This is a seminar on empirically-oriented political theory with an emphasis on the study of religion in the subfield of comparative politics. It is primarily aimed at MA students (MAFIP, MADRE, CMEPS) and those who are enrolled in a “Lehramt”-programme (WPO or GymPO). Please note that the participation of advanced BA students and students from other disciplines than political science is possible and welcome, but subject to the availability of spare places.

If you have any questions, please send me an email.

I. General Information

In recent years, it has become increasingly popular to claim that we are currently witnessing “the deprivatization of religion” (Casanova) and “the desecularization of the world” (Berger). Contrary to earlier predictions that religious beliefs are irretrievably doomed to wither away, religions did not cease to exist, but still continue to wield considerable influence on public life. Against this backdrop, the interdisciplinary study of religion has turned into one of the fastest growing and controversial fields in the social sciences and humanities because what is at stake is essentially the classical Western idea of a thoroughly secular modernity (cf. Schwinn, 2013).

In political science, however, research on religions has been given surprisingly little attention, especially when compared to sociology (cf. Kettel, 2012). It was only lately that the discipline rediscovered its long-lost, Tocquevillian interest the study of “Faith in Politics” (Bellin, 2008), resulting, for example, in the establishment of a new APSA journal on “Politics and Religion” and, just recently, in the publication of “An Introduction to Religion and Politics” (Fox, 2013).

In light of this trend, the seminar seeks to introduce, contextualise, and discuss major themes and theories in the small, but growing subfield of comparative research on politics and religion. Please note that this is not another seminar on political Islam or religious fundamentalism.
II. Course Overview

Roughly speaking, this seminar is divided into two large parts. Once we have settled the basic questions (sessions 1-2), we will first contextualise the study of religion and politics by taking a look at key contributions to ongoing debates about the secularisation paradigm (session 3-6). Afterwards, we will then slice the multi-faceted relationship between religion and politics into a couple of small, conceptually neat pieces (sessions 7-14) which allow for separate analyses.

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The first part of the seminar is aimed at assessing both the normative underpinnings and the empirical adequacy of the secularisation paradigm. Starting from the finding that “secularism quo political project and secularization quo sociological theory both find themselves in an increasingly defensive and even beleaguered posture” (Gorski/Altınordu, 2008: 57), we will try to examine whether we are really confronted with the resurgence of politically salient religions or, rather, just beginning to overcome a secularist bias which has long prevented students from
taking religion(s) seriously when researching political life in modern times. This little excursus into the sociology of religion and the field of political philosophy is a prerequisite for anyone who seeks to avoid the trap of (re-)producing grand narratives about the fate of religion. Otherwise, it is impossible to determine whether scholars of political science are empirically right in asserting that “God is winning in global politics” (Sha/Toft, 2006: 43) and that “if there ever were an award for the most durable, yet outdated, theoretical perspective in the social sciences, secularization theory would be the winner, or at least a close runner-up” (Gill, 2001: 119).

The second part of this seminar is dedicated towards exploring major themes and theories in the comparative study of religion and politics. Beginning with some critical remarks on the relative merits of secularism as an analytical concept (session 7), we will try to understand how scholars of comparative politics try to make sense of religion in political life. The focus of the seminar is thus not on particular faith traditions, but rather, more generally, on identifying the various levels and channels of interaction between religion and politics in modern times.

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**III. Introductory Literature**


IV. Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this MA-level seminar about the relationship between politics and religion (“Normative Challenges and Empirical Puzzles”), participating students will be able to

- reflect on issues of methodology and epistemology in the social scientific study of religion;
- distinguish between demand-side- and supply-side-arguments in the sociology of religion;
- evaluate normative and empirical contributions to the debate about religion and modernity;
- go beyond common wisdom in critically discussing the nexus of religion and democracy;
- examine different strands of literature in the comparative study of religion in political life;
- identify shortcomings, blind spots, and open questions (i.e., avenues for further research).

It should go without saying that this seminar remains in many regards a tentative attempt at making sense of religion in politics. Accordingly, the themes and theories are exemplary only.

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Over the course of the term, we will see that “religion” can be an explosive and highly controversial issue. Please make sure that you always participate in a respectful, considerate, and sensitive manner!

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V. Course Requirements

Since this seminar is open to students from all degree programmes, it is beyond the capacity of your lecturer to take a look at each and every module handbook of the University of Tübingen. Hence, you are strongly urged to raise your voice early if you have any formal questions.

In order to pass this seminar and to be awarded a “Schein” (worth 6 ECTS points), students are expected to miss no more than two sessions and to fulfill the three following requirements:

(a) to prepare the mandatory readings for all sessions & to actively participate in class (10%);
(b) to write a short response paper (2-3 pages) which comments on one of the sessions (20%);
(c) to pass the take-home-exam (72 h) that will be held at the end of the summer term (70%).

Please note that each requirement and assignment must be passed separately (with a grade of at least 4.0). Further information on (b) and (c) will be provided on additional instruction sheets.
VI. Literature

All mandatory readings will be available on ILIAS, the online learning management system of the University of Tübingen (password for this seminar: [REDACTED]). Since the texts can be very different from one another, it is advisable to read them in order of appearance, respectively.


What Is Politics? (Please note that this list is exemplary only and, thus, anything but exhaustive!)


What Is Religion? (Please note that this list is also exemplary only and anything but exhaustive!)


2nd session (20/04/2015): How to Study Religion: Methodology & Epistemology

Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


5th session (11/05/2015): “Postsecular Society” (Habermas) vs. “Secular Age” (Taylor)?

(a) Mandatory Readings: Jürgen Habermas on Religion and Politics in a Postsecular Society


(b) Mandatory Readings: Charles Taylor on Religion, Politics, and Western Secularity


Further recommendations:


**6th session (17/05/2015): Religion in Politics: Drawing the Line with Michael Walzer**

Mandatory readings:

Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


9th Session (15/06/2015): Political Culture (I): “Civil Religion in America” by Robert N. Bellah

Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


10th Session (22/06/2015): Political Culture (II): The Relationship of Religion and Nationalism

Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


11th Session (29/06/2015): Religious Actors (I): The Political Economy of Religion

Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


12th Session (06/07/2015): Religious Actors (II): Analysing Religions as Social Movements

Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


**13th Session (13/07/2015): Repression of Religions (I): The Argument of “God’s Century”**

Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:


**14th Session (20/07/2015): Repression of Religions (II): “Why Governments Repress Religion”**

Mandatory readings:


Further recommendations:

