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Religion and the Opinion Makers

Views of Religion among Elite Journalists in Germany

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, religious themes have been attracting increasing attention in Germany. The strong media presence of religion is the outcome of, on the one hand, its role in various political upheavals¹ and, on the other hand, public debates over religion in the social sphere, such as the installation of crucifixes in classrooms and the introduction of “life skills, ethics, and religion” (*Lebenskunde/Ethik/Religion*) as a compulsory, nondenominational course to replace religious education in schools.² The spotlight has been on religious conflicts and religiously motivated violence as well as on issues that accentuate religious differences, for example, whether female Muslim teachers should be allowed to cover their hair in school and whether, and where, mosques may be built.³ Occasionally, religion itself becomes a media topic. The new millennium, for instance, was an opportunity for reflection on the Christian roots of Western culture, and the highly public death of Pope John Paul II in April 2005 was perceived as a religious event, even a provocative or irritating one.⁴ Islam, which, unlike Christian churches, is experiencing growth in Europe, is also featured in the media, though as a potential source of the meaningfulness of life that secular society appears to have lost. In this way, the media’s coverage and staging of religion have contributed to an increase in the visibility of religion, and even institutionalized religion, in

- 1 See José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- 2 See Joachim von Soosten, “Öffentlichkeit und Evidenz – Evangelische Kirchen im öffentlichen Wettbewerb. Ein Bericht zur Lage in Deutschland,” *Jahrbuch für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften* 44 (2003): 40–1; Karl Gabriel and Hans-Joachim Höhn, eds., *Religion heute – öffentlich und politisch. Provokationen, Kontroversen, Perspektiven* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008); and Christel Gärtner, “Die Rückkehr der Religion in der politischen und medialen Öffentlichkeit,” in Gabriel and Höhn, *Religion heute*.
- 3 See Werner Schiffauer, *Migration und kulturelle Differenz* (Berlin: Ausländerbeauftragte des Senats, 2002) and Monika Wohlrab-Sahar and Levent Tezcan, eds., *Konfliktfeld Islam in Europa* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2007).
- 4 See Michaela Pilters, “Der ‘Gebrauchswert’ einer Religion,” in *Buckower Mediengespräche. Die Medien und die Gretchenfrage*, ed. Hans-Dieter Felsmann (Munich: Kopaed, 2006).

the public sphere but, at the same time, to continuing shifts in the discourse on religion.⁵

In this paper, I will present some of the findings of “Religion among Opinion Makers,”⁶ our study of the visibility of religion in media and politics. I will first outline the study’s questions, objects, and methodology (section 2), and then present some of its results (section 3). My principal interest concerns the patterns of interpretation that elite journalists adopt as they write about religion. I approach this from two perspectives: religion as an object of professional journalistic practice (3.1) and religion as a subjective factor, i. e., the extent to which the journalists’ own religious attitudes affect their view of the world, their understanding of contemporary history and society, and their professional ethics (3.2). In the concluding section, I will summarize my findings in section 3 and apply them toward understanding the conditions for media inclusion and exclusion of religion (4).

2. Research questions, objects, and methodology

Our study focuses on news coverage of religion in the public sphere.⁷ The relationship between religion and the media in modern societies is ambivalent. Religions have always used media to disseminate their messages, and modern mass media offer religion a chance to heighten public awareness of itself outside of the church, yet the media themselves have no particular commitment to religion. Thus, modern mass media both shape the public’s image of religion, as research on, especially, the image of Islam has shown,⁸ and play a

- 5 See Frank Bösch and Lucian Hölscher, “Die Kirchen im öffentlichen Diskurs,” in *Kirchen – Medien – Öffentlichkeit. Transformationen kirchlicher Selbst- und Fremddeutungen seit 1945*, eds. Frank Bösch and Lucian Hölscher (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 18.
- 6 Karl Gabriel and Hans-Richard Reuter led the research project, carried out at the University of Münster, with funding from the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Adolf-Loges-Stiftung. Christel Gärtner, Karl Gabriel, and Hans-Richard Reuter, *Religion bei Meinungsmachern. Eine Untersuchung bei Elitejournalisten in Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2012).
- 7 See Karl Gabriel, “Säkularisierung und öffentliche Religion. Religionssoziologische Anmerkungen mit Blick auf den europäischen Kontext,” *Jahrbuch für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften* 44 (2003): 13–36; and Hans-Richard Reuter, “Öffentliche Meinung,” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, vol. 6, 4th ed., ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).
- 8 See, for example, Anne Hoffmann, *Islam in den Medien. Der publizistische Konflikt um Annemarie Schimmel* (Münster: Lit, 2004); Sabine Schiffer, *Die Darstellung des Islams in der Presse: Sprache, Bilder, Suggestionen. Eine Auswahl von Techniken und Beispielen* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2005); and Dirk Halm, “Zur Wahrnehmung des Islams und zur sozio-kulturellen Teilhabe der Muslime in Deutschland” (unpublished manuscript, 2006).

part in transforming religion and religions. There is a dialectical movement between the way churches and religions see themselves and the way the media see them. On the one hand, media presentations change public perceptions of religions, while, on the other hand, churches and religious communities respond to those changes with their own reinterpretations.⁹

However, the study did not examine the media's representation of religious issues. Instead, it investigated the significance that public opinion makers in the media ascribe to religion and communicate to society. Our research was guided by questions regarding the selection criteria for coverage of religion, the relevance and news value that journalists attributed to religion, their perception of religious events, and how they represent the changing function and meaning of religion in society. We were also interested in journalists' own understanding of religion, their religious identities, their commitment to religious norms, and the relevance of religion to professional ethics in their everyday journalistic practice.

These interests determined the subject of our research, namely, the group of influential leader writers and political columnists known as the *Commentariat*. This comparatively small group of opinion makers, which is also called a "public-sphere elite,"¹⁰ interprets social developments, and its views are very influential. We hypothesized that this highly professional minority forms a kind of vanguard of changes in perceptions of the relationship between religion and the public sphere and is itself an active participant in establishing new boundaries between the two. We interviewed a total of 18 journalists who either hold leading positions on editorial teams for politics, culture, or news or write opinion pieces. The media they represent are German supra-regional daily and weekly papers, public television and radio broadcasters, and private broadcasters. We used contrasting criteria for gender, generation, regional origin, and religious background in selecting our subjects. One-third were women, who are more strongly represented among the younger respondents. Germany's two major Christian denominations, Catholicism and Lutheranism, were approximately equally represented. One journalist from eastern Germany was included—the only one who did not have a religious upbringing. Atheists are hard to find among Germany's elite journalists, as are members of religious minorities.

9 This highly complex situation is described in Bösch's and Hölscher's volume *Kirchen - Medien - Öffentlichkeit*, which explains how the structural transformation of the public sphere in the 1960s changed the ways that churches communicate.

10 On the term "Öffentlichkeitseelite," see Christiane Eilders, Friedhelm Neidhardt, and Barbara Pfetsch, *Die Stimme der Medien. Pressekommentare und politische Öffentlichkeit in der Bundesrepublik* (Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2004).

We carried out a combination of narrative-biographical¹¹ and expert interviews¹² with all of the journalists. These were recorded and transcribed. On the basis of the interviews, we reconstructed, first, typical patterns of interpretation and argumentation and, second, interviewees' professional and religious habitus-formation.¹³ Interviewees' statements were interpreted in terms of their narrative contexts. In addition to their subjective attitudes, we were particularly interested in latent meanings and habitual patterns of action and interpretation.¹⁴

The interviews were carried out between June 2006 and April 2007, which explains a dominance of Christianity in the results, as the death of John Paul II and the election of Benedict XVI were still very recent events and had a positive effect on perceptions of the Catholic Church (although this had changed by the end of the decade as cases of child abuse came to light). For this reason, our study may appear to show more extensive coverage of the Christian religion than is actually the case.¹⁵ A further high-profile event may also have influenced interviewees' perceptions, viz., the attacks of September 11, 2001, which intensified political interest in Islam. Although our research was not specifically directed at the treatment of religious minorities, in the following I will look at interviewees' opinions on this issue, especially with regard to Islam, which is the subject of far more attention than other religious minorities. Clearly, our findings on Islam are historically specific, and if the interviews had been conducted today the results might have been very different. In recent years, the fixation on Islam as a source of conflicts has lessened slightly,

- 11 See Fritz Schütze, "Biographieforschung und narratives Interview," *Neue Praxis* 3 (1983): 283–93.
- 12 See Michael Meuser and Ulrike Nagel, "Experteninterviews – Wissenssoziologische Voraussetzungen und methodische Durchführung," in *Handbuch Qualitative Forschungsmethoden in der Erziehungswissenschaft*, eds. Barbara Friebertshäuser, Antje Langer, and Annedore Prengel (Weinheim: Juventa, 2010).
- 13 For details of our analysis of habitus, see Gärtner, Gabriel, and Reuter, *Religion bei Meinungsmachern*, 123–255. Because journalists are members of the society on which they report and reflect, attitudes to which they do not have conscious access will always influence their work.
- 14 On procedures of case reconstruction and their methodological foundations, see Klaus Kraimer, ed., *Die Fallrekonstruktion. Sinnverstehen in der sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000); Ulrich Oevermann, "Die Methode der Fallrekonstruktion in der Grundlagenforschung sowie der klinischen und pädagogischen Praxis," in Kraimer, *Die Fallrekonstruktion*; Uwe Flick, ed., *Qualitative Sozialforschung. Eine Einführung*, 6th ed. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002); Andreas Wernet, *Einführung in die Interpretationstechnik der Objektiven Hermeneutik. Qualitative Sozialforschung* (Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2006); and Aglaja Przyborski and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, *Qualitative Sozialforschung. Ein Arbeitsbuch* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008).
- 15 Viewed over the long term, media attention to religion appears to undulate between peaks and troughs. See Bösch and Hölscher, "Die Kirchen im öffentlichen Diskurs," 8.

due partly to reflection on the part of journalists and partly to the increased presence of Muslim Germans in the media. These changes have produced a significant expansion in the range of themes covered.

3. Elite journalists' patterns of interpretation regarding religion

In this section, I will characterize some of the patterns of interpretation with regard to religion that we found among interviewees, which I arrange as a series of propositions.¹⁶ The analysis first addresses selection criteria for media coverage, the relevance of religion for coverage, and interviewees' views of religion (3.1) and, then, the ways in which their religious self-understanding influences their actions in the coverage of religion and in their professional ethics (3.2).

3.1 Religion as an object of professional journalistic practice¹⁷

First proposition: The selection of religious themes for media coverage complies with criteria typical of the media system as a whole.

This proposition states that the perceived newsworthiness of religion is subject to the same selection criteria as other topics: meaningfulness, mass appeal, unexpectedness, the status of speakers, their orientation on conflict and scandal, and a certain preoccupation with quantitative data, for example, a rise or drop in the number of people leaving a church. Only in exceptional cases, and depending on their personal habitus-formation, do journalists decide to devote space to religious topics as such, perhaps because they observe society's loss of tradition and do not want to support it.¹⁸ Overall, however, the data suggest that, for the most part, journalists subscribe to a systems-theoretical mirror-model of the public sphere.¹⁹ We observed no ambition on the part of interviewees that their work contribute actively to changes in the society's understanding of religion.

16 These propositions are presented in Gärtner, Gabriel, and Reuter, *Religion bei Meinungsmachern*, chapter 2 (written by Karl Gabriel and Hans-Richard Reuter).

17 For further detail, see *ibid.*, 33–67.

18 See *ibid.*, 167.

19 See Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, trans. Kathleen Cross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000). Systems theory holds that the mass media offer society and its actors a reality-constructing mirror to observe both events and the observers of events.

Second proposition: Media coverage of religion is based primarily on religion's social and political effects and pursues an inclusionary strategy.

As one interviewee put it, the media cover religion for worldly, not religious, reasons.²⁰ The decisive factors are social and political significance. Around two-thirds of German citizens still belong to a church, and the Christian churches are a factor in public life, if only because of their constitutionally protected status, to which status other religious communities aspire. At the same time, the number of immigrants with non-Christian backgrounds is rising markedly, so that religious minorities are also becoming a subject of interest. Irrespective of their religious affiliation, the majority of interviewees advocate a paradigm of inclusion. That is to say, most of them accept that religion and the churches should have a place in the public sphere and view the social influence of religious representatives as both significant and legitimate.

In contrast, exclusively religious themes or themes internal to the churches call less for news coverage or commentary. Religiosity itself is alien to the media system and is therefore seldom addressed; it is generally regarded as a private matter. Nevertheless, journalists occasionally take Christian holidays such as Christmas or Easter as opportunities to go beyond the everyday business of politics and write something "timeless" on religious issues, for example, a reflection on theodicy.²¹ As a rule, journalists working in the area of the arts and culture are more likely to feel an affinity with religious questions, their interest in literature having familiarized them with the contemplation of transcendental matters or the sublime.

The journalists we interviewed cite three main reasons for the growing interest in religion in the mediatized public sphere.

(1) A special sensitivity to religiously motivated conflicts and violence. Our interviewees find that Islam, in particular, has made the public aware of the pivotal role of religion in many political conflicts across the world. They argue that media coverage of religion has changed since the 9/11 attacks. They believe that the global framework of religious conflicts and the various religions' attitudes towards violence have become the focus of media attention. In this context, they perceive Islam primarily as a religion that has not sufficiently clarified its relationship with other religions and its stance on violence. They accuse Islam of failing to incorporate the Enlightenment values that to a certain extent pacified Christianity and led to the separation of church and state. Coverage of the dangers of religious violence—dangers that they see as associated with the expansion of Islam—stimulates more general reflections on the theme of religion. As one interviewee explains:

20 Gärtner, Gabriel, and Reuter, *Religion bei Meinungsmachern*, 55.

21 *Ibid.*, 60.

And as a result we are looking into this and we have to think about it, because it threatens us ourselves, our way of life, our freedom, our concept of tolerance, and all that obviously puts religion on the agenda every day.²²

The difficulties of intercultural communication in everyday life and especially the political topicality of religiously motivated terrorism, the global spread of Islamism, and the Middle East conflict, all make religion a privileged subject of media coverage. In addition, such phenomena generate qualitative changes in the perception of religion: according to the interviewees, the conflicts among religions and between religion and society show that, far from being a private matter, religion is a crucial source of violence, political tension, and conflict in the world. This makes national and international dialogue on religion extremely important. Today, religion is becoming more accepted as a constitutive component of culture. Another journalist remarks:

And in this context, of course, we discuss it heatedly, and at the moment, these years, you'll find the topic very widespread in all the German media and also with us, and anyone who thought that religion was a private affair, well of course in this context they've had to think again. Religion affects everyone, regardless of whether they personally are believers, but religion affects everyone because political dialogue cannot exclude the topic of religion, as you can see very clearly these days because everyone is affected by the claims of religion both in an ethical respect and in a democracy, but also in the separation of religion and state, for example in Islam. And that means dialogue within Germany and international dialogue is affected, so we are increasingly realizing that the dialogue between states has to be a dialogue about cultures, an important component of which are the religions; that's to say, it's impossible to ignore religion in any international dialogue, in any intercultural dialogue, and anyone who tries to do so will probably be leaving aside the most important part, which at the moment is causing tension in the world.²³

(2) A second factor informing the new interest in religion stands in contrast to the media's preference for covering interrelationships between religion and conflict. According to our interviewees, the Christian religion and churches are attracting growing media attention because of their unique role as guarantors of public morality and the common good. When it comes to questions of principle about social coexistence, interviewees say, the voice of the churches is indispensable.

(3) The third reason, which our interviewees consider particularly characteristic of the media's new interest in religion, is that, as the public death of the Pope, the subsequent papal election, and the new Pope's visit to Germany

22 *Ibid.*, 56. For the transcription conventions, see *ibid.*, 279; the German excerpts were slightly streamlined for readability.

23 *Ibid.*, 57.

in 2005 and 2006 show, religion in the age of television and the Internet can generate unimagined religious staging. Since the days of the media pioneer John Paul II, Catholicism has been successful in combining the media's interest in grand spectacles with the Church's self-staging. This success may be explained in part by the fact that the media depend on the embodiment of religion in tangible institutions and charismatic, photogenic personalities.

Third proposition: Religion is taken to be relevant not only to individuals but also (and especially) to institutions and the cultural more generally.

Our interviewees do not distinguish among the churches, religion, and Christianity nor do they have a sophisticated concept of religion. This finding was not unexpected. On the one hand, they are able to think about religion and religiousness in a framework wider than ecclesiasticism. Indeed, this would be hard to avoid given that religious pluralism, which is growing as a result of globalization and migration, includes religious traditions that do not form churches, such as Islam and Buddhism.²⁴ Interviewees also see a rising tension between institutional religion and the subjective aspect of religion, an expression which can be found in those forms of worship outside the Church that have come to the fore as a result of the New Age movement. On the other hand, almost all of the journalists we interviewed find a completely individualistic form of religion unimaginable. They find it hard to imagine a religion devoid of all connection to a larger community since any such religion would be unable to build a tradition or exert influence on society. Likewise, our respondents do not believe that the novelty value of alternative forms of religiousness favors their mass-media amplification and popularization.

Three dimensions of religion may be distinguished: (1) the *individual or personal*, (2) the *institutional and organized*, and (3) the *cultural*. Interviewees consider the first to be an option for individuals. They believe that institutional religion is considerably more relevant to the mediatised public sphere because they regard religious organizations as a necessary and legitimate means for religion to increase its opportunities to influence society. However, they ascribe the greatest importance to the third dimension, as it is the provider of religion.

24 See Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, "Die Entwicklung von Religion in der modernen Gesellschaft," in *Religion, Kirche, Islam. Eine soziale und diakonische Herausforderung*, ed. Klaus D. Hildemann (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 31–5.

3.2 Religion as a subjective factor²⁵

In the following, I will discuss the extent to which our interviewees' religious self-understanding shapes their views on contemporary history and society and on their professional ethics.

Fourth proposition: In general, a new visibility and public presence for religion can be observed.

Interviewees' comments on this matter follow four patterns of explanation and interpretation.

(1) The new interest in religion can be interpreted as a "cultural defense"²⁶ in response to Islam. Some interviewees regard the Islamist attacks on September 11, 2001, and the new religious pluralism in Germany arising from its large Muslim population as causes of a return to Christian roots. They take this to explain the media's dual interest in religion's potential for conflict²⁷ and its integrative function. Most of the interviewees in our sample see the interweaving of Christianity, humanism, and the Enlightenment as the basis of peaceful coexistence, but they tend to deny that Islam is capable of a similar combination. Nevertheless, some acknowledge that Islam emphasizes the vivid commitment and cohesion that religion can generate. According to the interviewees, the new public presence of Christianity is the result of native-born Germans' need to reassure themselves of their own religious and cultural identity. For example:

Faced with the attack on our ways of life and our convictions—the ones we have founded our society on, that we have set down in laws and constitutions and human-rights declarations—combined with ... religious attacks coming from parts of Islam, I do see something like a ... reinvigoration of Christian self-confidence.²⁸

(2) On questions of social justice and the biomedical manipulation of human nature, churches in Germany are ethical agents and defenders of the common good. Even if most of the journalists in our sample do not consider religion relevant to the conduct of their own lives, they ascribe an important societal role to Christianity as a foundation for ethics, morality, and a sense of direc-

25 See Gärtner, Gabriel, and Reuter, *Religion bei Meinungsmachern*, 68–118.

26 Steve Bruce, "What the Secularization Paradigm Really Says," in *Religiosität in der säkularisierten Welt. Theoretische und empirische Beiträge zur Säkularisierungsdebatte in der Religionssoziologie*, eds. Manuel Franzmann, Christel Gärtner, and Nicole Köck (Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2006). "Cultural defense" refers to a countertrend to secularization consisting of "circumstances in which people will forego the benefits of increasing individual liberty and freedom and remain committed to community models of identity in which religion remains central" (*ibid.*, 42). Applied to our case, this means the defense of Christian, culturally Christian, or secular values.

27 Gärtner, Gabriel, and Reuter, *Religion bei Meinungsmachern*, 86.

28 *Ibid.*, 85.

tion in life. This suggests that our subjects believe that they are seeing a social crisis that gives questions of values and their grounding a special urgency.

(3) The character of large-scale religious events has proven to be especially inviting of mass-media coverage. Thanks to its talent for staging, the Catholic Church proved to be particularly attractive to mass media in 2005 and 2006.

(4) The new public presence of religion depends on the charisma of individuals, which the media amplify. During the period of our research, the especially charismatic leaders were Cardinal Karl Lehmann, president of the German Bishops' Conference; Bishop Wolfgang Huber, chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany; and Paul Spiegel, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. The media presence of representatives of Muslim associations was still quite minor at the time, though this has since changed.

Fifth proposition: Organized, institutional Christianity remains the reference point for interviewees' religious self-understanding, whether critical or affirmative, but their perceptions of the compatibility between institutional requirements and individual religious sensibilities differ according to denomination.

Thirteen of the interviewees are members of either the Lutheran or the Catholic Church. On the basis of baptism, all but one has a Christian background. It proved very difficult to find a single representative of an atheist identity among the elite journalists. Despite substantial differences in the influence of their religious backgrounds and the extent of their disengagement from it, all of the interviewees still think about religion in terms of Christianity and the Christian Churches, whether approvingly or critically. It is here that denominational differences are most striking. For Catholics, there is tension between doctrinal moral norms and decisions of conscience taken on one's own responsibility, whereas for Protestants conflicts tend to arise from aesthetic or intellectual preferences that diverge from those of church authorities.

Among the socially relevant functions of religion, interviewees name especially the meaningful interpretation of human existence and the moral guidance of action. They don't necessarily combine both; some report a commitment to Christian values without a belief in God. The majority considers the ideology of critically unmasking and devaluing religion, an attitude long dominant among intellectuals, as anachronistic.

Sixth proposition: Allegiance to standards of professional ethics does not depend on an individual's values or religious attitude.

All of the interviewees share a binding commitment to respect for human dignity as the highest moral principle. Professional associations and training institutions are most responsible for passing on the fundamental standards of professional ethics set down in the guidelines of the German Press Council. The interviewees believe it is necessary to update the profession's code in order to reinforce the media's autonomy and independence from political influence. However, they note that the bases of situationally appropriate deci-

sions in everyday journalistic life, especially in reflecting on the consequences of one's actions, subjects' right to privacy, and the portrayal of violence, usually exceed what can be codified in general rules or taught as part of training. Instead, practical learning on the job and case-specific reflection in the editorial peer group are vital. Our analysis of the working habitus of the elite journalists we interviewed reveals that they have a fully formed professional habitus. The same is not true of journalism as a system, which is in need of further professionalization.²⁹

4. Conclusions

(1) Concerning the media approach toward religion we observe changes since the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, the West German media pursued a strategy of *exclusion*,³⁰ which marginalized the churches and excluded them from the circle of socially relevant agents, but the journalists we interviewed advocate a strategy of notable *inclusion*. They rate churches and religions highly as a force in civil society and see them as fulfilling the important function of providing a foundation for society's values. Our subjects are becoming more aware of the need to preserve Western culture and are recollecting their own roots, which some also wish to strengthen. Yet the media inclusion and consequent cultural renaissance of the Christian religion may go hand in hand with the hardening of attitudes against Islam. This risk arises when citizens feel that their personal identities or the internal cohesion of society is under threat.

(2) The media's exclusion or inclusion of religion may be considered in terms of the state of tension and conflict within the realm of religion. The old tensions among the Christian denominations, perceptible in Germany well into the 1960s, are now almost completely a thing of the past (even if they can still be glimpsed occasionally as, for example, when Protestant journalists complain of exaggerated "Pope hype"). The new lines of conflict run, on the one hand, between the religious and the secular and, on the other, between the culturally Christian and Islam. In terms of their responses to the public presence of religion and, thus, of religious minorities, our analysis of their religious habitus reveals three different types of journalist.³¹ The *first type* consists of journalists who maintain an institutional affiliation to Christianity, even if it is not necessarily accompanied by religious commitments, and take a

29 Ibid., 201–204.

30 See Pilters, "Der 'Gebrauchswert' einer Religion," 67–72.

31 See Gärtner, Gabriel, and Reuter, *Religion bei Meinungsmachern*, 123–96.

positive attitude towards religion. This has two consequences. These journalists reflect on the limitations of the Enlightenment and secularity, and they are more likely to perceive Islam as a religion that generates values and community. As a result, they are more inclined towards the inclusion of religious minorities in media coverage. The *second type* lacks any religious affiliation but acknowledges the sociopolitical engagement of Christianity and the churches, and even welcomes them for their ability to protect minorities. However, they perceive Christianity primarily as a culture and not as a religion. This attitude is frequently associated with intolerance towards Islam, which is perceived as “culturally alien” and thus tends to result in the media exclusion of religious minorities. Another form of “cultural defense,” but one with a different slant, can be found in the *third type*, which has a more secularist habitus. These journalists combine a positive view of the Enlightenment with an “enlightened intolerance” towards all religions, acknowledging their rights solely in the private sphere. This type generally argues for an exclusion of religion from public space.

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Abstract

Die Studie »Religion bei Meinungsmachern«, die mit Elitejournalisten in Deutschland durchgeführt wurde, untersucht die Frage, wie Journalisten Religion wahrnehmen, deuten und medial kommunizieren. In dem vorliegenden Beitrag stelle ich einige Ergebnisse der Studie vor, und zwar zentrale Deutungsmuster der meinungsbildenden Journalist*innen im Umgang mit Religion. Zum einen wird Religion als Gegenstand der professionellen journalistischen Praxis beleuchtet, wobei es um die Auswahlkriterien der Berichterstattung und das Religionsverständnis der Journalistinnen und Journalisten geht. Zum

anderen als subjektiver Faktor hinsichtlich des eigenen religiösen Selbstverständnisses der Befragten. Es wird dargelegt, inwieweit das religiöse Selbstverständnis die Zeit- und Gesellschaftsdiagnose sowie die berufsethischen Entscheidungen beeinflusst. Die journalistische Wahrnehmung und Deutung von Religion wird sowohl allgemein als auch im Hinblick auf den Islam in den Blick kommen.

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