
It is with great pleasure I welcome you to Uppsala University, and to the conference “The Impact of Religion: Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy”.

Religious and social processes of change within the society, law and democracy merit our greatest attention.

Religion play an important part in our culture, even though the western world of today is often considered to be a secular society. Religion is a link to our past and has in many ways influenced our values and set the stage for today’s society. As society go through changes, so does religion. People’s actions and thoughts are affected by the communities they live in, and the different beliefs and attitudes they encounter.

Organised religion has perhaps lost its hold on most people’s everyday lives (at least in Sweden), but religion is at the same time very present in the public sphere. Religion is constantly debated in the media, and in all the Nordic countries there are large and active religious minorities. A large proportion of the citizens in Sweden is still member of the majority churches, and regularly uses the church for major life events like baptisms, weddings and funerals. We also see a widespread individualized spirituality and an increased religious diversity.

In our culturally diverse society that seems to change faster and faster, knowledge about religion, and its impact on society, is especially important. Religion has become an essential research area in a range of academic disciplines, such as political science, law and medicine.

This conference is organized by Uppsala Religion and Society Research Centre, an interdisciplinary research center at Uppsala University. The center is focusing on religious and social processes of change, and the major research programme at the center is The Impact of religion – Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy.
The programme runs over ten years, from 2008 to 2018, and involves about 50 researchers at several faculties and departments at Uppsala University. Since the programme is now halfway through, this conference provides an opportunity to spread, share and obtain the results within this expanding field.

Sharing knowledge and research, as we do through participation in conferences such as today, is important in order to develop new ideas and discover new information. Collaboration and interaction is also a way to ensure quality. By being open to problems and challenges of business and society, we can identify new and exciting research and educational areas.

When it comes to meeting today's major societal challenges, Uppsala University is a very good place to be.

We are a broad university, and sometimes we say even a complete university. We have over 50 institutions in nine faculties from science, medicine and pharmacy, to social sciences, law and humanities. By crossing borders between disciplines and developing interdisciplinary research, we have even better opportunities to deal with the challenges of our society, and thus contribute to a better world.

Before I give the floor to Per Pettersson, Director of the Impact of Religion Research Programme at Uppsala University, I want to take the opportunity to thank all of you involved in organizing this conference.

Thank you, and again, welcome!