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Research Project:
Religions inside the UN-System

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1. The Return of Religion into World Politics?

During the Mid 1990s Mark Juergensmeyer¹ and Samuel P. Huntington² triggered a controversy on the role of religions in worldwide politics. Standing in the tradition of International Relations-analysis, they referred to religions as the basis of a clash of civilizations or perhaps even a new Cold War. Both diagnoses served as the starting point for a public debate on the resurgence or the return of religions and initiated a wide range of further academic research³. In the wake of this debate, the academic view on the secularity of modern societies underwent fundamental changes. Criticising the so-called ‘secularization-theory’, an increasing number of authors underlined the significance of religious beliefs and practices in modern societies. To quote but one of the protagonists of this debate:

*“My point is that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today, with some exceptions to which I will come presently, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labelled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.”*⁴

Without doing justice to the complexity of this discussion, it is possible to highlight three specific features. In general, they illustrate the important role religious actors play on the present-day political scene:⁵

- (a) The commentators talk about a *global return of religions* taking place in a variety of national or political contexts.
- (b) Moreover, they identify *the 1979 Iranian Revolution* as the major milestone of this development.
- (c) Finally, the majority of analyses emphasize either *extremist religious groups or extreme political situations*.

In some respects, however, these interpretations have to be reframed or reconsidered: First, the long history of interaction between religious and political actors has to be kept in mind. As soon as one talks about religion and politics as two separate social spheres, one has to admit, that there is no religious history without political implications and vice versa. Second, extremist groups must not be equalled with the religious traditions they form a (small) part of. Religious groups have developed a wide range of different tools to cooperate with politics. Third, parallel national developments do not necessarily stand for a global trend. The worldwide political scene has changed in a variety of ways and so did the religious activities.

¹ Juergensmeyer, Mark, *The New Cold War?, - Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State -*, Berkeley / Los Angeles / London 1993.

² Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York / London / Toronto / Sydney 1996.

³ Among the most profound analysts: Haynes, Jeff, *Religion in Global Politics*, Essex 1998. Madeley, John T. S. (ed.), *Religion and Politics*, Aldershot 2003 (The International Library of Politics and Comparative Government).

⁴ Berger, Peter L., *The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview*, in: Berger, Peter L. (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World, - Resurgent Religion and World Politics -*, Washington 1999, p. 2.

⁵ In this proposal I use this term in order to emphasise the social aspect of religious phenomena. The term ‘group’ or ‘actor’ stands for a social entity, whose members have a particular religious believe or practice in common. In addition, the term ‘tradition’ emphasises a broader common sense. In this terminology Lutheranism or Shi’it Islam stand for specific ‘religious traditions’. The Lutheran churches in Germany or particular Sufi orders are ‘religious groups’ or ‘religious actors’.

Taking these general convictions into consideration, the **research project presented below** wants to add a Religious Studies-perspective to the debate on the return of religions: The author focuses on the activities of religious representatives in the context of the two major political world-organisations (the League of Nations (LoN) and especially the United Nations (UN)). On this basis, he intends to analyse the activities of religious actors on the political scene of International Relations.

2. Religious Actors in the Context of the Political World-Organisations

2.1. First Academic Approaches

Until most recently, academic researchers approached this field predominantly from two directions. On the one hand, Religious Studies-scholars emphasized the globalization of religious phenomena alluding to old and new worldwide religious institutions (e.g. the Baha'i-community or the Roman-Catholic Church) as well as more fluid religious networks (inside Muslim traditions for instance or inside the Protestant denominations).⁶ On the other hand, political and sociological scientists talked about the downfall of the nation state and the increasing influence of supranational political institutions (such as the European Union or the United Nations) as well as the development of an international Civil Society (around international Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) or Conferences).⁷

Among others, Susanne H. Rudolph and James Piscatori started to combine these two approaches to a new research agenda. In cooperation with the contributors to their edition on 'Transnational Religion and Fading States' they intended to rethink Cold War conceptions of security after the end of Cold War bipolarity.⁸ Distinguishing between religious networks and religious organizations they argued:

*"Thousands of interveners in transnational space have the authority and power to provide an alternative to state activity, not replace it. The process being described here is not the collapse or demise but rather the thinning of their effect, function, and finality. Transnational activity is guided by imaginary maps whose boundaries do not approximate the spaces depicted on political maps - for example, the (large) transnational realm of Catholic Christianity, or the (smaller) transnational realm of the Tijaniyya Sufis."*⁹

From different angles, the authors of the 'Culture and Religion in International Relations'-series (edited by Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil) elaborated on this agenda. Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos for example argued for a systematic incorporation of religion into the analysis of international relations: "In its *weak version*, [... this approach] calls for the elaboration of new interpretative categories and analytical frameworks. [... The *strong version*] calls for a new subfield of International Relations, what she [Vendulka Kubálková]

⁶ Beyer, Peter (ed.), Religion im Prozess der Globalisierung / Religion in the Process of Globalization, Würzburg 2001 (Religion in der Gesellschaft). Juergensmeyer, Mark, Global Religions, - An Introduction – Oxford 2003.

⁷ Beck, Ulrich (ed.), Perspektiven der Weltgesellschaft / Perspectives on World Society, Frankfurt a. Main 1998 (Edition Zweite Moderne). Fues, Thomas / Hamm, Brigitte I. (eds.), Die Weltkonferenzen der 90er Jahre / The world-conferences of the 90s, - Baustellen für Global Governance -, Bonn 2001. Boli, John / Thomas, George M. (eds.), Constructiong World Culture, - International Nongovernmental Organisations since 1875 -, Stanford 1999.

⁸ Rudolph, Susanne H. / Piscatori, James (eds.), Transnational Religion and Fading State, Boulder / Oxford 1997.

⁹ Ibd, p. 12.

terms International Political Theology.¹⁰ Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler followed a more tentative approach. On the basis of statistical surveys, they highlighted the direct influence of religious convictions on the legitimacy of political agendas and international conflicts.¹¹

Last year Scott M. Thomas presented an analysis that focussed on the role of religious groups in International Relations. Putting himself into the tradition of the English School of International Relations, he pointed out that a global resurgence of religion challenges “our interpretation of the modern world – what is meant to be modern – and this has implications for our understanding how culture and religion influence international relations.”¹² From this point of view, Thomas argued for an interdisciplinary approach, to analyse the influence of religious groups on international political processes: “September 11 dramatically demonstrated the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion in international relations.”¹³

This last remark makes an important point. Despite all their differences, the publications mentioned above, have one thing in common. - They come from the tradition of political sciences and use two rather distinct approaches to religious phenomena: On the one hand the more empirical analyses (such as Hayes or Sandler) stand in the tradition of comparative political sciences and incorporate religious phenomena in their research design by adding religion- or church-centred items (such as church-attendance or ethnic population) to their surveys. On the other hand, the more theoretical publications (e.g. Petito/Hatzopoulos or Thomas) allude to concepts of religion more or less influenced by the so-called ‘new paradigm of the sociology of religions’.¹⁴ They focus on rational decision-making and institutional structures.

From a Religious Studies-perspective, both approaches underestimate the diversity of religious traditions as well as the influences of concrete religious beliefs and practices on social actors. Following this line of thoughts, one has to get a more detailed idea of the specific religious activities inside a specific social setting. The activities of religious groups inside the UN-system might serve as an example to analyse these processes.

2.2. Glance at the Religions inside the UN-system

In order to draw an appropriate picture of these processes, the political world-organisations must not be reduced to the role of more or less powerful diplomatic institutions. The history of the League of Nations (LoN) as well as the United Nations (UN) is a history of nearly all the major topics of recent world-politics: the two World Wars, the Israel-Palestine-conflict, the de-colonization-process, the proclamation of human rights, the rise and fall of the East-West-confrontation, the situation of the Third World and so on and so forth. All these topics were discussed on the diverse and changing scene of both world-organisations.¹⁵

¹⁰ Hatzopoulos, Pavlos / Petito, Fabio, The Return from Exile, - An Introduction -, in: Petito, Fabio / Hatzopoulos, Pavlos (eds.), Religion in International Relations, - The Return from Exile -, New York / Basingstoke 2003, p. 4+5 (Culture and Religion in International Relations).

¹¹ Fox, Jonathan / Sandler, Shmuel, Bringing Religion into International Relations, New York / Basingstoke 2004 (Culture and Religion in International Relations).

¹² Thomas, Scott M., The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations, - The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-First Century -, New York / Basingstoke 2005, p. 10 (Culture and Religion in International Relations).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁴ Young, Lawrence A. (ed.), Rational Choice Theory and Religion, - Summary and Assessment -, New York / London 1997.

¹⁵ Opitz, Peter J., Die Vereinten Nationen / The United Nations, - Geschichte, Struktur, Perspektiven -, München 2002. Gareis, Sven / Varwick, Johannes, Die Vereinten Nationen / The United Nations, - Aufgaben, Instrumente und Reformen -, Opladen ³2003. Meisler, Stanley, United Nations, - The first fifty Years -, New York 1995.

From the start, this field was not left to state-representatives alone. So called ‘Non-State Organisations’ were among the most ardent supporters of the LoN and the UN in general and the Human Rights-policy in particular.¹⁶ During the 1950s und 1960s the term Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was introduced to describe those groups that were also labelled as the ‘Conscience of the World’¹⁷ or a ‘curious grapevine’¹⁸. The 1990s in particular can be seen as the decade of NGO-participation inside the UN-system. A constantly increasing number of organizations were officially accredited and participated in world-conferences as well as informal meetings. Moreover, they attempted to influence the UN on a variety of ways, including official resolutions, various forms of lobbying or media campaigns.¹⁹

A wide range of religious groups sees itself as an integral part of this NGO-community. as soon as they enter into the context of the LoN and the UN they label themselves as Religious Non-Governmental Organisations (RNGOs). To quote the first systematic description of religious activities inside the UN-system, published by ‘Religion Counts’ and edited by Geoffrey Knox:

*“Religion is not new at the UN. But new and important trends have appeared in recent years. There is clearly an increased religious presence at the UN. The increase in the number of religious NGOs at the UN today rides the crest of the NGO wave generally. Religious voices multiplied and strengthened as global civil society matured in the 1990s following the general lull during the Cold War years. Many of our sources point to the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, popularly known as the ‘Earth Summit’) and the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) as important milestones of increased religious NGO participation at the UN.”*²⁰

Taking the activities of religious groups accredited to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as a first indicator, it is possible to identify around 200 religious groups inside the UN-system. These groups are far from being a monolithic block. According to my own research, they vary widely in terms of:

- *Religious tradition:*
Around half of the RNGOs see themselves as Christian. There is a number of rather old and influential Muslim (29), Inter-faith (15), and Jewish groups (11), too. Moreover there is an increasing number of Buddhist and Hindu NGOs (6 each).
- *Organizational structure:*
The accreditation-process itself is strictly formal. As long as the NGOs follow the ideals of the UN-Charta it does not introduce any distinctions between well-

Krasno, Jean E. (ed.), United Nations, - Confronting the Challenges of a Global Society -, Colorado / London 2004.

¹⁶ Fellner, Fritz, Vom Dreibund zum Völkerbund / From the Tri-League to the League of Nations, - Studien zur Geschichte der Internationalen Beziehungen 1882 – 1919 -, Oldenbourg 1994.

¹⁷ Willetts, Peter (ed.), ‘The Conscience of the World’, - The Influence of Non-Governmental Organisations in the U.N.-System -, Washington 1996.

¹⁸ Korey, William, NGOs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, - ‘A Curious Grapevine’ -, New York / Basingstoke 1998.

¹⁹ Martens, Kerstin, NGOs and the United Nations, - Institutionalization, Professionalization and Adaption -, New York / Basingstoke 2005.

²⁰ Knox, Geoffrey (ed.), Religion and Public Policy at the UN, Washington 2002, p. 41 (Religion Counts Report).

organized religious institutions and more fluid religious networks. They just have to follow a worldwide agenda.

- *Concrete aims:*
The majority of the RNGOs can be categorized as Charities, working in a variety of fields. Moreover, national or international umbrella organisations are accredited to the UN. Finally, some of the main religious bodies of particular religious traditions are present at the UN, too.

This first glance focuses on the present-day institutional links between religious groups that see themselves as NGOs and the UN. A further analysis, however, has to go beyond those formal associations. Religious actors are far more complex phenomena and an analysis has to take this into consideration. In order to do this, it might be helpful to take the stance of a Religious Studies-approach.

2.3. Religious Studies-Approach

Methodologically speaking, Religious Studies-scholars approach religious phenomena from 'the outside', emphasising their historical development as well as their social basis.²¹ On this basis, the researchers try to reconstruct the historical and present-day relations between (a) the general religious beliefs and practices, (b) the convictions of individual believers, (c) the organizational or institutional aspects of religions and (d) their specific social and cultural setting. All these aspects influence each other without being identical. The analytical differentiation, however, helps to highlight the characteristics of religious activities and to formulate more concrete questions.

Following this approach to the actors inside the UN-systems, first, the political world-organisations constitute a *specific social setting* religious groups act in. This must not be restricted to the situation in New York City or Geneva. The different branches of UNICEF or Worldbank for example form a very complex network that interconnects a variety of places. In this respect, it has to be asked in which ways the LoN or the UN influence religious activities and whether they are as significant as specific national or local settings.

Second, *religious beliefs and practices*, influence for example they way in which religious groups approach the world-organisations. Some groups interpret them as a part of a divine plan, a 'demonic' force or nothing but peripheral. Even inside a specific religious group the attitudes towards the LoN or the UN might find a variety of different expressions. It is quite interesting in how far these different attitudes influence the world-organisations or vice versa.

Third, these practices and beliefs also have an effect (in a non-deterministic way) on the *institutional relations* to the world-organizations. Some groups comprise internal networks interested in the discussions at the LoN or the UN. In other groups, the connections to the world-organisations are more or less restricted to official cooperation on the top-levels of religious hierarchy. As far as I know, these relationships are not systematically analysed yet.

Fourth, surprisingly enough, the global relationship between religious organisations and the world-organisations seems to depend heavily on *individual efforts and activities*. In this respect, the official representatives play an important role. At the same time individual commitment in grass-root activities has to be taken into consideration. It is not sure yet, what kind of significance they have for the activities in question.

Looking at this multi-layered frame of reference, the question comes to mind in how far this relationship can be interpreted as reciprocal or rather one-directional. It has to be asked in

²¹ Sharpe, Eric J. *Comparative Religion, - A History -*, New York 1975.

which ways the religious groups influence the world-organisations and vice versa. From a Religious Studies point of view the second aspect seems to be more interesting. In order to answer this question, the analysis has to leave the level of analytical distinctions and considerations and has to go into greater historical detail.

2.4. Wide Spectrum of Religious Groups

In terms of methodology, this leads to a research agenda, focussing on specific case studies rather than comprehensive surveys. This is best encompassed by a qualitative research-design that underlines the dialectic relationship between in-depth empirical research and theoretical reflections.²² Following ‘Theoretical Sampling-strategies’, well established among qualitative researchers, the groups presented here are far from being representative. The selection rather alludes to a wide spectrum of different cases.²³ They do have in common that the respective religious groups look back on a long tradition of high profile cooperation with the political world-organisations. They represent different religious traditions as well as major umbrella-organizations. The cases include mainstream as well as more marginal religious groups. Moreover, they represent a wide spectrum of approaches towards the LoN and the UN.

In line with this agenda, the next paragraphs draw on research undertaken by the author in 2005 and 2006. In both years I have been to Geneva and New York City and worked at the LoN and the UN Archives. Besides, I conducted some interviews with religious UN-representatives.²⁴ These short trips of about four weeks each provided no more than some first, unsystematic impressions of the situation of religious actors inside the UN-system focussing on the 1940s (in terms of Archive analyses) and the 2000s (in terms of interviews and official documents). However, these miscellaneous insights as well as the work done by other researchers help to give a first idea of the processes in question.

(a) Roman Catholic Church

In more than one way, the Roman Catholic Church holds a singular position inside the UN-system: Historically speaking, it is among the oldest world-organisations and serves as the role-model of many Western global institutions.²⁵ In terms of formal relations, the Holy See holds permanent observer status with the United Nations representing a religious as well as a political entity. This forms the basis of a complex relationship: First, the Nuncio in New York City represents the institutional link between the Holy See and the UN. Second, parallel relationships exist on national levels and support the standing of the Holy See in New York

²² Bohnsack, Ralf / Nentwig-Gesemann, Iris / Nohl, Arnd-Michael (eds.), *Die dokumentarische Methode und ihre Forschungspraxis / The documentary method and practical research*, - *Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung* -, Opladen 2001. Knoblauch, Hubert, *Qualitative Religionsforschung / Qualitative analysis of religions*, - *Religionsethnographie in der eigenen Gesellschaft* -, Paderborn / München / Wien / Zürich 2003.

²³ Glaser, Barney G. / Strauss, Anselm L., *Grounded Theory*, - *Strategien qualitativer Forschung* -, Bern 1998 (especially pages: 53 to 83).

²⁴ I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people that supported my research so far. I am most obliged to the people at the archives in Geneva and New York City as well as my interview-partners: Sister Gayatri and Sister Julia (Brahma Kumaris), John Reitter (Kolping International), Dorothy Farley (International Catholic Organizations Information Centre), Paul Zamora (Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of America), Katherine Nightingale (World Council of Churches), Ruth Kahurananga (World Vision), Jim Nelson (Unitarian Universalists), Bani Dugal (Baha’i International) and Stein Villumstad (World Conference of Religions for Peace).

²⁵ Casanova, José, *Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a ‘Universal’ Church*, in: Rudolph, Susanne H. / Piscatori, James (eds.), *Transnational Religion and Fading State*, Boulder / Oxford 1997, p. 121-144. Kallscheuer, Otto, *Papismus und Internationalismus / Papism and Internationalism*, - *Zur Rolle des Vatikan in der Weltpolitik* -, in: Minkenberg, Michael / Willems, Ulrich (eds.), *Politik und Religion*, Wiesbaden 2003, p. 523-542 (Sonderheft der Politischen Vierteljahresschrift).

City. Third, around 50 Roman-Catholic organisations are formally accredited to ECOSOC and work inside the UN-system.

In terms of organizational structure and concrete aims, the Catholic groups cover the whole range of religious NGOs from traditional orders and younger charities up to mainstream as well as oppositional grass-roots-organisations. All these groups are united by a common religious basis. At the same time, they form a Catholic network and cooperate with other religious and secular groups. To quote from an interview with John Reitter (Kolping International) and Sr. Dorothy Farley (International Catholic Organizations Information Center (ICO)):

“13: The ICO constitutes ... it works towards a network of Catholic NGOs at the United Nations. At the moment we have more than 40 member groups including both lay and religious organisations. They all want to make the Catholic voice to be heard at the UN.”²⁶

During the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, the cooperation between the Holy See and the UN intensified.²⁷ On the one hand John Paul II used the world-organisation as an official platform e.g. to criticise the Iraq-war. On the other hand, the UN-context in a way suggested particular actions such as the Assisi inter-faith peace prayers. Finally, more informal activities on human rights or the family gained momentum and opened new ways to support the specific aims of the Roman Catholic Church.

(b) World Council of Churches (WCC)

The World Council of Churches developed out of a totally different institutional setting. Its history goes back to the first Christian world-conferences of the 1920s and 1930s. Under the leadership of William Temple and Willem A. Visser't Hooft the WCC was officially established in 1948 and became the main umbrella organization of the ecumenical movement. Keeping this historical background in mind, the WCC stands for the cooperation of Churches around the world, coming from very different Christian traditions.²⁸

Inside the UN-system, the WCC gained a central position because it was perceived as a strong organisation. Under the guidance of Dr. O. Frederick Nolde (the first director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs) the WCC established itself as a kind of ideal-type cooperation between different NGOs, representing in a way ‘the Churches’ or even ‘Christianity’. As early as 1948 J. B. Orrick (Chief of the UN Section for NGOs) argued in an UN-Interoffice Memorandum:

“The Churches are among the principal workers for the United Nations. The World Council is planning an information campaign through local parishes throughout the world. It is highly important from the point of view of public relations, to accept their invitation to the [first WCC] Assembly.”²⁹

Since the 1950s, the WCC in general and the CCIA in particular continued to cooperate with the UN using a multitude of approaches: The main bodies of the WCC published official

²⁶ Interview by the author: July 26th 2006 in the CIO-office

²⁷ Dupuy, André (ed.), Pope John Paul II and the Challenges of Papal Diplomacy: Anthology (1978-2003), New York 2004. Dupuy, André (ed.), Words that Matter, - The Holy See in Multilateral Diplomacy -, New York 2003.

²⁸ Frieling, Reinhard, Der Weg des ökumenischen Gedankens / The Way of the ecumenical idea, Göttingen 1992 (Zugänge zur Kirchengeschichte).

²⁹ UN-Archives: Series: S-0441 Box: 8 Lin Mousheng (assistant to the Director of the Human Rights Division) added in another UN-Interoffice Memorandum: “In the course of the last three years, C.C.I.A. has contributed great deal to the work on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Draft Covenant on Human Rights and draft measures of implementation, especially in the field of religious liberty.” [ibid.]

resolutions covering UN-statements and policies, they strengthened the organizational links via the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) and cooperated with the UN in behalf of its member organisations.

(c) World Jewish Congress (WJC)

Founded in 1936, the World Jewish Congress is another religious umbrella organisation, highly active inside the UN-system. In a very specific way, world politics in general and the situation around Israel in particular formed the relationship between the WJC and world-organisation. Just before its second session (1948) the WJC published a book to present the general ideals of the Congress. It is not at all surprising to find a chapter on the relationship to the United Nations, describing the first cooperation between the two organisations:

“THE WAR EMERGENCY CONFERENCE had laid down the principles which the Jewish People considered indispensable for a world of peace, freedom, democracy, and equality after the war and the destruction of Hitlerism. [...] It] set forth the demands of the Congress in regard to the restoration of Jewish legal rights, urging the ‘retroactive abrogation of all anti-Jewish legislation, the abandonment of anti-Jewish administrative practice, and full unequivocal restoration of the legal status of Jews and Jewish communities under the provision of municipal or international law’.”³⁰

To name but some other prominent stages of this cooperation:³¹ In 1948 ECOSOC discussed a series of memoranda, published by WJC, on the situation of Jews in ‘Moslem Countries’. The so-called ‘Zionism is Racism’-resolution of the UN-General Assembly from 1975 (revoked in 1991) is a symptomatic example for the situation inside the UN during the Cold War decades. Since the 1980s the relationship smoothed down, leading among others to the official invitation of UN Secretary General Pérez de Cuéllar to the Annual Dinner of the American-Jewish Committee in 1984.³²

(d) Baha’i International

In comparison to religious institutions such as the WJC and the WCC or the Roman-Catholic Church, the Baha’is certainly constitute a small religious group, organized in 183 Spiritual Assemblies around the globe.³³ Looking back on a history of religious discrimination and characterized by a strong ‘millenarian tendency’³⁴, the Baha’is were particularly active on the international political scene. Most prominently, Bahá’u’lláh (the founder of the Baha’i faith) in 1867 wrote a number of letters to the political leaders of his time (including Emperor Wilhem I, Pope Pius IX, Tsar Alexander II or Sultan Abdu’l-Aziz), in order to present his religious convictions.³⁵

Following this tradition, worldwide political activities form an integral part of Baha’i self-understanding, leading to a long tradition of institutional connections with the political world-organisations, with a line of representatives dating back to the 1930s. To quote from an interview with Ms. Bani Dugal (Baha’i UN-representative in New York City):

³⁰ World Jewish Congress, *Unity in Dispersion, - A History of the World Jewish Congress -*, New York 1948, p. 311.

³¹ Rubinstein, Hilary L. / Cohn-Sherbok, Dan / Edelheit, Abraham J. / Rubinstein, William D., *The Jews in the Modern World, - A History since 1750 -*, London 2002.

³² UN-Archives: Series S-1032 Box 34

³³ Towfigh, Stephan A. / Enayati, Wafa, *Die Baha’i-Religion / The Baha’i Religion, - Ein Überblick -*, München 2005, p. 110 + 111.

³⁴ Smith, Peter, *The Babi and Baha’i Religions, - From Messianic Shi’ism to a World Religion -*, London / New York / New Rochelle 1987.

³⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh to the Kings and Leaders of the World*, Haifa 1967.

“71: As Baha’is we believe that ahm ... world peace is going to ... come. And we believe that ... it’s not Baha’is that are going to assure the world-peace. It’s member-states that are going to do it. And our role is to provide the moral impetus, for this happening. And so that is, how we see us, as ... the, the catalysts that are going to prove, help these world-leaders to arise to the place, where they are going to have the world-peace.”³⁶

(e) Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Even though coming from quite a different religious tradition, the Quakers – in terms of institutional structures and UN-relations – seem to be closer to the Baha’i than e.g. to the WCC. For the Baha’is as well as the Quakers, UN activities form an integral part of their religious ideas. The link between the Quakers and the UN is first of all constituted by the ideal of worldwide pacifism, built into the general convictions of the Quakers as well as the UN-Charta. From the perspective of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) this reads:

“Pacifism has emerged in the twentieth century as the most distinctive belief of Quakers, that which sets them apart from other churches and American society. To be a pacifist in America is to be radical, no matter how middleclass one feels. The Cold War, the arms race, apartheid, the pervasiveness of poverty, and the preponderances of oppressive regimes have forced Friends to seek, debate and agonize over what it means to be peacemakers.”³⁷

On a day-to-day basis, this connection led to an ongoing history of cooperation with the UN centred around the Quaker Houses and their teams in Geneva and New York City. These activities are coordinated by the ‘Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)’ established in London by the Second World Conference of Friends in 1937. According to the UN-website of the FWCC:

“In New York, QUNO focuses on building coalitions to bring little-noticed conflicts and issues to the attention of the governments at the Security Council and General Assembly. American Friends Service Committee manages the programme with the policy guidance of the Quaker United Nations Committee—New York, which is comprised of Friends from the US and each of the four sections of FWCC.

In Geneva, QUNO works with UN agencies and related organizations such as the International Organization for Migration and the World Trade Organization to bring to them the voices of the under-represented governments and groups. [...] The Quaker United Nations Committee—Geneva is half appointed by Quaker Peace & Social Witness of Britain Yearly Meeting which manages the programme and FWCC.”³⁸

These short descriptions can’t form a solid basis to answer the questions formulated above. They illustrate, however, the close and complex relationship between specific religious groups and the political world-organisations. These must not be reduced to mere institutional links. They are rather built on highly symbolic individual activities as well as dogmatic reflections. As long as it is possible to talk about the motives of religious groups or traditions

³⁶ Interview by the author: August 10th 2006 in the Baha’i UN-office.

³⁷ Barbour, Hugh / Frost, J. William, *The Quakers*, New York / Westport / Connecticut / London 1988, p. 258 (Denominations in America)

³⁸ http://fwccworld.org/un_work/index.shtml (last visit: February, 10th 2007)

(rather than the motives of individuals), one has to keep in mind that there exists a wide range of motives inside as well as among religious groups that guide their relationship to the UN.

The high commitment of religious groups supports the idea, that their activities are more than just a peripheral phenomenon. In different ways, they are incorporated into the main agenda of the religious groups under question. Keeping these considerations in mind, three main theses will guide the further analysis.

2.5. Further Research-Perspectives on the International Political Scene

First Thesis: Among those religious groups, that are active at the world-organisations, new forms of complex networks developed.

In the social sciences, the term ‘network’ stands first of all for a formal category, highlighting the complex links between different persons as well as official positions or institutions.³⁹ As far as the religious groups inside the UN-system are concerned, these activities created new types of networks of social interaction. They reach into three directions. First, there are persons and offices inside the religious groups or traditions themselves, dealing with UN-topics or reaching out towards the world-organisation. Second, these persons or offices are interconnected with their counterparts inside the UN-system. Third, members of these different networks form coalitions with other religious as well as secular persons and offices. In this context, the religious UN-representatives play a central part. In addition, there are further links on different levels of the religious or political institutions that transcend the limits of religious traditions as well as the divide between religious and political actors.

These networks have to be analysed in more detail. In order to do this, it will be worthwhile to deal with - on the one hand - the official documents leading to institutional links, cooperation or coalitions. On the other hand, it is necessary to include the personal aspects of the networks, focussing on archived correspondences of as well as interviews with people active in the field. These network-analyses need extensive research and have to be restricted to specific cases as well as time-horizons:⁴⁰ (a) the early 1930s (before the decline of the LoN), (b) the early 1950s (after the establishment of the UN), (c) the late 1960s (at the height of the Cold War) and (d) the 1990s (characterized by an increasing influence of civil society on the UN).

Second Thesis: The activities on the stage of International Relations react upon the religious groups.

The analysis must not be restricted to mere institutional or personal relationships. It also has to keep the level of religious beliefs and practices into consideration. In this respect, the applications for consultative status indicate no more than a formal attempt of specific religious groups to get in touch with the world-organisations. In the end, the respective groups might either want to make their point of view to be heard, to use the UN as an international stage for their activities or to get access to specific forms of funding. As soon as the activities inside the UN-system stand for a substantive cooperation, however, it has to be kept in mind,

³⁹ This formal approach is well presented by: Holzer, Boris, *Netzwerke / Networks*, Bielefeld 2006 (Themen der Soziologie). The following edition stands for a more general approach, that interprets networks as a specific form of social relations under the conditions of modern society: Castells, Manuel / Cardoso, Gustavo (eds.), *The Network Society, - From Knowledge to Policy -*, Washington 2006.

⁴⁰ On the methodological basis of qualitative analysis of networks: Hollstein, Betina / Straus, Florian (eds), *Qualitative Netzwerkanalyse / Qualitative Analysis of Networks, - Konzepte, Methoden, Anwendungen -*, Wiesbaden 2006.

that such a relationship might be no 'one way street'. The analysis has to take into considerations in how far the LoN- or the UN-setting influence the religious groups. This leads to the whole area of unintended consequences of the processes under question.⁴¹

In order to analyse these processes one has to deal with the way in which religious groups position themselves rhetorically inside the UN-context. The debates around human rights, peaceful conflict resolutions, the relations between 'the North' and 'the South', the work against HIV/Aids as well as gender issues might serve as examples. On all these topics, religious groups established strong positions. A systematic analysis has to work towards a triple comparison between (a) the main LoN and UN-related positions, put forward by religious groups, (b) the central documents on those topics published by the world-organisations, and (c) further statements formulated by the same actors without any connection to those specific topics. On this basis, it will be possible, to identify the changes and the influences that occurred throughout the years.

Third Thesis: The cooperation between the religious groups and the world-organisations constitutes a new relationship between religion and politics.

This third aspect opens a wider perspective. It is based on two rather strong assumptions: First, religious groups look back on a long history of relationships with the main political actors of traditional entities such as the Clan, the City, the Empire or the Nation. Second, the LoN and the UN constitute a novel type of worldwide political setting, characterized by a plurality of religious groups cooperating in one single (though highly complex) political setting without traditional links between the religious and political actors. Following this line of thought, it can be argued, that the research-agenda presented here helps to formulate a more general theory of the relationship between religions and politics under the conditions of global democracy or civil society.

Following this line of thought, the whole project becomes a case study in order to discuss this thesis. This puts the results on the activities of religious groups inside the UN-system into a wider theoretical setting constituted by the debates around the globalization of religions, the relationship between religion and politics as well as the developments of plural religious settings. In order to contribute to these debates, the analysis has to focus on the question how religious groups manage to bridge the span between centre and periphery, how they incorporate themselves into a system of democratic representation, and how they build coalitions over the boarder of religious beliefs. Maybe the analyses inside the UN-system, will cast a new light on the developments of these processes.⁴²

⁴¹ This is one of the classical objects of sociological research, going back to: Merton, Roobert K., On Theoretical Sociology, - Five Essays, old and new -, New York / London 1949.

⁴² Dahl, Robert A., Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy, - Autonomy vs. Control -, New Haven / London 1982. Casanova, José, Public Religions in the Modern World Chicago / London 1994. Lauth, Hans-Joachim / Liebert, Ulrike (eds.), Im Schatten demokratischer Legitimität / In the Shadow of Democratic Legitimacy, - Informelle Institutionen und politische Partizipation im interkulturellen Demokratievergleich -, Opladen / Wiesbaden 1999.

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