



Socio-economic
Sciences and Humanities



Call for Papers: International Symposium “Religious Diversity in the European Workplace”

Leuven, Belgium, 13 January 2011

Religion continues to make its way into the amalgam of European workplaces. For some members of Europe’s increasingly diverse workforce, deeply-rooted religious beliefs and practices cannot simply be checked in during work hours.

In recent years, employees have claimed accommodation of their religious beliefs and practices before the national courts and the European Court of Human Rights. For instance, in the UK and the Netherlands, pious Catholics have sought to wear visible crucifixes with their uniforms. In Germany, the issue of public school teachers wearing an Islamic headscarf was hotly debated and remains controversial. In Denmark, grocery store clerks have won, and then again lost, claims to wear Islamic headscarves on the job. In Belgium, job seekers have sought to retain state unemployment benefits after refusing or resigning from positions that contradict with their religious obligations.

Various jurisdictions have reached divergent results, with judicial decisions affecting the public perception of religious conflicts in the context of labour relations. Because religious claims potentially conflict with other rights and interests in the workplace, a delicate balance must be stricken between a multitude of factors, perspectives and values. The question is what judges, policy makers and employers managing religious pluralism in the workplace can learn from the experiences in other countries.

With a view to bring together junior and senior scholars from a range of disciplines and practitioners to exchange experiences and ideas, an international symposium is being organized at the Law Faculty of the Catholic University of Leuven on Thursday 13 January 2011 under the umbrella of Religare. Keynote speaker will be Professor Lucy Vickers, author of *Religious Freedom, Religious Discrimination and the Workplace*. (2008, Hart Publishing)

About Religare

Religare, “Religious Diversity and Secular Models in Europe: Innovative Approaches to Law and Policy, ” is a 3 year EU 7th Framework Program (2010-2013). This project addresses the challenges of religious pluralism in contemporary Europe. It starts from the idea of equality and the ways in which it is challenged by the increasing diversity of religions and other convictions that are transforming Europe into a new type of entity. The focus is on ten target countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. For more information on Religare, see www.religareproject.eu

Call for Papers

We are interested in symposium papers addressing emerging questions at the intersection of religion, law and the workplace. Papers addressing the following issues/questions are welcomed:

- **Role of the courts.** How do judges handle issues such as religious symbols, religious dress and religious time in the workplace and what are the challenges in applying legal techniques to accommodate religious and non-confessional practices in the workplace (such as indirect discrimination, reasonable accommodations, the duty of good faith, conscientious objections)?
- **European frameworks and EU competencies.** How do the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Employment Equality Directive contribute to the solutions provided in practice in the various Member States? What are the limitations to a Europe-wide approach, and is such approach even desirable in this area? What is the effect of the EU's limited competencies with regard to religion on European policy with regard to religious issues?
- **Religion-state regimes.** What are the normative and pragmatic limits of accommodation of religious practices in the workplace in the light of the historical shaped church-state models in various European countries?
- **Private-public sector divide.** Do the underlying principles that apply in the public sector (neutrality, laïcité) compare with those in private sectors across the EU and Turkey, and if so, how?
- **Faith-based organizations.** Are exceptions or derogations under labour and antidiscrimination laws for certain 'religious employers' justified?
- **Work segregation and self-employment.** Have realities and approaches with regard to the place of religion in the workplace contributed to employment segregation and concentration of minorities in certain sectors? What about a possible escape from mainstream employment to self-employment?
- **Social rights and protection.** How do strict religious dress and work limitations of religious job seekers (who are required to search for and accept suitable employment) affect entitlement to public or unemployment benefits under state law?
- **The role of research.** Which cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research is actually being conducted (or should be conducted) in the area of religious diversity in employment contexts? What practical tools can these insights offer us?
- **Diversity management.** What are the current challenges for practitioners (diversity and HR managers) and which practical tools are applied in the field to prevent and/or address conflict situations (e.g. mediation, arbitration)? What are the perceived gaps in this approach and how can law and policy address these lacuna's?

The timeline for contributors is as follows:

- Proposals (approx. 400-word abstracts) must be submitted by **1 October 2010**.
- Applicants will be informed by **20 October 2010** whether their application is accepted.
- Papers (between 7.500 and 18.000 words) are due **15 December 2010** and will be presented in Leuven on Thursday **13 January 2011**.
- After the Symposium, presenters will have the opportunity to edit their papers in the light of comments and suggestions received at the Symposium and send in final versions. Contributions are scheduled to be published in the Religare Series in the Summer of 2011.

While presenters are encouraged to seek university or alternative funding to meet travel and accommodation costs, every effort will be made to financially assist presenters who would otherwise be unable to attend the Symposium.

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