

# Secularisms: Ideals, Ideologies and Institutional Practices

An International Conference organised under the auspices of the Yves Oltramare Chair  
on Religion and Politics in the Contemporary World

**25–27 September 2014**

→ The Graduate Institute, Maison de la paix, Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2, 1202 Geneva

Over recent decades, the global religious-political landscape has been widely shaped by conflicts between advocates of *secularism* and resurgent fundamentalist movements. In the United States, evangelical Christians have entered politics through the Republican Party and have tested the boundaries of the “wall of separation” between church and state. Various European countries have serious inner political conflicts about the public visibility of symbols of religious, especially Muslim, minorities, be such symbols minarets or headscarves. In India, Hindu nationalists have challenged the secular state in the name of “true secularism”. In post-communist Russia, the Orthodox Church and President Putin have joined forces in order to promote a new nationalism. And in Egypt and Tunisia, clashes between religious and secular forces over the crafting of new constitutions have characterised the recent political developments in these countries. These are just a few examples that illustrate the centrality of *secularism* and its contestation in contemporary politics.

However, at a closer look, it turns out that *secularism* is by no means a clearly defined concept. Some see it more as a worldview that rejects transcendence and relies solely on scientific knowledge. Others emphasise the separation of state and

church (or better: religious associations). Again others mean by *secularism* that religion should be kept out of politics in general. For the purpose of this conference I would like to focus on the separation of state and religious institutions with all its implications.

*Secularism* exists in many different instantiations, which is reflected in the title of this conference. We encounter not one *secularism*, but many *secularisms*. Many constitutions are seen as being secular; but *secularism* in India looks different from *secularism* in France, Turkey, Germany, the United States, or China. Even if various states had the same constitutional understanding of *secularism*, we would still find that their institutional practices vary immensely, for example with regard to the funding of religious schools and hospitals, juridical institutions, or the toleration of religious symbols in state institutions.

*Secularism* can also serve as an ideology, for example in imaginations of modernity. The proclamation that the West is modern and secular and therefore all societies that aspire to become modern have to become secular too, is such an ideology. It resembles the preaching of free markets as the only path to economic development by nations who often owe their own wealth to protectionism. On closer examination,

most Western countries are much less secular than they think they are. Let me give you some examples from Germany, usually regarded as a rather secular country.

German politics since 1949 has been strongly shaped by Christian parties, the CDU and the CSU. In 44 out of 64 years they were in government. The German state collects the taxes for the two main churches, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church. The state also finances their welfare agencies (“Caritas” and “Diakonie”) to the effect that they have become the two biggest employers in the country with over a million employees. Moreover, state universities have departments of Catholic and Protestant theology employing more than 400 professors, whose appointment needs approval by the churches. There even exist “Konkordats-Lehrstühle” (special professorships in non-theological disciplines) where the Catholic Church has the right to veto candidates. Although Germany does not know a state church, other “secular” countries in Europe do, such as Great Britain, Norway and Denmark. If the concept of *secularism* can cover such a weak separation between state and churches, it seems worthwhile to revisit the concept, its various meanings, and its relationship to “modernity”. This is one of the purposes of our conference.

In order to free the term of its occasional vacuity and to clarify how it is being interpreted around the world, I propose four strategic moves in approaching *secularism*:

- a conceptual one
- a theoretical one
- a methodological one and
- a political one

**Conceptually**, I propose to treat *secularism* as an ideal type. What does that mean? An ideal type defines basic structural characteristics and explores to what extent a given case approximates them. In this respect it is different from a classificatory system, which asks whether or not something is the case. For example, the question whether or not Switzerland is a secular country is a classificatory question that – given the examples mentioned above – I find not very fruitful. Instead, I would prefer to ask: To what extent and in which respects is Switzerland secular?

What now are such characteristics of *secularism*? This, among other goals, is what the conference intends to explore; but let me make the following preliminary suggestions. The ideal type of *secularism* shall consist minimally of the following three characteristics:

1. A strict separation of state and religious institutions
2. Equal treatment of all religious associations and beliefs
3. Equal opportunity for the political participation and occupational opportunities of all citizens independent of their (religious or non religious) affiliations and beliefs

Accordingly, one of the tasks of the conference will be to explore how and to what extent various countries approximate these three (and/or possibly other) criteria at various points in history.

**Theoretically**, I propose to uncouple the notion of *secularism* from notions of modernity and progress. If the role Christian churches play in Germany has not prevented Germany from becoming a modern state and society, strict *secularism* cannot be the precondition for modernity. Instead, we should look at the form and degree *secularism* takes as the outcome of political struggles and compromises between strictly secularist, moderately secularist, and anti-secularist forces as well as potentially many people in-between who do not have a principled position on *secularism*.

**Methodologically**, I propose to put the various Western understandings and experiences of *secularism* aside for the time being and focus on other countries in order to reflect back on the concept and its practices. The idea behind this methodological move is to treat *secularism* no longer as a modern Western concept or problem that has been exported to other parts of the world, but rather as one that concerns all countries worldwide in their own way. It has been appropriated globally and has become part of the multiple modernities we encounter. This conference will devote considerable attention to the cases of India, China, and North Africa (Egypt and Tunisia), in order to better understand what *secularism* means in various contexts.

**Politically**, I would like to suggest that *secularism* should not be viewed as an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. This end should be a pluralistic societal order, in which all citizens feel equally and adequately represented and recognised as individuals and as members of groups, a society in which they ideally all have the same opportunity to live their lives according to their own convictions. It does not come as a surprise that the form and degree of *secularism* as a means to achieve this end will vary according to the social structure and cultural traditions of each society.

It goes without saying that no one who presents at this conference has to share any of the views I have briefly outlined here.

MARTIN RIESEBRODT

*Yves Oltramare Chair on  
Religion and Politics in the  
Contemporary World*

## PROGRAMME

Thursday 25 September 2014 | Auditorium Ivan Pictet

- 18:30 – 20:00      **Opening of the Conference**
- Welcome to “Secularisms: Ideals, Ideologies, and Institutional Practices”**  
MARTIN RIESEBRODT  
Professor, Yves Oltramare Chair on Religion and Politics in the Contemporary World,  
the Graduate Institute, Geneva
- Secularism, Nationalism, and Religion in Asian History**  
PRASENJIT DUARA  
Raffles Professor of Humanities, Director of the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore
- 20:00                  Reception

Friday 26 September 2014 | Auditorium 2

### I. Secularisms: Some General Observations

Chaired by GOPALAN BALACHANDRAN  
Professor of International History, the Graduate Institute, Geneva

- 9:00 – 9:45          **Early Western Critique of Secularism: Conservative Ideals of the Christian State in the Early 19th Century**  
FRIEDRICH WILHELM GRAF  
Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and Ethics, University of Munich
- 9:45 – 10:00        Discussion
- 10:00 – 10:45       **Beyond Church and State?**  
WINNIFRED SULLIVAN  
Professor of Religious Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington
- 10:45 – 11:00       Discussion
- 11:00 – 11:30       Coffee break
- 11:30 – 12:15       **Secularisms, Post-Secularism, or Liberal-Democratic Constitutionalism?**  
VEIT BADER  
Professor Emeritus of Social and Political Philosophy and Sociology, University of Amsterdam
- 12:15 – 12:30       Discussion
- 12:30 – 14:00       Lunch break

### II. Secularisms in India: Models or Failures?

Chaired by SHALINI RANDEIRA  
Professor of Anthropology and Sociology of Development, the Graduate Institute, Geneva

- 14:00 – 14:45       **The Crisis of Secularism in India**  
RATNA KAPUR  
Professor of Law, Jindal Global University
- 14:45 – 15:00       Discussion
- 15:00 – 15:45       **India as a Model of Secularism**  
RAJEEV BHARGAVA  
Professor of Political Science, Director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi
- 15:45 – 16:00       Discussion
- 16:00 – 16:30       Coffee break

### III. Secularisms in Modern China

Chaired by LANXIN XIANG

Professor of International History, the Graduate Institute, Geneva

- 16:30 – 17:15 **Secularism against Secularisation in Republican China (1911–1949)**  
VINCENT GOOSSAERT  
Directeur d'études, Section des sciences religieuses, Ecole pratique des hautes études (EPHE), Paris
- 17:15 – 17:30 Discussion
- 17:30 – 18:15 **Ironies of Secularism: How the Chinese State Promotes Christianity**  
YANFEI SUN  
Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Zhejiang University, China
- 18:15 – 18:30 Discussion
- 19:30 Dinner for presenters, chairs and invited guests

## Saturday 27 September 2014 | Auditorium 2

### IV. Between Secularism and Islam: Negotiating Constitutions in North Africa

Chaired by RICCARDO BOCCO

Professor of Anthropology and Sociology of Development, the Graduate Institute, Geneva

- 9:00 – 9:45 **Negotiating a Constitution: The Case of Tunisia**  
MALIKA ZEGHAL  
Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Professor in Contemporary Islamic Thought and Life, Harvard University, Cambridge
- 9:45 – 10:00 Discussion
- 10:00 – 10:45 **Debates About Religion in the Making of the Egyptian Constitution**  
KRISTEN STILT  
Professor of Law, Harvard Law School (as of 1st September)
- 10:45 – 11:00 Discussion
- 11:00 – 11:15 Coffee break

### Panel Discussion: Secularisms, Citizenship, and Democracy

- 11:15 – 12:30 **Panel Discussion with all participants**  
Chaired by REDA BENKIRANE  
Research Associate, Centre Jacques Berque, Rabat
- 12:30 **Closing remarks**  
MARTIN RIESEBRODT
- 13:00 Lunch for the panelists

### VEIT BADER

is Emeritus Professor of Sociology and of Social and Political Philosophy (Department of Philosophy) at the University of Amsterdam and a member of IMES (Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies). He has written on a wide range of issues in critical social theory; social inequalities and collective action; democracy and the rule of law (particularly in the EU); racism, ethnicity and citizenship; ethics of migration and incorporation of minorities; global justice; and governance of religious diversity. His publications include *Secularism or Democracy? Associational Governance of Religious Diversity* (Amsterdam University Press, 2007), and *Changes in colonial and post-colonial governance of Islam. Continuities and ruptures* (University Press, Amsterdam, 2011).

### REDA BENKIRANE

is a sociologist and an international consultant. His major fields of interest are interdisciplinary, inter-cultural and interreligious issues. He is currently a Research Associate at Centre Jacques Berque (Rabat, Morocco), a member of the Lyon Institute for Philosophical Research (IRPHIL, University of Lyon 3), and the founder and coordinator of the research workshop Iqbal. Reda Benkirane is author of *La Complexité, vertiges et promesses. Dix-huit histoires de sciences* (Paris, Le Pommier, 2002, 2006) and *Le Désarroi identitaire. Jeunesse, islamité et arabité contemporaines* (Cerf, 2004).

### RAJEEV BHARGAVA

is the former Director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. He also served as Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University and between 2001 and 2005 as Professor of Political Theory and Indian Political Thought and Head of the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi. His publications include *Individualism In Social Science* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992), *Secularism and its Critics* (ed.) (OUP, New Delhi, 1998), *Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy* (ed. with A. Bagchi and R. Sudarshan, OUP, 1999), *Transforming India*, (ed. with Francine Frankel et. al, OUP, 2000), *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship* (ed. with H. Reifeld, Sage, 2005), *Politics and Ethics of the Indian Constitution* (ed. OUP, Delhi, 2008), *Social Justice* (ed. with M. Dusche and H. Reifeld, Sage, 2008) and *Political Theory: An Introduction*, (ed. With Ashok Acharya, Pearson, 2008). He is currently working on a book on secularism.

### PRASENJIT DUARA

is the Raffles Professor of Humanities and Director of the Asia Research Institute at National University of Singapore. He was born and educated in India; received his PhD in Chinese history from Harvard University; and was previously Professor and Chair of the Department of History and Chair of the Committee on Chinese Studies at the University of Chicago. In 1988, he published *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (Stanford University

Press), which won the Fairbank Prize of the AHA and the Levenson Prize of the AAS, USA. In 1997, he published *Rescuing History from the Nation. Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (University of Chicago Press). His work has been widely translated into Chinese, Japanese, Korean and European languages. His new book, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* will be published by Cambridge University Press later this year.

### VINCENT GOOSSAERT

is Professor of Daoism and Chinese religions at EPHE. He has served as the Deputy Director of the Societies-Religions-Secularisms Institute (GSRL, Paris) since 2004. He has been ICS Visiting Professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and visiting professor at Geneva University and Renmin University (Beijing). His research deals with the social history of premodern and modern Chinese religion. He has published books on Chinese temples, Anticlericalism in China, Chinese dietary taboos, the production of moral norms, and most recently, with David Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (University of Chicago Press, 2011) which won the Levenson Prize for Books in Chinese Studies in 2013.

### FRIEDRICH WILHELM GRAF

is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and Ethics at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich. In 1999 he was awarded the Leibniz Prize of the German Association of Higher Studies (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), the first theologian to receive this award. Professor Graf is a regular member of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften). His publications include *Die Wiederkehr der Götter. Religion in der modernen Kultur* (2004, new edition Beck'sche Reihe, Munich, 2007), *Der Protestantismus. Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Schriftenreihe Band 623, Bonn, 2006) and *Kirchendämmerung. Wie die Kirchen unser Vertrauen verspielen* in 2011.

### RATNA KAPUR

is a Global Professor of Law at Jindal Global Law School (Sonapat-Delhi) India. She is also part of the Core Faculty of the Harvard International Global Law and Policy Institute. She has been a Visiting Faculty at a number of law schools around the world including Yale Law School, New York University School of Law, Georgetown University Law Centre, and UN Peace University (Costa Rica), as well as a Fellow at Harvard Law School. She has written and published extensively on issues of gender, religion, secularism and postcolonial legal studies. Her publications include *Secularism's Last Sigh?* (co-authored Oxford University Press, 2001), *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism* (Cavendish Press, T&H, 2005) and *Makeshift Migrants and Law: Gender Belonging and Post-colonial Anxieties* (Routledge, 2010).

### KRISTEN STILT

is Professor of Law at Harvard Law School (as of 1st September). Her research interests are the historical development and practice of Islamic law as well as contemporary manifestations and applications of law that are presented as Islamic. One of her current projects, for which she was named a Carnegie Scholar, studies the constitutional establishment of Islam as the state religion in Morocco, Egypt and Malaysia. She is the author of *Islamic Law in Action: Authority, Discretion, and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and the co-editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Law*.

### WINNIFRED FALLERS SULLIVAN

is Professor of Religious Studies and Chair, Department of Religious Studies. She also is Affiliated Professor of Law, Maurer School of Law, Indiana University Bloomington. Professor Sullivan holds a JD and a PhD from the University of Chicago. She studies the phenomenology of religion under the modern rule of law. She is the author of *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton 2005), *Prison Religion* (Princeton 2009) and *A Ministry of Presence* (Chicago 2014). She is also co-editor of *Politics of Religious Freedom*, with Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Saba Mahmood, and Peter Danchin (forthcoming from Chicago 2015).

### YANFEI SUN

is Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology at Zhejiang University (China). Her research primarily concerns the interrelationship between religion and politics. She is currently working on a book manuscript on the changing religious ecology in post-Mao China. Her recent publications can be seen on *Social Compass and Modern China*.

### MALIKA ZEGHAL

is Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Professor in Contemporary Islamic Thought and Life in the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations Department and the Committee on the Study of Religion at Harvard University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Formerly an Associate Professor of the Anthropology and Sociology of Religion and Islamic Studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School, she is a political scientist who studies contemporary Islam and politics. She is particularly interested in Islamic institutions and Islamist movements in Muslim societies, with special focus on the Middle East and North Africa. She is also interested in the regulation of Islam in France and the United States. Her publications include *Gardiens de l'Islam. Les oulémas d'al-Azhar dans l'Egypte contemporaine* (Presses de Sciences Po, 1996), and *Islamism in Morocco: Religion, Authoritarianism, and Electoral Politics* (Markus Wiener, 2008). She is currently working on a genealogy of the concept of "Muslim state" and on its institutional implementations in the contemporary Arab world (forthcoming from Princeton University Press).