

Religion and Identity in Europe

The Makings of Religious Enemies
in Antiquity and Today

Susanne William Rasmussen

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Copenhagen, August 2013

Susanne William Rasmussen

Preface

There is a huge difference between studying the religions and cultures of Antiquity and those of our own age. This is mainly because the sources on ancient history are terribly fragmented. What we do have available is a jumbled assortment of archaeological finds and scraps of text from various written sources and various periods, stretching across several centuries. On top of that, we often know little or nothing about the specific contexts in which the individual sources were produced. Small wonder that scholars of Antiquity can find it tempting to throw caution to the wind and engage in airy speculation. On the other hand, it is something of a relief to study people who are no longer among the living and therefore unable to participate in activities like filling out questionnaires about religion. Actually, the results of such questionnaire studies are often dubious, partly because it is difficult to quantify and measure religious sensibilities and involvement at all, and partly because both American and European research indicates that the respondents in such studies either exaggerate their degree of religious commitment (Americans) or understate it (Europeans). This issue is discussed in Chapter 7.

But regardless of whether people give misleading answers when questioned about their personal religious views, the globalization, culture contacts, and culture clashes that are taking place today are accompanied by an increasingly intense interest in, and assertion of, religions and religious views and identity. Many people have found this perplexing – not least those sociologists and historians of religion who have offered up a variety of flawed secularization theories in recent years. I agree that the time is ripe for decisive elements of these theories, and of the entire secularization paradigm, to be either revised or rejected, since we know that in nations that have been secularized religion has, indisputably, survived and is even seeing an upsurge in some places.

In short, we of the postmodern world can continue our efforts to democratize, rationalize, liberalize, individualize, secularize, integrate, and

assimilate – until kingdom come. There is no indication whatsoever that this will cause religion to disappear, or to become a purely personal matter that lingers unobtrusively in the wings of the postmodern world's public stage.¹ There is a widespread sense of wonderment, among scholars and in the public and political debate at large, at the discovery that religion is an actual, active aspect of public life and not just a private concern. This wonderment shows, among many other things, that an anxious Europe remains immobilized in the quagmire of an antiquated secularization paradigm. However, if the basic premise is that religion ought to be banned from the public sphere, questions relating to culture contacts and religious conflicts simply cannot be studied, much less clarified. This certainly holds true for Antiquity, and for the current situation as well. Only by systematically and thoroughly analysing the sociological and identity-creating significance of religions, at a micro level and a macro level, can we hope to more profoundly understand or, dare I say, resolve the cultural and religious conflicts that exist in Europe today.

Unlike those who write books about the religions of Antiquity, the authors of works that analyse contemporary religion are expected to include in their preface, and as a matter of course, an account of their personal religious views. This spares readers the nuisance of guessing, and wondering. Let me simply say, however, that my own personal view on religion can be summed up very concisely by referring to William James, the scholar of religion who passed away long ago, and whose answer to the question of faith

1 I am well aware of the problems associated with using the term “postmodern”. I nevertheless choose to employ it here, chiefly in the meaning “postsecular”, in recognition of the knowledge that – in direct opposition to the calculations done in “modern” secularization theories – religion actually makes itself felt in secular environments. In other words, modernity does not lead to the retreat of religion. Hence, in a postmodern present and future, religion and religious communities must be more systematically recognized and analysed as factors that not only play a role in people's private lives but also manifestly influence, and are influenced by, public life and the broader context in which people live and act. Cf. P. Berger, G. Davie & E. Fokas (2008) *Religious America, Secular Europe?*, Farnham; K. Eder (2002) “Europäische Säkularisierung – ein Sonderweg in die postsäkulare Gesellschaft?”, *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, Heft 3 (2002), pp. 331-343.



Fig. 1. *Europa and the Bull*. Mosaic from a Roman villa in Arles. Late second century CE – early third century CE. Now at the Musée de L'Arles Antique.

was this:² “What mankind at large most lacks is criticism and caution, not faith.” Besides this, I would like to stress that I wholeheartedly embrace the Weberian ideal of “value-free” sociology and sociology of religion, which I sincerely hope the reader will find reflected in this work.

At any rate, although religious thinking is not one’s own personal gateway to understanding the world, religions are important threads in the intricately woven fabric of human societies, based as they are on inherited cultural traditions, norms, values, and behaviours. That is why religion – directly and indirectly, and regardless of one’s personal perceptions of religion as a positive or negative factor – is of fundamental significance to society at all levels, from the most detailed to the most general. What is more, various types of faith and religious identity constructions seem to be playing an ever more important role in our globalized world. Age-old controversies about

2 W. James (1956) *The Will to Believe: And Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, New York NY, p. X.

the relationship between religion and politics, and about what place religion ought to hold in the private and public sphere, are once again at the top of our current agenda as a result of the cultural encounters (“acculturation”) and religious conflicts arising in the wake of migration and globalization. Some refer to this phenomenon as the “resurrection” of religions in the postmodern world. I must say that I find the term somewhat grandiose, and also somewhat misguided. For one thing, religions as social internalization processes have always been at stake, and consequently Christianity has been a continuous source of normative guidance throughout European history. For another, if religious matters have seemed invisible in modern society, one very plausible reason for this is that scholarly acuity has been dulled by the narrow paradigm and the numerous secularization theories in circulation. In any event, the sudden upsurge of religions in many places around the world – also in Europe – is associated with an almost systematic stereotyping and constructing of religious enemies, accompanied in varying measure by fear, hate, threats, and violence.

Hence, the fundamental question that this book seeks to address from a modern-day point of view is very simple: When and how did the construction of religious enemy images in Europe actually begin? The answer to this question, which is far from simple, stretches back into Antiquity.

Introduction

“Why ponder? God commands.”

Tertullian

The meeting between Roman culture and Christianity was a protracted affair: a dynamic cultural process that hopped, skipped, and lurched along for a period of three to four centuries. It is therefore striking that both the sources for and the history of research into this area reflect a certain lack of continuity in the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity. One moment the traditional Roman world seems to be upheld by age-old, unassailable norms and values, while the next moment these seem to have evaporated and been replaced by solid Christian values. Naturally, the reality of things would have been far more complex. One factor contributing to this snapshot-like understanding of events, which seems to depict a rapid and unproblematic shift, is the dominant position of the idealizing accounts provided by the Christian victors. The vast majority of portrayals we have of culture-contact events are written by Christians, and the non-Christian sources we do have are, alas, both sparse and problematic. Even so, there are certain features common to both source groups: Cultural encounters led to physical violence and verbal combat, to tangible conflicts and the construction of religious enemies. But they also led to coexistence and innovation, which we can detect in the converging, merging, and reinterpretation of different social and religious institutions and ideas. The meeting of Roman culture and Christianity – which, in reality, consisted of numerous contacts between Jewish, Christian, Greek, and Roman thinking and traditions – ended up producing a new motif that was, decidedly and decisively, new and unique in the great tapestry that was Europe.

The aim of this book, which is structured around a series of analyses and case studies, is to examine how the construction of religious enemies came about in this crucial meeting of Roman and Christian religion and culture. What sociological factors were at work before and during the time

we begin to find religious enemy images being constructed in the Roman Empire? How were the perceptions that Romans and Christians held of one another as religious enemies expressed in their attitudes and their interactions? Many different aspects relating to history, the history of religion, sociology, philosophy, and economy have played a role in the processes that saw Christianity prevail. The investigations in this book concentrate on two aspects: the conflicts arising from this culture contact; and the constructed religious enemies associated with these conflicts.

Chapter 1 begins by examining some of the central conflicts and fields of tension between Roman and Christian religion and culture, notably focusing on how clashes and the construction of enemies are intimately intertwined with the construction of identity, not just at a macro level, but at a micro level as well. This has a bearing on vital issues such as intrafamilial kinship, cultic affiliation and community, and the embedding of religion in imperial power. It also has a bearing on various rituals and ideas that relate not only to diverging perceptions of religion in the narrowest sense, but also to fundamental social norms, values, and institutions throughout Roman history. Pursuing this line of investigation, Chapter 2 sheds light on one of the most important religio-political institutions in traditional Roman culture – public portents – and discusses this institution in relation to a defining feature in early Christian faith – miracles. In Roman history we see that the shift from Republic to Empire also caused a shift in the nature of Rome’s public portents. With the rise of imperial power, the importance of public portents came to concentrate less on the collective well-being of society and more on the legitimization of the individual emperor’s status and power. In the present context, this change in the role of public portents and the subsequent Christian miracle rivalry on Roman soil are considered to be important sociological and religio-historical factors in the process by which Christianity gained a firm foothold in the religious landscape.

Chapter 3 discusses a number of selected and partially unresolved religio-political issues concerning how the Romans handled Jews, Christians, and internal Christ-related disputes going on in Rome. Continuing along these lines, Chapter 4 examines the periodic Roman persecution of Christians seen in relation to the religious Romanization and Christian violation of Roman cult and culture. This chapter also contains an analysis of Christian martyrdom as a central element, both in the institutionalization

of Christianity and in its staging of itself, in that martyrdom structured and defined Christian teaching and identity in a new and dramatic way.

Chapter 5 elaborates on several issues, including the acculturation and religio-political use of the sun-god Sol Invictus, who despite his name was ultimately vanquished by the cult of Christ. Furthermore, this chapter deals with certain consequences of the idolization and worship of the Roman emperors, representing one of the key conflicts in this particular culture contact: the controversy about the cult of the Roman emperors and the Christians' refusal to participate in it. However, the curious about-face of Emperor Constantine the Great in favour of Christianity contributed immensely to the control and the consolidation of the Christian Church as a powerful organization. Constantine became the catalyst in the process that redefined the motley crew of Christian believers, which developed from a suspect and subversive *superstitio* into an esteemed, top-down-controlled, and formidable *religio*. Nevertheless, non-Christian Roman religion and culture long maintained their own tenacious toehold, as witnessed in the writings of the church father St Augustine of Hippo and others. Chapter 6 therefore looks in greater detail at selected passages from Augustine's works, which showcase the meticulous construction of religious enemies as part of a relentless attempt to eradicate pagan, meaning non-Christian, religion and philosophy. From an Augustinian point of view, the fall of the Roman Empire in 410 CE could be regarded as a manifestation of how the regimen of the Christian Almighty God, and universal Christian values, were destined to conquer multi-religious paganism.

It is striking that, implicitly or explicitly, similar views and questions about the regimen of God, and especially about the validity of universal ideas and values, are a prominent feature in contemporary multicultural Europe, with its agendas and discussions about so-called clashes of civilizations, EU expansions, the role of religions in liberal democracies, integration, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the use of religious symbols, exotic apparel, and so on. In today's disharmonious cultural encounters we can also identify the systematic construction of religious enemies. Chapter 7 brings this angle to the table as it compares the culture contacts and religious enemies of the ancient Roman world with some of the religious conflicts and enemy images in contemporary Europe.

The perspectives

Although there are essential and obvious differences between life in Antiquity and life in modern-day Europe, the two have certain significant features in common: Life is lived in a multicultural world that is characterized by a high degree of religious pluralism, various processes of globalization, intensified identity constructions, and religious conflicts. When analysed as culture-contact processes, the Romanization of the past and the globalization of the present put the norms and actions of the involved parties into stark relief. And upon closer examination, our own globalized, enlightened Age of Information does not seem to offer any better understanding of “the other” than Antiquity did. In any event – and quite importantly in this context – just like the Romanization processes that took place in Antiquity, the globalization processes taking place today lead to an increased focus and increased pressure on religion and identity, both at an individual and a collective level. Also, presumably the individuals, groups, and nations of the future will increasingly assert their own socio-religious identities in the struggle for recognition, and in order to stake out a position of their own in a globalized world. Furthermore, certain striking and conflicting tendencies seen in ancient Romanization can be compared with observations of contemporary globalization: the tendencies to encompass both “global flow” and “cultural closure” (which I refer to as cultural “flux” and “fix” and explain later). The flux of past Romanization and modern globalization seem(ed) to increase the urge to fix upon (religious) identity in order to set oneself apart and find a secure foothold on the world’s unpredictable multicultural terrain.

This book examines more closely how such social and religious mechanisms can unfold and exert a negative influence, and how cultural and religio-political tensions are expressed as images of religious enemies and acted out in Europe past and present. Because it focuses precisely on the stuff that cultural conflicts are made of, on the differences and the constructed enemies, there are bound to be a whole array of religio-historical aspects that regrettably cannot be discussed here. One aspect lies in the Christian messages of showing charity and loving one’s fellow man, which are not drawn into the chapters that deal with the antique perspectives. Another aspect lies in the book’s contemporary perspectives focusing specifically on

the cultural heritage of *Europe* – that is, on the enemy images produced by Europe’s ethnic, Christian majorities – while refraining from including a corresponding treatment of Islamic enemy images produced by Muslim minorities living in Europe.

When discussing perspectives in and between the past and present, I urge the reader to remember that the antique texts naturally deal with the questions and problems of Antiquity – not with those of today. The ancient sources must therefore, above all and to the greatest possible extent, be analysed on Antiquity’s own terms. The analyses in this volume seek to fathom the meanings, intentions, and effects of the texts, and also to clarify what they express about the culture contact and religious conflicts as experienced at that time. This said, the approach taken does not render the classical texts “irrelevant” to the pressing questions of our time. On the contrary. In many cases these sources can promote understanding, not only by bringing to our attention the workings of more or less parallel social and religious mechanisms and issues in the past and present, but also by honing our ability to identify cultural variations in social, religious, philosophical, moral, and political classifications, ideas, and patterns of behaviour. This combined diachronic and synchronic way of viewing the topics at hand may well give us reason to indulge in what the Romans referred to as *ruminatio*. To chew our mental cud as we contemplate the prevailing dilemmas and questions that spring from Europe’s cultural history: our own religions and cultures and those of others; universal values and religious relativism; hope and fear; co-existence and clashes; marginalization and the fight for recognition; identity construction and religious freedom. An all but indigestible diet. But perhaps a stint of historical and sociological ruminating is just what it takes to promote the cultural self-insight and open-mindedness that seems to be in such short supply these days in postmodern Europe?

Everyone agrees – by and large – that the foundation of European history builds on a Christian legacy. Some people, on the other hand, find it far less relevant to continue studying the non-Christian, Graeco-Roman past. Quite apart from the fact that knowledge about Antiquity is highly valuable in and of itself, our pagan background embodies a variety of dimensions that are

useful to examine and compare with modern cultural circumstances. The pre-Christian and non-Christian portion of our European past discloses a wide range of views and values to which, admittedly, most people no longer subscribe, but which, precisely for that reason, can remind us of questions that we have long since ceased to ask. Or of questions to which we more or less automatically respond with implicitly Christian and/or (neo)evolutionist and/or (neo)liberalist assumptions and concepts.

Culture contacts and religious disputes involve different types of discussions and conflicts which, from a sociological point of view, are especially concerned with identity and social recognition. As will become apparent, this was also true in the religious debates of ancient Rome and the bickering between pagans and Christians about the worship of gods/God, miracle makers, brothel visits, gladiator spectacles, food orgies, binge drinking, luxury, vanity, and a profusion of other topics, from the oldest deities to the newest hairstyles. Likewise, this is true in today's European religious debates and their bickering about clashing civilizations, immigration, integration, social values and virtues, democracy, freedom of speech, the eating of pork, the oppression of women, sexual morals, and numerous other issues, ranging from the visibility of Christian crosses in classrooms and judges' apparel in courtrooms and to the use of Muslim headscarves, burqas, and niqabs in public spaces.

Those debating in Antiquity – just as those who debate today – were grappling with theoretical and religio-philosophical questions and with practical issues that arise from culture contacts. Questions such as: How can one live as a Christian minority in a multicultural world which – seen through Christian eyes – is entirely depraved? Then, as now, the ongoing discussions and the various viewpoints, attacks, and defences reveal a great deal about the links between religion and identity. About cultural insecurity and anxiety. About how the construction of religious enemies creates identity and a sense of community, both among the constructors and among those around whom the enemy image is constructed. In other words, a combined diachronic and synchronic analysis of culture contacts and constructed religious enemies can help us, for instance, to reflect upon what it actually means to have freedom of religion in a given society. When is religion violated? And when is the freedom of religion violated? How are minorities pressured into assimilation to comply with normative representations of

what it means to be, say, Roman or Danish, Christian or Muslim? How do various normative representations devalue the culture of “the other”, and how do they undermine the freedom to choose differently, to challenge, or to criticize?

On constructing identity

Generally, and also throughout this book, the concept of “identity” is frequently referred to in connection with the construction of enemies. However, both in scientific and non-scientific contexts it is often unclear just what the concept covers. This lack of precision arises because the identity concept springs from the relationship between individual and society and can therefore be viewed in many very different ways, across a wide field spanning from individual and social psychology, across sociology and philosophy, and over to anthropology. To be quite brief, there is no absolute or even approximated consensus as to a single definition of the term “identity”. What the various scientific disciplines can agree upon, however, is that the concept of identity has to do with the question: “Who am I?”, and with the things that differentiate oneself from actual or imagined others. Roughly speaking, specific attempts to define “identity” tend to gravitate towards, and actually cluster around, one of two opposing poles. Either identity is primarily regarded as an innate core or inborn individuality, or identity is primarily regarded as an expression of the individual person’s own story, which, to a certain extent, is a work in progress that can be continuously constructed through interaction with other individuals. Although identity at a micro level is, of course, influenced by each individual’s potential for developing certain personality traits, the investigations in this book will take a sociological approach where the main emphasis is that identity – like religion – is shaped and evolves in constant interaction between each individual person and the world around them.³

One question that keeps us bogged down in definitions is whether identity

3 Here I follow the sociological approach to religion that is represented, for example, in J.A. Beckford (2003) *Social Theory & Religion*, Cambridge. Cf. the chapter entitled “Religion: a social constructionist approach”, pp. 11-29.

(or identities) should generally be characterized by stability or by flexibility. Studies of identity, particularly more recent ones, indicate that individuals in the postmodern world can often experiment with a wide range of different identities.⁴ It must be stressed, however, that the ancient world offered nowhere near the same degree of flexibility or opportunity to experiment with identity construction.

In Antiquity, “identity” and “recognition” did not exist and were not discussed as concepts, as they are today. It goes without saying that this was not because the people living in Antiquity were devoid of what we call identities, or that identity was not dependent upon acknowledgment and recognition. It was presumably because the identity constructions of Antiquity were based, first and foremost, on very rigid social categories and a firmly stratified structure that everyone took for granted. Since the modern concept of “identity” simply has no semantic expression in the languages of Antiquity, one might be tempted to claim that the concept cannot properly be applied to the ancient world. Nevertheless, I find the concept of identity quite useful to help display and clarify various social mechanisms and patterns of attitudes and actions that we can discern in the ancient sources – even though all we can grasp at through the veils of time are scattered fragments, hints, and shadows. Furthermore, although during Antiquity there was no discourse that directly debated the concept of “identity”, both non-Christian and Christian sources still took a keen interest in finding out “who they were” in relation to other cultures. What did it mean to be a Roman, or a Christian, or a Roman who was also a Christian? Clearly, the answers to such questions – then as now – were highly dependent upon social recognition. In Antiquity religion was one of the pivotal elements of such recognition, whether from a Roman or a Christian point of view.

4 Cf. S. Stryker & P.J. Burke (2000) “The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory”, *Social Psychology Quarterly* (vol. 63; 2000), pp. 284-297; B.E. Jensen (1999) “History and the Politics of Identity. Reflections on a Contested and Intricate Issue”, *Historiedidaktikk i Norden 7. Bruk og misbruk af historien*, Trondheim, pp. 43-67; K.J. Gergen (1991) *The Saturated Self. Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, New York NY; K.J. Gergen (2001) *Social Construction in Context*, London; U. Beck & E. Beck-Gernsheim (2002) *Individualization. Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, London; C.R. Jørgensen (2008) *Identitet. Psykologiske og kulturanalytiske perspektiver*, Copenhagen.

So recognition as an incontrovertible human need and a social necessity is nothing new, even though one does occasionally get that impression when looking into modern research on these issues.

What *is* new, and what has varied down through history, are the conditions under which people seek – or struggle – to attain recognition.⁵ Yet when discussing what we, today, denote as “recognition”, it is important to underscore that recognition in Antiquity was extensively built into, and anchored within, extremely rigid social categories that few people (if any) would ever call into question. As Charles Taylor has pointed out, the modern preoccupation with identity and recognition, and the questing discussions about the underlying concepts, are extensively produced by the demise of old social hierarchies.⁶ On the other hand, cultures, nations, and individuals in a globalized world that is continuously being (re)shaped by cultural and religious interests and conflicts will increasingly become preoccupied with their own identity and status within the new *global* hierarchy.

When employing the concept of “identity” at a macro level, the research behind this book means a society’s or a group’s construction and assertion of a common frame of reference and a shared self-perception. This internalized collective identity relates to distinct classifications, norms, values, behaviours, institutions, and so on that are perceived as fundamental characteristics differentiating a particular society or group from other societies or groups.⁷

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- 5 C. Taylor (1994) “The Politics of Recognition” in A. Gutmann (ed.) *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton NJ; A. Honneth (2003) “Die Pointe der Anerkennung: Eine Entgegnung auf die Entgegnung” in N. Fraser & A. Honneth (eds) *Umverteilung oder Anerkennung? Eine politisch-philosophische Kontroverse*, Frankfurt am Main; A. Honneth (2004) “Recognition and Justice: Outline of a Plural Theory of Justice”, *Acta Sociologica* 47 (4) (2004), pp. 351-364; A. Honneth (2011) *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriss einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit*, Berlin; Z. Bauman (2001) “The Great War of Recognition”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18 (2-3; 2001), pp. 137-150.
- 6 C. Taylor (1994); cf. P. Berger (1983) “On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honour” in S. Hauerwas & A.C. MacIntyre (eds) *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, Notre Dame IN, pp. 172-181.
- 7 Cf. G.H. Mead (1934) *Mind, Self, and Society*, Chicago IL; P. Berger (1963) *An Invitation to Sociology. A Humanistic Approach*, New York NY; P. Berger & T. Luckmann (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York NY; P. Gleason (1983) “Identifying Identity. A Semantic History”, *The Journal*

Collective identity has to do with aspects such as how citizens in Europe, based on their own institutions, traditions, world-views, and religious ideas, wish to perceive themselves and others in their encounters with cultural and religious dissimilarity. Also, and not least, collective identity involves the individual countries' different political cultures and their handling of internal and foreign affairs, including discussions and decisions regarding social welfare reforms, value-based politics, immigration, religious symbols, and active engagement in warfare. In such matters of societal significance, religion and contentious religious issues will unavoidably affect the political processes and the interpretations of fundamental constitutional principles. Consequently, in the modern democracies of a globalized world – secularization processes notwithstanding – religions and religious conflicts are playing an ever more prominent role.

In Antiquity, what we refer to today as “collective identity” was, more than anything else, a question of the interaction between inherited religious and political traditions. This was true first of the Roman Republic's and later of the Roman Empire's particular religio-political institutions, issues of conferring Roman citizenship and the rights that went along with it, and various viewpoints and activities relating to domestic and foreign policy. Indisputably, religion and politics in Antiquity were two sides of the same prestigious and powerful coin. That is why the terms “religio-politics” and “religio-political” are frequently used throughout this work. Collective identity in ancient Rome was highly dependent upon participation in cultic activities that revolved around the Roman gods and the health, happiness, and safety of the emperor, the aim being to ensure the welfare of the empire and maintain cultural continuity.

Revisiting the definition of identity, it is fair to say that religious enemy images are generally constructed on the basis of more or less stereotypical, rigid, prejudiced, and distorted ideas of cultural contradictions, heresy,

of American History (69; 1983), pp. 910-931; V. Burr (1995) *Social Constructionism*, London; R. Jenkins (1996) *Social Identity*, London; S. Hall & P. du Gay (1996) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London; Beckford (2003); S.W. Rasmussen (2008) “Priests, Politics and Problems in Identity Construction in Ancient Rome” in A.H. Rasmussen & S.W. Rasmussen, *Religion and Society. Rituals, Resources and Identity in the Ancient Graeco-Roman World*, Rome, pp. 259-265.

and religious fallacies.⁸ In order to delimit one's own identity, the element that is foreign or heretical (that is, "the other") is sometimes simply culled out and set apart as an enemy against whom one can unite. And in today's Europe the enemy consists of people who are disparaged, marginalized, and attacked solely or primarily because of their religion. Yet interestingly, in parts of the present European self-perception, to quite a great extent religious enemies and their construction is something that primarily belongs to a remote past, not to a civilized present. This reasoning relies on the idea that religious enmity and constructed enemies have been overcome thanks to the Enlightenment, to secularization processes, and to the solidification of a European concept of tolerance.⁹ But the question is whether this (immensely simplified) reasoning as currently preached and practiced in Europe would not be more appropriately classified as a collective self-deception?

In this context, the conclusions of a recent research enquiry published by the German think-tank Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung give food for thought. This enquiry from 2011 finds that *in general*, European countries demonstrate a considerable – and worrying – hostility towards Muslims living in Europe. On average, about half of ethnic Europeans think there are too many Muslims living in their country. The enquiry also suggests that the precise proportion of the Danish population holding this view is 43%, while 45% of Danes believe that Muslims cause trouble and think that Muslim headscarves ought to be prohibited by law.¹⁰ Contemporary xenophobia is

8 The analyses in this investigation do not make any pronouncements about the actual make-up of the individual constructed religious enemies. What they do is to focus solely on their religious, social, and political significance and functions in Antiquity and in the present.

9 On the concept of tolerance, see Derrida's treatment of the concept's inadequacy and foundation in Christianity in J. Derrida (2003) *Philosophy in a time of terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, Chicago IL; cf. J. Habermas (2009) "How to answer the Ethical Question: Derrida and Religion" in *Europe. The Faltering Project*, Cambridge, pp.17-36.

10 The results from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung enquiry have been collected in an anthology (2011) available at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/do/08338.pdf>. The percentages for Denmark are taken from a study done at the Department of Political Science and Government at Aarhus University, which is not yet accessible to the public. Cf. "Living together: Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe", report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe, published May 2011. Members of the

directly linked to religion: Whereas today's social norms render it more or less unacceptable to offer actual racist commentary, evidently there are no norms that prevent Europeans from making derogatory and biased statements about Islam as a religion, or about Muslims as adherents of this religion. Put differently, the enquiry from Germany indicates that intolerance towards Muslims is widely considered to be socially acceptable.

Such findings must undoubtedly be considered in connection with today's globalized and rapidly shifting world and its ever-more permeable boundaries, which seem to be promoting identity-related insecurity, anxieties, and conflicts.¹¹ Globalization is not only about cultural flows. It also entails constant efforts towards cultural closure and fixing at multiple levels. This raises important questions about who is creating new boundaries, why they are doing so, and against whom. In this perspective, globalization seems to make it ever more pressing to consider the questions of who we are, and who our enemies are. As it turns out, apparently religion – implicitly or explicitly – is of decisive importance to the answers we come up with. Just like our modern multicultural world, the world of Antiquity fostered a whole host of cultural encounters and religious movements, of which Christianity was just one among many. Taking a broader view of the antique religious landscape it is therefore thought-provoking that – at least as far as we know – the cult of Christ was the only cult that regarded all others as rivals.

Group: J. Fischer, E. Bonino, T.G. Ash, M. Hirsch, D. Hübner, A. Kadioglu, S. Licht, V. Lukin and J. Solana.

11 Cf. D. Moïsi (2009) *The Geopolitics of Emotion. How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation and Hope are Reshaping the World*, London.