

UTBLICK

ISSUE

N° 3

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THEME »
RELIGION

UTRIKESPOLITISKA FÖRENINGEN GÖTEBORG

LETTER FROM » THE EDITORS:

After almost a two year tug of war, the moment has finally arrived, where we bring you Utblick with the *theme of religion*. Although most people inhabiting this ambiguous planet of ours are often described as 'religious', few pay attention to what this actually means; whether to the individual, society, or for politics. Part of the impetus of this theme is to bring religion to be into the discussion, where religion is viewed and discussed as a political thing in itself.

But how is something like religion, that is innately personal, subject to interpretations and generalisations that go beyond the scope of any book or magazine, let alone a student magazine like Utblick, to be discussed? This problem has led many to abandon religion altogether, while smearing its reputation every time it decides to pop up in the news, taking the shape of incoherent rants on what religion is, does or who it is for.

We've tried to do something else, namely pointing to the fact that belief or religion, however you choose to define it, is important to politics because it affects people's lives – whether at the micro, meso or macro level. Consier this issue a parting gift as one of our editor-in-chiefs, Aiysha Varrach, bids us adieu as the study of how religion affects politics beckons her to the world of political science research. Godspeed, shalom, salam and Om.¶

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ODEFINIERBART, OMÄTBART, »

Vad är egentligen religion? Det är svårt att precisera vad religion är. Det är också svårt att mäta religionens påverkan på saker och ting. Hur påverkar den omvärlden? Vid exakt samma ögonblick som religion hamnar på en x- eller y-axel sipprar sanningshalten ut mellan diagrammens staplar och kurvor. Att definiera och mäta religion är, om något, ett enormt uppdrag där komplexitet bara är en av delarna i problematiken. Den mjuka, andliga texturen gör sig ogreppbar för den objektiva observatören. Allt rinner ut som sand mellan fingrarna. Flera tappra försök har gjorts för att konvertera människors och nationers etik- och moralkompasser till ett greppbart religions-index. Om religion i sin natur är komplex, vore det rimligt att det är komplicerat att väga in den som mätbar variabel. En annan sida av problemet är att religion endast tillåter en nutida västerländsk tolkning. Detta leder till att endast förenklingarnas och de haltande tolkningarnas analyser kan erbjuda en säker, solid plats för alla de hypoteser som finns. För att sanningsenligt studera vilka demokratiska processer som påverkas av religion, hur en nation eller en provins i värsta fall splittras eller förenas av denna, vilken inverkan religion har på könsroller eller ett lands ekonomiska utveckling krävs kanske något nytt som ännu ej är upptäckt. Hur definieras det odefinierbara?

Ofta har det skett försök i mer skönlitterära former, men också i till synes framgångsrik forskning. Analyserna om inkomstklyftor beroende på statsreligion, vilken inverkan islam har på kvinnors rättigheter i Bangladesh, var i världen det föds fler eller färre barn på grund av sina föräldrars tro är många. Det totala antalet analyser är större än det för de analyser som givit en fullt vital, högupplöst spegelbild av världen. I exempelvis Eric Kaufmanns bok *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth* förs en tes fram om att fler och fler barn föds i demografiska grupper ju mer religiösa människorna är inom denna. Enligt Kaufmann kommer till syvende och sist de liberala, sekulära människorna vara mångt färre än de religiösa; morgondagens västvärld kommer vara mer religiöst konservativ än idag. Kritiken lät inte vänta på sig: Att Kaufmann klumpar ihop alla religiöst mer extrema grupper till en och samma massa. Människorna och deras värderingarna inom dessa ortodoxa grupperna är mer mångsidiga än vad Kaufmann vill framställa.

Ett annat exempel är när den svenske läkaren Hans Rosling som grundade statistik- och informationssidan *Gapminder*, har samlat

UNDERBART

data från många av världens databanker för att påvisa religionens inverkan – eller snarare avsaknad av dess inverkan – på antalet födda barn per kvinna. Under sina svepande och vid tillfällen väldigt vackra illustrationer av vad som hänt i världen under de senaste två seklerna mellan x- och y-axlarna hamnar religionen unikt nog innanför. »Religion har väldigt lite att göra med antalet barn som föds per kvinna», fastslås och fenomenet *Peak Child* – maximala antalet

”Att mäta, studera och definiera religion är ett sannerligen ett enormt komplext uppdrag.”

barn på jorden – som med viss modifikation kan jämföras med den fossila bränsleanvändningens *Peak Oil*, är uppnått hävdar Hans Rosling. Dock är den båt han satt sig i insmord i en tämligen vattenlös tjära, där världens religioner och dess olika inriktningar och trossamfund är kategoriserade i blott fyra grupper. Den ena av dessa fyra grupper omnämns som *Övrigt*. För att Hans Rosling ska kunna behålla religionen i sitt diagram måste den helt sonika förvandlas till fyra stadiga ben. Annars välter hela bordet och därmed far slutsatsen ut på golvet tillsammans med den utspillda mjölken.

Det är värt att iaktta att diskussionen om religionens betydelse i vår samtid och värld är långt ifrån ofruktbar. Tvärtom! Det finns mycket sagt, skrivet och tänkt om religion. Det svåra är att veta om de är rätt. Till och med om ordet religions etymologi tvistar de lärde. Handlar ordet om gudsdyrkan, att binda sig eller samvetsgrannhet? Religion har olika betydelser för olika människor. Möjligen är uttrycket bara en västerländsk längtan efter att beskriva; en kolonialtidens arv där katolicism eller protestantism stod som grund för vad som noterades på den nya platsen där landstigning råkade ske. För att fråga en hindu om denne är religiös eller inte är dödfött. Religion som sådan finns inte och har ingen mening i dennes liv. Att mäta, studera och definiera religion är ett sannerligen ett enormt komplext uppdrag. Det är nog just det som är pudelns kärna när man vill mäta människors tro. ¶

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Illustration Jakob Feltsén

A SEPARATE »ISSUE

Religion and politics should never mix. That is the modern mantra laying the ground for a popular belief that the causes of violent conflict somehow are religiously motivated. But to say that religion causes conflicts is no more or less true than saying that ‘capitalism’ or ‘ideology’ causes violence; it obscures the messy relationships among people that is human history.

In her account of secularism – how religion became separated from politics in the western world – Karen Armstrong asks the opposite question of what every orientalist interpretation of the Middle East has been asking since the Crusades: why is it that religion in ‘the West’ became a matter of solely private nature, separate from all other human activities and somehow isolated from every other part of the human experience? Is it really the case that democracy, the welfare state and peace are sustained because of this historically and geographically unique idea?

The notion that the separation of church and state developed organically as a result of some natural progress towards reason and enlightenment is, according to Armstrong, simply silly. Secularism is about as old as the modern nation state, and while the separation of two phenomena requires there to be two phenomena to separate, asking a Hindu to detach ‘religion’ from ‘politics’ simply produces scratching of the head (or in this case, maybe *wobbling*). Translating religion into valid vocabulary out of context is famously pointless, unless you want to cause misunderstandings (google *Augustus the son of god* for more on that).

Silly as it may be, the assumption that secularism is simply the result of careful and skilled reasoning is generative of how religion as a political force is being characterized in the West. For if religion is not

considered to be an issue in our 'modern', 'developed' societies, certainly not a political issue – the fact that it is outside of Fort Europa is considered enough for condemning those acting in accordance with it as backward and faulty. Hence, it shouldn't be that hard to figure out why there's so much violence going on in the Middle East. Of course, it's because of Religion (read 'Islam').

What is being called 'fundamentalism' has, according to Armstrong, always existed as the counter-movement of imposed secularism. Violence cloaked in religious language follows from the fear of being forced into secularism. Just as nationalistic forces respond to a supposed threat of annihilation to their beloved values, the social forces driving fundamentalism is a reaction to, rather than a source of violence.

The problem, though, with the argument made by Armstrong is that she does not abide by her own rules. To simply argue that fundamentalism is a reaction to violence carried out by 'secular' institutions presupposes that religion and secularism has some form of generally applicable essence, making it possible to determine what religious violence is and what it is not. Arguing on what religion 'does' is as unhelpful; it 'does' not either promote or disqualify violence. No motive for human action can be separated from the time and place within which it occurs. People act, not scripture. If Armstrong took that proposition seriously, she would have to address the wider claim that what she and others label as religious or secular is inherently political; a myth in itself. ¶

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"Arguing on what religion 'does' is as unhelpful; it 'does' not either promote or disqualify violence. No motive for human action can be separated from the time and place within which it occurs. People act, not scripture."



Photography Frank Polak

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For more on Karen Armstrong, read her book *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, or her commentary in The Guardian at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/25/-sp-karen-armstrong-religious-violence-myth-secular>.

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EN TROVÄRDIG » TRO:

Har du en genuin och personlig, religiös övertygelse? Eller är din nya tro bara ett sista försök att få ett uppehållstillstånd i Sverige? Det är frågor som en beslutsfattare på Migrationsverket kan tvingas ta ställning till.

Innan Paulus, han som i början av vår tideräkning gjorde kristendomen känd för världen, själv blev kristen förföljde han och drev en vad som närmast kan liknas vid en häxjakt mot de kristna församlingarna. Så en dag, på vägen till Damaskus, som en blixtnär från klar himmel får han en uppenbarelse från Gud. Han ser ett ljussken och hör Jesus tala till honom. »Varför förföljer du mig» säger Jesus och visar Paulus att hans uppgift på jorden är att sprida den kristna tron. Från den dagen var Paulus, född till jude, kristen. Ärkekristen skulle man kunna säga. Och omvändningen var snabb som blixten.

Enligt svensk asylrätt har den som känner en välgrundad fruktan för förföljelse på grund av religiös uppfattning rätt till asyl. I Afghanistan är det inte tillåtet att utöva sin kristna tro som konvert. Därifrån har en inte försumbar del av Sveriges asylsökande kommit de senaste åren. Många av dem har, för handläggare på Migrationsverket, uppenbara asylskäl. Ibland uppstår dock situationen då Migrationsverket måste skilja de verkligt troende från de som försöker få uppehållstillstånd på falska premisser.

En grupp som oftast är svårbedömd för handläggare är konvertiter. I Migrationsverkets prövning ska all tänkbar bevisning beaktas. Konvertiterna inkommer ofta med intyg från präster och andra församlingsmedlemmar för att bevisa ett aktivt kristet liv. Kunskapsfrågor om den nya religionen hör också till proceduren. Denna får dock inte ges för mycket vikt. Vad som oftast är och ska vara avgörande är att personen kan berätta om hur den kom till tro. Presentationen av ett trovärdigt händelseförlopp. Det är här det blir särskilt komplicerat.

På Migrationsverket sitter ofta sekulära öron och lyssnar till en berättelse som kan vara väldigt svår att relatera till. Berättelserna om hur människor kommer till tro låter inte sällan lätt otroliga. ibland kommer den i drömmar eller precis som i Bibeln, som uppenbarelser. Paulus hade kanske haft det svårt om han sökt asyl i Sverige idag. Paulus som gick från att ena stunden förfölja de kristna till att helt vända om och viga resten av livet åt Jesus och att sprida Jesu ord. Men få tvivlar nog på att Paulus religiösa övertygelse var genuin? •¶

MINDFULNESS: »SIMPLY DOING NOTHING

Seeking means: to have a goal; but finding means: to be free, to be receptive, to have no goal. You, O worthy one, are perhaps indeed a seeker, for in striving towards your goal, you do not see many things that are under your nose.

Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*

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A manic sound of a clock that hurries away: *tick. tock...* Another moment gone with thoughts occupying the present moment: when will the bus come? What will I do on the bus? I have to read this and that book for tomorrow. What will I eat when I come home? Perhaps Julie wasn't sincere about what she said. I'm always ending up like a fool... (The countryside, Stockholm, Rio de Janeiro) When will the bus come? Did I do anything wrong? And blablabla.. checking the phone; writing a text-message, perhaps a post on facebook, twitter - completely unable to notice the wind that caresses the skin, sometimes gently sometimes a little rougher, the different melodies of birds singing or the existence of people around and the actual feeling of standing still.

But have you ever thought about what would happen if you just dropped all those things, and sat down, did nothing for 10 minutes? Or even for 5 minutes? Just sitting and doing nothing. Letting everything, around you and inside you, just be. How would that make you feel?

Mindfulness is a term that has become more and more common in recent years. Historically it originates from Buddhism and has different meaning depending on which discipline is considered. In our western definition the aspects of spirituality and philosophy aren't as highlighted as the scientific evidence of its health increasing effects. Yet Mindfulness is a fascinating example of the benefits that can be drawn by a secularised society from ancient religion and its traditions.

In today's society we constantly live with the thought that we always need to have something to do, and it has become a habit which we seldom question. Always being occupied with something has become our natural state of life. But society seems more depressed and



anxious than ever before, and conversations where people tell stories about themselves or other people ending up with, physical or psychological breakdowns because of stress seem to have become more common. The fact that we sometimes have to slow down is unavoidable and too often it takes a painful situation to arise before we realise that that's not true, that we're only humans not machines.

As Andy Puddicombe says in his *Ted Talks* video "All it takes is 10 mindful minutes", mindfulness is simply about doing nothing. It's about leaving everything for 10 or even 30 minutes and to just notice what happens. Letting it be good or bad; asking yourself "Where am I going?" and listening to the outside as much as to what's happening inside you. It's about being in touch with that which normally goes unnoticed by us in the daily duties of life: *our own being*.

What's interesting about mindfulness is how eastern Buddhists and western scientists have collaborated in neuroscience research, trying to understand what's happening with the mind while practicing mindfulness, or meditation. Much of the results show increased ability in concentration, emotional stability, decreased stress and the increased ability of understanding other people's feelings. It strengthens our ability to acknowledge the thoughts and feelings we're having from a distance, instead of always falling. ¶

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Photography Frank Polak

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If you would like to find out more about mindfulness there's a lot of interesting research on the web, articles and even explanatory videos on youtube. But I would like to recommend you reading Jon Kabat – Zinns book *Wherever you go, there you are*. It's a really interesting book that covers the philosophy and methods of mindfulness in short chapters. Hermann Hesses *Siddartha* is also interesting, though it was written long before mindfulness became common in the western world, it still deals with a lot of the philosophy and importance of mindfulness indirectly, and its importance to mindkind.

*“In our religion men and women
are equal but our society is made by
men.”*

Vad tänker du på när du hör ordet *islam*? Flimrar det förbi en bild på svartklädda krigare och gråtande barn? Du är inte ensam. Vilken tidning du än öppnar kommer du garanterat se IS – Islamiska staten nämnas. Du kommer inte undan historien om de fanatiska islamisterna. Kanske har du till och med börjat bläddra förbi dessa sidor i ren frustration?

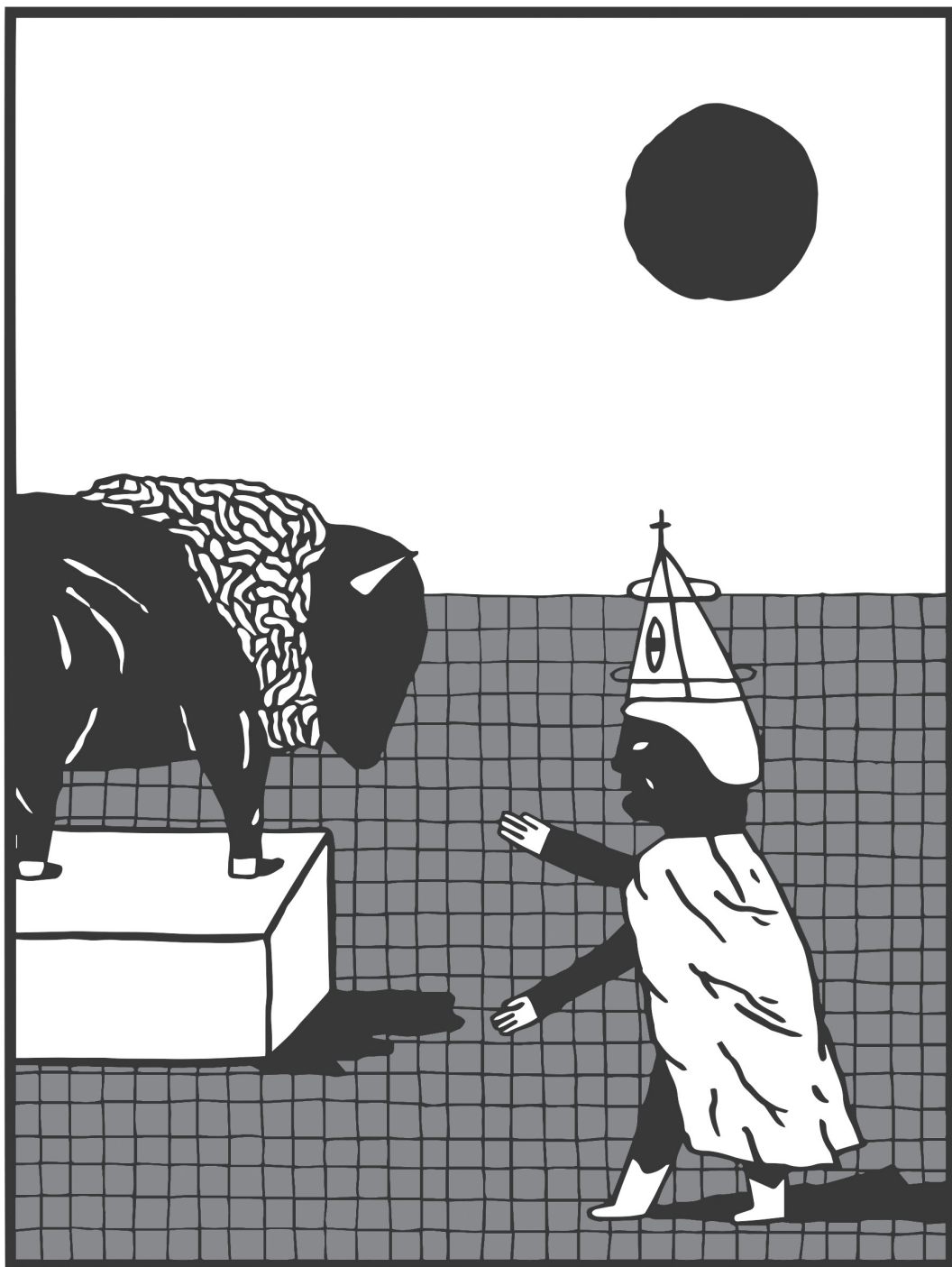
Att IS får stort utrymme i media är visserligen rättfärdigat men det väcker också en tanke på när faktarutan som förklarar att islam och islamism inte är samma sak ska dyka upp. En muslim är så mycket mer än 11 september och förtryckta kvinnor. I möten med muslimska kvinnor i Pakistan har själva religionen snarare visat sig som en styrka än något som begränsar kvinnors levnadsutrymme. En kraft som hjälper dig kämpa vidare, trots samhällets mycket konservativa värderingar. En kvinna berättar för mig: »In our religion men and women are equal but our society is made by men». Det är kloka ord. Självt är hon med i Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF), en förening mot slaveri, som jobbar mycket med kvinnors rättigheter. De faror som följer med detta verkar knappt beröra henne. Hon säger att hon litar på gud. Böneropen ekar på den med stenmurar omringade gården och hon går undan för att be.

Går det då att skilja på samhället och dess religion? Benazir Bhutto, Pakistans före detta premiärminister, påstår att det är möjligt. I hennes bok *Försoning* skriver hon om hur islam ofta har missuppfattats som en hård och kvinnofientlig religion då det egentligen är gamla stamtraditioner som skapat dessa begränsningar. Hon lyfter upp exempel på exempel från koranen som visar på dess syn på jämställdhet som självklar. Att denna bok var banbrytande när den kom. Profeten Muhammeds 25 år äldre hustru var affärskvinna. Både män och kvinnor uppmanades söka kunskap och tänka för sig själva. Att dessa vackra ord på många håll inte har blivit verklighet förklarar min pakistanska vän genom analfabetismen. I hennes hemområden i Baluchistan får endast männen lära sig att läsa och det är då även de som får tolka koranen och sedan berätta för sina kvinnliga släktingar vad de har kommit fram till.

Det finns trots allt 1,5 miljarder muslimer i världen. Det är 20% av jordens befolkning. Självklart är dessa mer än något annat tänkande och kännande individer. Det går inte att förklara hur en muslim är. Ändå är det viktigt att få lyfta fram dessa muslimska frihetskämpar som jobbar genom utbildning och samtal för en fredligare värld. Hur ska annars komplexiteten i religionen speglas? Att visa på de positiva krafterna som religionen kan ge oss är jämställt relevansen i att fördöma IS. Bilden du får upp i huvudet när du tänker på islam hoppas jag ska kunna bli mer mångfacetterad. Kanske att den kan bestå av en rad olika ansikten som liksom fladdrar förbi. På så sätt kan du bättre hantera, och kanske till och med eliminera, de förutfattade meningar du har. ¶

LENOIR: THE RELIGIOUS »

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PHENOMENA

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Frédéric Lenoir is a sociologist and philosopher, director of the newspaper *Monde des Religions* (World of Religion), a presenter of a cultural broadcasting show, who has written around thirty books about religion. As his books are not all translated in Shakespeare's language, here is an opportunity to better acquaint oneself to a French intellectual's point of view on the topic of religion.

In France he is known as the 'specialist of religion', considered one of the most qualified in the field. Religion and philosophy being intimately related to one another, his philosophical and scientific angle is what characterizes his work. Indeed, he does not belong to any religion, which brands his work as neutral and objective. However, after reading his books, we realise that he is really engaged and involved.

His most interesting book is *Les Métamorphoses de Dieu* (The Metamorphosis of God), for which he received the *European Writers' Prize* for French language. The focus of the book is on how religion and religious beliefs have evolved. The 20th century was the century of modernity, people believed in scientific progress. From a religious standpoint, it involved what the German sociologist Max Weber called *the disenchantment of the world*. Science was

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“The believer becomes a consumer; he takes what attracts him in each religion. He builds his own spirituality. That means we are all a sort of founder of a new religion. People are not locked in a formal religious institution anymore. Faith becomes a pragmatic faith; there is no longer the notion of obedience but the notion of responsibility.”

Notes:

If you're interested in more of Lenoir's work, you'll find all you need on his website. Especially this interview is particularly interesting: <http://www.fredericlenoir.com/interviews/are-you-open-minded-about-your-spiritual-life/>

the main 'religion' because it offered hope; the scientific 'believer' thought science was the only way to get better, to grow and improve his situation. He no longer took care of the community because science taught him that the pursuit of his personal interest led to the wellbeing of the community.

Indeed, modernity involved individualisation and secularisation which explains the decline of religious phenomena. However, Lenoir explains that the outcome of globalization and individualization represents *the re-enchantment of the world*. What Frédéric Lenoir's work is highlighting, is that traditional religions have declined but beliefs have remained. So, we no longer speak about traditional religion but about religion 'à la carte' or 'religious kit'. The believer becomes a consumer; he takes what attracts him in each religion. He builds his own spirituality, effectively we are all founders of a new religion. People are not locked in a formal religious institution anymore. Faith becomes a pragmatic faith; there is no longer the notion of obedience but the notion of responsibility.

We are the actors of our own religion. The decline of traditional and institutionalised religion is not synonymous with the end of religious feeling. People are wondering what is true, what is fair, through a particular spirituality. They experience spirituality without God. A religion without God allows for self-fulfillment while giving meaning to one's life.

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Our relationship with this spirituality evolves according to readings and meetings, which is how we built our spiritual itinerary. Although, one point of criticism can be raised. Nowadays, when religion becomes a fad, we are not all a builder of our own religion, some of us are but others are maybe just going with the flow. •¶

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I BELIVE* »

ON FAITH AND ORGANISED
RELIGION IN
A GODLESS COUNTRY

It is easy to believe Sweden to be an entirely secular country. The many old churches scattered over the land seem relics of a religious past, or haunts of an ever-decreasing congregation of white-haired denizens. Statistics ostensibly back up the image of waning religiosity. Since the abolition of the Lutheran state church in 2000, membership has waned steadily with a few per cent a year, according to the national SOM survey, resting on around 78% in 2012. Regular attendance to a religious meeting is still lower; with the 16–29 cohort's attendance being dramatically rubbish at 4%, but the population at large is only insignificantly more devout at 8%. It is however important not to forget that though Swedes are non-committal when it comes to organised religion, 45% maintain they believe in God.

Though rather visible, non-Lutheran Christian denominations make up only around 7% of the population. Making an active choice in religious affiliation, rather than remaining placidly in the Swedish Church because it's a hassle to leave, is surely indicative of religion being a more important aspect of life.

What, then, *is it like* to live as a devout, non-Lutheran Christian in this non-religious Nordic wasteland? To make sense of this, I interviewed a number of self-identified Christians of different denominations, ages and backgrounds.

RELIGION IS PRIVATE

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The overarching theme to all interviews was that though society as a whole is respectful to them as devout and to their faith, they still feel uncomfortable being completely open about their faith as others see religion as a deeply personal matter. One interviewee compared talking about their faith to debating their sex life in the break room – it is simply too intimate to discuss. This, they noted, is a problem as they witness widespread ignorance from their peers about religion and what being religious entails. This privacy may be based on the Swedish apprehension to attending organised religious services, where faith and religion is openly discussed, although many still believe in God. Another interviewee speculated that most Swedes are still in some way religious, though an increasingly individualised and secular society has paved the way for a private, individual spirituality in favour of traditional organised religion. While the excessive privacy of religion in Sweden was seen as a problem by the interviewees, the opposite situation, which several had experienced living in the USA, was experienced as still worse. Many felt that Christians in religious countries live in a bubble, shielded from reality, just critique and opposition.

“One interviewee compared talking about their faith to debating their sex life in the break room...”

THE MEDIA LIES

Several expressed annoyance at the treatment of religion, especially alternative Christian denominations, by mass media. Trashy TV shows, scandalous and exotic news items, and ignorant TV debates on polarising issues construe the main impressions of religion and religious people to the mainstream audience, which all interviewees felt upsetting due to unfair and biased reporting. Given the general ignorance of Swedes, interviewees believed a more educational approach would improve understanding and, in extension, improved comfort for religious people.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Some of the interviewed persons felt that expressing mostly traditional Christian opinions and beliefs was not considered politically correct. Differing opinions on polarising issues like abortion and marriage equality were felt to be unacceptable, even damning, by society at large. One was particularly incensed about this, accusing mass media of ruling iron-fisted over what opinions are deemed acceptable, but the majority simply wished for a wider spectrum of opinions on moral issues to be fairly represented.

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While Sweden was felt by all interviewees to be a very non-religious country, the main issue with life here was not expressed as disdainful authority figures, but with a decided narrowness. This was present both in what questions fellow citizens feel comfortable asking, and in the limited spreading of unbiased, open-minded knowledge about the beliefs and lifestyles of different people. Seen through the eyes of my interviewees, secular thought seems to rule the country not with mockery and derision of religion, but with acceptability politics. It banishes religion to the private life of individuals through limiting public knowledge and policing what opinions are seen as acceptable to represent. ¶

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* Title: Song from musical *The Book of Mormon* by Robert Lopez, Matt Stone, and Trey Parker, playing at Broadway (New York City) and West end in London.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS OF »

Combining studies with extra-curricular activities can be a challenge, yet it has been shown time and time again that a well-balanced and active lifestyle can increase employability, enhance personal development and provide valuable opportunities for networking. Whilst studying in Gothenburg, there are many ways in which one can engage with the wider community and break free from the all too familiar weekly routine.

26 For the past year, the Society of International Affairs in Gothenburg (UF Göteborg) has been working to establish the Model United Nations society (MUN) as a permanent fixture of student life. MUN is a discussion forum through which internationally-minded students can take on the role of a delegate or country representative, and simulate committees of the United Nations. Both local simulations and international conferences provide opportunities for students to participate in committees which include, but are not limited to, the Security Council, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and NATO.

The foundations of the MUN Society in Gothenburg are now firmly in place, following a successful trip to the Budapest International Model United Nations Conference (BIMUN) last semester. A group of ten students were selected to represent the MUN Society in Gothenburg for the 'Sustainability' themed conference. The group came from diverse backgrounds and disciplines, and worked together to prepare their assigned countries extensively, going on to perform admirably during their respective committees. Whilst it is important to have knowledge of international affairs and policies, it is also crucial to combine previous research with a thorough knowledge of the rules of procedure, good listening skills, and a confident public speaking manner. The delegation from Gothenburg quickly discovered that previous MUN experience was indeed useful for such conferences, but that public speaking and analytical skills obtained from other endeavors could be just as important.

MUN is a global phenomenon that is open to anyone with

THE MODEL UNITED NATIONS SOCIETY IN GOTHENBURG



an interest in international affairs, active learning and debating. The Society in Gothenburg has a diverse and expanding membership, with simulations taking place on a regular basis at the local level. In addition, confident members of the society have ample opportunity to attend international conferences in the upcoming months. The MUN Society is pleased to announce that delegations are being sent to both Cambridge University Model United Nations conference and to the Model United Nations of Malmo in November, with preparations already underway for both conferences.

The Society of International Affairs hopes that after the successful launch of MUN in Gothenburg, the society will continue to grow, offering more opportunities to meet and engage with like-minded people from all over the world. Keep your eyes peeled for local simulations, events and MUN conferences in the future, and do not hesitate to send us a message if you are interested in hearing more about the MUN Society in Gothenburg, and how you can get involved. ♡

Zealot

Reza Aslan

"The job of the historian is to say what is likely; the job of faith is to say what is possible. There need not necessarily be a contradiction between the two."

Reza Aslan's ambitious book about the historical Jesus of Nazareth takes as its starting point the fact that we know rather little about the man, but a lot about the place and time in which he lived. Situating this man into 1st century Judea, Aslan's interpretation of Jesus' acclaimed achievements is one of a revolutionary worthy of his own manifesto – far from the pacifist Gandhian character many attribute to him. According to Aslan, Jesus was probably a bit more materialist, so to say. For any religious or non-believer out there, this is one of the most *hyped* books about on a religious topic in years.

What's the matter with Kansas?

Thomas Frank

In recent decades, the religious right has gained tremendous land in America, influencing the Republican party and the direction of politics in the country as a whole further to the right. Author Thomas Frank, a historian and journalist, investigates the conservative boom in Kansas, his native state. Kansas, in the late 18th century a hotbed for radical left wing thought, is now one of the most conservative states in the USA. Frank explores why Kansans, against their own economic interest, embrace the curious combination of conservative values and laissez-faire economy espoused by the religious right movement.

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"Out here the gravity of discontent pulls in only one direction: to the right, to the right, further to the right. Strip today's Kansans of their job security, and they head out to become registered Republicans. Push them off their land, and next thing you know they're protesting in front of abortion clinics. Squander their life savings on manicures for the CEO, and there's a good chance they'll join the John Birch Society."

(Frank, p.68)

The Three Colours

Krzysztof Kieslowski

Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Three Colours*, in Swedish called *Trikoloren*: is a filmatization of the ideals behind the colors' of the French flag, that originates from the aftermath of the French revolution, into three separate movies: *Blue*(freedom), *White*(equality) and *Red*(brotherhood). Though not directly religious, as Kieslowski's earlier *The Decalogue* series were, the plots in the movies do have spiritual aspects. For example, the scenes are shot from a birds-eye view: the characters criss-cross with each other in their daily lives but remain clueless of it until a certain situation emerges bringing them together. This technique is characteristic of Kieslowski's work, and was cultivated by him in the 80's, in movies such as *Blind Chance*. It's one of the things that rank him among the most innovative filmmakers of the 20th century.

Each of the three movies will be screened at Cinemateket in November, on Bio Capitol at Övre Husargatan starting from Saturday the 8th (Blue movie) and then the ongoing two Saturdays, the 15th (White movie) and 22nd (Red movie). Don't miss the chance to see a genial work of art!

Bio Capitol
Övre Husargatan

8th, 15th & 22nd November



Sandrine Wastiaux

Who am I? Well, I am a French student, studying political science at my home university. I would describe myself as a utopian. Indeed I want to make my voice heard and I struggle for my ideals in a peaceful way. In lieu of this, I have a lot of respect and admiration for the French intellectual Stéphane Hessel who wrote the book titled *Indignez-vous* (Time for Outrage!). The message he conveyed was is "Engage yourself, be proud to fight for your ideas and change things."

At this moment of my life when wondering what I would like to be, I currently think of journalism, because writing is one of the purest ways to share information, to learn. Thus, I joined Utblick to improve my skills in journalism, and I hope to introduce you to some French thinkers.



Cilla Smitt Meyer

Political science student with a special interest in economic development in third world countries. Likes to drink bloody marys and listen to almost any female rapper!

Legally Responsible Publisher
Josef Svantesson

LETTER FROM »

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THE PRESIDENT:



Utrikespolitiska
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For many years now, the complexity of the political situation in the Middle East has hardly escaped the attention of anyone with an interest in politics. Looking at the way we talk about it in Sweden, it's obviously frustrating to see so many generalisations taking a hold over the debate. We would hardly consider a political analysis of Europe as good if the author takes the conclusions made about one country to be valid for a completely different country. Some people even fall into the trap of making conclusions about countries based on what religion people have there. Just making a simple comparison with our own societies would make most people hesitant of entering this territory of thinking. There are so many other dimensions that seem more relevant in understanding political outcome - foremost economical factors, the religious-secular divide, and also cleavages within the world religions.

UF has been doing study trips abroad for some years now, usually one in the spring and one in the autumn. As we grow in terms of resources and know-how, it becomes natural for us to gradually scale up the ambition-level of the trips. In November, twelve UF members will travel to Jordan for little more than a week, which will mark the first trip we do outside of Europe (we get half a point for last year's trip to Istanbul), which for me as president feels like a milestone. As on every UF trip, our delegation will meet with several organisations working with various issues, and a particular focus on this trip is how the war in Syria affects the neighbouring countries at large, and in particular Jordan. To further highlight the Syria war, we will also host some UF lectures this winter on this topic, the first one with author Aron Lund in the end of November.

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Besides our bi-yearly study trips, during this year we've also engaged UF in other projects that have enabled our members to travel abroad to deepen their knowledge. In April, our Model United Nations club participated in their first conference in Budapest, and this November they are travelling to Cambridge. We were absolutely thrilled by the amount of highly competent applicants who showed an interest in travelling with us to Cambridge, and we feel sure that MUN should have a permanent place in UF. And in the spring, five UF members will go to Palermo, Italy to get a closer look at the struggle against organized crime, a theme week hosted by the organization Libera Palermo.

Not only do we know that these trips are popular among our members, I know from experience that they give insights you can hardly get from your every-day university studies. The core aim of everything we do is to make our members more knowledgeable, and even though it's hard to say whether the problems I point to in the beginning of this piece are becoming more common or not, it's my belief that the people coming back from Jordan will be among those who contribute to a more nuanced public debate, based on such principles as concise and impartial examination, and complexity in problem framing. ¶

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THE SOCIETY OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS GOTHENBURG IS A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION WITH THE AMBITION TO SPREAD KNOWLEDGE AND SPARK DISCUSSION ABOUT FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. WE ORGANIZE LECTURES AND TRIPS, HOST MOVIE SCREENINGS AND PUBLISH THE MAGAZINE UTBLICK. A ONE-YEAR MEMBERSHIP IS 50 SEK AND EVERYONE CAN JOIN.