

Religion and Pluralism

CONFERENCE REPORT BY KRISTINA STOECKL



Photo: IWM

Why is it that a country as secular as France organizes the *hadj* to Mecca for Muslim members of its armed forces? How come that a relatively simple legal adjustment like marriage for gay couples has proved so controversial in many European countries? And why is it that Eastern Orthodox Christianity still finds it so difficult to define its relation to modernity? As different as these questions may seem, they all come down to the same issue: the relationship between religion and pluralism.

Modern secular societies are characterized by the coexistence of a variety of worldviews and normative perspectives on the world by which individuals give orientation to their lives. Some of these worldviews are religious, others are not. For the most part, and certainly in most Western European societies, the religious perspective is no longer the default option that individuals choose. This is the meaning of “secularity III” described by Charles Taylor in his book *A Secular Age*. It acknowledges that *plurality* is the quintessence of modern secular societies. But whereas *plurality* is a fact pretty much everywhere in today’s globalized world, the commitment to *pluralism* is not. Pluralism

stands for a particular kind of moral attitude with which an individual, a group or, for that matter, a state meets the challenges related to plurality inside society. It is based on the judgment that plurality is a resource, not a threat, and that human flourishing is inseparable from freedom and the possibility to live according to one’s own choices.

How secular states and religious communities relate to plurality as a social fact, and to pluralism as normative commitment, was the topic of a conference that took place at the IWM in June 2014. The conference, organized by IWM Permanent Fellow Charles Taylor, gathered a group of distinguished scholars who discussed the topic of religion, plurality and pluralism in four thematic sessions.

The first session looked at European legal frameworks on immigration and religious plurality. It approached the question of pluralism from an institutional perspective, examining the legal and institutional provisions in countries like France, Germany and the UK. The startling finding of the scholars on this panel chaired by John Bowen: the commitment to pluralism in Western European countries is at risk. In the face of controversial

debates about the accommodation of culturally and religiously diverse migrant communities, Western liberal and secular publics struggle for the right response to plurality. They may even find it increasingly difficult to uphold the liberal commitment to pluralism, to the point that Maleiha Malik spoke of the risk of an emerging “European racism”. This battle over principles stands in stark contrast to a culture of pragmatism widely diffused in European institutions, which allows the accommodation of religious difference at the level of practices. Christophe Bertossi presented his audience with a puzzling example: In France, the alleged fortress of *laïcité*, the French military command has established a Muslim chaplaincy to Muslim members of its armed forces. It organizes the *hadj* to Mecca for French Muslim soldiers, just as the Catholic military chaplain organizes a yearly pilgrimage to Lourdes for French Catholic soldiers. In times of military professionalization, quite pragmatically, the French army has become an equal opportunity employer who acknowledges and supports the individual rights and needs of its soldiers. Pragmatism seems a common strategy for public institutions in Eu-

continued on page 14

Conference Modes of Secularism and Religious Responses VI June 12–14, 2014, Vienna

Program

June 12, 2014

Welcome and Introduction:
Charles Taylor

Session I: Comparative European Legal Frameworks on Immigration and Religious Pluralism

Chair: John Bowen

Introduction:
Christophe Bertossi
Maleiha Malik
Mathias Rohe

June 13, 2014

Session II: Gender, Sexuality and Religion

Chair: Michael Warner

Introduction:
Nilüfer Göle
Kathryn Lofton

Session III: Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Challenges of Secularization

Chair: Kristina Stoeckl

Introduction:
Alexander Agadjanian
Pantelis Kalaitzidis
Vasilios N. Makrides
Fr. Vladimir Shmaliy

June 14, 2014

Session IV: A Secular Age Outside the West

Chair: Mirjam Künkler

Introduction:
Gudrun Krämer
John Madeley
Shylashri Shankar
Jonathan Wrytzen

Participants

Alexander Agadjanian
Professor of Religious Studies, Center for the Study of Religion, Russian State Humanities University, Moscow

Christophe Bertossi
Director, Center for Migrations and Citizenship, French Institute for International Relations (Ifri), Paris

Rajeev Bhargava
Director, Centre for the Study of Developing Studies (CSDS), New Delhi

John Bowen
Dunbar-Van Cleve Professor in Arts & Sciences, Department of Anthropology, Washington University, St. Louis

Craig Calhoun
Director, London School of Economics and Political Science

Fajsal Devji
Professor of History, University of Oxford

Alessandro Ferrara
Professor of Political Philosophy, University of Rome Tor Vergata

Dilip Gaonkar
Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Public Culture, Department of Communication Studies, Northwestern University, Illinois

Nilüfer Göle
Professor of Sociology; Directrice d’Études, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Centre d’Études Sociologiques et Politiques Raymond Aron (CESPRA), Paris

Pantelis Kalaitzidis
Director, Volos Academy for Theological Studies; Professor of Systematic Theology, Hellenic Open University, Patras

Mirjam Künkler
Assistant Professor of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University

Gudrun Krämer
Director, Institute of Islamic Studies, Freie Universität Berlin; Director, Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies (BGSMS)

Kathryn Lofton
Professor of Religious Studies, American Studies, History, and Divinity, Yale University

Jocelyn Maclure
Full Professor of Philosophy, Laval University

John Madeley
Departmental Tutor, Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science

Maleiha Malik
Professor of Law, King’s College, London

Vasilios N. Makrides
Professor for Religious Studies (Orthodox Christianity), Faculty of Philosophy, Universität Erfurt

Bernice Martin
Emeritus Reader in Sociology, University of London

David Martin
Emeritus Professor of Sociology, London School of Economics and Political Science

Mathias Rohe
Chair of Civil Law, Private International Law and Comparative Law, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

Shylashri Shankar
Senior Fellow, Center for Policy Research, New Delhi

Fr. Vladimir Shmaliy
Archpriest, Pro-Rector of the SS Cyril and Methodius Postgraduate and Doctoral School of the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow

Kristina Stoeckl
Research Director, Religious Traditionalisms and Politics, IWM; ÖAW APART-Fellow, Department of Political Sciences, University of Vienna

Charles Taylor
Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, McGill University, Montreal; IWM Permanent Fellow

Michael Warner
Professor of English and American Studies, Yale University

Jonathan Wrytzen
Assistant Professor of Sociology and International Affairs, Yale University

This conference was generously supported by Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.

Conference Report by Kristina Stoeckl
continued from page 9

rope when responding to the challenge of religious plurality and devising ad-hoc solutions that uphold the commitment to pluralism. This pragmatism, however, as Mathias Rohe pointed out, is at risk in times of public hysteria about religious and cultural difference and about the emergence of “parallel societies.”

The second session shifted the focus from secular approaches to religious plurality to religious reactions to pluralism. The speakers on the panel (Michael Warner, Nilüfer Göle and Kathryn Lofton) asked how one can explain that the rejection of pluralism by religious conservatives today has crystallized around issues of sexuality and gender. Why is it that conservative religious actors across the confessions have made the opposition to gay rights the quintessence of their expression of anti-liberalism? In many non-Western countries, the rejection of lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender rights, which are denounced as a Western, secular and liberal “invention”, has become part of post-colonial identity politics; this is true for countries as diverse as Uganda, India and Russia. But even in Western societies conservative religious actors have engaged in a battle against gay rights. Nilüfer Göle offered an interesting explanation why sexuality and gender appear to have become the last frontier in debates about secularism and pluralism. In Europe, she said, secularism historically was about the relationship between the state and the church. But in an Islamic country like Ottoman Turkey, secularism, i.e. Kemalism, was, from the start, about the state and the body: about visibility, costume and sexual norms. This debate has now reached Europe, and the negotiations over institutional secularism (which had been settled after a long series of armed conflict in European history) have given way to a much more difficult debate about secularism as a norm of individual equality in public life. In this session, Western Europe appeared, just like in the previous panel, not as a place where secularism and the commitment to pluralism have been accomplished, but rather as the space where the challenges of pluralism are only just unfolding.

The third session zoomed in on one particular case study of religious reactions to pluralism: the Eastern Orthodox Christian Churches. Orthodox Christian Churches today appear particularly challenged by the task to define their relationship with the state and society under conditions of political modernity and plurality. In this session, the speakers discussed the question whether this difficulty was due to the Byzantine (symphonic) legacy of Orthodox Christianity, to historical particularities of nation-state building processes in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, or to a lack of attention to worldly topics in Orthodox theology. The two social scientists on the panel, Alexander Agadjanian and Vasilios Makrides, shed light on the historical resistances to modernization and secularization in the Orthodox world. For many Orthodox Christians, the plurality of modern soci-

eties is a sign of apostasy, i.e. a sign that these societies have fallen away from God. Against such a theological background it is very difficult to imagine how Orthodoxy could arrive at a positive commitment to pluralism. However, the two theologians on the panel, Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Fr. Vladimir Shmalyj, gave examples where Orthodox theology has started to engage in a constructive dialogue with the modern world and has endorsed pluralism. The disagreement on the panel whether these modernizing tendencies in contemporary Orthodox theology are signs of a general opening up of Orthodox Christianity or the work of an isolated liberal elite was most instructive for the audience. In the discussion, one conference participant made the observation that the tension between a conservative tradition and progressive intellectual elites inside Orthodox Christianity are very similar to debates and constellations in the Islamic world.

The last session was dedicated to the results of an ambitious publication project on the impact of secularization in societies outside the West (*A Secular Age Beyond the West*, edited by Mirjam Künkler, John Madeley and Shylashri Shankar, forthcoming). Some of the case studies included in the book and presented at the conference comprised Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Egypt and Russia. These are countries with religious and cultural plurality inside society, but no overall commitment to pluralism. Instead, one belief system tends to be privileged over others, and religions may come to define political and collective identities. The debate on this panel (which included, besides the book's editors, also Jonathan Wrytzen and Gudrun Krämer), revolved around the question of how central the power of the state is in defining the fate of religions in non-liberal democratic settings. Gudrun Krämer suggested that a shift from a state-centred perspective to a focus on civil society could be helpful. She provided evidence from her own research on Islamic countries which suggests that the religious life in a country is less determined by state-defined constitutional provisions than by transnational flows of ideas, piety movements and even market forces.

Conferences like this one do not aim to arrive at one conclusion or at a shared result. In fact, when it comes down to the concrete assessment and interpretation of the phenomena at stake—the French military *hadj*, controversies over LGBT rights, Orthodox anti-Westernism or the quasi-sacralization of the state in many autocratic countries—there was little on which all speakers would have agreed. But one finding common to all the discussions was that conflicts over religion in present-day societies are not exclusively over religion and secularism, but are increasingly concerned with religion and pluralism. The point in question in many of today's debates about religion in the public sphere is no longer the right balance in religion-state-relations, but individual equality in public life. <

Eurasian Union: Russia's Failing Quest For Greatness

BY ALIAKSEI KAZHARSKI



Vladimir Putin unveiled his grandiose vision of a “Eurasian Union” in November 2011, shortly before announcing that he would be running for a third term as president. Russia's new geopolitical project would create a common market stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific and, together with the European Union and other regional organizations, would become a building block of the new global architecture.

Official rhetoric was initially full of promises about learning from European integration, combined with ambitious claims about obtaining the same results faster and more effectively. The post-Soviet countries would capitalize on their historical social and economic ties and common cultural background, above all the Russian language, which remains the region's lingua franca.

But if the Eurasian Union was officially about free markets, the Kremlin's underlying calculations were about more than economics. The idea of a Eurasian Union gained momentum at a time when the EU was becoming increasingly active in its “shared neighborhood” with Russia, promoting the Eastern Partnership as its own project for the social and economic integration of the former Soviet republics. Russian politicians' reference to the EU both as role-model and rival demonstrated the persistence of Russia's old love-hate relationship with Europe. They may have admired the Europeans for their success in building the EU, but they wanted Russia to be perceived as an equal and independent player. Because Russian exceptionalism

made it impossible to accept being treated as “just another country” in Eastern Europe, the option of joining the Eastern Partnership program was rejected: being lumped together with its former imperial subjects and bossed around by Brussels was seen as an insult to Russia's dignity as a great power. To demonstrate its geopolitical sovereignty, an alternative regional union had to be created.

Along with permanent membership in the UN Security Council and its nuclear arsenal, the Eurasian Union is a key component of Russia's status in the international arena. By running a successful project of regional economic integration, the Kremlin hoped to gain recognition from other global centers of power, above all the European Union and the United States. The Eurasian project is more about Russia's international identity and self-perception than economic goals.

The problem, however, is the gap between Russia's ambitions and capabilities. Gaining influence over the former Soviet republics has been a constant priority for the Kremlin since 1991. Vladimir Putin, who famously said that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, holds firmly to this foreign policy tradition. Russia's new Eurasianist doctrine envisions the re-integration of the former Soviet space on the principles of economic liberalism and the freedom of movement for goods, services, labor and capital. This formula of the “four freedoms”, which lies at the heart of the EU, is not new to the integration projects of the former Soviet countries.

When the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was formed in 1991, its members vowed to work towards creating a common European and Eurasian market. Attempts to build an economic union inside the CIS were unsuccessful, however.

After Putin announced a new round of post-Soviet integration in 2011, the question many asked was how Russia would have any chance of competing with the EU in attracting its neighbors. The Russian economy could hardly serve as a model for reforms, given its heavy dependence on revenues from energy exports, and with Russia's public institutions becoming increasingly corrupt and inefficient and its political system more authoritarian. Moreover, the post-imperial syndrome has not disappeared from the region. Fear of domination by Moscow is strong in the post-Soviet countries, both among the political classes and the populations as a whole. Russia, on the other hand, has never learned to treat its neighbors as equals. Moscow's habit of seeing the former Soviet republics as its exclusive “sphere of influence” means that its policies are always about subordination, hierarchy and control, rather than respect for equality and independence. It also means that any European or American involvement in the region—including the Eastern Partnership initiative—is automatically met by Moscow with suspicion and labeled “anti-Russian”.

Eurasian integration was clearly not sufficiently attractive to persuade the former Soviet countries to abandon participation in the Eastern Partnership. However, the Eurasian