Religion and Politics

Course Coordinator: David Lehmann
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Course Team

Véronique Altglas
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8 lectures in Michaelmas Term on Religion, secularisation and social change: theories and explorations

Wednesdays at 3.00

Emile Perreau-Saussine
ep207@cam.ac.uk
8 lectures in Michaelmas term on State and religion in comparative perspective

Thursdays at 10.00

David Lehmann
8 lectures in Lent on Fundamentalist and charismatic movements

Wednesdays at 10

Humeira Iqtidar
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4 lecture in Lent on Political Islam in South Asia

Mondays at 11.00

Aims and Objectives

To provide students with a broad sociological understanding of modern religious movements and their relationship to politics.

To explain the relation between the state and religious institutions in a comparative framework.

To develop an analytical and comparative framework for the understanding of religious movements, including fundamentalist and charismatic religious forms, within world religions.
Brief Description of the Paper

The paper provides a critical reflection on the secularisation thesis, explaining theories of contemporary religion in a historic and comparative context, and also the background in political philosophy to modern relations between the state and religion. The teaching is grounded in the contemporary transformation of world religions and with the place of fundamentalism within them, exploring the interconnections between fundamentalism, modernity, and democracy. The paper offers a comparative sociology of religious and political movements in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It considers the relationship between the secular and religious spaces in France and Pakistan and compares these with other countries. Case studies include evangelical churches in Latin America, Islamist politics in Pakistan, and religious revival in Israel.

Mode of Assessment

Two 5,000 word essays OR a three-hour examination

Teaching arrangements

This course will be taught in lectures and supervisions. Students should have three supervisions to prepare for each of their long essays and six to prepare for the examination.

Supervisions will be organized by the course team. The lecturers will supervise, or arrange supervision, on the subject matter of their lectures.

Background Reading


Sample Exam Paper

1. How has social theory responded to the apparent retreat of secularization?

2. Is secularization truly ‘disproved’ by the proliferation of charismatic and fundamentalist movements?

3. To what extent are contemporary accounts of Islamic – or any – fundamentalism vulnerable to the criticisms of western scholarship contained in Said’s *Orientalism*?

4. To what extent are Jewish, Christian and Islamic fundamentalism ‘the same’?

5. “By allying itself with political power, religion augments its authority over a few and forfeits the hope of reigning over all […] The unbelievers of Europe attack the Christians as their political opponents rather than as their religious adversaries; they hate the Christian religion as the opinion of a party much more than as an error of belief; and they reject the clergy less because they are representatives of the Deity than because they are allies of government”. (Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*). Comment
6. Is political Islam a revolt against modernity or, on the contrary, an attempt to modernize Islam?

7. Assess the claim that religious movements help to create social capital.

8. Describe the contrasting strategies adopted by different institutions and at different times to adapt the Catholic Church to modern society.

9. The use of the media by charismatic and fundamentalist movements shows that they have perfectly well assimilated the ethos of modernity. Discuss.

10. “Our government makes no sense, unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith – and I don’t care what it is” (Eisenhower in 1952). Comment.

11. Why should the choice of religious affiliation be any more or less rational than any other choice?

12. How can sociological theory respond to the challenge of cognitive interpretations of religion?

13. Is neo-Hinduism more New Age than Hindu?

14. In what sense have western liberal democracies “tamed” Christianity?

15. Is Pentecostalism the most global of contemporary religious movements?

16. Is the French idea of “laïcité” anti-liberal?

17. In what ways did the Second Vatican Council change the politics of the Roman Catholic Church?

18. How successful was Jewish emancipation?

19. Should the Anglican Church be dis-established?

20. Can anti-clericalism ever be justified?

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Dr Véronique Altglas

Religion, Secularisation and Social Change: Theories And Explorations

8 lectures

Michaelmas term 2007

1. CLASSICAL THEORIES OF RELIGION
This lecture explains how the different lecture series in the paper fit together to provide an integrated picture of the relationship between religion and politics. It also addresses what students can expect from the paper. It introduces key debates and theorists of religion, showing how these are related to contemporary social debates, in particular Weber’s, Durkheim’s and Marx’s seminal work. In these sociological theories, “Religion” is objectified and defined as a product of society. It is a central concept for understanding society, and more especially the effect of representations and values on social organisation and economic activities, the key role of religion in shaping collective solidarity, the relations between ideology and power, and the characteristics of Western societies.

READING

* highly recommended


2. SECULARISATION (1). IS GOD REALLY DEAD?

In the late 20th century, sociologists couldn’t help but notice the decline in the influence of religion, notably the involvement with religious organizations which was
first assessed by quantitative investigations (such as rates of church attendance). Concerned with the development of modern society, social theorists of religion conceptualised this category in terms of a process of secularisation. Secularisation is a concept designed to understand the loss of religion’s social significance and cultural hegemony, but it is open to a variety of interpretations, focusing on bureaucratisation and rationalisation in modern societies, on the privatization of religious practices and beliefs, on the relation between church and state, etc. The purpose of this lecture is to introduce some of the main secularization theories and discuss their validity.

READING


3. SECULARISATION (2). DIVERSIFICATION AND INDIVIDUALISATION OF RELIGION

Whereas early sociologists might have felt they were the witnesses of the demise of religion, the 1960s counter culture seemed to contradict this assumptions. With social protest and exploration of alternative lifestyle, came New Religious Movements, New-Age ideologies, unconventional religious and healing practices, etc. This doesn’t necessarily contradict secularisation theories. This nebula of minority movements brought to the fore fundamental changes of religious practices and beliefs in modern societies, such as privatisation of religion, but also individualism and subjectivism, utilitarianism and consumerism which also affect religion today. Incidentally, those
tendencies which might be more visible in unconventional religiosity, have also become characteristic features of mainstream religions in western societies.

READING


4. MYSTICISM. INDIVIDUALISM AND RELIGION IN MODERNITY.

A central theme of the sociology of religion has been the categorisation of religious organisations. E. Troeltsch amplified the church-sect typology, adding a third type (“Mysticism” or “spiritual religion”). Because of its radical religious individualism, Troeltsch argued for an affinity between mystical or spiritual religion and modernity. Indeed, the modern world is characterized, in his view, by a strong claim for autonomy. Thus, Troeltsch’s perspective leads us to consider religious individualism as contributing to modernity. Drawing upon Troeltsch’s typology, C. Campbell asserted the adaptive superiority of mystical religion to modernity, especially to its secular and scientific culture, its individualism, relativism and pluralisation. Using empirical examples, this course will update this approach and discuss the pivotal role of pragmatism in the secularisation debate.

READING

Cf. reading list on previous handout, and:


5. SECULARISATION AND RELIGION IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

One of the most significant phenomena to challenge classical secularisation theory is globalisation. If secularisation seemed to be more concerned with processes through time (the fate of religion in modern times), globalisation probably relates more to spatial and geographical dimensions of social change’s impact on religion – e.g. the spreading of Eastern religions in the West such as Buddhism and neo-Hindu movements, the growing transnational influence of Pentecostalism, the transformation of immigrants’ religious practices… This lecture will cast light on the responses to globalisation made by religion, whether they consider it a threat or an opportunity. The transnational diffusion of Neo-Hindu movements will illustrate the second case. This case-study will also shed light on the universalisation of particularism, which interplays with the particularisation of universalism in the global context.

READING
6. GLOBALISATION (2). STANDARDIZATION AND DIVERSIFICATION OF RELIGION

Drawing on another case study of the universalisation of particularistic religion, the lecture will firstly underscore how globalisation involves the intricate processes of standardisation, individualisation and westernization. Do continuous contact and
circulation of cultural components, mixture and syncretism entail the formation of a single global religion, or the diversification of practices and beliefs? Indeed, one of the most debated aspects of globalisation is whether it leads to cultural homogenisation or pluralisation. The issue will be discussed, in the light of anthropological critics of globalisation theories. Expression, interpretation and use of globalisation in local contexts undeniably shed light on the process of cultural differentiation involved in globalisation. As a result, it will be argued that “indigenization is the other side of the coin of the homogenizing aspects of globalization”, since globalization cannot occur without the global spread of ideas and practices being adaptable to particular circumstances.

READING


7. RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, PLURALISM, RE-POLITISATION OF RELIGION. ANTI-SEMITISM IN FRANCE

One of the major social changes in modern societies, notably because of globalisation, is the disentanglement of citizenship and religious identity, religious diversity, and the repoliticization of religion. This social condition raises new issues, such as the regulation of diversity, the existence of common national identities, the integration of minorities, the meaning of citizenship, human and religious rights. Preliminary remarks will be made to reflect on the contemporary analysis of the public role of religion, especially on the ambiguous relation between academics and political agenda, and the need of historical context. Then the repoliticization of religion in societies in which religion has been privatised and diversified will be illustrated by
the evolution of antisemitism in France, especially its manifestations among young Muslims and Afro-Caribbeans since 2000.

READING


8. LOCAL ADAPTATION OF TRANSNATIONAL RELIGIONS AND RESPONSES TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

This lecture considers the perception of cultural and religious diversity, especially in France and Britain, in the light on neo-Hinduism’s adaptive strategies to national contexts. Indeed, religious diversity can also be well understood by drawing on cross-national comparisons. Neo-Hindu movements are particularly relevant because of their potential to adapt their collective identity to different social environments – as ethnic-based religions attracting South-Asians or as western New Religious Movement for a white urban middle class searching spiritual tools for well-being. By using the Political Opportunity Structure theory, the aim is to analyse mobilisations and claims of religious minorities, in order to understand how political contexts shape opportunities and constraints for them. This approach will be illustrated by the adaptive strategies of neo-Hindu movements in Britain and France, and the response of NRMs to anti-cult campaigns in France.

READING: see previous list.

Specimen essay questions

Discuss the evolution of the role of religion in social theories.

Does secularisation theory retain any value today?

Does individualism undermine religion?

Evaluate how processes of globalisation have helped or hindered the promotion of religious belief and practice.

Is globalisation a process of homogenisation of culture?

By addressing either Christianity or Islam in the West today, discuss whether the forms they take are best understood through reference to national or transnational processes.

Compare French and British responses to religious diversity.

Is religion a factor of unification or division among EU countries?

Discuss the factors behind the resurgent role played by religion in contemporary British public life.
Dr Emile Perreau-Saussine

State and religion in comparative perspective
8 lectures
Michaelmas Term 2007
Thursday 10 a.m.

Background Reading: René Rémond, *Religion and Society in Modern Europe* (Blackwell, 1999)

I. The American way: the alliance of religion and democracy


* The Federalist Papers, n° 10 and 51


On Tocqueville and religion, see


Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: http://pewforum.org/
II. The Roman Catholic Church’s adaptation to the separation of Church and State

* Declaration on Religious freedom, Dignitatis Humanae, 1965


John Courtney Murray, We Hold these truths. Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition (Sheed and Ward, 1960)

http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/JFK+Pres/Address+of+Senator+John+F.+Kennedy+to+the+Greater+Houston+Ministerial+Association.htm

Congregation for the doctrine of the faith, Doctrinal note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life, 2002

III. “The Jewish question”: emancipation and its limits

* Jacob Katz, Outside the Ghetto (Harvard U.P., 1973)


Joseph Blau, Modern Varieties of Judaism (Columbia U.P., 1966)

Michael L. Morgan, A Holocaust Reader: responses to the Nazi extermination (Oxford U.P., 2001)

IV. “The Jewish question”: Zionism

* Theodor Herzl, The Jewish State: an attempt at a modern solution of the Jewish Question

* Yeshayahu Leibowitz, “The Religious Significance of the State of Israel”, in Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State, p. 214-220

Shlomo Avineri, The making of Modern Zionism: the intellectual origins of the Jewish State (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981)

Ber Borochov, Nationalism and the class struggle: a Marxian approach to the Jewish problem. Selected writings (New York, Poale Zion-Zeire Zion of America, 1937)

Ahad Ha’am, Nationalism and the Jewish ethics. Basic writings of Ahad Ha am (H. Kohn, ed.) (New York, 1962)

V. Integrating Islam in France

On secularism, integration etc:


C. Laborde, “Toleration and Laïcité” in C. McKinnon and D. Castiglione (eds), The Culture of Toleration in Diverse Societies (Manchester U.P. 2003), p. 161-177


On the headscarf ban:


John R. Bowen, *Why the French don’t like the headscarves, Islam, the State and public Space* (Princeton U.P., 2007)

**On Islam and the State**


Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the people and the state* (I.B. Tauris, 1993)

VI. The Anglican way: an Absolutist form without its content

**In general**

François Guizot, *The history of civilization in Europe*, 13th lecture


**On (dis-)establishment**

R.E. Prothero, “Disestablishment”, *Quarterly Review*, July 1892, vol. 175, p. 258-286:

* Paul Avis, *Church, State and Establishment* (S.P.C.K., 2001)

**Colin Buchanan, Cut the connection: disestablishment and the Church of England** (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994). (offers a useful commented bibliography)

John Habgood, *Church and Nation in a Secular Age* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983)

* Adrian Hastings, *Church and State, the English experience* (University of Exeter Press, 1991)

H. Hensley Henson, *Disestablishment* (Macmillan, 1929)

David Nicholls (ed.), *Church and State in Britain since 1820* (Routledge, & K. Paul, 1967)

VII. The politico-theological problem

The Church is part of the State:

Machiavelli, Discorsi, I.11-15 and II.2

Hobbes, Leviathan, parts III and IV

Montesquieu, Dissertation sur la politique des romains dans la religion

* Rousseau, Social Contract, IV.8

Jacques Gernet, China and the Christian impact (Cambridge U.P., 1985), chap. 3

Ultimately, the State is part of the Church: “We must obey God rather than man”

(Acts V.29)

* Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologicae:
  - First Part of the Second Part, q. 91, art.
  - Second Part of the Second Part, q. 100, art. 3

Augustine, The City of God, book 1-5 and book 19


VIII. Liberal democracy and religious freedom

* John Locke, Letter on toleration


Compare with:


John Milton, *Areopagitica*

Jefferson, *Notes of the State of Virginia* (1787), Query XVII.


Sample questions

“Our government makes no sense, unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith – and I don’t care what it is” (Eisenhower in 1952). Comment.

In what ways did the Second Vatican Council change the politics of the Roman Catholic Church?

How successful was Jewish emancipation?

Should the Anglican Church be dis-established?

How adapted to Islam is French laïcité?

Can anti-clericalism ever be justified?

Is the separation of Church and State an acceptable compromise for both the Church and the State?
After presenting a framework in terms of the concepts of popular and erudite religion, the lectures will focus on the conversion and ‘reversion’ phenomenon which is becoming a leading feature of contemporary religion and may be reshaping what we understand by religion: an increasing proportion of the religiously active (i.e. regular public participants) are either converts or people who have ‘returned’ to religion after a secular or completely a-religious upbringing.

Lecture 1

Interpreting religion today

This lecture asks to what extent it is realistic for religious affiliation to be interpreted in terms of the doctrine of a particular religious tradition. It develops the notion of popular religion and examines the dialectic relationship between the popular and the erudite or official. Institutionalized religion and the divisions it demarcates has imprinted itself so deeply on the modern consciousness and our ready-made interpretation of the world that it is easy to forget that for most people, most religious practice is not theology-based at all. This claim is then linked to concepts of the secular and secularization.


Lecture 2

Conversion-led movements: redefining religious affiliation?

Religious affiliation tends to be thought of – by assumption rather than by explicit theories - as inherited and shaped in a person’s childhood: until the last generation or two a person who observed religious rituals, whether intensely or merely as a matter of occasional routine, would be enacting rhythms and rituals and even incomprehensible utterances (in Hebrew, Latin or Arabic for example). This ignores the major role played by missions in the Victorian churches (both the Church of England and the Methodist and other denominations in England and Scotland) and


also the expansionary drive of Catholicism through Crusades, through Spanish and Portuguese Empires and indeed throughout the world (viz. Jesuits in China and Japan etc. etc.) Those could be thought of as ‘top-down’ undertakings driven from the institutions. But already in colonial situations a grassroots evangelization got under way spearheaded not by external missionaries but by local people, especially in Africa. Among Muslims the earlier history of geographical expansion has been succeeded, as among Jews, by an expansion ‘within’, bringing secularised people back to strict observance.


Lecture 3. Religion and globalization: the view from the grassroots

The contemporary pattern of apparent empowerment of grassroots spread of religious affiliation converges with globalization. Global spread can be broadly divided between the cosmopolitan and the strictly global – the former allowing or even encouraging local authenticity and difference under a multinational and multicultural canopy (cf. traditional Catholicism, African-originating cults, New Age) and the latter propagating a more self-reproducing or mimetic pattern (cf. evangelical Christianity and new charismatic developments with Catholicism).


Lecture 4

The meaning of ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘charismatic’

The word fundamentalist strictly speaking refers to movements which focus intensively on a holy text and its ‘inerrancy’ – on the absolute accuracy of every word and letter in it. Despite its contemporary pejorative connotations, the word still has a conceptual core worth preserving, especially since, together with the notion of charismatic it encompasses two dimensions – not mutually exclusive but also by no means inseparable – of the contemporary upsurge of religious mobilization, covering all the major world religions. Fundamentalists and charismatics do challenge the secularist assumptions of any social scientific study of religion and it is important to be aware that the position of the analyst vis-à-vis the object of analysis is somewhat different in this subject from others, such as for example the study of political behaviour.


Lecture 5

Pentecostals, charismatics: case studies

This lecture will analyse the development of charismatic Christianity worldwide, with examples from Latin America and European diasporic communities. It will cover the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as well as evangelical Christianity in the Protestant tradition.


Lecture 6

Religion and the state in Israel

This lecture will describe the acute difficulties arising when a modern state is obliged by political pressures – and by its origins – to give religion a privileged place in the social and legal system. The upshot is a crazy-quilt of secularism and multiculturalism – and above all politics.


Lecture 7

Rational choice and cognitive approaches

The classical sociological tradition treats religion as a product or a cause of features of social structure. The rational choice approach, developed by Iannacone and Stark most prominently, takes an approach modelled on economics in which people are understood to join religious organizations because those organizations enable them to achieve goals. Some of these goals are quite mundane, while others – the spiritual ones – are hard to evaluate, detect or quantify.

A separate departure is that derived from evolutionary and cognitive psychology and cognitive anthropology. In this approach religion is seen to be a feature of all human societies and to fulfill fairly standard functions within them. But in contrast to classical sociological explanations, this approach sees religious ways of thinking as ‘hard-wired’; into the human mind and as products of evolution. However, Boyer, who with Atran is one of the two main exponents of this approach, also adopts a rational choice approach when he comes to studying institutionalized ‘religions of the book’.


Lecture 8

The media in the contemporary religion field

The role of media in contemporary religion links in the grass roots globalization and popular religion: established highly institutionalized religious bodies (the Vatican, the
Church of England) have proved much less adept at mobilizing the media than more decentralized movements. The cheapness of radio and cassette transmission, for example, favours low-budget, one-person shoestring operations which without them would never get off the ground. But, as the Indian case shows, this is not the only variant.


Essay questions

What are the features of Pentecostalism which has made it such a successful worldwide movement?

Discuss Talal’s and Casanova’s concepts of the secular

Do evangelical movements create more social capital than mainstream religious institutions?

Compare conversion-led movements in Judaism and Christianity.

Are the rational choice and cognitive approaches to the understanding of religious behaviour compatible with mainstream sociological approaches?
Has the use of contemporary media resources brought about fundamental changes in the ways individuals relate to religion?

Can Israel ever be a secular (and still Jewish) state for all its citizens?

Why are there no Catholic fundamentalists?
Lecture 1 Islam and Politics: Continuities and Disruptions Under Colonialism


David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence, Beyond Turk and Hindu: rethinking religious identities in Islamicate South Asia, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2000


Lecture 2 Contemporary Manifestation Islam in South Asian Politics


