Religion and Politics
- A Valid Divide?:
Confessionality in Politics
and Higher Education

Jonatan Bäckelie

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Abstract

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Jonatan Bäckelie: *Religion and Politics - a valid Divide?: Confessionality in Politics and Higher Education.*

Today western democracies are generally referred to as liberal democracies. Such an understanding includes attachment not only to a functionalist democratic form, but also to certain values. In what ways must society subscribe to such values, and what happens when some citizens do not?

Cavanaugh argues that if either substantivist or functionalist definitions of religion should be used to öcircleö all world religions and define these *as* religions, then political ideologies also qualify as religious according to such definitions. From such a perspective öliberalismö can be perceived as one religion alongside others. So, if current democracy has these öreligiousö liberal ideas built in, how does this affect citizensø rights to exercise freedom of religion or freedom from religion?

This essay analyses the Swedish Government Official Report *The State and the Imams* dealing with questions of confessionality, state-religion relations and higher education. By drawing on agonistic political theorists (Connolly & Mouffe) the essay highlights ways in which religion is expected to be öliberally codedö in order to function in a liberal democracy. Said political theory also provides perspectives on how society can remain democratic although not necessarily liberal and how this could potentially deepen societal pluralism.

The essay highlights how liberal values are center stage both in general, but also more particularly in higher education. In the report above the expert panel observe problems with defining religion, and religionsø place in society, although proposes a stance of öpassive neutralityö in order to formulate a proposal which fits the current political expectations and context.

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Islam, Imams, Confessionality, Higher Education, Liberalism, Liberal Democracy, Agonistic Political Theory, Defining Religion, Cavanaugh, Connolly, Mouffe

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Introduction

In the 19th century there was no word for the color purple. Everything that we see as purple today was then considered brown. In postmodern philosophical thought there are some different schools of thought, but regardless of what school one subscribes to, there is a general agreement that language shapes the way we understands reality – just try to think without using words.

Thus, language can be approached in different ways. It can be seen as substituting the real of experience for the symbolic of language,[1] it can be viewed as revealing truth or hiding reality. In either case language certainly doesnøt merely õtransmitö reality; it interprets, perhaps in some sense replaces it. In a best case scenario this makes reality easier to grasp. In a worst case scenario the opposite is possible; language prevents us from seeing connections that have become invisible because we choose to talk and think through certain words.[2]

One key ingredient in scientific research is *definitions*. In order to talk about i.e. Swedish young Muslims do or think, we must first get to grips with what we mean by *Swedish, young* and *Muslim*. Swedish in what respect – are we thinking of citizenship, or is there something else weøre thinking of? Where do we draw the line for when people arenøt young anymore – 18? 25? 40? And what do we mean by Muslim – someone who prays to Allah five times a day, or someone who comes from a country where the majority of the population are Muslims? Depending on how we answer these questions we get a certain definition and perimeter which we can then conduct our scientific study within.

In this essay I critically asses the use of two words; *religion* and *politics*. When we hear these words most of us probably feel intuitively that we know what they mean – in other words we have implicitly already defined religion and politics. Most peopleøs gut feeling probably tells them that there is a big difference between the two. This division is something I intend to problematize in the coming pages.

Political scientist Marie Demker expresses well what religious people want to do; namely õorganize society confessionallyö.[3] However, this essay will look into the argument that people who come from a political perspective are trying to do the same, although their

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[1] Jacque Lacan cited in Pound, 2008, pp. 30.
[2] Other ways of thinking about language can be described as structuralism and post-structuralism. I will return to this whilst discussing the theoretical approach of this essay in chapter 3.
[3] Demker, 2004, pp. 144.

confessionality is not one of Catholicism, Buddhism or Sufi Islam, but one of Marxism, Neo-Liberalism or Social Democracy.

Theologian William Cavanaugh tends to think that politics may be equally confessional. In his book *The Myth of Religious Violence* (2009) he deals with the problem of defining religion. I will present his case in more detail below, but for now two key issues can be noted. The first point is that defining religion is usually done using either a substantivist or functionalist definition. According to a substantivist definition *religion* becomes too narrow a term, excluding what is generally referred to as religions such as Theravada Buddhism, and strains of Hinduism (two õworld religionsö). On the other hand using a functionalist definition defines religion in too broad terms; leaving room for i.e. nationalism and political ideologies to be viewed as religions. Again, I will expand on Cavanaughøs arguments (and what the words substantivist/functionalist imply) in greater detail in chapter 2.

1.1 Purpose and Question

The purpose of this essay is to analyze the current relation between religion and politics, and specifically the relation between them in terms of power. Does dividing religion and political ideology from each other (although they may be seen as the same thing according to various definitions of religion) mean that the latter has power over the former? The main question is therefore:

- Is a separation between *religion* and *politics* a valid divide?
  Subquestions to this being:
- What power relations are produced by understanding these as either one or two subjects?
- How does such a power relation manifest in general?
- How does such a power relation manifest in an academic setting?

How such a power balance manifest in general is the topic of the academic field called *Political Theology,* and there is certainly no shortage of writing on the matter. In chapter 2 I outline some broad features of this academic discourse. The latter question however; how such a power relation manifests in an academic setting is dependent on several variables, not least national attitudes and laws. Here I will look specifically at a Swedish context. The material chosen to do so is discussed below.

1.2 Demarcation

Below I present how I intend to use the words "religion" and "politics". Strange as it may seem, these words are not defined in a strict sense. Rather, they are critically analyzed and current understandings of what the words may signify are challenged and compared. In this section I will also touch on my use of theory, a definition of the word *power* which is relevant to the essay, and last discuss material and method for my analysis.

1.2.1 What Religion? And What Politics?

In order to answer these questions we need to narrow down the understanding of religion and politics. As I have presented above, the guiding definition will be the problem that Cavanaugh expresses – either a wide substantivist or (any) functionalist definition of religion and political ideology. This is not to say that this is all religions could ever be, or mirror all the functions within a given religion. Neither is political ideology and politics the same thing. Political ideology is something guiding the praxis of everyday political decisions. Equally theology provides a similar guide for the orthopraxy and orthodoxy of religious institutions. In section 2, I will argue that the two are indeed comparable in this sense. Although there is admittedly numerous other aspects of religion and politics, the principles that are used as guides in order to "organize society confessionally" are what my analysis is about. Although there may be a more roundabout but exact way of writing, I will refer to the short words *religion* and *politics* throughout my text when referring to this.

1.2.2 Use of Theory

Liberal thinking has been a formative part of the current political system. Thus, a political theory that challenged core ideas of liberalism may be a valuable source for assessing problems which arise out of the current divide between religion and politics. For liberalism *consensus* and *toleration* are guiding principles. *Conflict* on the other hand is something undesirable. Agonistic political theory (also referred to below as *agonism*) sees the world as a place where conflict is naturally bound to occur. Because of its natural occurrence, conflict is not something we should seek to avoid. Rather, how we deal with conflicts is what defines a successful or potentially dangerous political sphere.

For Chantal Mouffe, there is great value in the "classical" divide between left and right. Once the system collapses into tiny differences within an overall liberal agenda, other – often

extremist groups – may come into play forcefully. This line of argument – and its connection to Carl Schmitt – will be pursued in chapter 3. For now it may suffice to say that in the most recent election in Sweden the grouping together of what were earlier singular parties into two competing blocs can be said to have played a role in the Sweden Democrat's entry into parliament (SD being a more far right party than the Swedish parliament has included in the last fifty years – perhaps ever). This tendency is what Mouffe proposes will occur in such political climates, which suggests her argument carries some weight, and its critique may be well targeted.

Over all Mouffe's writing revolves much around the effects of *de-politicizing* certain areas; which leaves people without legitimacy to bring their passions and beliefs into the political realm. Mouffe argues that when conflict is politicized, people with different views become legitimate *agonistic adversaries*. When one side is de-politicized a much more dangerous divide is created; one between *antagonistic enemies*.

Apart from Mouffe, the other pertinent thinker that the essay will touch on is William E. Connolly who is also usually labeled *agonistic* although Connolly has an admittedly different approach. Connolly builds heavily on some core concepts of Gilles Deleuze. Rather than Deleuze's eclectic philosophy, Connolly uses deleuzian concepts such as *micropolitics* and *becoming* specifically in a political context,[4] to show how these may be operable in a *politics of becoming*.

For Connolly (as for Deleuze) humans are multifaceted, and different aspects of a person's views and beliefs may come into play at different times. This also means that using certain traits in specific situations, also means that we are susceptible to change in a wide array of ways. Connolly argues that the concept of the *secular* is problematic because it rests all too much on an understanding of humans being rational. In order to maintain this belief in human rationality, a number of important philosophers, philosophies, belief systems, and biological feats must be overlooked or left out.[5] In his view the secular builds on an untenable presumption about humans.

The secular being an unreasonably rational paradigm and criticism of liberalism are in other words core features of agonistic theory. It should be clear why putting such theory to work would provide valuable tools in analyzing a government issued report that revolves around the state's current divide between religious confessionality on the one hand and

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[4] Not that Deleuze is unpolitical; however Connolly reshapes deleuzian thought into his own specific mode of politics.
[5] Connolly (2002) even folds neuroscience into the mix, bringing neuroscience, cultural studies and political theory into conversation with each other.

political rational objectivity on the other. Especially seeing that such objectivity is invoked as safeguarding pluralism and tolerance.

1.2.3 Defining Power

If we are to say anything about power, we also need a model for understanding what power is. How can we think of power, and when does someone (person or institution) wield power over another? For the purposes of this essay, I will use Steven Lukes' understanding of power, presented in his *Power: A Radical View*. Lukes described three (what he calls) dimensions of power: A's power over B to make B do something B wouldn't otherwise do; A's power over B to exclude B from *milieus* where political decisions are taken, and lastly A's power to influence B's in such a profound way that B's desires and identity is changed or transformed.[6]

The second dimension – also referred to as non-decision making – meaning the possibility to hinder religiously informed thought to enter into political debate. The political theory applied in this essay is critical towards liberalism because of this prevention of certain perspectives to enter into the debate as legitimate.

1.2.4 Material and Method

Analyzing how two subjects relate to each other requires a material where the two clearly are at work at the same time. In Sweden courses in higher education must be non-confessional. At the same time priests and church clergy are undertaking most of their training at the state's universities. In May 2008 government member Lars Leijonborg commissioned an inquiry into whether universities should also offer educations for Imams. This resulted in Swedish Government Official Report 2009:52 *The State and the Imams* (below refered to as *SOU*).[7] This being an official document commissioned by the state *on* religion, and religion's place in state funded education more precisely, it is the document I have chosen for analysis.

That this report gives a particular recommendation regarding the relationship between religion and politics should not be taken to mean that there is a static understanding of, or relationship between, the two. Needless to say, the outlook on the topic varies from country to country, and from time to time. The document should also be viewed in this light: it has significance regarding attitudes held in Sweden at the moment.

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[6] Lukes, 2004.

[7] Title in Swedish: *Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2009:52: Staten och imamerna – Religion, integration, autonomi.*

Furthermore, the report is also of interest because of reports from *Högskoleverket*[8] and their reflections on confessionality and in criticism directed at the University of Gothenburg, regarding *pastoralterminer*; courses with õconfessionalö[9] content that has been given in co-operation between church and university.[10] Now these courses will be moved off the university curriculum and handled solely by the church. As such developments tie in with the topic of confessionality in higher education, some notes will be mades regarding this.

1.3 Disposition

The disposition of the essay is as follows. Chapter 2 draws a general picture of how religion and politics have been handled by various important thinkers ó political theorists and philosophers ó through the years. Special attention is given to the paradigm called *Political Theology,* which is anything but a homogenous movement, but contains many different voices who for various reasons believe that the relation between religion and politics ought to be renegotiated. Cavanaugh, whose criticism of the definition of religion vs. politics I draw sustenance from here, is set within this context.[11]

Chapter 3 describes what theories Iøm using, against which Iøm engaging the text. Here I draw on Chantal Mouffe and William E. Connolly usually labeled *Agonistic Political Theorists* (below also *agonists*). Mouffe draws inspiration from Carl Schmitt, Connolly from Gilles Deleuze. I will therefore also touch on these two and the bearing they can be seen to have. I will discuss some differences between the Mouffe and Connolly, as they share some views but not others. Also I will discuss some criticism raised against agonism.

In Chapter 4 I present the Swedish Government Official Report (below also *SOU*) 2009:52. The report is made up of six chapters, and it will be presented in that sequence. Informed by Cavanaughøs understanding of religion and politics and Lukeøs understanding of power, I discuss what lies at the heart of the text, and whether or not this can be said to be problematic from the viewpoint of agonistic political theory.

In Chapter 5 I then tie the analysis of the report to a thematic discussion and analysis of themes present in the report and expectations that it ought to answer to. It also furthers the discussion by introducing some other scholarly perspectives that could be valuable in the analysis, such as scholars from the field of History of Religion and Islamic Studies.

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[8] *Högskoleverket* being the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education
[9] What I mean by "confessional" will be explored and critically analyzed during the course of this essay along with "religion" and "politics".
[10] See *Högskoleverket*'s *Rapport 2008:41 R*
[11] Among other things he is the editor of *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* along with Peter Scott.

Chapter 6 is the closing chapter. I recapitulate the possibilities surrounding the understanding of religion and politics as two separate topics. I then sum up the analysis of chapters 4 and 5, and how this tie in with the questions of the essay, how I have tried to answer them, and what my analysis has yielded.

1.4 Summary

In this chapter I have presented my question: *Is a separation between* religion *and* politics *a valid divide?* Then I have specified that I will look at this by analyzing the Swedish Government Official Report *The State and the Imams* (2009) which offers some normative judgments on how religion and politics ought to relate to each other. Addressing these questions I will make use of different ways of understanding power which Steven Lukes offers in his book *Power: A Radical View.* To assess the current relationship between religion and politics *as* two different subjects, I will use theoretical tools from the perspective of agonistic political theory, which is explicit in critiquing liberalism and liberal democracy for handling questions regarding religion and other things which it deems õprivateö in a potentially dangerous ways, because of its depoliticizing tendency.

2

Political Theology and Defining Religion

There are many starting points possible when talking about the potential of approaching *religion* and *politics* as the same subject. Far from it being one possible way of understanding the two, I however find the field of political theology useful, in dealing with the current relation between the two. A theoretical discussion such as this necessarily falls back on ontological and epistemological presumptions about reality. In other words; what is reality and how can we gain knowledge about it? This has always been at the heart of theological inquiry. Perhaps surprising to some, the same holds true for the subject of political philosophy.

2.1 Political Theology

Political Theology is a phrase first used by Carl Schmitt in 1922, when publishing the book *Politische Theologie*. Schmitt then claimed that all political terms have their origin in theology, but have been given other, secular content.[12] The field of political theology today however is a broad international field, which includes political theorists, theologians (not just Christian) and non-theistic thinkers alike. The subject is diverse, but one commonality that most scholars have is that they object to the current divide between religion and politics as separate spheres, with different kinds, or varying degrees of legitimacy. What I will do in this section, is to provide a historical overview and a summary of some important directions in the field. Then I go on to touch specifically on William T. Cavanaugh's argument that has influenced the thoughts of this essay in section 2.3-2.4.

2.2 Looking Back at Religion and Politics

In their *Religion in Political Thought* (2006) editors Graham Ward and Michael Hoelzl presents a number of important historic political texts. The texts are from the likes of Jean-Jaques Rousseau and Karl Marx and touch especially on the relationship between politics and religion. Ward and Hoelzl show that what all these important political thinkers have in common is that they somehow have felt compelled to relate to the intersection where religion

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[12] For a discussion of Schmitt, see chapter 3.

and politics meet. It seems that all of the political philosophers feel that politics and religion are in some way or another õfightingö for the same space. There is a difference in what various philosophers prescribed and prescribe for society; sometimes no religion seems best ó in order to give politics its full scope ó other times proposals like õcivil religionö is put forth, as there seem to be a general agreement that people must *believe* in their system of government, in a sense that can adequately be described as (equivalent to) religious faith.

According to Viktoria Höög a part of liberal bourgeoisie ideology consist of viewing religion as something which is private.[13] From the point of view above, such a perspective can be criticized as an attempt to *prescribe* a place for religion, rather than *describe* how actual faith is organized or performed. Religious scholar Olav Hammer offers another helpful view: õEvery attempt to dictate other peopleøs behavior, to affect how public and private life should relate to each other and to prescribe how people should perceive their reality, is about the exercise of powerö.[14] Theologian William T. Cavanaugh, who we will touch on next, adds a claim which seems in keeping with the reasoning above, in saying that õliberal democratic societies are every bit as ‑liturgicalø as traditional onesö.[15]

2.3 The Myth of Religious Violence

William T. Cavanaughøs argument regarding defining religion is based on why it is important to single out something that is essentially religious, as opposed to something that is secular. Cavanaugh argues that authors who try to single out religion as something different from politics and moreover sharing some õessential religious qualityö fail because there is no such thing as a õtranshistorical and transcultural essence of religionö.[16] The context in which the term religion has appeared ó in its modern version ó has been to give way to its twin: *the secular*.[17]

Cavanaughøs book is about showing how religious violence is not different from secular violence. Although my focus here is on Cavanaughøs points on the trouble of defining religion, I will briefly touch on his argument as a whole, as it has bearing on *the need* to even have such a term as religion. Also, the kind of violence Cavanaugh speaks of is linked to a certain configuration of power, which has very much to do with my line of argumentation in this essay.

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[13] Höög, 2004, s. 60.
[14] Hammer, 2004, pp. 256.
[15] Cavanaugh, 2009, pp. 113.
[16] Ibid., pp. 3f.
[17] Ibid., pp. 70.

In his book *The Myth of Religious Violence* (2009) Cavanaugh sets out to show how religious violence and secular violence are two sides of the same coin. Cavanaugh makes no effort to say claim that religion does not encourage violence at times. His point is simply that religious and secular violence doesn't differ; there's no typical õreligiousö quality to some kinds of violence. Instead the effect of creating a divide between what is religious and what is secular stems from the rise of the nation-state. The nation-state wanted to ensure that its citizens primary loyalty lay with the state.

One way of measuring this loyalty is as Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle suggests; by finding out what people are willing to kill or sacrifice their lives for.[18] Seen in such a light the most powerful õreligionö in the USA is nationalism,[19] something that possibly holds true for many other countries as well. The outcome of distinguishing religion and the secular from each other is that one type of violence is legit, or even worse; it can make secular violence *invisible* or no violence at all.

Not only was separating the religious from the secular important in a European nation-state context, but it also proved a valuable source of legitimacy when conquering new countries and peoples all over the world. This is not unimportant to the rise of the modern concept *religion*, but this is not the proper place to highlight it.[20] Conflicts of loyalty's that the state õhelpö to arrange in the manner said above, certainly gives the state no shortage of power over the realm of the private or the õde-politicizedö or õapoliticalö.[21]

2.4 Defining *Religion*

When defining religion one can either turn to *what a religion is* or *what a religion does*. The former deals defines religion from a perspective where *religion x* believes in (for instance) *god y*. This is called a *substantivist* approach. The other; what religion does, focuses on what functions a religion have in people's lives ó in what way do they impose an õorderö on the individual or the collective? This is generally referred to as a *functionalist* approach. These two types of definitions of *religion* are not exclusive to Cavanaugh (the report also notes this distinction) nor is Cavanaugh's critique of these definitions. However, when expanding on the definitions below I do this based on Cavanaugh's line of argumentation.

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[18] Ibid., pp. 118.
[19] Ibid., pp. 117.
[20] See the chapter "The Invention of Religion Outside the West" in Cavanaugh, 2009, pp. 85-101.
[21] Cf. Lash, 1996.

2.4.1 Substantivist Approaches

As stated above, a substantivist approach usually has its starting place in belief in God/gods. However, this criterion is usually deemed too restrictive and so it is usually phrased as belief in some sort of *transcendence;* something above or beyond the material world. Even so, transcendence as a concept does not present a solution. Most scholars for instance would not agree that Confucianism contains any concept of transcendence. Also, ancient Greek or Roman gods were not seen as transcendent in such a sense, but highly involved in the affairs of men. The problem with the definition, Cavanaugh argues, is that õin order to be inclusive enough to embrace both Judaism and Buddhism, it must be vagueö.[22] Furthermore, as the definition springs from a western scholarly setting, the concept of transcendence is elaborated from a Christian (or at best Abrahamic) starting point, why it is hard to fit for instance many asian religions into the mold without doing violence to the adherers own self-understanding and understanding of their faith.

If the concept of transcendence is widened (into the vague concept Cavanaugh argues must be applied to accommodate both Judaism and Buddhism) it comes to include ideas and concepts such as nationalism. This poses a problem as this is exactly the type of phenomenon scholars want to single *out* from the bunch of religions, with help of the definition.[23] In short, a substantivist approach does not succeed in removing itself from the intuitive gut-feeling approach to *religion as something that we know what it is when we see it*. Therefore it is a stretch to say that a substantivist approach to religion suffices as a scholarly definition.

2.4.2 Functionalist Approaches

The functionalist approach to religion instead deals with how religion influence peopleøs/peoplesø actions and behavior. Functionalists return to the broadest meaning of the word *religio* in classical Rome: Any binding obligation or devotion that structures oneøs social relations.[24] Sociologist Emilé Durkheim ó pioneering the functionalist approach ó defined religion as such: õa religion is a unified system of belief and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitionsö.[25] Although this definition relies on dividing sacred from profane; Durkheim says nothing about what *is* sacred in a specific context. Rather, anything has the potential of being viewed as sacred depending

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[22] Cavanaugh, 2009, pp. 103.
[23] Ibid., pp. 104.
[24] Ibid., pp. 106.
[25] Ibid.

on context and culture.[26] In the US, for instance, it is a crime to *desecrate* the flag. It doesn't matter in such a context that the flag is not thought to be God or materialistically speaking made from anything other than fabric; the symbolism embedded in the flag makes it an object of reverence, *surrounded by prohibitions*.

There can be a great many things added to the list of what is holy according to different people. Suggestions above have been the flag and nationalism, but consumerism, capitalism and the market can be equally valid in that it orders people's actions and priorities.[27] Furthermore, Robert H. Nelson shows in his book *Economic as Religion* (2001) how market economics today has the place which Christianity had earlier in Western Society. From there it's not far to Italian political theorist Emilio Gentile's *Politics as Religion* (2006). Gentile's analysis is that politics is religious insofar as it is "a system of beliefs, myths, rituals, and symbols that interpret and define the meaning and end of human existence by subordinating the destiny of individuals and the collectivity to a supreme entity".[28]

With such an understanding of religion and politics, Cavanaugh points out that it does not matter whether the supreme entity humans are subordinate to is a god or a nation-state. Neither does it help in predicting how a system of beliefs will function in society.[29] Cavanaugh also points out here that Marxism has a clear eschatology built into its beliefs; the end goal is the proletariat taking control of the means of production and thus liberating the masses.[30] As outlined in the outset of this section, all politics depend on a view of (a) what it means to be human, (b) what the good life consists of, and (c) how we should organize society in order to get there. Both capitalism and marxism surely has millions of adherers that see these as untouchable principles that ought to be the founding principles on which to organize society. Although Capitalism may not have a collorary book, the *Communist Manifesto* is nothing short of a Bible for some who believe in its principles, and its right as a guiding light. In short, this concludes Cavanaugh's arguments as to why both substantivist and functionalist attempts at defining religion fail.

The reason to still trying to divide our lofty visions and ideals into one group of secular and another which are religious should be found in the argumentation above; that by circumscribing "religions" as something illegitimate within the realm of (secular) politics, we are more willing to give our allegiance to ideologies and ideas such as nationalism, patriotism

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[26] Cf. Eliade, 1996, pp. 11.
[27] Cf. Sölle, 1984; Loy 1997; Goodchild 2007
[28] Cited in Cavanaugh, 2009, pp. 109.
[29] Ibid., pp. 110.
[30] Ibid., pp. 111.

or similar movements. We are not short of voices critical against religious participation within this realm. What we lose, however, is the critical voices that religions can add to the political discussion; something that will be discussed more indepth in section three.

As you may notice, I have not chosen to favor either definition. Both substantivist and functionalist definitions wrestle with the same problem, and understood widely they both come to include political ideologies. The argumentation above renders the term religion ambivalent at best, or useless at worst. It may therefore seem odd that I continue to use it throughout the essay. Let us then also bear in mind that problematizing religion, also poses the same õexistentialö threat to õpureö politics or the concept of the secular. My main question still is whether religion and politics is a valid divide. However, we do have an understanding based on these categories where probably all of us know Marxism as a political ideology, and Christianity as a religion. Therefore I continue the use of these words arbitrarily, in order to evoke these connotations.

2.5 Summary

Throughout history religion and politics has shared in some core tasks; that which in this essay is described as trying to *organize society confessionally*. It happened in the Roman Empire, and it happened in the texts of Enlightenment thinkers such as Marx and Rousseau. Once there was a separation of the religious sphere vs. the political sphere, explicit attempts have been made of trying to address exactly what place religion could be allowed.

Cavanaughøs argument highlights the problem with trying to separate political from religious as different ways of õorganizing societyö. In terms of definition; both substantivist and functionalist definitions fail to separate the political from the religious. Rather, it is the rise of the nation-state as a concept that demanded peopleøs primary loyalty that was the beneficiary of such a divide.

In chapter 3 I will present agonistic political theory, which has other thoughts on how a state can be ruled than what is the usual take in a õliberal democracyö. I present how agonism is relevant to the analysis of this essay and respond to some criticism leveled against it.

3

<u>Agonistic Political Theory</u>

As described in the first chapter the theorists Iøm using for my analysis can be labeled *Agonistic Political Theorists* (below this theory is also called *agonism* and its proponents *agonists*). The theorists Iøm relying on are Chantal Mouffe and William E. Connolly. Because Mouffe is building a part of her argument on Carl Schmitt, a brief look at Schmitt is offered before mapping out Mouffeøs argument. The same goes for Connolly, who relies on Gilles Deleuzeøs philosophy, which makes it reasonable with a short presentation of Deleuze before presenting Connollyøs argument.

Agnostic political theory is not necessarily the only way these thinkers could be grouped. For instance Mouffe is sometimes also grouped together with Slavoj fiiflek and others, forming what is usually referred to as the *new post-Marxist left.*[31] In other words, it is not necessary to present these two theorists together. However, I find that highlighting Mouffeøs argument helps to highlight important features in the Connollyøs work, and vice versa. They also share some criticism of core concepts within liberalism. This justifies touching on both their arguments, as liberalism is arguably formative for todayøs political landscape.[32]

Before mapping out my use of theory, a brief presentation of Liberalism and liberal democracy seems in order.

3.1 Liberalism and Liberal Democracy

Before going into the argument of agonistic political theorists, it may be important to gain an understanding of what liberalism and liberal democracy is about. This will only be a brief summary, and not deal with the entire history of Liberalism. Rather, it will touch on some core features that are present in Liberalism and liberal democracy today.

First of all, liberalism and liberal democracy is suggested by some to be two different things.[33] However, what this separation consists of is rather vague. If the term liberal democracy is simply another word for democracy then the prefix öliberalö seems unnecessary. In this essay I have adopted the view that liberal democracy are decmocracies that are guided

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[31] Cf. Sigurdson, 2009, pp. 102.
[32] Jagers, 2005, pp. 47; 49.
[33] Ulrika Mårtensson takes a different approach than the one I'm presenting here. See Mårtensson 2010 pp 63-100

by liberal principles. Therefore, I will not examine what we mean by democracy here (as this is an ongoing discussion in the essay, and in the entire field of political theology) but rather focus on examining ways to interpret what these liberal guiding values are.

According to political scientist Sverker Jagers we can understand what a liberal democracy is by judging whether a state adhers to the following principles; the will of the people, representation, the primacy of majority will, individual freedom and rights, the free market, and the nation-state.[34] This list provides us with components which are predominantly functionalist democratic, and some component which are predominantly substantivist democratic. By dividing these two it is possible to view some as integral to something being a democracy, and other things as integral to being liberal.

In order to have any kind of democracy one requires a *demos* – a people. Thus anything tied in with the will of the people is reasonably considered functionalist democratic. Equally the nation-state as territorial bounds is a way of providing such a *demos*. Representation and the possibility to elect and re-elect rests on the presumption that the people do not rule themselves - what is ususaly referred to as direct democracy. Thus this can be said to be a liberal component. Economic competition by way of a free market is also a value or belief that liberalism has invested into (democracy). The question of majority rule, lastly, can probably be located somewhere öin betweenö the distinctions of substantivist and functionalist, as the acknowledgement of the peopleøs requires some form of decision-making. What one means with majority vote and when this is applicable is however a question that is open-ended, and its answer differs between liberal democracies as well.

In a discussion on liberalism it is also noteworthy to discuss the role of the state, and the idea of consensus. Common in liberal democracies is that the state sees itsø role as öas small as possibleö. The state should function to fascilitate equal rights, freedoms and opportunities for all citizens. In liberalism a minimal state is seen as something that only regulates these, but meddles as little as possible in the öinner workingsö of citizens, organizations and companies alike. This brings about a division into two spheres; the public and the private. The idea is that in the private sphere citizens should be free to do as they please with their lives.[35] Another aspect which is important to touch on is consensus. The idea is that the role of the government is to be an intermediate between different peoples and interests within a nation-state, with a belief that these can in the end agree on what is the best way forward for society

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[34] Jagers, 2005, pp. 49.
[35] Instead of evaluating the mertis of this, I propose the following discussion of the potentially problematic nature of the division between private/public in Jones, 2000, pp. 135-145.

as a whole. In other words there is a strong sense that universalism is possible, and they are possible through rational debate.[36] Differently put, the idea here is that although people have different ideas, goals or passions in life, these can be suaded to coincide with each other, and that the way to change people's ideas, goals or passions is through *rational debate*. It is also thought that a free market economy allows a range of differing interests to emerge, which provides an arena some private consumption that does not require to be örationalö enough to enter into public life.

Important to note here is that the possibility of rational debate rests on a belief in that humans are above all *rational*. This is not something which liberals try to öproveö in any way. Rather, it is an ontological presumption which the politics rests upon. From this ontological presumption follows the opportunity to unite in consensus as the outcome of such rational debate.

Second it can be noted that the division of democracy into one political sphere and one economic sphere divides the power (and possibility to express the will) of the people. In the political sphere (which is to be minimal) some topics can be addressed (in rational discussion). In the economic sphere on the other hand, no equal share of power is promised to the citizens, meaning that some citizens can in effect be left without any influence in the economic sphere.[37] In sum if economic power is thought to present the opportunities and freedoms in the private sphere, this poses a problem for those who either are not deemed öfully humanö or do not have any economic power, thus disabling such citizens from parttaking in private life's economic transactions.

Above I have summarized what liberalism and liberal democracies can be thought to be, and how these tie together (as there can be such a thing as merely democracy without the prefix). I have touched on some principles and also hinted at some more general criticism leveled at liberalism.

3.2 Carl Schmitt

Schmitt's political theory emerged in the aftermath of the First World War. He was skeptical towards liberalism, democracy and pluralism alike, and later came to align himself with German Nazism. However, skepticism of democracy was not uncommon then (as it was not

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[36] Mårtensson, 2010, pp. 69.

[37] For a critical discussion of the connection between economics and democracy, see Kofmel, 2008; Kofmel 2008b.

as widespread and accepted as today). Pluralism can also be understood through this perspective where Europeans just recently failed to deal with *its own internal* pluralism. And the economics of liberalism didnøt seem to provide a failsafe as European countries went to war with their principal trading partners.[38]

In 1922 Schmitt wrote the book *Politische Theologie* and thereby introduced the concept of Political Theology. Schmittøs argument was that the political terms were derived from theological concepts and then made secular. Most importantly *sovereignty* was guided by the thought of divine sovereignty; a source of rulership that did not fall back on anything or anyone else.[39]

Apart from the observations that the political rested on the theological, Schmitt criticized liberalism for rendering realms of society apolitical. Regarding pluralism; in the international context pluralism was something to be protected from, nationally it was to be rooted out for the sake of stability. Schmitt argued for the political dichotomy between (legitimate) friend and (illegitimate) foe as something that could help expedite the protection of the friend from the foe. In other words Schmitt was critical of liberalism but did not manage to resolve the theoretical challenge of consensus versus conflict any more successful than did liberalism.

3.3 Chantal Mouffe: Adversary or Enemy?

When understanding Chantal Mouffeøs political thinking itøs important to have an understanding of where she does and does not draw on Schmitt. Mouffe remains critical of liberalism but not of democracy. Furthermore she utilizes Schmittøs concept of friend and foe in a way which reinterprets the concept, making its application on politics radically different. Used in Mouffeøs way, the concept manages was Schmitt does not; to find a way forward which does not require that we purge society of differences or pluralism. Rather, it highlights the task of the political as providing the arena where conflicts can be put forth in a legitimate manner, rather than taking other ó more sinister ó forms. In Mouffeøs interpretation the concepts are reinterpreted as legitimate friend *and adversary,* both acting within the political arena, which can avoid shutting various people out and creating *a-political illegitimate enemies.*

In political science western democracies are usually labeled liberal democracies. They are considered liberal because of the particular structure and type of democracy. Democracy in itself can be a great many things; ancient Athens had direct democracy which however only

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[38] Nugent, 2010, pp. 9
[39] Schmitt, 1988, pp. 36.

involved Athens' free men, not women, children or slaves. In today's representative parliamentarism the Athens type of direct democracy is absolutely vacant. In the liberal form of democracy some areas of people's lives are deemed *apolitical* and are relegated to be handled by other mechanisms. The free market economy – although expressed differently in various western democracies – is one of these mechanisms, according to Sverker Jagers.[40] Others, such as Ulrika Mårtensson, however suggest that it's possible to exclude this dimension, or at least omits this from the list.[41] What she does not omit is the liberal strive towards a belief in consensus, based on universal values that everyone can agree upon.[42]

Mouffe points out that a politics focused on consensus or reconciliation is far more likely to achieve the opposite result than it strives for. Liberal strive to a democracy that is post-antagonist, beyond sovereignty or beyond left or right reveals a complete misunderstanding of the mission of politics.[43] Rather than aiming for a politics free of conflict the mission of politics should be to *provide the arena of conflict*. If politics fails to be this arena, then the conflict may be taken elsewhere, and take on more sinister or violent shapes. In short, the risk with the liberal attitude is that the drive towards consensus runs the risk of making what could be agonistic, legitimate adversaries, into antagonistic, illegitimate enemies.

The results of this agenda can be seen, and instances of populist parties gaining political influence is one aspect of the smoothing out of the divide between left and right.[44] There seems to be a lot of weight to Mouffe's argument not only based on her examples, but also in the light of current developments in the Swedish elections where right-wing populism has gained support whilst the established parties has approached the political middle ever more.

The danger we run by excluding certain topics from the political sphere, Mouffe argues, is that when people have passions invested in these areas but no way to fully express this in political terms, this may give birth to extremist agendas operating elsewhere than on the political circuit. For instance, the post-political vision of 'emotional democracy' suggested by Anthony Giddens seems to take passions all too lightly, almost as if people's investment in other people, and in politics were merely a hobby. The problem which arises in the context of Giddens' 'life politics' is that it does away with the adversary view *but* introduces a new dichotomy between the modern individual on the one hand and the traditionalists or

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[40] Jagers, 2005, pp. 47; 49.
[41] Mårtensson, 2010.
[42] Ibid., pp. 69.
[43] Mouffe, 2005, pp. 2.
[44] Ibid., pp. 66.

fundamentalists on the other ó again without providing an arena where the modern and traditional can meet.[45]

Another example where Mouffe provides a different perspective is on the topic of international terrorism. Basing her argument on Carl Schmittøs critique of liberalism; she points out that liberalism tends to claim the categories of the universal or humanity and goodness. The problem with such a labeling is that whatever is not liberal then falls under the category on inhuman or evil.[46]

3.4 Gilles Deleuze

Deleuzian theory is widely recognized as hard to grasp. This is mainly because Deleuzeøs aim was not to map out philosophy as a system that could explain the world in a reductionist way. Rather, Deleuze argued, the mission of philosophy was to create new modes of being and complicate our ideas. In order to maintain a philosophical discipline that creates rather than merely re-presents örealityö, he uses various terms, styles and invokes insights from various scientific disciplines in order to not get caught in using singular reoccuring terms. Having said this, some deleuzian ötermsö that are central to understand are *difference, intensities,* and *becoming-*.

Structuralists approached the world as something without meaning, something impossible to understand without the help of signifiers or taxonomies. Deleuzeøs response was that such a pre-signified world did exist in a meaningful way; the world exists in all its difference. Structuralisms attempt to öcreate meaningö was in such a view a way to re-present the world, but reduced to similarities weøve agreed or decided upon. Living in the world of difference does in other words not require reducing difference to a structured, *lesser* difference.

Such a worldview does not afford us to always look at humans as individuals. Much like looking at a flower as molecules it does not always make sense to apply the same perspective. Rather than a molecular view, the beauty of a flower is better appreciated when looking at the billions of molecules in a way that makes us see the entirety of the flower. And sometimes, when trying to understand the processes that produce a flower, we need to go to a sub-molecular level. Understanding humans and humanities, requires constantly changing our

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[45] Mouffe, 2005, pp. 49.
[46] Ibid., pp. 78; 81.

perspective.[47] To focus at only the level of individuality would require a view where see these entities as exchangeable with each other.

Going back to the analogy, this would be like viewing human society as only H2O (water) molecules, rather than different molecules that do have commonalities, but are also radically different from each other. The flower is not produced by only H2O molecules, neither is it best understood in such a reductionist way. Constantly changing perspective is adamant. Humans are both similar and different, but they are depending on connections to difference on a micro, meso, marco and meta level.[48]

Intensities are the drives in creating these connections, sometimes referred to as desiring-machines. Such intensities does not always happen at the inter-human level, but can be proto-human or take place on levels smaller or larger (such as the influence of hormones or the impact of large environmental forces).

Understood in such a way, the human being is never a closed off end product, and Deleuze would argue it being absurd to think of a human individual as a stand-alone entity. Such an understanding of a stand-alone entity provides a few problems. One is that it affords us to disregard the connections and dependencies between humans (and non-human forces). The other is that humanity can be reduced to *a* human, a human normality, which makes individuals both interchangeable or exchangeable for each other, and can be judged as soon as they step outside the bounds of normality.

Deleuze instead proposes a becoming-human, becoming-man, becoming-woman, becoming-nonhuman. As the world of difference keeps on manifesting itself constant change is afoot. This change means that we are in no sense the same as we were yesterday; neither physiologically nor phychologically. The human individual as a becoming-something, is critical to understand in order to grasp the depth of its applicability in William E. Connolly's political theory.

3.5 William E. Connolly: Critiquing Universalism, and Politics of Becoming

Chantal Mouffe stress the functional value of dichotomies in general, and amongst them the dichotomy of left-right in reoccurring in particular. William E. Connolly's writing, on the other hand, is more freeform. This could at first glance be seen as agreeing with Giddens'

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[47] A line of thought that Connolly infuses with new aspects in books such as *Neuropolitics* and *A World of Becoming*.
[48] Micropolitics however, is not necessarily understood as micro/meso/macro but also non-human perspectives that cannot be captured by sociological terminology. Thus, this is no attempt at making Deleuze a sociologist.

view on õlife politicsö. However, although Connollys may agree to some extent with Giddens about the way in which õnew globally aware individualsö are õproducedö and are subject to change, Connollyøs line of argumentation differs from Giddens on some key points.

The first point is that Connolly shares Mouffeøs skepticism regarding the outcome of liberal, secular or rational-based ideas. Connolly doesnøt assume that the development of peopleøs identities will have a general trajectory, where people become more and more alike, and more and more liberal.

The second thing separating the two is what kind of effort is necessary in order to change one self. Giddens may be taken here as one (of many) proponents for a rational ideal where the exchange of ideas happen through calm discussion, as if one was just picking and choosing from a smorgasbord of lifestyle choices or identity-markers. Like Mouffe, Connolly acknowledges the difficulties and struggle involved in such a change in identity. Connolly argues that the difficulty of exchange/change must focus to a greater extent on other forms of formation than calm argumentation. Rather, structural pressures are important, but so is proto-thoughts; or in Nietzscheøs words õthe thoughts behind our thoughts, and the thoughts behind thoseö.[49]

Rather than believing that there is some merit to the thought that we are inevitably moving in a direction towards more õenlightenmentö or rationality, Connolly proposes that the secular, rational or liberal does not suffice to let other important modes of being and thinking grow and evolve. In his view secular or liberal tendencies do not deserve a hegemonic position above all else, and the same holds true for other theistic and atheistic ideas and ideologies; they all deserve *a* place however.

At this junction an important separation can be made between the liberal political theology of Habermas and that of Connolly. Although Habermas opts for a postsecular society where religious individuals and organizations may be lively contributors to the political order, there is a disagreement on how this is supposed to happen. Habermas remains convinced that the political can be an all-together rational mode of discourse. In such a view religious people are not meant to *split* themselves between a secular/public and a religious/private sphere, but rather *consolidate* these and join them together. If religious citizens cannot communicate in a rational manner Heidegger claims that they will be enable to engage other individuals.[50] Such a train of thought however, seem to entirely discard the appeal that for instance Christianity

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[49] Cited in Connolly, 1999, pp. 28, see also Connolly, 2002, for a further problematization of human formative processes.
[50] Mårtensson, 2010, pp. 78.

and Islam holds over people – enough to "make people into believers" – exactly by engaging in conversation *on their own* terms (in a language or way that Heidegger deems incomprehensible to secular people).

To be clear, what separates for instance Habermas from Connolly in this respect is the belief that all religions must come to terms with a mode of being, and speaking even, that is decidedly liberal in character in order for society to function. Agonistic political theory on the other hand posits that any doctrine that tries to universalize itself is problematic. As long as people accept the basic tenet of allowing equal space for others, agonistic theory does not see the same need for control via *liberal* values.

Leaving liberalism specifically and looking at the ontological aspect of Connollys work, it is useful to approach his deleuzian streak. Deleuze understands life as difference, production or a constant flow. To single out the individual human subject as something detached or autonomous cannot be done according to such an understanding of life in all its interconnectedness. According to Deleuze, the creation of meaning is a political endeavor; there is no meaning or end goal that the flow of life aspires to achieve. In this sense, there is nothing natural in singling out an object/subject called the "human individual" and believing this to be autonomous. Rather, the creation of such an object/subject is a political maneuver.

Connolly sees the individual similarly. It would undoubtedly be difficult to have any kind of functioning democracy without a *demos* built on an understanding of people, rather than a large undifferentiated mass of life. Thus the individual is used as a starting point, but not treated in an autonomous sense. Individuals may exist (having been produced politically), but they are highly interdependent on proto-thoughts, sub-human connections, structural pressures, and other flows and variations of life that does not move solely on the level of a rational individual basis.

Deleuze uses the idea of becoming- (becoming-man, becoming-human etc) to signify that individuals are always on the move, en route to becoming something else entirely or in part (for instance we are all becoming-dead eventually). Connolly uses this concept and turns it into a *politics of becoming*.[51] This means that potential identities; male/female, straight/gay, white/black, old/young, poor/rich, atheist/Muslim, along with passions for sports, studies, economics, music, arts and whatnot results in highly *individual* individuals. In some respect

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[51] See also the furthering of the concept in Connolly's *A World of Becoming* (2011).

we are *different* but at the same time we have overlapping passions and features that make us able to connect and group together with other people.

Given this, Connolly suggests two important things. The first is that the grouping together ought not to be about finding *the* group that we have the most in common with. Rather, we can group and regroup with different people depending on the topic. Sometimes we are grouped with other old people, trying to press for the rights of such citizens. Another time, actualizing the identity of atheist or our passion for music may be the best way to put forth our interest for the time being. A politics that allows such a group/regrouping procedure allows us to become more fluid than the current political system. Second, it means that at some points we will be included in the minority-interest in some instances. Connolly argues that this may be beneficial because it reminds us of the importance of inclusion of minorities and the accommodations of their interests within the political sphere.

Second, such a õsystemö demands what Connolly refers to as *contestability*. This means that although we may hold our ideals, ideas, passions or identities very dear and care about these deeply (compared to giddean õlife politicsö), we are also required to acknowledge that our deepest and most cherished beliefs can be contested by others.

Connolly is not only critical towards secular liberalism, although that is the theme of one of his books. Another book deals with the topic of what he calls evangelical capitalism (2008). This movement, typically present in the politics of the American right, shares some similarities with the secular liberalism Connolly is skeptical towards because it too seeks to make its particular values universal. Denying the particularity of ones values and trying to transpose them into universalities, or make them transcendent, negates Connollyøs idea of contestability. Any set of values that negates this is in Connollyøs view unfit to rule, when it tries to encompass the whole of the political sphere.

Such an approach makes provisions for being sensitive towards new developments, new interests, and new groups wanting societal and political recognition. It does not, however, allow a clearly formulated end goal or a set of consensus-based ethics that ought to guide who can be allowed to be a part of the political. In other words Connolly agrees with Mouffeøs argument that the political ought to provide the arena for all discussion. However, highlighting dichotomies such as left-right ó with the õriskö of propelling certain sets of ideas or meaning into the middle of politics ó separates Mouffe from Connolly who opts for a less õdichotomizedö and less õvalue-chargedö politics.

3.6 Applicability

From the presentation above, it should be clear that some political theorists deem liberalism and secularism as insufficient modes of politics, which do not make sufficient provisions for the kind of pluralism present in today's societies. Rather than trying to achieve consensus, agonistic political theorists provides two separate (but reasonably compatible) suggestions on how politics can afford to broaden its mission, and create sufficient space for all sorts of (presumably often heated) debate *within* the political realm. This stands in contrast to a liberal aim for consensus, which struggles with the difficulty of having dreamed up a typical rational, autonomous human subject as the model citizen. Depending on how the citizens can fit into such a mold, they are afforded *different amounts* of space within the political. In other words, those who embrace this concept of the human subject – and live up to the criteria – have the best chance of gaining political influence. Those who are somehow not deemed fully human in comparison to this understanding of humanity are instead prevented from full participation in political life.

Therefore this essay uses this perspective as a way of highlighting a way forward that does not appear to be open when viewing society from a perspective of liberalism or secularism. What such a perspective does not is to make some values "transcendent" within politics. Rather, it focuses on the *functioning* of politics as the arena where all sorts of societal debate, exchange and conflict can take place, without implying that the conflicts ought to be eradicated or have a particular outcome.

3.7 Kristen Deede Johnson: A Critique Against Liberalism *and* Agonism

One who is critical of both liberalism and agonism is Christian theologian Kristen Deede Johnson. Johnson sees the merits in critiquing liberalism (from an agonist point of view or elsewhere). However, she does not agree with the solution of agonism. In her *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism* (2007) she sees liberalism falling short of being a structure which can accommodate new modes of being that hasn't been granted rights yet. She appears to be less flexible, however, in how to regard humanity and its purpose. The two ideas that clash with Johnson is mainly the ever changing nature of human beings, and due to this also the concept of conflict. Thirdly she remains skeptical about the scope of the political presented in agonist theory.

Building on Augustinian thoughts, Johnson is hesitant towards the all-including state, where everything should be afforded room within the political arena. Rather, spiritual matters

may not be best addressed in such a forum, drawing on the ideas of the City of God and City of Man.

Deleuze's theory – on which Connolly draws heavily – is admittedly opposed to the idea of transcendence; especially in a sense that something or someone has created humans and our world and given the whole and the sum a specific purpose that we try to achieve. Life and difference in itself is the purpose for Deleuze. In Connolly's political theory, there is also the same sense that the state ought not be substantivist in values, but rather value the value of difference, not trying to reduce it to commonalities when this can be avoided.

Johnson is critical towards this open-ended humanity, which also makes her view on conflict differ from an agonist perspective. According to Mouffe and Connolly conflict is the state humans are bound to live in. Johnson believes that there may be a way to avoid this. However, in doing so she runs the risk of misinterpreting conflict. For Mouffe and Connolly the question is not whether conflict does or does not exist. Rather, it is what kind of arena the conflict takes place in. Meaning that conflict – and this is what Johnson seems not to grasp – can be peaceful. Conflict will most likely not be indifferent discussion, nor must it be violently enacted, there is a middle ground.

For instance, there is a conflict between me and my two year old daughter over who should brush her teeth. The conflict can get loud as my daughter insists on doing all the brushing herself, and I insist on sharing the task. A year ago only I brushed her teeth. All along I've been taking the liberty of imposing my will on her (teeth). However, doing this I'm aware that the circumstances will change, and that the current arrangement is only preliminary.

In Johnson's eyes conflict is unfortunate, rather than natural. In other words, she shares the liberal drive for consensus, although fails to agree with the agonists saying that conflicts constantly arise as a way to tackle the particular situation that has arisen in today's specific context. Tomorrow we will be new individuals (due to individual, but also non-human and societal events), and thus new conflicts will arise then.

However, in my view the objection Johnson voices is not necessary even if we imagine humanity to actually have an end goal. It is possible to retain the vision of "going somewhere particular" without doing away with conflict (either in the present day or in eschatology). Viewing conflict as something naturally occuring does not mean that there can be absolutely no values, it merely means that one particular theology, ideology or other cannot provide the specific values that all must agree upon in every *specific* situation.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has presented my choice of theory for the essay. The arguments of agonistic political theorists Chantal Mouffe and William E. Connolly have been presented, along with a mapping of how Mouffe draws on Carl Schmitt and Connolly draws on Gilles Deleuze. Mouffe acknowledges Schmitt's criticism of liberalism but reinterprets his work in order to improve democracy rather than to critique it along with liberalism. Schmitt's concept of friend/enemy is in Mouffe's work refashioned into differentiating between legitimate adversaries on the one hand, and illegitimate enemies on the other: Mouffe's main point being that the task of the political is to make all conflicts into political conflicts between legitimate adversaries, rather than running the risk of conflicts taking more sinister turns, where enemies are created because of the lack of political accommodation.

Connolly draws on a deleuzian understanding of the human. Although the individual is a necessary unit in order to expedite politics and democracy, the individual shouldn't be thought of as stable or autonomous. Rather, non-human intensities have great impact on human action, as does passions and proto-thoughts. Connolly suggests a *politics of becoming*, which facilitates a broader range of connections between peoples, allowing them to group and regroup depending on the question (rather than choosing one party to "belong" to). This would make better provisions for pluralism and the many identities and signifiers that are present in today's society and *within* the individuals themselves. Such a politics has no end game, but rather presents a framework that can afford a place for various passions, interests and identities to all be part of the political sphere.

This agonistic perspective is applied in the essay, because it provides a perspective on politics that does not first propose a "model citizen" (which is thought to be rational, secular and liberal) – the problem with such a model being that people are given different amounts of political influence depending on whether or not they reach the criteria of the model. Agonistic theory acknowledges conflict, and proposes that its rightful place is within politics instead of trying to hamper conflict or propose a particular normative outcome, the way that liberalism can be said to do.

The chapter also presented Johnson's critique against both liberalism and agonistic political theory. However, the argument is that Johnson misinterprets the meaning of conflict – in the way it is described by Mouffe and Connolly – which makes her unable to acknowledge the merits in a value-free mode of politics.

Next chapter will present and analyze the SOU report *The State and the Imams,* doing so in the same sequence as the chapters in the report are set out.

4

<u>The State and the Imams ó Chapter-Based Presentation</u>

In this chapter Iøm presenting the Swedish Official Government Report *The State and the Imams: Religion, Integration, Autonomy (Below also SOU 2009).*[52] In this chapter I will discuss the contents of the report in the sequence it is arranged. The Chapters in SOU 2009 are as follows: 1. The Investigation (4.1); 2. A Changing Sweden (4.2); 3. The Imams (4.3); 4. The Education (4.4); 5. Considerations (4.5); and 6. The Proposal (4.6).

In chapter 5 of the essay I will move from a discussion of the report ó built on the sequence of chapters within the report itself ó to one that sums up some tendencies and highlights these with the help of agonistic political theory (described in chapter 3).

This essay is consciously building on a theological (or political-theological) line of argumentation. In chapter 2 I presented the main points of the field of Political Theology. I have however excluded references to the fields of Islamology and the History of Religion; the name under which Islam is often studied at Swedish Universities, my own studies of Islam included. However, in this chapter it seems appropriate to introduce references to such studies, although having not given any background account for this academic field. Hopefully this separation will make it easier to discern what is part of the theoretical politico-theological paradigm and what is specialized studies regarding Islam, but also show that many empirical and contextual studies on Islam can be used in support of a perspective of agonistic political theory.

4.1 The Investigation

This chapter sets out the need of the inquiry; Sweden is a society that is changing in its religious demography, and the number of Muslim Swedish citizens is increasing. A number of voices have made themselves heard regarding the idea of one way or another starting an education for Imams in Sweden. From the stateøs perspective the topic of an education for Imams have been around for some time, and these voices adding to it certainly justifies putting the report and its line of inquiry into motion.

Instructions were that the work on the report should be guided by the principles of existing support to religious organizations. Who receives support today is dictated by whether or not

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[52] The Swedish title is: *Statens Offentliga Utredningar: Staten och Imamerna: Religion, integration, autonomi.*

the organizations are trying to "contribute to maintain and strengthen the basic values that the Swedish society is based upon, so that these remain stable and thriving".[53]

Here, the last formulation is noteworthy; that the core-values that Swedish society is built upon should be (or can be expected to be) *stable*. If we are to engage William E. Connolly on this topic it should be clear that *stable* is somewhat of a problematic word which I will go into further details on in Chapter 5.

4.2 A Changing Sweden

The report's second chapter paints a picture of how Sweden has changed, from the 19th century onward. It is made clear that "independently of what single individuals think of religion or immigration, the religious and cultural multiplicity is a fact which both the state and its citizens must relate to, and there is a need to create sustainable strategies for building a common society, open to all humans".[54] The report then goes all the way back to *Uppsala möte 1593* when it was decided that all Swedes should belong to the Lutheran state church. We are also shown through the centuries, highlighting how immigration from i.e. Wallonia and Scotland also brought about changes as to what religions were present in Sweden.[55]

Freedom of religion then became final in Sweden 1951, which for the first time meant that freedom of religion could also mean freedom *from* religion. The report also notes that the free churches (or low churches) played an important role in forming a social security network, but that this function diminished as the welfare-policy expanded.[56] In the chapters summary the report states that Sweden has become a heterogeneous and multicultural society in a short period of time, and that this fact should also translate into political action. It is thought that this change challenges basic (or foundational) guidelines for our relations; it engages what responsibilities we have toward each other but also what rights we have towards groups or cultures that try to control us.[57] What role the state is seen to play in such relations is however not elaborated upon.

4.3 The Imams

The third chapter of the report also deals with questions such as *Who is an Imam?; How do you become an Imam? How many are there?* etc. but also more specifically presenting a

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[53] SOU 2009, pp. 16.
[54] Ibid., pp. 21.
[55] Ibid., pp. 22.
[56] Ibid., pp. 23.
[57] Ibid., pp. 24.

historical background regarding Islam and Muslims in Sweden. The chapter states that even though the main immigration of Muslims to Sweden started in the 1960øs (as work-force immigration), diplomatic relations and even archeological findings from the Viking Age bear witness of some contact, although itøs hard to say how important such contacts were.[58] As religious affiliation is not counted in Sweden, the last survey that did look into this was from 1930. Then only 15 people claimed to be Muslim, whereas todayøs number is usually estimated to be between 350 000 and 400 000. The portion of practitioning Muslims are estimated to be around 150 000.[59] As immigration changed from work-force immigration to relatives immigrating (at the beginning of the 1970øs) a new set of questions emerged for the first time. This was questions such as how parents could guarantee their childrenøs continued commitment to Islam, as well as questions about mosques and Muslim congregations in general.[60]

In the section õWho is an Imam?ö there is a discussion about what an Imam does exactly. First of all the name means õhe who stands beforeö, meaning simply that the Imam is the man who stands before the believers, leading them in prayer (the feminine version of the word being õImamaö). For Sunni Muslims this is also the more general meaning of the word Imam. In such an understanding itøs not possible to translate the function of the Imam into being exactly that of a priest.[61] Within Islam there is not a system of ordaining clergy in the way the church does. This also means that it does not require formal training to lead a congregation in prayer. However, some organizations ó i.e. Turkish mosques connected to Diyanet ó have requirements that Imams must live up to.[62]

Furthermore, Muslim groups are not organized the same way as either the protestant or catholic church; it for instance lacks central figures of authority (such as an archbishop) that can speak on behalf of the whole organization.[63] Instead of a top-down structure, where priests are ordained centrally and are then allowed to work everywhere, the Muslim community can better be described as a bottom-up structure where the local congregation (in lack of a better word, as it is not always organized as such) puts forth what specifications they require and what expectations they have from the serving Imam.[64] This is important to notice

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[58] SOU, 2009, pp. 25.
[59] Ibid., pp. 26. For a detailed discussion on how to measure "who is a Muslim" and estimates of how many there are in Sweden, see Larsson & Sander, 2007, pp. 153-169.
[60] Ibid., pp. 27.
[61] Ibid., pp. 28.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

as the types of financial support that can be received from the government is based on an understanding where *the structure of a religious organization is expected to look like the organization of a church*. Larsson & Sander states: "In other words – and as experienced from the Muslim point of view – in order to qualify for support, a religious collective must, for all practical purposes, transform itself into a 'free' church."[65]

There are a few ways to approach this. One is to draw on Cavanaugh's criticism regarding defining religion. Both substantivist and functionalist approaches fail to circle exactly those subject matters that we intuitively *want* to label "religious". But it is also possible to direct the argument without using Cavanaugh, by instead looking to the Swedish freedom of religion act from 1951. Would it not be reasonable that Islam (covered as a religion in this understanding) would be free from the demand to organize itself as if it was simply another Free Church or form of Christianity? As noted earlier the act includes freedom *from* religion. To structure your belief-based organization according not to your own ways or wants but according to how another religion is structuring theirs clearly fails to meet one basic criteria of freedom *from* religion. This view reflects the problematic nature of trying to use the *religion*-typology and expect various faiths to fit comfortably within. However, such a standpoint cannot be said to stand for the scholars in the report, for instance secretary Göran Larsson highlights this problem in his own previous literature together with Åke Sander. Rather it reflects some attitudes of the state that has gone unchecked in this area.

4.3.1 Methodological Issues

Below I will formulate some possible thoughts that may be attached to the chosen methodology of the report. This is discussed as it influences the recommendation the report puts forth in its final chapter. The report is not found wanting, or lacking expertise on the topic. On the contrary some of Sweden's foremost scholars and professors within the field of Social Sciences and Religious Studies have taken part in it. To have this mix of expert knowledge in the field of politics and in the field of religion is all too rare otherwise, so the report is founded on sound research and methods overall. There is also an awareness amongst the participating scholars that the question of a domestic education for imams has been handled in different ways across the continent.[66]

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[65] Larsson & Sander, 2007, pp. 184. Their full discussion is found in pages 183-186.
[66] Amongst other things, the report's secretary Göran Larsson have written an appendix in the Report, offering an outlook on European models of educations of Imams. See also Larsson 2010.

The information gathered from Muslim organizations has been by way of survey and round-table discussions/interviews over a period of time. A part of the task in the report is to review existing forms of education, and how this can be applied to the education of Imams in Sweden. The question I would like to address ties in with both the selection informants for the survey and for the overview of existing forms of education.

The survey has been answered by people who are currently serving as Imams in different Muslim congregations and organizations, and rather than being seen as representatives, the 121 answered questionnaires should be seen as individual answers from people *currently serving as Imams*.[67] Furthermore, 17 of these individuals lack any formal education for their work; 16 have an education of 1-3 years; 38 have an education between 4-6 years; and finally a total of 49 individuals have an education of 7 years or more (according to the report, however, the education should not be seen to only be Islamic studies, but include other parts of formal higher education as well).[68]

One cannot help but wonder what the survey and interviews would have yielded, had other groups of Muslim practitioners been able to express their thoughts. For instance; what would the *organizations* feel the needs were? And equally interesting; what would a younger generation of Muslims in Sweden have to say on the topic? As there is no education currently available in Sweden for Imams, this effectively means that their training has been undertaken in another country. If the Imams have emigrated from another country, being trained in Saudi-Arabia, Egypt or Turkey would probably not seem strange. For a Swedish citizen who has never lived in another country (as is the case for more and more young Swedish Muslims) the idea of having a certain part of your studies taking place at a University outside Europe ó let alone Sweden ó may not be as õnaturalö.

One survey among *Sveriges Unga Muslimer* (Swedenøs Young Muslims, Below: SUM) ó which is the largest Sunni-Muslims youth organization in Sweden ó shows that 73% of the informants were positive towards the proposal of starting a Swedish education for Imams.[69] The Imams asked in the SOU report were also positive, but what could potentially vary between the groups is what kind of content such an education would be in need of.

In assessing what types of educations are available to current Imams and how this coincides with what educations the Imams themselves see a need for SFI (Swedish For

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[67] SOU, 2009, pp. 39.
[68] Ibid., pp. 44.
[69] Bäckelie, 2010, pp. 84.

Immigrants) is mentioned and written about at length.[70] If the question was directed towards young Muslims born and raised in Sweden with Swedish as their first (or possibly second) language, the inclusion of SFI would hardly be seen as an important type of education, central to becoming an Imam in Sweden. Put differently; seeing SFI as an ingredient in the education of Imams is likely to become less and less relevant, as more Muslims are born in Sweden and speaks Swedish fluently.

In summary, the report does not address whether there may be important generational differences between what is pertinent for *current* Imams working in Sweden on the one hand, and what may be central for potential *future* Imams springing from an õall-Swedishö context (if the expression is allowed). This does by no means make the report invaluable, but is rather an aspect which shows that the question of Imams and what kind of training (if any) the state should provide can be addressed and answered in many ways. Furthermore the question is under constant revision õnaturallyö due to the changing demography of Swedish Muslims. In short, the report does not highlight the difference between education *of* Imams and education *for* Imams (something I will return to).

4.3.2 The Imams (Demographic Composition)

Above Iøve tried to engage the question of how the report could have been addressing different questions, by addressing different Muslims. I have also touched briefly on who were in fact asked to answer the questionnaires and partake in the dialog/interviews. Below I will expand on what can be said to be the Imams own views, trying as best I can to separate this from the Reportøs recommendation.

As mentioned above regarding methodology, those who answered the survey and partook in the dialogue/interviews were people currently working as Imams in Sweden. 17% had no formal training for this, meaning 83% had. This training however varied between 1-7+ years.[71] 5 individuals undertook their training in Sweden, the other 116 elsewhere. The most common countries for education were Turkey (47 individuals), Bosnia-Hercegovina 10, Saudi-Arabia 9, Jordan 7, and Iraq 7. 27 individuals received their educated in a European country (not counting Turkey), out of which 3 in Germany, 3 in France, and 4 in England.[72]

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[70] SOU, 2009, pp. 55-60.
[71] Ibid., pp. 44.
[72] Ibid., pp. 42.

37 individuals have been working as Imams in Sweden for 0-5 years, 32 individuals for 5-10 years, 31 for 10-15 years and 19 for more than 15 years.[73]

The survey shows that 102 individuals thought that they would themselves benefit from further training, in order to function better in their role as Imams. 94 individuals (77% in comparison with the number at the youth conference mentioned above) thought it a good idea to start an education for Imams in Sweden.[74] When asked what kind of content such an education ought to have the alternatives were (these were not mutually exclusive, the respondents could choose to favor as many as they liked): Swedish law, Islamic theology, Swedish history and social science, training for handling conflicts and counseling, leadership training, the Swedish language, spiritual care and religious dialogue. 81 individuals thought Swedish law appropriate content, 31 approved of Islamic theology (aprox. 25% percent), 68 of Swedish history and social science, 61 of training for handling conflicts and counseling, 38 approved of including leadership training, 75 of Swedish language, 31 of spiritual care and 43 of religious dialogue (aprox. 30%).[75]

Most informants thought that the appropriate place for such an education would be at universities as with current education for priests, pastors and church clergy, although this picture did not go uncontradicted as some representatives pointed out that not all individuals who are interested in becoming Imams have the qualifications to be accepted into higher education.

Another concern was also raised, which mainly revolved around a suspicion or fear that the state's motive for educating Imams was an issue of wanting to control Muslims by controlling the education. Many informants felt that it was inappropriate for the state to meddle in the confessional parts of the training.[76]

In summary the data shows that the main interest for the Imams are not one of religious education, but rather education in subjects that would equip the Imams for working in the Swedish context.[77] This is perhaps not surprising given that almost half of the respondents have an education of seven years or more. However bearing in mind the question raised in the methodology section, my suggestion is that the picture would be likely to vary depending on who is asked, and what generation they belong to.

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[73] SOU, 2009, pp. 43.
[74] Ibid., pp. 46.
[75] Ibid., pp. 47.
[76] Ibid., pp. 49.
[77] Ibid., pp. 52.

4.4 The Education

Included in the assignment of the report was to survey the existing forms of education available that could be used as education for Imams. The forms of available education listen in the report are SFI (Swedish for immigrants), education in Swedish language in higher education, *folkbildning*,[78] higher education and universities, education for religious leaders within religious organizations, and a section on state funded education for religious leadership. This is then compared to a Norwegian model of interreligious leadership education, and a summary of European models.

Within the first two sections it is said that foreign academics are best helped by Swedish language education in higher education.[79] As suggested above, listing education in Swedish language as a part of an education for Imams can be viewed as a response to the chosen methodology. However, the short-term solution to answer the demands of current Imams also runs the risk of permanenting a structure where Swedish citizens are not able to train as Imams domestically.

Within *folkbildning* funding is given to organizations and educational programmes that work to strengthen and develop democracy, increasing people's possibilities to affect their own lives, create commitment and participation in societal development, contribute to the reduction of educational differences, increasing society's educational level, and broaden interest and participation in cultural life.[80] Within such education certain areas can be prioritized if deemed appropriate. Such areas include commitment to õ*den gemensamma värdegrunden*ö[81]*;* the common values of society. Another such area is the õsocietal challenges of multiculturalismö.[82]

It seems appropriate to put forth a few remarks here. Regarding *folkbildning*, the strengthening and development of democracy is put forth as a goal. However, the report does not offer any deeper discussion of what democracy õisö, or what is referred to as democracy; for instance whether or not democracy can be perceived as different things from this perspective depending on time and context. What is emphasized rather often is however the notion of necessity in having common societal values.[83]

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[78] *Folkbildning* meaning popular adult education/non-degree further education.
[79] SOU, 2009, pp. 60.
[80] Ibid., pp. 62.
[81] Ibid., pp. 63.
[82] Ibid.
[83] For a highly critical discussion about potential problems within democracy see Kofmel, 2008; Kofmel 2008b.

The question here is whether strengthening and developing democracy can be perceived as opposing goals? If we are talking about strengthening liberal democracy – meaning current democracy with its built-in values – such an interpretation is possible. But if the goal is rather to produce and support societal climate and structures that develops democratic modes of working, being, and thinking; then such pro-democratic development can simultaneously be anti-liberal in character.

The wording of seeing multiculturalism as a societal challenge, also suggests a challenge between various sets of values, out of which one set of values ought to be favored and perhaps even protected from the other(s). The fact that projects committing to common values and multiculturalist challenges is a prioritized area, suggests a hierarchy between the strengthening and developing (the current form of) democracy, where developing is less likely to come out on top.

Furthermore, the report mentions that Sjövik and Kista Folkhögskola have come up with the initiative to become Sweden's first Muslim *Folkhögskola*[84]. These educational centres have submitted a proposal for an investigation into the possibility of educating Imams within the sphere of non-degree education (rather than as part of Higher Education).[85]

The report goes on to note that all religious organizations seek their own way in terms of education and legitimacy in relation to the state and that such processes take time. The Free Churches are seen to be of interest here as they have often chosen to facilitate their leadership training outside of Universities and state funding. According to the report such developments are of interest because the history of the Free Churches bares resemblance to situations which minority organizations face today.[86]

A number of questions can be put forth towards such an argument. First of all it depends on how you view religious organizations. For instance a part of the "success" of the Free Churches was their social function; at the time of birth of many of these organizations Sweden dealt with a nationwide problem of alcoholism and the churches provided part of the "answer" to this, by being a drug-free community. As noted above, the report also acknowledges this connection when it states that the social function of the churches has decreased which effectively means a lesser role for the church in the public sphere. A broad statement saying that the situation of the Free Churches are applicable in general to other "religious" bodies must do more than to simply suggest that such a comparison is reasonable, for instance by

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[84] Meaning a centre for non-degree educations.
[85] SOU, 2009, pp. 63.
[86] Ibid., pp. 64f.

showing how Muslim organizations provide answers to similar societal needs/challenges (in a completely new day and age).

From the perspective of Cavanaugh, which this essay draws on, such a perspective is doubtful as it deals with all religions as various types of the same; all kinds of Islam, Christianity or Theravada Buddhism being comparable to each other, because of a shared õessenceö (even if this essence is responding to socio-economical needs, thus rendering it compatible with ideological strategies to deal with the same).

Later the report acknowledges that although the relations between the Swedish state and the Swedish Church (*Svenska Kyrkan*) has changed, *Högskoleverket* remains skeptical towards the element of pastoral education within a university degree in theology. Three quarters of the education that was earlier handled by the Swedish Church is now provided by universities, the result being that the semesters of pastoral care provided by the Swedish Church has been shortened, and that the line between practical and confessional elements become blurred.[87]

Some distinctions can be made here. First of all, it highlights the fact that what was formerly the state church still has somewhat of a special position in relation to Swedish education and relations to the state in general. But it also highlights that drawing a line between what is confessional and not, is something that is not easily done. Judging from the reports wording (or this should possibly be interpreted as the position of *Högskoleverket*), a õblurringö of these two is essentially something negative. Such an interpretation also suggest a belief in the possibility that education (in theology for instance) could be completely purged from confessionality in all its forms. Such a way forward, in other words, seems more preferable than openness towards different kinds of connections between state and confessional frameworks/organizations.

In the pages to follow the report outlines the history of Swedish Religious Studies. In said context Ingmar Hedenius is mentioned as one key philosopher who has been influencial in forming õthe Swedish perspectiveö on religious education.[88] The question however remains whether religious studies (and education on other levels) that is non-confessional in nature is the only possible õbreeding groundö for highly valued concepts such as multiculturalism and pluralism? A Connollyan reply would probably be that any attempt at a totality which is secular can only be made universal or total by excluding a wide range of schools-of-thought, in order to preserve secularism. In other words, secularism *itself* must be the value we try to

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[87] SOU, 2009, pp. 65.
[88] Ibid., pp. 67.

achieve as secularism is achieved at the *cost of* pluralism, rather than a way to ensue or ensure it. Suggesting that autonomy is only reached when the state can remove itself from other sources of ideas, ethics and thinking suggest an õemptyö state. However, as critics have pointed out liberalism does not constitute such an õemptyö functionalist understanding of the state.

The differences between secular Higher Education and various theological faculties are smaller today than what they have been, according to the report. This is due to the institutions run by Free Churches are becoming ever closer to the models in theological education and research at state funded Universities.[89] Such perspectives on Religious Studies are interesting, because it suggests that there is little need to worry about the quality of Free Church-run organization to provide bad education, poor research or a theology that is not õup to the markö.

4.4.1 Education in Norway and Other European Models

The report presents a Norwegian model which is of interest for a number of reasons. First, it is directed towards all religious leaders of foreign descent, which does not stigmatize or single out Imams in particular. Second, according to the authors of the report, Swedish and Norwegian society share similarities in many ways, and experiences from such a course would be relatively easy to insert into a Swedish context.[90] The course serves as an introduction to societal life, particularly to Norwegian law, international conventions on human rights, discussions on values and religious pluralism (including religious dialogue), and moral and religious counseling.[91]

In a European context it is in some countries possible for Muslim students at higher education to receive education which is confessional in nature. Countries that offer this within their educational systems are Finland, Germany and Austria.[92] In public Swedish schools Religious Education is confessionally neutral, although within the framework of some private schools some confessional additions to education are accepted. The report touches on different types of motivations for introducing an education of Imams. One motive for providing such education could be from the point of equality (given that priests and pastors have access to education with state support). However, in the light of events such as 9/11, the

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[89] SOU 2009:69.
[90] Ibid., pp. 75.
[91] Ibid., pp. 74.
[92] SOU, 2009, pp. 75.

murder of Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh, the attacks on the London Underground etc, discussion has also revolved around the possibility of Imams having a potential role to fill in Muslim integration.

Within Holland the universities themselves (who receive state funding) have adopted different approaches to confessional elements in education; some allow it while others do not. Apart from these, there have also been initiatives to start private Muslim education, which however does not receive state funding nor has a right to issue out degrees.[93] In France the discussion has been on-going, but the principle of *laïcité* (meaning separation of state and church, according to the report) makes it difficult to motivate such education at French Universities.

In England there are a number of seminars who trains Imams, although most do not receive state funding and legitimacy (in terms of issuing recognized degrees). In addition, the Muslim College, the Islamic College, and the Marksfield Institute of Higher Education also provides similar education, which are private, but validated and granted the power to issue degrees in co-operation with local universities.[94]

In Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina Imams and Islamic religious teachers are educated at state universities.[95]

The report concludes that most European attempts at starting these educations wrestle with problems of credibility, both in relation to the Muslim communities and the state. Lengthy English initiatives show that the educations are found wanting; instead of preparing students to work in a multi-religious, pluralistic and largely secular society, they are trained to preserve and enhance cultural, ethnical and linguistic barriers.[96]

At EU-level, the EU Commission has initiated the project IAMA (Integration: A Multifaith Approach), which attempts to educate and strengthen religious leaders from countries outside of Europe in order to help expedite the integration of the members of their congregations.[97]

Whilst the first section of the outlook to Europe mainly presents a mapping of different approaches, some interesting aspects emerge, such as *laïcité*, integration (/assimilation) and pluralism, which I will address below.

4.4.2 Laïcité

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[93] Ibid., pp. 76.
[94] Ibid., pp. 77.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] SOU, 2009, pp. 77.

Muslim theologian Talal Asad writes in his article *Trying to Understand French Secularism* (2006) about the problematic nature of the *laïcité*-concept. Asad argues that *laïcité* is not merely a separation between church and state. Although it is often said that *laïcité* does not require citizens of the Republic to be identical, the kind of diversity it encourages is diversity which can be afforded within a realm of positivism and humanism.[98] Asad argues that *laïcité* encourages particular modes of being, living and relating, whilst other ways of leading one's life is problematized and portrayed as illegitimate. Furthermore, when *laïcité* tries to locate what is problematic (in relation to itself as a "neutral" state-bearing ideology), the problem is often singled out as part of religion which is not Judeo-Christian, but coupled with other ethnic groups. However, Asad argues that differences such as sex/gender, class, religion and ethnic origins do not constitute a community of shared values.[99] Even if one manages to overcome three quarters of these differences in a particular question, there is always a remainder. Asad quotes Esther Benbassas:

> "precisely because secularism is a *state* doctrine, devised for the purpose of dealing with *state* unity, it does not fit well with a world of multiple belongings and porous boundaries, nor can it acknowledge the fact that people identify emotionally with victims in the past and with victims in other countries as 'their own'".[100]

In other words, Asad underscores similar aspects of citizenship as does Mouffe and Connolly, and ads: What does it mean to be French? That you are always French, more than any other identity? And what exactly does this territorial identity signify really – does it mean the same thing for all? The suggested answer is that there is no reason to see the "French" identity to be a *re-write of another* identity. Differently put; to postulate that to be French is first and foremost to be *laïc* is to attach the identity of the secular positivist to mean "French" (and everything else essentially in opposition to being French).

4.4.3 Integration/Assimilation

Integration is a reoccurring word in discussions on Islam and Muslim identity. In such discussions it is not uncommon that what one is really talking about – or perhaps expecting of certain groups – is *assimilation*. Briefly the difference resides in that assimilation is an expectation to *adapt* to already given norms, codes or behavior. Integration on the other hand

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[98] Asad, 2006, pp. 519.
[99] Ibid., pp. 525.
[100] Ibid., pp. 511.

is the possibility of being a citizen of a country (or other territory) and being able to choose in what ways to adapt, in what ways to õremain the sameö, how much one wants to interact, and how much to õwithdrawö.[101]

If we were to take Swedenøs part in EU as an example, this is probably best described as integration. The EU is not something which Sweden approaches with only the option of being entirely õEU-izedö. Rather Swedenøs participation in the European Union is marked by voluntary participation in certain processes (such as the single internal market), whereas keeping its Swedish õintegrityö in other questions (such as the state-regulation of sales of alcohol, the exemption to sell *Snus*, or the decision to remain outside the monetary union). This approach goes for all European countries within the EU; in some areas countries have willingly integrated, in others they remain much as they were before entering into the Union. The process can also be reversed, and countries can even õexitö the Union nowadays (something which was not possible at the time when Sweden entered).[102]

In recent years various survey and sensus polls have had specific outlooks on what Muslims think, value and believe. Two such reports are Esposito and Mogahedøs *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (2007) based on Gallup data, and Pew Research Centerøs *Muslim Americans, Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream* (2007). According to Esposito and Mogahed õtechnology and democracyö are what Muslims admire most about the West ó which is also what American respondents in general say,[103] whilst Pew Research introduces their research by saying that American Muslims are õdecidedly American in their outlook, values, and attitudesö.[104] The problem with such a depiction of Muslims, is that it describes how well integrated or assimilated Muslims are. Such reasoning runs two risks.

First of all it may be taken to suggest that *because* Muslims are like everyone else they should be afforded equal treatment and equal rights. Such line of reasoning (which as we have seen above in the European discussion of integration and control) decidedly hampers the concept of freedom of religion and human rights. The second risk is that it may turn Muslims into an invisible form of citizenry. Differently put; it only manages to solve the õdifficulties of multiculturalismö (in the wording of the report) by *dissolving* it, rather than finding active strategies that allow for continuous integrating and a pluralism which is not trying to be self-reductive.

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[101] Larsson & Sander, 2007, 95f; and a longer theoretical discussion on pp. 88-95.
[102] For an indepth look at EU integration, see Nugent, 2010.
[103] Esposito & Mogahed, 2007, pp. xiif.
[104] Pew, 2007, pp. 7.

I exemplified integration above with explaining international relations within the European Union. There is one important distinction to add here. The fact that the EU is a project of integration, rather than of assimilation, does not mean that various statesø resolve to be part of the Union is constantly put into question. That Swedes are Europeans is not doubted because of them being Swedes. Rather, the way that regional politics have a significant place in European politics, suggests that not only can members have the identity of Europeans and i.e. Spanish simultaneously, but they may also stress their local Catalan (or other) identity,[105] and perhaps a cosmopolitan identity as well.

In comment to the reportøs summary of the chapter SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) is again mentioned as one of the types of education existing for Imams, and something which is also in need of evolving in a direction towards being more specifically tailored to meet the demands of the Imamøs line of work.[106] I would like to tie this into the discussion above about integration, making a distinction between the education of Imams and education for Imams. Listing SFI should probably best be described as an education *for* Imams. However, anything that can be described as an additional education for people who are already trained seems to not fully tackle the issue of pluralism and integration. Rather than offering education *of* Imams, meaning education that can attract Swedish-born Muslims, attempts at education *for* Imams will only reproduce todayøs issues of a lack of understanding of other codes, modes of being, and Swedish interpretations of identities such as class, gender, race, religion and so forth.

Not understanding how any of the mentioned identities are perceived in Swedish society makes it more likely that a sharp line appears between a world-view which is perceived as õSwedishö on the one hand, and another which is õIslamicö on the other, although such an Islamic identity may really be subject to ó for example ó Egyptian concepts of gender, race, class and so forth, and have seemingly little õinstrisicö connection to something essentially õIslamicö.[107]

4.5 Considerations

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[105] Karlsson, 2006.
[106] SOU, 2009, 78f.
[107] See Esposito & Voll's *Islam and Democracy* (1996) regarding the nation-state's contextual impact on how religion is viewed in specific societies. This is also interesting because it to some extent contradict findings in Esposito & Mogahed (2007).

In the fifth chapter of the report we find what political areas are guiding the political actions initiated in regards to an education of Imams. This is especially the areas of integration and politics of religion.[108]

õThe goal of Swedish integrational policy is *equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic and cultural background*ö.[109] However, during the 1980ies the policy of treating different groups differently became criticized, and the concept immigrants was problematized as in itself categorizing, which could contribute to thinking in terms of us and them. Such categories could have negative consequences, contributing to seeing immigrants as a homogenous group in society.[110]

The report states that Sweden under recent decades has become a multi-religious society. To achieve the goals desired, Swedish proposition 1997:98:16 postulates that: õOpenness and respect towards other religions and faiths than oneøs own follows naturally from the (in Sweden) constitutional freedom of religionö.[111]

Various studies (including studies taken up in the report) show, there is nothing that guarantees this type of õnaturally flowingö understanding of one another. The idea that a constitution in itself manages to unite peopleøs opinions seem a rather vague idea, which says little about the route such change should take. This, however, becomes clearer as the report touches on the petition *Egenmakt mot utanförskap ó regeringens strategi för integration* (aproximately öPower over oneøs own life against societal exclusion ó the governmentøs strategy for integration). One of the points mentioned in this strategy is õcommon values in a society increasingly marked by pluralism[112]ö.[113]

As repeatedly noted above this rests on a presupposition of consensus; the liberal idea which Mouffe and Connolly (among others) critique for not being inclusive enough to provide the political sphere with the tools of handling pluralism. The concept of *egenmakt* is also worth commenting on, as liberalism focuses on a division of power, where the state aims at filling a rather minimal function, as to enable citizens to have as much power as possible over their own lives. The problem that may arise out of the liberal distinction between private and public is if the õprivateö is not a big enough sphere to allow religion to be practiced within it and religion thus wants to cross over into also being visible and audible in the public sphere.

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[108] SOU, 2009, pp. 81.
[109] Ibid., pp. 82. Original italics.
[110] Ibid., pp. 82f.
[111] Ibid., pp. 83.
[112] Pluralism is here a translation of the word *mångfald*.
[113] SOU, 2009, pp. 84.

In other words such division ó although aiming at providing *egenmakt* (power over one's own life) ó may be successful in providing this to some people, whereas it may struggle with incorporating the pluralism it expresses desirable.

Going back to the suggested way of viewing religion and politics as essentially trying to accomplish the same thing (the confessional organization of society), it seems that liberalism ó as one "type" of religion, bearing in mind Cavanaugh's definitions ó comes to compete with other types of "the same" such as Christian or Muslim (or other) confessions. Although liberalism claims to make provisions for alternative ways, and suggesting that "freedom of religion" naturally fosters this kind of tolerance and pluralism; it appears more likely that it fosters or encourages Christian and Muslim behavior that is liberally coded (i.e. where liberalism is the primary value, ideology or religion).

4.5.1 Politics of Religion

The report states that it appears hard to find any definition of religion that is simple and can gain general support. On a general level, a division can be made between a substantivist and functionalist understanding of religion.[114] In other words the report itself highlights the problem of defining religion, and that there is a problem with coming to a general agreement about what "religion" is. In previous work on the politics of religion ó which the report relies on ó such as SOU 1972:15, the phrase that has been guiding is that religion "ought not to disturb societal peace or achieve public disturbance".[115] Here a distinction is made between religion as private, individual and on the other hand collective, societal:

> In Sweden, like in western democracies in general, religion is often seen as something foremost belonging to the private sphere í   This could comprise a problem for those religions whose practitioners wants to manifest their faith by ó for example ó a certain type of clothing or by erecting buildings of religious character. The perspective can also camouflage that the state unknowingly upholds or favors majority-culture, its possibility to interpret and its interests.[116]

The report then goes on to say that although Sweden has sometimes been considered one of the world's most secularized countries, developments in later years have shown what is sometimes describes as desecularization or re-sacralization, and many times an increase in

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private forms of religious and spiritual practices. To this can be added that "the majority society's understanding of itself as confessionally neutral has been challenged".[117]

This is indeed a very interesting passage in the report, as it shows an awareness of the problems related to defining religion, the place of religion in society and current developments. What appears clear is that there is in other words a problem of "converting" the insights that the scholars and scientists have on the one hand, and the data and material gathered from informant groups on the other, in order to insert these insights into the typology or taxonomy of the existing political framework. The report even goes as far as signaling that failing to understand different religions for what *they* are (rather than what religion *as an entity* is) may be a means of *camouflaging* political ideologies that are not really confessionally neutral, but upholds or favors majority-culture.

The insights of the scholars and scientists writing the report are put in contrast to the political context into which they are to input their suggestion. The report acknowledges the difficulty in defining religion, and *the political* definition of religion (used in the report) is actually no definition at all. Rather, it is a prescription of what religion ought to do (or not) and what place it may be afforded in Swedish Society (which is one that may not disturb the peace or bring about societal change).

4.5.2 Conclusion on Guiding Principles

In chapter five's conclusion, the report recapitulates some principles that are important within a Swedish political context that the report has tried to take into account. The Swedish constitution (*Regeringsformen*, below also *RF*) displays a *politics of acknowledgement*, which means that the state should be neutral on the topic of religious confessionality. This principle of freedom of religion is combined in RF with a *politics of supporting*; supporting various religious organizations as part of the constitution on which Swedish politics rests. There is also a principle of *equal treatment* which acknowledges and values the sum of all existing cultural and religious perspectives - without trying to value their individual merits.[118]

According to the report, a Swedish education of Imams also borders on the state risking evolving the role of the Imam into something that it is not currently, and which is not supported within a Muslim communal structure. From an integrational policy perspective this

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[117] Ibid., pp. 86.
[118] SOU, 2009, pp. 97f.

is also important, and the report stresses that an education for Imams runs the risk of not corresponding to communal expectations or needs (SOU 2009:98f).

In the report it is stated that higher education complements other forms of education by õchallenging the particular connection to a certain social, cultural and religious situationö which other education can sometimes contain (SOU 2009:99). The report concludes (in original this is one passage, here broken into three sections):

> õIt is a reasonable expectation of a confessionally neutral system of education to provide methods as well as knowledge in order to practice critical thinking, without connections to belief systems and ways of learning of a predetermined kind.

> As more and more citizens from different traditions meet in these milieus, there ought to be an ever growing chance of deepening invaluable democratic values of tolerance and respect for various modes of thinking.

> That the globalized Swedish society is multicultural does not mean that it is value neutral. That the state is confessionally neutral does, in closing, not mean that it should extinguish its ethical framework by accepting a total relativization of valuesö (SOU 2009:99f).

It is unclear exactly what makes *Högskoleverket* (which is the source cited in the report) conclude that confessionally neutral systems of education is generally preferred. Assuming that people cannot encounter others in a way equally valuable outside of this õneutralö realm is no small assumption to make. Such an understanding is on the verge of insinuating that nowhere does tolerance and respect flow more freely than at Swedish neutral universities. As will also be clear from the point of view brought forward in this essay a *liberal milieu* does not constitute a neutral milieu. Nor does it constitute the most *tolerant* of milieus. On the contrary, drawing on the agonistic critique of liberalism, it should be clear that liberal secularism has some serious issues with embracing a tolerant or respectful stance towards people that *differ* (without insinuating here that Muslims are or arenøt such differing people).

Detaching liberal values and democratic values from each other may (regarding relativization of values) be helpful here in order to judge the merits of this passage in the report. For the last sentence to make it into a text on education of Imams, it seems that the sentence should have some bearing on the particular issue discussed, not only refer to some general idea of what Sweden and its constitution is or isnøt, ought or ought not to be. Closing the passage with this sentence makes it easy to attach relevance to the sentence, within the context and *regarding* the issue of the education of Imams at Swedish universities. Put differently: In order for the last sentence to be relevant, opening up for an education of

Imams, must somehow be connected to the idea of opening up to the "total relivization of values" which the report seems wary of.

The tendency embedded in such a sentence also seems to suggest that the opposite of liberal values are *no values*. Agonistic political theory offers the view that this is not the case; there are indeed other values than liberal values which are many times problematic, according to Mouffe and Connolly. Values such as holding democratic equality in high regard are not only attached to a liberal ethos. Understanding democracy as something functionalist rather than substantivist makes it possible to hold "one individual, one vote" sacred, without embracing particular moral codes attached to liberalism, Christianity, Islam, communism or some other way of thinking.

4.6 The Proposal

Recapitalizing the report thus far, the concluding chapter (6) states that Swedish Muslim organizations are a highly heterogeneous group. Not many general stances may be possible to formulate from such a diverse demographic group. This includes trying to find a general position on what kind of education of/for Imams there is a need for in Sweden.[119] However, some general observations are still offered:

> What is above all sought after by Muslim organizations is non-confessional education for current Imams in Swedish Language, and in societal knowledge. In a long term perspective it is reasonable to assume that young Muslim growing up in Sweden get an education as Imams, either at foreign universities or within the framework of the Swedish religious studies in higher education, with a confessional add-on within their respective organizations. The latter presupposes that education at the Swedish universities is confessionally neutral, so as to also be attractive to students with other religious affiliation.[120]

Although there are merits to part of this thinking, the presumption that young Muslims will all of a sudden get an education within the system at an unspecified junction in the future, is merely guesswork. The perspective of how an education *of that kind* would look is something that is overlooked in the report. The methodological problems discussed above in this chapter of the essay holds some explanatory power here. From the focus group selected and the material gathered within the report, it appears unreasonable to make any such assumptions as

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[119] SOU, 2009, pp. 101.
[120] SOU, 2009, pp. 101.

to what may or may not result in an attractive education for Swedish born Muslims in the future.

It should be added that we are currently in a situation where this scenario could happen, in other words; there are currently plenty of Swedish born Muslims. However, the question of whether or not existing forms of education at Swedish universities provide an opportunity to study the relevant courses from a either a õMuslim theological perspectiveö or an õover-all Imam perspectiveö is not an overview that the report provides. Courses within the existing Swedish educational system are weighed against the need of *one particular* group of Imams ó and the make-up of this group is not predominantly young Swedish born Muslims. There is in other words insufficient knowledge on this perspective of the matter, within the report, to make said judgment.

Adding to this, a clause that confessionally neutral education proves more attractive to students of different (or no) religious affiliation is questionable. The sentence makes a reference to *Högskoleverket*øs review of education in theology and religious studies.[121] However, this is not a survey showing that non-confessional education makes for a more attractive education, but rather a normative document asserting the stateøs position that the education *ought* to be *non-confessional*. There are many ways to approach the question of confessionality and education, and within European countries there is a wide array of solutions regarding how to handle various forms of religious education. It is, in other words, not a case of secular education being better or more attractive ó than say German or Norwegian education ó but merely a normative judgment asserting this course of action as the best one.

Then comes the proposal of the report. It states that with the given background, two courses of action are possible, of which both will be discussed. The first option is to do something particular; the other is to improve what is already being done.

4.6.1 Doing Something Particular

Regeringsformen dictates that a goal for public institutions in Sweden should be to õmake provisions for ethnic, linguistic and religious minoritiesø possibilities to keep and maintain a cultural and religious life of their ownö.[122] This paragraph, the report adds, could be used to justify an education for Imams. The report sees the benefit of taking such an option that

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[121] Högskoleverket, Rapport 2008:41R.
[122] SOU, 2009, pp. 102.

Imams would be officially recognized and that their knowledge is credited as valuable for society. The drawback of such recognition, on the other hand, may be that Imams are perceived as especially problematic leaders which are in greater need of education than representatives from other faiths.[123]

Demand for a state funded education varies, along with thoughts on what the contents of such an education ought to be. Apart from this, the report also weathers the concern that although Islam may be the second largest religion in Sweden, it cannot be presumed that only representatives from a Muslim faith is in need of the sort of add-on education that seems the most suitable to initiate from the report's perspective. Some Catholic and Orthodox organizations may be examples where there is an equal need for such an education.[124]

According to the authors another benefit with this potential course of action is that a particular education for Imams (of the add-on type mentioned) can be specifically tailored to the needs of the recipients,[125] whereas the current Religious Education contains very little or no Swedish language, law and societal knowledge. However, European initiatives thus far of a state funded education has not been convincing, but rather displayed a difficulty in such educations being recognized as legitimate by the religious organizations, according to the report.[126]

4.6.2 Improving What is Already Done

This section starts off with the report referring to the following: õThe principle that saturates our constitution as well as laws in general is that general rights should apply rather than particular interestsö.[127] Furthermore the government is restrictive in its policy towards special solutions. Regarding immigrants no special measures should be taken towards immigrants as a group after the first period in Sweden. This is to avoid thinking in terms of õus and themö.[128]

Furthermore, after the State-Church-reform, the Swedish state no longer has a possibility to meddle in the inner affairs of the Swedish Church (previously the state Church). Given this, the report feels, it may seem strange to consider opening a new religious education in Sweden, in a time when these educations no longer should be connected to the state.[129]

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[123] Ibid, pp. 103.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] SOU, 2009, pp. 104.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

A few thoughts can be offered here. Letøs take the image of a religious organization as an enterprise. If considering religious institutions in this light, the separation between state and church does little more than the separation of state and pharmacies (that used to be state owned in Sweden). Seeing education in the light proposed above have much more severe repercussions. It suggests that in any instance where the state does not directly handle the organization, enterprise or company, the education should be removed from state funded universities. Economic, medicinal or other educations are paid for by the state to a large extent in Sweden, even though not all economists, doctors and nurses work in state run enterprises after finishing their degrees. This makes it important for the state not to meddle unjustly in the education in such a way that the state õpreparesö its students for something completely other than the marketplace or work environment in which they will operate. Somehow, however, it seems just to question an education aiming at providing religious leaders to enterprises within the Swedish community, without explaining why such a division (the judgment that religious organizations are not just enterprises) is made or on what grounds exactly.

Although the õequality factorö in favor of initiating an education of Imams are lessened by the fact that some courses are going to be removed in the near future from the curriculum due to the critique from *Högskoleverket*, this does not take away from the fact that education for priests and clergy will ó as is the case with many other professional groups ó receive the bulk of their education at University level. As an assumption that there is something particular about religious enterprises compared to other societal õbusinessesö without saying what such a distinction derives from, deserves to be noted and addressed separately, as I have done. Now I will turn back to the overall discussion in the report.

The report states that there are already several possibilities to educate oneself within Swedish language and societal knowledge within the current educational system. With this in mind the report questions whether there really is any need for a specific education of/for Imams. Instead the report suggests that the religious organizations could themselves demand that their Imams undergo the relevant education in order to gain the competence needed for their work.[130]

In 2007 the government decided that ethnic organizations did not have to promote integration in order to receive funding, as a way of removing the state from the inner affairs of such organizations. The report finds it reasonable to approach religious organizations in the

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[130] SOU, 2009, pp. 104.

same manner.[131] Based on the incentives of equal treatment and an attempt to withdraw from the inner affairs of religious and ethnic organizations it seems there are multiple reasons to abstain from initiating an education for Imams. The principle is as follows: "It is not the role of the state to authorize or legitimize religious educations ... The state's role is to remain confessionally neutral and not contribute to either strengthening or weakening the role of religion in society".[132]

In not initiating a new religious education, or even courses tailored to the needs of non-Christian clergy, the benefit would be that the state does not take sides between religions. It recognizes religious practices but remains neutral between different believers and practitioners, "within the boundaries of what is constitutionally acceptable".[133]

Two aspects in the above discussion are worth touching on here; the meaning of neutrality, and the strengthening or weakening of religion – concentrating on the weakening of religion. Turning first to neutrality, the following objection can be offered: Does being neutral necessarily mean being passive? Who would, for instance, propose that a by-stander watching a father hit his child is neutral in doing nothing? This is not meant as an analogy over the state or Islam's standing in society, but rather a way of highlighting that power-relations are not necessarily on an equal footing to begin with. Saying that the father and the child can battle it out while we stand on the side in neutrality, does not take away from the fact that one part in the battle has little chance of accomplishing anything, even protecting themselves.

Again, although this is no analogy over Islam's position in Sweden, it may be recognized that a long-standing historical presence of Christianity means that Christian ideas and ideals have become so intertwined into the fabric of society that they in some cases have become invisible. This is a problem attached to liberalism, according to agonistic thinking. Only the people who manage to live up to the threshold of human, Swedish, citizen or some other epithet may be granted the rights that flows from this. However, what liberalism historically often has been found lacking is ways to be observant and include new groups or individuals into humanity or citizenry. According to Connolly, such an integrating process is lacking in classic liberal theory.

In other words, the critique that is possible to direct towards the reasoning found in this section of the report is that the lack of initial equality or equal footing may not allow the state to have a passive stance and call it neutral. Rather, a neutral active stance may be required.

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[131] Ibid, pp. 105.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

This in turn lead us to the discussion of strengthening or weakening of religion, where the aim of the state is to do neither. Drawing on Talal Asadøs line of argument regarding *laïcité*, this concept of the state can be viewed as somewhat of a õcreedö. Many authors highlight the fact that Muslim immigrants (which are two components of an identity, which I would like to keep separate from each other, as they do not necessary intertwine to the extent that the report sometimes suggest) sometimes have a very different view on the universal individual rights in the õwestern worldö. However when arriving with high hopes and expectations, they find that these rights have been tailored or worded in such a way that they are particularly suitable to people already living in that area, many times people who are not necessarily in need of the protection the rights claim to grant.[134]

Put differently, these rights tie in with the problem of passive neutrality. They may not be tailored to do so, but de facto favor one individual or group over another. The stance of passive neutrality has every opportunity of leading to inequality. There is a high likelihood that liberal values of today may favor first of all secular values, secondly Christian values ó that are not seen as Christian, but have been õnaturalizedö ó and lastly õotherö values such as Muslim values. This last type of õotherö values may even been perceived as not even values ó in terms of being *valuable* ó but rather differences that cannot be subsumed into a general consensus, but must (perhaps regrettably) be tolerated. As agnostic political theory suggests, however, such a stance is not necessary to protect democratic values. Rather, the stance is perhaps most of all beneficial in keeping liberal values in somewhat of a transcendent position, placed above religious but also above other political values.

So, if the state resides in the public space and religion can roam freely in the private realm, the question is also if this in itself strengthens or weakens religion. Seeing that some forms of religious practice may find itself confortable in residing only in a private sphere, such forms of religion can potentially benefit from such a divide. However, all religions that have the ambition to õorganize society confessionallyö (as is the phrase used in this essay) are instead weakened by the relegation of all religious activity to the private sphere. All political movements, that draws from any type of experience or set of ideas that does not originate within what is currently deemed õpoliticalö is also hampered by this understanding.

The report also addresses a more practical issue arising from the fact that the whole initiative of the report has been questioned: What are the motives behind the state wanting to initiate an education for Imams? This has been a reoccurring concern. Other practicalities

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[134] Cf. Klausen 2007; Larsson & Sander 2007

such as education not resulting in a higher income level, or the fact that one may be indebted (by taking student loans) in order to undergo the education have also been perceived as problems by some informants.[135]

However, it seems pertinent to improve the education that currently exists, such as SFI, as this education many times fails to yield satisfactory results[136]. The report also highlights that the government wants to expedite possibilities to complete a higher education from abroad so that its merits are recognizable and usable in Sweden.[137]

Furthermore, the authors of the report highlights that it is the responsibility of the authorities to satisfy their citizensø needs. If for instance there is a need for Muslim spiritual care within hospitals, prisons, at burials etc., then the same provisions ought to be accessible for Muslim citizens as for Christians or others. Such forms of education could be undertaken at the relevant authorities, according to the report.[138]

After this the report wants to attain a long-term comparative perspective. For free religious organizations (as in not tied to the state) the process of managing to have a form of education that is both satisfactory to the occupation within the organization and that is of acceptable academic and scientific standard, has been a long road. In the long-term it would be ideal for Muslim leaders to partake in a general education in Religious Studies, with a broad curriculum with appeals to people from many different walks of life or religious affiliations. Such an education ought to include not only Religious Studies but also the chance to acquire special knowledge within humanities which may be required for the study of particular religions. Examples of such courses within humanities, in regards to Islam, could be education in Arabic, Turkish and Persian.[139]

However, among the individuals interviewed by the report panel, there is no consensus as to whether they are willing to study together with other Muslim affiliations, or be taught by university teachers who are not themselves Muslims. From the perspective of the report a milieu where the teachers are multifaceted and students come from various religious and cultural backgrounds is superior in its worth to the participating students.[140]

The report therefore concludes with supporting the notion that improving what is already done is favorable over initiating a new education of Imams. Out of principle reasons,

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[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., pp. 107.
[137] SOU, 2009, pp. 107.
[138] Ibid., pp. 108.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., pp. 109.

initiating such an education is not in keeping with the confessional neutrality of the state. The practical reasons for not initiating such an education is the lack of unanimity amongst Muslim organizations in terms of what courses are needed, if such courses should be taught in higher education or in another form, who are to teach them, and in terms of studying together with other Muslim or non-Muslim students. The type of education that is asked for from Muslim organizations is today largely available or could be offered within the existing educational system.[141]

After this, the report briefly notes that a cost- and consequence analysis will not be necessary to undertake, after which the report ends.

Analyzing this last passage, the report admittedly makes a decision based on a host of parameters. There is little need to be critical towards seeing an all-encompassing education of Imams at Swedish universities as something hard to achieve, given the sentiments expressed from Muslim affiliations and leaders. Apart from such a component, there are two more highlights to be made. These both have to do with pluralism, and how to support it. The first is the much discussed idea that liberal values above all cater for a tolerant, pluralistic society. Such a view has been discredited above with the help of agonistic political theory. There is however another take on pluralism both in general and in higher education ó present in the report ó which is compatible with the view of agonism.

There is an insistence in the report that a õgeneralö milieu of Religious Studies is a suitable place for the educations of Imams, as this provides a meeting place for people from different religious, culture (and I would add political) backgrounds. Studying together, and within a framework that facilitates the interests and the needs of all such individuals is something that is very much in keeping with agonistic political theory. In Connollyøs view pluralism cannot build on any one faith tradition (including õpolitical faithsö) having universalized itself thus no longer being *a* tradition but *the* tradition in which all other are set and are subordinate to. To insist that this milieu is a successful breeding ground for pluralism, tolerance and respect is highly likely, certainly given the alternative of any type of õsecludedö out-of-the-way education that can roam wild in a depoliticized private sphere. However, for such a milieu to be truly successful in its objective of enhancing tolerance and pluralism, it may be necessary also for the liberal values currently at the center of such a milieu to õstep downö and become

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[141] SOU, 2009, pp. 109.

but one of many ideas/ideals, which all tolerate each other, even though they may fiercely disagree at times.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter I have gone through the report *The State and the Imams,* describing the content of the different chapters. I have also commented on what are questions worth addressing from the theoretical viewpoint of agonistic political theory. I will not summarize the analysis in depth here. Instead I will present and deepen the analysis in the following chapter in a thematically arranged manner, in order to highlighting reoccurring tendencies in the report.

5

The State and the Imams – Thematic Analysis

In chapter four I discussed the contents of *The State and the Imams* in the sequence of the report itself. In this chapter I have circled a few themes that tie in with the discussion of the essay. This discussion and analysis will be explored in more detail in the chapter below, and the chapter is divided as follows:

    5.1 The Possibility of Studying Religion

    5.2 Liberalism and Consensus

    5.3 Christian and Muslim values

    5.4 Syncretism

    5.5 Secular State/Secular Society

    5.6 The Task of the Report

Not all of these themes are *derived* from the criticism that agonistic political theory puts forward. However, agonism remains helpful in highlighting certain aspects of my argument. I have thus tried to restrict my argument to subjects that can somehow be tied in to the criticism of agonism.

5.1 The Possibility of Studying Religion

This section is starting the discussion of this thematic analysis, as it deals with the possibilities of academic disciplines and science, and connections within this sphere to political control. The section therefore also touches on the issue of confessionality within academic discipline, and the fear thereof. The fear is what some scholars proposes becomes reality when for instance Islamology is informed by Islamic confessionality. According to many, this becomes "bad religious studies", as it is not sufficiently *detached* from its object of study. One example of such a scholar is Aaron Hughes who in his book *Situating Islam* (2007) argues that Islamology many times tends to be overly apologetic rather than remaining critical of its object of study. Hughes tends to call uncritical religious studies either bad religious studies or *theology* (as if these were exchangeable descriptions). What Hughes does not, however, is to assess what kind of scientific inquiry is at all possible, and what religious

studies *can* rest upon. Rather, he proposes a false dichotomy between critical and confessional.

In this section, I would briefly like to discuss the idea of objectivity, detachment and non-confessionality. My starting point is, as philosopher of religion Ulf Nilsson points out, that scientific inquiry is guided by pre-scientific philosophical questions. Science starts with presuppositions about what questions are worth spending time investigating and looking further into.[142] As these are assumptions about the world, they cannot be scientifically tested.

To say this is to suggest that scientific inquiry starts with attachment rather than detachment. Attachment to ideas of õthe good lifeö and ideas about õthe humanö, õthe worldö and how to ó for example ó improve ourselves, the conditions surrounding life, a greater understanding of the world and so forth. In order to be accepted into the highly specialized and sectioned-off fields of science, one needs to undergo years of training. It is hardly likely that scientists and scholars in general are detached enough to not care what they spend their life working away at. This would suggest that scientists and scholars wouldnøt mind a lottery-machine handing out tasks and scientists in turn accepting to carry them out regardless of the task is curing cancer, interpreting ancient scrolls or producing a seedless watermelon.

The next question regarding attachment vs. detachment is one of morals. If the upstart of scientific inquiry can be said to always be guided by pre-scientific assumptions, then the process and results are often guided by morals. For instance, it would be hard for a scientist building an atom bomb to extricate himself from the (literal) impact of his work. The scientist pretending that his building the bomb has nothing to do with the usage of the bomb, is a scientist who opposes morals to guide the process and result. The point is not that science cannot or has not operated like this at times, but rather a normative judgment that this type of science is probably not very desirable.

Neither can religious studies or other disciplines extricate themselves from the effects of their own production. If a survey shows that *group x* hate *group y,* this may have a number of effects on a societal level. *Group x* may be looked upon with disgust, *group y* may all of a sudden receive police protection, new laws may even be passed to support or suppress one or the other. Another scenario is that the societal effects (heated debates or whatnot) that are produced in the aftermath of the survey may cause *group x* to revisit their standpoint on *group y.* Any type of study ó religious, anthropological or other ó that deals with people as õtheir

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[142] Jonsson, 2004, pp. 99.

materialö must be aware that science is encased within society, and the production of results may indeed be the very reason that societal change occur.

If the word õobjectivityö is understood as meaning õdetached enoughö, this does not seem like a plausible nor desirable goal for science. Rather, detachment suggests a nonconfessionality towards the subject matter at hand, but is no guarantee that other types of attachments (which guides science) can still be in place. I will now turn to how politics may be understood as a confession, and what kind of effects this may have on the understanding of science, and the possibilities of studying religion.

5.1.1 Politics and Science

In politics, we can separate ideology from research. Research is commissioned in forms of SOUøs (for instance), where expert groups carry out surveys, field work, and research in various areas, in order for politicians to make an informed decision. However, the question that is being assigned to the experts to dive into, comes ó as above argued ó not from science itself, but is commissioned from a political party which has its own particular ideas about the world, humanity, the good life, and how to get there. SOUøs are in some ways an assessment of whether the idea of õhow to get thereö is realistic, and would indeed serve the purposes of the ideology that the parties are committed to.

Equally, when the panel of experts returns their finished research in the form of a completed SOU, the expectations from a political perspective is that the research can somehow be fitted into the existing political framework. If for instance the SOU that is the focal point for this essay, would not try to come up with a way of what to do about the education of Imams in Sweden, but rather suggest that education of Imams first of all requires revising the understanding of terms such as democracy, religion and the political, such a report would not be useful *for basing (shortterm) political decisions upon,* even though the report may have ever so much merit to it.

In other words, the research may be too complex or somewhat incompatible with the current political climate. Iød like to pose the question if this is not, in fact, a relatively good description of the case with the SOU on education of Imams. As shown in chapter 4, the report suggests problems with understanding religion as something private, with the balance of negative and positive freedom of religion, the role of the Imam, and even the understanding of the term *religion* itself and whether religions are indeed possible to define in the first instance and thus comparable entities in the second instance. However, all these ends up being

mere suggestions as the scholars behind the report do not deem it possible to fit that type of discussion into the framework..

Another example, leaving the specific SOU, is academic funding. More than once during my studies there have been no new postgraduate studies-position offered. This means that no one can receive a higher education (than masters level) in all of Gothenburg that year ó on any topic relating to religion. Instead, money is directed towards other disciplines; not seldom technology is favored over humanities in general. My point is not whether or not humanities receive sufficient funding. Rather it is showing how political *confessionality* directly influences even the possibility of science (not only particular commissioned science but *all* science in a community).

If we were to not divide politics and religion this may instead create a discourse (societal and academic) where we accept that science never leave the arena of the *religio-political*, but are always guided by normative ideas ó and that this is as it should be. This also carries a potential where perspectives from religions and ideologies alike can be discussed, mixed, sometimes discarded and sometimes accepted.

Attempts to address some ideas and modes of thinking as political, and others as religious have two effects. Circumventing the latter risks making religiously informed ideas appear more intimidating ó because religion may be perceived as threatening the whole of society rather than one component of the intertwined (in this case Swedish) culture. It also hacks away at both understanding current voices in societal debate and obscures parts of the historical heritage which it has undoubtedly been a part of. Understanding religious as something that is not political, but has an õessenceö of its own, turns religion into something unnecessarily intimidating, almost transcendent in quality.

5.2 Liberalism and Consensus

The argument of this essay, up to here, has been the following: It is not democracy and religion that is incompatible. Rather, it is when the specific values of liberalism are center stage ó or possibly even are equated with democracy ó that the problem arises. When the nation-state demanded the primary loyalty of its citizens, this was a demand made in contrast to the church that has previously been a power that also demanded loyalty. Thus there was a need for the introduction of õprivate religionö in order to make the public õsecularö.

This may seem indeed like a valid divide from the perspective of the state being something we õnaturally ought to be loyal toö. However, the question is whether the state needs to be

secular in the *liberal* sense it is today. Agonistic political theory is helpful in disclosing ó from a non-theistic point-of-view ó that there is nothing particularly natural or especially suiting about secularism in a liberal sense. Rather, many alternative sources of legitimacy, ideas and passions must be left behind when entering into a conversation that is õsecularö or õliberalö.

The problem that liberalism poses is that it denies any other source of authority in terms of values. Liberal values must persevere *within* other modes of thinking, in order for such sources of authority ó political and religious alike ó to be acknowledged or tolerated. In other words, liberalism only allows sufficient room for values that coincides with liberal values.

If we accept William Cavanaughøs view we are not able to separate politics from religion with either a substantivist or functionalist definition of religion. The current relationship emerges in the light of one (politics ó secular power) being given priority over the other (religion ó spiritual power), which allows politics to postulate which place in society religion ought to have. But as agonistic political theory points out, it is not only religion that is obstructed from partaking in societal or political debate, but all modes of reasoning ó including other forms of political ideologies ó which are not decidedly liberal.

Liberal values are not automatically democratic values. Rather, liberal democracy is a substantivist understanding of democracy, where the preservation of liberal values is the task of democracy, rather than safe-guarding functionalist democracy (i.e. safe-guarding that decisions are made by democratic processes, regardless of the value õenclosedö in the outcome).

There is no guarantee that democracy will remain liberal in terms of values if democracy is õdemocratizedö. On the contrary, some studies show that developments in countries that do not have long-standing liberal traditions are generally not developed in a liberal direction just because they are developed in a democratic direction.[143] However, as both Connolly and Sigurdson show, much of the developments and values that we pride ourselves of today, has not sprung out of liberal context.

Connolly levels one important critique here against secular liberalism: It does not contain its own momentum. Differently put, who qualifies as a human whose rights must be protected is outside of the function of liberal values. What Connolly calls the õthreshold of humanityö cannot be arrived at by way of a consensus procedure. Werner Hamacher argues that the UN declaration of Human Rights is not the starting place of rights but a conclusion on what is

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[143] See Esposito & Voll, 1996.

counted as human.[144] From this *conclusion* people are granted certain rights, based on the fact that they are counted as human. However, it is outside the function of secular liberalism to *extend* rights, both in terms of extending rights of people already deemed to be humans, but also of people who does not currently meet the criteria. In the past such groups have been slaves, women and gays. Consensus does not provide the momentum to say why these groups or groups to come should be viewed as equals.

Turning to the report, it seems that the perspective of secular liberalism it applies, in which it supports itself on the Swedish constitution, presents us with this problem. The consensus of secular liberalism must be supported by Sweden's – organizations and individuals alike – and for those who have a different perspective (those who do not already agree with this idea, and therefore reaches up to the threshold of being protected by these human rights) the result is insufficient.

As touched on in 4.1 the guide of the report should be existing principles for supporting religious organizations. This is done when organizations contribute towards maintaining and strengthening the basic values Swedish society rests upon, so that these remain stable and thriving.[145] Such a formulation unveils a belief in stable values, rather than a society functioning in a state of constant change. Set against such a backdrop it is hard to see pluralism as something other than negative, which is also hinted at when the report touches on the "challenges of multiculturalism".[146]

At the heart of liberal thinking is the idea of consensus.[147] Chantal Mouffe argues that any politics striving towards consensus has misinterpreted the task of the political. Rather, the political ought to be the arena where opposing parties ideas are allowed to air their views, so that such sentiments do not take on more sinister forms (examples being populist or extremist parties and terrorism).

According to the report's interpretation of the Swedish law, consensus is viewed as a key understanding of how to "guard" certain untouchable principles such as human rights, democracy and equality. These values must be shared by all. It is not said however, what types of rights, democracy and equality we must protect.

Attempting to arrive at a consensus and preserve secular education in other words risk failing to meet the educational needs of some citizens. This is a balance-act where multiculturalism is set at odds with the consensus needed to remain a stable liberal

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[144] Hamacher, 2006, pp. 674f.
[145] SOU, 2009, pp. 16.
[146] Ibid., pp. 63.
[147] Mårtensson, 2010, pp. 69.

democracy. Another way of putting it, perhaps overly critically, is to claim that the perspective of secular liberalism stands in the way of the Swedish educational system presenting an education that is also constitutional, and that could be valuable although maybe not first and foremost in protecting constitutional values as õconstantsö. Only if we approach the topic of human rights, democracy and equality in a more fluid, movement-focused way, can we ask how these three concepts ought to facilitate their own change, rather than being defined in a substantivist manner which one day (and that day would seem to have come) is out of keeping with the citizenry it is trying to protect and grant rights to.

The report expresses a need to create sustainable strateg*ies* for building a common society, open to all.[148] The question is whether liberal politics is the best suited strategy, or indeed if it contains strategies not merely a dominant strategy. Agonistic political theory provides a way forward which protects human rights, democracy, equality and pluralism, without needing to resort to consensus, thus avoiding friction between pluralism and consensus (because how can true pluralism always end up in a consensus?). Connollyøs suggestion is that we cannot afford certain sets of ideas or values to take center stage; not Christian, Muslim, liberal, secular or other. Instead the political sphere can facilitate a battleground where ongoing conflicts between these and other modes of thinking can bring their passions into the political conflict. Sometimes the effect of such politicized conflict will be that the battle does not only happen between these value-systems, but also *within* them.

The report highlights this clearly, as it is hard to give any accurate account of what õall Muslimsö think that the Swedish state should provide in terms of education of Imams; some say some education; some say education but in other areas; some say a lot of education, and some say no education. Even within a group that could be imagined to share a relatively big amount of guiding principles the differences in practice and thought are vast.

In its summary of what education currently employed imams desire, the report claims that the main interest is not education of a theological kind, which surprises rather little given that almost half of the respondents have an education of seven years or more. However, up to a third of the respondents showed interest in education in fields such as Islamic theology, spiritual care, religious dialogue and leadership training, which is a fair bit of support given that so many already have many years of education behind them.[149]

The heterogenity of the group of respondents is apparent to the authors of the report. In the same sense, it may be reasonable to imagine other groups (Christians, liberals, atheists or

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[148] SOU, 2009, pp. 21.
[149] Ibid., pp. 47.

communists) to be equally heterogeneous. Perhaps not on all issues, but definitely on some. Here, Connolly's suggested model of overlapping minorities can be helpful in order to imagine a politics where liberals are not always liberal and Christians not always Christian – at least not first and foremost or in the sense that all Christians (for example) are Christians in the same way.[150]

When a type of politics that can connect over such lines (that are often perceived as *dividing lines*), a politics emerge where all individuals can count on being included in the minority on some issues. If this were to happen, all citizens would most likely be more aware of what kind of protection minority groups may indeed need in their causes and opinions, instead of a consensus culture tending to lend rights to the same majority, whilst constantly keeping one or a few particular groups in a minority position on the outskirts of society.

In chapter 4 I touched on the methodological problem of whom to select, and which voices should be heard regarding the needs of educations of (or for) Imams in Sweden. As noted above the focus of the report is predominantly on educations for Imams, meaning additional education for people who are already working as Imams. However, if we were to add the above reasoning about overlapping minorities to the mix of how to select a group to interview for such a report, the problem of getting a "clear" estimate of "the Muslim voice" on the matter of educations of/for Imams would not only hard to summarize – such a unison voice completely disappear. Laying the idea of overlapping minorities on top of the already heterogeneous demography (meaning Muslims aren't always *first and foremost* Muslims), and taking into account both the need of currently working Imams and young Swedish citizens of Muslim affiliation, a 100 page report would only suffice as an introduction to this demographical jigsaw puzzle.

In the case of *folkbildning* there are parameters which must be met in order to receive funding. These institutions of non-degree education should work towards some of the following goals; decreasing educational differences, increasing society's educational level, broaden interest and participation in cultural life, and in other ways create commitment to societal life.[151] Some of these goals, should be pointed out, are less liberal in wording and seem to aim more at a functionalist understanding of society, rather than a substantivist liberal one. It seems there may indeed be strategies available that does not require attachment to liberal ideas/ideals in order to gain support. Engaging in societal life, participation in political

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[150] Connolly, 2006.
[151] SOU, 2009, pp. 63.

life and education here seems to be goals which are not tied as directly towards any specific political agenda, but rather an emphasis on an active part in society as such.

It may also be of some value to point out that supporting participation in societal life, without commitment to any specific values or agenda, is not the same as initiating an education of Imams in order for them to somehow integrate the respective members of their congregations. The report also notes that the end goal of a Swedish education of Imams must not be to imagine that this will somehow integrate others. Studies have shown this approach to be unsuccessful,[152] and the report also notes that it is not in keeping with the Swedish constitution to integrate members of society through religious leaders.[153]

The question to end the line of reasoning regarding consensus with could be formulated as follows: Does the lack of consensus mean that the best course of action is to do nothing? Unfortunately this appears to be approximately where the report ends up: The populace is too heterogeneous, therefore any action is hard to motivate (perhaps rather than several actions being considered appropriate). The final proposal of this report, however, is of course not final in any other sense. It does not conclude the matter of different needs for different (Muslim) peoples, nor does it give any final overview as the cultural patterns and demographic composition of this õgroupö is rapidly changing.

5.3 Christian and Muslim Values

Undoubtedly Christianity is pertinent for many western frameworks, not least in the area of ethics and values. Some scholars, such as atheist philosopher Richard Rorty, supports the notion that Christianity was instrumental in giving birth to natural science.[154] Sociologist Max Weber also states that Christian pietism was an integral part in bringing about Capitalism.[155] Theologian Ola Sigurdson (2009) also demonstrates how modernity has (in his words) a genealogy, in which Christian thinking have been influential in bringing about the modern understanding of society, humans and many concepts including freedom and human rights, and has of course had an important bearing on values.

The case should not be overstated however. It is not that Christianity is responsible for everything good and bad that has happened in Sweden over the last thousand years, or two thousand in Europe. Larsson & Sander points out that there are many other influential

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[152] SOU, 2009, pp. 77.
[153] Ibid., pp. 106
[154] Jonsson, 2004, pp. 99.
[155] Cf. Repstad & Furseth, 2005, pp. 53 & Connolly, 2008.

õmovementsö such as Greek philosophy, Roman jurisprudence, French enlightenment, British empiricism, liberalism, German socialism, and American Coca Colanialism.[156] Rather than taking the stand point that Christianity is somehow the origin of all societal change in Europe, a more reasonable approach seems to be that Christianity has been an integral part of various developments, philosophical, scientific and societal, in Europe. In other words, Christianity cannot be extricated from such a genealogy to use Sigurdsonøs words.

The danger of overstating that everything originates from Christianity is that other things deemed õreligionö may *appear* to be incompatible with any kind of thinking that Christianity is somehow given credit for. Although doing so in a subtle and implicit way, the SOU report also airs fears that opening up to õMuslimö or other values ó understood as something different from the (implicitly Christian) values that are talked about and constitutionally protected ó will open a Pandoraøs box of value relativism, risking to put society in some sort of moral free-fall. To phrase concerns about confessional neutrality in opposition to value neutrality becomes (although maybe not intentionally) a way of suggesting that õMuslimö values either cannot or ought not to be given the same weight or room as õour usualö values.

Here is seems helpful to recall some points from Cavanaughøs argumentation. First of all Cavanaugh presents a strong case for the problem of extricating something that is religious which is totally separate from the political. Rather, the rise of the concept õreligionö was so that the state could pass religious allegiance into a private sphere, where it didnøt compete with the allegiance that the nation-state required. Second, the concept of religion was also introduced in order to facilitate colonization. First õthe savagesö had no religion making it a religious obligation to õshow them the lightö. Then, when discovering that the conquered peoples indeed had belief systems, these would be acknowledged only in order to argue Christianityøs supremacy as comparison was now possible.[157]

Not only is William E. Connollyøs theoretical approach helpful here, it is also compatible with the views of all of the mentioned scholars (Rorty; Weber; Sigurdson; Larsson & Sander). For Connolly there is no such thing as a solid foundation upon which society, morals or values rest. Rather, trying to achieve or even believe in the possibility of such a solid foundation makes it more likely to be poorly equipped to handle new situations, new human beings and new modes of thinking about our society.

Such discussions cannot be thought to arrive at any final conclusion on what it is to be human or how we want to arrange society. In any given situation there will always be a spill-

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[156] Larsson & Sander, 2007, pp. 32.
[157] Cavanaugh, 2009, pp. 86.

over, a remained which cannot be accommodated in the current solution. Such a position would highlight the temporary character of all solutions, and foster an understanding where the temporary solution is admittedly open to change, even right from the start. Talking specifically about Muslims in Europe, Larsson & Sander points out that there is a significant difference between aiming at a society which is integrat*ed* or one that is integrat*ing*;[158] the former suggesting that there is a õfinalö stage or societal structure that can be reached whilst the latter suggest an open-ended society which ought to change for its citizens as demography, interests, passions or desires change in character.

It is worth noting here that the former viewpoint (strive towards an integrat*ed* society) and the mode of consensus can be tied in to the view on Islamic countries. For instance, Mårtensson proposes that many Muslim countries show a positive attitude towards democracy at the same time as the countries are undemocratic.[159] However, what Mårtensson does not say is whether the data points towards a support of *liberal* values for one. Secondly, she does not separate between support of values and having a functioning democracy, without attaching particular values to it. (It should also be noted that she goes on to complicate this picture with Mannøs model of social advancement as key to understanding when consensus is at play, and what role this has on immigrants. This is however, another discussion which will not be ensued here.)

5.3.1 Values in the Public Sphere

Sometimes the strategy for coping with values in the public sphere seems to be one of aiming at a neutral state managing to create a õneutralö space, which is seen to only be possible by adapting a negative strategy of withdrawal. This strategy includes banning all kinds of religious symbols from the public sphere, including headscarves, crosses and crucifixes, avoiding celebrating the end of the school semester in church and so on. However, this does not create a public sphere neutral or free from values. Rather, it shows that only secular values are welcome to participate in public life, and forces other modes of thinking or believing to retract and possibly find other ways.

When reviewing theories of secularization, such processes should be kept in mind as they *forcibly* secularize the public sphere and compels religions (and what Connolly also reminds us may be important non-theistic, non-secular modes of thinking) to adapt or surrender. The

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[158] Larsson & Sander, 2007, pp. 93.
[159] Mårtensson, 2010, pp. 69.

report underlines the point of negative freedom of religion is that no individual should be forced into an area saturated by religious practice.[160] This could effectively mean that one emergent idea is the right *not to be engaged (or annoyed) by others* and the display of their identities and signifiers whenever one resides in a public space.[161]

Viewing political ideologies the same way, let's take the example of Capitalism and Marxism. Which Marxists can today believably say that they live outside of Capitalism or that they are not forced into co-operation with a consumerist culture, which they do not agree with? Furthermore, if we accept the equal footing of things deemed religion and political, then we also have to investigate how the paradigm that has current hegemony (i.e. liberal democracy) imposes itself on other faith-systems, such as Islam (in this case).

In political life, on the contrary, part of the political *is* to be *exposed* to various modes of thinking. In the election of the Swedish parliament, for instance, people are actively engaged by the different parties across the spectrum from left to right. The political parties are given additional possibility to occupy public space and make themselves heard, as part of the democratic process. To apply the viewpoint of having a right not to see, hear or engage with political parties and their representatives within the public sphere would probably appear outright absurd to most.

The negative freedom of religion works to protect humans from being forced into co-operation with what is usually deemed to also be "religion". However, it comes with no such guarantee for what is instead labeled "political". Religion, being the grouping relegated to the "private sphere" is instead expected to co-operate with politics. But not only that. The co-operation of the "de-politicized" *religion* is expected to happen on the politicized terms of *politics*.

The picture gets even blurrier when you trace what theologian Ola Sigurdson refers to as the *genealogy of modernity* and see how the developments of concepts in the West coincide (bear in mind the discussion above regarding Rorty; Weber; Larsson & Sander). Taking such developments into account, the report fails to account for not only the serious impact that other doctrines – such as the political climate – has on the possibility to exercise one's religious faith ("unhampered"), but also by not admitting the connections that the *Christian* heritage has produced.

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[160] SOU, 2009, pp. 35.
[161] Žižek, 2006, pp. 240.

Looking to agonistic political theory one can say the following. First, what is deemed *the religious* in this case (the education of Imams) is something that is decided over in a õneutralö context of the political. This political however, is saturated with both Christian and political ideas that in the end play a big role in effectively being a formative part of the future of Islam in Sweden. To talk with Mouffe, the fact that the religious is de-politicized to begin with hands the discussion over to someone else than the people who it ultimately concerns. (As it would be a mistake to think that the education of Imams first and foremost affect the Swedish state rather than Swedish Muslims.)

Second, I would claim in accordance with Connolly that there is no such thing as the exercise of a unhampered religious faith. The movement or õfluxö of ideas and identities is something on-going. There is no such thing as the final being. Rather, as Deleuze would point out, we are dealing with a *becoming-man*, or perhaps *becoming-Imam*. This also includes a more critical understanding of *becoming-state,* i.e. how the state ought to change to reflect its citizens.

5.4 Syncretism

In this section I explore in more detail the possibility of viewing intertwining religious and political ideas as syncretism. The concept is usually reserved for when two õreligionsö mix. However, if the definition of religion is as wide as to include political ideologies ó as Cavanaughøs critique of religious definitions suggest ó then the concept of syncretism can reasonably be applied to encompass combinations of the two.

Looking briefly at the history of the concept of syncretism, it is usually applied when trying to describe religious traditions that have somehow intermingled in what can be seen as an unusual fashion. This may be the example of Christians in south-east Asia believing in Jesus Christ, the idea of heaven, but also in rebirth. From a western European point of view infusing Christianity with the idea of rebirth may be seen as something of a stretch.

What can be highlighted here is the example made by Larsson & Sander regarding Swedish culture. They do not circle customs from within Sweden, but influential õoutsideö elements. In other words, in other to hint at the tightly knit web that makes up Swedish culture, we need a *point of view*. In Larsson & Sanderøs case, they display feats that do not originate in Sweden (such as Roman jurisprudence or British empiricism). The same thing can be said to be true when attempting to postulate something as syncretism. There needs to be something that is perceived as an õoutsideö movement or influence that has come to impose

itself on what is the "inside" or "true" essence. In the example made above rebirth is not deemed a genuine part of "true essential" Christianity. But to say this, one must situate that Christianity within the particular context of (for instance) Sweden where it is not customary to see rebirth as integral. The concept of syncretism would be meaningless if it was applied to the combination of Christianity and rebirth from the *local perspective* where this is part of the belief-system in south-east Asia. In short, any attempt to postulate some syncretistic tendencies must originate in a local context, where there is another practice (and where this practice is usually elevated to something more "true" or "original").

What is generally not done, however, is to point to things that has influenced *our* outlook on Christianity as syncretism. One never makes a case of seeing one's local practice of Christianity as syncretistic. If we were to attempt to view our own local version of Christianity as a syncretistic form of belief, we may struggle to find other *religions* (in the traditional problematic sense of the word) that have clearly influenced it. Rather, what has influenced Swedish, or even western Christianity is *politics*.

As the main argument of this essay goes, religion and politics can be approached as the same subject, in so far as religion and politics alike attempt to organize society according to what is perceived as "the good life". Ola Sigurdson argues that when looking Swedish or western society and politics today, it is best understood if we develop an understanding for its genealogy and with that its ties to Christianity. However, the reverse holds equally true; there is little value in trying to assess Christianity – or any other religion present in Sweden or the west – without trying to map the many ways and developments in which political ideologies have impacted it.

This is what makes Connolly's book on the American fusion of capitalism and Christianity interesting. Connolly argues for what he calls a bellicose resonance machine. It does not mean that capitalism and a certain branch of evangelical Christianity on the right is exactly the same thing, but they find ways in which they're sentiment towards the world and the way it ought to be governed. There is a feeling of "extreme" self-entitlement that should make up for sacrifices that the adherents of this syncretistic doctrine feel they have made. Connolly builds a case claiming that there are sentiments and views on the world – what Deleuze would call micropolitics – which coincide in such a way that these movements find it natural to operate together with one another and merge with one another at many junctures.

This mutual influence even bears weight on what passages of the Bible are prioritized as the most central in such Christian congregations (where the book of Revelation is seen as the most important in the New Testament). The flow in the opposite direction (from Christianity

to Politics) causes downplaying tolerance of pluralism, a heightened sense of judgmentality and a carte blanche in support of environmental degradation.[162]

Going back to the argument of syncretism being an important ingredient in the understanding of the relation between politics and religion, two things can be said. The first that Connolly points out is that this is not a one way flow. Rather, the two clearly reinforces predispositions already present in the other doctrine. Secondly, Connolly proposes not that this connection is unjust, but rather that the American left has failed to formulate a *positive* response to this. In Connollyøs view, the current American movement is one example of how politics is not a rational practice that can be compared to irrational religious sentiments. Instead, both are filled with highly emotional dispositions *and* rational elaborate practices that can make these sentiments a political reality.

Above I touched on the problematic nature of liberal democracy transposing itself to something universal. It very much has the tendency of locality versus syncretis, where the local is never syncretistic but merely the õtrue practiceö (from its own perspective). When liberalism demands adherence to its core values and does not accept a merely functionalistic democracy (for instance built on a pluralistic variety of values) it demands that all religion active in societal life infuse itself with a liberal component.

What liberalism currently has succeeded in, in Sweden (and probably in many other countries) is to secure a place where people feel for these values, and therefore consider them a legitimate, neutral, rational type of rule which ought to work out fine for all citizens. Doing so, one overlooks the fact that many do not find liberal logic compelling and certainly not universal. Viewing the current religious landscape in Sweden it could probably be helpful to identify groups in terms of who are currently tuned in to a liberal-religious syncretism, and who are not. However, the report highlights that there is expectancy on religious, cultural and minority organizations to live by certain, many times liberal, codes. Such demands to follow õliberal codesö appears to fail to live up to the criteria of freedom of religion, especially in the sense of freedom *from* religion.

5.5 Secular State/Secular Society

In a talk at a conference on Muslims and Political Participation Professor Jørgen Nielsen made a distinction between a secular state and a secular society. Such a distinction can mean different things. One interpretation, however, can be comparing the model in USA with how

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[162] Connolly, 2008.

the same relation is viewed in Europe, perhaps especially in Scandinavian countries. In the US one finds what could perhaps be called a secular state (although this can be debated with Connolly's argument in 5.4 in mind) whilst society is fiercely religious. In comparison it seems that European countries imagine both a secular state and a society being secular as well. Whereas the first instance could be derived from a vast pluralism in religion – which is õin the openö – one may get the impression that European ideas build on the premise that the state should be secular to reflect its society, which is the opposite logic. Differently put: It may seem reasonable to have a secular state if one imagines society to be secular as well. However, a *pluralistic* secular state is necessary in order to safeguard the different religious and non-religious experiences of the citizens.

Connecting this to the report, it seems that *Högskoleverket* is critical towards elements of pastoral education, within higher education. As 75% of the education that earlier was hosted by the church is now taught at universities, *Högskoleverket* feels there is a risk of blurring the line of what is confessional and what is not.[163] Given that we can isolate õwhat the state isö and when the activity of the state is no longer strictly speaking the state, this can be discussed with the above argument in mind.

If we perceive the state to be political sphere, where decisions are made, citizens' needs are being weighed and where the way of deciding are by democratic election, then in short we perceive state and parliament to be the same. If we see everything that the state somehow owns as the state, the perspective is rather different. If we expand the parameters to view the state as all that it funds the perspective is again different. Without saying that this is clear-cut or that there is one reasonable way to view what the state õisö, one principle can be used to address all of the above perspectives.

Viewing the task of the state as making provisions for what its citizens need, it seems reasonable to be secular in one sense and in another sense not so much. In order for a state with a heterogeneous population to function and be able to make provisions for all – not just for some – citizens, there needs to be a commitment to the principles of democracy and equality. However, it seems less reasonable to make provisions only for those citizens who agree with the policy decisions made for all. Differently put; it seems reasonable for the state to take in the wants and needs of its citizens even though such wants and needs may be informed by religious motives. From a functionalistic democratic standpoint it appears unreasonable for the state to decide only to help when there are secular motives for helping.

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[163] SOU, 2009, pp. 65.

In other words, from such a perspective it is doubtful whether educating priests or Imams are any different from educating other citizens, equipping them with particular skills and knowledge needed in their future line of work. Here it would appear that the position of *Högeskoleverket* sees it fit to purge certain educations of õconfessionalö elements whilst others are simply not seen as evoking any confessionality, which goes back to a problematic view on religion and its place vis-à-vis politics (perceived as something different from religion).

The report cites *Regeringsformen* which dictates that a goal for public institutions is to õmake provisions for ethnic, linguistic and religious minoritiesø possibilities to keep and maintain a cultural and religious life of their ownö.[164] At the same time it is also highlighted that our constitution dictates that õgeneral rights should apply rather than particular interestsö.[165] Furthermore, the State-Church-reform is thought to mark the end of the stateøs possibility to meddle in the inner affairs of the Church, which makes it appear strange to consider initiating a new religious education.[166] So how should all this be understood?

This can be perceived as constitutional support of making provisions for minorities, although they ought not to be treated as exceptions if this is possible to avoid. But it can be questioned whether general rights vs. particular interests constitute a conflict of interests. Another question is if the obligation for making provisions for individual citizens can rest on something other than understanding them as belonging to a social body of some sort which can include belonging to a profession or organization, signaling an aspect of identity that the state may notice. It is not possible for the state to have knowledge about every single citizen as an individual, although provisions should be offered on an individual basis. The state must õget to knowö its citizenry by learning about the identities or signifiers that make people part of a collective, as such a collective can be perceived.[167]

So in making provisions for individuals, this does happen through making provisions for collectives or õidentitiesö. Such interests are both particular and general. However, the moment the state starts gauging which of the expressed interests coincide with a liberal code of ethics or conduct, then the democratic principle and the obligation towards equal treatment of the citizens seems weakened.

Connecting this to the overall discussion of the essay it is possible to emphasis liberal secularism as one confessionality among others. If this confessionality takes upon itself to

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[164] SOU, 2009, pp. 102.
[165] Ibid., pp. 104.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Derrida, 2006, pp. 263.

purge the political sphere from other confessionalities informing the organization of society and the strive towards "the good life", then such confession is poorly equipped to be a vanguard for pluralism and heterogeneity. From such a point of view a secular state is not a *netural* state, but one that clearly favors one set of values – and the citizens who sign off on them.

The discussion can also be approached from a slightly different angle. If we were to say that any doctrine that fosters or at least allows pluralism is welcome to partake in the political, then the outcomes would look different than today. The interesting thing however, is that liberal democracy does not currently cater to pluralism in this sense, but rather makes itself universal. If we are left with a choice between pluralistic approaches to the organization of society on the one hand, and approaches that try to make its values universal on the other hand; then it seems reasonable to group liberal secularism together with theocratic approaches, rather than along with approaches (religious or not) that try to influence politics with its values, without trying to make such values the only values tolerable. In other words, liberal pluralism is a pluralism accepting liberalism; much like an "Shia-Islamic pluralism" would accept Shia-Muslim doctrines but make all others illegitimate. The fact that liberalist secularism circumscribes values in this sense, makes it possible to group it with doubtful doctrines rather than approaches that try to safe-guard an integrat*ing* functionalist democracy, open to change, rather than having a clear end-game for all of society.

5.6 The Task of the Report

The purpose of this essay is to examine whether the separation between religion and politics is a valid divide. The essay has touched on thoughts from various spheres such as political theory, theology, history of religion, and political science in order to demonstrate how there are components in all of the above that supports the possibility of not dividing religion from politics. The particular effects the current divide has today, is demonstrated by highlighting aspects of the report *The State and The Imams* – a government commissioned report on whether Swedish Universities ought to have an education for Imams.

When analyzing this report I wish to make one separation, in order to finally pose one important question. The separation is that of the panel of experts and scholars, carrying out the task of undertaking the work necessary and compiling this in a report on the one hand, and the government having commissioned the report on the other hand. As chapter 4 should've made clear, I do not doubt the expertise of the scholars. However, how the panel of experts

has *interpreted what the task at hand is*, can be addressed and possibly criticized without undermining the merits of such a panel. The question I'm posing is the following: Is the mission of highly insightful religious scholars and political scientists to provide a straightforward yes-or-no answer to the question at hand, or is it reasonable to be critical of such a question if it either is too simple or possibly rests on presumptions that are hard to support?

Some of the involved scholars are no doubt aware of the problems of defining religion. Others are no doubt aware of the criticism directed towards liberal democracy. Is it then reasonable to simply pass judgment on the matter, as if these reservations did not exist? As displayed in chapter 4, the report even touches on the problem on defining religion, and functionalist vs. substantivist definitions. However, this does not stop the report from treating religion*s* as a comparative phenomenon. Likewise, the word *democracy* is used and referred to many times, without actually touching on the possibly problematic aspects of democracy, and how democracy can be understood without the prefix of *liberal*.

Although the report does not lack in competence, it is possible to propose that it is found wanting when it comes to displaying the problems that are connected to the question. It is also found wanting because it does not provide much in terms of proposing provisions that would be reasonable to make in order to accommodate Swedish citizens with Muslim affiliation. No doubt the scholars are aware that this is a balance on somewhat of a tight rope. In my view however, they lack of problematizing central tenets which the report rests on maintains an imbalanced understanding of Swedish society, rather than contributes to one that is more equal in character – *which* would in fact be in keeping with the guiding constitutional documents which the report refers to.

In conclusion I would like to recapitulate the following quote from the report (found in the section on politics of religion):

> In Sweden, like in western democracies in general, religion is often seen as something foremost belonging to the private sphere í   This could comprise a problem for those religions whose practitioners wants to manifest their faith by – for example – a certain type of clothing or by erecting buildings of religious character. The perspective can also camouflage that the state unknowingly upholds or favors majority-culture, its possibility to interpret and its interests.[168]

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[168] SOU, 2009, pp. 85.

It would seem that the report has failed to incorporate this insight into its recommended strategy.

6

Conclusion and Summary

This short conclusion comes in two parts. The first is a general discussion about liberal democracy and secularism vs. agonistic political theory. The second one ties in directly with the object of this study, namely the application in academia and in this specific case, how the report *The State and The Imams* has been impacted by liberal ideas.

6.1 Liberalism in General

The purpose of this essay was to analyze the current relation between religion and politics, and specifically the relation between them in terms of power: Is a separation between religion and politics a valid divide? What power relations are produced by understanding these as either one or two subjects? And finally, how does such a power relation manifest in general, and specifically in an academic setting?

This essay has approached the subject by looking at religious and political entities as entities that attempt to organize society confessionally. This does not mean that all Christian or Muslim attempts to influence people are õfundamentalistö, trying to impose a very strict understanding of religious law on society. Neither does it mean that Christians and Muslims are entirely carefree of what laws are enforced. Rather, the societal climate is weighed against a õmoral compassö. However, this is not particular to religion but holds equally true for political ideologies. Just as communists can believe in something they perceive as fairer than free market capitalism, most can still stomach to live peacefully in a country where capitalism is part of the political make-up.

Viewing religion and politics this way enables us to view them both as systems creating and/or carrying meaning. As such systems of meaning they seem fit to be on an equal footing with each other. However, as I have tried to show within these pages, politics has more influence over religion than vice versa. This derives from a historical birth of the nation-state, where the separation of secular from spiritual was used in order for the nation-state to ensure the primary loyalty of its subject on the back of a lessened influence by religious authority which had previously been more prominent. Religion was thus given a place in the private sphere, whilst the public realm was a realm of secular, rational politics.

However, the history of these concepts is not enough to maintain that a divide is valid. Rather, there is little reason to exclude any system of meaning which does not try to remove

the decision-making power from the people. Regarding the power balance today, the agenda is not only that religion is private and politics is public. Instead, liberal secularism currently projects itself as the totality of acceptable political practice. This means that religious ideas but also ideas that are indeed deemed *political* are likewise excluded from public politics.

The current liberal politics manages to extend the rights of some and inhibit the rights of others as it purports a certain code of conduct and ethics as necessary for democracy to function. However, as illustrated with the help of political theorists Chantal Mouffe and William E. Connolly in this essay, the particular liberal code of conduct and ethics is not necessary in order for a õmodernö democratic state to function.

The democracies of the west are usually labeled liberal democracies. However, it is possible to separate these two from each other and acknowledge that it is possible to be democratic without being liberal. What both Mouffe and Connolly do is that they highlight how liberal democracy sometimes expands its liberalism at the expense of democracy; whereas it is fair to say that they would prefer the opposite.

It is helpful to distinguish between what is a functionalist understanding of democracy, and a substantivist one. When liberalism imposes a particular code of conduct or ethics onto political life it suggests a particular substantivist understanding of democracy. Such an understanding hampers other modes of political or religious thinking, even though these may be entirely democratic.

This is my attempt at offering a negative response to the questions if the divide presently in place is valid, and that it results in a power balance where not only politics, but a certain mode of politics, has the upper hand. It also offers the view that this is neither fair nor necessary for a functioning democracy.

Should we try to pinpoint where liberalism can be found on a scale regarding tolerance and the fostering of pluralism, it would be grouped with other doctrines that try to make its logic universal and valid for all of society much like approaches that are labelled õfundamentalistö (although an unsuitable term for academic discourse), meaning those who wants one mode of particular values to be the building-bloc of society. Liberalism merely fosters liberal secular pluralism, and is in such a respect highly excluding. It does not work for an integrat*ing* society being one where pluralism and change are welcomed and tackled well. Rather, it works for an integrat*ed* society where different peoples have been integrated into a liberal secular mode of being in society. As such, liberalism does not pose a particularly suitable state doctrine.

One further presupposition that ought to be addressed when it comes to the view on Islam in Sweden is the question regarding the possibility of comparing religions. At times the SOU report states that the history of the free (or low) churches are interesting in connection to the current context of Muslim congregations. As noted in chapter 4 ó and noted in the report ó the õsuccessö of these organizations depending to a large extent on them being able to provide a social security network, thus answering particular socio-economic needs. This essay sides with the perspective that both functionalist and broad substantivist definitions of religion fail to exclude political ideologies from being counted as religion. Therefore I do not accept simply comparing what is generally refered to as õreligionsö as does the report.

A statement saying that the situation of the free(/low) churches a hundred years ago is applicable to Muslim congregations in 2011, must suggest the comparison being reasonable for instance by showing how Muslim organizations provide responses to similar needs or challenges (and that such challenges today are indeed comparable to any circumstances in Sweden in the early 20th century). It does not suffice to conclude that religions share an essence, especially without saying anything about what this essence is thought to be.

If such an essence is of a socio-economic nature then it also strengthens the argument that politics and religion should indeed be viewed as the same topic, as the õessenceö is then dealing with societal challenges, working out from ontological convictions towards what the religio-political body sees as õthe good lifeö.

The report also touches on the goal of Swedish integrational policy, which is (among other things) to provide equal opportunities. A bit later the concept of *egenmakt* (approximately õPower over oneøs own lifeö) is introduced as part of the governmentøs strategy. Trying to tie this two together it is clear that the strategy is one of reducing the role of the government as much as possible. However, the current strategy is found wanting in terms of providing this *egenmakt* and these equal opportunities if we are to really take the equality aspect seriously. From the perspective put forth in the essay, the current liberal strategy does not comprise the best available strategy to achieve these goals or foster a pluralism that is not just a diversity of values that are generally liberal in orientation.

Here I have tried to sum up the power relation produced as set out in the questions of the essay. Next I will go on to elaborate on the last question on the specific effects of this divide in academia.

6.2 Academia in Particular

As the essay should have made clear, I have confidence in the competence of the panel of experts, scholars and scientists who have compiled the report *The State and the Imams*. My main objection to the report is the attempt to fit a large number of respondents, world-views and varying understandings of Islamic faith into a given framework, which is liberal in character. The report many times hint at problems that are pertinent, but that could at the same time cripple the ability to provide an answer that sits comfortably with the people who have commissioned the report. Differently put; these experts diminish their knowledge and the facets of the question, in order to give an answer that is suitable for a liberal political context.

It may seem highly idealistic, to hope that a government report should try to educate the government. However, when the understanding of the place of religion vis-à-vis politics is out of keeping with potential solutions, then it may be a good idea to not only hint at the problems and alternate solutions, but to raise these more critically. Judging from the authors of the report Sweden is a country in change, and in order to understand and handle such change the people who are experts within their respective fields have the chance to contribute rather more than they do in the end.

Leaving this idealism aside, the report shows that there are passages in the Swedish constitution that could be utilized to support an education of Imams. There are also passages that do not clearly hint at democracy being liberal in character, but rather õjustö democratic. The report declares that it is not the role of the state to either strengthen or weaken religion. However, I have tried to show that a neutral stance may require a more active (rather than passive) commitment to facilitating what the citizenry needs, when some religious influences have been part of a long-stretching cultural heritage. Not recognizing this strengthens the position of Christianity in Sweden and weakens the opportunities for those who adhere to Islam, although liberal politics would deny that it has any part in this.

The fact that there is a higher education where Universities give the majority of courses for priests and clergy, but that the most reasonable course of action for the state is to not initiate a similar education for Imams or other religious leaders, tells us that the current status-quo is not recognized as problematic. It could be debated that some courses are going to be removed from the curriculum due to critique from *Högskoleverket*, although the fact remains that education for priests and clergy will ó as is the case with many other professional groups ó receive the bulk of their education at University level.

When liberalism poses as the totality of political life, it makes its contents core values, consensus, or common sense as if they were self-explanatory and all must agree on them. This makes it appear as if agreeing on these values is the door which everyone must pass through

in order to engage in politics. In the same way, academia is imprinted with these values and poses as the door which everyone must pass through in order to engage in academic studies or research.

It would however be more honest to recognize that academic principles (regarding both students and scholars) have been infused with a particular liberal ethos, and that this does not constitute a neutral or objective stance. Rather, all academic disciplines are being approached with liberal values at their base. This type of study is not free of confessionality, but colored by a specific history, locality and contextuality.

One may question what speaks in favor of liberal values being exceptionally suitable above all other confessionalities as a starting-point for scientific enquiry and academic disciplines. A general rule in academia seem to be that being forthcoming with one's uses of theories and methods, presumptions and expectations is the best bet to decrease the portion of õbadö subjectivity involved in the process. As I've tried to show above, however, the embedded liberal values in academia tends not to be forthcoming in this sense, but rather hides in the claim of its universality.

In sum, it is not politics and religion that are at odds with each other. Nor is religion a less suitable influence on a general level than political ideologies in the public realm. What is unsuitable is any doctrine (religious or political) that tries to make itself transcendent ó a prerequisite that one must subscribe to, in order to engage in politics at all. There is reason to be alarmed when any confessionality that poses as universal tries to exclude *other* confessionalities on the basis of their beliefs, as opposed to its own claimed neutrality. This means that there is reason today to be cautious of the liberal ingredient of democracy, which circumscribes aspects of political life *and* academia.

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