

Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue: Religion and Human Rights: Complementary or Contrary

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Human rights law is supposed to direct all social forces towards enhancement of the autonomy and equality of all citizens. Human rights law cannot function as a strictly neutral umpire or even impartial authority, but needs the support of various forces in civil society. These forces are called upon to prevent the subordination of human rights law to ideological interests and to improve its interpretation and application in order to promote the principles of human dignity, freedom and equality.

Religions are influential social forces in many societies. Like human rights, they have a universal concept of a just and good life. All religions claim that the ethical aspirations and moral duties they share contribute to the well-being and welfare of individual human beings, groups and communities. This applies particularly to the golden rule, which plays an important role in all religions, namely that one should treat everybody as one would wish to be treated. The principle of universal reciprocity underlying this golden rule can be seen as the very basis of all human rights law. However, one could ask whether and to what extent this principle is actually observed both within and between different religions, as well as in the secular world, both within and between nation-states. More specifically, one could ask whether and to what extent religions contribute to the realisation of human rights to legislate, positivise and universalise the moral codes they espouse, or at least help to prevent and counteract the violation of human rights. The question is legitimate, because religions can be requested and even required to abide by their own ethical and moral standards.

The eight studies presented in the following cannot, of course, by any means comprehensively address and answer the questions just touched upon. However, these theoretical and empirical studies each explore interesting questions. The first is a philosophical comparison by E.Y. Hwang between Augustine and Xunzi on the understanding of human dignity and human rights, followed by quantitative and qualitative empirical studies. First, A. Unser and H.-G. Ziebertz examine in an international study the influence of religious beliefs and the national origin of the respondents on attitudes towards the rights of refugees. M.J. Mim deals with the issue of Rohingya Refugee Camps in Bangladesh, followed by an empirical study by F.-V. Anthony and C. Sterkens on the relationship between religion and socioeconomic wellbeing in Tamil Nadu, India. O. Breskaya, L.J. Francis and G. Giordan deal with instruments for measuring religion in the context of religious freedom. Two contributions deal with religion and human rights in Romania. S.E. Rogobete and L. Pețan quantitatively examine the impact of religiosity and value orientations on attitudes towards human rights, and M. Guglielmi deals with the Romanian Orthodox Church and human rights in the context of the European Union. The final paper by L.J. Francis, O. Breskaya and U. McKenna provides an empirical study of Italian students' attitudes towards civil human rights.

This collection of studies does not claim to offer a comprehensive theoretical and empirical treatment of all relevant issues; rather, they are specific case studies whose value lies in their in-depth treatment of the respective problem.



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