

CERI (Sciences Po Paris) – GSRL (EPHE/CNRS) – IRSEM – CESPRA (EHESS)

Religious Actors in the International Sphere

3-4 December 2018 at the CERI and the Ecole militaire, Paris

Call for papers

Deadline for responses: 15 September 2018

The role of religious actors in the international public sphere is no longer easy to define. We observe a growing involvement of such actors in international issues, be they diplomatic, military, economic, social or cultural. Yet, at an analytical level, theories of international relations do not always pay sufficient attention to them, considering that they have only “supporting roles” in the global scene compared to the United-States, international organizations or even to non-state armed groups.

Nevertheless, the modes of intervention adopted by religious actors are numerous, varied and significant at the political level. What characterizes the presence of such actors is the way in which they mobilize cultural, social and anthropological imaginaries while at the same time elaborating different strategies to accentuate their religious claims. Therefore, the question that arises is two-fold: In what ways do religious actors proceed in order to defend their own agenda? And, how do States and international organizations use religions and religious actors to reach their own objectives that are confessional as much as political?

When the Catholic Church talks about ecology, for instance, it implies an “integral” ecology which understands fighting against the right to abortion or “trans-humanism”, as we have witnessed during the papacy of Jean-Paul II and Benedict XVI. International institutions as well become the centre of preoccupations for religious groups such as the Orthodox Church, which attempt advancing critical stances against liberalism at the European Council. The political actors themselves also capitalize on religious discourses: The interdependence between the Wahhabi ideology and the Saudi diplomacy is as obvious as Iran’s determination to extend its influence into Iraq, relying on the Shiite community which is historically close to Tehran.

It is crucial to understand how religious or political leaders defend their ideas and

norms in the context of globalization, which favors not only their propagation but also their fragmentation. How do these actors blend in the international arena fashioned by the States and transnational organizations? In what manner do the States and transnational organizations rely on religious factors having strategic and symbolic purposes?

The subject of this conference, organized by the Ph.D. candidates of CERI, GSRL, IRSEM and CESPRA, consists in examining thoroughly this constellation of questions, a constellation which is willingly kept comprehensive yet clustering around a common thread: How can we conceptualize the re-composition of the place of religions within international affairs and their connections to States and transnational organizations?

One of the main goals of the conference consists in better incorporating the Francophone research into the international scientific debates on the place of the religious factors in the international sphere and the process of globalization. We believe that this essential issue in contemporary international relations and public debates does not attract the deserved attention in the Francophone social and political sciences.

The three main axis of this conference are described below.

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Axis of the Conference

1. Modes of visibility adopted by religious actors in the international sphere

This first axis aims at providing an overall picture illustrating the visibility of religious actors in the international scene, paying particular attention to the following three points:

- The typology of the religious actors' visibility in the process of globalization. We are going to concentrate specifically on the diversity of actors making reference to denominational themes and symbols: States (Iran, Saudi Arabia, and so on), Churches (the Holy See, and so on), confessional NGOs, political parties (the Muslim Brotherhood, among others). We would like to better comprehend different types of religious actors, their sociological characteristics as well as their particularities.
- We would also like to point out the diversity of themes broached by the religious groups such as gender, sexuality, and minority rights, to cite but a few examples. It is also important to note that religious themes and symbols reappear in certain other areas where they are less expected such as economic growth, cultural productions, education, and environmentalism and so on. How do religious actors appropriate these themes? For what purposes? What does the specifically confessional treatment of these issues mean?
- Finally, we would like to study transnational regimes and organizations (the European Union, European Council, UNO, UNESCO) in which these actors have become more and more visible, to the extent that confessional networks within the transnational organizations constitute one of the privileged spaces of action in the international political scene.

2. The registers with which religions are internationalized

The second axis explores the ways in which religious actors have imposed their agenda in the global scene by deploying the means available in the international system. Hence, the interlocking relations between the State of Law and liberalism should be illustrated in this axis, considering that the area of Human Rights appears to be a platform of intervention as well as an object of contestation. Several registers merit our attention:

- How do religious actors, faith communities or States that lean towards a confessional diplomacy impose their concerns to transnational organizations in particular and to the international scene in general?
- The Human Rights question appears to be fundamental in this context. Certain

minorities claim the freedom of religion in order to legitimize the visibility of their practices. What does the concept of individual liberty come to mean in this context? How can we explain the fact that religious claims mobilize the fundamental rights? Furthermore, certain actors such as the Vatican proclaim to establish a religious base for European societies coined as “subjectivist” or “relativist.” What kind of interpretation is then proposed to define fundamental rights in this conjuncture? In which frameworks can any public authority with a theological base intervene on the questions related to Human Rights issues?

- In some circumstances certain religious actors reject the right to freedom of expression in the name of refusing the antireligious critiques and in the name of “blasphemy.” This strategy of contesting one of the building blocks of modern democracy has been elaborated through multiple registers leading to questioning the principle of free speech. What kinds of social constellations are at the origin of this contestation? What are the modalities of their intervention in the public sphere? What are their intellectual references?

3. Religions, conflict and peace

Finally, we would like to contribute to a better integration of the religious factor into strategic studies. The practical difficulties of States with regards to the globalized terrorist groups (particularly Al-Qaeda) become very often the subject of debates. However, in a complementary manner and to avoid usual readings that are strictly related to security issues, it is also important to take into account the phenomenon of the mediation set about by confessional NGOs or Churches and religious groups as a means of facilitating the exit from armed conflicts (e.g. Sant’Egidio). Last but not least, from a normative point of view, we would like to explore eventual venues through which it would be possible to improve the training of political decision-makers or military staff faced with these phenomena. How can we assure that the decision makers within the state apparatus could accede to scientific information on religious phenomenon?

Application modalities:

- Deadline for applications: 15 September 2018
- Proposals should be a maximum of 450 words, including the title and the central problematic of the presentation.
- Send your proposals to the following email address: religionsinternational@gmail.com
- The disciplines concerned are: Political Sciences, International Relations, Sociology, Anthropology, Religious Studies, History and Law.
- The Area Studies specialists or those focused on a specific religion are invited to present papers dealing with transnational aspects of the phenomena cited above.
- The time period covered in the papers should be between the 1970s to today.
- The language of presentations will be French and English.
- Established scholars as well as graduate students and post-docs are welcome.

Scientific committee: Alain Dieckhoff, Jean-Vincent Holeindre, Philippe Portier

Organized by:

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