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Introduction: authorities in religious individualisation

Concluding a publication on religious individualisation with three sections on different aspects of the notion of ‘authorities’ requires an explanation. The sections of this fourth part lead back to our starting point: the study of individualisation as a social phenomenon, as a phenomenon involving complex processes with different agents and time-lines in varying social contexts.

If new religious practices are an expression, as much as a trigger, of religious individualisation, it is processes of grouping (see Lichterman et al. 2017) and, hence, institutionalisation that stabilise this individualisation. ‘Associations’ (*collegia*, *thaisoi*) were present in ancient Mediterranean cities from quite early on in their development but it was during the imperial period, in particular, that they started to become ever more important as organisational forms of religious grouping. *Collegia* were private organisations that could acquire a legal status (and, from the second century AD onwards, own property) by being ‘registered’ (for the following see Rüpke 2007, 205–14). The gamut of different types of *collegia* is very wide: the slaves owned by a large household (*familia*) might unite to form a *collegium*; independent craftsmen formed large professional organisations partly for convivial purposes but also to protect their rights and status, as did the mediaeval guilds in a period of European history. The name of the association and the location of the meeting place suggest that religious identities were ascribed to these groups by members and observers. A membership of between fifteen and one or two hundred members was common.

Internal forms of organisation were highly variable. By the middle of the second century, nearly four hundred members of a Dionysian club set up an inscription to honour the daughter of the founder, Pompeia Agrippinilla. This inscription from suburban Torrenova takes the form of a membership list identifying a wealth of different functions for about fifty members of the association. Hierarchically ordered, it lists *dadouchos* – *sacerdotes* – *theophoroi* – *hypourgos kai seilenokosmos* (minister) – *cistaphoroi* – *archiboukoloi* – *boukoloi hieroi* – *archibassaroi* – *amphithaleis* – *liknaphoroi* – *phallophoroi* – *pyrphoroi* – *hieromnemon* – *archineaniskoi* – *archibassarai* – and finally custodians, *antrophylakes*, listed only after the mass of female *bakchai* and male and female *seigetai* who, as newcomers, had ‘to remain silent’ (see Rüpke 2006). Obviously, at least a minimally corresponding complexity of rituals and ritual space has to be imagined for this religious group made up from an extended family.

The temporal structure of the group's interaction was, likewise, open to definition. From the mid-second century AD, the rules of the *collegium* of Aesculapius and Hygieia gave a schedule of dates that might give some indication of the usual practice.

On 4th January: New Year gifts are to be distributed as on 19th September.

On 22nd February, the day of the Caristia (family feast): a distribution of bread and wine to be made at the *schola* near the temple of Mars, in the same amount as on 4th November.

On 14th March, at the same place, a dinner is to be held, which Ofilius Hermes, the president, has promised to provide each year for everyone present; alternatively a money distribution in the usual amount.

On 22nd March, Violets day: in the *schola*, gifts of money, bread and wine to those present, in the amount stated above.

On 11th May, Roses day: in the *schola*, gifts of money, bread and wine to those present, in the amount stated above, on the condition, agreed at the full assembly, that the monetary gifts, bread and wine allocated to those who do not attend shall be put up for sale and given to those who do attend, except in the cases of those who happen to be abroad or who are indisposed through illness.

(From *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6.10234 = *Année Epigraphique* 1937, 161, trsl. Richard Gordon in *ibid.*, 209.)

The whole association had been financed and (re-)organised by a certain Salvia Marcellina, wife of a libertine named Capito, in commemoration of her husband and his superior (Flavius Apollonius, a procurator Augusti in charge of the imperial painting galleries), to whom Capito was assistant. Thus, the association had received a roofed structure as a meeting place and funds to hold banquets. In order to make the bequest meet the costs, the donor had limited the maximum number of members to sixty. The most important dates were related to the cult of consecrated emperors and further meetings were scheduled for days commonly used for the commemoration of the dead. Surely, such a practice was a consequence of the Roman laws controlling associations, which limited official meetings to one per month and allowed monthly contributions only up to a certain sum. Tertullian, at the turn of the third century AD, claimed that Christian associations – in fact churches, with their Sunday services and alms-giving – conformed to these rules (*apol.* 39.5). Such a claim might be the lie of an 'apologetic' to cover the illegal behaviour of more frequent meetings and giving, but given the spaces available for meetings and working conditions for many potential participants beyond members of the household, we cannot be sure that frequent meetings could have been efficiently institutionalised. But the very presence of the source, a lasting inscription inscribed in stone, regulating details and ordering meetings so as to assure the memory of a founding figure, demonstrates the dialectics of

individualisation secured by institutionalisation, even if the idea that such associations could exercise influence over the members' life-style, *disciplina*, developed only slowly. Already in Hellenistic and earlier times, such a connection was known and accepted for groups qualified as philosophical 'schools'. Such rules could include regular attendance, abstaining from meat, even sexual regulations (Sen. *epist.* 108.17–22; Diog. Laert. 8.19).

The notion of 'Authorities', as thematised in this last and fourth part of our publication, points to the impact of power relations, to the relationship of the ruling few and the many subjects, of majorities and minorities, of centres and margins in terms of political power, cultural or religious authority, economic dominance – and the collaboration between the two sides. Again, this demands a nuanced concept of individualisation in accordance with our previous treatments.

Contrary to the still dominant view of individualisation as a uni-linear and coherent process, the perspective from the history of religion reveals diverse, temporary, and discontinuous processes. The claim of uniqueness, unity, and the irreversibility of individualisation (above all as a process of Western modernity) is not the result of empirical findings, but is in itself part and parcel of a self-description that finds a scientific expression in modernisation theory. For historical analysis, it is useful to differentiate between the concepts of 'individual' and of 'individuality', of 'individuation' (the biographical process of acquiring a full member's role in a society, see Musschenga 2001, 5 for these terms) and 'individualisation' (the social structural process of institutional or discursive changes allotting more space for individuality). Elsewhere I have proposed to differentiate between types of individuality, in order to enable a closer look at the phenomena and their contexts (these will be introduced and developed further below, see Rüpke 2013 for the following).

But what kind of phenomena does such a concept of individualisation embrace? What kind of family resemblance does it produce? First and foremost, it includes the notion of de-traditionalisation as thematised in the first section of Part 4. Individual action is less and less determined by traditional norms handed down by family and the wider social context. Options open up, choices can be, and need to be, made. On the part of the individual, this development is reflected in changes in 'individuation' – the process of a gradual full integration into society and the development of self-reflection and of a notion of individual identity. Socialisation is the parallel biographical process of being integrated into ever larger social contexts. The individual's appropriation of social roles and traditions and, more specifically, religious roles and traditions, goes hand in hand with the development of individual identity. I know how to act in society and I act strategically, being self-aware but not necessarily selfish. Religious individuation, for instance, does not imply the individual's wish to be different. On the contrary, in many historical circumstances being different was not a value that informed individuation. Dignity

and honour were such values, notions of competition, being better than others in certain respects, or even being perfect. Religious practices may have been treated as fields of competition, for instance in sponsorship and charity, in displays of a cultured taste, or in intensive relationships with a deity.

Such changes entail institutional developments: options are declared legitimate; voluntary associations help to realise certain options; writing, as is suggested by *bhakti* or *Sufi* poetry, helps to develop notions of individuality; inscriptions on stone, wood or internet pages might help to express it on a larger social scale. The rights of the individual are legally protected against society's demands, culminating in the formulation of individual human rights. As we have seen for the American white middle classes (Madsen 2009, see the general introduction), individuality takes on a normative character: you *have* to be an individual. This relates only to a segment of society. Individualisation as well as socialisation are processes within complex and multi-layered societies, processes that are informed by basic social factors and contingent local and temporal circumstances. They are also informed by potentially globalised discourses, pluralised (as the second section is to emphasise) not only within fields like religion but also with regard to the importance attributed to different fields of the economy, culture, politics or religion – and the 'exchange rates' between the different forms of capital acquired in such fields.

Talking about plurality thus goes beyond (and even questions) the simple acknowledgment of the co-existence of different 'religions'. Religions are usually understood as traditions of religious practices, conceptions, and institutions, in some contexts even fully developed organisations. According to an important strain of sociological thought going back to Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), we are dealing here with social products (Durkheim 1947; also Pickering 2008; Rosati 2009), with groups of people normally living together within a territory, who withhold the central core, the shared orientation of their life together, from the necessity of daily discussion by investing it in forms of religious symbolism. There emerges a system of signs whose immanence is preserved by the performance of rituals and which seeks to explain the world in images, narratives, written texts, or refined dogma and to determine behaviour by the use of ethical imperatives, often by recourse to an effective apparatus of sanctions (for instance, through the power of the state), but sometimes even without that implied threat.

Such a conception of religion already meets its limits when it seeks to explain religious pluralism, the enduring coexistence of different, mutually contradictory conceptions and practices. It is even more limited with regard to the quite distinct relationship of individuals to religion, the aspect with which research into religious individualisation is concerned. This conception of religion has already been attacked for being too closely oriented towards 'western' and, above all, Christian religious and conceptual history and has been criticised for its unquestioned

and unquestioning ‘colonial’ transference to other cultures (Asad 1993; McCutcheon 1997; Masuzawa 2000; 2005). The approach has similar problematic ramifications when we seek to apply it to Euro-Mediterranean antiquity (see Nongbri 2013; Barton, Boyarin 2016; Rüpke 2018b, 1–22). The reason for this also lies in the present. The dissolution of traditional allegiances, a common feature of our time, is seen as religious individualism, the disappearance of religion, or even the displacement of collective religion by individual spirituality (Luckmann 1991; also Dobbelaere 2011, 198; Rüpke 2016). This perspective then becomes associated with the complementary assumption that early societies and their religions must have been characterised by a high level of collectivism. Thus, a problematic assumption in respect of the present day creates a highly distorted picture of the past.

But it is not the notion of religion that needs to be set aside. What is needed instead is a concept of religion that enables us to describe the aforementioned changes regarding the social location and individual significance of religion. This can successfully be achieved by conceiving of religion from the point of view of the individual and his or her social involvement. Here, the notion of ‘lived religion’ is helpful (for the following Rüpke 2012; 2018a). The concept of lived religion was developed in the late 1990s. Instead of analysing expert theologies, dogma, or the institutional setting and history of organised ‘religion’, the lived religion approach focuses on what people actually do. More precisely, it is not interested in inquiring into how individuals reproduce the set of religious practices and intellectual tenets of a ‘faith’. Taking into account the inter-subjective and relational character of the individual (Fuchs, Rüpke 2015; Fuchs 2015), the approach focuses instead on the individual’s ‘usage’ of religion. Religion is, however, not to be seen as existing independently of individual practice. We are not asking how, over the course of their lives, individuals replicate a set of religious practices and beliefs preconfigured by an institutionalised official religion or, conversely, how they opt out of adherence to a tradition. Instead, ‘lived religion’ focuses on the actual everyday experience, on practices, expressions, and interactions that are related to and constitute ‘religion’. Such ‘religion’ is understood as a spectrum of experiences, actions, and beliefs and communications hinging on human communication with super-human or even transcendent agent(s), whether conceptualised as gods, demons, ancestors, or powers. Material symbols, elaborate forms of representation, and ritualisation are called upon for the success of communication with these addressees (Bell 1992; Rüpke 2010b). Of course, such a communication at the same time implies the forging or, at times, the rejection of human alliances. Thus, the existence and importance of culturally stabilised forms of rituals, and of the concepts and people who are invested in developing and defending them, cannot be denied.

In contemporary usage, ‘lived religion’ is in the danger of focusing on what is also addressed by concepts such as ‘everyday religion’ or ‘popular religion’. Orsi

(1999; 2010) and McGuire (2008) focus, respectively, on religious practices on the streets of an Italian neighbourhood in New York and on religion in American living rooms. Focusing on meaning, however, David D. Hall urges ‘breaking with the distinction of high and low’ (Hall 1997; cf. Orsi 1997).

As has been stressed above, individual practices are not entirely subjective. There are religious norms, there are exemplary official practices, and there are control mechanisms. It is precisely such institutions and norms that tend to predominate in the surviving evidence from historical religion. In this biased transmission, what historians of religion are used to read as a norm fully in force is not the result of the validity of the norm but, rather, a communicative strategy on the part of agents in positions of power or in possession of larger means. If we observe religion in the making – as is stressed here –, institutions or beliefs are not simply culturally given, but are themselves aggregates of individual practices – as well as the constraints of these practices.

The concept of ‘appropriation’, as initially developed by Michel de Certeau (2007), is useful to capture the relationship between the individual agent and the cultural and material environment. The specific forms of religion-as-lived are barely comprehensible in the absence of specific modes of individual appropriation of motives and models offered by traditions, up to the extreme of the radical rejection of dominant ways of life, as is the case with asceticism or martyrdom, that is, of walking the edges or even dying on them. For the concrete forms and, above all, for their material survival (and thus being available as ‘evidence’ today), cultural techniques such as the reading, writing, and the interpretation of mythical or philosophical texts, rituals, pilgrimages and prayer, and the various media of representation of deities in and out of sanctuaries, are decisive.

The notion of agency implicit in the idea of appropriation is important. Agency is not concerned with the lonely individual but with the interaction of individuals with structures. And these structures are, again, the result of individual action. In view of the normative tagging of teachings, traditions, narratives, etc. in the field of religion, that is to say in view of the normative claims raised by some of the agents, the question of how ideas are taken up and modified by others (or in other words: the specification of processes of reception) is of particular importance. Talking of lived religion offers a frame for a description of the formative influence of professional providers of law and other legal norms, of philosophical thinking and intellectual reflections in literary or reconstructed oral form, of social networks and socialisation, of lavish performances in public spaces (or performances run by associations) with recourse to individual conduct in rituals and religious context. This valuation and methodological primacy of the individual is more than a radicalisation of modern research strategies that are interested in differentiating the practices of ever smaller defined groups and

communities. Again, institutions are not regarded as ontologically antecedent. Individuals' agency and structure constitute each other (Emirbayer, Mische 1998; Dépelteau 2008; Wang 2008; Campbell 2009; Rüpke 2015). Taking religion as lived religion brings the precarious state of institutions and traditions to the fore and does so without denying the power of such authorities. But above all, these are as much the means of expression and creativity of their inventors and patrons as spaces and material of experience and innovation for their users and clients. Statistically speaking, only in rare instances does such lived religion coalesce into networks and organised systems to resemble what we normally categorise as religions, expressed in written texts that may then develop an enduring autonomous existence of enormous proportions. And yet, they were and are important, or have importance ascribed to them, as several chapters of the fourth part of our publication underline. Without the support of individual choices by institutionalised practices or beliefs, or even by full-grown organisations, explicit religion might become implicit religion, visible religion invisible religion, and vice versa. Processes of individualisation in their different forms are reversible processes, potentially following or being followed by processes of de-individualisation.

There are, however, even more complications involved in these relationships. Periods and regions that could be regarded as characterised by a variety of processes of individualisation can also be seen as seedbeds of religious traditions, even organisations. In short, they can be seen as equivalents to what we are used to call 'religions'. Mediterranean Late Antiquity is the birthplace of what has been called the first autobiography, Augustine of Hippo's 'Confessions' at the end of the fourth century, and of monastic and ascetic *virtuosi* in the preceding century. And yet, Augustine was the powerful head of the Catholic 'church' of Carthage, fighting the widespread Donatist movements. Many ascetics and hermits grouped together as cenobites in monasteries where their 'fathers', the abbots, started to write monastic rules. Similarly, the idea of the loving relationship to a god, called *bhakti*, elaborated from the Puranic period, roughly the third century AD onwards, quickly led to the formation of *sampradayas*, of sects, which focused the religious practices on specific deities. The Central European Reformation of the early 16th century propagated the ideas of individual belief and a personal salvation that is dependent on God's grace in the place of ritual services provided by the Christian Church, but different theologies and alliances still organised themselves into ever closer structures that were also political in nature. The 'new religious movements' in the era of New Age spirituality attest to a broad differentiation of world views and religious practices but they are not only indicators of individual options and choices made. At the same time, they also attest to loose and tight networks, practices of bonding or even the sanctioning of disloyalty. De-traditionalisation and neo-traditionalisation might go hand in hand.

These observations can be generalised. Individual behaviour that might be judged deviant, or at least non-conformist, from the point of view of the majority or the religious mainstream, is precarious and threatened. As a consequence, it is safeguarded and institutionalised in the form of (at least in the beginning) minority groups. From here, the paradox takes its point of departure. A bundle of factors and motifs lead to the encaging of those who group together to defend their religious individuality. In order to define their boundaries, groups dogmatise their norms and denounce outsiders, as well as exclude internally deviant members. Systematisation of belief and the attempt to gain political support produce rigidity or compromises that turn away other members. Professional leaders judge the power of their institution by its influence on the behaviour of the people who judge themselves members or are ascribed membership. The conviction or practice safeguarded by the institution might be rigidly enforced among its members. By the fourth century AD, Christian bishops had achieved juridical power, granted to them by the Roman emperor; ‘heretics’, ‘followers’ of (just another) sect had been banned earlier but could now be sanctioned with public support. Manicheans and heretics had to fear for their careers and even their lives. Even if the question of whether Muhammad’s Islam was just a new heresy or an independent ‘religion’ of its own was discussed by Christian observers far into the Middle Ages, in hindsight we can classify this culmination of individualisation processes as a period of ‘religionification’, of the rise of religions (Rüpke 2010a). In Europe, a comparable process can be observed in the early modern period. Down to the 18th century, the processes of confessionalisation, the development of different ‘confessions’ (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed), sharply defined group limits, formalised standards of belief and behaviour, and assured the internalisation of specific denominational norms leading to lasting habits, social and economic behaviour, and intellectual orientation. Only for a few contemporaries, who were able to leave the habitual social and intellectual context, such confessions offered practically eligible options. Despite the existence of religious pluralism from the bird’s eye view, for any historical individual the exercise of choice was very restricted. In many instances, this stimulated internal differentiation rather than the costly switching of allegiances.

The fourth part of this publication engages with these questions from the three different perspectives already indicated. In all of them, the differences in power, the sometimes dramatic degrees of dependency and hegemony, are taken into account. The first group of articles focuses on processes of de-traditionalisation – identified as a major indicator of processes of individualisation above – as well as re-traditionalisation or, rather, neo-traditionalisation, thus taking the perspectives of those in power. The section opened with *Richard Gordon’s* chapter on religious specialists of low social status in the ancient world and their development of

competence and knowledge in the realm of roots, herbs, and basic ritual practices in the face of anti-magic legislation and the necessity to perform in a market. *Jan Bremmer* tackles the question of the possibility of limiting de-traditionalisation head on by authorities and legal systems by looking into juridical cases in ancient Athens. This is followed by *Avner Ben-Zaken's* chapter on the trans-local and trans-cultural establishment of traditions which cross the boundaries of religion and science in the geographical space of Europe, the Mediterranean, and western Asia. *Kumkum Sagari* focuses likewise on individuals, now Annie Besant and M. K. Gandhi in 20th century India, and their appropriation and reformulation of traditions. For the same period, the tension between individualised and institutionalised religion is discussed with regard to Catholicism in Germany by *Veronika Hoffmann*. *Michael Nijhawan* concludes the section by turning again to a legal system, this time in contemporary Germany, and its construction of membership in a religious tradition for immigrants.

In the second section, processes of pluralisation, another key phenomenon of individualisation, are brought centre-stage. Depending on the character of political or juridical regimes or constellations in which religion is not sharply differentiated against 'non-religion' or 'society', different degrees of group formation (see Eliasoph, Lichterman 2003; Lichterman 2012; Lichterman et al. 2017) and stabilisation of such groupings lead to a pluralisation that might even offer possibilities to 'opt in'. *Angelika Malinar* focuses on textual strategies of religious pluralisation in ancient India, whereas comparable strategies in the form of ritual practices and objects in ancient Mediterranean religion are thematised by *Jörg Rüpke*. *Marion Frenkel* directly engages with processes of institutionalisation that, at first glance, seem to attest singularisation rather than its opposite, but points to neglected practices of individualisation in late ancient circum-Mediterranean Christianity. It is texts that again take centre-stage in *Asaph Ben-Tov's* chapter on an early modern learned man who employed the confrontation with a different linguistic tradition, the Arabic Quran, as a means to add new perspectives to contemporary Protestantism. In the fifth chapter, *Amit Dey* takes the topic of Islam to India and investigates Islamic pluralisation there.

Finally, the focus shifts even more to the individual agents. Emphasis is given to marginal positions and how individuals in such positions were facing societal pressure. *Cristiana Facchini's* protagonists were 'walking the edges' in their interpretation and transformation of prophets in early modern Europe. Going back to the Middle Ages, *Katharina Mersch* inquires into the processes sanctioned and furthered by formal exclusion from the Roman-Catholic church, while *Britta Müller-Schauenburg* looks into the case of a pope who reflected on his own deviance, which was constituted externally by the fact that he was driven out of this very office. The last two chapters, by *Cornelia Haas* and *Vera Höke*, turn to 19th

and 20th century India and attempt to consolidate religious individualisation in teachings and organisation.

Collectively, these essays deny that the available sources, even if normative, judgemental, or straight-forwardly condemnatory texts, provide access only to the exclusive and excluding polemic of those in power. Following Michel de Certeau (1988), one might claim that such texts also provide a view of the highly varied, distorted, hyperbolic, and 'devious' ways in which such norms were appropriated by individuals. The norms themselves can be regarded as attempts to represent a complex reality that resisted subjection to such formulations (Rüpke 2016). Thus, the chapters do not solely inquire on constructivist lines into processes such as labelling, exclusion and the creation of otherness, or regulation and the construction of deviance (Perrin 2001; Thio, Calhoun, Conyers 2008, 3). Rather, they allow us to obtain some idea of the breadth of individual religious activity and the positions espoused by minorities, or marginalised by the dominance of the politically dominant groups or elite literary tradition. In short they give us a sense of the scope of the views held by those 'walking the edges'.

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