



Centre for Contemporary Religion

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Today's Danish Religion in figures

Featuring "Wedding ceremonies" and "Free religion"

Religion in Denmark 2010: An introduction

- An online yearbook from the Centre for Contemporary Religion

Introductory article by

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How many Catholics are there in Denmark today? How many wedding ceremonies have the Pentecostal churches conducted in 2009? And who are the new groups that have been approved as religious communities?

This is some of the information available in this edition of the online yearbook Religion in Denmark. Additionally, we take a look at what is hiding behind the figures: which trends emerge from the information we have gathered.

In the first volume of the online yearbook Religion in Denmark, we described some tendencies in the state of religion in Denmark today. We did so on basis of numbers collected from a large number of the recognized and approved religious communities in Denmark today. We have chosen to focus on the recognized and approved religious communities because they represent a group of religious communities who, through their search for and obtainment of approval, have shown that they wish to partake in a more formal relation to the Danish state and have a role in the public sphere. These are religious communities of which we can say that the general public has a legitimate wish to gain insight into. Not all religious

About the online yearbook

The online yearbook **Religion in Denmark** is published annually by Center for Contemporary Religion at Aarhus University and presents information about the approved religious communities in Denmark.

We are speaking of a significant amount of different religious groupings, which provides us with a foundation for saying something general about religion in Denmark today.

Therefore, the yearbook's numbers concerning the religious communities' memberships, buildings, religious specialists and religious practice are accompanied by a number of perspectival articles.

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General public has a legitimate wish to gain insight into... Not all religious communities in Denmark have applied for and achieved recognition but approx. half of the free churches and half of the mosques have, while the figure for Buddhist groups is significantly lower; only approx. a fifth of the Buddhist groups have applied for and obtained a position as approved religious community. For many of these groups (Buddhists) a stately approval is simply not desirable. The same applies to many of the groups designated as new religions. Overall speaking, the vast majority of the larger religious communities have obtained recognition/approval. At the same time, it is clear that there are large differences in how the different religious communities organize themselves and in how conscious they are about what it means to be an approved religious community.

Now the next edition of the online yearbook is ready for publication. Once more, we have gathered figures from a range of religious communities and here we present what we see in these figures. We do this through a row of specific commentaries to the gathered figures from a long row of researchers connected to Center for Contemporary Religion, as well as through a number of articles that shed light on central phenomena of contemporary religion.

In this edition we have decided to take a closer look at wedding ceremonies as an aspect of recognized and approved religious communities. Where possible, we have gathered figures on wedding ceremonies and blessings of civil marriages, enabling us to compare the figures we have from 1999 (in some cases even 1989) with those gathered in 2009. We have done this because we wish to take a closer look at the activities of the individual religious communities. And because precisely the authority to perform marriage ceremonies is one of the rights most often underlined as one of the most important privileges accessible to recognized or approved religious communities, it is an obvious choice for closer investigation. In Denmark, only the civil authorities and religious communities can receive the authority to perform marriage ceremonies. Associations, e.g. Humanistisk Samfund (“Humanist Community”), cannot acquire that authority. Consequently, we were interested in learning whether it is a right that the religious communities exercise. And generally, across the

different religious traditions, we can conclude that the authority to perform marriage ceremonies is not used to any great extent. In the article, “På rådhuset, i kirken – eller helt ude i skoven? Vielsesbemyndigelse i Danmark” (“At city hall, in church – or way out in the wild? The authority to perform marriage ceremonies in Denmark”), Lene Kühle tells the story of the implementation of the civil marriage in the years after the first Constitution in 1849 as a form of “emergency marriage” for people who were not members of a religious community. In the beginning of the 20th century, politicians broadly agreed that only the civil marriage should have validity. However, as a result of public pressure they chose to keep the arrangement with two different kinds of marriages: civil and church weddings, the latter coming in many different variations since ceremonies performed by free church pastors, imams and lamas alike are designated church weddings. In spite of the large increase in the number of approved

religious communities, the numbers we have gathered show that there has not been a corresponding increase in the number of church weddings among the recognized and approved religious communities.

The headline of a number of the articles in this online yearbook is “Free Religion”. The articles illuminate different aspects of religion in Denmark today and especially the theme of religion and freedom, from the wish to be totally free from religion to different ways to be free within and outside organized religiosity.

Tim Jensens article “”Statslig godkendelse af (fra folkekirken) ’afvigende trossamfund”” (“State approval of (from the Folkekirke) ‘diverging religious communities””) focuses on the legal aspects and the principles and procedures of approval that apply in relation to the approved religious communities. Since 1970, when religious communities could no longer achieve recognition, but were instead given the possibility to conduct marriage ceremonies with civil validity (and began being termed approved), the principle that all religious societies outside the Folkekirke (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark) must be treated equally has been praised. Tim Jensen acknowledges that much has happened in that direction but that the Department of Family Affairs, the authority responsible for religious communities outside the Folkekirke, can improve in certain areas.

Kirstine Helboe Johansens article “Den ny ateisme” (“The New Atheism”) puts the focus on the groups wishing to be completely free of religion, i.e. the atheist and humanist groups in Denmark. The establishment of associations for atheists, agnostics, and people adherent to a non-religious humanistic worldview over the past few years represents an innovation in the Danish religious landscape. One of these new associations Humanistisk Samfund, established in 2008, has, very aggressively, chosen to offer independent humanistic rituals, naming, confirmation, wedding ceremonies, and burials. The Norwegian Humanist Association, a corresponding community in Norway, has achieved a position equivalent to that of the religious communities. Humanistisk Samfund in Denmark seeks to obtain the same privileges enjoyed by the approved religious communities. Thus, they challenge the idea that religious communities should have special privileges that other associations and organizations do not have.

The Folkekirke is a unique church in many ways. One of the characteristics of the Folkekirke is the extensive freedom that exists within it and which comes from religious awakenings in the 1880s, where the ambition was to secure that both the Inner Mission and the Grundtvigians could remain in a common people’s church. Steen Marqvard Rasmussen’s article “Hvor rummelig er Folkekirken?” (“How inclusive is the Folkekirke?”) examines the freedom and inclusiveness in the Folkekirke, which has different legal boundaries for what it is possible to believe and practice within the Folkekirke depending on whether one is a pastor, employee in a church (a pastor, administrator or organist) member of the parochial church council

or an ordinary member. Whereas the three former groups are subject to certain limitations for their belief and practice, the only requirement made of the ordinary members is that they pay their church taxes. Marqvard Rasmussen claims that while the financial crisis has only affected the wealthy Folkekirke lightly, it is in a “crisis of relevance” which means that the church needs to relate to what its members believe and also that it needs to formulate and implement a new “inclusion policy”.

Marie Ramsdal-Thomsens article on the electoral congregations, congregations on the outskirts of the Folkekirke, shows another way in which the thought of freedom expresses itself in the Folkekirke. The idea of electoral and free congregations has had its 100th anniversary long ago and has a very strong connection to Grundtvigs conceptions of spiritual freedom. None should be forced to listen to a priest they did not care for or celebrate mass in a way that did not support their faith. In the article “Frie menigheder – gamle og nye valgmenigheder og deres syn på Folkekirken” (“Free congregations – old and new electoral congregations and their view of the Folkekirke”), Marie Ramsdal-Thomsen presents the results of a survey conducted by her on the free and electoral congregations. In total, there are approx. 20.000 members of electoral congregations in Denmark. These 20.000 are at the same time members of the Folkekirke. But they represent groups of Folkekirke members who have joined together to hire a pastor themselves. The 3.500 members of the free congregations, on the other hand, have, in spite of sharing beliefs with them, stepped out of the Folkekirke because they want greater freedom to conduct church services in any way they wish. The free congregations often have status of approved religious community. Since 1989, 40 new electoral and free congregations have emerged, often with a charismatic characteristics. This growth highly represents an innovation in Danish church life.

Another innovation is presented in the article “Evangelist – på mission i Danmark” (“Evangelist – on mission in Denmark”) by Rikke Gottfredsen. Evangelist is one of the free churches in Denmark that has received a lot of attention in the past years. Evangelist is not an approved religious community and does not wish to be one. They see their role as a church that reaches beyond what is associated with a tradition church with attendance on Sundays. With a weight on speaking in tongues, and healings, they wish to change and heal people spiritually and physically. In the same way as the growth in electoral en free congregations, Evangelist is a Danish variation of a larger global charismatic and Pentecostal movement, which counts close to 600 million Christians especially in Latin America, the USA, and Africa.

But religion also changes in different ways. In his article, “Hvad betyder det egentlig at betegne sig selv som ‘troende’?” (“What does it really mean to describe one self as a ‘believer’?”), Lars Ahlin discusses results from the so-called values study 2008. Based on some general results, he examines how these fit with other variables. In this case it is not, as is usual in

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sociology of religion, demographic variables, e.g. gender and education, which are focus. Instead, the question is how certain “religious” variables, e.g. religious self-understanding, are linked with other “religious” variables, such as church attendance or the belief in reincarnation. The interpretation of these variables is constantly connected to whatever differences occur between four distinct generations.

Ahlin’s claim that important changes are happening in the religion of the Danes is also an important agenda in Iben Krogsdal’s article. Under the heading, “Damebladsreligiøsitet” (“Women’s magazine religiosity”), she takes a close look at some religious phenomena lying outside the organized religious institutions. Through an analysis of different women’s and family magazines in week 7, 2010: Femina, Alt for Damerne, Søndag, Familie Journalen, Ude og Hjemme, Hjemmet, Psykologi and Netto’s free magazine Lime, a clear picture of how the media conveys religion is drawn. Or, one might say, “do not convey religion”; for while the magazines from this week overflow with spirituality, mysticism, and spiritual dimensions, religion in a traditional sense is conspicuous by its absence. Only a few articles mention religion, and there it is distancing: ‘religion has nothing to do with god’. Iben Krogsdal concludes that Danish women subscribe to other forms of religiosity than that of the Folkekirke, though the majority of them are still members of the Folkekirke. This is the relevance crisis that Steen Marqvard discusses in his article. Members of the Folkekirke still, to a great extent, make use of the church for the religious festivals but in their everyday life, the popular cultural representation of spirituality and religiosity apparently plays a bigger role.

The connection existing between popular culture and religion is also the main point in Markus Davidsens “Genfødt og blå: Religiøsitet baseret på James Cameron’s Avatar” (“Reborn and blue: Religiosity based on James Cameron’s Avatar”). The science fiction adventure, Avatar had barely hit cinema screens, had a revenue of more than 14 billion kroner, and received nine Oscar nominations (of which it only took home three statues), before it occasioned a degree of mythologization and ritualization, that one could ask whether it, in time, will form the basis of a new religion. It has happened before, that books and films have formed the basis of religion-

making, among others Star Wars has given rise to a religious identity, Jedi, which has featured more than 500.000 followers in censuses in Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Even though there is good reason to doubt how serious the majority of the people who describe their religion as Jedi are, Jedi-groups with status of approved religious community do exist in the USA and Canada. The question now is rather, can the committee that treats applications for approval as religious community expect an application from the Avatar-community in Denmark in the near future?

Some of the trends we presented in the last volume of the online yearbook illustrated how migrant congregations are on the primary phenomena in the transformation of the religious landscape in Denmark within Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism alike. In the 2010 volume of the online yearbook we continue our focus on migrant congregations in

the online yearbook, we continue our focus on migrant congregations in the form of the article, "Religion, migration og integration" ("Religion, Migration, and Integration"). In this article, Jørn Borup examines the role religion plays in relation to living in a new society as a migrant. The meaning of religion in integration processes has been overlooked by research in many years but there is every indication that religious commitment is does not play the unequivocally detrimental role it is often ascribed, to such an extent that decreasing religious commitment in and of itself is seen as a sign of integration. It is difficult to put religion, migration, and integration into a formula. Muslims and Catholics are both more devout and practicing than Buddhists and Protestants. On the other hand ethnically Danish Buddhist converts attend the Buddhist centers more often than ethnic immigrant-Buddhists and ethnic immigrant-Christians attend church more often than Danish members of the Folkekirke.

The new material from 2009 can provide new perspectives on migrant religion. More often than not, we link migrant religion with immigration from places far from Denmark but there are other religious communities belonging to this category, even though they come from our closest neighbors; these are Svenska Kyrkan and Den Norske Sjømannskirke in Copenhagen. Both churches have high numbers of wedding ceremonies in general (though with a drop from 2008 to 2009, something both ascribe to the financial crisis). A closer inspection reveals that almost all couples are migrant couples, i.e. Swedish-Swedish or Norwegian-Norwegian, and that the only exceptions from this involve Danish citizens. Other parts of their work also show that they function as migrant churches, i.e. that their core product is to function as a frame around an ethnic-cultural identity, a home away from home. This is reflected in Sjømannskirken's website, "do you miss Norwegian foodstuffs?", a reference to the church's store with Norwegian products.

(www.sjomannskirken.no/kobenhavn/aktuelt/arkiv/2010/02/norsk-butikk). And in Svenska Kyrkan's home for elderly Swedes who have stayed in Denmark. They take care of their own and give them a familiar frame for their life in a foreign country. This even though the geographic distances are not particularly great. See Marie Vejrup Nielsen's comment on the Christian groups for more on this phenomenon.

The purpose of the online yearbook is first and foremost to gather data useful for research. Research may take the form of comparisons over time, as what we have conducted: hvad has happened in 10 years within these religious communities? It may also concern studies of concrete questions: how a specific group has developed, or it can be a comparison, e.g. of how the term 'membership' is understood in different religious communities. It could also be an examination of why these groups sought status as approved religious communities in the first place. Why would they want approval? Is it to obtain the economic rights that come with approval? Or is it the religious rights to perform wedding ceremonies and funerals? Or are there completely other things at play?

The vast majority of the figures come from the groups themselves. We only have limited possibility to verify their accuracy. In the comments to the various groups of religious communities you can find more information on

various groups of religious communities you can find more information on membership numbers and activities, along with contact information: Christian and Christianity-inspired religious communities and congregations (comment by Marie Vejrup Nielsen), Islam and Islam-inspired religious communities and congregations (comment by Lene Kühle), Buddhist communities and congregations (comment by Jørn Borup), Hindu and Hindu-inspired religious communities and congregations (comment by Marianne Qvortrup Fibiger). Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain figures from all religious communities. In cases where the religious community provided an answer last year, we refer to these figures, which are in the yearbook 2009. Since membership numbers often change slowly, we have permitted ourselves to use figures from the previous volume of the yearbook and in some circumstances even a little older figures. In any case, it is clearly marked where the individual figures come from.

Since the statistics published in online yearbook 2010 are especially concerns the religious communities outside Folkekirken, we have, to a great extent, used the lists of approved religious communities provided on the Department of Family Affairs' website. We have, to the extent it was possible, chosen to use the terms and categorizations the Department of Family Affairs uses, though, as Tim Jensen points out in his article, these can be questioned. In one case, we have chosen to diverge from the way in which the Department of Family Affairs lists the approved religious communities in that we arrange them in alphabetical order, rather than in the order on the website, which roughly mirrors the order in which the religious communities achieved recognition. We have also chosen to arrange the specific categories of religious communities according to size.

With his edition of the online yearbook, we hope to illuminate some of the trends that take part in affecting the development in Denmark today.

Links:

If you wish to read more on what we have done

(<http://samtidsreligion.au.dk/religion-i-danmark/rel-aarbog09/intro/>)

If you wish to read more about the term approved and recognized religious communities

(<http://samtidsreligion.au.dk/religion-i-danmark/rel-aarbog09/rdp/>)

If you wish to read the online yearbook Religion in Denmark 2009

(http://samtidsreligion.au.dk/fileadmin/Samtidsreligion/Religion_i_Danmark/2009_e-aarbog/Religion_i_DK_2009.pdf)