

# Continuity with the Past and Uncertainty for the Future: Religion in Danish Newspapers 1750–2018

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## Abstract

The article examines the newspaper constructions of religion in Danish newspapers in a quantitative longitudinal analysis from 1750 to 2000 and a more qualitative analysis of recent news production from the last forty years. For the longitudinal part, the database of the digitization of Danish newspapers project is used. Using the available tools for quantitative data analysis, the article shows that the category of religion and world religions has been visible in Danish newspapers since 1750. The coverage of world religions is often related to the coverage of international news. Overall, the article documents a remarkable continuity of the presence of religion. Examining the more recent material qualitatively, the article shows that although many religions have been historically visible in the news, they have most recently become more frequent in the debate sections than in the news sections. It is primarily Islam that is debated. This is connected with a shift from religious diversity as part of foreign news coverage to domestic news coverage, related to changes in the surrounding Danish society. Nevertheless, the coverage of Islam also displays a remarkable continuity.

*Keywords: Danish newspapers, coverage of religion, secularization, religious diversity*

The oriental question is one of today's most pertinent questions. While some rejoice at the possible fulfilment of the probably quite reasonable wish to see the end of Turkish barbarism in Europe, others hope that this is a confirmation of Islam's impotence and the beginning of the eradication and disappearance of Islam from this world. Nevertheless, we must remember that according to the law of history it is more difficult to remove old ways and centuries of misconceived illusions than to establish new ones. The question is whether Islam has the necessary capacity and vitality to establish an organic state and functioning society (von Mehren in *Berlingske Tidende*, June 1876).

Religion has long been a recurrent theme in Danish public debate, and a number of scholarly works have been dedicated to the study of its media representations. The debates have concerned Christianity and Islam, and based on the most recent migration history of the last four or five decades, it seems that increasing religious diversity is one of the reasons religion is represented in the news.

One of the world's oldest newspapers still in circulation is the Danish national daily *Berlingske Tidende*. The first issue of the newspaper was published in January 1749, and today, with *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken*, established in 1871 and 1884, it is among the newspapers with the highest circulations in Denmark. Much has changed since these newspapers were established, and today digital platforms and social media are challenging not only printed newspapers but the entire business model of the newspaper industry. Nevertheless, newspapers remain important for a study of the representations of religion in news – especially if such studies include an historical dimension. Older studies of representations of religion have criticized the media for not covering various religions in accordance with their size (Ferre 1980), and the news media because they 'are not always neutral institutions simply disseminating facts about societal events and trends' (Richardson and van Driel 1997, 116). I agree with Mark Silk here that news media are never neutral institutions, merely disseminating facts. On the contrary, 'they engage in the business of *shaping* the information at their disposal (good, bad or indifferent) into a culturally significant narrative' (Silk 1997, 137; my emphasis). Stories published in the news media are not neutral and unbiased observations of society, but culturally significant narratives, and studying the representation of religion in the media is thus an observation of the ways in which the media observes religion (Christensen 2018). In this article I examine the media construction of religion in the Danish news. News stories are shaped by a certain understanding of religion and news. This is commonly found in studies of how the media frames religion – Islam, for example (cf. Vellenga 2008; Jacobsen et al. 2013). However, such framing analyses tend to focus on the way journalism shapes or frames its input while ignoring the fact that what counts as input in the first place is also always already part of this process. Journalists only observe religion of some kind, which is then turned into news stories framed in a certain way. Examining the output in the coverage of religions across religious traditions can help us observe the kind of religion journalists can see and use as an input in the first place.

### News in society and religion in the news

With regard to religion and media, Danish society has two large institutions: the *Folkekirken* (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark), established by the democratic constitution of 1849; and the state-run public service broadcaster, *Danmarks Radio* (Denmark's broadcasting company), established in 1925. Both institutions have been *de facto* monopolies for decades. Göran Gustafsson and his colleagues examined religion in the Nordic countries during part of this monopolistic period (Gustafsson et al. 1985). They concluded that religion became less and less visible in society during this period. Both monopolies have been challenged since by increasing diversity. In a more recent work Stig Hjarvard argues that diversity erodes religious authority, and that more visible religion does not equate to more religion. He concludes that at the macro level 'mediatisation is part of the very process of secularisation' (Hjarvard 2011, 131f). The increased diversity in both fields increasingly uses digital platforms to communicate, which can be a source of conflict. Knut Lundby and Pål Repstad write that 'growing diversity in the religious field, as well as in the media landscapes, forms part of the conflicts that are arising' (Lundby and Repstad 2018, 14). Inger Furseth argues in the NOREL project that the situation is more complex today, as we can observe

seemingly contradictory trends, such as growing secularization in the Nordic populations, trends of both differentiation and de-differentiation of religion at the state level, a growing presence of religion as a topic at the political level, a greater visibility of religion in the media, and a deprivatization of religion at the level of civil society (Furseth 2018, 16).

In other words, we can simultaneously observe both decline and growth, secularization and de-secularization, and continuity and change. As Taira mentions in his introduction (Taira 2019a), it is interesting to examine what the category of religion looks like when it is observed by the news media and represented in news production.

In his book on imagined communities Benedict Anderson argues that news and newspapers were important vehicles for the shaping of a national community of citizens (Anderson 1983, 12–22). Newspapers are 'one-day bestsellers' that create a certain sense of time through 'the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper as fiction' (Anderson 1983, 35). The news media thus plays an important role for society's observation of itself. Barbie Zelizer argues that the 'very essence of journal-

ism is creating an imagined engagement with events beyond the public's reach' (Zelizer 2017, 2). Journalism informs readers of events to which they have no personal access. Helle Sjøvaag argues that the press is the medium through which the governed and the government communicate about society (Sjøvaag 2010, 880). Journalism is also about the maintenance of the social order, because it informs the public of transgressions and norm violations (Sjøvaag 2010, 883).

### Religion in Danish newspapers

The material for this article consists primarily of news articles collected through the *Infomedia* database, which collects articles from all newspapers. The oldest newspaper articles in this database are from the 1990s, which means that older material has been collected using the Danish Royal Library's digitization project and microfilm collection. Of the 570 million articles in the corpus, the oldest are from 1750. The corpus is only used for quantitative analyses because of its size, and because, for copyright reasons, the Royal Library only releases articles more than a hundred years old for a large-scale content analysis. Additionally, the article draws on the material collected by the group of researchers responsible for the media part of the NOREL project (Lundby et al. 2018).

#### *Religion in Danish newspapers 1750–1960s*

Although the corpus is huge, it does not contain all the newspapers or issues of a newspaper since 1750. Furthermore, it is currently impossible to filter a search, and the results are therefore based on the entire corpus. The figure below shows the use of the words 'religion' and 'religious'.

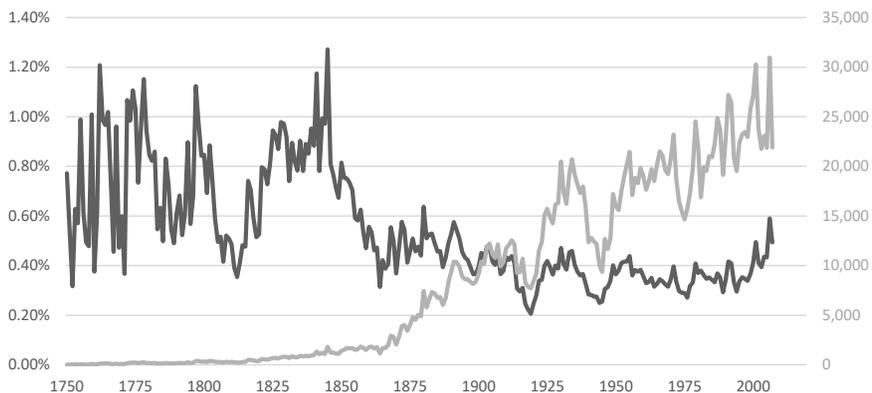


Figure 1: The use of 'religion' over time in absolute and relative numbers, 1750-2007

As Taira mentioned in the introduction, visibility can have a range of meanings, one of them being the quantitative presence of religion in the media. The dark line shows the relative share of articles using the words ‘religion’ or ‘religious’. The variation is huge in the first part of the sample, because it consists of relatively few articles per year. Religion is found in eighteen (of 2 330) articles from 1750 and in nineteen (of 3 495) articles from 1751. The relative share of articles mentioning religion continued to be large until the 1860s. Religion was therefore relatively less visible between the 1860s and 2000. The figure also includes the absolute number of articles, and here we see an increase from the mid-1860s: except for the two world wars, the general trend is to publish more articles mentioning religion. Nevertheless, the share of articles about religion has never returned to pre-1860 levels. Newspapers have therefore published more articles in general, but the share of articles using the word ‘religion’ has remained fairly constant throughout the twentieth century. It is only since the turn of the millennium that the share has begun to increase again and thus also become visible. Specifically examining world religions, the next figure shows the use of Hinduism and Buddhism.

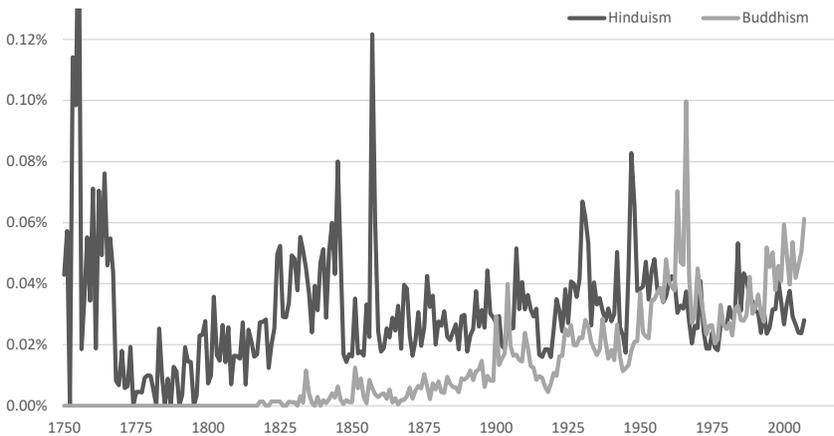


Figure 2: The use of ‘Hinduism’ and ‘Buddhism’, 1750–2007

The figure shows that Hinduism features more often than Buddhism. From a news reporting perspective some obvious events explain this. In 1845 the only Danish colony in India was sold to the British East India Company, and in 1857 there are newspapers reports from the Sepoy Mutiny and In-

dian Insurrection. The peaks of 1930 and 1947 are connected to the road to independence. Gandhi had visited London in 1930 and negotiated a pact with the Viceroy of India that year, and the 1947 peak is connected with the independence of India. Danish newspapers therefore have a long history of global news production. The press history of Buddhism is shorter. There are some articles before the twentieth century, but the first peak is associated with the British invasion of Tibet, which reached the capital, Lhasa, in August 1904. That campaign may explain the numerous articles in the press on the Dalai Lama, Tibet, and Buddhism. Indeed, much of the early coverage concerns Tibet. The 1950 peak is connected with the Chinese invasion of Tibet, and the 1959 peak with the Dalai Lama's flight to India. However, this changes during the 1960s. The 1966 peak consists of 6,200 articles. As we cannot access the articles, we can perhaps assume that the newspapers were beginning to report on young westerners' encounter with Buddhism during the 1960s. Using a combination of search words ('Tibet' or 'Buddhism'; 'Dalai' or 'Buddhism'), it is evident that they co-occur until the peak in the 1960s. Furthermore, the Danish Buddhism researcher Jørn Borup writes that after the late 1960s the young generation behind the civil rights movements, student protests, and the counter-cultural movement transformed Danish Buddhism from an elite literary kind into a practising Buddhism (Borup 2005, 37f.). The coverage of Buddhism shifts from the foreign (non-western) news pages to more local (western) or even domestic pages. It also shifts from a political focus on international relations to one on more individualized forms of religion, following the counter-cultural break with the establishment. Neither religion is mentioned to the same extent as Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, though the number of references to Islam and Hinduism is remarkably similar until 1979.

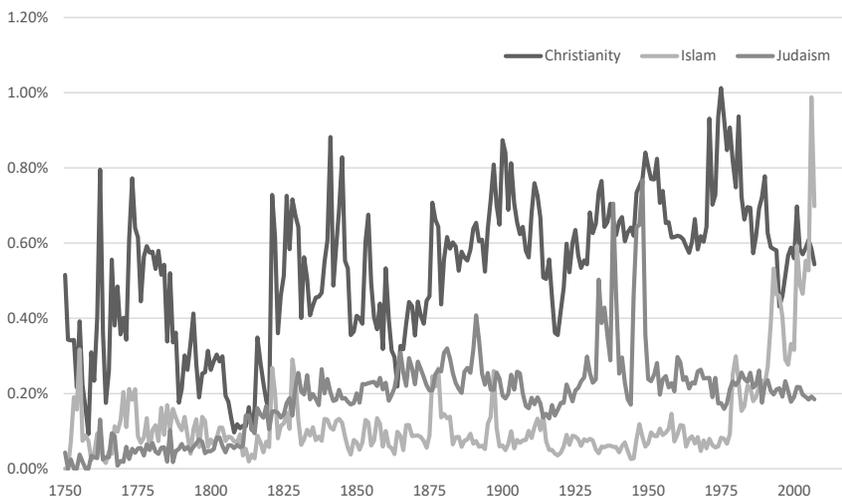


Figure 3: The share of articles using 'Christianity', 'Judaism', and 'Islam', 1750–2007

The figure shows the relative development in the use of the words ‘Christianity’, ‘Judaism’, and ‘Islam’ with different spellings, including nouns and adjectives for both religion and adherents. Christianity is mentioned in five out of every 1,000 articles on average; Judaism and Islam are mentioned in fewer than two out of every 1,000 articles. Historically, it is worth noting that both Judaism and Islam have always been visible in the Danish news. Judaism is mentioned more often than Islam. The difference between the averages of 1.9 and 1.2 articles out of every 1 000 amounts to almost 500 000 more articles mentioning Judaism. Concerning Judaism, there are obvious peaks related to the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel. Concerning Islam, the arrival of guest workers in the late 1960s and the 1970s does not seem to trigger the use of the term ‘Islam’. Indeed, it does not seem the use of ‘Islam’ increased dramatically until the Islamic Revolution in Iran, with the exception of a few peaks during the nineteenth century. After the late 1970s ‘Islam’ occurs increasingly frequently in the newspapers and surpasses ‘Christianity’ in 1995, 2006, and 2007.

However, this data is affected by some methodological problems. Some of the oldest newspaper articles refer to Iceland rather than Islam, because the software has some difficulty in recognizing Gothic lettering.<sup>1</sup> I have included different spellings, but over a 250-year period terms other than the present ones may have been used. Islam was long called the religion of Muhammad, *Muhammadanism*. And Muhammad has also been spelled differently: for example, as ‘Mahomet’ (and his religion as ‘Mahometism’). I have combined ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’, which results in more hits and less variation. This shows they are not used interchangeably, evening out some of the peaks found when only searching for one word. The Crimean War of 1853–4 is less visible if ‘Islam’ is the only search term used. However, there is a visible peak surrounding the uprising in the Balkans, the dethroning of Sultan Abdülaziz, and the war against Russia in the late 1870s. Indeed, it is of the same relative magnitude as the Islamic Revolution in Iran a hundred years later. The quotation opening this article is from an introduction to Islam published in *Berlingske Tidende* by a professor of Semitic languages at the University of Copenhagen in June 1876. It is a 3 500-word introduction to the history of Islam, aiming to demonstrate why a Muslim state is unsustainable.

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1 This corresponds roughly to *Islam* vs *Island*, but we need also to consider the effect of time on a 175-year-old newspaper page. The letters may not even have been clearly set when they were printed, but over time they have become even more blurred.

I will sum up this part of the study by examining the difference between the coverage before and after the Second World War.

**Table 1:** Number of articles before and after the Second World War

	1750–1945			1946–2007		
	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD	n= <sup>b</sup>	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD	n= <sup>b</sup>
Atheism	0.5	0.4	10.7	1.0	0.4	35.2
Buddhism	0.6	0.8	33.5	3.7	1.4	130.3
Christianity	48.0	18.3	1 329.0	68.3	12.4	2 353.0
Hinduism	3.0	2.1	69.4	3.4	1.1	115.2
Islam	9.3	5.2	166.5	21.6	19.2	773.9
Judaism	17.0	10.8	563.1	24.6	10.6	830.5
Religion	59.6	23.5	870.2	36.4	5.5	1 265.0
Secular	0.5	0.4	5.0	1.0	0.4	21.6

<sup>a</sup> Number of articles using keyword per 10 000 articles.

<sup>b</sup> Total number of articles including religious keywords in 1 000s.

All differences are statistically significant at the  $p < .001$  level

The table shows how many articles mention a specific keyword. For every 10,000 articles published forty-eight mention Christianity in the first period, and sixty-eight in the second. This is not the only interesting thing about the number of articles published. First, the table also shows that all keywords except the word 'religion' itself have increased. 'Religion' was the most used word in the first period, with 'Christianity' a close second. In the most recent period they have switched places. 'Religion' is the only word that has decreased in use. It is possible that 'religion' was used interchangeably with 'Christianity', or that all other religions were more often described simply as religions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while the twentieth-century news media became more specific. Yet the expectation that increased religious diversity would make the use of a generic term such as 'religion' occur more frequently is not met. Second, 'Judaism' is the third most used term in the newspapers in the corpus. Third, 'Hinduism' has received almost the same amount of coverage throughout both periods, while 'Buddhism' has shown an increase in the most recent. The second column shows the standard deviation. 'Christianity' has increased in use and decreased in variation, revealing that it has fluctuated less from year to year. However, 'Islam' has increased both in use and in variation, which means that the coverage of Islam has fluctuated more from year to

year in the most recent period. The last column shows the total number of articles using a keyword. There are 8.5 million newspaper articles in the above table, with 5.5 million published since 1946. In the period between 1750 and 1945 the keywords were mentioned in 1.38 per cent of the total corpus, increasing to 1.58 per cent in the most recent period.<sup>2</sup> In summary, religion has been a stable presence in Danish news production for centuries. In raw numbers all these terms are only mentioned in two more articles out of every 1,000 articles in the post-war period compared to the two hundred years prior to this. However, the content may very well have changed. The following sections examine studies of religion in the news and news articles in the last fifty years.

#### *Religion in Danish newspapers, 1970s–1990s*

With the arrival of migrant guest workers from southern Europe, Turkey, and Pakistan newspapers began to cover immigration rather than religion. There are some studies of the coverage of religion and religious diversity before the 1980s, but many more studies of guest workers (Würtz-Sørensen 1988a; Madsen 2000; Andreassen 2007). During the 1980s researchers began to focus on religion just as the newspapers were beginning to. This probably reflects events such as the election of a new pope and the Jonestown massacre in 1978, the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and the arrival of refugees from the Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988. Ole Riis (1985), who wrote the chapter on Denmark in Gustafsson's book about religion in the Nordic countries, concludes that the number of articles covering religion has increased. He collected articles from the Easter and Christmas editions of four newspapers: *Socialdemokraten*, and the papers already mentioned, *Berlingske Tidende*, *Jyllands-Posten*, and *Politiken*. In 1938 there was almost no coverage of religion in *Jyllands-Posten*, and only sporadic coverage in *Politiken* and *Socialdemokraten*. However, the conservative newspaper, *Berlingske Tidende*, published some articles about the national church. In 1958 *Politiken* and *Socialdemokraten* covered religion broadly, while the nature of *Berlingske Tidende's* coverage had not changed. Even the Sunday column had the same title as in 1938. Riis found an increase in *Jyllands-Posten* in the broad coverage of religion, church-related news, and reflections from the perspective of the philosophy of religion. In 1978 the coverage of religion had

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<sup>2</sup> Scanning mistakes may have inflated the share in the oldest part of the material. Similarly, the share in the recent period may also be inflated, because more articles mention more than one religion today than previously.

increased in *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken*, and articles in the latter were often critical of religion. The coverage in *Berlingske Tidende* had still not changed greatly and focused mainly on the national church. Unfortunately, there is little detailed analysis of the newspaper material. He provides no statistics to illustrate what 'almost no coverage' and 'several articles' mean. Indeed, this is a common feature of most of these early studies. His findings are at odds with the findings from the corpus analysis mentioned above. This may result from two factors: first, Riis bases his findings on a few select weeks that may in some ways be biased; second, the corpus search engine is blind to context: it counts a keyword if it is used, regardless of whether the article actually focuses on religion.

In the late 1980s the historian Jørgen Würtz-Sørensen started documenting the newspaper account of the immigration resulting from the economic boom in the late 1960s. He published a series of working papers describing the coverage decade by decade and concluded that religion was absent in the representation of migrants. This group includes all 'southerners': people from Spain, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and later Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq. The entire group is represented negatively as men 'stealing' jobs and women from Danish men, but this image does not include references to Islam. Only a few articles mention Islam indirectly – for example, when employers praise guest workers for not drinking alcohol (on the job) (cf. Würtz-Sørensen 1988a, 1988b, 1990). This corroborates the quantitative analysis above. The use of 'Islam' does not increase with the first guest workers, but with the revolution in Iran.

One of the few who have quantified the coverage is Jacob Gaarde Madsen, who published a book in the Danish Democracy Project (*Magtudredningen*) in 2000. He examined the coverage of refugees and immigrants in 1970, 1984, 1993, and 1998 in *Jyllands-Posten*, *Politiken*, and one of the tabloids, *BT*. He does not mention religion in his treatment of the 1970 material (Madsen 2000).

In the 1980s the newspapers started to devote more attention to migration based on the war between Iran and Iraq, and the increased national focus created by the right-wing populist Progress Party. A study by Øystein Gaasholt and Lise Tøgeby suggests 'the Muhammadan threat' was first mentioned in 1985, when the Progress Party replaced their economic argument against migrants with a cultural one (Gaasholt and Tøgeby 1996, 29). This is not to suggest that other critics abandoned the economic argument, but that by the late 1980s Islam and Muslims had emerged as a category of their own. In 1988 the first edited volume on Islam and Muslims in the

Danish media was published (Olesen 1988). One of the chapters examined the representation of Islam over twenty-one months between 1986 and 1987 in the small left-wing newspaper *Information* (Pedersen 1988). The study concluded that Islam was always connected with fundamentalism, fanaticism, crime, or terror, and explained every conflict, from wars to domestic disturbances. In another contribution Hussain argued that time constraints especially make journalists buy into already established but false truths concerning Islam (Hussain 1988).

In the NOREL material from 1988 Lundby et al. showed that newspapers gave most coverage to Christianity. *Jyllands-Posten* still had a theological column every Sunday, and it was prominently placed on the same page as the editorial. Apart from this column written by a group of pastors, the newspapers did not cover events and development within the church unless they had a clear potential for conflict. One such case focused on one of the bishops, who encouraged pastors and parish councils to boycott Shell as providers of oil for heating churches and vicarages because they supported the apartheid regime in South Africa. This initiated a debate on the politicization of the church. Similarly, coverage focused on the inherent or potential conflict in other cases – for example, when a group of pastors started a petition encouraging politicians not to allow same-sex marriage. There were a few articles on the Catholic Church in *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken* about the anniversary of the election of John Paul II. Both newspapers also mentioned the speech the pope gave to the European Parliament, and the events in Poland when the Solidarity movement organized strikes against the communist regime were also covered.

There was little coverage of other religions or spirituality. Both *Jyllands-Posten* and *Ekstra Bladet* wrote about astrology as a new form of alternative spirituality. *Jyllands-Posten* wrote that it had gone from being ‘an occult speciality for weirdoes’ to something everyone knew about, and it thus hinted at the increasing acceptance of individual choice in matters related to religion. Other religions were scarcely mentioned, though an important exception was in *Ekstra Bladet*, which featured a series of articles on Jehovah’s Witnesses called ‘Jehovah’s Hell’, focusing on the conditions under which the children and young people lived. Finally, Scientology was also covered in a few articles. The coverage focused on the economic exploitation of people: we are told that ‘the sect is notorious for its greed’. Other articles covered some of the lawsuits Scientology had lost. The only article that mentioned an Eastern religion was in *Jyllands-Posten*’s religious-philosophical column ‘The Man in the Forest Cabin’, where the author had heard a radio broad-

cast about people and faith. 'The other day there was a conversation with a Danish Buddhist about soul travel, reincarnation, and the belief in the immortality so many people want. There is no end to what people demand these days' (*Jyllands-Posten* 16 October 1988).

The war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s saw Denmark receiving many Bosnian refugees. The coverage of these Muslims was largely positive, because the population could identify with them (Jensen 2000, 484ff). As already mentioned, Madsen showed that the 1970s material did not refer to Islam. In his content analysis of the 1990s, however, he argues that after 1998 the cultural argument became more dominant than the economic one (Madsen 2000). Similarly, Tim O'Connor examined the coverage of ethnic minorities and Islam in six daily newspapers and the evening news on the two television channels in September, October, and November 1996. He concluded that the coverage of Islam was based on conflict. Very few articles focused on Islam only as a religion: they combined Islam with politics and tradition (O'Connor 1997, 143). In 1999 Peter Hervik edited a book on the Danish reaction to increased multiculturalism (Hervik 1999). Three of the book's seven chapters examined the media coverage of Muslims. The book's general argument concerned the clash between an imagined public tolerance and anti-racist attitude in Denmark on the one hand and how physical and cultural boundaries on the other told another story (cf. Fadel et al. 1999; Jørgensen and Bülow 1999; Toft 1999).

The material from the NOREL project shows that *Jyllands-Posten* was still publishing its theological columns every Sunday, and that Christianity, especially the national church, was not always covered negatively. There were stories on the renovation of the Cathedral in Aarhus, the new chasubles made by the Queen, the reopening of the Danish church in Paris, and the publication of a new hymnal. There was little news about Christianity in *Politiken*, but there was some on the church's dire economic situation, the declining attendance rate at Sunday services, and a few articles about a pastor who had hidden refugees who had been sent back to Serbia. One story featured in all three newspapers, both in news articles and letters to the editor. This concerned the publication of a textbook on minorities by the author Kåre Bluitgen. The chairman of the Council for Ethnic Equality advised the author to retract it or be charged with discrimination. Because the chairman was one of the bishops in the national church, the church was also dragged into the debate. *Jyllands-Posten* defended Bluitgen's freedom of speech, and accused the chairman of authoritarianism and censorship, while *Politiken* criticized the project. It was 'as well intentioned as it [was]

dangerous' because he was so set on 'provoking a debate that he [forgot about] promoting enlightenment'. Although the Muhammad caricature crisis was still seven years away, it is interesting to see the positions and read the arguments in this debate, because they can be seen as a rehearsal for a much larger debate to come. As it turns out, the Muhammad caricatures were a project initiated by Bluitgen.

In 1998 *Jyllands-Posten* launched an expedition called 'JP Explorer', featuring reports from wherever the newspaper's 4WD jeep went. In the NOREL material there were a few articles from Burkina Faso and Zambia which mentioned religion. In one article, entitled 'Sacrificing to the Sacred Fish of the Bush', the journalists discover that 'the most sacred beings according to the Bobo people are some cat-like fish far out in the bush. JP Explorer sacrificed a chicken, but was not convinced.' Later they report from their stay 'at the end of the world'. 'Where else would the new religious movement Raëlism meet? We freely admit that this sounds like a malaria-induced fantasy, but it isn't.' At Christmas the JP Explorer team met a Danish missionary couple in Zambia. They had sold their house and firm in Denmark because the husband had received a calling eight years previously. The explorers found this quite natural and did not exoticize them as they had the Bobo people or Raëlists. These stories show that the media was aware of religious diversity, but it is difficult to treat the diverse range of religious expression equally.

#### *Religion in Danish newspapers, 2000s–2010s*

One of the few other quantitative studies of the coverage of Islam and Christianity has been undertaken by Mathias Rosenfeldt. He examined the number of daily articles about these religions in *Jyllands-Posten*, *Politiken*, and *BT* in 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005. He was only interested in the number of articles, not the actual content.

He found that Islam was mentioned in more articles in 2005 than in the other years in his sample, which is similar to the corpus data results shown above (Rosenfeldt 2007, 35). Part of this may be explained by the caricature crisis, but that debate was in itself a debate in the media (and eventually also the rest of society) on the way religious diversity could be addressed by the media in a setting where religious sensibilities might clash with secular freedoms. It is also noteworthy that the number of articles mentioning Christianity also increased in 2005.

Before the 2001 terror attacks the Council for Ethnic Equality decided to repeat the 1997 study of media representations. On this occasion Peter

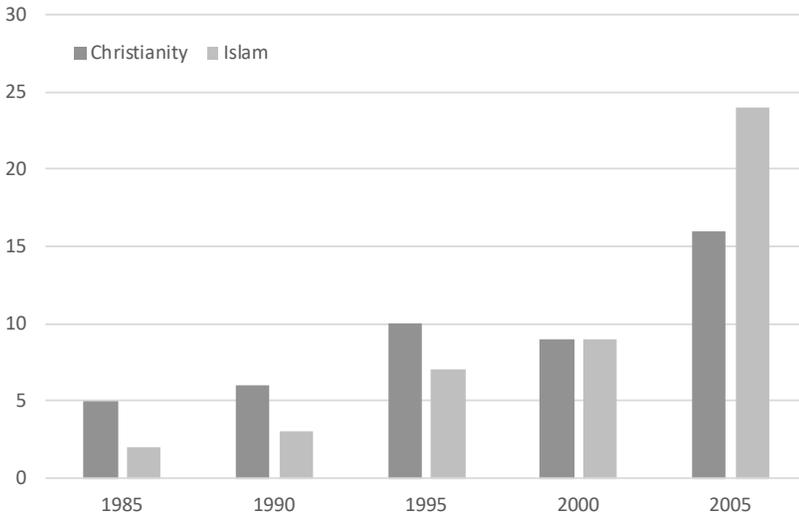


Figure 4: Daily articles about Islam and Christianity in selected years (Rosenfeldt 2007)

Hervik was responsible for the study. He wished to examine religion in the news. He writes that the preliminary title was *The Media's Religion*, because he wanted to examine the kind of religion the media covered. However, he discovered that the media only covered Islam, and settled on another title: *The Media's Muslims* (2002). Like previous studies, he concluded that Muslims were represented as supporters of an archaic, anti-humanist, totalitarian, violent, and ignorant religion (Hervik 2002, 127). Rikke Andreassen examined the construction of migrants in television news, and in her chapter on the veil she reached the same conclusion – that is, that the news portrayed Islam as repressive and intolerant (Andreassen 2007). Christensen (2007) examined the coverage of Islam in a representative sample of all the seven national dailies' articles on Islam and Muslims in 2001. He concluded that although 2001 was a special case because of the terror attacks, the nature of the coverage did not differ substantially from that found by Hussain and Larsen in the 1980s (Hussain 1988; Larsen 1988), or Madsen, and Gaasholt and Togeby in the 1990s. What had changed was not the coverage's actual content but the extent to and intensity with which the issue was discussed. This was a general pattern through the first part of the 2000s, but the Muhammad caricatures changed this. There was a natural division of labour in the coverage of Islam until 2005: the foreign news section covered Islam as a military and security threat in relation to military campaigns, the war on terror, and contemporary terror attacks around the world; the domestic

news section covered Islam first as an economic burden and later as a cultural threat against Danish values – for example, when Muslim’s demands were accepted in the school or health systems (cf. Sløk 2006). With the Muhammad caricatures and the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 the focus shifts to the new threat from homegrown terrorists. In 2005 the first group planning to carry out a terrorist attack was arrested, and two other groups followed in 2007. The security dimension thus also entered the domestic news. The caricature crisis saw the Danish news media publishing more articles on Islam than ever before. *Jyllands-Posten*, *Politiken*, and *Ekstra Bladet* published 8,378 articles the first year after the 2001 terrorist attacks; they published 13,243 articles the first year after the publication of the caricatures. Hervik published a qualitative and longitudinal study of the coverage of Islam in the press, with case studies from 1997 (an *Ekstra Bladet* campaign), 2001 (on young Muslims seeking influence in political parties), and 2006 (the Muhammad caricature crisis) arguing, as in the 1977 Danish book, that the news media supported and reproduced a neo-racist discourse (Hervik 2011).

Since 2010 the coverage has focused on terrorist attacks on European soil: Norway 2011; Paris and Copenhagen 2015; Berlin, Brussels, and Nice 2016; and London and Stockholm 2017. Asta Andersen argues that journalists presuppose that terrorism is committed by Muslims. Examining the coverage of Breivik’s attacks in Norway, she argues that ‘the expectation that terrorist attacks are Islamic is not immediately correlated with the probability that it is Muslims who have carried them out. Rather, journalists have been so accustomed to the fact that Islamic terrorism happens that this is how they understand and interpret reality’ (Andersen 2014, 252). This is more than probability; it is the lens through which reality is seen.

The coverage of radicalization is amplified by the civil war in Syria and the war against ISIS, because part of the coverage focuses not only on the risk of homegrown terrorists, but on how young Muslims born and raised in western societies join ISIS. As Taira mentions in the introduction, any differences between foreign and domestic news are interesting. There are some, but concerning Islamic terrorism the two types of news converge in the coverage of the security risks associated with the return of foreign fighters. In other words, coverage before 2001 placed the security threat in distant lands, while coverage after 2001 also focused on domestic security threats. The latest development is the homegrown terrorists who leave the country only to return more dangerous than they were before. The issue of Islam as a cultural threat and the silent Islamization of society also continues to

be of interest. After long preparation a new law against face covering came into effect in 2018, which was inevitably seen as targeting Muslim women wearing the burka or niqab. At the same time the government decided applicants for Danish citizenship should shake hands with a civil servant. In these debates both gender and lack of respect for Danish society and its values became important. And in both issues Islam (or some versions) has been seen as incompatible with Danish values.

Christianity has also been more visible in recent decades, but this does not extend to the Catholic Church. Benedict XVI was elected in 2005, but there was no anniversary coverage in 2008 or 2018. Although the Catholic Church has been covered intensely since the turn of the millennium because of sexual abuse, this does not appear in any of the material we have collected, and I have found no studies of the Danish media coverage of sexual abuse cases. Hjarvard uses this case as an example of how journalism investigates transgression and refers to *Berlingske Tidende*, where one hundred articles on sexual abuse were compiled and given a dedicated 'news theme' on their website (Hjarvard 2012, 33f). Meanwhile, Buddhism is covered in more articles than in 1988 and 1998. In 2008 the Olympic Games in China triggered a number of articles on human rights, the invasion of Tibet, and Buddhism in all three newspapers. Buddhism received other positive coverage. A curious example is an article in *Ekstra Bladet* about a Chinese construction worker who was buried alive by accident but survived, because he meditated and thereby decreased his oxygen consumption. In *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken* there are two articles on meditation practices: *Jyllands-Posten* published an article on meditation at the 'Institute of Depth Therapy', which offered free meditation classes to help all to achieve greater awareness and self-realization. Subscribers to *Politiken* were invited to a workshop on 'the five Tibetans' – meditation practices originally developed by Buddhist monks. In the 2018 material all three newspapers begin to discuss Buddhism negatively in their coverage of the conflict between the Buddhist regime in Myanmar and the attack on and eventual ethnic cleansing of the Muslim Rohingya ethnic group, who were being forced out of Myanmar into neighbouring countries.

Coverage of the majority church has become more visible in recent decades. After almost seventy years of coverage, *Jyllands-Posten* published the last of its Sunday theological columns in March 2009. Nevertheless, church issues has become more visible because of greater contestation. There have been several public debates on religion. In 2006 the cathedral in Copenhagen exhibited a statue depicting a crucified and pregnant African woman,

intended to criticize American and Vatican development aid organizations and their attitude to contraception. Another intense debate followed COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009. Some pastors suggested that churches should toll their bells three hundred and fifty times (to reflect the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere if global warming were to be avoided). Like the statue in front of the cathedral, this led to an intense debate on the politicization of religion. Another debate in 2009 arose when a pastor (and his parish council) decided to grant asylum seekers sanctuary in their church. After months of tension, and in front of several hundred demonstrators, the police raided the church and arrested the people inside. The pastor was accused in the debate of taking the church hostage for political reasons. There have also been public debates on theology. Since the millennium, the newspapers have been arenas for the theological conflicts within the church. In 2003 a pastor wrote a book in which he denied the existence of a creator, but it was not until he was interviewed by a newspaper that it became a national public debate. The issue was debated for years, because the church (and the political system) did not know what to do. Some wanted him tried in an ecclesiastical court, but his parish supported him. This sparked a debate on the articles of faith. The pastor was under the supervision of various bishops until he retired. During the Christmas of 2014 *Jyllands-Posten* sent a questionnaire to all pastors, asking if they believed in the literal resurrection of Christ. Although the survey was anonymous, the pastor who had offered sanctuary in 2009 gave an interview in which he argued that he did not believe in the literal resurrection. He was placed under supervision for most of 2015, and the ending of this supervision was reported in the news. A few weeks later, in November 2015, another pastor announced in a television show that she believed in reincarnation and had no problems reconciling this with being a pastor. She was suspended but reinstated in early 2016 after a theological examination by her bishop. In all these cases the media played a pivotal role. These notwithstanding, one of the most important sources of debate in all newspapers is the 2012 law on same-sex marriage. The Labour government and the minister of ecclesiastical affairs agreed a new marriage law and charged the bishops with the task of producing an appropriate marriage ritual for same-sex couples. From the day of the government's announcement of its intentions to the day the new law was implemented, the matter was debated in the newspapers, and on radio and television (Christensen 2013). Finally, there have been debates on the relationship between Christianity and Danishness. Marie Vejrup Nielsen has examined the use of Luther in the debate section in *Jyllands-Posten* and

*Politiken* in 2000 and 2001. She argues that Luther is used as a rhetorical strategy for debating the role of Islam in Danish society and concludes the debates are political rather than theological debates on Denmark's national identity (Nielsen 2011, 317). Henrik Reintoft Christensen has examined the news in *Politiken*, *Jyllands-Posten*, and *Ekstra Bladet* in 2006 and finds a similar use of Christianity, which he argues is an indication of its culturalization (Christensen 2010). This was also evident in the debate following the 2016 Atheist Society bus campaign that encouraged people to leave the church (Thyssen 2018).

### **The category of religion in the news**

This article has primarily focused on the coverage of national dailies in the last thirty years, though the first part of the analysis examined a much wider timeframe. The analysis has identified a number of continuities and discontinuities. From a purely quantitative perspective the total number of articles on religion has increased, but so has the total number of articles in general, and in the last two hundred and fifty years the share of articles on religion is smaller today than it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, we do not know the exact content of the material. Nevertheless, we can say that as with Lundby's analysis of documents concerning the Norwegian case (Lundby 2019), Lövheim's of the Swedish case (Lövheim 2019), and Taira's of the Finnish cases (Taira 2019b), Islam has also become more visible in the Danish news. Supplementing this, the longer historical timeframe of this study shows that the coverage is quite similar over time. Islam's representation as a religion in the 1876 introduction resembles much of the contemporary coverage, with a single great exception. Today, the Islam that is covered is itself in Denmark.

The journalist finds sources to contribute to a story and decides how it is framed, and in this sense most news organizations will not treat religious sources differently from nonreligious ones. The religious authorities have little involvement in the actual *production* of the news, but they may be used as sources, examined for transgressions, and made the *content* of the news. Such news can be differently framed, intentionally or unintentionally, based on the story, the newspaper/journalist, and general societal values. One of the core values in Danish society seems to be that religion is a private matter and should not be part of the public sphere. Much of the content about religion reveals that when religion is a major issue in an article, not merely an adjective about a person (being a cultural Christian), a group (Iran's

Islamic clergy), or a country (describing Israel as a Jewish state), it often revolves around transgressions or boundary disputes. The distinction between public and private is important in one set of boundary disputes. This is a primary distinction when pastors get involved in public life: boycotting Shell; harbouring deportees; or criticizing American development aid. This is also found in all the debates on the Islamization of society. In his focus on journalism about religion Hjarvard (2012, 32) argues that journalism brings religion into public and political life. This is also a general conclusion of the analyses of the coverage of religion in the news in this article.

However, it is worth emphasizing the irony in the widespread public discussion of a matter that is nonetheless suggested should remain private. The second boundary dispute focuses on the distinction between true and false Christianity. There are several examples of the coverage of theological disputes in the press, and they have become more frequent, with increasing diversity and individualization (cf. Taira in this issue). Must pastors believe in a creator or in the resurrection? Can pastors believe in reincarnation, or in clairvoyance and telepathy? These are debates in the national secular newspapers in Denmark, and in none are there voices arguing that religion is a private matter. These conflicts bear no relation to politics, education, or the public space, and it is apparently unproblematic to discuss religion in public. The third boundary dispute focuses on national identity, and the role religion plays in this. It examines whether you have to be Christian to be Danish, or if you can be Muslim. Very little attention is paid to religion as a public utility, but Christianity might be seen from this perspective as a narrative that strengthened national unity and cohesion. However, this is a more abstract idea of utility than Taira mentions in the introduction, which focuses more on welfare services.

It is clear that journalists observe religion according to the general criteria for newsworthiness. In this sense news production and its mediatization of religion is a secularizing force, as Hjarvard argues. But it is more than this. It is important to note that not all religions and not everything religious make the news. Some religions are more exotic, and some stories are more easily picked up as news than others. What do the stories of sacred fish in Burkina Faso, of attitudes to blood transfusions among the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the participation of pastors in public debates on climate change, the apartheid regime, same-sex marriages, and the use of Luther tell us about religion in the news? Despite their differences, they have at least one thing in common: they have been identified as newsworthy by journalists and their editors. Many stories never become news stories, and the media

representation of religion fails to reflect the multitude of religious expressions. News criteria often involve drama, conflict, and surprise, which are not necessarily features most religious people associate with their religious identity. The religion found in the media often irritates religious individuals precisely because the coverage is based on criteria which they do not think are very important. We see this in the coverage of Scientology, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Islam in what Ali Hussain calls the clash of misconception (Hussain 2007). Hussain studies the caricature crisis, but this is relevant for how religion is represented in the news in general: the journalistic religious semantic is one of a kind. First, our observations of the media observations of religion reveal that norm violation and contestation – not merely secularization – is integral to them. Second, and more importantly, our observations reveal that there is a paradoxical continuity in the journalists' observations of discontinuities. Their existence depends on convincing readers that tomorrow will be different from today. However, today is often remarkably like yesterday.

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