Shared responsibility of religions and denominations – the role of religions in Europe

Summary of the presentation of Dr Matthias Inniger

14 Oct 2021

Dear audience,

The overall conference title: "Pillars of Modern Age Europe – Coexistence of Religious Communities", shows that Hungary takes seriously the creative potential of religious communities and, by implication, religion as a human phenomenon.

In this presentation we are speaking, in general, about the phenomenon of religion, the existence and coexistence of religious communities, the value-building potential of religious communities and about the religious landscapes of modern Europe.

In particular, we are speaking about the social potential of religious communities, the shared responsibility, the relevance of religion and religions for the state, the design of the state-religion relationship, the so-called "governance of religious diversity", and about the role of religions in the Europe of today and the future.

In view of the complexity of the topic: **"Shared responsibility of religions and denominations – the role of religions in Europe"**, I divide my presentation in two parts. The first and introducing part presents ten preliminary short comments, and the second part follows with four general statements.
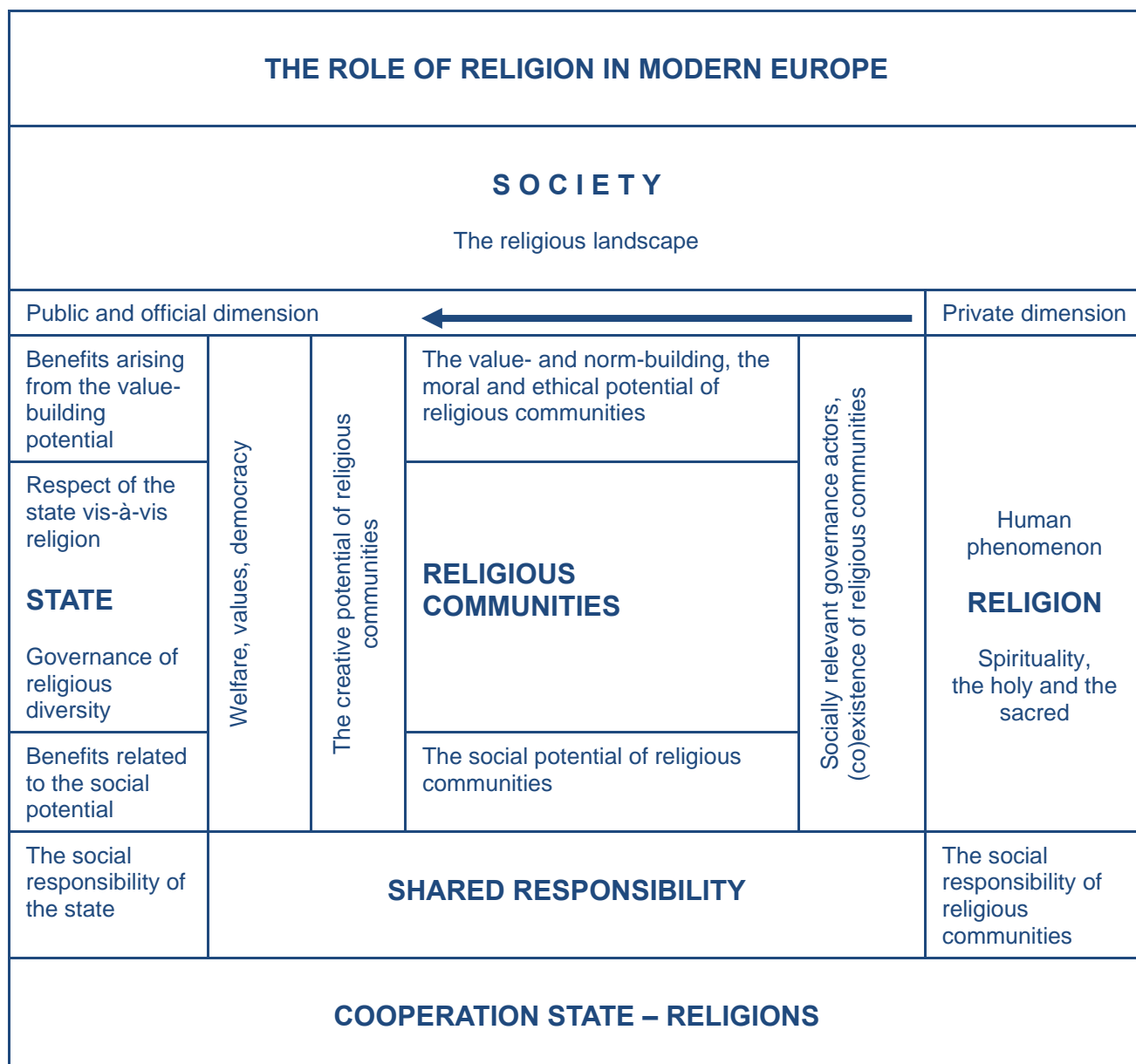
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| THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN MODERN EUROPE |

S O C I E T Y

The religious landscape

| Public and official dimension | ← | Private dimension |

Benefits arising from the value-building potential	Welfare, values, democracy	The creative potential of religious communities	The value- and norm-building, the moral and ethical potential of religious communities	Socially relevant governance actors, (co)existence of religious communities	Human phenomenon
Respect of the state vis-à-vis religion					**RELIGION**
STATE			**RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**		
Governance of religious diversity					Spirituality, the holy and the sacred
Benefits related to the social potential			The social potential of religious communities		

| The social responsibility of the state | **SHARED RESPONSIBILITY** | The social responsibility of religious communities |

| **COOPERATION STATE – RELIGIONS** |

Figure   The complexity of the topic "Shared responsibility of religions and denominations - the role of religions in Europe"

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Part I

1. The topicality of religion

The topicality of religion is a given in Europe. Religion is receiving increased attention in politics, society and research. Contrary to the expectations by the end of the last century, religion and religious communities are still relevant in post-secular societies (Jürgen Habermas, 2018).[1]

2. Religion is a human phenomenon

Religion is a human phenomenon, and it is part of human existence. People approach, experience and express religion in various ways by considering the *numinosum*[2], the miracle of the holy, the sacred, and what is beyond human understanding. I consider that the majority of the believers view the *numinosum* mainly as an adoration of the *misterium fascinosum*, which is "the mystery that attracts", and "by which humans are irresistibly drawn to the glory, beauty, adorable quality, and the blessing, redeeming, and salvation-bringing power of transcendence".[3]

3. The respect of the state towards religion

A state that respects the fundamental values of human life that go beyond the material and mundane and by which people orientate and make sense of their lives, respects – together with its institutions – the dimensions of religion, spirituality and the sacred (Cobb 2015[4]; Inniger 2016[5]).

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[1] Habermas, J., 2018, *Glauben und Wissen*, 9. Auflage, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, p. 13, and: Schilm, P., 2006, *Lecture in Bremen* (09.02.2006), chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dialog-religio.de%2FHabermas.pdf&clen=301421&chunk=true (04.09.2021).

[2] Otto, R., 1917, *Das Heilige*, 1. Auflage, C. H. Beck, München.

[3] Britannica, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/mysterium-tremendum-et-fascinans (04.09.2021).

[4] Cobb, M. et al., 2015, *Introduction to Chaplaincy Studies*, in Cobb, M., Swift, C. & Todd, A., (eds.) *A Handbook of Chaplaincy Studies. Understanding Spiritual Care in Public Places*, Farnham, Ashgate, p. 1-12.

[5] Inniger, M., 2016, *A theological-ethical evaluation of the Christian-Muslim dialogue in the Swiss army chaplaincy*, PhD thesis, North-West University, Potchefstroom, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Frepository.nwu.ac.za%2Fbitstream%2Fhandle%2F10394%2F19661%2FInniger_M_2016.pdf%3Fsequence%3D1%26isAllowed%3Dy&clen=2832696 (01.10.2021).

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4. Religious communities as expression of religion

A main expression of religion is that believers assemble in communities in order to experience religion together. Religious communities are social groups, assuming various forms and rich in tradition. Religious communities are congregations of people who assemble to share their faith, to pray, to celebrate and to experience God. In a noisy, fractured world, torn by suffering and violence, religious communities listen together to the whisper of the spirit of God.

5. Religious communities have a public dimension

While individual religious affiliation is a private matter, religious communities are a societal matter with a clear public dimension. If our conference title considers religious communities as pillars of society, it addresses the fact that religious communities operate in the public domain, be it vis-à-vis other religious communities, further societal stakeholders of civil society, or vis-à-vis the state. It is the proprium of religious communities that they do not exist only for themselves, rather they have an effect on the outside, they have charisma, visibility and impact.

With regard to their public dimension Gunnar Folke Schuppert considers religious communities as "communities of identity and communication". They have a capacity for acting collectively. Transnational, institutional and law-making power turns them into highly relevant actors with respect to society and the state. With good reason Schuppert calls religious communities "governance actors". [6]

6. Religious communities have value-building potential

Religions and denominations have significant value-building potential. The value-building, moral and ethical potential of religious communities for the benefit of the public and the society is one important reason why religious communities are relevant to the state. Principles for life, norms, moral, ethical concepts and values grow out of the heart of religion.

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[6] Schuppert, G.F., 2017, *Governance of diversity: Zum Umgang mit kultureller und religiöser Pluralität in säkularen Gesellschaften,* Schriftenreihe Religion und Moderne 10, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt.

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A leading influence on the Swedish policy on religion, Åke Göransson, confirms this and states that the history of Swedish democracy is the history of civil society. Positive forces such as religious communities have participated – and are participating – in the never-ending process of establishing the norms that are necessary for the maintenance and enhancement of the fundamental values on which society and democracy rest. Göransson highlights that active organisations such as religious communities help to strengthen the democratic system. He concludes that the state should support these organisations so that their important voices can be heard. Tellingly, Göransson titles his publication, in which he justifies the state's subsidies for religious communities, as a "Contribution to the contributors of society".[7]

Sophie van Bijsterveld, Member of the Upper House of the Dutch Parliament, professor of Religion, Law and Society, emphasises also that religion is a phenomenon that offers societal and moral orientation and creates values and identity, and thus social, moral and societal bonds. This is – Professor van Bijsterveld concludes – where religion is unique, and no other societal organisation can take on these functions.[8]

7. Religious communities have social potential

In my presentation I focus specifically on the huge social potential of religious communities. The social potential is – besides the value-building potential – the other important reason why religious communities are relevant for state and society, and why states should cooperate with them. States and religious communities have common goals regarding the public welfare.

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[7] Göransson, Å., 2014, *Contribution to the contributors of society,* in a transcript from the Swedish journal Kurage no. 14, 2014, The Commission for Government Support for Faith Communities, Bromma.
[8] Van Bijsterveld, S., 2018, *State and religion: Re-assessing a mutual relationship*, Eleven International Publishing, The Hague, p. 31.

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8. Value-building and social potential belong together

If this presentation specifically focusses on the social potential of religious communities, this in no way implies that I am ignoring their value-building, moral and ethical potential. The large-scale creative potential of religious communities consists of their social *and* of their value-building potential. Politicians who understand the nature of religion and religions might consider the social potential and the value-building of religious communities as Siamese twins. The social potential of religions and denominations is highly dependent on their value-building, moral and ethical potential that is, quasi, the drive engine for the social contribution. The state cannot simply make use of the social potential of religious communities, since the value-building, moral and ethical potential is part of the package.

9. Religion and religions are relevant for the state

Ninth, based on the mentioned points it is obvious that religion and religions are highly relevant for states. In view of the topicality of religion, of the huge social potential of religious communities and of common goals of religions and states, many European governments are currently considering issues of the implementation of religious rights, of religious communities as collective actors vis-à-vis the state, and of shared responsibility. European states and governments are currently considering and reconsidering the role of religion and religions in state and society.

10. The religious landscapes of Europe today are Christian, plural and secular

We should also take a quick glance at the religious landscapes of modern Europe. In many European contexts, the traditional state-recognised Christian churches still flag dominance, and their influence still characterises the religious landscapes.[9] But modern Europe is also experiencing changes in the religious landscapes. These changes can best be explained by the trends of pluralism, diversification, deinstitutionalisation, individualisation and secularisation.

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[9] Inniger, M., Vorster, J.M. & Rheeder, R., 2020, *Changing religious landscapes challenge confession-based state policies on religion*, In die Skriflig 54(1), a2527, https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/article/view/2527 (07.04.2020), p. 3.

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Pluralism and diversification developed mainly due a globalised world, due to travelling and cross-national business, politics and research programs, and due to migration.

Deinstitutionalisation and individualisation are also clear trends. These trends are equally apparent from the attitudes of people who come from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist backgrounds. In the context of deinstitutionalisation, a self-critical side note seems necessary: Some people turn their backs on religious communities because of disappointments. Other people are, in fact, areligious, agnostic, or strictly unaffiliated with any one religion. Many people have, however, not once and for all turned their backs on religion, rather they simply no longer want to be paying members of their religious communities. They want to feel freer – for example as "cultural Christians", "cultural Muslims". But still, they proudly celebrate with the family their religious feasts, and still, they give their babies names with a religious meaning.

And secularisation? "Secular" implies neutrality with regard to religion. Furthermore, a secular state conducts the state and public affairs without the precepts of religion. In my experience, a secular attitude does not necessarily involve an anti-religious attitude. I know many politicians who are non-denominational, no longer affiliated to any specific religion, very often agnostic and secular, but, more often than not, they accept religion as a human phenomenon, they are not against religion in the public sphere, and they see the relevant social contributions of religious communities, and, therefore, they accept a robust state-religion relationship as well. I have the same deep respect for citizens without religious affiliation as for citizens with religious affiliation.

I conclude with Paul Weller, who states that today's European landscapes are "Christian, plural and secular".[10]

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In view of the topicality, the public dimension and the huge creative potential of religions and denominations, and in view of the relevance of religion and religions for states and governments and the changed religious landscapes, it is a good choice to make the topic of "**Shared responsibility of religions and denominations and the role of religions in modern Europe"** the subject of discussion.

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[10] Weller, P., 2005, *Time for a change: Reconfiguring religion, state and society*, T&T Clark International, London/New York, p. 71.

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Part II

1.   The people that make up the religious landscape are the citizens of our nations: this creates – in view of the huge social potential of religious communities – a shared responsibility between state and religions: States, religions and denominations serve the same society.

Mr. Zsolt Semjén, Deputy Prime Minister, aptly states in the preface of the documentation *"Together with our Churches at the service of society"* that the Hungarian church policy is built on harmonious cooperation of the state and the churches "…since we are members of our churches and citizens of our country at the same time."[11]

The shared responsibility between state and religious communities are obvious, especially with regard to public welfare. States realise that religious communities support the state with a wide range of social activities. Religious communities give a home, support and security to their members and beyond. They contribute to education. They help their members solve conflicts. They give financial support to pauperising people. Furthermore, they contribute to interreligious dialogue and to the promotion of social peace among religious communities. They also contribute to cultural activities and economic achievements.[12] States realise that religious communities assume the tasks of the state itself in the social sphere, for example, regarding the responsibility for a dignified burial, for the spiritual care in public institutions, for family support, for support of people living under the subsistence level, or for overburdened parents. All over Europe, religious communities have soup kitchens, counselling services, safe havens for people experiencing difficulties, kindergartens, hospitals and schools. And not to be forgotten, the spiritual first aid during emergencies and catastrophes.

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[11] Available at the Miniszterelnökség Egyházi és Nemzetiségi Kapcsolatokért, Felelős Államtitkárság, Egyházi Koordinációs és Kapcsolattartási Főosztály, H-1125 Budapest, Szilágyi Erzsébet fasor 22/C.

[12] Inniger, M., 2018, *Religionspolitische Auslegeordnung für den Kanton Bern: Kurzbericht im Auftrag der Justiz-, Gemeinde- und Kirchendirektion des Kantons Bern* (3 April 2018), Justiz-, Gemeinde- und Kirchendirektion des Kantons, Bern, https://www.jgk.be.ch/jgk/de/index/direktion/ueber-die-direktion/dossiers.assetref/dam/documents/JGK/GS/de/Auslegeordnung%20 Bernischen%20Religionspolitik.pdf (11.09.2021), p.18.

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The huge social contribution of religious communities to the common good is obvious. This capacity supports the state's concerns greatly, especially in view of the high quality of their professional work. In Hungary, for example, the professional work of religious communities is obliged to fulfil state quality standards. In view of the long list of the social contributions of religious communities to the common good, and of the shared responsibility of the state and religious communities towards the one and same society, I proceed to my second statement.

2. **Even if a modern state is secular and religiously neutral, governments should harness the huge social potential of all religious communities by cooperating with them.**

In view of the shared responsibility, researchers recommend that governments cooperate with religious communities.[13] Thus, states can benefit from the huge social potential of religious communities. I argue that governments miss a great opportunity if they do not harness the social potential of religious communities. Given that states are secular and religiously neutral,[14] governments should cooperate with all religious communities, regardless of their religious affiliation.

The Fundamental Law of Hungary, for example, clearly provides this option for the state to cooperate with religious communities. Hungary, where state and religious communities operate separately, has chosen a form of relationship between the state and the religious communities that values the large-scale creative potential of religious communities and that makes cooperation the most normal thing of the world.

Göransson argues in the same way. If religious communities contribute greatly to the common good, the state can actually boost the public benefit of religious communities by "contributing to the contributors of society".[15] The state subsidies to religious communities are, in particular, in the interest of the state itself, because it is the same society that state and religious communities serve. Shared responsibility.

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[13] For example: Inniger, M., 2018, p. 8-12, and Göransson, Å., 2014, *Contribution to the contributors of society,* in a transcript from the Swedish journal Kurage no. 14, 2014, The Commission for Government Support for Faith Communities, Bromma.
[14] For example: Engi, L., 2017, *Die religiöse und ethische Neutralität des Staates*, Schulthess, Zürich.
[15] Cf. footnote 7.

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If a state ignores religious communities, their contributions and their needs, it misses a great opportunity and leaves valuable social potential unused.

So far, the recommendation is clear, and it has broadly been accepted in many European countries that governments should harness the huge social potential of all religious communities by cooperating with them. In view of today's diverse and plural religious landscape, this cooperation, however, requires the non-discriminating, inclusive and transparent governance of religious diversity. This governance makes possible and organises the contact, the cooperation and the inclusion of all religions and denominations. The governance of religious diversity is, however, a major challenge, and this brings us to my third statement.

3.   **A state should develop a policy for cooperation with religious communities that includes the non-discriminating, inclusive and transparent governance of religious diversity.**

The purpose of establishing the governance of religious diversity as part of a state policy on religion is to clarify the general attitude of the state to religion, to grant religious rights for all, to promote social cohesion and peace among religious communities, to rule the relationship between state and all religious communities and – with regard to our topic – to coordinate the achievement of the common goals of states and religions and denominations in terms of the shared responsibility towards one and the same society.

Establishing the governance of religious diversity in today's complex societies is, however, a major challenge. But there is no way around it if governments want to include – in the sense of equal treatment – all religious communities in their policy and governance and if they want to harness all the social potential of religious communities.

I illustrate today's challenges with the establishment of inclusive and fair governance of religious diversity based on the Swiss examples. All other nations are invited to consider these issues by looking at the example of their own country and their own governance of religious diversity. Finally, I will consider the Hungarian system of governance of religious diversity.

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In Switzerland, the policy on religion is delegated to the 26 different cantons. Even if the cooperation between the Swiss cantons and the traditional state-recognised churches is functioning well, and even if the social contribution of these state-recognised churches to the common good is impressive, the traditional policies of Swiss cantons are currently creating challenges. Whereas in the past these policies included almost one hundred percent of the population, they include only part of the population today, and in a few years, they may perhaps include only a social minority: the state-recognised churches are losing members at a remarkable speed, and religious communities that are ignored by the state are growing. Of course, these ignored religious communities also contribute greatly to the common good, and many of them wish that the state would boost their social potential as well.

The necessary adjustment of these policies on religions implies hard work ahead for the Swiss cantons because these policies have an "either-or" approach. They publicly and legally recognise the Catholic, Reformed and Old-Catholic churches. In certain cantons they include also some Jewish communities. All other churches and religious communities – for example, the Orthodox churches, the Baptists, the Anglicans, the Lutherans, the Pentecostal churches, the Salvation Army, the Methodists, the Unitarians, the Adventists, and also Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and all other non-Christian religious communities – are being ignored by the state. Either the state includes a religious community in its policy, or it ignores and excludes them. There is no in-between.

The Swiss Canton Bern, for example, on the one hand generously favours the established churches, for example, with respect to paying the clergy's salaries, the tax system, access to public institutions, university training for the clergy and inclusion in state consultation processes. The state supports them even though they are declining in number every year. Conversely, all other churches and religious communities – even if they are growing – remain ignored. Very often religious communities that are ignored by the state do not find rooms for worship, they have trouble to find and pay well-trained clergy, and they do not receive the tax contributions of their community members. Moreover, their members have no specific spiritual care in public institutions. These communities and their members suffer a lack of acceptance and a lack of social esteem because the state ignores them. Their social potential remains ignored as well.

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Due to societal and demographic changes, "either-or" systems of recognition and non-recognition are currently under pressure. Swiss cantons are therefore trying to find a new form of governance of religious diversity as part of their policies on religion, one that is more inclusive, that treats citizens equally and groups fairly, and one that includes and boosts the social potential of all religious communities.

In this situation I recommend that governments should provide an access ladder to recognition with steps of empowerment. One step could imply the possibility of registration, another could be the possibility of giving 1% of the income tax to his or her faith community, or inclusive training programmes for clergy and social workers for all religions and denominations, or support for social projects. This recommendation is based on the current experience of ignored religious communities that legal and social recognition remains out of reach for them, with the consequence that the religious communities can – without the "state-booster" – not contribute greatly to the common good. This recommendation is also based on the idea that it is in the interest of the state itself that religious communities have a good infrastructure, well-trained and well-integrated clergy and long-term perspectives to exist. Fluid communities cannot be partners of the state. This idea is also based on the consideration of non-discriminating treatment. When it comes to issues of chaplaincy, burial fields, official registering of citizens or tax issues, these citizens and groups should not be treated differently.

An approach to the governance of religious diversity with an access ladder with pre-stages seems appropriate to me. Such differentiating governance of religious diversity – some religious communities are already established, and other communities are on the way to this status – does not necessarily create a two-classed society. If the reasons for diversifying by different steps are transparent, and if the intention of this system is to empower and include all religious communities and to boost their social potential, the system that diversifies can be considered as fair, inclusive and dynamic, also with regard to the shared responsibility.

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I consider the Hungarian concept as a role model for a governance of religious diversity with an access ladder that provides steps of empowerment. By granting and guaranteeing the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion for everyone, and freedom of assembly, the Hungarian policy on religion rules the relationship between state and religion in a way that offers open doors to all religious communities. In Hungary, even if a community does not (yet) belong to one of the 32 established churches, it can register at a court as a religious association. The taxpayers can then offer 1% of their income tax to these associations. The religious community becomes a partner of the state, either belonging to a religious association or a listed or registered church. Later on, they perhaps receive the status of an established church. This system is transparent. Moreover, this system gives also smaller communities a long-term goal of social recognition and, first and foremost, it provides all religious groups the chance to contribute to the common good. I consider this governance a win-win system, also in view of the great support that the Hungarian state offers all religious communities: the support for social institutions (child protection, social care), and kindergartens, schools, higher education and health care, and the support for the renovation of buildings of religious communities, even support of cultural institutions like museums, libraries or archives. Rewarding cooperation is ensured. This system is inclusive. It is to the benefit of religious communities and to the benefit of the state and the whole society, a win-win-model that allows a state to benefit from the huge potential of all religious communities. It allows the state to "contribute to all contributors of society".[16] By doing so, this system pursues a common direction regarding the shared responsibility with all religious communities.

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[16] Cf. footnote 7.

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4. **If religious communities assume their social responsibility, their role will always remain important in modern Europe. Acting in this manner may include the clear stance on the faith of the religious community.**

I first conclude: In view of the shared responsibility, states are advised to cooperate with all religious communities. States can boost the social potential of religious communities to the benefit of state and society. Religious communities will continue to greatly contribute to the common good together with their value-building and with their social potential. Thus, they will always play a relevant role in modern Europe.

Finally, I would like to outline: In playing this important role, religious communities should not abandon their clear stance: they should not deny who they are. A clear stance of faith is fair and transparent. Colours are allowed. Manyfold colours contribute to the "rich colour of diversity".[17] Confessing one's faith is not a shame, since faith and confessing faith is an integral part of people's identity and of the identity of religious communities. I close my presentation with the call not to hide one's religious identity.

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I wish you an inspiring conference, a clear common direction and productive cooperation regarding the shared responsibility.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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[17] Lartey, E. Y., 2003, *In Living Color. An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling.* 2nd ed., Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., London, p. 177.

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