Religious Pluralism: Religious Minorities in Castilla y León (Spain)

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*A paper presented at the CESNUR 2012 International Conference in El Jadida, Morocco. Please do not quote or reproduce without the consent of the author*

In Spain we have lived for many years trapped in a religion that did not provide answers to anything. For this reason people have sought answers. I think it is very positive what is happening at present. It is a process that at the moment is unstoppable due to the dissatisfaction and the desire to know other religious points of view the Spanish people. For example, a Buddhist who lives in Castilla y León (Spain) responded with these words to the question: Why do you need a new analysis of the religious fact?

It is not our intention to confirm or refute this view but rather to define what new challenges are facing the Spanish population. Below you will see the principal lines of study of religious minorities in Castilla y León. We understand by a religious minority, any religious group that seeks social recognition both through its number of adherents as well as because of the significant differences it holds with the majority religion.

The origin of the present study emerged at an international conference in 2009 where members of a research group at the University of Valladolid agreed with representatives of the Fundación Pluralismo y Convivencia (Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation) to publish the results of such an investigation.

The Foundation is a governmental organisation created by a decree of Spanish Council of Ministers at the proposal of the Ministry of Justice in December of 2004.

*The aims of the Foundation are:*

• To promote religious freedom by supporting projects of those religious denomination which have a cooperation agreement with the Spanish Government.

• To act as a forum for reflection and debate on religious freedom and on the latter’s impact on the creation of a suitable framework for co-existence.

• To promote the normalisation of religious phenomenon throughout society.

Their primary focus is on three areas in order to achieve these aims: on minority religions by supporting their representative bodies and activities as well as their communities’ churches and grass-roots organisations; on mainstream society as the driving force behind public opinion and the focus of social cohesion and co-existence; and on the public administrations as policy-makers, guarantors of rights

and managers of diversity and plurality nation-wide.

The present study and that which will be published in October, aim to contribute to display, identify and recognize the Spanish religious plurality, and in particular the variety of expressions in Castilla y León. Since 2007 the Fundación Pluralismo y Convivencia has edited reports on the situation of religious minorities in Spain. Reports have been published of Cataluña (2007), Comunidad Valenciana (2007), Madrid (2007), Canarias (2008), Castilla La Mancha (2009), Aragón (2009), Andalucía (2010), País Vasco (2010), Murcia (2011) and Navarra (2012).

The objectives of the study have been to:

* Take a photograph of the religious reality of Castilla y Leónn.
* Describe and analyze the current religious diversity.
* Point out issues for analysis and discussions.

It has followed the same process of research as any other work of this nature, first to prepare a map of collective minority religious entities seated in Castilla y León, and second to analyze the historical evolution of minorities, their needs, beliefs and social perception.

To perform this task it has required reliance on many sources of information (both primary and secondary) and upon a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. It is derived from a documentary analysis of studies in research already developed on some of these religious faiths; from the analysis of data in records and directories of the Ministry of Justice; from the databases of the Center for Sociological Research, the Institute of Youth, of the National Institute of Statistics, of the Office of Sociology and from statistics of the Spanish Episcopal Conference as well as those minority religions that maintain periodic records of their yearly activities. Additionally, the current project has drawn from studies of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, the BBVA Foundation, the World Values Survey, the exploration of official websites and non-official religious communities, and interviews conducted personally with the representatives of the religious minorities of Castilla y León.

The work has been considerably complex due to the difficulty of analyzing a changing and diverse religious map. We had to deal with a vast territory, Castilla y León being the largest geo-political region of the European Union. Having to cover a territory of this magnitude demands serious geographic planning.

In spite of these difficulties we have to say that the project has been rewarding, both because of what has it brought to us intellectually as well as because of the relationships that we have seen develop among the members of these religious minorities.

At first approach and upon examination of the issues as we pointed out earlier the majority religion in Spain is Roman Catholic. As of August 2011, the number of Catholic parish churches was 23,074, or 82.15 % of the places of worship in the country. In contrast, only 17%, belong to minority religions (a total of 5,013 places of worship).

The 60% of these minority religions are found in Madrid, Cataluña and Valencia. On many occasions we can say that this is due to migratory movements, in particular the immigration from Africa, South America and Eastern Europe (specifically immigrants from Bulgaria and mostly from Romania), comprise the considerable increase in the number of followers of the Muslim, Evangelical and Orthodox confessions.

Castilla y León has one of the lowest concentrations of religious minorities in Spain, along with Extremadura, the most eastern part of Castilla y La Mancha, Galicia, Asturias, País Vasco, La Rioja, and Aragon (except for Zaragoza). If we look at the region of Castilla y León in the present, we currently have 321 places of worship of these minority faiths. This figure is approximate in view of the following limitation: The growth and the high mobility of populations that are part of these confessions, as may be the case of Muslims, eastern orthodox and certain evangelical denominations, , makes a the realization of an accurate "snapshot" of the situation of minority religions in the region out of date from the outset. Also, the boom in recent years of new religious forms adapted to the West, as is the case of the Buddhists, causes any desire for a complete picture of the minority religious reality nearly impossible. However, we believe it is still possible to define and delimit their primary characteristics.

In Castilla y León minority religions which are at a greater level of development are Evangelical Churches (66.4 % of the total number of places of worship of minority religions), the Kingdom Halls of the Jehovah's Witnesses (12.5 %) and the oratories Muslims (8.1 %). We also found a group composed of minorities of low representation with respect to the total number of religious minorities. These are the Orthodox Churches (3.4 %), the Buddhist temples or centers (2.8 %), the wards or chapels of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2.5 %) and Adventist churches (2.2 %). With virtually no representation are other religions or other Christian denominations (1.2 %), constituted by Gnostics, the modern Rosicrucian philosophy or the Bahai's.

Relative to the respective population of each province with regard to the total number of places of worship, we must highlight the following observations:

1) Overall, evangelical churches represent most of the places of worship, with special incidence in Zamora and Valladolid (74.07 % and 72.46 % respectively).

2) In regard to the diversity of places of worship we are at disparate levels. Only the province of Valladolid can boast of at least one place of worship for each of the religious groups present in the region. At the other end of the distribution, the provinces of Soria and Zamora are characterized by having much less diversity. In Zamora only 5 religious denominations celebrate meetings in 27 places of worship, and in Soria the 5 denominations there only meet in 10 places of worship.

3) Muslim oratories and the Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses are present in all the provinces of the region. Worthy of note is the fact that the 11 halls of the Jehovah’s Witnesses represent 18.97 % of the places of worship of minority religions in Leon. The 7 Muslim oratories comprise 14.29 % of the places of worship in the province of Burgos.

4) On the other hand, except in Zamora, orthodox churches are present in all the provinces of Castilla y León. In Segovia there are orthodox churches representing immigrants from Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. It is important to recognize that the Romanian and Bulgarian churches are closely linked to migratory movements.

According to official figures, foreign residents in Castilla y León come from a broad spectrum of countries. Historically, the Portuguese immigration has been the largest until very recent times. However, their relative contribution has significantly for various reasons, given way to new actors in the economic globalization of migration. This is the case of Romanians and Bulgarians.

5) Castilla y León, with a level of economic development around or below the national average with little tradition of settlement on the part of the religious minority confessions, has a low percentage of places of worship with respect to other Spanish regions (only 321 places of worship of the more than 5,000 existing in Spain).

These data are presented in order to fairly contrast the relative impact of each one of these confessions on the rest of the minority faiths, with the objective of deepening our understanding of each group studied, and analyze their history, establishment in the region and progressive development.

In conclusion, as previously indicated, this study has been the product of two years of investigation and analysis of religious pluralism in Castilla y León. It has been the first step in the construction of a sociological map in which to situate the realities of religious order among the minority groups.

All minority religions studied in this work have gone through several stages of invisibility, visibility, legitimization and recognition. Each one of them contains radically diverse implantation histories and development and in some cases has not yet fully reached completion in the process. Evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims are the groups with the greatest presence and recognition. On the contrary the Buddhist groups, the Baha'i faith and the Gnostics are still in the initial phases of visibility and social legitimization.

Another of the aspects to take into account is the impact of immigration on the composition of these groups. Immigration has affected both the increase of the population of the communities and the challenges and issues they face.

Another issue that should receive focus in future studies is how the new Spanish socio-economic reality affects these minorities. That is, as the financial crisis and the pattern of change in migratory processes continue, will this help or hinder the process of visibility and recognition of these groups. Venturing any sort of prediction should not be the objective of sociology, but it may provide the keys to guide our thinking in this area.