and hurt in his/her religious feelings. While the debate on whether or not issues of domination and discrimination outweighed religious issues in the rise of Islamic terrorism are continuing, one has to accept that whatever mockery with people hurts (Pelletier, 2021). It is a nice to state that there is no right not to be offended, but does this allow all kinds of blasphemy? What are the red lines and who will have the right to control them? Are faithful expected to be silent? People speak of taboos on religion in modern society (Van Lierde, 2021).

2.4. Narrating Stories, Writing History

The history of the compulsory conversion under threat of expulsion of Jews and Muslims in Spain is a well-studied topic among historians and theologians. Less attention is paid in European scholarship to the conquest of countries such as Bulgaria and Greece by Muslims, starting in more or less the same period. Indeed, the common people in Bulgaria up to the current day are still speaking of Ottoman slavery or Ottoman yoke. The Bulgarian case is an interesting one and this not only because it can serve as mirror image of the Reconquista, but also because the Ottoman period is a challenge for Bulgarian historians, doubting about the qualification of slavery for the whole period and this on the basis of academic research. Up to the current day, they still have to look for *compromises* that satisfy the desire of the majority of society – people like to hear what they want to hear - while still defending the principles of academic work.

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In the context of "culture of rights", both the beginning and the end of the Ottoman rule are characterized by violence. The massacres at the time of Bulgaria's struggle for independence are etched in the collective memory of the Bulgarian people (Karavaltchev, 2021). Interesting is that after the independence in two successive periods with two different regimes the official, state-controlled impact on historiography and its methodology does play a role in the description of the past. Its mechanism is not unique – the celebration of the 200th anniversary of Napoleon Bonaparte's death is an excellent example of how many Bonaparte's de facto exist and how French politicians want to claim him for their own concerns -, but in Bulgaria's case, the first historical works on this past were written by "clergyman, primary school teachers and local dilettantes" (Karavaltchev, 2021). After the communist regime was imposed in Bulgaria, "official history" found its way: there were a number of points of reference and statements that should not be questioned under the threat of being censored or banned. More or less at the end of the communist regime, the Islamic minority suffered from the regime's repressive attitude towards them. In the century after the beginning of the growing independence, ideological presuppositions thus hinder an "objective" history of the Ottoman period.

These phenomena challenge the thesis as formulated in WP7-D7.3: "The entire development of the modern and contemporary discourse on rights is deeply linked with religious issues, and this is true not only on the side of the contents of rights but also on the side of the different degrees of acceptance or refusal of rights from religious and non-confessional communities all along European history." In fact, under communist regime, historiography had to be done in accordance with the ideological theses of Marxism-Leninism. In the context of the Mila-case, people have spoken about the French "laïcité" as "une laïcité triomphante" (with clear reference to the case Dreyfus), but de facto, it is more propriate to speak of concrete behavior of concrete people.

In this regard, the Samuel Paty-affair reveals how the murder of a history teacher, killed because he had shown – in the context of freedom of speech – several cartoons of the prophet Mohammed – caused an emotional debate on the "principles of the Republic" versus "Islamist separatism". The French president, Macron, criticized the small minority within the group of Muslims which is hostile to the Republic, *laïcité*[1], and to freedom of speech. Given the fact that 78% of the French are favorable to showing in class caricatures that mock religion, this means that mocking religion is a value for the majority of the inhabitants of the French Republic. In the Paty-case, one clearly sees a conflict between the secular norms of the public school and the religious norms of believing families (Pelletier, 2021). In the Mila case, a minister of Justice was urged to revise her first evaluation of Mila's positions as blasphemy infringing the freedom of thought of believers. Minister Belloubet had to declare publicly that blasphemy is not reprehensible in France and that freedom of speech takes precedence. An essential question that has to be asked in the context of a culture of rights is: where are the rights of the faithful, who feel harmed? In any case, as we will discuss infra, the attitude of states towards blasphemy are not unanimous, again a proof that rights, like duties, are cultural constructs and thus are to be put under categories such as

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[1] Larousse: "Conception et organisation de la société fondée sur la séparation de l'Église et de l'État de l'exercice de tout pouvoir politique ou administratif, et, en particulier, de l'organisation de l'enseignement. » Le Petit Robert adds : 'l'État n'exerçant aucun pouvoir religieux et les Églises aucun pouvoir civil ». It goes without saying that such definitions also nuance the rights of the states.

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respect and dialogue. In any case, the interpretation of human rights is to be considered as a constant process, taking place at a different pace in different traditions and environments (Geens, 2021).

2.5. History Speaks through Historians: Changing Perspectives

Views on the religious convictions of the "others" are related to one's own background and point of departure. People write histories on the basis of source material and on the basis of their own presuppositions (for Holland, see Selderhuis/Nissen 2015). In this regard, for a long while the Dutch Protestant historians claimed that the promotion of Bible translations in the vernacular was the merit of the protestants, thus confirming the old adage that it was forbidden to Catholics to read the Bible and that they therefore were following Rome in a slavish way and that they certainly were less developed than Protestants, a thesis which is refuted in recent years (Claassens, Desplenter, François, 2015). In any case, for a long while, Catholics were considered as inferior to Protestants. At the same time, Catholics (both in the Netherlands and abroad) are using religious qualifications to express depreciation for people: when people qualify the Dutch people as Calvinist, they do not intend to do justice to the actual situation but they want to show that these people are strict, narrow, dogmatic, intolerant and the like. Such attitudes reveal, from both sides, prejudices that, as we will see, affect and infect academic work, even although they no longer result in oppression or persecution.

Historians (too) often speak of Golden Ages: the Golden Age of Pericles (a rather short one), the Golden Age of Rome (1st century CE), the Golden Age of Antwerp (16th century), the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic (17th century) and underpin their claim by theological arguments (Groen van Prinsterer, 1846), or reject that term, claiming that one should use it for the 18th century (Huizinga,). There is seemingly an inflation in using this qualification: the Golden Age of Capitalism (1880-1930) (De Gier, 2016), the Golden Age of Russian Poetry (the first half of the 19th Century) (Batyushkov, 2017); the Golden Age Period of chemical industry in Northern France (19th century about Kuhlmann).

Still in the 20th century one's Catholic or Protestant background could result in presenting the Calvinist protestants as patriotic freedom fighters, the Catholics as loyal to the Spaniards (Protestant thesis) or the Protestants as the ones who were imposing Reformation on the Dutch people and were able to protestantize Holland and took effect only in those regions were the Catholic Church had fallen into disrepair (Rogier, 1946). In both approaches, the confessional imprint was presented both in the Catholic (Vermaseren, 1981) and in the Protestant historiography (Backhus, 2003). The picture will change when one uses other methods or approaches as developed in other academic branches such as transaction theories from social sciences (Frijhoff/Spies, 2004). This picture also changes because confessional agonism is decreasing (although not totally absent, see Hamans, 2018), secularization resulting in less interest in confessional polemics, partly because the intended readers are also sought outside one specific confession, partly because historians often are not religious at all (Geraerts, 2021), and thus create their own blind spot.

In any case, in a secularized context, the confessional background of historians understood as defending the own tradition, seems to be replaced by an agnostic attitude in which religious phenomena are described in an "objective" way. In such context, people suggest to give up "traditional church history", the

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three terms used being a point of debate. In fact, what is meant by "traditional", what by church (in a Dutch context with more than 80 Christian denominations) and by history. In such context, historians, when dealing with reformation, think in plural: reformations, including a Catholic reformation (which, in a confessional reading of history, was qualified as counter-reformation). However, in their interpretation schemes they continue to use "religious" categories. For the Dutch Republic, historians opted either for an Erasminian reading of the Republic's history (Erasmian regents supporting religious freedom out of commercial self-interest, thus contributing to the formation of a pluralistic society) (Enno van Gelder, 1972), or stressed the impact of Calvin on the Republic's culture (van Deursen, 1991).

The phenomenon of the "schuilkerk" (hidden churches) – often these schuilkerken were found in existing buildings - in the Dutch Republic reveals that freedom of conscience versus freedom of celebrating one's own religion can be a very tricky concept (Kaplan, 2002): when Calvinism became the dominating Christian denomination, many other denominations like the Roman-Catholics (and since the beginning of the 18th century the Old Catholics), the Lutherans, the Mennonites were no longer allowed to celebrate their faith in public, while many church buildings were confiscated by the Calvinists, especially in the beginning of what is qualified as the Calvinist Republic. In fact, in the Golden Age, the Calvinists, taking the political lead, recognized freedom of conscience, but freedom of religion was the privilege of Reformed Church. Only foreigners and Jews, perceived as foreigners, had the freedom to practice their religion, while all the others were expected to join the Nederduitsche, later the Dutch Reformed Church, which was never formally the state religion, but the law demanded that every public official should be a communicant member. As a result, there were privileged relations between members of this church and the political leaders. Gradually, these schuilkerken were allowed to exist, partly because the Reformed Protestants failed in imposing their religion (Rogier, 1946), but a good number of restrictions continued to exist up to 1795. However, recent research has made clear that Rogier neglected the 'recruitment power' of the Calvinists (Geraerts, 2018).

Within the context of Protestantism, the split of churches is a well-known and a well-studied phenomenon. However, such splits also happened in the Roman Catholic Church as was the case in 1723 – tensions between Utrecht and Rome existed since the time that the "Jansenist" Church of Utrecht, considering itself as the legitimate heir of the church as founded by Willibrord, was condemned by Rome. Both defenders and rejectors of the continuity line offered arguments in favor of their own positions (Geraerts, 2021). Research made clear that part of the tensions and final split can be explained by the conflict between the secular and religious clergy and by different theological approaches (among others the conflict between the Faculty of Theology of Leuven University and the Jesuits) (Lamberigts, 1994; 2000). This event is also a good example of how a central government (Rome) declared, against the wish and fear of local ministers (Catholic secular priests) that a Christian country (the Dutch Republic) was to be considered as a missionary country. The restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy by Rome (in 1853), a decision motivated by the Dutch government with a reference to the separation of Church and State, not only caused much protest among the protestants (cf. the April Movement), but also among the Rooms-Katholieke Kerk der Oud-Bisschoppelijke Cleresie, for the latter considered the restoration as an infringement of its legitimate rights. Between the two churches, a dialogue started in the midst of Vatican II and after a long period of condemnations of the Clerezie on the basis of the Formulary of Alexander VII and the Constitution *Unigenitus* (1713), it was decided by Rome in 1965 that these two documents no

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longer could be a hindrance for an ecumenical dialogue between the churches, even although according to Vatican I the Old Catholics were extinct. The impulses as given by the ecumenical movement and the discovery of the importance of ecumenism during Vatican II resulted in a respectful dialogue between Roman Catholics and Old Catholics in the aftermath of Vatican II (Spiertz, 1975). It was the merit of L. Ceyssens' research on Jansenist and anti-Jansenist sources that would pave the way for the start of the dialogue between Kok, archbishop of the Old Catholics and Alfrink, archbishop of the Roman Catholics.

While the previous examples discuss the freedom of religion in a context of different denominations, the matter becomes even more complicated when one wants to discuss the freedom of dissent. European history offers many examples of (the absence of) freedom of dissent, the cases Antonio Brucioli (1498-1566) and of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) being interesting because both persons got a "second life" during the Italian fascist regime, which seemingly identified the Italian "race" with the Roman Catholic Church, its history and its orthodoxy. Bruno, burdened in 1600, martyr of the freedom of thought, received a statue in Rome in the aftermath of the Risorgimento (end 19th century). However, in the mid-1930's, people were forbidden to organize any public events in front of his statue. It was the period that the fascist regime repressed Christian religious minorities. At the same time, academies, such as the Volta Foundation, linked to the fascist Reale Accademia d'Italia, sponsored research on these "heretics", as was the case with Cantimori. Cantimori was enabled to travel in the footsteps of Italian "reformers" abroad. The results of his work received sharp critique in the clerical fascist magazine *Rassegna Nazionale* in 1941. Cantimori was a good example of an academic who first showed sympathy for a moderate fascism, then became a communist and finally would leave the communist party. His positions as an historian with changing sympathies is still a matter of debate.

In 1940, the protestant Giorgio Spini published a volume on Brucioli, paying attention to the forgotten evangelical Italy. In the Italy of that time, the use of French by the Waldenses (Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire Vaudoise) was interpreted as a sign of hostility to the Fascist regime, making propaganda for the French language among Italian citizens. At the instigation of the Vatican, the regime would forbid Pentecostal worship in Italy (1935), this being considered as contrary to the social order and harmful to the physical and psychic integrity of the Italian race. Renewed interest arose in rationalistic attitudes such as those of Castellio (1515-1563), great defender of tolerance in the dispute with Calvin, convinced that defense of doctrine could never justify the killing a men. Castellio wrote a book De arte dubitandi (for the first time published in its integrity in 1981), in which he argued that reason was more important than dogma.

In the midst of the fascist period, interest in this kind of books was considered to be a detachment from the fascist regime's defense of the Catholic tradition as the only (acceptable) root of Italian history. Liberal appeals to humanism, tolerance, defending (religious) freedom of thought did not match with the "ideals" of majorities. At the same time, the opponents of fascism like Gramsci, liberal and democratic intellectuals of republican Italy and the like, argued that these "heretics" should be considered as heroes of the values of a dreamed Italian modernity, in which a moral and civil reformation of Italy should find its place, inspired by renaissance and the religious reformation. One has to wait until the post-Vatican II period before topics such as religious freedom and culture of rights will become the new normal, resulting in laws on divorce, on women's self-termination and the new Lateran pact (1984) and a relaxation of the relations between the Italian State and the religious minorities.

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2.6. An Important Intermezzo

This paper does insist on the importance of emic research as a prerequisite for etic research (one has to understand what was at stake in one denomination/religion/political ideology in order to discuss in an appropriated way about its conflict with another denomination/religion/political ideology). We are well aware that in a world, dominated by emic actors, the step towards etic research is a challenging one, for fixation on the emic, in many senses the easiest way, will block attempts to understand the other on the basis of knowledge. One can only seriously study cross-cultural differences when one is profoundly familiar with one's own culture, but one must set a step further and we do think that academics are in a privileged positions, transcending the boarders of an emic world. Religious diversity requires team research. The study of religious diversity requires interdisciplinary approaches: too often people look to what other disciplines like anthropology and sociology have to offer to historians but neglect the interaction between different domains. Anthropology and sociology are not "uniform" and there are as many schools and approaches as in the domain of religious history. It is not on the level of the offer but on the level of the dialogue and the sharing of ideas that disciplines will make progress. We are well aware that such position opts for a "democratic" approach in religious studies, id est, a service to a community which recognizes equality among citizens. In this regard, there is an urgent need to give up the "intellectual superiority" that "objective and agnostic" historical research on religious phenomena, based on a presumptuous neutrality, is "better", for total neutrality does not exist, not even when programming a robot (Pacillo, 2021). It is part of academic religious research to be open to new insights on the basis of research of data as offered by the sources: neither research asked by faith communities, political institutions, societal needs, nor research that intends to serve "hidden agendas" will be of help in a period that knowledge of and familiarity with the religious past in view of the future of religions is an urgent need.

Historians of religion or religious history must do their academic work in a context of dialogue and respect, offering tools to current and future generations that help to understand the conflicts of the past in such a way that they are willing to overcome contradictions and tensions through consultation. The study of history, including religious history is not only a matter of knowledge but also of respect and understanding, and thus of service to the society.

2.7. The Separation of Church and State: a Solution?

Religion is a cultural construct: human beings are reflecting on their destiny and concretize this in there concrete lives, giving authority to books which, according to them, are inspired and reveal a divine message. Human beings give or accept that persons are chosen or called to guide religious communities. States can consider all this as belonging to the private domain, thus forgetting that religious convictions have an impact on the concrete life and ideas of faithful. Putting all this in the "category private sphere" results in giving up any control over what happens in such private spheres.

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In the context of the Correnti bill all Italian theological faculties at state universities were closed in 1873, what would result in the fact that higher theological education became an exclusive prerogative of the ecclesiastical authority. It was the result of a process. The first arguments used to close the faculties had very much to do with a ranking in rights related to education: because of the small number of students, the theological faculties were too expensive for the state budget, the State thus giving priority to other educational branches. In a next step, it had to do with the academic status of theology, considered by many as a non-science, which in the context of the time resulted in giving priority to scientific data over dogmatic positions (dogmatic positions considered as positions in which freedom of conscience and freedom of dissent on the basis of rational arguments were not accepted). As a result, both State and Church were happy with the decision of the Correnti bill, even although some people warned for a loss of control over the clergy education, a quite important concern in a period that the clergy was expected to be loyal to a pope who lived in self-chosen exile. The case is interesting because the State, as a result of a self-chosen distancing, lost control over the Church's loyalty to the State. Implicitly, the concern about loss of control admits that religion could have an impact on the behaviour of Catholics who were at the same time citizens.

In any case, with the Correnti bill "theology – Catholic theology – had to be kept closed inside seminaries and proclaimed not compatible with the nature of national public universities, which were instead rooted in the freedom of inquiry and research: theological disputes could not involve the State." (Cadeddu-Ferracci, 2021). Considering the present-time role assigned to theologies in the academic and institutional environment, we consider such a position as both presumptuous and interesting: if religious history has to do with religious content, but theological ideas, often the result of religious content, cannot be studied in an academic civil university context, religious history becomes the domain of people who do not know this theological content. How can people, not familiar with theological ideas, write about people living a life according to or in line with these theological ideas?

The teaching of theological ideas and doctrines being excluded from university programmes, became the privilege of seminaries, and, in the context of the separation of Church and State, of the clergy alone, thus excluding, for years, the lay faithful from any (re)search *de divinis* (Unterburger, 2010). In Italy but also elsewhere, the lay faithful were in a sense "excluded" from theological studies. No wonder that people speak of religious illiteracy (Melloni, 2014), consider it as one of greatest weaknesses among journalists – you do not write about things you do not (want to) know (Di Benedetto, 2021) - and that e.g. the implementation of a Council like Vatican II got off to a false start because the formation of the laity was lacking (Lamberigts, 2021).

Religious literacy, for its part, is the ability to read, write, speak an listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively with an audience that is able to understand it. It is a prerequisite for a successful culture of rights.

We argue that keeping religious convictions out of the public realm (and, in some cases, higher education) – a vision that goes against the recommendations of the Council of Europe but is still present in several member states of the EU - in the long run has resulted in a religious illiteracy from the side of the public, even although all conditions are present to act otherwise (Pacillo, 2021). On the other hand,

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religious communities, not respected for excluded, will develop a profound distrust in political systems, distrust that may end up in religious isolation and (violent) resistance.

2.8. How to do Justice to Religions, Freedom of Speech in a Context of Secularism?

Religion or the absence of it, is intrinsically related to the political ideology of nations, as becomes clear in the following examples. The American motto IN GOD WE TRUST (in capitals) replaced, in the midst of the battle with the godless communism of the USSR, in 1956 the motto E Pluribus Unum, since the late 18th century the motto of a nation that gradually became united. Since 1956, the motto was printed on American bank notes, although it was already present on coins and this since 1864 (in the midst of the American Civil War 1861-1865). People seemingly put their trust in God in periods of fear and anger.

In the romantic 19th century, in protestant circles there was a clear bond between God, the Netherlands and Orange (Selderhuis, 2021).

Opposition to religion as a player in public life, also is strongly related to the political ideology of nations. Secularism, not to be confused with secularization, is a conviction that religion may not influence societal life. It cannot be reconciled with any idea about human dignity, human dignity being the concept that is able to bridge gaps between human beings' ideological' differences.

From the perspective of the Jew, the Muslim, the Christian, there is an enormous tension if not discrepancy between secularism (not a "neutral" term but an active actor limiting the presence of religion in society) and freedom of speech. Indeed, if people want to express their religious belief in public, this is an act belonging to the domain of freedom of speech, just like the right to blasphemy is an act belonging to the domain of freedom of speech. One cannot reject the first, while admitting the second. That is simply a violation of democratic rights in general and cultural rights in particular. A culture of rights presupposes freedom of speech for all, not only for the blasphemers. In this regard, the story about Bulgaria's last years on the communist regime is striking: tens of thousands Muslims were urged to change their names and many Islamic Turks were forced to leave the country. Historians rightly questioned this kind of behavior, in which not only ethnic background but also religious belief played a role.

History has shown how blasphemy can cause all kinds of horrible things: for a long time, the blasphemers were severely punished by (religious) regimes. Since the Enlightenment and up to recent times blasphemy, although no longer regarded as a crime against God, is considered as an offence against society, and in several European countries it still can be punished as such, thus making clear that ridiculing the convictions of other citizens is not a neutral given. Needless to say that there does not exist a "universal" European approach. However, the planned EU-Digital Services Act of the European Union intends to maintain order on the internet and to allow for the removal of hate speech and of illegal content. But who will determine what is hate speech and what is acceptable blasphemy? Politicians, experts in law, consider such exercise as very difficult (Geens, 2021; Pacillo, 2021). Respect and responsibility with due respect to autonomy and freedom of speech probably would offer an avenue for peaceful cohabitation of citizens. In this regard, one should recall that culture as human construct is a flexible and changeable one, thus a construct that in a sense is constantly under construction and must

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be based on adequate information, the latter probably the most important challenge for historians of religion, in this era confronted with new types of massive information. It is an urgent desideratum that historians of religion on the basis of their expertise about the past do intervene in current debates for the power of media is enormous, while the intentions of the diffusers are not always clear. Historians of religion can offer expertise on the impact of religious (mis)use of information channels (Pacillo, 2021).

2.9. Doing (Religious) History in the Era of Big Data

As became clear in the Mila-case, "big data" can have several meanings. With big, we consider the quantity of data which is too large for one person to handle (Geraerts, 2021). The term "big data" indicates a wealth of sources and information. The input on which this paper is based reveals that partners in this ReIReS-project often make use of sources and literature, which are not known outside their country. In the domain of data dealing with religious studies, researchers (at first sight) do not have to complain. However, data bases such as ATLA (American Theological Library Association), IR (Index Religiosus), and IT (Index Theologicus), in their richness, show also their limits. Because of the language, they can limit themselves too much to one language group (English or German), or are not able to cover all literature because of interest in many languages (IR). Data bases are built up on the basis of what is available to the designers. In this regard, a check of literature mentioned in the preparatory papers, reveals that the language boundaries are a hindrance for a smooth exchange of data. Books considered to be important in one language group, are unknown in another language group, Michel Wieviorka (dir.), La famille dans tous ses états, Auxerre, 2018 being a good example for the book is absent in IT and in ATLA. As a result, in both big data-sets, probably because of language, works that may stimulate the reflection on religion on an international scale, are simply not available. This is not typical of religious studies. It happens in all branches of science, most in applied sciences.

Although ReIReSearch has already made available several holdings of the partner institutions, exchange transcending the linguistic hindrances is still needed. ReIReS has made clear that there is an urgent need to integrate in a platform the many "small data" as present in different branches in such a way that at least the material is available to start a fruitful dialogue.

In all research programmes, emphasis is put on interdisciplinary research. Although nobody is questioning the importance of this type of research, one is still looking for a database that does justice to the multifaceted approaches as developed in the domain of religious studies (used in its broad sense). Historians have shown the importance of social, economic, political, religious networks, but in our experience the interactions between these branches are still in their infancy. The ReIReS TNA exercises have made clear that important literature is "hidden" for outsiders. Quite often, it has become clear that a researcher found more in the TNA-institution he visited than he had expected before. In other words, even on the level of the "small data" there is still a lot to be done, for it also belongs to contemporary cultures of rights to make material available to all researchers in the European community. Throughout the trajectory of ReIReS it has become clear that both important and interesting primary sources and challenging secondary literature are often unknown. ReIReS has made clear that there is an urgent desideratum to develop platforms such as ReIReSearch and networks of scholars who know the holdings of their own institutions and thus are able to measure and appreciate the holdings of the other

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institutions. Part of the culture of rights (WP7-D7.3) is that material will be made available to researchers all over Europe. We are well aware that this is not evident because of hindrances on the level of ownership, technical tools needed, institutional policy and the like. The ReIReS activities as developed in the TNA-programmes have made clear that the continuation of a platform like ReIReSearch is needed, because it offers trans- and interdisciplinary research opportunities. Progress in research does not only result from the use of new methods, but is also related to a better accessibility of sources through new media and technologies, helping to acquire a broader familiarity with potential sources. Every historian has his/her blind spot, which in the comparison/confrontation of research results can be detected.

Moreover, data bases are composed on the basis of material available in the laboratories. Data bases are only useful for the researchers when qualitative selections are made. A qualitative evaluation of the material available is a time consuming but needed exercise. Collaborators of data bases (professional as they may be) are always limited in what they can cover. Consciously or unconsciously, people are influenced by their own time. Without defending the traditional confessional church historical approaches, a caveat should be expressed: the historians doing their work in that context not only offer a specific view on sources but also on their personal life: history is always history created by human beings and one should not neglect the huge information as present in these "traditional confessional church historical approaches". The value of religious studies depends on academic rigor, sound methods, respect for the data. Religious studies focus on religious beliefs, behaviors, institutions, movements and the like and in such studies a whole series of branches have to interact, but this is only possible when they know each other's work. In a culture of rights one has the right to know the sources of his colleagues!

Apart from the ignorance about historical work done among the peers – ignorance often results in exclusion without a substantial dossier being available - , a second problem arises in the field of historical research. There is a dramatic increase of "new" sources, the Twitter-material with regard to Islamo-leftism being a good example. There is an urgent need for methodologies that are able to classify and ranking material as presented on media like Twitter, not to control them but in order to bring an hierarchy in them, a method that has proved to be fruitful and helpful in the "classic" historical and literary approaches.

With regard to the need of (and concern about) big data, there is a factor which is often neglected. Nobody questions the importance of digitization, and the historians are very happy with the many initiatives taken, even although they are well aware of the (implicit or explicit) injustice of choices made: often the digitization of "haves" (both on the level of data available and on the level of the financial means to digitize) is prioritized, even although there is no evidence that these data are superior to those not available on digital platforms because of a lack of means. It might well be that in a continent where culture of rights is so much propagated, a lack of financial resources will result in information input at different speeds. Needless to say, that this will have an impact on (the lack of) a correct view on European history in its rich diversity.

Moreover, the digitization of archival sources, important as it is, is as good as the instructions given to the digitizers and the prejudices that define the working procedures. What will be put in the databases depends on technology – research based on technology is always dependent on the capacity and quality of the instruments used. It also depends on the absence/presence of qualified personal. And finally it

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depends on the diversity of the material available in an institution: archives in a dominant Catholic region will consist of much Catholic data, but probably do not do justice to what is preserved by the minorities, if any. Moreover, material of "newcomers" (migrants, often with a different background), often is not preserved – in fact, in new contexts, priority is given to the future, not to the preservation of the immediate past -, because the newcomers are confronted with serious challenges such as survival, integration, adaptation, and the like.

2.10.   Some Recommendations

The many examples given in this paper make clear that the culture of rights is a very complex issue and that it is a culture that time and again must be defended, if not conquered. A genuine culture of rights includes a culture of duties for all. Freedom of conscience and religious liberty are based on respect for the human being and thus are to be defined in terms of dialogue. Respect and dialogue should be "universal categories" in the organization of human societies. A numeric majority should not be used as a criterion pro or con freedom of speech, freedom of dissent, religious liberty. In a sense, all people belong to minorities. Being a minority is not a guarantee that one is right. The examples mentioned throughout this paper make clear that all regimes become totalitarian the day they reject public expressions and acts, revealing people's (a)religious meaning of life programmes.

Fruitful dialogue presupposes literacy, in our case religious literacy: the contours for the development of such literacy exist, but there is a clear distance between legal frameworks and concrete realisations.

Speaking without knowledge of dossiers leads to hopeless misunderstandings and futile conclusions. Religious literacy is a condition sine qua non both among academics and the society as a whole. Religion is a phenomenon that has an impact on societal life and requires a firm grasp of religious traditions. The examples given have shown the complex diversity of the religious backgrounds of individuals and communities. In a culture of rights, historians of religion will only do justice to this diversity if they are profoundly familiar with one's own culture. The emic and etic must interact constantly.

Globalization has resulted in a growing awareness of heterogenous diversity. Reflection on that diversity requires availability of sources. We live in a time where digitization facilitates entrance to sources, also to sources that were often neglected in the past, partly because they were (and are) produced by minority groups, thus not belonging to the dominant trends in history. However, there is an imminent danger that digitization will depend on who is able to pay (the haves) thus excluding those who do not have the means (the have-nots).

Dissemination of data will result in increase of knowledge and dissemination of an academically well-founded knowledge. Whether this will happen in a "democratic" way or not, remains a challenge.

In this era of big data the data available in religious studies and history of religion are both impressive and limited. Although we speak of millions of data, we have to accept that language barriers, differences in approaches, differences in expertises used, result in gaps in our knowledge. That the same is happening in all academic branches, is not a consolation.

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The new media are becoming a source of big data. They may become sources for future research, also on the level of religious history. However, reflection on this challenge is still to be developed. It belongs to the task of historians to take care of these sources in view of future research.

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