

MANAGING RELIGION IN A GLOBAL WORLD

The United Nation's ruling against Norwegian Religious Education

Abstract

In 2004, after a group of parents supported by the Norwegian Humanist Association and the Norwegian Islamic Council brought litigation against the state to the United Nations (UN), the mandatory teaching of religious education (RE) in Norway was found to be in violation of the Human Rights Codes of article 18, paragraph 4, of the Covenant by the United Nations Human Rights Committee. In light of the above, this study asks the question: what role does Christianity play in the state of Norway's discourse of integration and how is this managed in the face of supranational censure from secularized global institutions such as the UN? This is a qualitative study that critically explores official documents from the Norwegian government and the United Nations Human Rights Committee. The debate is situated within the theoretical framework of Foucault's (1999) 'technologies of pastoral power' which morphed into modern forms of 'governmentality', and aspects of secularization thesis in making sense of the potential 're/desacralizing' effect of supranational policing of national religious space. It is argued that the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, as a manifestly western document rooted in liberal individualism and social contractarian theories is poorly equipped in grappling with worldviews rooted in other epistemologies.

Introduction

The teaching of religion (i.e. a confessional Christianity) in public primary schools in Norway was the reserve of Lutheran Christians until 1969.¹ In 1997, the new subject, named 'Christianity, Religions and Life Stances', was made mandatory in public primary schools in grades one through ten (ages six to sixteen). Citing Norway's Christian heritage, the lion's share was devoted to Christianity, but world religions and philosophies also featured in the subject to reflect the increasingly pluralistic demography. Unlike the earlier subject, no exemptions were granted to students from other faith traditions, except for activities considered to be explicitly religious, such as the attendance of Christmas church services. The latter gelled into a lightning rod political issue which accounts for the subject's checkered and fraught trajectory.

¹ See Oddbjørn Leirvik 'Teaching for tolerance, respect and recognition in relation with religion or belief. The current debate about religious education and freedom of religion in Norway. Based on a paper presented to the conference on "Religious Education and Education in Religions"', *Swedish Institute in Alexandria*. 2002. <http://folk.uio.no/leirvik/OsloCoalition/Leirvik0902.htm>

Nicolaisen notes, 'In 2008 the curriculum for the new common Norwegian RE subject was revised for the third time since it was introduced in 1997. It was renamed for the third time and is now called "*Religion, livssyn og etikk*" (Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics)'.² The most contentious issues inter alia are: the space allotted to Christianity in the curriculum, opt-out clauses in regards to aspects of the subject perceived as religious participation, and pedagogical issues pertaining to neutrality and objectivity.³ In 2004, after a group of parents supported by the Norwegian Humanist Association and the Norwegian Islamic Council brought litigation against the state to the United Nations (UN), the teaching of RE in Norway was found to be in violation of the Human Rights Codes of article 18, paragraph 4, of the Covenant by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (*Leirvåg v. Norway*).⁴ Two years later, another ruling against the current status of RE in Norway in 2006 by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg led to amendments that redressed some of the concerns raised.

In light of the above, this study asks the question: what role does religion play in the state of Norway's discourse of integration and how is this managed in the face of supranational censure from global institutions such as the UN? This is a qualitative study that critically explores official documents from the Norwegian government and the United Nations Human Rights Committee. My focus on the UNCHR ruling is premised on the overall aim of this paper which is to critically consider the challenges that arise in a world where local stakeholders appeal to the UN – the world's preeminent global organization – to arbitrate in matters of religion. This is not to take away from the salience of the ECHR ruling against Norway which, unlike the UN's, was binding and led to changes in the teaching of RE. Rather this is a study that puts the *global* rather than the *regional* under the spotlight. Germane to the analysis in this paper is a heuristic problematization of the very real potential for UN member states, especially where RE is mandatory, to perceive the UN as a viable interlocutor in conflicts pertaining to what might be perceived as an adversarial state religious discourse.

The question becomes – what happens when local stakeholders, having lost confidence in the nation-state's ability to safeguard their freedom of conscience and belief, appeal to the only

² Tove Nicolaisen, 'Corresponding values and colonizing discourses: Situating "Hindu children" and their values in relation to hegemonic Norwegian discourses about religious education', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 34: 3 (2012), pp. 231-245.

³ Njål Høstmælingen, 'Mandatory religious education that builds tolerance: Lessons to be learned from Norway?' *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 13:4 (2005), pp. 403-412.

⁴ Bengt-Ove Andreassen, 'Religion education in Norway: Tension or harmony between human rights and Christian cultural heritage?' *The Finnish Society for the Study of Religion*, 49:2 (2005), pp. 137-164.

other body invested by the global community with the moral gravitas to corroborate their grievance? In this regard, Ghana, to take a random example, would obviously not direct its grievance to the ECHR but to the United Nations, and when this transpires, of significance is the problem of a UN discourse of human rights locking horns with a Ghanaian worldview that might be rooted in either a Christian, Muslim or African traditional religions epistemology.⁵ The need to appreciate the above is captured in the following statement:

The United Nations remains the only multilateral service-oriented body with a comprehensive remit and a mandate signed on to by all the governments of the world. As such, it is an inescapable feature of modern day development, governance, and humanitarian service. And while it has obviously been able to exist—and grow—the last sixty plus years, with relatively little systematic notice to religion and religious bodies, the arguments presented in this journal edition show that times have significantly changed. ⁶

The debate is situated within the theoretical framework of Foucault's 'technologies of pastoral power' which morphed into modern forms of 'governmentality', and aspects of secularization thesis in making sense of the potential 're/desacralizing' effect of supranational policing of national religious space.⁷ With regards to practical significance, it is argued that stakeholders concerned with the subject of RE and religion in general will benefit from an interrogation of the novel manner in which the mandatory teaching of religion is now no longer an affair left to the discretion of national states, but is impacted by the rise of transnational organizations in a globalized and increasingly 'supraterritorialized' world with a decline of boundaries.⁸ In the next section the crux of the ruling against the subject of religious education in Norway is presented.

The UN Committee's ruling against the state of Norway

The UN Committee's ruling, among others, opines that the subject evinces internal tensions that morph into contradictions. On the one hand, the subject shows a clear preference for Christianity while, on the other, the opt-out clause is formulated in such a way that it appears to grant full exemption from any part of the subject that parents deem participatory or the practice of another religion. The Committee further was of the opinion that, as it stands, the

⁵ Paul Thomas, 'Religious education and the feminisation of witchcraft: a study of three secondary schools in Kumasi, Ghana', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 34: 1(2012), pp.67-86.

⁶ Azza Karam, 'Concluding thoughts on religion and the United Nations: Redesigning the Culture of Development', *Crosscurrents*,. (September 2010) Pp.462-474.

⁷Michel Foucault, *Religion and culture: Michel Foucault*. Jeremy R. Carrette (ed) (New York: Routledge, 1999), p.149.

⁸ Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A critical introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005).

rules that govern exemption put undue pressure on the parents who are required to read the entire text and validate exemption. This cumbersome procedure it is feared will have the effect of discouraging parents from exercising their right to opt-out, according to the Committee.

The Committee stresses that the KRL-subject combines teaching of religious knowledge with the practice of a particular religious belief, among others the memorization of prayers, the singing of hymns and religious assemblies. The Committee concludes that the subject's proselytizing and explanatory sections are so intertwined that the right to exemption is for all purposes impractical...The conclusion is that the case constitutes a breach of Article 18(4) (Translation mine).⁹

In the aftermath of the UN ruling, the government of Norway could have either amended the contents and framework to make it more palatable as a mandatory subject to a wider audience or it could have chosen to grant more latitude to those wishing to opt-out and hence provide alternative teaching avenues for this latter group. All governments since 1997 have more or less opted for the first course of action.¹⁰ Clearly, as the government white paper (see Appendix 1) indicates, the *détente* was quickly shaken revealing the subject's controversial foundations. Three points are established from the above. As refracted through the prism of the UN Committee, Norway's state-sponsored mandatory religious education is deemed as one that demonstrates a clear 'preference for Christianity'; the rules governing exemption put undue pressure on parents and have the effect of discouraging them from exercising their rights and, finally, that the guidelines that distinguish between the 'explanatory' and 'participatory' are muddled. The above legal wrangling, though not the main focus of this paper, underscores this paper's thesis that the UN Committee's human rights-based discourse is perceived to trump the nation state's traditional role of arbitrating on matters of religion. What is needed is a genealogical unraveling of the epistemological and discursive underpinning of both the state of Norway and the UN with a view toward understanding how this might impact on future conflicts. The focus in this paper considers the wider repercussions which can be formulated in this manner: in a world that is shrinking rapidly, what implication does such a ruling, from the current world order's premier organization, have for the wider global community (currently 193 member states)?

⁹ Njål Høstmælingen 'For sterk trospåvirkning: norsk kristendomsundervisning i strid med menneskerettighetene', *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift*, 4:106 (2005), pp.232-252.

¹⁰ Erling Birkedal, 'Krl – Et Fag For Fremtiden? Integrerende sosialisering som pedagogisk mål for skolens religionsundervisning', *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke*. 79: 2 (2008), pp. 130–147.

Neutral and objective?

Admittedly, the brand of Christianity peddled by politicians is elusive to pin down. The introduction to the national Norwegian curriculum underscores terms such as ‘cultural heritage’, ‘Christian values’ and ‘humanistic values’. These terms are used interchangeably and without elaboration. The elasticity of the terms gives much latitude for politicians and other stakeholders in education (and RE in particular) to mean very different things while shying away from a rigorous engagement with their precise meaning.¹¹ It is in the interstices of such lexical obfuscation that right-wing populist parties (e.g. the Progress Party) promote themselves as the defenders of a ‘Christian, cultural heritage’ under assault. Halldis Breidlid, for instance, refers to the Progress Party representative, Christian Tybring-Gjedde, who accused the Christian Democrats of de-Christianizing Norway in supporting a liberal immigration policy.¹²

The Progress Party, founded in 1973, went from being a pariah in the political arena to one which is in power currently having piggybacked on a wave of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment. Tybring-Gjedde went on to state that this attitude of de-Christianizing Norway was extended to the subject of KRL/RE – a testimony to the many mis/uses the subject can be put to. Buoyed by the 9/11 attacks, some governments in the West paid closer attention to the potential of religious education to function as a tool in addressing security concerns. In the eyes of the authorities, what was taught in the homes and madrassas can no longer be perceived as private matters peripheral to the interests of the state. Gearon refers to the latter as the ‘the Counter Terrorist Classroom’.¹³ He draws on Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between ‘negative’ and ‘positive liberty’ to argue for the need for vigilance against state intervention in the religious space with the pretext of upholding democracy and freedom. Gearon states: ‘Although such moves are in intention benign, I conclude that political and security interventions and justifications for religion in education will inevitably shift the aims and purposes of religious education to the aims and purposes of political and security interest’.¹⁴

¹¹ Halldis Breidlid, ‘Et ekskluderende «vi»? Verdier, kulturer og kulturarv i læreplanens generelle del og i formålparagrafen: nasjonalt fellesskap, multikulturalitet og kulturell kompleksitet’, *Acta Didactica Norge*, 6:1, Art.15 (2012), pp.1-18.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Liam Gearon, ‘The Counter Terrorist Classroom: Religion, Education, and Security’, *Religious Education*, The official journal of the Religious Education Association, 108:2 (2013), pp. 129-147.

¹⁴ Liam Gearon, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

What is distilled is the following in regard to the hegemonic discourse of RE in Norway: as stated previously (see Table 1), church baptisms and attendance is in sharp decline. Despite this, the public discourse is one where there is broad agreement that RE is vital as the bearer of a vague ‘Christian-humanistic-cultural heritage’. This RE has of course been supplemented with other world religions and traditions (e.g. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Humanism, and Philosophy) but the rhetoric revolves around the miasma of upholding and perpetuating the ‘Christian-humanistic-cultural heritage’.

In the United Nations ruling against Norway (*Leirvåg v. Norway*) the terms ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ were used without elaboration. On the other hand, RE scholars in Norway have their own interpretations of the terms. According to Peder Gravem the subject is and ought to be neutral to the degree that it does not promote one religion or a life philosophy as the true one.¹⁵ It is my contention that these fine-sounding theoretical formulations do not resonate in sections of the country where segregation of schools along religico-ethnic lines is growing at an alarming rate. Figures for 2014 from the Municipality of Oslo indicate that 40.2 per cent of pupils in the Capital Oslo (primary and lower secondary schools) hail from minority/immigrant backgrounds.¹⁶ The distribution is highly skewed with 7 of these schools having a cohort of over 90 per cent students from minority/immigrant backgrounds. In the high school where I teach Religious Education as a subject, for instance, the overwhelming majority of students are Muslim.¹⁷ It has been my experience that the notion that all religions and life stances are treated equally, as Peder Gravem states,¹⁸ is rejected outright by these students. The denouement of the above, I contend, is the following: the earlier Lutheran hegemony may have lost its hold in Norway due to the process of secularization but the government, intent on inculcating values deemed vital for integration, hammered together a subject (RE) they believed would achieve this objective. It is no surprise, then, given the nebulous nature of the values underpinning this national project, and the authority’s underestimation of the power of personal conviction, that a subject intended to function as a unifying force has turned out to be a Pandora’s Box.

¹⁵ Peder Gravem, ‘Religions- og livssynsundervisning i skolen innenfor rammene av menneskerettighetene, Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift, 2:106 (2005), pp. 67-89.

¹⁶ Utdanningsetaten. <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/politikk-og-administrasjon/etater-og-foretak/utdanningsetaten/>

¹⁷ Paul Thomas & Anders Breidlid, ‘In the shadow of ‘Anglobalization’ national tests in English in Norway and the making of a new English underclass’, Journal of Multicultural Discourses,(2013) DOI:

10.1080/17447143.2015.1041963

¹⁸ Ibid.

In what follows, the genealogy of a Lutheran pastoral national context in Norway is traced with a view towards understanding why the subject of religious education has become a site of contestation.

The genealogy of a Lutheran pastoral power

Despite the UNHCR and the ECHR ruling against Norway in 2004 and 2006 respectively, the incumbent government has drafted a White Paper to reinstate the nomenclature ‘Christianity’ in RE (removed in 2008 in response to the ECHR). The extract below is from the government White Paper (2013) recommending amendments to the current RE curriculum (see Appendix 1):

The government will change the name of the subject of Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics (RLE) to Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics (KRLE). About half of the teaching will be used for the knowledge of Christianity. In the cooperation deal between the Left Party, the Christian Democrats, the Progress Party, the Conservative Party and the Socialist Liberal Party (Left), there was an agreement that the subject of RLE should change name to KRLE (Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics) and that the subject, commensurate with the competence aims, should contain at least 55 per cent Christianity-based knowledge (Translation mine).¹⁹

The government White Paper above is an oddity because the fixation with giving prominence to Christianity in RE is dissonant with the general trend of national secularization in Norway as evidenced in Table 1. Indices of church membership, baptisms, confirmations and church attendance point consistently downwards every year. The White Paper met a storm of protests in 2013 not only from the traditional bastions antithetical to Christianity, such as the Humanist Association, but from church representatives and academics in the field of religious education and religion in general, including the ‘Father’ of the first mandatory RE in 1997 (called Christianity, Religion and Philosophies of Life), Erling Pettersen.²⁰ Broadly speaking, the aforementioned argue that the focus on Christianity will undermine RE’s current integrity as a neutral and uniting platform, lead to acrimonious demands for exemptions and weaken the teaching of Christianity itself. Another poll, conducted by Ipsos MMI found that for the first time since 1985, the number of those answering yes and no to the question “Do

¹⁹ Regjeringen. no [The Government.no]. Forslag til endringer i RLE-faget [Suggestions for amendments to the subject of RE]. Available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/nb/aktuelt/Forslag-til-endringer-i-RLE-faget/id2008836/> (accessed 15 April 2015).

²⁰ See Per Anders Aas ‘Å legge til K i RLE-faget vil virke mot sin hensikt’ [To put the K in the subject of religious education will backfire], *Dagbladet*, 2015, <http://www.dagbladet.no/2015/01/07/kultur/meninger/kronikk/debatt/kristendom/37033461/>

you believe in God?” was tied at 38 per cent (24 per cent answered “not sure”) (Omvik, 2015).²¹

Table 1: Membership and activity in the Norwegian State Church (2004-2014): Source: Generated through Statistics Norway website (2014). (: colon means “could not be divulged officially”).²²

One of the ‘cooperating parties’ which won only 5.6 per cent of the national vote in 2013, and the main agitator behind the campaign to bring back the ‘C’ (Christianity) in RE, is the Christian Democratic Party. According to the party chairman, Knut Arild Hareide:

We are very pleased that KRLE (Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics) is being reinstated in place of RLE (Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics). It was important for the Christian Democrat Party and it is important for the Norwegian society. After all, it was the church which in its time introduced schooling, so it follows that knowledge of Christianity in school is essential. The subject is not introduced for proselytizing, but to give more understanding about society. This is enormously important in regards to integration – that other religions learn to know about our history, says Hareide to TV2.no (Eide, 2013) (translation mine).²³

The above discourse, which equates more Christianity in RE with better ‘integration’, is perhaps better approximated through a genealogical lens of Christianity in Norway. In his method of genealogy, Foucault taps into Nietzsche’s analysis of morals as obfuscated, mundane and lodged in an ignominious past.²⁴ Genealogy is not understood as comprising any lofty part of a linear and progressive history. Foucault’s early usage of the term, archaeology – briefly understood as an exploration of discursive knowledge systems (*epistemes*) operating on a subconscious level and governing rules of thought – did not take into account historical contingencies. This is what Foucault’s genealogical analysis sought to remedy in *Discipline and Punish*.²⁵

Norway (under Denmark at the time) has witnessed two watershed moments in its religious history. The first was a national conversion from paganism to Catholicism (ca. AD 1030)

²¹ Eirik Omvik ‘Gudstro på retur’, [Belief in God Declining] *Vårt Land*, 2015,

<http://www.vl.no/samfunn/gudstro-p%C3%A5-retur-1.348200>

²² Statistisk Sentralbyrå [Statistics Norway]. Church of Norway: Key figures. Available at: <https://www.ssb.no/statistikkbanken/selectvarval/saveselections.asp> (accessed 15 April 2015).

²³ Cathrine Eide C (2013) ‘KrF gjeninnfører kristendom i religionsfaget på skolen’ [Christian Democratic Party reintroduces Christianity in the subject of religion in school] *TV2.no*, 2013,

<http://www.tv2.no/a/4129910>

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Alan Sheridan (trans.) (London: Penguin, 1977).

²⁵ Ibid.

followed by another transition from Catholicism to Lutheranism (AD 1536).²⁶ The population had to be re-educated twice in the space of roughly five hundred years. Thus contemporary experiments in inculcating a desirable religico-ethical ethos in the population through a carefully crafted and state-approved subject of religious education appear to have a long pedigree. During the 18th century, when Norway was in a union with Denmark, ambulatory teachers taught Bishop Erik Pontoppidan's (1698-1764) *Explanation of Luther's Little Catechism* (authorized in Denmark in 1738) to children who learned it by rote. Below are the first 8 questions of a total 759 (translation mine).²⁷

1. Dear children, would you not like to be happy on earth and blessed in heaven?
Yes, if I knew how I would.
2. Then you would like to follow the way that leads to this goal?
Yes, if I can find it.
3. Do you not believe there is a God?
*Yes, for the world cannot possibly have created itself, but must have a cause which is higher and older than everything and this eternal being is God.
Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth.*
4. Do you believe that God decides over all blessings?
Yes, without a doubt, for he is above all.
5. Do you believe that God wishes you to partake of this blessedness?
Yes, because he is a good God.
6. Do you believe that God wants to show you the way to the blessedness?
Yes, there is no doubt about that.
7. How does God show me this way?
By his word.
8. Do we then have this God's word in our midst?
Yes, the holy script, which is called the Bible.

The indoctrination continued well into the late 19th century in Norway. The catechism has been called, "The single most stable and universally shared feature of this educational experience."²⁸

All children, beginning at the age of seven, were expected to memorize this text through catechistic exchange with their teachers so as to be able to answer their pastor, dean, or bishop's questions on Confirmation day, normally at the age of fourteen.²⁹

85 per cent of the higher strata of society (politicians, professionals etc.) were involved in the clergy in the period between 1811 to 1820 when the Constitution was written. They 'were

²⁶ John T. Flint, 'Historical role analysis in the study of religious change: Mass educational development in Norway, 1740-1891' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁷ See Erik Pontoppidan's, 'Sannhet til Gudfryktighet' [From truth to the fear of God], <http://www.himmelen.info/index.php?eid=437&mid=189>

²⁸ John T. Flint, op. cit., p. 18.

²⁹ Ibid.

overrepresented in the Storting [Parliament] and still constituted a majority group within the professional labor force'.³⁰ Such was the concern with 'measuring and monitoring' the religiosity of Norwegians that Eliert Sundt, considered the father of sociology in Norway, ranked the deaneries according to the number of illegitimate births for every 100 legitimate marriages in his book *On Moral Conditions in Norway* (1857) (*Om Saedelighedstilstanden i Norge*).³¹ It was only after 1868 that the process of secularization began to gradually emerge from the shadows of the Church, partially due to dissention and the dissolution of religious unity in Norway. One such forerunner of sectarianism was the lay preacher, Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824) who denounced the Church's monopoly on public preaching and valorization of ritualism.

For Foucault, the modern state is the denouement of an apparatus of 'pastoral power'.³² Pastoral power is a religiously-premised technology of power which spawned modern forms of government. The metaphor of the 'deity, or the leader, as a shepherd followed by a flock of sheep wasn't familiar to the Greeks and Romans'.³³ Foucault goes on to outline three ways this individualizing pastoral modality of power was implemented: power was wielded over sheep rather than the land; sheep were gathered, guided and led, and the ultimate objective was the salvation of the flock.³⁴ The sheep were showered with constant attention and kindness on an individualized level; the shepherd was accountable for the sheep and through a plethora of ordinances and traditions – such as confession (secret sins) – engineered a powerful mutual bond with the sheep.³⁵ It was in the interstices of individualization, confession, and obedience that Foucault maintains Christianity spawned an unprecedented subjectification.³⁶ Foucault makes a case for understanding modern forms of government – what he terms 'governmentality' – as a process inherited from Christian forms of pastoral administration.³⁷ It is within this framework that the Chairman of the Christian Democrats can stake out a claim in granting prominence to Christianity in RE. (explained later).

Though Foucault's analysis of pastoral modalities of power lends itself well to unraveling the current government's desire to reinforce the status of Christianity in RE as vital to

³⁰ John T. Flint, op. cit., p. 71.

³¹ John T. Flint, op. cit., p. 96.

³² Michel Foucault, op. cit., p. 136.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, op. cit., p. 137.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, op. cit., p. 143.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, (2007b) 'What is critique?' in S Lotringer (ed) *The Politics of Truth* (Los Angeles: Semiotext 2007), pp.41–81.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, op. cit., pp. 144-147.

‘integration’ and knowledge of a vague Christian heritage, there is one caveat with respect to Foucault’s theory: as Petterson points out in her study of colonial subjectification in the Danish colony of Greenland in the early 18th century, Foucault’s pastoral power modalities evince a Catholic bias in its focus on confession, a practice abhorrent to Protestant sensibilities.³⁸ Foucault’s analysis will have to be modified somewhat to account for Norway’s Protestant/Lutheran outlook. For example, in her study of RE workbooks after WWII, Haakedal writes, ‘The vast majority of the expressions in Agnes’ book from the 1950s dealt with catechetical themes and more than two thirds consisted of texts from Luther’s Small Catechism with added references to biblical texts’.³⁹ The anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic bias in Norway was enshrined in the Constitution of 1814 which forbade Jews and Catholics (Jesuits in particular) from entrance. Though the law was amended to allow Jews entry in 1851, the ban on Jesuits remained until 1956.

I contend that the brief genealogy of Lutheranism in Norway manifests a predilection for the ‘canonization’ of texts in the Protestant/Lutheran tradition (*sola scriptura*), such as the Bible and Bishop Pontoppidan’s aforementioned catechism of Luther. Lutheranism in Norway effectuated subjectification through a process in which individuals were immersed in state-approved, ‘canonized’ texts rather than a confessional, sacerdotal tradition. It is argued that this genealogy of a text-based Lutheran tradition goes some way to account for the importance accorded the mandatory subject of religious education in Norway, which may appear baffling to external observers. The current government, in stating that immigrants to Norway must be familiar with the country’s Christian heritage and is the rationale for expanding the content of Christianity at the expense of other religions and worldviews, can be usefully considered employing Foucault’s metaphor of ‘police’, which he attributes to Turquet de Mayenne.⁴⁰ The ‘police’ is presented as a multi-pronged administration that concerns itself with how the population lives; theirs is a multifarious portfolio that includes religion, health, supplies, roads, safety, liberal arts, science, trade, factories and the poor. It is not dogmatic truth that is the chief concern, but the ‘good of the soul (religion and morals)’ is

³⁸ Christina Petterson, (2012) ‘Colonial subjectification: Foucault, Christianity and governmentality’, *Cultural Studies Review*, 18:2 (2012), pp. 89-108.

³⁹ Elisabet Haakedal, ‘Norwegian Religious Education Workbooks after World War II: Exploring Teachers’ Workbook Constructions by Interpreting Traces of Textbooks and National Curricula’, *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 54:1 (2010), p. 69.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, op. cit., pp. 148-151.

pursued so that individuals ‘live in such a way that their development also fosters that of the strength of the state. ⁴¹

Having briefly considered the genealogy of a Lutheran pastoral power and having suggested ways in which this informs the contemporary debate surrounding religious education in Norway, the next section considers how local, national pastoral modalities of power clash with and negotiate a global governmentality, as was the case when the United Nations ruled against aspects of Norway’s mandatory KRL-faget of 1997 (the subject of Christianity, Religions and Philosophies of Life).

Universalizing pastoral power: from the church to global human rights

As a signatory and advocate of a plethora of international legal agreements (the first ever United Nations General Secretary was a Norwegian, Trygve Lie), awardee of the Nobel Peace Prize, and champion of human rights worldwide, Norway is well respected internationally. Hence the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruling against Norway in 2004 in regards to the mandatory subject of religious education in its 1997 incarnation (CKREE stands for Christian Knowledge and General Religious and Ethical Education; KRL in Norwegian) was an embarrassment. Among others, it reads:

Some of the *travaux préparatoires* of the Act referred to above make it clear that the subject gives priority to tenets of Christianity over other religions and philosophies of life. In that context, the Standing Committee on Education concluded, in its majority, that: the tuition was not neutral in value, and that the main emphasis of the subject was instruction on Christianity...The Committee concludes that the teaching of CKREE cannot be said to meet the requirement of being delivered in a neutral and objective way, unless the system of exemption in fact leads to a situation where the teaching provided to those children and families opting for such exemption will be neutral and objective.⁴²

Central to UN’s argument are the reified pre-modifiers ‘neutral and objective’. Reified because what constitutes ‘neutral and objective’ is not explicated. As the purpose of this study is not a legal analysis of the ruling but the manner in which religion is managed (constrained, modified or reinforced) in the state vs. supranational encounter, there is a need to first attempt at a genealogical unpacking of the ideological underpinnings of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (from hence UDHR(1948)). The genealogy of the UDHR, I argue, reveals a

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴²As a signatory to the Human Rights Committee, the Norwegian government had to publish the United Nation’s ruling against it on its website. Communication No. 1155/2003.

<https://www.regjeringen.no/nb/aktuelt/Human-Rights-Committee-Communication-No-11552003/id422478/>

secularized global governmentality, which, if consistently applied, will have the effect of secularizing national spaces.

Despite its pretensions to ‘universality’, UDHR is a manifestly western conception rooted in state-centric liberal individualism and social contractarian theories.⁴³ Although arguing for the universality of the UDHR, irrespective of its origins, Donnelly concedes: ‘Nonetheless, the association of the West with internationally recognized human rights seems to me, as a matter of historical fact, fundamentally correct’.⁴⁴ The likes of Immanuel Kant and H.G. Wells dreamed of the fulfillment of what Lord Tennyson called ‘The Parliament of Man’, which deeply influenced US President Harry Truman who was committed to international organization.⁴⁵ With respect to this study, it is of significance that this dream was a secular one. The principal drafters of the UDHR in 1948 were Canadian (John Humphrey), French (Rene Cassin) and American (Eleanor Roosevelt). The fact that the newly hammered out UDHR was hailed as the new ‘Magna Carta’, demonstrates that it was essentially a document hammered out by western interests but was to be foisted on the rest of the world.⁴⁶ Indeed, this ‘universality’ had some of the hallmarks of an Orwellian ‘Animal Farm’ in which some animals were more equal than others. Kennedy notes, ‘Eleanor Roosevelt, fearing backlash at home, warned that Du Bois’s appeal for Negro equality in the United States would ruin the work of the conference’.⁴⁷

The new ‘universal’ document, which Kennedy calls ‘one of the greatest political statements in world history’, was ‘translated into almost all languages’.⁴⁸ ‘It was brief enough to be printed on a single poster and was hung in schools and libraries across the globe’.⁴⁹ The above bears some resemblance to the manner in which Pontoppidan’s catechism was foisted upon Norwegians. The supranational, like the national, understands the necessity of a ‘canonized’ text shot through with unassailable platitudes promising salvation and utopia. The language employed by Kennedy accompanying the inauguration of the Universal Declaration taps into topoi of transcendental intertextuality. The term ‘civil religion’ is germane in

⁴³ Frans Wijsen, *Seeds of conflict in a heaven of peace: From religious studies to interreligious studies in Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 132.

⁴⁴ Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights: In theory and practice (2nd Edn)* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 62.

⁴⁵ Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), p.x.

⁴⁶ Paul Kennedy, op. cit., p. 180.

⁴⁷ Paul Kennedy, op. cit., p. 181.

⁴⁸ Paul Kennedy, op. cit., p. 180.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

capturing the quasi-religious nature of the UN (in 1971 the organization encouraged its member states to make the 24th of October a public holiday):

Civil religion is ‘any set of beliefs and rituals, related to the past, present, and/or future of a people (‘nation’) which are understood in some transcendental fashion’. Civil religion is the expression of the cohesion of the nation. It transcends denominational, ethnic, and religious boundaries. It includes rituals by which members commemorate significant national events and renew their commitment to the society.⁵⁰

The discord between the ‘universal’ human rights and other traditions is captured in Wijzen’s study which demonstrates four ways in which the Universal Declaration and many sub-Saharan African societies are at loggerheads: in the areas of property, education, marriage, and the dead.⁵¹ At the heart of the tension is the Eurocentric understanding of the individual’s autonomy which has a Cartesian rupture between the profane and sacred as its point of departure. This is antithetical to African ontological/epistemological understandings that are premised on a porous spatial-temporal interpenetration that includes the community/tribe at large and deceased ancestors who are imminent and consulted in decision-making. Several in the Muslim world, too, have serious misgivings about the universal pretensions of the UDHR. ⁵² The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI) (1990) is seen as a counter response to the UDHR. It privileges the Qur’an and *sharia* as the supreme source of revelation that supersedes non-sacred documents such as the UDHR. What is considered discriminatory practices, proscribed by the UDHR, such as Article 18 which establishes rights to freedom of conscience and religion and other inequalities deemed contrary to Islamic law and traditions, have been excised.

To state that the UN consciously promotes secularization is as erroneous as accusing the government of Norway of using RE in a project of willful theocratization. As Chrulew points out, ‘Insofar as, for Foucault, resistance is coterminous with power, it is to be found equally in the religious and secular domains, wherever the conduct of subjects is governed’.⁵³ The objective is to make explicit the discourse of power that informs the state of Norway and the United Nations in this tussle over RE. Of pertinence to my argument is that the United

⁵⁰ Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The social context* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2002), p. 202.

⁵¹ Frans Wijzen, op. cit., p. 130.

⁵² Irene Bloom, J. Paul Martin and Wayne L. Proudfoot, *Religious diversity and human rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁵³ Matthew Chrulew (2014) ‘Pastoral counter-conducts: Religious resistance in Foucault’s genealogy of Christianity’, *Critical Research on Religion*, 2:1 (2014), p. 61.

Nations, as perhaps the most potent of supranational entities, disguises its role as an agent that secretes secular values into the national space of countries such as Norway. This is encapsulated inter alia in its lexicality where words such as ‘neutral and objective’ are bandied about without any rigorous engagement. The secular blinkers that are the denouement of a Eurocentric trajectory have clashed often with other epistemological traditions that have not been incubated in a Cartesian binary worldview.

Foucault’s pastoral modalities of power, when translated to the supranational and global stage present some interesting comparisons.⁵⁴ Returning to the Foucaultian metaphor of ‘pastor’, the United Nations now assumes the role of ‘global pastor’ caring for its ‘global sheep’. There are parallels with the globally-dispersed papal system. The Pontiff, whose papal authority is supranational and supraterrestrialized, convenes international conferences, issues bulls, canonizes saints, rebukes, instates, defrocks and performs a host of functions. In this manner, Foucault’s observation has valid and useful applications for the United Nations and its adjudication in matters pertaining to religion.⁵⁵ Only this time, the pastoral modality of power that the United Nations lays claim to appears to be entrenched in secular origins which are the result of complex western historical contingencies. Following Foucault, the challenge is to demarcate the blurred lines between the pastoral and the secular – the church and the later secular ‘governmentality’ that emerged from its shadows. It is precisely such a study Chong and Troy attempt in their consideration of the status and machinations of the Holy See (which is granted Permanent Observer status) at the United Nations.

The diplomatic comparisons between the two organizations are clear. Both are concerned with forging unity among the human race and mitigating conflict among nation-states qua peoples. However, unlike the UN, the Catholic Church possesses an extra-temporal dimension to its mission to convert souls to Catholicism.⁵⁶

It is the above ability to straddle the worldly and transcendental realms uncritically which is problematic. Donnelly surveys history and fails to find the notion of human rights as is enshrined in the UDHR in any other civilization except the West understood as a ‘desacralized’ West. Christianity, for instance, comes short because Thomas Aquinas’ concept

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, op. cit., 1999.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Alan Chong and Jadok Troy, ‘A universal sacred mission and the universal secular organization: The Holy See and the United Nations’, *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12: 3 (2011), pp. 335-354.

of ‘right’, for example, does not include the ‘English notion of right in the sense of entitlement’.⁵⁷ He concludes:

The historical connection of human rights with the West is more accident or effect than cause. Westerners had no special cultural proclivity that led them to human rights. Rather, the West had the (good or bad) fortune to suffer the indignities of modern markets and states before other regions. By necessity rather than superior virtue they got a jump on the rest of the world in developing the response of human rights.⁵⁸

The UN, then, is a perpetuation of pastoral technologies which had their genesis in the church but gradually transvaluated, first into state and then suprastate power (governmentality), while shedding their religious coloration. What is of paramount concern is what a discourse of secularization, enshrined in the language of universal human rights, entails for the teaching of religion in national states. Whereas the state ‘monitored’ and sought to ‘police’ what was available on the mandatory religious educational menu, the UN ruling against Norway is a case of the supranational ‘policing’ and managing what the state in turn puts on the menu. Whereas earlier European monarchs appealed to the ‘divine right of Kings’ to legitimate their rule, a ‘canonized’ but poorly defined ‘universal human rights’ buttresses the UN’s authority. Thus far, two trajectories rooted in divergent but overlapping discourses are manifest: the current Norwegian government is informed by a Christian ethos that perceives the public space as one where RE is a forum to disseminate Christianity, whereas the United Nations, as evidenced by the lexicality in its ruling, perceives the national public space as a forum where any confessional teaching of religion is a violation of its ‘canonized’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The next section explores the latter within the framework of secularization thesis.

A de- or re-sacralization of national space?

Weber in his Protestant Ethic has been credited with being one of the foremost theorists of the secularization thesis. His employment of the term ‘disenchantment’ has come to signify secularization as the denouement of a rupture between the spiritual-religious and temporal-mundane in the modern era. According to Newman, however, this is a misreading of Weber.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Jack Donnelly, op. cit., p. 77.

⁵⁸ Jack Donnelly, op. cit., p. 78.

⁵⁹ Jane O. Newman, ‘Enchantment in Times of War: Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, and the Secularization Thesis’ 105:1 (2009), p. 144.

She argues that he was aware that magic had been excised from modern man's worldview prior to the promulgation of Christian theology, such as Luther and Calvin's. In fact, according to her, Weber was concerned that the sacralized space created by these theologians (ancestors) in Europe was dissipating too quickly in the face of modernity. She concludes, 'Weber was thus in fact interested in modalities of re- enchantment, that is, in ways of seeing and living out transcendent significance in this world'.⁶⁰

In the 1960s, secularization thesis presaged that the convergence and onward march of three forces subsumed under modernity – the rise of the sovereign state, capitalism and the empirical sciences – would diminish and ultimately expunge religion in modern countries (Chavura, 2013: 66).⁶¹ The thesis assumes a cornucopia of shapes with each severely contested, but some of the arguments are as follows: that talk of secularization is non sequitur since a golden era of faith never obtained;⁶² that though the phenomenon is occurring, this does not conflate with a bona fide secularization which is equivalent to the deinstitutionalization of religion ;⁶³ that secularization entails a shift of religion from a formerly default position in the center to being one among many options in modern societies and,⁶⁴ finally, that secularization was a temporary upshot of the Enlightenment compartmentalization of religion, which is why religion is now making an aggressive comeback, especially Abrahamic religions which took an uncompromising stand against modernity.⁶⁵

In light of the above, I argue that the incumbent Norwegian government's decision to bring back the 'C' (Christianity) into RE as a tool of integration is a response to the centrifugal forces of globalization where greater world convergence, heterogeneity and polarization is perceived as a threat to Norwegian values. Like Weber, there is a concern with the loss of the heritage of the 'fathers' (e.g. Luther) in the onslaught of modernity and postmodernity. Among others, the rise of Islam (from 3,500 Muslims in 1983 to ca. 150,000 in 2013 in a country with ca. 5.1 million people) and the media frenzy surrounding issues such as halal and

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Stephen Chavura, (2013) 'The secularization thesis and the secular state: Reflections with special attention to debates in Australia', In *Religion and the state*, eds. Jack Barbalet, Adam Possamai and Bryan S. Turner BS (ed.) (London: Anthem Press, 2013), pp. 65-92.

⁶² Jose Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁶³ Gary Bouma, *Australian soul: Religion and spirituality in the twenty-first century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶⁴ Charles Taylor, *A secular age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁶⁵ Victoria S. Harrison, *Religion and modern thought* (London: Canterbury Press, 2007).

terrorism culminating in the massacre of 69 people in July 2011 by the anti-Islam,⁶⁶ self-styled ‘Crusader’,⁶⁷ Anders Behring Breivik, has put Islamophobia on the national radar. Anders Breivik was for a period a member of the Progress Party which is in a coalition government. Over the years, this party has been accused of fomenting Islamophobia and a concomitant support for strengthening ties with Israel and the place of Christianity in Norway. RE, then, is recruited in the task of “re-enchanting” the public space with values commensurate with a Christian ethos. The conundrum is that this idealized ‘Christian heritage’ suffers from historical amnesia in forgetting how Christianity was mis/used as a handmaiden of colonization.⁶⁸

The state-sponsored policy of ‘integration through mandatory Christianity’, which is a poorly veiled address to Muslim immigrants, precipitated the decision to sue the government of Norway. Although their case was dismissed in the Supreme Court of Norway, the Norwegian Islamic Council and the Norwegian Humanist Association, in conjunction with independent parents took the case (i.e. the 1997 RE version) to the United Nations.⁶⁹ In this regard, Foucault’s (2007) concept of ‘counter-conduct’ is germane.⁷⁰ The apparatus of pastoral power contains within it the seeds of resistance through the scrambling together of various forms of anti-hegemonic forces. Foucault’s exegesis of the matrix-like capillaries of the power/knowledge nexus sees it having a fruitful, productive dimension. For instance, the government’s desire to ‘enchant’ the national space with a vague ‘cultural Christianity’ saw the alliance of two unlikely allies: atheists and Muslims. As Chrulew notes, ‘Yet they are productive rather than simply negative forms of refusal, ethically and politically inventive practices of being otherwise’.⁷¹

If secularization piggybacking on globalization and the fear of ‘cultural hemorrhaging’ seem to motivate the Norwegian state, how does the secularization thesis tease out the United Nation’s ruling against Norway? Chavura argues that in the post WWII era, an exclusive

⁶⁶ Paul Thomas and Amina Selimovic, ‘Sharia on a plate? A critical discourse analysis of halal food in two Norwegian newspapers’, *Journal of Islamic Marketing* (In press; assigned to issue 6:3 (2015) due for publication in the middle of September (2015) and will be Earlycited in Emerald at the end of July 2015).

⁶⁷ Sindre Bangstad ‘Eurabia Comes to Norway’, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24: 3 (2013), pp. 369-391.

⁶⁸ Sturla Stålsett, *Religion in a Globalised Age: Transfers & Transformations, Integration & Resistance*. (ed.) (Oslo: Novus Press, 2008).

⁶⁹ Bengt-Ove Andreassen, *op. cit.*, 2005.

⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, M Senellart (ed.), Graham Burchell (trans.) (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁷¹ Matthew Chrulew, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

secularization thesis that shares commonalities with the anti-religious *laïcité* of the French Revolution appears to inform public discourse on the place of religion in modern societies, especially in the West. ‘It was with the Revolution that the European tradition of the secular as merely *distinct from* the religious seems to have been confronted with the very different notion of the secular as *exclusive of* the religious’.⁷² This secularized premise, according to Chavura was adopted in John Rawls’ monologic discourse on Public Reason which he concluded had to be devoid of religion.⁷³ The age-old question of the place of religion in a pluralistic society exercised Rawls. His objective was to arrive at:

The most acceptable political conception of justice for specifying the fair terms of cooperation between citizens regarded as free and equal and as both reasonable and rational and (we add) as normal and fully cooperative members of society.⁷⁴

He postulated an alternative reading of the social contract that had a mutual consensus among citizens of the same society as its objective. Rawls maintained that citizens in a plural society would struggle to acquiesce to one moral source of authority to substantiate principles of justice that are universally binding. This modern phenomenon, which he dubbed a ‘reasonable pluralism’, precipitates a national conversation where rules are agreed upon. Prior to this, however, Rawls imagines an ‘original position’ in which the participating stakeholders don a ‘veil of ignorance’ where divisive practices based on religion, race, social class and the like, are bracketed.

As previously alluded to, the UN ruling is buttressed in a secular discourse. The UDHR is a document which, according to Donnelly,⁷⁵ for instance is best theorized within a Rawlsian framework of ‘overlapping consensus’. ‘John Rawls’ idea of an overlapping consensus offers a descriptively accurate and morally attractive explanation...I will argue that there is an international overlapping consensus on the Universal Declaration model’.⁷⁶ Donnelly concedes that this puts human rights in the domain of political theory and not moral theory. Hence not only is the UN discourse secular, but if Chavura is right, such a Rawlsian secular

⁷² Stephen Chavura, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁷³ John Rawls, *Political liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁷⁴ Daniel Moulin, D (2009) ‘A Too Liberal Religious Rducation? A thought experiment for teachers and theorists’. *British Journal of Religious Education* 31:2 (2009), p.163.

⁷⁵ Jack Donnelly, *op. cit.*, 2003.

⁷⁶ Jack Donnelly, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

model does not bode well for religion given that Rawls' saw the overlapping consensus as one devoid of religion.

Rawls' philosophy has become the de facto norm against which various constitutions and institutions are measured. But must the secular state be the exclusive Rawlsian state? Must the secular state be emptied of religion, as opposed to its aims being merely nonreligious, yet open to the presence and contribution of organized religions?⁷⁷

A secularized underpinning does not constrain the UN from working together with several faith-based organizations on a range of issues from HIV/AIDS to climate change (Karam, 2010).⁷⁸ However, it is essential that the UNDHR's secularized underpinnings are rigorously interrogated and made transparent given its global reach and the nature of the precedence set by the Norwegian ruling. That this is not currently the case is showcased in the fact that the Holy See holds a Permanent Observer status at the United Nations which grants it an advantage in forging relations with other countries through UN auspices. This has been capitalized upon by the Vatican to forge convenient alliances on fundamentalist issues with Muslim states like Libya and Sudan on women's issues.⁷⁹ Obviously, this has been derided by other NGOs and religious organizations who consider this discriminatory. The authors give expression to this dearth in research on this issue: 'There is, however, only one work to date that treats the subject of the controversy arising over the Vatican's chameleon ability to switch between church and state in representing its causes in UN-sponsored conferences'.⁸⁰

Conclusion

The UN ruling against Norway's religious education curriculum raises questions about the legitimate locus of religious arbitration and mediation in the intersection between state and the supranational. This is particularly so given that religion has traditionally been the mainstay of religious bodies in dialogue with the national state since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) created a framework for national self-determination. There is a growing corpus of literature that seeks to flesh out the uncharted territory in which the traditional state is now constrained or empowered by, among others, globalization and a post-Westphalian world.

⁷⁷ Stephen Chavura, op.cit., p.84

⁷⁸ Azza Karam, 'The United Nations population fund's (UNFPA'S) legacy of engaging faith-based organizations as cultural agents of change' *Crosscurrents*. Association for religion and intellectual life, (2010), pp. 432-450.

⁷⁹ Chong and Troy, op. cit., 2011.

⁸⁰ Chong and Troy, op. cit., p. 337.

Acknowledging that each country has a unique historical trajectory, I have tried to show that the Norwegian state (albeit in a union with Denmark) has been accustomed to a monopoly where mass re-education programs first catholicized the population and then expunged this catholicization through an equally effective Lutheran education where Pontoppidan's catechism was central. It has been argued that such a pastoral technology of power underpins contemporary political ambitions to integrate immigrants into Norway's Christian heritage.

On the supranational level, the liberal and social contractarian moorings of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were explored. It is argued that a secular governmentality, commensurate with a Rawlsian overlapping consensus rooted in Enlightenment rationalism, that originally saw the light of day in the bosom of a Christian pastoral power, is at the core of the Declaration. On a theoretical level, the aforementioned has necessitated an extended application of Foucault's pastoral modalities of pastoral power to account for the growing prominence of supranational and transnational entities in the last few decades.⁸¹

The findings raise at least two questions which, it is believed, will warrant rigorous engagement across several disciplines, especially as globalization continues to gain traction. Firstly, how do signatories to the United Nations reconcile their faith traditions steeped in divergent epistemologies with the liberal/social contractarian nature of the Universal Declaration? With respect to the United Nations and other transnationals, the question appears to be the reverse: in a world where religion is no longer peripheral, what clout does a Universal Declaration that shies away from locking horns with world religions have when intervening in national affairs? In this regard, the case of Muslim countries ratifying an alternative Declaration illustrates my point. Perhaps the very task of crafting a declaration that is truly universal and can grapple with the challenges thrown up by 193 member countries is a chimera but, as the resurgence of fundamentalism on the world stage has shown, unless the UN engages effectively, the current paralysis in addressing challenges rooted in religious epistemologies will continue. This may warrant nothing short of a new world convention that jettisons a Rawlsian, Eurocentric lens. As matters stand, the Declaration's refusal to take seriously religion in a re-enchanted global space will lead to its dismissal as 'a genealogy of a more complex and, indeed, sophisticated secularization narrative'.⁸²

⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *op.cit.*,1999.

⁸² Christina Petterson, *op.cit.*,p.94.

APPENDIX 1: GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER ON THE PROPOSED REINFORCEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM (All translation mine)

Suggestions for amendments to the subject of religious education

Source: <https://www.regjeringen.no/nb/aktuelt/Forslag-til-endringer-i-RLE-faget/id2008836/>

Press release. Date: 22.10.2014

The government will change the name of the subject of Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics (RLE) to Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics (KRLE). About half of the teaching will be used for the knowledge of Christianity. In the cooperation deal between the Left Party, the Christian Democrats, the Progress Party, the Conservative Party and the Socialist Liberal Party (Left), there was an agreement that the subject of RLE should change name to KRLE (Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics) and that the subject, commensurate with the competence aims, should contain at least 55 per cent Christianity-based knowledge.

It is this deal between the cooperating parties the government now wishes to follow up. We suggest in the meanwhile a more flexible orientation in regards to how much teaching time should be allotted to Christianity, says the Minister of Education and Research, Torbjørn Røe Isaksen.

From 2005 to 2008 there was a stipulation that about 55 per cent of the teaching in RLE should be used for Christianity. The reason for this was a research from 2000 which showed that 9 per cent of the teachers used 80 per cent or more of the teaching time on Christianity, while 6 per cent of teachers used 30 per cent or less.

The government recommends that about “half” of the subject time should be used to teach about Christianity, and is confident that teachers will align the teaching to reflect this. It is not our intention to micro-manage the teaching in each classroom, says the Minister.

The cooperating parties desire that knowledge of Christianity should be emphasized more than it is today, because of Christianity’s history and tradition in Norway.

Not confessional: the RLE subject consists of the following main areas: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Life Stances/Worldviews, Philosophy and Ethic.

The school's role is not to proselytize or favor any particular faith, but to teach children and the young about the society they live in, about Norwegian history and traditions. The young should learn to think critically and independently, also in the teaching of RLE, stresses Røe Isaksen.

The Curriculum and The Act on Teaching are the official frameworks around the subject of RLE. It follows from these that RLE shall be a meeting place for pupils with diverse backgrounds, where all shall be met with respect. The subject shall contribute to dialogue and understanding, and the teaching shall not be confessional. This framework will be untouched in the new KRLE subject.

FACTS: The government will recommend two changes in the subject of RLE: Add Christianity to the name, so that the name of the subject becomes Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics – KRLE. This requires a change in the Act on Teaching and the Curriculum. Introduce a provision in the Curriculum which states that half of the teaching time in the new KRLE subject will be used towards Christianity.