REPORT

The Centre convened a one-and-a-half-day colloquium on religion and the political imagination, a new research programme which investigates the reality of secularisation and re-sacralisation at two levels – at a socio-cultural level between religion and politics and at a constitutional level between church and state. The approach to this relation is historical, comparative and conceptual in order to give equal weight to similarities and differences between countries across the world and within Europe.

Participants came from disciplines as varied as anthropology (Valentine Daniel), medieval and early modern history (Karen Barkey, William O’Reilly), the 19th- and 20th-century history of Britain (Jonathan Parry), the socio-cultural history of religion (Callum Brown), the wider history of ideas (Chris Clark, Geoffrey Hoskins, Ira Katznelson, Gareth Stedman Jones), political theory (Istvan Hont, Emile Perreau-Saussine), sociology (José Casanova, David Lehman) and the philosophy of religion (Adrian Pabst).

In the course of five sessions and on the basis of introductory presentations, the colloquium examined the validity of different theories of secularisation and the transmutations of the sacred over time and across space. The focus was on the complex and multi-faceted interactions between constitutional arrangements, political structures, social and cultural factors and religious beliefs and practices. The conference presentations and discussions were framed by a number of questions that arise from contemporary phenomena and current debates:

(1) does the European configuration of politics and religion exemplify the transition to modernity and the process of secularisation or is it an exception compared with other parts of the world? How different is the experience of countries within Europe?

(2) does it make sense to speak of a single theory of secularisation and re-sacralisation or is this a Euro-centric account that fails to capture the world of Islam and the religious and political culture of the USA?

(3) does the established periodisation stand up to scrutiny or is secularisation a phenomenon of the last four to five decades rather than the past three centuries?

(4) how to combine the religious, political, legal and cultural factors in a single overview and global index of the correlation between religion, politics, culture and the law?
I. The Sociology of Religion: Rethinking the Process of Secularisation and Modernisation

The first session critically assessed the sociology of religion, which at least since Weber has tended to equate secularisation with modernity. In his presentation José Casanova, from the New School for Social Research, New York, argued that this thesis needs to be questioned and qualified in several ways. First, while Europe is undoubtedly witnessing an ‘unchurching’ of society and a collapse of Christianity as an overarching system of shared beliefs and practices, the underlying general theory of religion as a unitary phenomenon with a universal history is Euro-centric and as such fails to give an account of other parts of the world. Secondly, the privatisation and individualisation of religion does not necessarily lead to the decline and loss of religiosity. As a result, one and the same theory cannot account for the simultaneous secularisation in Europe, the (re-)sacralisation in the USA and rapid modernisation without secularisation on continents as varied as Latin America and South-East Asia. The implication is that the widely held idea of associating modernisation with secularisation is profoundly mistaken.

Thirdly, the current process of secularisation in Europe is as much the outcome of the internal dynamics of religion as it is of the external process of secularisation (e.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss on the former and Hans Blumenberg on the latter). The Middle Ages hold the key to the nature of the internal dynamics, while the transition to modernity is a multifaceted process. Therefore, it is more accurate to study the historical continuities and discontinuities between the Middle Ages and modernity in terms of multiple ‘Christianities’, ‘Enlightenments’, ‘Protestantisms’ and ‘secularities’ – in short, ‘multiple modernities’.

The complexity of the processes at work is exemplified by the revival of Christianity in the years after the Second World War, followed by the unprecedented collapse since the mid-1960s: Holland, the Flemish part of Belgium, Quebec and other countries or parts of other countries have seen the collapse of Catholicism and the emergence of secular nationalism. The expansion and the subsequent demise of the welfare state in Western Europe have also affected the relations between church and state on the level of solidarity, social provision and the social fabric. Finally, the global evolution of transnational religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam and others requires a global comparative research project that abandons the narrow perspective of western-style modernisation and seeks to address the challenge of developing a theory of multiple modernities and secularities, building on works by Shmuel Eisenstadt.

The discussion focused on the insights and limits of some prominent approaches in the sociological study of religion. The distinction between ‘supply-side’ and ‘demand-driven’ theories is useful to take account of a number of phenomena like the explosion of evangelical and pentecostal forms of popular religion, which extend beyond Christianity: Latin America and South-East Asia are notorious examples, but Israel and the Middle East are fast catching up. These theories also address psychological factors such as social conformity, anomie and alienation, which inform diverse patterns of religiosity (the marked contrast between the USA and Western Europe but also a high degree of diversity within European countries). ‘Supply-side’ theories tend to assume that ‘demand’ for religion is constant and that deregulated and liberalised markets for religion (i.e. disestablishment in the case of the Church of England) will produce religious flourishing.
Moreover, scholars like Heinz Schilling argue that confessionalisation is a much more important factor in explaining secularisation than hitherto assumed because it affects both the ‘demand’ and the ‘supply’ dimension of religion. However, it was also remarked that there can hardly be free and perfect competition because the kind of religion on offer (i.e. endowed with sufficient market power) will determine the kind of religiosity, e.g. conservative religion in the USA, which has displaced liberal religion.

Among some of the other factors that characterise contemporary forms of religiosity, there is, first, the coexistence of deploying ultra-modern means in the pursuit of medievalist ends, which raises questions about the precise nature of religious fundamentalism and puts into question the validity of a single, global theory of secularisation. Secondly, it has also been suggested that monotheist religions carry themselves the seeds of internal rationalisation and dualism between the rational and the mystic, which contributes to events as important as the Constantine settlement, not least because *seculum* is a Christian theological category and as such is not necessarily external and foreign to Christianity’s own logic.

Thirdly, there are important dynamics which are not captured by Durkheim’s collective identity-formation (nationalism derives from this) or Weber’s individualised form of salvation (Protestant capitalism derives from this), e.g. the coexistence of collective and individualist religions in some Asian countries. Moreover, such hybrid processes are not independent from the political history, which can explain why some sets of ritual practices became religions, e.g. Hinduism after the 19th century, emulating the Protestantism of British colonial presence. Migration is another central phenomenon that highlights differences at the level of belief and practice: the same kind of traditional Jews from Russia became devoted liberals in the USA, those who stayed in Russia became Bolsheviks and those who emigrated to Palestine became nationalist Zionists. This highlights the relation between religion and individual quotidian choices or life-changing decisions.

Finally, the issue of trust can shed some light on different levels of adherence to religious beliefs and practices because religion – one of the most important manifestations of trust towards people and contingency – cuts across the divide between the individual and the collective. What all these theories and phenomena point to is the relation between the conceptual and the historical, the theoretical and the empirical. The challenge is to devise a theory of religion that is more universal than the Euro-centric understanding of secularisation while at the same time taking account of the particular diversity within and across different countries.

II. The Enlightenment, the late eighteenth century revolutions and their aftermath

The second session turned to the historical development of the double relation between religion and politics and church and state. The focus was on the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and on the aftermath of the French Revolution. In her presentation on religion and politics during and after the Ottoman Empire, Karen Barkey from Columbia University, New York, argued that Islam is neither unitary nor subject to one and the same historical process. As a result, no single theory can explain Islam’s path to modernity and secularisation. Instead, just as there are multiple ‘Islams’, there are also within the whole of Islam multiple paths to European modernisation and secularisation. The Ottoman Empire, a major Islamic polity, is a case in point. By subjecting Islam to a French-style top-down state and by separating folk Islam from elite Islam, the Ottomans embraced one particular form of
modernisation and adopted one specific Enlightenment model, which produced a secular state avant la lettre. This move also prepared the subsequent formation of Islamic fundamentalism by imposing central control upon some forms of Islam and thereby pushing them underground.

Four features of the relation between politics and religion and church and state made the Ottoman Empire a distinctly modern polity where both secularity and fundamentalism flourished. First, there were competing legal systems, not one formal body of Islamic law – Sunni sharia law and customary law confronted one another. At the same time, the sultanate wielded supreme sway: absolute obedience to the sovereign meant that even sharia law was subordinated to the absolute power of the sultan. The second feature was the fact that the religious elite was disconnected from the population because it was appointed and paid by the state, which also controlled the madrasas. The principal Islamic authority, the kadi judges, were not only taught Islamic principles but also trained according to canon and customary law and entrusted with popularly resented practices like tax collection. Whereas they portrayed themselves as the link between the state and society, between folk and elite, they were in fact seen as agents of the empire.

Thirdly, the sultanate deployed a combination of Sunni imperial orthodox Islam and Sufi mystical heterodox Islam, which in the form of two sheikhs – one Sunni, one Sufi – competed in a quasi-market for influence over the sultan and the state apparatus. Political issues as well as religious issues like questions related to heresy were decided by the state, which was bent on eliminating any group that represented a threat to the empire (e.g. the Safavid). The final feature was that religious diversity coexisted with the unity of the state but failed to be integrated into it – Islamic courts adjudicated conflicts within other religious communities (e.g. on interpretations of the Talmud) but both Christians and Jews remained second-class citizens.

When the Ottoman Empire underwent a process of western-style modernisation, the focus shifted rapidly from the economic realm of technological progress to the political and the social realm: from approximately 1808 to 1950, the Ottomans embraced a Jacobin project of large-scale social engineering that sought to replace religion with science. Banners during the 1908 Revolution featured slogans like ‘Le salut de la nation est la science’ (the salvation of the nation is science). From Rousseau, Voltaire, Tugot, Condorcet to Raspail, Claude Bernard and Le Blanc, the Ottomans adopted one specific ideology of the French Revolution and adapted it to the elites and the populace. Crucially, the Kadi were abolished, Sufi preachers persecuted and local institutions destroyed. As a result, Islam went underground and re-emerged subsequently, both Sufi traditional religion and Sunni fundamentalism.

Gareth Stedman Jones from Cambridge University argued in his presentation that the French Revolution is best understood as a failed Reformation. This account builds on work by Quinet and Hegel and provides a counterweight to the narrative of Tocqueville and, more recently, Habermas. The religious origins are significant because they explain how the attempts to reform the Gallic Church became a political conflict that issued forth into a parliamentary struggle about authority, legitimacy and sovereignty. The attempted reforms related not so much to the question of church property as to the creation of a national church with more autonomy vis-à-vis Rome and the election of the clergy by the laity. As such, the target of the French Revolution was not so much the King as the sacred alliance of the monarchy and the Church. It was primarily the resistance to the absolute power of this alliance which led to the mobilisation of the countryside and the foundation of Jacobin clubs.
Key to the French Revolution was the question about the nature of the separation between state and church, especially after the defeat of the Huguenots, which raised the problem of confessional pluralism. Paradoxically, the de-christianisation of France was ultimately the outcome of a process that had started as a set of problems internal to Christianity. The Revolution’s ambivalence vis-à-vis religion—anti-clericalism coupled with Robespierre’s belief in the immortality of the soul and the existence of a supreme being—produced a Republic that could be viewed only as a constitution or also as a creed—or both. The Thermidor ideal of generating a unity of the civic and religious realms ran into trouble, as the majority of the citizens had remained Catholic and showed little sign of embracing the new religion. This is why French socialism can be read as a systematic attempt to create a post-Christian religion beyond confessional divisions (Saint-Simon, Guizot, etc.).

In Britain, there was not so much tolerance of difference as freedom of judgement, provided national unity was not under threat (Locke). The French Revolution caused such turmoil in Britain because it was perceived as apocalyptic and science was not viewed as a solvent of religion but instead as ally of millenarian Protestantism which was pervading British society. Ever since the apostolic succession had been broken and the Pope been branded as the Anti-Christ, millenarian Protestants embraced science and scientists embraced millenarian Protestantism, e.g. Newton’s interest in millenarianism, Fox’s book of martyrs and Locke’s idea of ongoing revelation. Other strands of dissent argued that the pursuit of truth must not include civil power and that science, religion and politics are separate. For instance, Malthus’ anti-utopianism was ultimately based on a set of theological arguments and figures like Coleridge and Mill called for a new priesthood in a challenge to Christianity that had become ossified.

The discussion focused on two topics: the importance of religion in the Ottoman Empire and the French Revolution and the reality of tolerance in Europe in the wake of the Enlightenment and the 18th-century revolutions. What the Ottoman Empire exemplifies is the complex interaction of the state and religion and the implications for tolerance vis-à-vis different communities. The mufti was the key figure in the Ottoman configuration of relations between the state and religion. Appointed by the grand vizier, he was consulted on issues of national sovereignty and security like war. He also issued fatwas. Kadi judges were not formally appointed but came out of the centrally controlled madrasas and had to rotate every three years. In their capacity as local administrators, they enforced imperial policies, including vis-à-vis groups such as the Greeks, the Sh’ia and the Azeri who were seen as a threat to national unity. These groups were tolerated as religious communities but were denied any political autonomy. In short, tolerance was state-controlled and regulated, frequently used to re-assert central authority but at times also adapted to local conditions. Moreover, there were tensions between Islam as the state religion (and therefore the supreme source of legitimacy for the sultanate) and Islam as a critique of the state and the sultan who tried to control it on secular terms.

In terms of historiography, both socialist and Marxist French historians wanted to suppress the religious dimension of the French Revolution. However, it was more than a political struggle or a Protestant event. Montalembert, Laménais and other Catholics proposed reforms within the Catholic tradition. Moreover, the internal fear of a reactionary Catholic restoration was reinforced by wars with foreign Catholic powers. This is significant because, as Philip Hamburger has recently argued in his book *The Separation of Church and State* (2002), the aim of the First Amendment of the American Constitution was not the separation
of church and state but the prevention of a Catholic takeover. The constitutional dimension is particularly relevant today: in addition to the debate on the disestablishment of the Church of England, the growing importance of Islam in Europe puts the question of constitutional arrangements back on the agenda of European politics.

The question of tolerance follows from the change in the constitutional regime of France and America. In the wake of the French Revolution, Jewish emancipation was associated with rampant secular individualism, whereas in other countries, including Britain and Germany, the picture was mixed. This points to the crucial difference between states and empires. In Britain, there was no promulgation of Jewish emancipation; instead common law gave Jews equal rights. Moreover, there were no nationality laws, as all citizens were subject of the Crown, beyond class, nation and race. The Presbyterian Church in Scotland was another example where a tolerant religion and a tolerant state could coexist.

There are two questions that require further study. First, if there is no single chronology of secularisation, then the question is not only when but also whether the forces of secularisation ever became dominant. To revise the history of secularisation is perhaps also to reconsider the teleological argument that secularisation always and everywhere did take place. In turn, this raises a second question – the transformation of religion, rather than its demise, and the locus of the sacred. Saint-Simon himself declared that religion cannot disappear, but that it can only take on different manifestations. Instead of viewing secular modernity as the eradication of religion, it is more accurate to theorise it as the displacement of the locus of the sacred and the transmutation of religion.

III. 1848, Darwin and after

The third session examined the impact of 1848 and the Darwinian revolution on religion and politics. Chris Clark from Cambridge University argued in his presentation on the cultural wars in the second half of the 19th century that the mass mobilisation and social polarisation, which touched all domains of life, were characterised by three features. First, the broader political and institutional change, especially the expansion of political participation, were shaped by, and influenced, the struggle between religion and politics. 1848 marked a watershed, but the cultural wars thereafter were a direct result of the constitutional changes that had taken place, e.g. the establishment of the Third Republic in France and the passage from a fixed to a more fluid context with a curious mixture of clerical and anti-clerical policies. In France as elsewhere, religion was increasingly affected by the process of nation building.

The second feature was the transnational scope of the political and religious changes that were taking place. The changes within Catholicism had repercussions beyond the confines of individual nation-states because Catholicism followed a transnational logic. Moreover, the cultural wars were interconnected, e.g. the impact of Bismarck outside Germany. Generally, it is possible to speak of a confrontation between the liberal secular elite and Catholic constituencies across Europe. The third feature was the unprecedented mass mobilisation of political and religious forces, e.g. the 1844 pilgrimage in Germany. Conjointly, these three features raise historical and conceptual questions about secularisation. The secularisation paradigm was itself an outcome of these wars, not least because Weber was an anti-Catholic Protestant liberal.
Historically and conceptually, it is useful to contrast the process of secularisation with secularism as a system of belief. Secularisation did not mark the universal imposition of secularism. For example, in a legal sense, the nationalisation of Church property did go hand in hand with the consolidation of papal authority. Furthermore, secularism is not the only force of secularisation; other forces include religious anti-clericalism and anti-authoritarianism, religious non-conformism and pluralism. Equally, Catholic mobilisation and concentration within a certain political milieu (e.g. the Catholic party in Germany) fuelled secularisation by taking religion out of politics as a whole and confining it to one realm. This experience contrasts with countries like Ireland and Poland, where the absence of religious or confessional party did not cause confrontation with secular forces and therefore allowed the establishment of a religious polity.

In his presentation on secularisation in 19th-century Russia, Geoffrey Hosking from University College, London, outlined a number of trends. First, during the 18th century, Russia had experienced both confessionalisation and secularisation. Confessionalisation took the form of liturgical changes and messianic appeals which alienated zealots and conservatives who refused to follow the established Church. Secularisation concerned the abolition of the Patriarchate by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, who became de facto head of the Church and appointed the so-called ‘Overprocurator’. The Holy Synod ceased to be an elected Church Council and was downgraded to a bureaucratic body accountable to the tsar. Secondly, there was no translation of the Bible into modern Russian until 1870 and so the access to Scripture was restricted to those who mastered old Slavonic.

Thirdly, the clergy had a low social status, with the exception of monks and bishops. Relations between parish priests and the peasantry were problematic: although all peasants were Orthodox (the word for peasant is Christiani), there were all sorts of fervent beliefs and practices but not necessarily within the norms of the established Church. In fact, the 1905 revolution was triggered by a popular religious event, when the tsarist authorities killed at least 200 peasants. Tensions mounted between secular forces and the clergy and between popular religion and the official Church but a comprehensive reform scheduled for 1907 was abandoned, which exacerbated the overall situation and contributed to the downfall of the Tsarist regime in 1917.

Following the presentations, the discussion highlighted a number of common, trans-European characteristics. First, across Europe religious activity and popular participation within the Church were higher at the beginning of the 20th century than before. For example, compared with the second half of the 19th century, religious diversity and observance in Britain were higher in 1905 than just before or just after Darwin. Secondly, the rise of Anti-Semitism extended to most European countries, above all France and Russia. Russian theology and the Russian Orthodox Church were not inherently anti-Semitic but violence against Jews surfaced regularly, especially after the 1881 assassination of Alexander II, which was attributed to a Jew. In fact, the first pogroms took place in Ukraine and left wing and central parties were elected to the State Douma, not right-wing Judeo-phobic ones, though Nicolas II was genuinely anti-Semitic. One factor that changed after the Russian Revolution in relation to the constitutional status was that nationality became a matter of citizenship, rather than being associated with the Orthodox Church. In the USA, there was no formal exclusion of Jews from politics (German Jews were prominent in Congress) nor any cultural wars. But there were segregationist practices, e.g. signs saying ‘no dogs or Jews’. Growing tension between liberal and conservatism Judaism was linked to the post-1880 immigration of stringent Catholics from both Ireland and Poland.
The second topic that emerged from the discussions was the constitutional status of religion and the role of communities. Some participants argued that the history of the relation between politics and religion and church and state is much more stable and continuous than most secularisation theorists would admit. The cornerstone of these relations are religious groups. To undermine or expel such groups is to break up communities and produce secularity. This is not necessarily a process but can be an event that takes place over a very short period of time, e.g. 2-3 years during the 1960s and again over the last few years in countries like the Netherlands. Formalisation and bureaucratisation contribute to the weakening of group identity and communal bonds. Other participants contended that the nation has provided an important locus of religious identity, e.g. Saint-Simon’s hope for a national Church and the accommodation of a dominant majority with a (religious) minority in spite of profound confessional divisions.

IV. The 1960s onwards

Callum Brown from Dundee University argued in his presentation on secularisation that the 1960s marked a watershed in a historical and conceptual sense. The sociology of religion has failed to account for this periodisation because it tends to lack openness vis-à-vis the cultural and social history of religion. The terms ‘secularism’ and ‘secularisation’ have not only a plethora of meanings according to individual disciplines, but they also miss the point about the nature of the problem – far from being a long linear process, it was the 1960s that produced the de-Christianisation of Britain. As a result, there are three new developments. First, cultural secularisation, i.e. a significant (and empirically verifiable) change in religious and moral behaviour, e.g. the explosion of the illegitimacy rate from its lowest mark in 1956 of 4/1000 to about 500/1000 today. There are many factors which account for this change, including state policy: as Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins abolished virtually every law supporting the Christian state (including the law on blasphemy and abortion).

The second new development is the rise of militant liberalism within Christianity and the Church. Two examples illustrate this. First, reinventing the Christian doctrine on sex before marriage and relativising the importance of religious marriage. Secondly, the process of de-Christianisation within Christianity itself: for example, the Society of Friends, a Christian Church, seeks to remove Christ from its belief system. The third new development is the rise of fundamentalism, which has emerged in each of the three monotheistic world religions. While this phenomenon is not new, a significant increase occurred for all three religions around the 1970s.

The geographical distribution of these developments extends to most Western and Northern European countries, Canada and New Zealand. The Mediterranean countries responded later than the mid-1960s, but then more steeply. Prior to the 1960s, Britain was characterised by ‘the long 1950s’, one of the most puritan decades since the 18th century, when liberal practices were marginal, especially in terms of sexual behaviour. By comparison, the 1930s were much less puritan, which raises questions about the impact of the war on religious practices.

Most social science approaches have singularly failed to account for the divergence between the USA and Britain, not least because they cling to shared assumptions between religious and non-religious scientific communities about the advent of liberal democracy and the
inevitable decline of traditional religion. More recently, a number of trends have emerged that require explanation. First, the substitution of spirituality for religion, which has been likened by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead to a revolution that exceeds ‘new age’ forms of religiosity because traditional religion has been displaced (though not eliminated) and spirituality has become a matter of ‘pick-and-choose’. Coupled with the focus on the personal and the self, there has been a dramatic decline in conversion narratives and social transformation. In the case of Britain in the 1960s, this movement was pioneered by women who revolted against the consensus, left the Church and thus broke the link between the family and religion, as men followed suit and abandoned religious beliefs and practices. More generally, the 1960s foreshadowed the decline of the religious or confessional state, e.g. Sweden disestablished the State Church in 2002. The Balkans and Northern Ireland are exceptions to this rule.

In the course of the discussions, participants debated both the causes and the consequences of the changes which occurred in the 1960s in relation to religious and moral behaviour. Some participants wondered how this sort of account can be verified or indeed falsified. This raised the question of sources and highlighted the importance of oral history. What emerges from personal accounts about the evolution of religion and morals in the wake of the 1960s is that categories such as spirituality are not exclusive but instead coexist with some traditional patterns of worship. However, this does not conceal the depth and scope of transformation, as the change in funeral rites indicates: traditionally thought to resist the tendency of dechristianisation, funeral rites (and marriage) have been wholly secularised and are now being marketed as such by organisations like the Humanist Society. But oral history cannot ascertain whether a statistically significant change has taken place or not because it lacks the necessary time-series. One way to address this shortcoming is to study diaries and autobiographies.

Asked about whether the 1960s revolution was primarily cultural or technological (e.g. the widespread availability of contraceptives), Callum Brown argued that according to the social history of religion (rather than the traditional sociology of religion), this revolution was cultural because the revolt of women against the established consensus took place before the pill was available and made the widespread use of the pill possible. This contrasts with the 1950s policies of ‘re-puritanising’ society after the 1930s liberalisation, of which the movie ‘Brief Encounters’ is a powerful depiction.

V. Religion and Constitutional Change

The final session turned to the relation between constitutional structures and religion. In his presentation on changes in Britain and some other European countries in the 20th century, Jonathan Parry from Cambridge University argued that the diversity of experiences across Europe and between Europe and the USA raises questions about the nature of this relation in liberal democratic regimes. The French case of a total separation of church and state is on all accounts exceptional, both in the light of French history and compared with other countries, which have also seen both liberal and anti-clerical reactions to the Catholic Church. Britain and the USA, while building a liberal state that seeks to integrate different communities (including different religious groups), did not renounce Christian values. In both cases, the link between church and state has had a disciplining effect on religious communities, by helping to forge a national identity.
But the legal codification and the political practices in the USA and Britain exhibit marked differences. In the USA, the First Amendment guarantees that neither the federal union nor any federal state have an established religion. This was the reflection of the Protestant opposition to a possible Catholic take-over and to the suppression of religions rights. At the same time, universal citizenship and civic integration are not framed in opposition to religion. On the contrary, the religious influence on the founding fathers and the actual extent of publicly orchestrated religious observance is well documented (‘In God We Trust’, national days of prayer, oaths, etc.). Compared with Britain (and other European countries), the extensive autonomy of voluntary religious organisations in the USA is significant because increased central state control and regulation in the 1960s on issues related to welfare and the family sowed the seeds of the religious backlash of the New Right in the 1980s and thereafter. Interestingly, there is a communal reaction against the (imagined?) encroachment on individual, not communal, liberties.

There are some similarities with the Non-Conformists, which advocated the separation of state and church and attempted to recover what they termed ‘virtuous self-governed communities’. Like the New Right nowadays, they resented and opposed state intrusion into private and communal life in the 1840s and 1870s. But disestablishment never took place, and both the constitutional arrangement and the public practices like national prayer days remained intact. By the 1870s, there was a consensus on the link between Englishness and religious identity and a perceived neutrality of the state. Immorality and atheism were fought by faith communities under the protection of the state.

Today, expectations vis-à-vis the clergy remain high and on the whole the Church is seen as a mildly benevolent institution whose involvement in public life on some occasions is welcomed. This is largely the outcome of embracing religious pluralism in the 19th century, when the state bias towards any particular religion was removed, British identity was defined constitutionally (not ethnically or religiously) and there were state subsidies for Catholic school as early as 1846. Paradoxically, establishment has checked religious power and, if anything, made politics more autonomous from religion. More generally, in Western Europe, religion has been ‘contained’: Protestant countries are seeing a fragmentation of traditional religion; in Catholic countries, confessional parties constitute secular and secularising forces and the importance of religion in politics is increasingly a function of the liveliness of voluntary religious organisations.

The discussion focused on the relation between constitutional structures and questions of authority and legitimacy. Both the treatment of Jews in the late 19th century and of Muslims nowadays highlights the complex and delicate problem of determining which institutions and representatives have the authority to speak on behalf of their religious communities, e.g. the establishment of a Muslim Council in France. Some participants argued that the creation of Muslim representation tends to be top-down (with more or less state interference) and that the religious and spiritual dimension is cut out from the newly created representative structures. Others contended that the French strength and weakness is to radicalise this issue by questioning legitimacy, while the UK tends not to address it at all. Furthermore, the funding of faith-based schools sheds light on how principles and standards are enforced and implemented.

More widely, these problems point to the correlation between constitutional arrangements, on the one hand, and religious pluralism, coexistence and tolerance, on the other hand. Four rival models are available: no establishment and free exercise (e.g. USA); establishment and
free exercise (e.g. UK); no establishment and non-free exercise (e.g. France and Turkey); establishment and non-free exercise (e.g. Franco’s Spain). However, not only does the reality of religious and political practices differ markedly from these ideal-types; there is also a tremendous continuity of cultural values, despite variations in the constitutional structures.

All of which raises two sets of questions. First, are constitutional arrangements one of many factors or are they decisive in explaining the importance of religion in politics, e.g. do weak state churches in Britain and Northern Europe explain the decline of traditional religions? To ascertain this hypothesis requires extensive and systematic research in order to produce an overview of existing arrangements and devise a global index of the correlation between constitutional configurations, politics and religion. The book Secularism and its critics (edited by Rajeev Bhargava) outlines some empirical research on minority rights and on the extent of secularism in non-Western societies like India. The second set of questions relates to the importance of cultural and political discourse in charting the evolution of religious practices. A research project led by Lucien Hölscher at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum examines the implications of rhetoric on established churches for the interaction between constitutional law, politics and religion.

The difficulty is to combine the historical, the conceptual and the comparative dimension and to identify a short set of analytical questions, which can be tested in a wide array of cases beyond the European experience and can be refined in the light of more evidence. The challenge is to devise a theory that is both more universal and more particular than the Euro-centric account which tends to equate secularity with modernity.

Annex

Joint Session with the Participants of the Colloquium: Religion and the State IV – The City

6. City of strangers: how cities cope with difference

The fifth session was held in conjunction with the participants of the conference on ‘Religion and the Political Imagination’ and chaired by Gareth Stedman Jones from Cambridge University. Based on a presentation by Ira Katznelson, this session addressed the question of how cities cope with the difference of ‘strangers’. This theme is particularly topical in times of intense urban formation as a result of the confluence of two opposed tendencies: on the one hand, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious heterogeneity and, on the other hand, political and civic unity. ‘Strangeness’ and alterity do not simply refer to anonymity within urban areas but also extend to the lack of knowledge about different ways of life. As such, they pose normative as well as practical questions about how to configure tolerant coexistence between diverse groups and peaceful neighbourhoods composed of friends and strangers alike. Like contemporary societies, in the Middle Ages and the early modern era increasing heterogeneity heightened the potential danger of escalating violence along group lines. Then, as today, the challenge was to create the conditions for peacefulness and diversity, while at the same time preserving one’s own identity and having – legitimate – reservations about the identity of the ‘other’.

The theme of the presentation resonated with three recurrent themes of the colloquium. First, religion in relation to holistic visions of urban life that include not only ‘high theology’ but
also representations of quotidian life. Secondly, diversified and heterogeneous cities like medieval Prague where strangers such as the Germans (and at times the Jews) were no longer strangers but became citizens. Thirdly, ‘parallel cities’ within the same urbanity, which move according to different rhythms of different cultures yet inhabit the same urban space.

The particular focus of the presentation was twofold: John Locke’s vision on toleration and coexistence and the pre-1330 and post-1330 Bohemian experience with the difference of strangers. The presentation was divided into three elements:

1) **claim**: the modern world can be characterised as a widening of the spectrum of possibilities for the inclusion and exclusion of minorities (e.g. the process by which after French Revolution Jews could acquire citizenship without being required to convert); the extension of this range of possibilities already started in the Middle Ages.

2) **question**: what was it about the philosophical, political, legal and socio-economic constellation in the late Middle Ages and early modern era which made this extension possible?

3) **analytical challenge**: if this extension is a result of the mechanisms fashioned in those times, which factors determined when is there is co-existence, when exclusion and when violence?

The claim about the late medieval origins of the extension of possibilities for minorities is reflected in John Locke’s conception of the boundaries between civil government and religious beliefs. Locke’s idea of mutual toleration of private beliefs and his defence of the individual decision about which church society to join contrasted with holistic sermonising that tended to emphasise the collective over the individual and the imposition of one creed on other belief systems.

The Bohemian experience since the 14th century is a case in point. After 1319 and 1389, there were pogroms in Prague and Silesia in the wake of bonfires and mass open-air sermons against moral corruption. The target groups were the Turks, the Hussars and the Jews, but the brunt fell on the Jews who had been the victims of religiously inspired persecution since 1319, when they were temporarily expelled after a fire in Prague. Following a series of inflammatory sermons, the uneasy coexistence that was regulated by the municipality of Prague broke down; Jewish property was confiscated and the Jews were subject to looting, torture, forced conversion and expulsion. The ban on Jewish presence in Prague lasted for nearly three centuries until an imperial decree protected the Jews by granting them a legal status. Yet at the same time, there are examples of peaceful coexistence and mutual toleration in Bohemia.

One question that arises from this example is the relation between a macro-change like Locke’s innovative ideas and micro-stability like urban sermonising. A number of conditions that were closely related to urbanisation changed the nature and the context of coexistence between different religious groups:

i. a separation between formal official rule and informal private ‘civil society’

ii. a growing gap between religious life and religious doctrine, on the one hand, and secular law and civic practices, on the other hand

iii. increasingly complex public-private distinctions

iv. the production of urban space, shaped by town charters
v. the intermediary nature of towns (neither wholly independent powers nor mere imperial outposts)

Cities were the sites of regular and diverse contestation; as such, they faced the growing differentiation of distinct groups and they became increasingly dependent on voluntary consent and tolerance, based on including (or excluding) certain groups. The question that follows from the development of forms of coexistence is about the nature and the modalities of urban institutions that favour the integration of groups which are allowed to preserve and enhance their identity.

In addition to this question, these reflections also pose an analytical challenge. If the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity has led to an increasing differentiation that widens the spectrum of possibilities for the integration or exclusion of minorities, then how do we explain different outcomes over time and across space? It is clear that single-mechanism explanations fail to capture the complexity of the problem. The difficulty is to combine the analytical dimensions with historical contingency. Among the many explanatory factors, there are

a. the relative costs and benefits of orchestrated violence versus negotiated agreements between different groups
b. communal self-policing and official regulation (interventionist or restrained)
c. the expansion of civil liberties (and the parallel expulsion of Jews from a number of cities in England)
d. popular and official religious fervour
e. the nature and extent of fiscal taxation
f. territorial changes
g. the demographic evolution (rapid growth or decline like the Black Death epidemic)

One preliminary conclusion of Ira Katznelson’s presentation is that new forms of urbanity embody a wider spectrum of possibilities for the inclusion and exclusion of different groups and that there are close interactions between urban institutions and religious beliefs and practices.

The discussion gave rise to comments and questions on conceptual and historical aspects of coexistence and toleration in late medieval and early modern cities. Some participants questioned key concepts like ‘strangers’, ‘parallel cities’, diversity and civility. Marc Saperstein argued that ‘strangeness’ in cities refers to anonymity, not necessarily to different ethnic or religious groups. Moreover, the expulsion of Jews from France and from England occurred for separate reason. David Wallace concurred with this point, saying that ‘otherness’ is not a constitutive feature of urbanisation or coexistence of different religious groups, but only comes into play at moments of social confrontation. Ronnie Ellenblum questioned the analytical usefulness and thematic accuracy of the category of strangers, especially in the case of the Jews who were one of the most assimilated groups and frequently more authentic than the natives. Peter Burke pointed out that the concept of ‘parallel cities’ is limited because segregation takes different forms that cut across the boundaries of space and groups, e.g. language, skin colour, religion etc. And according to Jose Casanova from the New School for Social Research, New York, there is a need to clarify the meaning of commonwealth and civility in relation to the concept and practice of citizenship and group identity.
Others contended that there are more fundamental conceptual questions. Miri Rubin highlighted the importance of relativising the novelty of late medieval and early modern cities. This is to broaden the field of inquiry beyond the relation between religion and urban formation. She also remarked that the creation of increasingly diverse cities tended to exclude certain components of society, in particular a section of the lower nobility, with important implications for coexistence and toleration. Callum Brown from Dundee University objected that the use of terms like diversity and heterogeneity wrongly suggest that urban areas were freer, less regulated and more progressive than rural areas. Moreover, he argued that the city is central to the social history of religion but that urbanisation per se does not explain secularisation, not least because the actual history of early modernity is a history of rurality. People like Wesley were stoned in the county of Suffolk, not in the city of Bristol.

There was however wider agreement among the participants on two fundamental questions. First, in the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, the Lockean model was but one of several competing models of coexistence and toleration. Secondly, there was no absolute conceptual or historical break between the Middle Ages and modernity. Instead, diversity and heterogeneity originated in the 11th–13th century and it is apt to speak of a ‘medieval modern city’ that shaped urban formation well into the 18th century. Moreover, Locke did not privatise religion but sought to conceptualise Protestant pacification, which contrasted with urban sermonising of the same period (Istvan Hont). It is therefore more accurate to compare and contrast rival models over time and across space, rather than to reduce these complex phenomena to a linear process of secular modernisation.

Valentine Daniel suggested that one way to overcome the dualism of analytical concepts and historical particularity is to propose an ‘analytics of questions’, i.e. a limited number of factors that are brought into interaction with one another according to the specificity of different cities. He claimed that conversion is central to coexistence and toleration and that there is a triad composed of

a. inclusiveness and exclusiveness (a function of a religion’s claim to universality)

b. conversion (from indifference to forced conversion)

c. resistance or reaction (no resistance to extreme resistance to inclusion/exclusion and conversion)