Culture, society, religion: What do we learn from theories of religion? (Herodotus, Durkheim, Grundtvig)

Problems with defining ‘culture’
Since I am going to talk about culture and religion, let me say from the outset that both of these terms are extremely ambiguous and unclear. I understand the reasons why some may want to do away with them both altogether. However, it is not easy thing to simply do away with them, and I will use them also in this presentation. It is not uncommon to refer to the American anthropologist Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn who in their book Culture. A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions from 1952 listed no less than 146 definitions of culture. Probably one could list as many definitions of religion. I am not going to entangle myself in an endless game of definitions of either term. But the issue is of more than mere academic interest. With respect to culture, I shall try to be as consistent as I can in understanding it as a complex of signs that transmit values, ideas, concepts, norms and rules that are specific for a certain collective of human beings at a certain place at a certain time. In this understanding ‘culture’ resembles ‘language’, which also may be a part of a given culture, although there are instances where it makes sense of speaking of a culture without including language. There are at least three fundamental dimensions of culture, three ‘levels’ if you like: Culture 1: the universe of signs etc., which is special for human beings as a species in contrast with other animals; Culture 2: a specific universe of signs etc., which is special for one group of human beings in contrast with other groups of human beings; Culture 3: a specific universe of signs etc. special for a minor group of human beings that are also members of a larger (cultural) group.2

1 The presentation took place March 30.
2 In the model, ‘2-n’ stands for all other members of the same category (all other animals but human beings, all other nations than one specific nation (e.g., ‘Danes’, ‘Jews’, ‘Muslims’), all other kinds of class-determined or, e.g., regional culture than a specific one (e.g., bourgeois high culture in arts etc.)
In my understanding of religion, I shall follow Durkheim’s definition of “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them”. This definition may lie dangerously close to a common understanding of ‘culture’, and this was also the purpose of it. I shall elaborate a little further on this issue later on. For now, the important thing is to make clear that this definition does not necessarily include belief in deities and spirits – such as a vulgar understanding of religion may have it – although it of course often will. However, the point here is not to deny the importance of differences between religions. On the contrary, it may make a great difference whether one talks of ‘religion’ as if it was a well-defined matter, something that was always the same at all places and of all times, or in the plural, so that one had to be more precise about what kind of religion one is actually thinking about. Maybe it is unavoidable to speak about the relationship between religion and culture. But then, one should always do it with at least a bit of a bad conscience.

The theme of this presentation – such as it was agreed upon some months ago when this seminar was planned – is what we may learn from theories of religion. I shall unfold this theme in three parts. The first and second part will be the ones closest to my title. Here I shall present some points in a (necessarily very limited) number of theories current in the academic study of religion, firstly some considerations from the history of religion, secondly from Durkheim’s general theory of religion. In the third and final part I shall compare some – I think decisive – structures in the academic line of thinking with some comparable structures in Grundtvig’s thinking. In my opinion, Grundtvig was outstanding as a thoroughly political thinker with a vision of the relationship between culture and Christianity which was not only based on a very good analysis of the political and cultural developments of his time, but also with a program for action that may still be an inspiration for the present situation.
1. The origine of studies of religion: Herodotus, and the axial age

I believe that the decisive period in the academic study of religion was the period up to and during the first world war and I shall therefore return to this period in the second part of my presentation. The basic framework for a ‘secular’ understanding of religion, that is: an understanding compatible with the academic discourse of the secular universities, was established a 100 years ago with Durkheim’s theory. What has been added since then are important in terms of methodology, and of course in terms of empirical and historical information, but which only in few instances can match the level of theoretical sophistication reached by them.

This, however, does not mean that this period was also the absolute beginning of the study of religion. Like so much else, the genealogy of this particular branch of humanities reaches far back. To some, with whom I disagree, the study of religion is essentially based on a critical attitude to religion, the genealogy of which can be traced, through enlightenment philosophy with, e.g., Spinoza, Bayle, Hume and Voltaire, all the way back to Greek philosophy, maybe especially Epicure’s version. I, on the contrary, shall postulate that the origin of the studies of religion does not lie in a fundamentally sceptic attitude to the phenomenon of religion. The most important and influential representatives of the study of religion in the 20. Century were not critical towards or skeptic against religion in general. One of the important reason for this is that the most important theoretical work on religion in the last Century was done by anthropologist who were not, an could not be, ‘against’ the cultures they had stayed with and which they described and tried to explain. To the extent that such scholars were emotionally and politically engaged in the people they described it was with an attitude of sympathy, protection and maintenance. Some important students of religion thought that what Western modernity needed was not less, but more religion, although, what they meant by that, was often more primitive’ or exotic religion and less rationalist and intellectualized religion (here, on can refer to, e.g., Rudolf Otto or Mircea Eliade). Some, like Evans-Pritchard, joined the one version of Western religion closest to what he had masterfully described among people in Sudan, namely Roman Catholicism. Victor Turner seems to have had no problem combining exotic and Roman Catholic practices, at least playfully and in a more pre-post-modern version. The famous Mary Douglas, like Evans-Pritchard and Victor Turner a specialist in African cultures, turned, in her later years, to Roman Catholicism and to Old Testament studies where she made important contributions. Even a stiff rationalist as the awesome structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss uttered respect for religious ceremonies and saw no need to ‘criticize’ them. But significantly enough, the anthropologists’ sympathy with religion was with the outward dimensions, rituals, ceremonies, and processions, that is: with Catholicism, rather than with Protestantism with its individualized, subjective faith and its rejection of or at least reluctance towards symbols, acts, rituals. This fundamentally positive attitude to religion in anthropology.

This generally positive attitude towards religion is to my mind the dominant tendency in the academic study of religion. And this attitude is older than a philosophically based criticism of religion. The earliest example of this spirit is, as far as I can see, Herodotus, the Greek writer.
who was not only the ‘father of history’ but also of ethnography and thereby, of the study of religion. In order to better understand the wars between the Greeks and the Persians, the main topic of his work, he wanted to explain the context of this conflict. This led him to descriptions of some of the peoples involved: The Persians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Scythians. And in these descriptions, religion plays a prominent role. No doubt, Herodotus expected his audience to have an immediate and naïve interest in other cultures’ deities, sacrificial procedures, and burial practices. No doubt, this is not exactly the beginning of a theoretical take on religion. But it provides the basic empirical evidence without which there would be nothing to theorize about. Studies of religion is firstly an empirical discipline, no different from the study of art, or literature, or music, etc. Moreover, Herodotus was not ‘critical’ on the different religions he told his readers about. He calmly informed about the beliefs and practices of alien nations and noted in what way they were different from his own people’s. Finally, he did pick up information of religion; but he integrated them in a general description of the alien people’s customs. To Herodotus, religion was a collective phenomenon; he described what all (or most) Persians, Babylonians, etc. would normally believe and do. But he did not have a special category for religion. Beliefs in specific deities, special procedures for sacrifice, etc., belonged to the local customs. They obviously constituted the most conspicuous and interesting part, but they also belonged to the general category of ‘custom and practices’. One may say that the ‘cultural’ understanding of religion was already present in this early work.

One reason for Herodotus’ serene attitude to alien peoples’ religion was no doubt that in spite of all differences between his own Greek religion and the other religion, they belong to the same kind – the one we with the American sociologist of religion, Robert Bellah, may call ‘archaic religion’. This kind of religion is the one that is found all over in early civilizations, among which the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian are the earliest and earliest documented, but to which also, e.g., early Indian, Chinese, and Meso- and South American early civilizations belong. The German Egyptologist Jan Assmann has termed this kind of religion ‘primary religion’. Among important traits here is the ‘tolerance’ with respect to differences, an attitude which is grounded in a conviction that one may translate one religion into another. Herodotus could be critical towards specific elements in one or another alien religion. But generally he assumes that they are compatible. The gods may have different names; but they are, basically, the same: “the Persians use to climb the highest mountains in order to sacrifice to Zeus, since the call heaven for Zeus”. Archaic religions may be compared to languages: They are all different, but a message formulated in one of them may be expressed in all the others. You cannot avoid using at least one language; but it would be wrong to assume that all the others are unusable.

I mention this last point for two reasons: Firstly, in order to emphasize the continuity in this respect from Herodotus to the actual study of religion, and, secondly, to demonstrate in what way this attitude is different from the one that may be expected if talking about religion was talking about ‘truths’. To Herodotus, a claim for universal truth was not an inherent part of
religion. But, of course, some religions, such as Christianity, do make such a claim – or more precisely: some representatives, some persons, typically make such a claim. That is because religions that do make truth claims are all result of the dramatic shifts in religion that was beginning to take place around the time that Herodotus was writing, but which left no trace in his works, since the result of this shift only hit Greek religion much later. These dramatic shift is what we with the American sociologist of religion Robert Bellah may categorize under the label ‘the axial age’ (or, with the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann, ‘secondary religion’): the development of a new type of religion that combined rejection of the world and ascetic way of life with a promise of redemption from suffering and mortality. started, it seems, in Northern India around the middle of the first millennium BC, and with its full consequences only reached the Mediterranean area 500 years later, namely with Judaism. Only on this plane in the historical development of religion became religion essentially polemical in claiming their untranslatability. While the Iranian Ahura Mazda or the Egyptian Amon could be taken as other names for Zeus, the Buddha was not Indra, such as Jesus Christ (whom I here take as an instance of Judaism) was not Zeus.

It was the Hellenistic age that introduced the emerging emancipation of religion from traditional cultures in the Western world. The process is well-known from early Christianity, with the debates among the apostles of how much Jewish one had to be in order to be part of the Christian movement. But in its most basic form, the result was expressed in a wonderfully clear way in the narrative of the Easter miracle, where people from Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Cyrene in Libya, Rome, Crete and Arabia all heard the same message expressed in their native languages. Although the narrative in Acts takes care to present this multi-cultural multitude as Jews – since mission to non-Jews was not yet decided on – there is no doubt that it is really the Gentiles who are meant here. The spiritual experience here envisaged therefore does not entail a change of local culture, except when it comes to religion. The Parthians, Medes, etc. will still be Parthians, Medes etc., but they will be Christian Parthians, Medes, etc. Here, in contrast with Herodotus, religion is no longer an unproblematic part of a local ‘ethnic’ or ‘national’ culture. It has become a separate, independent sphere (the clear understanding of this we owe to Max Weber, who was an important inspiratory for the concept of an ‘axial age’). Any discussion of the relationship between religion and culture, like the one we are having at this seminar, is ultimately dependent upon this separation of religion from the rest of culture. The split of religion from the rest of culture entailed that religion could no longer remain an unproblematic and unquestionable part of daily life. To the contrary, religion became exactly questionable. Since there was no immediate, unreflective reason why a certain religion instead of another should be compelling, religion had to develop arguments for its existence. It had to argue for its ‘truth’. While there was no need to give reasons for why Parthians or Pamphylians worshipped Parthian or Pamphylia gods, there had to be given reasons for why they should worship a god who was neither Parthian, Pamphylian, or of any other cultural origin. The whole idea of religions being per definition claimers of a specific truth – a thought still dear to existentialist theology in the 20. Century – derives from the axial age separation of religion.
from the rest of culture. At this moment, religions became polemic and, if you wish, ‘intolerant’ in a way unknown in archaic religion.

The development, of course, had negatives as well as positive aspects. One obvious problematic aspect was that by taking religion out of an otherwise well-established culture the rest of that culture could not remain unchanged. If religion used to be an integrated part of social life, a rejection of participating in social events with traditional religious implications was really a rejection of participating in social events with one’s old relationships altogether. We see this very clearly already in the Deuteronomistic parts of the Old Testament. Another problematic aspect was that religion became a possible (not: necessary) source of, or – probably more often – pretext for violent conflicts between different religions or between fractions within one and the same religion (as we also see in some parts of the Old Testament). One positive aspect on the other hand was that religion now unchained a hectic intellectual activity by providing an environment, a ‘market’ so to speak, for thinking and writing and discussing and criticizing, without which we would not have had high theology and not the development that led to the university life we know of to-day.

2. Durkheim

This sketch of the background of the tension between religion and culture teaches us that religion may be, but not necessarily is at odds with culture; it all depends on what kind of religion: pre-axial or axial? In most of human history, as far as we can know, religion was an unquestionable part of culture, as we saw it in Herodotus. And in most of human history, religion therefore had not to do with convictions, but with tradition-based social actions, not with what is true, but with what is correct; the question was not whether Zeus existed, but how to worship him. Pre-axial age religions were fundamentally the way that communities consolidated themselves as groups; they were ‘religions of stabilization’, as the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has put it. The one scholar in religious studies that made that clear was the French sociologist and pedagogue Emile Durkheim in his book *The elementary forms of religious life* from 1912. I will give Durkheim’s theory of religion a special consideration because it is, to me, the most intelligent and inspiring ever formulated. No doubt, Durkheim’s take on religion has been reduced to absurdity in the ridiculous catchphrase that according to him, ‘religion is society worshipping itself’ – a reduction with which many students of religion seem to be satisfied (probably so that they do not have to spend time reading him). The opposite sentence would be equally true: ‘religion is society worshipping what it is not – but what it would like to be’. With ‘society’, Durkheim meant any group on a higher level than a family, that is: any group the members of which do not see and communicate with each other on a daily basis. ‘Society’ can be a clan, a tribe, or, in the present time, a congregation, a school class, a political party, the citizens of a state, or even participants at a conference. Some societies live a long life, some a very brief one. Individuals constitute a ‘society’ in as far as they want to do so, and if they have certain principles in common: certain norms and rules, certain memories and narratives, certain symbols. On the one hand, it belongs to human nature to form such ‘societies’; on the other hand, any group or ‘society’ is inevitably fragile
since it is not supported by daily experience. They only way that groups can ‘persist’, that is: exist in time, is by confirming is existence with an amount of regularity. And the basic form of such confirmations and revitalizations were, and still are, gatherings of the individual persons involved in an event that also reaffirmed what constituted this particular group. This is a rational translation of the basis of any religion: The principles specific for the group is what Durkheim called ‘the sacred’ or ‘the forbidden’ (that is: what should not be questioned), and the group is what he called ‘a church’. In brief, to Durkheim, man is a congregation-forming animal. The sacred does represent the ideals that the members of the group in question agree upon. Gods are symbolic representations of the ideals of a group, and therefore each group may have its own gods: warrior groups will have warrior-deities, women with babies will have ideal mother-deities, state-societies will include gods invested with royal power, small groups that are exposed to dangers from the outside, such as enmity and persecutions will have shepherd-gods, etc. Such deities are not mere reflections of a social reality; they do not represent people as they actually see themselves, but as they would like to be or as they would like the world to treat them. Gods are imagined beings at a sufficient distance from their worshippers – not too far away so that the ideals the personify would be totally out of reach for mere human beings, but not too close so that they would be a more or less trivial copy of a trivial reality. One of Durkheim’s lessons was that such ideals are not ‘ideological’ constructions in the Marxist sense of ‘false consciousness’, but rather groups’ active imaginings of themselves. They are certainly ‘emblems’ in the way that they express identity both to the individual members of the group and to the outside. But they are also active elements in groups constant modeling of themselves. Durkheim assumed that it does make a difference whether a groups god is a warrior or a nursing mother: Persons are more likely to be brave and daring if their god is a warrior than they would otherwise be, and more likely to be patient and caring with a nursing woman as their god than if this was not the case. But there is no vantage point from which one may say in an abstract way whether it is generally ‘good’ to be a warrior or a nursing mother.

Accordingly, to Durkheim religion was far from being irrational. It would rather have been the absence of religion that would present a serious problem for our understanding. And as far as we know, all societies have had a kind of religion. Actually, Durkheim’s model does not say that all societies must have been religious. But it does predict that without a religion such a society would not endure. Therefore, although to Durkheim religion in itself did not constitute a problem, it did present a problem for his own time (the French modernized society just before the first world war). Once they have been formed, anonymously, collectively, over a long period of time, religions take on a life of their own. They materialize into narratives, conceptions, social norms for everyday-life, buildings, sculptures, paintings and written texts, and thereby shape its followers more than they shape it – which is of course the way it should be since all religions have been educational systems aimed at making human beings better that they otherwise would be. This has an additional and altogether positive dimension to which I shall return in a moment. But by its sheer power over peoples’ minds, a religion may also come out-of-sync with the people it was supposed to unite and inspire. A society with no
great need of warriors will not be an ideal context for a warrior god; and in a republic a royal god is not the most obvious of ideals. The concluding question for Durkheim in his great 1912-book was then what kind of religion would form itself in modern societies? To him, the traditional religions, including Christianity and the Judaism in which he himself was raised, were old religions, exhausted and decaying. But he was afraid that the national states could not maintain themselves without some kind of religion. Durkheim would not prophesize about what the new religion would be like. He made clear that it had to accept modern science and Western rationality and social and political principles such as individualism and democracy. Still, the problem with the modern values to which he himself firmly adhered was that they were not enough to provide existential meaning. A religion, he said, was not essentially about convictions about how things may be. A religion is really something that makes human beings stronger, more confident about their lives. Ultimately, a religion is about emotions and an inner sense of purpose and direction; a religion makes you warmer and happier; rationality is cold, and lonesome. (Which by the way is why criticism of religion is lost on true believers: No argument from the outside can beat the experience of inner warmth). But inner warmth, generated by a group of co-believers, is a thing modernity cannot provide. But, on the other hand, if a modern society was not able to let a new religion construct itself, it would be so shaky, so fragile that it would risk to collapse. For every society exits only in so far as a group of people want it to exist and they would only want it to exist if it gave them something more and other that what each individual could provide for him- or herself. That ‘more’ and ‘other’ would as a minimum include the elementary warmth that comes for bodies being gathered at the same spot and acting together, confirming ideals that they have in common.

In Durkheim’s theory, originally, in the most elementary and ‘primitive’ version of religion, there was no difference between religion and culture. Religion was culture. However, culture in its earliest imaginable shape took the form of formalized gatherings (that is: rituals) around representations of collective ideals. Present day Christianity is no different, by the way. For what is a church service, if not a gathering of a group of people who get an emotional experience of inner warmth by being together with others who like them subscribe to a common ideal of inexhaustible compassion, love, and acceptance, materialized in the image of a being who is distant enough to be a god, and close enough to be relevant for human beings? But since religion, according to Durkheim, was the origin of formation of social life, and thereby the origin of everything truly human, it was also the cradle of that truly human ability which is the possibility to imagine things, actors, and events that are not present – because they only have been, or only will be, or only take place somewhere else than where people actually are. Deities, spirits, and other representations of the ideal are imagined beings. But human beings not only cannot avoid living a great deal of their time in imagined worlds, they deliberately seek it and love it. We do it all the time, from when we prepare a paper for a conference and wondering who will listen to it and what they would think about it, and when we make plans for our next vacation, to when we read an article in a magazine about things that happen far away, or about how atoms may be constructed, when we tell jokes about people who never existed, when we watch a movie or a clip on YouTube, or when we, some of
us, engage in religion. Out of religion came all the imagined worlds, fictions, dream scenarios, some fantastic, some realistic, some bordering on the trivial, and all unreal, all those worlds we all live in, constantly. I think this is what G.K. Chesterton implied when he wrote in his book *Heretics* that “We all believe fairy-tales, and live in them”\(^3\). (By the way, I can only agree with Slavok Zizek and John Milbank that Chesterton was quite a remarkable philosopher of religion; I note moreover that he wrote his apologetics of Christianity at the same time as Durkheim was formulating his theory of religion).

3. **Grundtvig**

From what I have said about some chosen examples of how studies of religion look at the relationship between religion and culture – and I could have mentioned others: Prominent examples would have been anthropologists such as Evans-Pritchard or Clifford Geertz or Roy Rappaport – it is a commonplace to regard religion as culture. But, in order to return to my remarks on the history of religion, since the great transformations from archaic to axial age religions, the relationship was never undisturbed. No doubt, when axial age religions became dominant, they formed a culture on their own so that religion could be integrated in and more and less define a general culture. This development mended the split between the archaic religion and the axial age religion – for a time being (actually a very long time). I propose to regard medieval Christianity as a ‘post-axial religion of compromise’, namely a compromise between the few and the many, between the renouncers and the masses, between blessing and redemption. But at least since the age of enlightenment and the French revolution, an unproblematic identity between religion and culture has not been possible. Religion has had to accept once more to be only a part of culture, or to be a culture on its own, different from and sometimes at odds with the rest of culture.

The most important person in Denmark who understood this and took the consequences, was of course Grundtvig. It is intriguing to read Grundtvig in parallel with Durkheim.\(^4\) Sometimes one gets the impression that Durkheim was a sort of a secularized Grundtvig, or that Grundtvig was a Durkheim *avant la lettre* within Christianity. To both of them, religion was fundamentally a social, a communal phenomenon, something that presupposed a congregation. Both were clear about imagination and fantasy as essential dimensions of religion. And both were willing to leave the physical world to science, as long as religion kept the much more important imaginary and emotional part. However, in one respect Grundtvig went a step further that Durkheim. He was not only aware that modern society needed a new religion, he was also willing to provide one, at least for Scandinavian societies. Norse mythology should replace Christianity as the common world of ideals and imaginations that Christianity no longer could or should provide. This Grundtvig did in order to protect true Christianity from being so adapted to the hegemonic post-enlightenment culture that it would lose what had always

\(^3\) *Heretics*, 1905, 130.

been essential. In a period in Europe’s history that underwent a process of ‘nation-building’, Christianity could not and should not provide the necessary ideological foundation. After all, even if Christianity always presupposed national cultures – as we saw in the Easter miracle – in itself it was the opposite of anything national. Christianity is a universal religion. It may thrive among Parthians and Pamphylians, but it cannot help Parthians with a special identity up against the Pamphylians. No doubt, Grundtvig thought that Danishness was an especially fertile ground for Christianity. But it was only logical enough that he also thought that Christianity eventually would move to India. Why India and not, e.g., China? Because without a sense of poetry, imagination and fantasy, one would never understand a word about Christianity. In China, according to Grundtvig, everything was examinations and formality. Indians, however, were obviously ready to believe anything – so why not also Christianity?

Time does not permit further elaborations on Grundtvig’s way of mediating between religion and culture, and many others would me more competent than I am, anyway. I only notice that national culture – the one to be revitalized, or, as we would say to-day, to be ‘constructed’ – served a double purpose: One the one hand, it should provide the Danish society with a minimum of shared ideas, ideals, identity and basic mutual sympathy so that the inevitable political changes and transformations could take place without the bloodshed and atrocities of the French revolution. On the other hand, it would introduce people into the sense of poetry and imagination without which Christianity would be unintelligible in the future (under the pressure of secular norms and scientific conceptions).5

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5 The axis ‘individual persons vs. humanity’ designates the 1700-Century discovery of individual cultures as mediators between persons and humanity (cf., Herder). The axis ‘state vs. church’ designates Grundtvig’s differentiation between a post-absolutist state and the church as an independent organism within the state.
In our days, the first of these purposes, the formation of a national identity, has once again become important, in light of emigrations and of the (to me regrettable) weakening of the European Union – a ‘society’ in Durkheim’s sense that so far has not been able to generate a religion around itself (cf., the remarkable absence of EU flags –elementary ‘emblems’ in Durkheim’s sense – in Denmark, in contrast to the core member states). The second of these purposes, the provision of a sense of poetry, has probably been superseded by electronic media. No-one to-day will be ashamed of being wildly fascinated by Star Wars, Harry Potter, or the Lords of the Ring. One of the things that to me remains very important in Grundtvig is his insistence, ‘pietistic’ or not, on Christianity as something which is not of this world. After all, Christianity is about salvation from this world; it is about redemption from sins, and eternal bliss in an eternal life. As far as I can see, Grundtvig insisted on that, and I agree. Christianity is a religion, and as all religions it should be and remain unrealistic, anti-common sense, even crazy (once again, I here follow Chesterton); it should insist on being itself, everywhere and nowhere, among the Parthians and Pamphylians, or Danes, or Indians, but never identical with them. I am not at all against translations and explanations and rationalizations, if one can do that. But I prefer that the crazy part remains. And as long as the church reads from the Bible in its services, everything will be OK in that respect.

Probably, many ministers to-day do not see it this way. I shall end this presentation by mentioning a detail that has to do with the church’s relationship to the state, rather than to a hegemonic culture; but I assume that the structure is comparable. In the traditional church prayer, many ministers seem not to want to pray for the queen for some reason, maybe an implied republicanism or egalitarianism, which makes it strange to pray for one particular individual person in special. Instead, they ether simply leaves her out or, what seems to have a certain popularity, they reformulate a special prayer for the royal house into a prayer for all families. What they do not seem to acknowledge is that the prayer for the queen should be a prayer for the state, for the political unit that is not the church, the unit and power that allows the church to exist on its premises, but which is not, cannot be and should not be identical with the church. The church should remain clear that it has to be a culture of its own, not identical with the state and not identical with the rest of the culture, or rather the many cultures of postmodern society. In Denmark, the church has been blessed with a very friendly state and a very tolerant culture Yet, it is less than a hundred years ago when states close to us were very different and much less welcoming. And if history teaches us anything it is that things never last and that you never know what comes next. Therefore, the church should pray for the state, that is: the queen, and keep ready to move to India, or Pamphylia.