

Editorial Note

Research work is always contextual, tied to its own time, culture and intellectual climate, regardless of whether the researcher acknowledges this fact or not. Likewise, each researcher is a product of her/his time and culture. The norms and values of the research field are reflected in the way the research is carried out: in what research questions are regarded as important and 'correct,' in what theories, analytic tools and interpretative perspectives are deemed relevant and important. In the history of comparative religion, the strong influence of textual and linguistic research is clearly visible, as well as the evolutionist and positivist currents of that time.

Contextualisation is the topic of Tomáš Bubík's article, in which he uses the Czech research field, and especially research on Indian religions, as his example. Bubík takes as his starting point the concept of stereotypes – images that may tell us less about the object of study to which they are applied than about those conducting these studies: not only the individual researchers, but also the Czech, and broader European, cultural context in which the research was carried out. In analysing the stereotypes used in earlier research, these can function as mirrors in which we see ourselves today.

Recent Czech research on religion was framed and formed by the post-Second-World-War cultural and societal climate, with atheism as a dominating feature. Indeed, for a long time atheism was so closely associated with socialism and communism that many secular persons hesitated to identify as atheists. Over the last decades, however, the connection between atheism and communism has faded. Today atheism has become an increasingly attractive worldview, not least due to the lively current of thought labelled New Atheism.

Disbelief has for a long time been a question of marginal interest within comparative religion, but due to the new visibility of atheism in society today, sociologists of religion especially have started developing theoretical and methodological tools to analyse non-religion and secularity. This new and innovative research field is presented in Janet Eccles' and Rebecca Catto's article dealing with young Brits identifying as atheists. Census data from several European countries show that young people are more likely than their parents to feel distanced from religion. Indifference towards religion is very common in this group, but as society at large is more or less permeated by Christianity, the atheists have to make conscious efforts to sustain and justify their conviction and to find communities of likeminded people. The non-religious, secular and atheists of today form an imagined

community, which is increasingly found on the Internet and which is built up against the counter-image of a religious Other. The article searches for theoretical and methodological tools for analysing atheism and non-religion, and shows that even though non-religion and religion are closely related research fields, there are also significant differences. While belief or disbelief in a god or gods has constituted a central element in the research on religion, atheists can hold a wide variety of beliefs, foster an interest in spirituality and regard many areas of life as sacred, such as reason, freedom or science. *Temenos* warmly welcomes articles dealing with theoretical and methodological questions relating to the understanding of non-religion and atheism in post-secular societies.

The terminology developed by the linguist, philosopher and scholar of literature Mikhail Bakhtin (including concepts such as dialogism, intertextuality, heteroglossia, polyphonia and chronotope) has influenced many different fields of research. Within the research on religion, however, these concepts have rarely been applied, even though the theoretical approach of Bakhtin expressly calls for heuristic application. Carine Cools has applied Bakhtin's terminology in her research on intercultural communication on the individual level, and in his article, Duncan Reid develops this research by applying it at the community level. Reid's article focuses on the ecumenical dialogue between different Christian churches, but his research findings can be applied to and further developed for the study of intercultural and interreligious communication as well.

To an increasing degree, the communication between individuals and communities of today is carried out virtually, online. People are constantly connected to each other and can for example attend religious services through virtual mediation. Similarly, many religious communities make extensive use of various media to spread their message and to publicise their activities. Nevertheless, as Stefan Gelfgren establishes in his article, religious communities cannot control how their message is received and treated online, where discussions often develop quite unpredictably. The empirical material used in Gelfgren's article is drawn from the social media, especially tweets and blogs. Thus, the article is an apt example of the methodological challenges many researchers face today as they strive to form and delimit useful research materials on the basis of virtual sources.

Temenos, too, is imbedded in a specific research context, and we consciously aim to honour the enthusiasm for Nordic co-operation as well as for theoretical and methodological debate – especially relating to ethnography – that marked the birth of this journal. *Temenos* therefore sets out

to complement the focus on Nordic research with articles presenting new theoretical and methodological openings as well as discussions on how to define, broaden and renew our discipline. As we see it, an article reporting the findings of a research undertaking is not only an endpoint, but also a beginning of new discussions, questions and investigations.

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