

4th Conference

Religion and Human Rights (RHR)

December 11th – December 14th 2016

Würzburg - Germany



**Religion and
Human Rights**

Call for papers

Religious Impact on the Right to Life in empirical perspective

Modern declarations of human rights have frequently repeated that human life and dignity are inherently connected. The concept of human dignity refers to the inner spirit of Human Rights. Most states consider it their duty to advocate the dignity of man. As stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) the recognition of the inherent dignity is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world (preamble). All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (art 1) and everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person (art 3). The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) pronounces in article 2 that everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) argues that every human being has the inherent right to life, that this right shall be protected by law and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) deals with the protection of life and requires that killing of persons either by direct murder or by inflicting conditions which bring about their death, e.g. deprivation of food, water and medication, has to come under the jurisdiction of a court.

With regard to different thematic issues the right to life is elaborated in a multitude of treaties. Nevertheless the right to life is not as inviolable as it might seem, for instance regarding the death penalty or in cases of self-defense. There are surely various ethical dilemmas concerning this topic, and the international community allows some exceptions. However, the basic value of human rights is that human life has to be protected at all costs and that only very few reasons allow the consideration of an exception.

The research program „Religion and Human Rights“ contains statements that directly address the right to life, i.e. the permission of the death penalty, conflicts in weighting regarding abortions, and exceptions from the unconditional protection of life regarding measures for euthanasia. In several countries there are ongoing heated disputes with controversial positions about the meaning of the protection of life regarding those exceptional circumstances.

The first task of the presentations should be to analyze the respective data and to explain them considering the national and/or religious culture of the respective country. To be precise: Should the death penalty be allowed because of its dissuasive effect? Should abortion be legalized, and if, under what conditions? And what about euthanasia, should that be allowed at all, and if, according to what criteria?

The second task of the presentations is the empirical reinforcement of the explanations for the convictions of the respondents, especially regarding the religious factor. It is obvious that religious communities adopt very clear positions in social discussions about the protection of life, sometimes they are even the main characters in those controversies, especially regarding any questions about abortion (i.e. in Ireland, Croatia, Poland) and euthanasia (i.e. the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany). The support of the protection of life is one of the main concerns of most religions and thus it should be immanent in the convictions of believers. This should be proved empirically for example by showing that religious and non-religious people differ significantly in that respect. Do the analysis show that religious belonging has a normative affect, since religious people, for example, are less likely to allow exceptions regarding the right to life? Furthermore, when religion proves to be considerably influential, is it mainly because of the dogmatic conviction, the loyalty towards the respective church, or is it rather a natural matter-of-fact attitude of the faith that influences the attitudes regarding the right to life? Empirical instruments contain several parameter that can measure the impact of religious believes and point out what dimension of religiosity is the most influential.

Perhaps differences are not or not only the result of the religiosity of the believers but rather of their cultural and social surroundings. That would explain the significant variances of opinions from respondents of the same denomination in different countries, while members of different religious communities and non-religious people have a much greater consistency within the same country. But even in this case there are more questions: what about the age of the respondents, their sex, their origin, their parent's education, their socialization? Do they influence specific attitudes? And if so, to what extend? How important are personal (psychological) dispositions regarding the differences of opinions about the right to life? How significant are social and political convictions? And, finally, what about the subjective values,

how do they affect the position of the respondents regarding the right to life? It is possible that personal autonomy is the basis of any considerations regarding euthanasia, and a specific idea of an ideal life provides the frame for any considerations about abortions. It is also possible that people with a materialistic-economic position and those with a more pronounced emotional intelligence differ in their opinions. Regarding the attitude towards the death penalty, law and order convictions or authoritarian tendencies are probably relevant as well.

The main themes that will be deepened theoretically and empirically are conflicts regarding the right to life, especially death penalty, abortion and euthanasia. Technically speaking they are dependent variables that should be analyzed. To explain the outcome in all their variances additional concepts have to be included. Several instruments (see below) are available for that purpose. The selection of the instruments depends on the decision for a theoretical model that provides the frame for an ambitious empirical analysis.

The conference deals with some special cases in which the strict protection of life is a topic of debate: euthanasia (when death occurs on demand), abortion (when a pregnant woman decides to terminate her pregnancy) and thirdly the acceptance of the death penalty (rather than a life imprisonment). The specific objectives of the conference are:

- Theoretical reflection on the right to life and its threat in the context of specific social debates and in international comparison.
- Collection of empirical evidence on the relation between attitudes towards the right to life, religious convictions, value orientations and other opinions.
- Development and critical discussion of hypotheses in national and international contexts.
- Comparison of the importance of the attitudes to human rights regarding Catholic, Protestant and Christian-Orthodox traditions as well as Islam.
- Identification of interdisciplinary problems within the theoretical and empirical research to the relation between human rights and religion.
- Methodological critique about the validity and reliability of the empirical instruments in inter-religious and inter-cultural perspective.
- Review of the research requirements and development of new research questions for the national and international research concerning human rights and religion.

Appendix for an elaboration of a paper

A. Items covering the main topic of the conference

(These items - or a selection of these items- can be used as “dependent variables”)

HUMAN RIGHTS → RIGHTS TO LIFE

IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE:

E2. RIGHT OF LIFE – END OF LIFE

E3. RIGHT OF LIFE IN CASE OF PREGNANCY

E4: RIGHT TO LIFE IN CASE OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY (DEATH PENALTY)

B. Explanatory connections can be made with a theoretical-based selection of the following variables:

(A selection of these items can be used as “independent variables” resp. “background variables”)

Population–characteristics

AGE

SEX

EDUCATION

FAMILY CONTEXT

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

RELIGIOUS SOCIALISATION

INTERRELIGIOUS CONTACTS

POLITICAL ORIENTATION

Psychological dimension

RIGHT-WING AUTHORITARISM

SOCIAL-DOMINANCE ORIENTATION

EMPATHY

Multiculturalism

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

PERCEIVED TENSIONS IN SOCIETY

Religion

INTELLECTUAL INTEREST

IMAGE OF GOD

FUNCTION OF RELIGION

TRUST IN RELIGION

INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

RELIGIOUS RITES

Values

INDIVIDUAL VALUE SYSTEM

VALUE HUMAN DIGNITY

State and Democracy

THREE POWERS

SATISFACTION WITH STATE / INSTITUTIONS

ORDER

C. STRUCTURE OF EMPIRICAL PAPERS

Abstract plus 6-8 keywords

Introduction

1. Elaboration of the problem
2. Conceptual elaboration of key terms in the problem
3. Method

Incl. conceptual model, procedure, sample, measuring instruments, research questions and possible hypotheses

4. Empirical findings (data analysis)
5. Discussion, interpretation

References

Tables

D. Miscellaneous

Formats for papers

There are two formats for the presentations. Papers can either be offered as plenary paper or as contribution for a collegial session. Plenary papers cover 75 minutes (45 minutes of speech and 30 minutes of discussion). Collegial papers will be presented in parallel collegial sessions, they cover 35 minutes (20 minutes of speech and 15 minutes of discussion). The final decision will be made by the program committee.

Deadlines

Abstract: Please send your abstract form (included below) to Hans-Georg Ziebertz (hg.ziebertz@uni-wuerzburg.de) **no later than June 15th 2015**. We will give communicate the outcome before July 15th.

Registration: For the organization of the conference your **registration is needed by 1st September** at the latest.

Publication

Contributors of theoretical and empirical papers can offer their text for publication in a book which will be published in the series “Empirical Research in Religion and Human Rights” (Brill).

Website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/empirical-research-religion-and-human-rights>

The discussion of the papers during the conference can be regarded as the first step of a review procedure. Delivered papers should consider relevant conclusions of the discussions. Later we will review the papers again to ensure the production of a coherent and high quality book. Guidelines will be provided during the conference in December 2016 (similar to 2015).

Finances

We are able to host all participants from Sunday afternoon 11th (arrival) until Wednesday morning 14th December (departure). Costs for board and lodging during that time are covered. We can also offer a contribution of 70 Euro (which is the average amount for train tickets from Frankfurt-Airport to Wuerzburg and retour) to the travel costs. With that, however, our budget is exhausted. You can book your train ticket “Frankfurt(M)Flughafen to Wuerzburg HBF” online in advance: https://www.bahn.de/p_en/view/index.shtml

Other

After the registration we will distribute further information.