EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conference on

Religion, secularism and the quest for a decent society

26-27 April 2013
Monastery of the Franciscan Congregation, Luxembourg

Introduction

The Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies (LIEIS) held a two-day conference on 'Religion, secularism and the quest for a decent society' on 26 and 27 April 2013 in Luxembourg. Approximately 40 participants from across Europe and beyond debated in the course of seven sessions the evolution of secularism, the significance of the so-called 'religious return' and the implications for the creation of a decent society.

This event is part of a series of seminars which bring together scholars from different academic disciplines and intellectual traditions to discuss pressing problems that affect the whole of Europe, notably the vitality of nations and societal development in the twenty-first century. In recent years, the LIEIS has organised workshops and colloquia on 'Europe facing ethnic and religious conflicts' (2006 in Moscow), '*Homo Europaeus*' (2008 in Luxembourg), 'Contemporary globalization and hegemonies: Transformation of nation-states and new inter-civilizational visions' (2009 in Luxembourg, based on an essay by Shmuel Eisenstadt) and, most recently, 'The rise of the extreme right and the future of liberal democracy in Europe' (2011 in Luxembourg).

The overriding objective of this conference was to have an open and frank debate about the role of religious and secular forces in shaping society. Beyond common stereotypes and caricatures, the objective was to raise critical questions and generate new insights. Instead of having long-winded presentations, the focus was on a free-wheeling debate and a robust exchange among the participants based on interdisciplinary theories and specific empirical facts. The ambition of the organisers was to come up with new ideas and concepts that can capture current trends and help us understand the complex interplay between religion and secularism.

In his brief introductory remarks, <u>Armand Clesse</u>, Director of LIEIS, mentioned the extraordinary proliferation of books on secularism and atheism (by advocates and critics alike), as well as a burgeoning literature on religious fundamentalism. What is often missing from contemporary interventions is any awareness about the strong anthropocentric nature of world religions and their lack of respect for the poor, for animals and for the environment.

Linked to this is the emphasis on earthly, material considerations at the expense of spiritual values and practices. For example, opposition to abortion suggests a strong sense of the inviolable, sacred character of life, which is curiously absent when it comes to extreme poverty, ecological devastation and the slaughter of animals.

Moreover, compared with earlier forms of atheism, the new 'atheists' such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris or A.C. Grayling display an arrogance and vanity that is only surpassed by their ignorance of philosophy and theology. There is also much confusion about terms such as the 'secular', the 'religious', the 'sacred' or the 'profane'. The conference seeks to shed some light on these issues and to avoid the often muddled thinking which dominates both academic research and public debate.

1. Secularisation or religious resurgence?

In his short presentation David Voas began by saying that secularity and secularisation are descriptive terms, whereas secularism is a normative notion. In Europe, we are currently witnessing both secularisation and also a small measure of religious resurgence. The latter does not by any means undermine or invalidate the secularisation thesis, which suggests that modernisation brings problems for religion. In his own research, he has put the emphasis on generational change: there is little change over the life of individuals (very few people become significantly more or less religious over their own life), but there is substantial change between generations. England is a case in point: more than half of the adults, and the older generation identify with the Anglican Church, while among young people the proportion is barely 1 in 20, so in this sense Anglicanism will become a sect. By and large the same will be true for other European countries, and possibly over time the non-Western world too.

In relation to the contemporary resurgence of religion in Britain and much of Western Europe, it is worth noting that this is linked to current levels of immigration. However, there are a number of factors that will limit this trend. First of all, immigration will slow down. Second, the fertility differentials between the indigenous and the immigrant population tend to diminish quickly. Third, religious-ethnic minorities do maintain their distinctiveness but also lose it over a generation or so. As a result, religion won't necessarily disappear but it could nonetheless lose its social significance and influence. Similarly, there has been a brief religious resurgence in Central Eastern Europe but it is unlikely to last. Beyond the West, China is a great unknown, as it is a strongly secular country and culture but with fast-growing religious minorities. This makes it harder to predict how it will evolve, D. Voas concluded.

Asked by James Noyes whether religiosity can be described as a generational half life and whether this is true for all religions, including Islam, D. Voas responded that second-generation Muslims are similarly religious compared with their parents but that there is more dispersion in terms of religiosity among the subsequent generations. Yet if, as J. Noyes suggested, Islam proves to be the exception and we cannot speak of generational half lives, then shouldn't we also consider differences within Christianity (e.g. between Catholic and Protestant)? In response, D. Voas said that secularisation has also affected hitherto staunchly Catholic countries such as Ireland, Spain and Portugal, and that the old thesis about the Protestant origins of Europe's secular 'turn' needs to be modified.

At this point <u>Larry Siedentop</u> interjected that religion is a deeply contested concept and that it correlates with a number of binary opposites such as the sacred vs. the profane, the public vs. the private or state vs. civil society. The role of conscience and belief in politics and society may be a better way to explore some of these issues than endless discussions about the meaning of religion. <u>Simon Glendinning</u> agreed with J. Noyes that secularisation seems to be predominantly linked to the Protestant tradition and that other confessions or indeed faiths are much less affected by it. What is distinct about Protestant cultures, and in fact certain strands in other world religions that resemble Protestantism, is that they promote a kind of withering away of faith and/or some form of privatisation, which runs counter to more traditional types of belief. In conclusion of this short exchange, <u>D. Voas</u> remarked that 'we are all Protestants now' (here <u>S. Glendinning</u> quipped: speak for yourself!).

The next presentation was delivered by <u>Eric Kaufmann</u> who began by saying that he largely agrees with the work of David Voas and Steve Bruce on secularisation, notably the point that there has been a dramatic and statistically very significant decline in private religiosity (both belief and attendance). The notion that 'God is back' applies to the global South but as these countries enter late modernity they too will become secularised (e.g. Brazil). However, even if individuals 'leave' religion, societies can paradoxically become more religious. The main reason is demography. We are in the middle of a global demographic revolution, with rapid ageing in the global North and parts of Asia (i.e. ageing and low fertility). By contrast, the religious South is young and has high fertility rates, and it affects other parts of the world through immigration, especially the North.

For instance, the city of London has actually experienced a 'religious revival' as a result of high and sustained levels of immigration from the global religious South. The second paradigmatic case is Israel: the Ultra-Orthodox Jews don't have children because of sheer economic need but because there is a battle between pro-natalist and secular forces: on average 7.1 children per Ultra-Orthodox women vs. 2.3 for secular women. There are also pro-natalist strands in Western Christianity. So in short, most religious people acquire their faith at birth, and ethnicity protects non-Christian religions from secularisation. This is an attempt to develop the cultural defence thesis first put forward by the sociologist of religion David Martin.

In the debate that followed E. Kaufmann's presentation, <u>Christopher Coker</u> said that we need definitions of religion and secularisation. That is because we are seeing simultaneously a decline of organised religion and a rise in religiosity. However, this is not strictly speaking a new phenomenon at all. For over two hundred years, the fervour of religiosity has shifted from traditional faiths to political religions. Moreover, not all religious institutions are in decline. Take the case of Brazil where various charismatic churches (both Pentecostal and Catholic) run banks and even produce religious TV soaps.

The problem with the 'new atheism' and its attack on religion is that it is not just bad philosophy and bad theology but above all bad science. Richard Dawkins is a bad Darwinist because he ignores one of the most fundamental insights of Darwin himself – that we are the God species. Indeed, human agency itself is linked to the idea of a personal Creator God who brought all things from nothingness into being through the combined power of the intellect and the will. Thus, 'new atheists' like Dawkins, Hitchens and Harris are fundamentalists, but Alain de Botton and others want to bracket God out of the picture and instead make space for notions of the sacred, perhaps even the divine but not in theistic terms. Among the current

crisis of meaning, one question that arises is what would be consolation for atheists or secularists, C. Coker concluded.

In his intervention, Adrian Pabst questioned the secularisation thesis, arguing that modernisation is fully compatible with religious revival, as evinced by the successive waves of the Great Awakening or the huge growth in Methodism in imperial Britain. Indeed, the three periods associated with modernising renewal were inextricably intertwined with the fervour of faith, whether in the late 16th and early 17th century, the period from about 1790 to 1850 and again at the dawn of the 20th century. These shifts from a clerically dominated to a more lay, popular Christianity, show how popular religion never went away but in fact grew stronger – culminating in the Pentecostal awakening in the USA which foreshadowed the spread to the global South. The secularisation of Europe has been a much more recent phenomenon and is clearly much more dominant in the Protestant Northwest than the Catholic South or the Orthodox East, in terms of both belief and belonging – especially the enduring cultural presence of faith. As such, the process of secularisation is neither necessary nor normative. Crucially, the secularisation thesis is tied to positivism, notably the way in which the secular institutes the religious as its opposite (rather than seeing both as two dimensions of a single, overarching reality). Until the modern era, the *saeculum* was not an independent space but rather the time between the Fall and the *eschaton*. Instead of being diametrically opposed, religion upholds secularity in the sense of distinguishing religious from political authority without however divorcing faith from politics.

This led to an exchange with D. Voas, who contended that modernisation undoubtedly causes religion problems and that secularisation has been the dominant trend across Europe and elsewhere. A. Pabst acknowledged this but said that globally we are seeing neither just secularisation nor simply religious resurgence but in fact both at once. There is also an increasing bifurcation – within and across different faiths – of traditional, orthodox traditions, on the one hand, and modernising creeds, on the other hand. Examples of this paradoxical development include the opposition between liberal and non-liberal wings in the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion or the religious resistance to unbridled 'free-market' capitalism and secular liberal democracy that is shared by various faiths. Moreover, secularisation in terms of congregational decline and similar measures fails to capture the manifold hidden interaction between religion, society and culture – whether education or welfare or social action.

D. Voas dismissed this as irrelevant to the issue of religious resurgence, since yoga classes in church buildings have nothing to do with faith. A. Pabst responded by saying that the churches are often the only providers of universally accessible social spaces in communities where both the state and the market have retreated, especially in the current age of austerity. What the secularisation thesis completely misses is the myriad of social action which only churches (together with civic associations) offer, including youth groups, dinners for the elderly, mums and toddlers groups, coffee mornings, food-banks, homeless shelters, credit unions, health services, etc. But D. Voas argued that same-sex marriage shows just how fast secularisation is progressing and how dramatically the influence of religion has declined.

Following this debate, a number of participants made comments and raised questions for D. Voas and E. Kaufmann. A. Clesse spoke of urbanisation as one of the most powerful factors fuelling the process of secularisation. The other sign that the secularising trends have prevailed is the crisis of priestly vocation. However, perhaps secularism and atheist attacks on faith run counter to nature. Perhaps there really is a human desire for transcendence. A

growing number of neuroscientists and other scholars are asking whether we are 'hardwired' for religion. If secularisation marks the disenchantment of the world (as Max Weber, Marcel Gauchet and Charles Taylor have argued in different ways), then the question is whether religion can help re-enchant reality.

In her remarks, Erin Wilson said that atheism assumes that religion is incompatible with science, which is historically false. Different world religions have promoted critical thinking and scientific research. Against the hegemony of secular reason, there are multiple reasons and rationalities, and religion is no less reasonable than other perspectives. Nor is the contribution of religion to society limited to strict moral values. In fact, it extends to a whole range of principles and practices such as empathy, care and social welfare. Moreover, faith shapes popular culture, as religious performances attract enormous audiences, e.g. the Passion of Christ, performed publicly in the Netherlands and religious imagery in Occupy London or Occupy Wall Street (Jesus expelling the money lenders from the Temple).

Jacques Steiwer argued that religion is functional, providing a cosmology and a whole political model. In the Middle Ages, the *saeculum* was opposed to *religio*. With the pope at the head of a theocratic hierarchy, the clerically mediated sphere of religious transcendence sought to dominate the natural sphere of immanence until the French Revolution. Faith also plays an important psychological function, mitigating existential anguish. But all these cosmological, political and psychological functions have declined, which helps explain the success of secularisation. In response, religion has diversified: Pentecostalists today would have been considered heretics in the past. Intolerance used to be religious, but as the churches have become more tolerant, politics is now the locus of intolerance. Finally, we should not confuse religious folklore with real religion.

Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb contended that most people believe that there is something like transcendence and that the various religions and churches are very different from the caricature of an absolutist theocracy. However, it is also true to take account of the recent decline: a country like Poland, which was very religious 40 years ago under Communism is today less Catholic. Yet at the same time, religions also undergo huge change, under the influence of other religions. For example, many Muslims in Belgium see themselves as engaged in secular affairs, leaving religion to imams – similar to the Judeo-Christian distinction of religions and political authority which was at the origin of secular politics. As such, what is significant is the mutual influence between religious and secular forces.

For his part, C. Coker quoted Aldous Huxley who said that God exists but it is transcendence that we fight over because it is part of the human imagination. Many strands of neuroscience are forms of scientism, which is just another religion – or secular creed. Ultimately, key features of human culture such as awe, a sense of the sublime or poetry have always been associated with the transcendent. Asked by D. Voas whether this is religion, C. Coker said that it may be an alternative religion.

Finally, Jean-Paul Harpes remarked that religious resurgence is a global phenomenon, including the revival of Islam, linked to the Muslim Brotherhood but also the return to sources such as Salafism or the renaissance of Buddhism across China. Globally speaking there is a huge diversity: we are seeing neither just secularisation nor a simple religious renaissance but both secularism and laicisation in North Africa (including Egypt and Tunisia). Likewise, France is currently experiencing demonstrations against same-sex marriage and a return to politicised and even ideologised religion. More fundamentally,

religion is not just a matter of church attendance but also a question of individual lived experience.

In response to some of these comments and questions, E. Kaufmann said that there is a clear and undeniable decline of religion in Europe but also an equally clear and undeniable resurgence in Israel, China and elsewhere. It is also the case that religion speaks to notions of the sacred and the divine and a sense of supernatural transcendence that are present in all human cultures and societies. It is therefore hardly surprising that the 'new atheists' speak of a surrogate of religion. But whether or not religion is hardwired into human nature (and culture) is the key question. In short, the secularisation thesis retains its validity but needs to be modified and complemented by other theories.

2. Is religion caught between secularism(s) and fundamentalism(s)?

The second session focused on the complex interaction between secularism and fundamentalism. In his brief introductory remarks, S. Glendinning emphasised the distinction between secularity and secularism: the former is procedural while the latter is ideological. He drew on the work of the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams who distinguished programmatic from procedural secularism: the former is monological, with an empty public sphere whereas the latter is plural – with the authority of a legal mediator. Finally, supernaturalism is not necessarily religious: *religio* is a relationship of faith between and among people, perhaps mediated by the other who could be God.

A. Pabst argued that we owe the principle and practice of secularity to the Judeo-Christian tradition. 2013 marks the 1,700[th] anniversary of the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. issued by Emperor Constantine, which recognised the legitimacy of the Christian faith and granted all citizens of Rome freedom in matters of religious belief. For the first time in human history, the theocratic fusion of politics with religion was abandoned in favour of a proper distinction of religious and political authority. Building on the Jewish heritage of prophets that held kings to standards of justice and righteousness, Christianity was the first movement to distinguish religious from political power without however sundering faith from politics. Indeed, Christianity stripped the sovereign State and its coercive power of any sacral aura and thereby guaranteed *both* the secularity of politics *and* the autonomy of the public realm.

Paradoxically, the State is ultimately provisional. Only the Church qualifies secular power and authority as something less than absolute and final. At the same time, the Church neither sacralises the State and sanctifies coercion, nor does it secularise religion and reduce faith to an instrument of political domination. By contrast, secularism subordinates the Church to the State and reduces religious belief to little more than a matter of individual opinion and personal taste. It posits an independent, neutral and natural space of immanence that brackets the supernatural sphere of transcendence out of the picture, A. Pabst said.

Sam Cherribi strongly disagreed with this account. Based on the work of Norbert Elias, he contended that at the birth of Christianity, church and state were already distinguished, not just at the Reformation. Moreover, there is no European standard of secularism. On the contrary, there are many models and various versions. One of the most significant projects in this respect was that of Spinoza and the start of the radical Enlightenment in the Netherlands. This matters for today, as schools in Holland and Belgium feature far greater diversity and tolerance compared with France where head-scarves are banned and there is no teaching of

Islam in schools. In relation to Islam and secularism, two questions arise: first, is secularisation an extreme sign of Christianity? Second, is there a clash between Islam and modernity?

On the latter, it is worth recalling that since the 12th century Islam has been in a state of intellectual coma (after Averroes and Avicenna). This has prompted a long-standing debate about *ijtihad*, i.e. independent reasoning that requires a thorough knowledge of theology, holy texts and law. As a secular Muslim, S. Cherribi would say that Islam has suffered a protracted period of intellectual stagnation because it is stuck in a medieval mind-set. Furthermore, various states have domesticated Muslim faith, institutionalising ignorance. Perhaps the Arab Spring can open up things. However, the charge of Orientalism is totally false: Islam is part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. What is most needed are models of genuine plurality, above and beyond the Latin-French world and also the Anglo-Saxon paradigm.

By contrast, J. Steiwer interjected that A. Pabst is right to say that secularism was a religious invention. However, secularism is not useful sociologically, as Niklas Luhmann showed. Instead of secularism, we need other terms and distinctions: first, we need to distinguish the religious apparatus, on the one hand, and civil society, on the other hand; second, there is a difference between religious belief and dogma, on the one hand, and scientific and rational inquiry, on the other hand; finally, there is also the opposition between immanence and transcendence.

Jean-Luc Karleskind sought to respond to James Noyes' question about whether Islam is the exception to the general trend of secularisation. First, there are mosques springing up everywhere in Europe. Second, there are fiercely secular movements in the Islamic/Arabic world. Third, technology and mass literacy open up cultures and tend to weaken the grip of faith over society. Fourth, various political factors such as democracy, human rights, but also deep structures like the army, tend to control the influence of religion.

However, J. Noyes wondered about the evolution of rates of participation and attendance of mosques on the part of first-, second- and third-generation Muslims in Europe. He began his intervention by suggesting that we have witnessed an increasingly marked pendulum swing between secularism and fundamentalism. But we need to be extremely careful about our concepts and definitions. First of all, Muslims in the USA pre-9/11 were largely middle class, integrated, less intense in terms of religious fervour and less specific in terms of their geographic origins (unlike Muslims in the UK, Holland and elsewhere in England). Second, fundamentalism before 9/11 referred to certain evangelicals in the USA and Latin America.

Third, we cannot underestimate the impact of immigration and the lack of integration and closely connected social issues. There is no relation between first- and third-generation: is the noisy 17-year old bearded Muslim really religious? Or is this a reaction against a certain Western culture from which he is – or feels – excluded? Fourth, the gates of *ijtihad* might still be open, depending on legal schools and traditions of interpretation, so an intellectual revival of Islam remains a distinct possibility. Fifth, we need to be clear about universal trends and local patterns, which could just be blips in a longer-term evolution. Finally, it is worth reflecting on Mark Juergensmeyer's argument about fundamentalism and terrorism, describing it as "the public performance of violence" and thus acts that target certain audiences and are part of a narrative of cosmic conflict.

In response to some of the arguments, E. Kaufmann made the point that the failure of secular regimes in the Arab world has in large part contributed to the geopolitical shift from secularism to fundamentalism. Other factors include the rise of Saudi Salafism and oil money that are promoting extremism. More importantly, modernity fuels religious fundamentalism, which is as modern as is secularism. There is little doubt that the reaction against modernity drives fundamentalism.

For his part, L. Siedentop argued that procedural secularism can also be called liberal constitutionalism, which differs significantly from the aggressive, programmatic secularism of atomistic liberalism. Figures such as Locke, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville defended the freedom of conscience, tolerance and free association against the obscurantist forces of religious and secularist thinking alike. He also raised a contentious question: aren't there beliefs intrinsic to Islam that favoured the intellectual shut-down?

Finally, C. Coker argued that the USA is a vast marketplace of belief (James Madison) and that there are about 370 odd sects. However, Christianity does not lend itself very easily to fundamentalism. There are three reasons for this. First of all, the 'scape-goating' of God is unique to Christianity. Like all marriages, this is a very unhappy alliance. As Spinoza remarked, we must love God, even if we suspect that He may not love us. There is a clear progression from Christianity via individualism to secularisation. Second, Christianity resists fundamentalism because it translates God into humanity. As such, we subject God to scrutiny and invite critical reflection, not least by writing a biography of God and seeking to prove or disprove His existence. Third, the emphasis on free will guards against religious extremism. Linked to this is the value of progress, as acting better towards other fellow human beings is a core part of the Christian message. Voltaire may have said that at this stage in history we do not need God, but Kant's notion of moral maturity is connected with God – as is the Hegelian sense of self-overcoming, even the possibility of not worshipping God but not necessarily lapsing into secularism or atheism.

3. Freedom of speech and freedom of religion

In his presentation, Daniel Barbu began by referring to Hervieu's thesis about 'belonging without believing', which suggests that faith and religious cultures are quite distinct phenomena. Tocqueville himself observed that America is actually quite secular and that 'civil religion' denotes a vague religiosity which has little in common with traditional Christianity. Ultimately, we are dealing with nominalism, i.e. we mistake mental names for reality. Bound up with this is a tendency of conceptual over-stretch, applying specific paradigms too extensively and expansively. It is true that Protestantism was undoubtedly more inclined towards secularisation than Catholicism. However, this does not mean that Catholic countries are immune to secular trends. Likewise, Greece pre-EU accession was partly Orthodox and partly secular Communist, and certainly did not or does not fit into the Protestant or Catholic paradigm.

Similarly, Orthodoxy in Romania falls outside conventional categories: religion is both above and below the state, and simultaneously the Church remains the main provider of common culture (*homonoia*). This is not the same as in Hungary where there are divisions between Protestants and Catholics. In Romania, the Church forges a common language and culture, e.g. vast pilgrimages with several hundred thousand people who gather quite spontaneously

and may not all be committed Christians. This could be described as 'performative belonging'.

There are also very dark sides to this, including certain spiritual traditions and politics in the West that glorified neo-pagan movements such as the Nazis and believed that Hitler would win (akin to the 'end of history'). The deep ambivalence of figures like Mircea Eliade also highlights the enduring presence and influence of religion, linked to the critique of secular democracy and the parliamentary system of representation.

What's troubling is when there is an absence of critical discussion, especially when believers are defensive and outraged about those who are accused of attacking national treasures such as the Romanian Orthodox Church. This is also true for countries like Greece and Bulgaria. Interestingly, the first political party in Romania to propose a new partnership between the State, the Church and civil society (on questions such as education and welfare) was the post-Communist party. But there is no commitment to the common good. At the same time, the Church is very present in the public square, buoyed by the highest number of churches and many new churches in cities, towns and villages.

In his intervention, C. Coker spoke of US exceptionalism. He described Moby Dick as a narrative of how the US democratised God, putting Andrew Johnson on a horse to the White House. What it illustrates is religion's incredible power of adaptation and the extent to which the American creed permeates society. The US also modernised religion, making it compatible with progress – notably the five 'great awakenings', which marked profound renewals in times of moral crisis. These great awakenings were almost Nietzschean in nature, revaluing values – except that Nietzsche could not imagine that faith can bring this about. All this suggests that religions are unbelievably adaptable.

By contrast, Norbert Campagna spoke of a book which claims that the US is not nearly as dominated by religion as most people presume. For example, Alexis de Tocqueville argued that the USA combined a 'soft dictatorship' with a soft version of Christianity. It is a case of belonging without believing: Tocqueville himself had a crisis of personal faith and could never believe again. In the USA, people behave as if they believe but they do so for purely private interests. The only aristocratic element in America is the class of judges. In fact, Tocqueville criticised those who attacked not just the clergy but the whole of religion

However, L. Siedentop reported that a recent cover of the Economist magazine bore the following title: Even God quotes Tocqueville! It is easy to overstate the functional dimension of Tocqueville's argument about religion. On his voyage around America he was delighted to see the moral consensus provided by religion – unlike in France which was divided between democrats who were anti-clerical and religious aristocrats who were anti-democratic. Both justice and liberalism derive from the moral heart of Christianity. Indeed, Tocqueville embraced a Christian ontology without the metaphysics of salvation. Apparently the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party has said that it is no longer so important to read Smith and Marx but instead Tocqueville.

E. Kaufmann said that the functionality of religion is twofold. First of all, it abets national identity (Ireland and Poland) though anti-clerical nationalism (France, Italy, Spain) shows this is not always the case. Yet religion is often woven into the tapestry of national life. Second, ethnic conflicts in which religion serves to identify the groups (here the dog is nationalism, the tail is religion). In reality, very few conflicts are truly religious (Northern

Ireland certainly is not). Similarly, D. Barbu said that the Church provides a device that is still considered by most people, which is to connect the living to the dead. This contribution has nothing to do with nationalism or national identity. There is also the role of relics and the fact that burials are perhaps even more significant than baptisms or marriages. Secularisation may proceed apace, but there are numerous vibrant churches, with processions and remembrance celebrations of the departed.

The discussion then moved on to the focus of the session, namely religious freedom. D. Voas argued that religious freedom amounts to little more than pleading for special favours by different religions. Take the position of privilege for the Church of England, which stands in stark contrast with procedural secularism. Another case in point is the public funding of faith schools: Thus, the stark choice is between either defending equality or entrenching privilege.

J. Noyes called for a proper distinction between God and church. For instance, Bellah's book about civil religion illustrates this very well. Arguably, the US invocation of God is plural, whereas Europe is divided along sectarian lines. D. Voas responded that the USA goes beyond civil religion because it is more specifically Christian: examples include biblical literalism, creationism and the fundamentalist fight against the so-called 'culture of death'.

However, E. Wilson contended that procedural secularism is not, and cannot be, neutral. That is because it is based on particular norms (rule of law, justice) which come from specific traditions, including Christianity but also secular Enlightenment. One question that arises is whether religious freedom is limited to faiths or whether it goes beyond secular norms. Likewise, S. Glendinning suggested that the concept of state neutrality is very problematic because the issue is simple: neutral for whom? Instead of neutrality, it is far better to appeal to the idea of impartiality whereby the State seeks to act in an even-handed manner and be an honest broker.

D. Voas disagreed, saying that even-handedness does not achieve moral neutrality. Here L. Siedentop interjected that the liberal tradition did not use the word neutral. That's only true of utilitarianism, which has been so dominant in ethics and economics. Similarly, E. Kaufmann said that the liberal tradition came out of monocultures which did not have to grapple with the level of diversity that is true of today.

In his remarks, A. Pabst suggested that the argument of neutrality is misguided because no perspective is ever equally neutral for all, as E. Wilson and S. Glendinning already indicated. Crucially, procedural neutrality merely masks a form of secular formalism that subordinates substantive principles to secular values and norms. Impartiality marks an improvement but in liberal democracies it gives power to secular mediators at the expense of associations and communities. Instead of trying to secure a neutral or impartial position, the genuine alternative to secular liberalism is a more mediated, 'organic' pluralism – a plural search for a shared common good, which is not merely pre-given in natural law and abstract reason, for that is part of the same logic which is inextricably intertwined with modern secular rationalism and religious fideism.

Pluralism involves re-inventing constitutional corporatism in a more pluralist guise against modern liberalism, which is linked both to an insistence on the fundamental anthropological relationality of all human beings and on the indelible role of association outside the modern dialectic between the individual and the collective, left and right or state and market. Beyond Habermas' argument that the norms to regulate debate between religious and non-religious

forces must themselves remain secular and liberal (i.e. procedural and majoritarian), we have moved towards a 'post-secular' phase where religious and other bodies should be able to express themselves directly in their own terms within the public square, A. Pabst suggested.

D. Voas replied that religions can express themselves in any way they want but they won't persuade anyone. A. Pabst said that the current forms of liberal democracy rest on an increasingly aggressive variant of secular hegemony, reducing faith to mere moral intuitions and bracketing substantive notions of the good out of the picture – all in the name of post-modern indeterminacy and the 'end of metaphysics'. By contrast, faith traditions straddle the divide between the religious and the secular and appeal to perennial principles and practices such as the common good, the good life, mutuality, reciprocity, participation, association, individual virtue and public honour.

Asked by J. Noyes what can uphold such a form of pluralism if not the state, A. Pabst answered that the public realm exceeds both the state and the market and that pluralism requires a mixed constitution whereby the power of the three branches of government is genuinely balanced and constitutionally guaranteed bodies such as professional associations and faith communities can participate in the governance of the public realm. That, in turn, requires a commitment on the part of government to uphold a civic, constitutionally guaranteed corporatism. In response to D. Voas's question 'what's stopping you?', A. Pabst responded that the hegemony of secular reason has subordinated churches and other religious organisations to the primacy of the national state and the global market.

N. Campagna invoked Montesquieu's conception of freedom as security and wondered whether states have an obligation to protect people not only against physical persecution but perhaps also against verbal, psychological persecution. In the long-standing debate about the best balance between the right to offend and the charge of blasphemy, what may be required is greater protection against the disappearance/destruction of religious (and indeed other) imagery in the public sphere. S. Cherribi added that religions do not have a level playing field to intervene in public debate – either because they find themselves excluded from old institutions or because new faith traditions lack the resources and the access (e.g. Islam in France).

For his part, J. Steiwer defended Habermas' support for the freedom of participation in public debate and the need to accept majority decision. On the link between freedom of speech and liberalism, he asked whether it is legitimate to allow the publication of fatwas that call for assassinations. What about the Holy Inquisition and the index of forbidden books? It is clear that the history of religions is a never-ending story of intolerance and religious conflicts, whether between Catholics and Protestants, Sunni and Shia or Copts and Muslims. Finally there is also the alliance of churches and fascist tyrannies (Mussolini, Greece, etc.).

Finally, J.-P. Harpes argued that state neutrality is necessary vis-à-vis religions, not vis-à-vis all norms in general. In terms of legal and ethical values, states cannot and should not be neutral vis-à-vis their own constitutions or human rights. Moreover, freedom of speech, which involves freedom of conscience, implies religious freedom and freedom to choose a belief or to abandon a faith in favour of another or indeed none at all. As such, religions have to respect freedom of conscience and religious liberty for all, including their own adherents, but how to protect religions from discrimination or even persecution? The best way to achieve this is by protecting constitutional prerogatives. Finally, Habermas rightly suggests

that the debate among religions has to respect the conditions possibly having a shared public discourse.

4. Religion, human rights and policies of equality

In his brief introductory remarks, A. Pabst made the point that the secular claim to secure freedom and tolerance for all based on human rights and equality masks an intolerant absolutism. This perspective reduces human rights to little more than individual entitlements and elevates equality into the new ethical imperative which can legitimately override freedom of conscience. In this manner, liberalism privileges the procedural formalism of individual rights over substantive notions of the common good and the good life. Crucially, the liberal secular use of human rights and equality ends up restricting liberty and undermining tolerance. First, to equate individual freedom of choice with personal consent implies that the individual is supremely sovereign, yet at the same time popular sovereignty requires the absolute power of the ruler – as Hobbes and Locke argued in different ways. Second, sovereignty so conceived rests on the idea that what makes us human is our sovereign will. But where there is only volition (and no substantive shared norms or moral codes), conflicts are arbitrated either by the power of the state (and the market) – as for atheist militants– or by references to absolute divine will – as for religious fanatics. In other words, militant atheism and religious fundamentalism are merely two variants of the same absolutist politics. Third, the doctrine of absolute equality leads to perverse outcomes – either by imposing sameness onto difference (by subordinating all practices to the same abstract general standards) or elevating difference into a new absolute (by saying that all standards are equally valid). The kind of negative liberty (Isaiah Berlin) which secular liberalism promotes leads to societies that are neither free nor equal, A. Pabst argued.

According to C. Coker, the discourse of human rights has run its course and is now either meaningless or counterproductive (or both at once). It is best to abandon it in favour of the notion of 'human wrongs' (Mary Midgley), i.e. to condemn and outlaw anti-social values rather than promoting values that end up dividing people. By shifting the emphasis to human wrongs, we can even encourage cooperation over conflict (based on shared language and trust). In relation to faith and reason, you cannot argue someone out of something they haven't been argued into (we are all socialists or environmentalists now). People are not converted by theology, but by experience (e.g. family), revelation or epiphany. Politics is about argument, not faith – as illustrated by Locke's account of tolerance in terms of civility. Indeed, the realm of rationality is evidence-based, whereas the realm of faith transcends evidence.

But this does not mean that faith is irrelevant to politics or that it should be banned from politics. On the contrary, there are at least three examples of where faith matters in politics: first, the civil rights movement and southern Baptists; second, the role played by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela; third, the contribution of Protestants in Eastern Germany or Catholics in Poland. Using Charles Taylor's concept of social imaginary, we can certainly say that the West's social imaginary is now secular. Take the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948: among the countries refusing to sign were South Africa and Saudi Arabia. In future we will face many more claims to exceptionalism. The weakness of Christianity and liberalism is that they want to offer a politics and religion without tears, but that's impossible. Both liberalism and Christianity are becoming far too utilitarian and impoverished. We need a culture of sacrifice, honour and ethos, C. Coker concluded. (Here L. Siedentop mentioned

that there is a piece of graffiti in Oxford which says: 'God is alive and well, and he is working on a less ambitious project'!).

There were a number of responses to C. Coker's intervention. First, S. Glendinning suggested that every country views itself as exceptional. On human rights, it is worth noting that the original declaration included the mention of 'rights of citizens'. So a crucial question arises: does equality apply to all Frenchmen or to each and every human being – or both at once? Whatever the problems, inside the tradition of nations and nation-states, there is a strong sense of equality. In the West, there are also cosmopolitan traditions, Stoicism as well as St. Paul. Therefore every nationalism is in some sense a cosmo-nationalism: not particularist but rather exceptionalist in a universal guise.

Second, D. Barbu wondered whether politics should be evidence-based. Tocqueville himself made the point that politics is not just about reason but involves judgement and even faith in the sense of trust and trustworthiness. Similarly, Carl Schmitt argues that politics involves judgement and faith in public discourse.

Third, E. Wilson insisted that there is a clear secularist bias in debates, even if religions have a historically different place in society. The flip-side of exceptionalism is the inferiority of some states and indeed those who are state-less (held indefinitely in Australia).

With reference to the work of John Rawls, E. Kaufmann asked to what extent a majority should tolerate an intolerant minority. If these groups get bigger over time as a result of demographic trends, then you have a problem. What about the right not to be offended? Human rights are not nearly enough to create peaceful coexistence.

D. Voas shifted the debate in a different direction, arguing that religions need good arguments to engage with others. It is true that religious groups have made huge contributions to human rights and equality, e.g. the abolition of slavery and the promotion of civil rights. However, this does not apply to recent and current issues. On marriage, religious arguments about procreation are weak. What is needed is to identify areas of reasonable accommodation with religious groups. Ultimately, this is not about state power or government fiat but ethical debate. Take the case of halal meat: it may now become the default position, which is itself problematic. Threats about blasphemy and burning show the sheer intolerance and irrational behaviour of many religious believers.

A. Pabst disagreed, saying that equality legislation shows the moral bankruptcy of secular liberalism. Far from liberating individuals and providing equal freedom for all, it denies and destroys any sense of shared ends in favour of individual, subjective rights which can be suspended by the state at will. Linked to this is the tendency of the modern state to declare a permanent 'state of exception' – whether in the course of the American or the French Revolution, or throughout the 19th century or, more recently, in the context of the 'global war on terror'. As the work of Giorgio Agamben and Sheldon Wolin has shown, the history of individual rights and equality legislation is a history of an inexorable rise of executive power at the expense of the legislature and the judiciary. Recent examples include the closure of Catholic adoption agencies and the state's unilateral redefinition of marriage, ignoring the fact that the institution of marriage precedes both the state and the church. D. Voas contended that only civil marriage has been redefined, not religious marriage, and that adoption agencies shut themselves down. It was their choice not to implement the law of the land.

A. Clesse made the point that there is a huge difference between blasphemy and warnings about burning in hell. Nor are fundamentalism and extremism limited to religious groups. The issue of abortion and euthanasia shows just how sinister secular thinkers can be. Peter Singer's advocacy of allowing the killing of severely disabled people or babies up to six months or selecting embryos is but the tip of the iceberg. Especially on abortion, the left is in a muddle: it purports to defend the equality and emancipation of women, on the one hand, but promotes the view that women own the life in the womb (feudalism), on the other hand. One objective of this conference is to debate issues of life and suffering beyond the ideology of human rights and to discuss the kind of society we want – with or without religion.

J. Steiwer suggested that Christians like St. Paul called for discrimination against women and that George Washington defended slavery. Marriage may be a millennium-old institution but has changed beyond recognition (e.g. matriarchy, marriage of convenience). Likewise, attitudes about euthanasia have evolved. Human rights are in full evolution; they are more like Marx's point about ideology, linked to class structure and social relations of production.

At the end of the session, J. Noyes asked some fundamental questions: what is civility? Do we not need minimal terms of a common settlement? Are we talking about protection or security? Ultimately, these issues revolve around questions of domination *versus* helplessness.

5. Religion and rival visions of society

In his introductory presentation, Bernard Feltz spoke about intelligent design and the compatibility between Darwinism and religion. First of all, intelligent design purports to be an alternative scientific approach that claims to be as scientific as Darwinism, but it is really a theological approach. Second, science is not about absolute truth or absolute objectivity but rather deals in partial truths. Third, epistemologically speaking, biology is not metaphysics and does not study life in an exhaustive manner. Therefore intelligent design confuses science with theology. Western science is focused on efficient causality but has perhaps neglected final causality.

Fourth, Kant and the post-Kantians argue that meaning transcends pure reason and is more akin to the realm of the reasonable. In terms of contemporary research, cancer is an interesting case in point: it is about the cellular differentiation and another area of research where science has much to explore. There are gaps in evolutionary biology but these gaps or weaknesses do not call for a simplistic theology that fills those gaps with the idea of God. It makes no sense to explain the unexplainable with something even more mysterious. Instead, what we need is a genuine pluralism between science, philosophy and theology, B. Feltz said.

On neuroscience, he argued that many neuroscientists are seduced by Spinoza who isn't a dualist (unlike Descartes) and who subscribes to a determinism that denies free will. Much of neuro-scientific research is philosophically and scientifically dubious. For example, there is growing evidence to suggest that science has ignored the plasticity of the mind. Apparently, language has an impact on the very structure of the brain, which means that biological determinism is untenable – and we need to take into account culture. As such, human beings are cultural-biological beings. Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, argues that reason alone cannot tell us whether we are free or not. There is an incoherence of theoretical reason, something that is not decidable, which is why he puts an emphasis on practical reason and the

decision of effective liberty. Thus, we are seeing an emerging synergy between Kantian intuition and the plasticity of the brain. Interestingly, Descartes wants to develop a science of the living (following Galileo's science on the physical).

There were a number of comments from other participants. E. Kaufmann said that there is an argument from biology that people might be naturally religious (responding to images and experience, etc.). Is there any evidence that religion affects the plasticity of the brain? (To which B. Feltz answered yes). Vladimir Vranić contended that science is only necessary if that's your starting point. However, modern science has no monopoly on evidence, truth or the natural world. In response, B. Feltz suggested that science is independent and does not require theology. Yet there is a 'Galileo problem': for Descartes, science is a methodology that provides truth independently of any other approach. Such and similar claims to absolute truth could prevent dialogue between Islam and science. What is not in doubt is that religion is one of the approaches that provides meaning.

Christopher Lyon commented that secular ideologies are concerned with the pursuit of power and wealth but there is also a need for certainty, which religion helps provide – above and beyond the secular claim to know the laws of history. The certainty of religious belief is not at all the same as blind faith but rather a trust in the personal Creator God and the possibility of reconciliation and peace. Since there are gaps in all holy texts, faith is a constant re-examination of belief and scripture truths. Linked to this are continuous debates about doctrine, all of which raise questions about legitimacy. But it does not mean that religion can be reduced to a simple list of do's and don'ts.

S. Glendinning warned against the idea that there is a one-way street from science to religion. What about the interest for biology that is promoted by religion? Beyond the old dispute of superstitious irrational faith vs. the scientific nature of secular reason, it is time to move and recognise the reasonableness of religion. There are some interesting figures to suggest that the debate needs to change: In Europe 19% of the population identifies as theists and 13.5% describe themselves as atheists. In other words, there is a substantial proportion of the European population who are not convinced by either, and this huge vacuum will be filled by some force that could be variously more secular-extremist or more religious-fundamentalist. Either way, blind faith and instrumental rationality will crowd out arguments about reasonableness.

J. Steiwer took issue with earlier remarks about causality. He said that in much of Western philosophy and theology, there is a bias towards finalism and determinism, with Aristotle distinguishing final and efficient causality. Religions tend to focus on final causes because this chimes with divine providence. But efficient causality does explain natural phenomena such as thunder or diseases. Moreover, 19th century positivism and determinism contrasts with the 20th and 21st century acknowledgement of indeterminacy and contingence, which religions abhor. *Contra* S. Glendinning's argument that God is not merely a hypothesis, he argued that the God hypothesis is just that, a hypothesis.

At this juncture the debate shifted back to liberalism. L. Siedentop commented that one of the first thinkers to emphasise the autonomy of the individual and the indeterminacy of the world was the fourteenth-century theologian and philosopher William of Ockham. It is surely not an accident that Ockham has been called the first liberal. E. Kaufmann argued for the idea of reconciling liberalism with strong faith traditions based on the notion of 'reasonable accommodation', e.g. Charles Taylor's report for the Quebec government. When numbers are

small, reasonable accommodation works but when numbers rise dramatically, then it breaks down, as illustrated by Jewish ultra-orthodox communities cordoning off whole areas on Saturday and ripping down advertising showing women without the veil.

C. Coker commented on the plasticity of the brain and referred to William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* to make the point that we are instinctive beings. If it is the case that we have both biological and cultural instincts, then it is the case that the latter can override the former (e.g. dying of shame). William James himself was fascinated by religious appetite and sacrifice, heroes and saints. The mistake of the 'new atheists' is to presume that you can get rid of religion.

A. Pabst took issue with contemporary Darwinism, saying that it is not just bad philosophy and theology but above all bad science. Hitherto, it had been assumed by most mainstream scientists that forms of life are the product of essentially natural, random processes – such that if we ran evolution again, life would look very different. However, there is increasing evidence to suggest that evolution shows biological convergence and is not random: if it ran again, the world would look much as it does. Here one can go beyond old divides (creation versus atheism; intelligent design versus natural evolution) and argue that recent research sheds new light on the teleology (or finality) of life. Natural selection is no longer thought to be the main driver of biological change. Rather, life displays a certain kind of inherency, such that the beings which come about are *also* a product of their own, intended integrity, intimating the possibility of being linked to transcendent principles and finalities.

All of which means that there is no necessary conflict between evolution and religion. In fact, different religious traditions provide a defense of evolution against the atheism of certain Darwinists and the fundamentalism of creationists. Arguably, evolution is no more purely naturalistic than God is totally deterministic – both can be shown to be compatible in the sense that the process of evolution does not conclusively refute the idea of an absolute beginning and a final end in a creative source. Just as creationists cannot reject scientific evidence on natural evolution, so scientists such as Dawkins cannot pretend that evolution justifies atheism. Of course, there will also be gaps between theistic and naturalistic accounts of the world. But equally there are eminent scientists such as Simon Conway Morris and others who see no contradiction between religious conceptions of a Creator God and scientific accounts of evolution deriving from Darwin. This changes the terms of debate on science and religion and also casts doubt on secular claims to reality and universal validity. Different world faiths, in particular Christianity and Islam, can draw on the historical links between theology and science to correct purely secular interpretations of evolution and to argue for a broader account of reason beyond the boundaries of immanent finitude. Ultimately, this challenges the modern claim that nature is divorced from the supernatural – a foundational assumption that underlies the '(de)secularisation' thesis and misinforms much of the public understanding of religion, A. Pabst said.

The Right Reverend Geoffrey Rowell, the Anglican Bishop of Europe, argued that much of modern science reduces the 'I am' to the 'it is', which means that we unnecessarily diminish the reality of personhood. Based on Michael Polanyi's notion of 'personal knowledge', it is important to remember that religions are pro-science. As both St. Augustine and St. Anselm suggested, Christians believe in order to understand (*fides quaerens intellectum*). If being is indeed made in the image and likeness of the Trinitarian God, then humanity is profoundly relational. Crucially, God cannot be contained in a concept but transcends all human categories.

As such, science can neither disprove the existence of the Creator nor provide positive evidence in favour of atheist attacks on religion. He concluded his brief intervention by referring to Iain McGilchrist's book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, which makes the point that the human brain is divided between a left sphere that is more self-interested and focused on mechanism and a right sphere that is broader, more flexible and generous. This division helps explain the origins of music and language, and casts new light on the history of philosophy, especially at a time when the left sphere seems to be in the ascendency.

Other comments included Louis-Léon Christians who said that some advocates of creationism seek to replace democracy with theocracy and that there are questions about confessional teaching at schools or concrete debates between different faith traditions on specific issues. B. Feltz reported that certain religious believers want to opt out from science on grounds of freedom of conscience.

According to D. Voas, Margaret Thatcher's remark about society could be seen as support for methodological individualism. However, the situation is more complex because she also spoke in favour of families. But the debate is not really about religious tradition vs. secular ideology any longer. S. Glendinning's statistics are very interesting because they show that most people aren't very much concerned with questions of religion or atheism and that they are busy living their lives, without any specific affiliation. In response, S. Glendinning described this as the 'indifference thesis' – the middle that is neither very religious nor overtly atheistic. While D. Voas seems broadly convinced about this view, S. Glendinning cannot say the same about himself – he finds this thesis utterly unconvincing. The main reason is that we do not have a good reflective grasp of what's happening in this space.

Here E. Wilson suggested that we lack a good account of it because we associate this thesis with Christianity. Likewise, we associate atheism with opposition to the Christian churches. In reality, we need a much broader understanding of what unbelief means. What is clear is that Thatcher's opposition to society and her promotion of neo-liberalism has undermined the public perception of religion. On the ground, faith-based organisations have often tried to fill the gaps left by the neo-liberal state. Faced with fierce opposition, too many people ignore both the moral authority and the legitimacy of such organisations that care for people beyond themselves – people of all faiths and none.

6. The role of religion in bringing about a 'decent society' – nationally and globally

In his opening remarks, Norman Bonney spoke about the state recognition of certain faiths in the context of the 1,700[th] anniversary of the Edict of Milan in 313. He also acknowledged the religious Christian dimension of many European states. However, there are a number of anomalies in cases such as the United Kingdom. First of all, for Anglicanism the monarch is the supreme governor and parliament effectively governs the Church of England. Second, Thatcher's funeral was decided by the UK cabinet and attended by the Queen and the Church's bishops. So why not dis-establish and privatise the Church of England? A strict separation of state and church is much more preferable to the current status quo. There should be no public subsidy or financial support – just like there should be no excessive influence of commercial interest on politics.

Lucas Sosoe made the point that there are a number of constitutional theocracies around the world (including Iran and Saudi Arabia) and that Rawls' critique of religion in the public sphere offers some important insights. Constitutional theocracy differs from other theocratic arrangements in that, first of all, it recognises one state religion and, second, promotes only one religion at the expense of others. This is the case of Iran but also Egypt and even tendencies in the USA (e.g. radical Catholics working to restore a Christian public morality). With Rawls, we should defend the idea of a pluralistic society, which means that we cannot base it on a single religion. L.-L. Christians agreed with this line of argument. He added that there are bans on Muslim parties in countries as varied as Turkey and Russia precisely because these parties are viewed as a threat to the secular constitutional order. While the ECHR is ambiguous about the role of shari'a, it is clear that shari'a denies the equality of men and women, so it is totally incompatible with constitutional government.

A. Clesse cited the Dutch ethologist Frans de Waal who argues that man is good and inclined towards cooperation. But is religion irreplaceable as a form of moral guidance? Is or should religion be concerned with serious questions of ontology or ethics? Or should it be easy, pleasant and not ambitious spiritually or ethically? Are we seeing a return to more thoughtful forms of religion? Or is this just the continuation of 'new age' spirituality or perhaps a Western variant of Buddhism?

In a similar vein, D. Barbu raised a number of fundamental questions: do people have souls? What about the bodies? We owe these notions from Antiquity and the Christian tradition. It is equally true that for a long time churches have had privileges and special rights, which they now fear losing. Should Church be an alternative society? The role of the Church should be a critical one, e.g. on the wider moral causes and consequences of the economic crisis. There are new social bonds or ties in post-Christian societies, including in countries such as Poland, Greece or Romania where the churches are in a minority even if their institutional place reflects a privileged position. In short, the Church should play a prophetic role, speaking truth to power rather than engaging in power politics or pursuing wealth, social control and other kinds of secular status.

In his remarks, C. Coker argues that we are story-telling animals, which is crucial for questions of decent society. Plato talks about fulfilling our natural desire and potential to know the good and do good. More recently, the British scientist Matt Ridley spoke of our inclination to virtue. Indeed, it seems to be universally true that there is human hatred of injustice and hatred of humiliation (being robbed of faith in humanity, e.g. torture). Apparently there are new technologies teaching empathy: the 18th-century novel enabled us to inhabit the lives of other people, which generated empathy. Then as now, religions inform our readings and our sense or understanding of what dignity is. Nor should we forget the 35% who said no in the Milgram experiment. In other words, there is a profound moral hinterland, which social psychology cannot grasp. Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of England and Wales, speaks of differentiated humanity, people with the same values (including people with religious identity) even though they may also have different beliefs. As such, secularism and religiosity will be part of a plural society, telling each other stories.

Bishop Rowell asked whether it makes sense to say that citizens have souls. Civic rituals do not speak to all the human desires, which religions can help fill. When thinking about the relationship between natural immanent desires for supernatural transcendence, it is worth remembering the patristic and medieval argument that divine grace does not abolish nature

but instead perfects it. This radical non-dualism (or mediated universalism) also suggests that modern and contemporary thought is wrong to view the religious and the secular as diametrically opposed. Instead, culture can straddle the divide. There are certain perennial principles that are variously more secular or more religious, e.g. holiness and integrity, catholicity and universality, apostolic transmission and tradition or continuity.

C. Lyon agreed with A. Pabst that the Church preceded the state and in many ways legitimised secular political rule and civil law. As such, it does not belong to the state to unilaterally redefine institutions such as marriage. Whether religion is ethical or not, it provides a microcosm for individual virtue – just like forestry needs micro-organism. Critical interventions in public debate such as the report *Faith in the City* underscore the Church's greater legitimacy than the state. The theologian N.T. Wright also points out that the early church rejected Caesar's claim to be the son of god with total authority and power everywhere.

J. Steiwer said that there are of course non-religious forms of spirituality. The same goes for non-religious moral values. The term 'decent' means something quite different in French and German. What we can agree on is that social solidarity is in decline and that the old Constantinian settlement is collapsing. Liberation theology provided some critical perspective but was quickly silenced by the Curia.

A. Clesse concluded the session by saying that the sanctity of life has been under attack by religious and secular forces alike. When it comes to abortion or euthanasia, it is crucial to be consistent and frank: killing is killing. By destroying the environment and slaughtering animal creatures, monotheistic religions have contributed to hypocrisy and bigotry.

7. Religion and secularism in Western Europe: the case of Luxembourg

In his presentation, Jean Ehret described the current religious landscape in Luxembourg and the debate about the new proposed law on state-church relations. He also set out the Catholic Church's response to a group of experts and their report about relationships between the Luxembourg state and the Church as well as other religious communities. First of all, there is no state religion in Luxembourg: unlike the Church of England where the supreme governor insists that the established church helps guarantee religious freedom, the Catholic Church is independent from the state. There are also arrangements to govern relations with the other religious communities, including Judaism, Anglicanism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism. The Muslim community is currently trying to establish formal links but so far there are issues about the hierarchy and also its juridical personality.

Second, in relation to the proposed constitutional revision, there are a number of issues. One is the salary paid to religious figures. Another is how best to achieve the objective of greater cohesion and unity of society. Third, what is the Catholic Church's position? The main commitment is to religious freedom and to be allowed to represent those 65% of people who declare themselves to be Roman Catholic (compared with just over 50% in Belgium). The Catholic Church does not seek any privileges but merely the right to speak out on public issues because faith is not merely a private matter.

Fourth, the principles guiding the Church are individual freedoms, organisational autonomy, subsidiarity, creating space for other voices (including humanists), freedom of religion as

well as the teaching of religion in state schools, which should be open to other faith traditions. Fifth, the Catholic Church and others have come together to make representations to the state in the context of the constitutional revision (representing 95% of society). Notably the importance of guaranteeing freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the key contribution of a civil society perspective, with partners and contracts to have cooperative links in a spirit of reciprocal respect and mutual understanding.

In the debate that followed this presentation, Cyril Welch remarked that it was the Grand Duke's refusal to sign a new law on euthanasia which led to constitutional changes about grand ducal approval for legislation. J. Ehret replied, saying that this was an important episode, as freedom of conscience applies to all, including the Grand Duke himself.

J. Steiwer said that in Luxembourg the clergy are paid by the state and that there is public funding for buildings (Catholic schools and other institutions). Why not fund all religions equally, including Scientology? Why not adopt a German model of church tax? As the constitutional revision proceeds, there is a need for more clarity.

In response to various comments and questions, J. Ehret said in relation to recognising Scientology that it's about human freedom; the state has a right to control the content of teaching (e.g. Catholic school curricula are subject to public scrutiny). In terms of freedom of conscience and speech, what do we do collectively when people refuse to abide by the laws of the land? Finally, religion and science are not diametrically opposed to one another, as each seeks truth and both defend academic freedom against any form of censorship.

The discussion then shifted from Luxembourg to other European cases. In his intervention, Philippe Poirier said that there are four models in the EU and the countries belonging to the Council of Europe. First of all, the cooperative model of state and religion (e.g. Germany, Austria, Switzerland), which does not go back to the French Revolution but emerged after World War Two in reaction against totalitarian states. Second, the identity model (Orthodoxy in Greece, the Protestant church in Denmark or the Church of England in the UK). Third, the 'service' model whereby the church is like a NGO that provides services (e.g. France and Germany in some respects). Fourth, a relationship of subordination (France, Russia, etc.), e.g. when Sarkozy tried to organise French Muslims. One question that arises in relation to all four models is state interference in dogmatic issues, e.g. homosexual marriage.

At the EU level, there have been developments in the relationships between the Community institutions and religions/philosophical traditions (e.g. Art. 17 of the Lisbon Reform Treaty). This suggests two approaches: first, defining the Church and religious communities as super-NGOs and, second, codifying freedom of conscience, worship and belief. Perhaps these two perspectives are in contradiction with one another. Finally, we can distinguish four states of religion. First, sectarian religion in a pluralistic, multi-faith society (identity politics in a sub-society). Second, religion of action (militant stance and participation in politics). Third, religion and religious organisations as super-NGOs. Fourth, religion as the exit from religion (or the absence of religion), which denotes not just the privatisation of faith but its destruction.

Asked by S. Glendinning where Turkey's system fits into this model, P. Poirier replied that Ataturk never wanted to break away from Islam but he worked for a model of subordination. As a result, religious buildings have been used as cultural heritage and gifts to humanity. But today – under the pressure from the governing AKP, there are efforts to make museums

available for Muslim (and perhaps Orthodox) feasts. Thus, subordination could mutate into cooperation.

S. Cherribi said that the pillar model in the Netherlands focuses on cooperation. But this arrangement is now in crisis because of huge pressures from the far right. Queen Beatrix refused to sanction a coalition with Geert Wilders. There is also the question of European Islam and the Muslim *droit de cité* (e.g. training of imams, [self]-organisation, etc.). Finally, patriotism could make a big difference to the integration of the Muslim population into Dutch society.

Bishop Rowell remarked that in England, it is clear that imams do not have the same pastoral role as clergymen. The pillar system has many merits but it is not clear whether it is possible to transpose it to another country that does not have the same underlying culture. Of course it is also worth remembering that the Ottoman millet system provides the backdrop to the current situation in Iraq. Closer to home, the new legislation on same-sex marriage in the UK enshrines a quadruple lock to protect the Churches from litigation on account of their opposition to celebrate gay marriage. But the new law suggests that the UK system now combines an established church with elements of subordination to the state.

In his intervention, D. Barbu focused on the Romanian case, saying that the situation is characterised by ten features. First of all, there is no formal cooperation, even if partnerships have been sought in the past. Second, the constitution upholds both freedom of religion and freedom of the churches but there is no strict separation either (as in France or Turkey). Third, there is an overall law regulating the life of the churches which stipulates that public recognition of religious communities requires a minimum number of believers/adherents of 0,1% of the population. If membership is below that threshold, then communities can form religious associations, e.g. Muslims and Jews. Fourth, the state pays the salaries of the clergy and non-clerical personnel (the latter is about 16,000). Fifth, the role of religion in the public square centres on education: in primary schools, religious teaching is compulsory, whereas in secondary schools it is optional.

Sixth, there are many theological departments at state universities across the country. Seventh, the Romanian Orthodox Church is the single largest 'company' (measured in terms of land property and the production of liturgical objects). Eighth, in the 1990s and early 2000s, public trust in the Church was very high (80%) but now it is down to 56% (behind firemen and teachers). Ninth, there are about 10% Roman Catholics (both Roman and Byzantine rite) as well as some Pentecostals (whose proportion in the population is fast-growing). Finally, so far the teaching of religion in school still has wide popular support, D. Barbu reported.

Concluding summary

The conference discussions covered a lot of ground and touched on many issues. At times the debates were very intense and the exchanges between participants extremely robust, all of which resists easy summary and categorisation. However, it is possible to distil a number of ideas and insights.

First of all, the secularisation thesis came under critical scrutiny, in particular the issue of how to define religion or the religious in relation to secularity, secularism and the secular but

also how to measure 'religiosity' – whether in terms of belief, religious practice or the enduring presence of religion in culture and society.

Second, there was agreement among many (though not all) participants that secularism and religious fundamentalism are conceptual mirror images of each other, with each making absolutist claims and representing some form of will-to-power. What this increasingly shrill opposition does is to crowd out a more mediated middle that is variously more religious or more secular but rejects the two extremes.

Third, the issue of freedom of speech and freedom of religion raises questions about the functional role of faith in society and the vantage point from which liberties are defined and upheld. There was much disagreement about whether it makes sense to speak of neutrality or impartiality.

Fourth, there was even more disagreement about the meaning and usefulness of appealing to human rights and equality legislation. If human rights are individual, subjective and tied to specific cultures, is it perhaps preferable to focus on human wrongs? Does equality legislation promote genuine equality for majorities and minorities alike?

Fifth, recent research in the field of natural science has raised fundamental questions about human nature and the universe. With ultra-Darwinism and creationism occupying the extreme positions, there is a new middle ground where scientists and theologians can engage critically – whether about the plasticity of the brain or the origins and outlook of man in relation to transcendent finalities.

Sixth, the role of religion in society was fiercely debated, especially in relation to education and public morality. Much of the disagreement among the participants reflected either a more 'naturalist' or a more 'culturalist' stance – (social) biology and psychological vs. anthropology and narrative.

Finally, the case of Luxembourg provided interesting insights into the evolution of Western European society and the development of state-church relations in the context of declining attendance but also the rise of new religions such as Islam. In addition to a number of different constitutional arrangements, issues of political culture, social attitudes and historical experience have shaped different European countries. Ultimately the debate centred on the question whether faith and the Church are – or should be – subordinate to secular reason and the state or not.

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Dr Adrian Pabst
Research Fellow
LIEIS
July 2013

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Conference

Religion, secularism and the quest for a decent society

26 and 27 April 2013

Conference Centre
Monastery of the Franciscan Congregation
50 Avenue Gaston Diderich, Luxembourg

Programme

Friday, 26 April

09.00 – 10.45   **Session 1: Secularisation or religious resurgence?**

10.45 – 11.00   Coffee break

11.00 – 12.45   **Session 2: Is religion caught between secularism(s) and fundamentalism(s)?**

12.45 – 14.15   Lunch

14.15 – 16.00   **Session 3: Freedom of speech and freedom of religion**

16.00 – 16.15   Coffee break

16.15 – 18.00   **Session 4: Religion, human rights and policies of equality**

Saturday, 27 April

09.00 – 10.45   **Session 5: Religion and rival visions of society**

10.45 – 11.00   Coffee break

11.00 – 12.45   **Session 6: The role of religion in bringing about a 'decent society' – nationally and globally**

12.45 – 14.30   Lunch

14.30 – 16.00   **Session 7: Religion and secularism in Western Europe: the case of Luxembourg**

List of participants

Ahmetspahic, Halil, Imam of the Mamer Mosque, Luxembourg

Als, Georges, Secretary General, Institut Grand-Ducal, Luxembourg

Barbu, Daniel, Professor of Political Science, University of Bucharest; Romanian Minister of Culture

Bonney, Norman, Professor Emeritus, Author of the book: *Monarchy, Religion and the State: Civil Religion in the UK, Canada, Australia and the Commonwealth*

Campagna, Norbert, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy and History of Ideas, University of Luxembourg

Cherribi, Sam, Senior Lecturer of Sociology, Emory University, Atlanta

Christians, Louis-Léon, Professor, Chair for Law and Religion, Catholic University of Leuven

Clesse, Armand, Director, Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies

Coker, Christopher, Professor of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science

Constantinescu, Stefan, Secretary of the Faith, Religion and Philosophy Department, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Ehret, Jean, Professor of Dogmatics and Spirituality, Grand Séminaire de Luxembourg

Feltz, Bernard, Professor of Science Philosophy, Catholic University of Leuven

Glendinning, Simon, Reader in European Philosophy; Director of the Forum for European Philosophy, London School of Economics and Political Science

Harpes, Jean-Paul, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy; Member of the National Research Ethics Committee (CNER), Luxembourg

Hausemer, Hubert, Professor of Philosophy, Member of the National Ethics Committee, Luxembourg

Karleskind, Jean-Luc, Vice-President of Shoura, Assembly of the Muslim Community in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Kaufmann, Eric, Professor of Politics, Birbeck College, University of London

Lyon, Christopher, Chaplain of the Anglican Church, Luxembourg

Nothomb, Charles-Ferdinand, Former Professor of International Relations and Public Management, FUCAM University of Louvain, Belgium

Noyes, James, Adjunct Professor, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris

Ojeda, Luis M., Research Assistant, Research Program on European Governance, University of Luxembourg

Pabst, Adrian, Lecturer in Politics, University of Kent; Research Associate, Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies

Poirier, Philippe, Coordinator, Research Program on European Governance, University of Luxembourg

Risch, Jean-Paul, Founding member of the Alliance for Humanists, Atheists and Agnostics Luxembourg (AHA); Independent researcher, Luxembourg

Rowell, Douglas Geoffrey, Right Reverend, Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe, Episcopal Patron of Project Canterbury

Siedentop, Larry, Emeritus Fellow of Political Thought; Emeritus Fellow of Keble College, University of Oxford

Skaff, Charbel, PhD student, University of Strasbourg

Sosoe, Lukas, Professor of Political Philosophy, University of Luxembourg

Steiwer, Jacques, Doctor of Philosophy; author of the book: *Une morale sans dieu,* Luxembourg

Voas, David, Professor of Population Studies, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex

Vranić, Vladimir, Presbyter**,** Serbian Orthodox Church, Office of the Holy Synod of Bishops for External Church Relations

Welch, Cyril, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Mount Allison University (Canada), Luxembourg

Wilson, Erin K., Director of the Centre for Religion, Conflict and the Public Domain, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen