REPORT

The Centre convened a two-day colloquium on religion and the city as part of its programme on relations between church and state in comparative historical and conceptual perspective. This colloquium was the fourth in a series of colloquia entitled ‘Religion and the State’, which have taken place annually since 2002.

Participants came from disciplines as varied as medieval and early modern history (Karen Barkey, Petr Charvat, Kate Lowe, Kate Jansen, William O’Reilly, Miri Rubin, Marc Saperstein), the history of ideas (Peter Burke, Ira Kratznelson, Gareth Stedman Jones, David Wallace), social and cultural history (Callum Brown), anthropology (Valentine Daniel), geography (Ronnie Ellenblum, Keith Lilley) and sociology (José Casanova, Saskia Sassen). There were a number of PhD students from various departments and faculties like architecture (Matthew Barac, Gil Klein), history (Kristina Spix) and theology (Adrian Pabst).

In the course of five sessions and on the basis of introductory presentations, the colloquium examined the interaction between religious beliefs and rituals and the process of urban formation, with a particular focus on religious and non-religious concepts and practices of coexistence and toleration in urban spaces. The main topics included

1. Types of Urban Space

The first session featured different typologies of urban space. Drawing on his forthcoming book on the city and the cosmos, Keith Lilley from Queen’s University, Belfast, discussed a number of rival approaches, both descriptive and theoretical. The functionalist approach posits a functional hierarchy of urban space (city, town, market town, cathedral city, etc.). The formalist approach analyses urban space according to a typology of street patterns. Theses two approaches tend to emphasise the material physical aspects of urban space. The third approach is more theoretical and focuses on the representational dimension of
urbaneity: the cultural (or ‘post-modern’) turn of critical theory conceptualises the city in terms of representation and performance, at the level of space, text and image.

However, these three conceptualisations are open to the critique of Henri Lefèvre’s ‘trialectic’ that consists of lived, built and conceived space. Thus to theorise space raises the question about how to overcome the dialectic between the material and the imagined. One way to achieve this is to map out urban space and to identify a morphology that discloses different phases of urban formation. Coupled with a contextualisation that bridges the gap between imagined and inhabited space, mapping out an urban morphology uncovers a set of stories that refer to the mythical as well as the actual origins of a city.

Moreover, the morphology of a city such as Bristol highlights the link between cosmology and urban space. The city is conceived and inhabited as a particular station in a hierarchy of micro- and macro-cosmoi that span the body, the city and the universe. For instance, in Chalcidius’ commentary of Plato’s *Timaeus* – an influential text in the 11th and the 12th century – there is a close interaction between the body, the city and the cosmos. The medieval theologians William of Conches and Alain de Lille combined Greek cosmology with Biblical themes and symbols. They outlined a hierarchy within the city that encompassed foreigners, citizens and the obedience to God and to angels. This hierarchy gave rise to a tripartite conception of society and mirrored the structure of the sacred universe. Popular sermons served as a vehicle to transmit conceptions of urban space into practices. William of Conches posited a parallel between the body and the city, with reference to Plato’s analogy between the whole and its parts. Two metaphors shaped the conception and practice of urban spaces: first, a vertical hierarchy between functionally different elements and, secondly, a distinction between the centre and the periphery.

The medieval reception and transformation of Platonist ideas produced a morally framed urban topography based on a divinely ordained hierarchy. The body of the world and the Body of Christ were superimposed onto one another, thereby linking cosmic history with divine salvation. The model of Jerusalem was at the heart of many urban conceptions, in particular the four ends of the Cross and the 12 gates of the Holy City. In contrast, the continent of Africa was at the margins of the map. Similarly, in a number of sermons on Chester, the crossing of streets was a symbol of the Holy Cross and the fusion of cosmic and earthly representations.

Moreover, conceptions of urban space materialized into lived practices within urban areas, which, in turn, inspired further conceptions and practices. Urban space itself was not only thought to be a reflection of divine cosmologies but also reflected back to creative activities – urban space was recursive and iterative; it had an impact upon human agency. For example, municipalities used to ordain a hierarchy of urban life, by excluding lepers and prostitutes (and also Jews) from the inner sanctum of the city walls. Equally, it is possible to speak of a ritualised geography, that is to say, rites and sites of embodied performance such as relics or the Eucharist, e.g. the processional and the pageant dimension of the York Corpus Christi.

Following the presentation, the response and the discussion revolved around three ideas that connect different ‘urban moments’ or ‘time-spaces’: first, productive space; secondly, informal actors and practices; thirdly, political space. Productive space is dynamic and ‘made’, not static and ‘given’, e.g. the creation of over 5,000 cities in less than 90 years
during the Middle Ages. As such, productive space is heuristic, making politics and the law intelligible because they are embodied in structures and practices. Moreover, urbanisation accelerated the introduction of a body of urban law, which was not clerical, canonical and absolute, but constitutional, secular and participatory. Secondly, urban formation was messy and anarchic and as such propitious to the emergence and extension of a set of informal actors and practices. More widely, urbanisation gave rise to ‘incomplete subjectivity’ (e.g. minority citizens) and powerlessness (exclusive practices), which became a feature of the modern age and modernisation. Thirdly, late medieval and early modern urbanisation led to the expansion of public space, as evinced by the centrality of piazzas. This phenomenon raises the question of ‘enclosure’ in contemporary cities, notably the privatisation of hitherto public space and the conditioning of public access to space. For instance, in Europe places of public assemblage are giving way to the construction of parking space, while the USA university campus space is being re-engineered for exclusively functional purposes, at the expense of ‘political space’ (Saskia Sassen, University of Chicago).

The discussion was primarily concerned with the nature of urban spatiality. In addition to conceptions of vertical hierarchy and models of horizontal centre-periphery, urban space can be theorised as a set of particular loci of identity, including the distinction between the self and the other. City walls are neither absolute limits nor the end of the city, as the surrounding lands are subordinated to the authority of the city but not wholly disconnected from it. Equally, the spatial dimension of the city can be distinguished according to four dimensions: centre, border, line and network. These distinctions bind together the vertical and the horizontal conceptions and allow for the dynamic interaction between the various elements. Another way to conceptualise urban space is to question Lefèvre’s ‘trialectic’ because, unlike Hegel, it fails to include sublimation (Aufhebung) and the corresponding adaptation to motion and change. Instead, it is conceptually preferable to speak of a triadic and to study how spatial representations call forth practices and other representations of built and imagined space, which in turn engender further practices (Valentine Daniel, Columbia University).

This also raised the question about the nature of modernity and modernisation. One way to characterise the passage to modernity is in terms of the de-sacralisation of the cosmos and of the city, which were reduced to physical and material space void of any mediation of the divine. As a result, the sacred no longer spanned the public and the private realm but became confined to specific loci. This process, which was by no means linear or universal over time and across space, tended to favour abstraction and formalism to the detriment of mediating practices. Moreover, social history can make a crucial contribution to historical geography by cautioning against elite representations of the city (at the expense of popular representations) and against the idealization of medieval cities, which were not exempt from the privatization of public space (e.g. Genoa) and the interference of private power into the public realm (palazzo versus piazza).

2. Urban Institutions: Strangers into Friends – the Challenge to Government

The second session focused on the role of urban institutions in the cultural perception and civic integration of strangers. Petr Charvat from the Charles University, Prague, examined
the response to the arrival of three ethnic groups in Bohemia between the 11th and the 13th century (the Germans, the Romanophones and the Jews). The German-speaking group, though already present in Bohemia, significantly increased its share in the overall population over this period. The majority of ethnic Germans learned Czech and by the 15th century were fully inculturated. They either joined the army or were represented in the liberal professions. One reason for their peaceful integration was the fact that the Duke only regulated relations with other communities and did not legislate on the internal affairs of the community. The second group was Romanophone and primarily composed of Italians. Their presence in society was highly visible, not least because Venice served as a hub for long-distance trade and international banking and Italians were specialised legal advisors, including notaries.

The Jews arrived in Bohemia as early as the 10th century and suffered persecution and pogroms in Prague approximately at the time of the first crusade. The 13th century marked a watershed in the integration of Jews: the expansion of feudalism raised the importance of money lending and helped the Jews become an integral part of Bohemia. The King not only refused to legislate on the internal affairs of the Jewish community but also granted the Jews a special status, with the effect that any attacks on the Jews were considered to be attacks on the monarchy itself. The main reason for the relatively successful integration of all three groups was the universal recognition of the King as the supreme authority.

Ronnie Ellenblum from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem discussed two conceptualisations of urban space in the case of Jerusalem. The temporal dimension relates to the mythical and historical foundation of the Holy City, in particular the construction and the location of the Temple. The second dimension is the symbolic meaning of the city for each of the three monotheistic religions. The challenge is to formulate an account of Jerusalem on plural terms that enables the peaceful and shared ‘ownership’ by all three religions. One contribution to such an approach is the project to set up a virtual library of Jerusalem – an archive and a library that gather material on the origins and the history of Jerusalem and make it available on the internet.

William O’Reilly from Cambridge University analysed three dimensions of the relation between religion and urban institutions. First, religion, the city and civic rights. Secondly, religion, language and parallel cities. Thirdly, religion, class and residence in the city. In the Habsburg Empire, civic rights were used by cities to re-assert their authority vis-à-vis ‘pawn lords’ who acted on behalf of the Emperor and ‘mortgaged’ the city to extract income and impose central control – a regime known as Pfandherrschaft. By inviting Protestant preachers and extending rights to foreign citizens, municipalities like Reinfelden and Laufenburg posed a threat to the imperial administration in Innsbruck. After a short struggle, the pawn lords were removed and the mortgage was repaid by the Emperor. In exchange for regaining their earlier autonomy, the cities agreed to ban Protestant preaching.

However, the Habsburg Empire also experienced division and conflict in relation to language and religion. After being retaken from the Ottoman Empire and Hungary in the 17th century, various cities such as Offen and Timisoara were renamed and mortgaged. Orthodox Christians became strangers who were forced to pay tax but were denied any political or civic rights. This led to the emergence of ‘parallel cities’ within the same urban space. In contrast to this experience, early 18th-century London integrated
continental Protestants. The Huguenots not only brought capital to London but also acquired extensive rights, though as individuals, not as a community. But the city of London closed its doors in the years 1709-1710, including as a result of harsh winter conditions when many foreign Protestants perished. Naturalisation occurred only in 1712 and by then London admitted no more than a few hundred Protestants. Some, like the Huguenots, were treated as friends while others remained strangers, not least on grounds of social class.

In response to the three presentations, Peter Burke from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, drew the distinction between ‘inculturation’ and ‘transculturation’. ‘Inculturation’ describes how immigrant communities integrate into indigenous cultures by adapting their distinct identities to new norms and practices. Following the work of the Cuban sociologist Ortíz, ‘transculturation’ describes how indigenous cultures are transformed by the arrival of immigrants. In the light of these concepts, the study of diapora communities raises a number of questions. First, how do the same groups integrate in different places and how do the same urban institutions cope with different groups, e.g. the massive exodus of Italians, Japanese and Germans to São Paulo? Secondly, which factors account for the formation of urban villages within cities, in particular the emergence of linguistic and religious frontiers, e.g. in Singapore where some Chinese do not leave their street because of linguistic divisions? Thirdly, how can one explain recurrent phenomena such as the rise of anonymity between different communities within the same urban area, the maintaining or loss of a native language (e.g. French in the case of the Huguenots) and the proportion between endogamous and mixed marriages?

The discussion focused primarily on the relation between the formal and the informal. Some participants contrasted the formalisation and institutionalisation of urbanisation with informal practices and raised the question of heuristics, in particular the potential of politics or the Church as a third dimension between formality and informality. Another question is the rationale for passing laws: is the formal process of legislating self-serving or aimed at resolving concrete problems? Equally, is the maintaining of French as the language of the Huguenots only a matter of self-identity or also a question of religion and civic integration? Other participants argued that changes take place either at the micro-level or at the macro-level, e.g. the city versus the empire. This raises the question of the mechanisms that channel the dynamics from one level to another. A concrete historical example was the influence of American revivalism that was feeding back into England at the time of the state union with Scotland, strengthening the Anglican dimension of ‘Britishness’ at the expense of Catholicism. In addition to religion and language, the locus of debate and integration can shift from a micro- to a macro-level, away from the local via the region to the nation (from the city via the marketplace to the Parliament).

3. Imagining the City

In the course of the third session, the presentations and the discussions addressed the role of the imagination in a number of different conceptualisations and enactments of urban space. Kate Lowe from Queen Mary, University of London, examined how black African slaves perceived city life in ‘Renaissance’ Italy and how they were perceived by urban populations. In the period from the 1440s to the 1650s, Black (i.e. Sub-Saharan) Africans became increasingly differentiated vis-à-vis other ethnic groups, particularly in relation to
the Church and the state. They could be tracked visually (in liturgical representations and at the level of the law), yet at the same time their origin was unknown (geographically and in terms of ancestry, as their names were derived from their owners). However, this process was non-linear, as paintings depicted black persons only in the 16th century. Written evidence was confined to tax and orphanage records (listed under ‘possessions’ and named after feast days, e.g. Lucia Negra).

But there were black confraternities in Brazil, Portugal and Southern Italy, which are known to have taken distinct processional routes (as compared with white confraternities). This could be indicative of a different use of the same urban space and perhaps even a certain ‘Africanisation’ of processions (including distinct dances, clothing, and singing). Inequalities persisted at the level of religion, as holy orders were limited to second-generation Black Africans (because of ‘proper’ parental background), until a papal bull of 1518 abolished this rule. However, Black priests rarely remained in Europe; instead, they were sent to parishes on other continents. While there is no evidence for forced baptism, children used to be baptised automatically, and those adults who refused tended to be Muslim.

In his presentation, David Wallace from the University of Pennsylvania argued that medieval urban representations of London were belated in comparison with other English cities because London was a small agglomeration of no more than 50,000-60,000 after the Black Death epidemic, divided between Westminster and Charing Cross. Neither Chaucer nor Shakespeare depicted London and there were but fantasimagorian representations of London in Wordsworth. This stands in stark contrast to the re-imagining of Florence after the onslaught of Black Death. The Florentines drew on an organic identity and a robust confidence in their urban culture. Only in the late 1660s did the first self-assured representations of London appear. This process was helped by the growing unity at the macro-level and the continuous differentiation at the micro-level. This apparent paradox was exemplified by the widespread adoption of guilds – the dominant form of association within and across London’s manifold localities. Another interesting example of emerging urban identities was the set of Hanseatic cities spanning the North Sea and the Baltic Sea coastline. They shared not only extensive merchant activities but also the cult of St. George the Dragon Slayer and King Arthur. The case of Danzig stands out as an urban space that is composed of three separate town halls and united by one parish church.

In the course of the discussion, the participants raised conceptual and historical questions. Conceptually, urban space is characterised by a complex interaction between unity and plurality. There are competing models: first, Plato’s conception of unitary ‘rulership’ over the polis in order to restore unity over plurality. Secondly, Foucault’s reading of pastoral power as an attempt to maximise the happiness of each member and of the group as a whole. Thirdly, Benjamin’s idea of street culture as a reaction against the formality of urban ordering and as a means of re-introducing familiarity and re-occupying bourgeois space. The conceptual challenge that derives from these accounts is to blend the static with the dynamic and unity with diversity, because individuality is not a fixed datum but in flux and constituted in and by action. The analysis of different forms of agency complements the traditional focus on the formality of urban structures, e.g. studying the effects of urbanisation on social relations and collectivities (Valentine Daniel, Columbia University, New York).
Historically, one central element of the imagining of the city were pan-European networks that transgressed national boundaries and social divisions. The best example is guilds that spanned most parts of Europe. The operation and extension of guilds is significant because it challenges the juxtaposition of bourgeois space and street culture or the binary structure of piazza and palazzo (Miri Rubin, Queen Mary, University of London). A second aspect of urban imagining emerges from the writings of travellers who described a variety of cities ranging from London to Troy and Baghdad. For instance, the 12th-century traveller Benjamin of Tudella was amazed by the splendour of Baghdad, which reflected the importance of city life in Islam (Marc Saperstein, George Washington University, Washington DC). One question that arises from these phenomena is the specific role of religion in urban life, e.g. the possible tension between formal representations and lived practices and how religious ideas shape the imagination and the inhabiting of cities (Ira Katznelson, Columbia University, New York).

4. Medieval English City Charters

In her introductory presentation, Miri Rubin gave an overview of the main conceptual and historical aspects of urban formation in the period 950-1350. Against interpretations by scholars like Roberto Lopez who emphasise the role of state taxation in urbanisation, she argued that as early as in the 11th century there was strong population growth and therefore a need to expand urban space through colonisation and urbanisation. This evolution was facilitated by relative peace: violence tended to be circumscribed and instigated by local barons, and there were few invasions from great imperial powers. For instance, the Norman Conquest was nothing like the Vikings’ landing in Northumbria and Yorkshire and the displacement which followed. Moreover, by the end of the 11th century Europe became more stable, investing in the economic infrastructure and the social fabric. The positive effect on village and city life was reinforced by the emergence of new religious orders (e.g. the Cistercians), which not only reinvigorated monastic life but in the same process also helped to explore new territory and create new settlements. New forms of state taxation and income extraction were a consequence of this evolution, not a cause.

Key to the economic and urban take-off was the phenomenon of ‘manorialisation’, i.e. land worked by the peasantry and marketed with great surplus to the landlord and the Crown. The surplus produced extractable income and required outlets, both for local sales and trans-local exports. In turn, this entailed the expansion of monetarised exchange. From the second quarter of the 11th century onwards, England witnessed the gradual rise of a uniform system of agrarian exploitation, urban production and trading system (particularly the creation of guilds). All these elements enhanced and sustained urban formation. The growing interest of landlords and the Crown in agriculture and trade led to the foundation of boroughs and towns by lords, abbots, bishops, archbishops and kings. The monarchy and the Church recognised that more urban autonomy would liberate local production and trade and thereby increase the surplus. As a result, the respective remit of Kings law and market law was more clearly established.

English cities were granted very different degrees of autonomy, but there was no prevailing unitary legal system. Instead, whole areas of life were not regulated centrally. Yet at the same time, there was a multiplicity of jurisdictions: common law, town law,
guild law, admiralty law, canon law, English customary law and Roman law. And just as the Crown repeatedly attempted to prevent the emergence of rival poles of power, individual citizens or cities ‘worked the system’, e.g. they tended to go to ecclesial courts with issues of debt because trading on Sunday would interest the Church more than the monarchy.

The second part of the session was devoted to the analysis of a number of medieval English city charters. William fitz Stephen’s depiction of London was described as a pastoral to a city with a divine calling. The absence of town-wide Eucharistic processions and a recognised patron saint intensified the competition with Canterbury and seems to have led to the co-optation of Thomas Beckett as London’s ‘guardian angel’. Moreover, city charters like that of London had a wide array of provisions, ranging from the specification of limited self-government of the Jewish community to the interaction of different levels of jurisdiction (boroughs, towns, the Magna Charta, etc.).

Religion was central to the (self-)representation of London, in at least three respects. First of all, churchwardens operated like city councillors in terms of being accountable, serving a fixed term and respecting the principle of collegiality (honour, trust, dignity and word). Secondly, religion was a ritual and moral force that shaped quotidian life. Thirdly, religion was an indispensable element of the mythical foundation of London, which was likened to the creation of Rome.

The case of Bury St. Edmunds highlights the symbiotic, paradoxical and conflictual relation between a city and the local abbey. The townsfolk enjoyed extensive freedoms, yet at the same time they resented the disdain of the clergy who tended to view the city as an extension of the monastery, subservient to its needs. This caused protracted strife. Urban resistance to certain lordship arrangements in 1321 led to the destruction of large parts of the abbey and its documentation by angry townsmen. English cities were characterised by an increasing tension between feudal landholding and urban autonomy. Such and similar tension was one of the factors in the sudden eruption of violence, e.g. the persecution of Jews in 1291 in Norwich.

5. City Street as Stage

The fifth session featured city streets as a stage for the enactment of different imaginings of urban space. Kate Jansen from the Catholic University of America, Washington DC, examined urban theatres of devotion and religious practices in the streets of some 14th-century Italian cities. The city was a stage for urban spirituality and urban renewal. Urban spirituality was characterised by asceticism, pilgrimage and charity, as evinced by the life of Remondo Palmerio who went to Jerusalem, returned to Italy, became a shoemaker, was married with children, was ‘liberated’ by his wife’s death, then went on a Europe-wide pilgrimage and had repeated Christic visions.

Palmerio’s life was indicative of the nature of urban formation in several ways. His activities as an ascetic pilgrim, who had severed all family and civic ties and engaged in works of charity, generated enormous alms-giving and allowed him to set up a hospital, a residence for women and an institution assisting prisoners. He thereby helped to address problems exacerbated by urbanisation, including endemic violence. For instance, he
intervened in factional disputes and continuous divisions that were undermining the social fabric of the Italian city of Piacenza where he was seen as a peacemaking ‘urban saint’. But he was upstaged by the advent of friars, as the provincial organisations of the main religious orders concentrated on city life and tended to be invited into cities to preach with the formal authorisation of the bishops. For instance, Francis of Assisi was closely involved in the pacification campaign of 1233 (jointly undertaken by Dominicans and Franciscans).

In the Augustinian tradition, other ambulant ‘urban saints’ like Bernadino of Sienna and Berthold of Regensburg used theatrical means to preach the inner conversion of the body to the peace of the soul and the outer conversion of the earthly city to the peace of the City of God. For instance, Berthold of Regensburg initiated a long tradition of burning velleties, which were also an integral part of Bernadino’s preaching. The aim was to engage the minds and bodies of the city-dwellers and to promote active kinaesthetic participation in sermon sometimes as long as 4-6 hours. Urban sermonising was accompanied by popular songs or vernacular poetry. In the reportationes (drafted by the followers of preachers, who could be members of confraternities or notaries and who would record all occurrences, including weather, interruptions, protest, etc.), there is evidence to suggest that conversions did take place in the wake of urban sermons and the associated spectacles. Relations between formal Church services and informal theatrical performances could be conflictual or peaceful, depending on whether urban preaching was at the same time as daily services and whether the travelling preachers brought their own confessors, who tended to be barred from cities which jealously guarded their prerogatives.

In her presentation, Kristina Spix from Queen Mary, University of London, reported the findings of her doctoral research on the religious dimension of medieval carnival in various German cities. One of the main features of religiously inspired carnival was the fluidity between actors and spectators and between rituals and spectacles. Cities became stages for a number of different formal as well as informal performances. First, official parades (like the Nuremberg Schembartlauf) with religious themes on the float (e.g. hell), which was burned at the end of a process (with a possible reference to Ash Wednesday). Secondly, spectacles with a political dimension like elements of the Reformation in parades in Nuremberg around 1525. Thirdly, popular carnival celebrations that featured humiliating practices with religious connotations, e.g. subjecting those who were seen to fail their reproductive potential to a ritual known as ‘pulling the plough’. In the wake of the Reformation, this was directed particularly against the celibacy of monks and nuns.

But there were also literal carnival plays that not only criticised the papacy (like the Herrenfastnacht in Lübeck) but also induced anti-Semitic persecution and pogroms (like explicitly anti-Jewish plays in Nuremberg). For most of the 15th century, the monarchy intervened against the worst excesses of this form of anti-Semitism, but in 1499 the Jews were expelled from Nuremberg and the municipality condoned Hans Sachs’ anti-Semitic plays depicting Jewish moneylenders and the Devil and deploying the notion of Judensau (Jewish pig).

Following the two presentations, Marc Saperstein argued that members of religious minorities tend be treated as individuals but are not granted the status of religious groups in the same way as the Church. This is an important distinction in the treatment of religious minorities in some Muslim
countries, Jews had to be identifiable within Christian societies (yellow stars, etc.). The denial of a communal identity amounts to symbolic humiliation, which frequently opens the way for persecution and expulsion. Paradoxically, the public presence of Jews as Jews occurred in Europe only after the creation of ghettos, e.g. in Venice in the 16th century. But there were also some examples for peaceful coexistence and toleration: for instance, young patricians participated in Jewish carnival, which frequently took place during Lent.

Peter Burke contended that the religious and the secular do not capture the nature and purpose of performances within urban spaces. Instead, the following distinctions are more accurate:

1. scripted, semi-scripted or non-scripted
2. daily performances or special performances
3. official versus unofficial events
4. materiality and geography: market cross, town-halls, etc.

According to Ira Katznelson, these reflections point to the interaction between spatiality and temporality and raise a number of questions. First, where did preachers originate from and how were they allowed to engage in urban sermonising? Secondly, were carnival celebrations restricted to city-dwellers or open to other spectators? Thirdly, were there authorised as well as unauthorised crowds? How, if at all, did municipalities regulate such popular celebrations? Fourthly, what was the relation between the Church, the municipality and itinerant preachers? Finally, how did potentially vulnerable minorities like the Jews manage the highly fluid environment? Did they hide temporarily or seek exile?

In response to some of these questions, Kate Jansen said that urban sermonising had a wide array of purposes, ranging from education and popular fervour to discrimination against groups like the Jews, which could lead to anti-Jewish riots and persecution, e.g. some medieval Holy Week preaching in Spain and Portugal. While the exact range of mobilisation and the audience of urban sermonising remain largely unknown (unless stated by reporters in the reportationes), some ‘model sermons’ were preserved by religious orders and there is some evidence that Jews attended sermons, not only as part of forced conversion but also to know what was being said. Kristina Spix remarked that carnival celebrations brought together urban and rural populations and that municipal authorities regulated both public and private (in-house) performances, though actual control was ex post and did not prevent excesses.

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 above 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:

1. a separation between formal official rule and informal private ‘civil society’
2. a growing gap between religious life and religious doctrine, on the one hand, and secular law and civic practices, on the other hand
3. increasingly complex public-private distinctions
4. the production of urban space, shaped by town charters
5. 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 reasons. 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)
7. Final session and planning for the 2006 colloquium

The final session was divided into a brief summary of the two-day discussions and an outline of future research and conferences. The colloquium on religion and the city examined a number of different paradigms from Judaism, Greek and Roman philosophy, Christianity and Islam. All the paradigms make claims about what a good city is or ought to be, which raise descriptive as well as normative questions. In turn, the ordering of a city towards something like ‘the Good’ points to the issue of individualism versus social conformity. Concepts of the common good and practices that embody it have the potential of binding together not only unity and diversity but also theory with praxis – relating the wholeness and differentiation to a real context (e.g. inhabited space and embodied rituals). Concepts and practices of the common good attempt to fuse the ordinary everyday life with the extraordinary special events like feast days, processions etc. As such, they bring together an urban infrastructure and a moral topography. At least since the ‘Renaissance’, architecture is one of the key realms of activity where religion, politics and culture come into close engagement with one another.

One theme that emerged from the presentations and discussions was conversion, which will be the focus of the 2006 colloquium. Conversion concerns identity within and without groups, along and across boundaries; it has a personal self-conscious dimension as well as wider social implications. Conversion also raises questions related to rationality and authenticity (a ‘true’ life).

Possible dates for the 2006 colloquium on conversion are the 24 and 25 July 2006 and potential participants include Eliot Horowitz, Christopher Clark and William O’Reilly (all from Cambridge) as well as Jean-Claude Schmidt, Steve Kaplan and David Nuremberg.

In the meantime, it was suggested that all participants send to the Centre copies or off-prints of any publications that might emerge from the discussions at this colloquium.

Adrian Pabst
August 2005