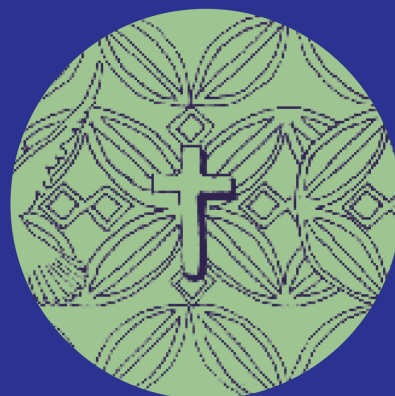




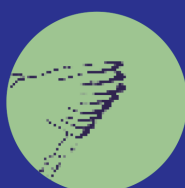
Green Values,



Religion



& Secularism



Editors: Nuala Ahern
and Erica Meijers



GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION

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Religion

& Secularism

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1. Introduction



About This Project

This report is the result of a two-year long project by the Green European Foundation. With the support of our national partner foundations Green Foundation Ireland and Bureau de Helling (Netherlands), we produced the book *Green Values, Religion and Secularism* over the course of 2015, which features conversations with European politicians and activists on the issues around religion and how it intersects with public and political life.

In 2016, the reflection on those issues was continued, since the debates still proved to be very relevant, also due to a new wave of religiously inspired terror attacks in Paris, Brussels, and elsewhere, which reintroduced questions around religion to the public discourse. The Green European Foundation, the Green Foundation Ireland and Bureau de Helling, together with the help of Strefa Zieleni (Poland), Green Institute (Greece), Fondation de l'Écologie Politique (France) and Yeşil Düşünce Derneği (Turkey), who had also contributed to the book in 2015, organised a series of events across Europe to launch the

book and further the discussions around *Green Values, Religion and Secularism*. In line with the Green European Foundation's mission to act as a platform to stimulate debates, it was also the aim of the project to work towards a more coherent debate within the Greens on the changing role of religion in society. This report summarises the outcomes of the debates organised by our different partner foundations, highlights themes that emerged throughout the implementation of the project and formulates recommendations on how this debate could be continued within the Green European Family.

Introduction

The project *Green Values, Religion and Secularism* was about dialogue and plurality within the Green movement. For two years, we have been debating and reflecting in a conversation on the relationship between secular and religious values in a political context. We published a collection of interviews and we conducted and took part in debates, seminars and media events. In this report, we try to give a small glimpse into the topics we talked about and the insights we gained.

A first conclusion should be that there are no Green values as such. Green people have different values, some coming from religious traditions, others from broader spiritual and secular sources. That is the first and clearest outcome of this project on *Green Values, Religion and Secularism*. If this is true, the question emerges how to do justice to these different values. Are some more 'green' than others and how do we decide this? How do religious and secular values relate to each other, not only within the Green movement itself, but also in the wider society?

Religion is part of our European public space. This fact is contentious in societies with a dominant secular identity. However, contending identities are part of the debate, as is conflict between conservatives and modernizers within the faith communities and between religious groups and secular society. Our modern European societies contain people of many different faiths, not only the many Christian denominations, but also Judaism and Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism, and also other spiritual traditions and humanistic and secular identities. In Eu-

ropean history, religion itself as well as the relationship between religion and secularism has always been a battlefield. A key question for the project was how do Green parties relate to the manifestations of these conflicts and turmoil today?

Behind the curve

The rise of religiously inspired political extremism and even terrorism in European cities has brought forth claims from perpetrators that tolerance and pluralism are targeted in particular, which they assert is against their idea of religion. For others, tolerance is the essence of religion. Rather than focusing on the issue of Islam and extremism we should begin with a consideration of religion and society in Europe the 21st century. In the last decades, the relationship between religion and modern society has shifted. In Western Europe, secularism has become mainstream. No single religious tradition can command a majority in society; religion is more diverse and not always clearly organised.

In addition, the quest for a personal spirituality has created a kind of privatisation of religious belief, which is very different from the former place of religion as a shared cultural experience. However, religion also plays a larger role in politics and society than it did before 2001. There have been fierce debates on issues such as ritual slaughtering and the wearing of the Islamic veil in various forms in public institutions. Moreover, Christian and Jewish communities have begun to raise issues of their freedoms in a European secular public space. Here we need to consider whether we are talking about the relationship between belief and politics, or is the relationship between religion and the state at stake? International scholars from different disciplines have increasingly focused their attention on the role of religion in politics and society, while political parties have been behind the curve. These scholars also look at social and economic position of the communities involved and the relationship between the majority and minorities in society and to look more precisely at the role of religion within these conflicts.

Green Debates

To stimulate a debate on the role of religion in our societies today within the Green parties, Nuala Ahern, Green Foundation Ireland, and Erica Meijers, Bureau de Helling, the Netherlands, started a project together with the Green European Foundation and four other partners, namely Bartłomiej Kozek (Strefa Zieleni, Poland), Olga Kikou (Greek Green Institute), Benoit Monange (Fondation de l'Ecologie Politique, France) and Nil Mutluer (Ye il Dü ünçe Derne i, Turkey). The Green European Foundation, together with these six Green foundations across Europe began a dialogue within both the Green movement and wider society. During 2015 they interviewed sixteen Green activists and politicians from France, Belgium, Austria, Poland, Greece, Turkey, Ireland, Northern Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany. This resulted in the book *Green Values, Religion and Secularism*, which was presented early 2016 and followed by debates and seminars in the countries of the participating political foundations.

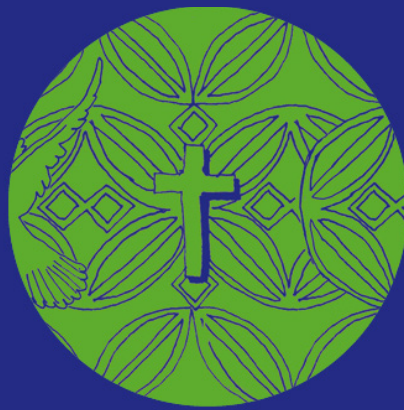
In the publication and in the seminars two major themes were discussed. Firstly, the interconnectedness of religious or secular values and political attitude; secondly, the role of religion in the public forum. Topics that came up were the difficulty of defining religion and its changing role in society; conflicts between religions and fundamental rights, such as the freedom of religion and the principle of sexual and gender equality; the role of Islam in Europe and the relationship between spiritual world-views and the struggle for a sustainable and just society.

The wide network of the Green European Foundation and its partner foundations were crucial in exploring these topics reflecting deeply on culture and identity in Europe.

In this report you will find a summary of the themes discussed as well as some recommendations how the Greens could proceed with this urgent debate on the relation between religions and secularism both in society as in our parties.

By interviewing Green activists and politicians and by debating the outcome of these conversations in and around the Green movement, we wanted to detect the most important issues regarding religion and secularism for the Green movement. With this final report we present a series of themes and questions to the Green movement in Europe, in order to discuss them more thoroughly. Our work and the responses during the last two years has convinced us of the urgency and importance of this debate.

2. *Emerging Themes*



The project on *Green Values, Religion and Secularism* has identified two main areas of dialogue and debate. Firstly the way values, secular or religious, of Green politicians and activists are reflected in their political views and opinions; secondly the role of religion in the public forum. Although it is impossible to separate the two, in this section, we present the themes that emerged mostly in the second area.

1. Religion in the Public Forum (including questions regarding Church and State)

2. Religion in Society: education, plurality, animal rights, gender and sexuality.

3. Religion and Ecology

4. Religion and the Green parties

With every topic, we present a few extracts from the interviews together with some remarks from the editors. Before going further we need to begin with a few words on the overarching problem; namely the question: What is religion?

What is Religion?

Every interview started with the question how to define religion, and every answer was different, revealing their specific relation to religion. We already noted in the afterword of the book that the definition of religion is not an objective matter one can depart from, but part of the debate itself. Most social scientists writing on religion avoid a definition but, if you want to find out about the different views on religion within the Green movement, it is a very revealing question. For some, religion is a coherent set of ideas, held by an individual, which give meaning to life in relation to some greater good, or a higher metaphysical force. For others, it is a space which contains the rituals of family and community life, particularly those of birth, marriage and especially death. Some see religion as a collection of stories and practices dealing with the mystery of life freely, while others think of religion as something embedded in an institution. Some regard religion foremost as a spiritual experience; for others it is a bodily way of life, which concerns the way we eat, celebrate and constitute families. For others religion as they understand it (mostly as a set of ideas and rules) can be replaced by a philosophic tradition, such as the ethics we find in Plato and Aristotle of wisdom and justice, and the ability to practice them with compassion.

The way religion is understood is connected to one's own background. Western traditions in general are more focussed on the idea of religion as a system of thought, while eastern religions tend to be focussed on practice rather than belief. The widespread acceptance of Eastern religions in Europe is only marginally reflected in the interviews on the book; however it was the subject of a number of discussions, particularly the spread of meditation and mindfulness in Europe.

In many discussions and seminars it was also noted that the quest for a personal spirituality has created a kind of privatisation of religious belief, which is very different from the former place of religion as a shared cultural experience and that this can (but not necessarily) be negative for the community though positive for the individual. However such a widespread experience in Europe is creating new religious movements and a reappraisal of traditional practice.

In short, the dialogue about religion starts with everybody's own definition of religion, which is linked to the tradition you are raised in (even if you stepped out of it) and to your personal experiences with this tradition. The dialogue on religion and secularism immediately reveals different Green identities. It shows that the Green world view is not coherent, but contains many discrepancies, at least between different contexts in Europe. The interviews show many examples of how one's definition of religion also defines one's look at ecology, education and plurality in society.

The state is the guardian of freedom of creed, but must also demand mutual respect amongst religions. The public and private spheres must remain strictly separate. [...] Nonetheless, no one has placed a ban on a religion's right to express its opinion on societal subjects. As Jean Baubérot – one of the foremost experts in the area of secularism – asserted, secularism has slipped from the state and entered society.
Noël Mamère

1. Religion in the Public Forum

The interviews as well as the discussions show a huge variety on practices and views on the place of religion in the public forum. Important topics discussed were conflicts between religions and fundamental rights, such as the freedom of religion and the principle of sexual and gender equality; the role of Islam in Europe and the relation between spiritual worldviews and the struggle for a sustainable and just society.

To conduct dialogues and conversations on this topic within and outside the Green movement in a fruitful way, it helps to have a clearer view of the different concepts in Europe regarding the place of religion within the public forum.

I think it's important to make diversity visible: everywhere problems arise by barring religions from public life.

Marco Schröder

The necessity of separation between institutional religion and the state is a clear basis for all Greens, but there are many different ways to organize this. Because our religious identities are interwoven with our national, cultural and political identities, they contribute to societal cohesion but also fuel conflicts. In post secular Europe this cohesion as well as these conflicts begins to take a new form because of the growing deinstitutionalized, globalized, and more fluid shape of contemporary religion. This means that we have to rethink the operation of the church-state separation that constitutes the central fact of our modern European societies.

What I do find unacceptable, is denying your pupils the right of expressing their outlook on life, as is the case with the ban on wearing the hijab in the classroom.

Meyrem Almaci

Some Greens are very much in favour of the French law of *laïcité* from 1905, which ordains that the public and private spheres must remain strictly separate, while others believe in the visibility of one's beliefs and convictions within the public sphere, or in a more cooperative model between institutionalized religion and the state. The state may be 'neutral', but this is not true for politicians, nor for the political parties to which they belong. The concept of *laïcité*, like other concepts of separation of 'Church' and State, need interpretation in the changing context of today. Just like religion, the concept of *laïcité* can be used to exclude others from the society. Therefore, the question for Greens must be which relation between 'Church' and State is best suitable to organize an inclusive and pluralistic society.

If we relate to one another not via the belief-systems or identities to which we feel attached, but through concrete practical issues which we care deeply about, we can co-operate and act in concert very effectively.

Nil Mutluer

2. Religion in Society

Under the umbrella of 'religion in society' we can sum up a big range of topics that were discussed in the interviews as well as during the seminars and debates in the different countries. The list is long: education, plurality, animal rights, gender and sexuality, abortion and euthanasia, and we could add more. In every topic the relation between religion and secularism plays its role, and in every context this role is different. A good example of this is religion and education.

Every country has a different educational system and a different way in which religions can express themselves within the system. Everywhere in Europe those systems are on the move and highly debated.

I like to look at pragmatic solutions. We had an issue about Islamic schools wanted separate swimming lessons for boys and girls. Some opposed to this as a matter of principle. But what's the use if you have a principled debate in the name of emancipation and at the same time you deprive those girls of a chance to learn how to swim?

Judith Sargentini

I am all for the abolishment of traditional religious education, whereby each child receives instruction from a teacher of their own religious denomination. I would opt for lessons in ethics for all children, both religious and secular. I think it's important when Muslim children get to know the pastor, Jewish children get to know the imam, and atheist children get to know a Buddhist.

Marco Schröder

In the question of animal welfare, harsh conflicts between religious communities and animal rights activists have come up. In the question of ritual slaughtering, there has been pressure on people to choose between either animal welfare or the freedom of religion. But it is difficult to believe that there is no respect for animals within Islam and Judaism, since these traditions come from societies in which cattle and other animals were at the heart of society. An encounter between leaders of religious communities and animal rights activists could show a way out of this trap.

Judaism is a behavioural religion, not a religion of belief. And many people do not understand that; worse still, they have depicted it as irreligious and wrong, thereby unconsciously Christianising the idea of religion, not doing justice to plurality and tolerance, leaving no space for others, for minorities.

Sergey Lagodinsky

Interesting enough, on the issue of refugees and the fight against poverty, there is not much debate between religious and secular Green people, for both the right to have a shelter and food is evident. People from religious communities and left-wing and Green parties can be (and sometimes are) strong allies in political actions around the defence of refugees and the rights of poor people in society.

With emancipation progressing, more and more people will find a kind of religion that fits into our modern society. Fine if there are still people who want to do that differently, as long as they let me live my life.

Judith Sargentini

“migrant women don’t opt for the western way automatically; they use their own symbols and ways ... There is a difference in cultural strategies: you may react against some things and you make use of other things to change things within the community”

Meyrem Almaci

Bigger conflicts arise however, when we talk about another topic that plays a role throughout Europe: the role of religion in controlling and organizing sexuality and family life, whether in the past or in the presence. The debate on the veil can be seen as a manifestation of the conflict around female bodies in society. But these topics are not solved by suppressing or privatizing (patriarchal) religion. Sexuality continues to be a place of conflict in secular societies. Different concepts and strategies in the drive for equality play a role here.

We need to understand that something sacred for us may be not be sacred to others. politics does not mean imposing our worldview on others.

Adam Ostolski

I think the conflict with Islam has little to do with religion. People who are carrying out such attacks as the atrocities in Paris, London, New York and other places are endangering people of all faiths and none, and encouraging reactionary Europeans to regard people of the Muslim faith with suspicion.

Trevor Sargent

To debate these concepts and strategies between secular and religious traditions would be a useful starting point. What seems to be of crucial importance for the position of Greens in these debates, is the relationship between the majority and minorities. Bridges between the Greens and minority groups are therefore of vital importance in order to have a relevant dialogue on the relationship of religious and secular values in the above mentioned topics today.

The north of Ireland conflict is not a religious war. Religion is a badge of identity here; there is an ethno-nationalist conflict between two failed state-making projects.

John Barry

Green politics and religions should be viewed in their dynamic dimension: potentially antagonistic to each other and open to different interpretations: religions are open to broader social evolution.

Yannis Paraskevopoulos

3. Religion and Ecology

Religious communities and Green parties often find each other in their engagement with challenges such as climate change and environmental destruction. Religious and Green traditions have a lot in common when it comes to the debate on ecology. They often do not see the human being as the centre of the universe, but as a part of something bigger than us.

If you are a Christian, you simply have to be an ecological activist. [...]The nexus between religious and environmental movements is the respect for life and the feeling that we are a part of something bigger than us.

François Mandil

Green ideas have deep roots in European philosophy and theology, and thinkers like the American transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and also theologians like Ivan Illich and Jacques Ellul have influenced the development of ecological thinking which see the human being as part of a larger whole.

During the seminars we saw some examples of common ground between certain religious and spiritual traditions and a specific Green view on ecology, in which the need for a moral, not exclusively rationalistic approach of the environment is recommended. Dr Enrico Tezzo spoke at the Oxford seminar on the ethical basis of Buddhist economics and the need for an ethic of compassion for human and economic life. He pleaded for the adoption of mindfulness to make more progress toward sustainability, which he doesn’t see happening as long as the major reliance is on a cognitive strategy, ignoring the emotional and irrational nature of the human being. In a slightly different proposal, Cathriona Russell spoke in Trinity College Dublin of the imperative to go beyond the idea of basic needs and the necessity to not only engage in practical solutions to injustice but to also embrace a contemplative ecology which asks us to pay attention to the world and to love as a powerful source of motivation. During the Oxford seminar, Reverend Jennifer Brown spoke on the theme of Christian values and environmental care and said that religion was a source of ethical values for all relationships, including that with the earth and non-human animals.

I think political ecology needs spirituality. Spirituality kicks in when we see that money and power alone will not solve all of our problems. Greens strongly combine ecology with social justice and activism, the critique of corporate rule and the global inequalities between the north and the south. We see a very Green view of the ecological crisis in the Pope’s encyclical Laudato Si’.

Adam Ostolski

I once read about what is in a teaspoon of soil, when you are walking for a couple of miles you are walking on literally millions of fungi and billions of bacteria and protozoa. (...) It was a primal experience of hearing and feeling my own beating heart in the dark and knowing I was a small part of the great sea of life.

Mary White

But other voices were also heard in these exchanges on religions and ecology, stating that the Industrial Revolution with its domination of the earth, was developed in a mostly Christian world. Remarks like this gave rise to lively debates during the seminars of the project.

Within the Green movement, important debates have come up about the possibilities of technology to show a way out of ecological crisis and transform our economies. This debate goes back to the underlying image of the human being itself: are we in charge of our planet as human beings, or are we part of a bigger whole that we have to adapt to? Here the Greens face a problem that is debated within religious traditions since the beginning of modernity. A dialogue between Green and religious traditions could be fruitful to develop the Green thought on ecology.

4. Religion and the Green parties

Topics so narrowly linked to people's identity are very hard in the political arena. It's good to talk to one another and to have a discussion without having to take a decision.

Bettina Jarasch

Maybe the most important of all the discussions we had on the relationship between religion and secularism from a Green perspective, was the dialogue itself. From the personal storytelling during the workshop at the EGP Council in Lyon, to the more academic seminars in Oxford, Athens and Belfast: mutual respect was the basis of all discussion. This is not always possible during conflicts in the streets, but it should be possible during gatherings of Green parties. Making space for the other - especially if he or she is in a position of being a minority - who might have something to offer from which you can learn. And even if you disagree very strongly, try to understand the experience of the other person. And even if you cannot and do not want to understand, respect the right of the other to think and talk like this. These values maybe seem simple, but they are under pressure in our societies in which growing inequality separates people from each other and in which populism is polarizing society. Greens should develop, use and maintain technics of communication in a situation of plurality, within their own parties as well as in society.

3. Events & Debate



Workshops during Councils of the European Green Party

EGP Council, Zagreb May 2015

Closed meeting with the participants of the project.

This was a first meeting in which we exchanged how everyone related to the topic of religion and politics. In all Green parties and all participating countries the role of religion in society was recognized to be a difficult topic, that needs more attention from Green parties.

EGP Council, Lyon November 2015

Speakers: Nuala Ahern, co-editor of the publication *Green Values, Religion and Secularism*, former president Green Foundation Ireland, former MEP for the Irish Green Party and Erica Meijers, editor-in-Chief, *Magazine De Helling*, theologian and co-editor of *Green Values, Religion and Secularism* (also Chair), Nil Mutluer, head of the Sociology Department at Nisantasi University Istanbul and Benoit Monange, political scientist and project manager of *Fondation de l'Ecologie Politique*.

Public workshop to see if there was any interest in the topic among the Greens. About 40 people from different countries came. Philippe Lambert participated spontaneously as a MEP. The discussion focussed on two topics.

Firstly, whether religion is a private matter, on which Green parties do not need a point of view, or if religion is and should be part of the public forum. Some participants, particularly from the francophone countries, objected to the workshop as part of a political event, and insisted that in their view religion was a totally private matter. This was hotly contested by others. Most participants agreed that religion was both and individual and collective experience and could not be dismissed as a private matter.

This discussion brought up a second, much more personal discussion. Speakers from France, Finland, Belgium and the Netherlands told they didn't feel recognized as a religious person in her own Green parties, which are predominantly secular. The evening turned into personal storytelling, as people with a background of religious faith told how they felt excluded from bringing this part of themselves into their Green activities, yet that it was a crucial part of energising their Green activism.

One woman told that her coming out as a lesbian in a conservative Christian family was less difficult than her coming out as a Christian with the Greens. People told her for instance that she was too old to have an imaginative friend.

Statement: "Parties that defend minorities in public should also make space for their own minorities."

Two hours after this workshop we heard about the attacks in Paris that same night. Erica Meijers commented afterwards: "Our proposal to have more dialogue about religious and Green values to decrease polarization between secular and religious worldviews is undermined in a terrible way by these attacks. In the same time, the attacks make this dialogue more urgent than ever." This was recognized by several party leaders during the plenary meeting about the attacks on the following day.

EGP Council, Utrecht May 2016



Speakers: Meryem Almaci, president Groen! Flemish Green Party; Philippe Lamberts, MEP for Ecolo, Walloon Greens and co-president of the Green group in the European Parliament; Judith Sargentini, MEP for Groen-Links, NL and Ali Bas, member Nordrhein-Westfälischen Landtag, DE.

Chair: Marijn Bouwmeester, Bureau de Helling.

In a jam-packed room about 50 participants, partly the same as in previous EGP workshops, partly others, debated mostly on questions of religion in the public forum, education and the positions of immigrants.

Events per country

France

Since public meetings on religion and secularism became very difficult after the state of emergency had been proclaimed in November 2015 and prolonged after the publication of *Green Values, Religion and Secularism*, it has been shown to be impossible for the small Fondation de l'Ecologie Politique to organize a public event. Since the foundation recognizes the importance of the debate, especially the importance to debate the meaning of *laïcité* in France and the way it is being used (often to marginalize Muslims in society), it was decided to publish a French edition of the book in the beginning of 2017.

Great Britain

Seminar in Kellogg College, Oxford University July 2016.

Speakers: Nuala Ahern, Green Foundation Ireland; Jennifer Brown, Anglican Priest Oxford, Enrico Tezzo.

Chair: Miriam Kennet, Green Economics Institute UK.

The relation between Christian values and environmental care was an important topic of the meeting. The speakers debated about the question whether Christian values are an important source for ethical values, or whether the Christian theology of dominion over creation was responsible for the lack of environmental care in western societies. If we talk of stewardship instead of dominion, alliances between ecological movements and Christian communities are possible to engage in challenges such as climate change and environmental destruction.

The ethical basis of Buddhism of which compassion for human and economic life is an important part, can also contribute here, e.g by adopting mindfulness behaviour and giving less room to cognitive strategies, since they ignore the emotional and irrational nature of the human being. Socratic virtues in western tradition such as wisdom, justice, fortitude and restraint, or sustainability needs to be rediscovered. All these ideas give rise to a lively debate on humanistic and religious values related to a more sustainable way of living.

An important question that came up was what it is in human nature and or culture that stopped us doing what we know is right. Recommendations made at the end: we need to move beyond our dichotomies, overcome our tendency to binary, mechanical thinking and look at the dimension of relationality to all that is.

Greece

Seminar in Athens, July 2016.

Speakers: Nuala Ahern; Yiannis Paraskevopoulos, founding member of Ecologists Greens; Giorgos Dimaras, Member of Parliament for SY.RI.Z.A and member of the Ecologists Greens; Giorgos Kontogiorgis, professor of political science Panteion University; Antonis Papanizos, professor of Sociology of Religion, Panteion University.

Chair: Konstantinos Loukeris, teacher, political scientist, and former President of Green Institute Greece.

The main topic of the event was the separation of Church and State in Greece. This discussion dates back to the 1980's but there has been little progress on church and state separation. The presentations showed how established religion in Europe was used by the political powers over time and how the church attempted to intervene in the exercise of political goals. The church and the religious system sets the rules for what is correct and incorrect, just as the political systems defines what is considered legal and illegal. The issue of turning the power of the institution of the Church on a very realistic level, towards progressive goals was discussed. It was recognized that in Greece the institution of the Church has declined somewhat as people do not participate so much in everyday religious rituals. However it is still very important to them in their minds and crucial moments in their lives such as birth, marriage and death. The close connection of religion and nationalism in Greece and the entanglement of economic power and the church was noted.

In this context proposals included the utilization of the institution of the Church in a direction that would rescue our natural resources as the holistic approach that characterizes the ecological spirit is in line with the holistic concept of religious faith while the social role of the Church could present an ally for the State particularly during the current period of economic crisis.

Thus in Greece the Green movement could discuss when the church as a whole, or in different regions, could be an ally in its progressive goals, and when the church needed to be challenged, as on the issues of taxes for example. It was proposed that a conference could discuss these themes further in Panteion University in 2017.

Ireland



Book launch in Dublin, April 2016

Speakers: Erica Meijers, Bureau de Helling, Fr. Sean McDonagh.

Chair: Nuala Ahern, Green Foundation Ireland.

During this festive book launch the need for trust and democratic skills and values in our societies was emphasized, just like the importance of a critical view on our own (colonial) histories.

During this festive book launch Erica Meijers emphasised the need for trust and democratic skills and values in our societies as well as the importance of a critical view on our own (colonial) histories. Fr. Sean McDonagh who had been instrumental in drafting the papal encyclical on the environment *Laudato Si*, emphasised that the encyclical is intended to be ecumenical and that it is addressed to everyone, not just Roman Catholics; Pope Francis is saying we have all desecrated creation and is calling us to change our ways. *Laudato Si* was a powerful sign that the Roman Catholic church, with all its global influence, was strongly endorsing the environment as worthy of universal concern.

Seminar “Green values, religion, secularism, and the ethical basis for social and environmental action” in the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), November 2016

Speakers: Cathriona Russell, lecturer in environmental ethics TCD; All Hallows; Erica Meijers; Sorley McCaughey, director of advocacy at Christian Aid; Francis Duffy, Green party Councillor, lecturer and architect.

Chair: Ian Attack, professor of Peace Studies ISE.

The relation between values and public debate was showed to be very diverse. Erica Meijers pleaded for an open space in which we can meet the other, inspired by anti-Semitic and new interpretations of a story from the New Testament (Luke 18: 9-14); Francis Duffy gave an illustrated talk on his own experience as a Green councillor of how his values both as a Green and as a human being were important for his political work. Sorley McCaughey illustrated how the work of Christian Aid depended on Christian values, which were often not articulated clearly, to leave the space open for others to participate. Cathriona Russell said that it is unjust if the developed world consumes in a way that cannot be universalised; we require not only practical solutions to injustice but also to embrace a contemplative ecology which pays attention to the world with loving kindness; an ethic of justice through love can be found in Christianity; Buddhism; Confucianism; Daoism and other spiritual practice.

Netherlands



1. Dutch prepublication of eight of the Interviews of the book in a special of de Helling, magazine of Bureau de Helling, december 2015, with an essay of the philosopher Ger Groot.

2. Book launch during the New Year reception of the Linkerwang, Platform for politics and religion related to GroenLinks, the Dutch Green party, Utrecht January 2016.

Speakers: Ger Groot (keynote), professor philosophy Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam and columnist; Ruud Ganzevoort, Senator GroenLinks, (parting) president LinkerWang and professor in Practical Theology at the Free University in Amsterdam; Marjolein Meijer, president GroenLinks and Erica Meijers.

Chair: Tjeerd de Jong, member board LinkerWang.

The festive presentation of the publication to the president of the party was preceded by comments of the philosopher Ger Groot, who noticed an ambiguity in the perception of the human being by Green parties, being partly relational and critical about modernity, partly activist and typically modern. The party president confirmed the importance of the topic and the ongoing thinking about pluralism in Green and leftwing parties. In the same time she did not want to launch an official party debate on the topic, because 'religion is not a priority for our party'.

After this launch there were several interviews with Erica Meijers on Dutch national television and in magazines (see list of publications and press coverings)

3. Debate on 'Religious Diversity in Politics', organized by DWARS, youth Organisation of GroenLinks, Utrecht, June 2016.

Speaker: Erica Meijers

Chair: Noortje Blokhuis, DWARS.

During this evening we spoke about personal views on religion and secularism as well as on the question of how politics and religion should be discussed within the Green party and if the Young Greens had a role to play here. They organized a week on religion in November, so the evening has inspired them to discuss religion and politics more. There was a huge variety in opinions, which made a very lively debate.

4. Workshop Hogeschool Windesheim Zwolle on Religious in the Public Forum for theological students, Zwolle June 2016.

Speaker: Erica Meijers.

Chair: Kimberley Ring, student Hogeschool.

After an introduction on the Publication, the students debated in small groups on different topics of the book. Afterwards there was a plenary debate. The students came from very different (Christian) backgrounds, from Roman Catholic to Orthodox Protestant and Evangelistic. The debate was chaired by the only secular student of the group.

5. A debate on 'Religion: restraint or remedy', with different politicians on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Linker Wang, platform on religion and politics related to GroenLinks, the Green Dutch Party, Utrecht, October 2016.

This debate was part of a seminar which lasted a whole day on the same topic.



Speakers: Naïma Azough, journalist, reporter on the prevention of extremism and former MP GroenLinks in the Dutch Parliament; Janneke Stegeman, theologian and staff member of cultural debating centre 'De Nieuwe Liefde'; Rien Fraanje, director of the political foundation of the Christian Democratic Party in the Netherlands; Nieke Jansen, theologian, profile manager at Landstede (professional training institute) and leader of the Green group in her hometown Kampen.

Chair: Erica Meijers.

After a personal introduction of every speaker, different issues were discussed, like the growing contempt for religion in the public forum, the mistrust of Islam and the topical debate on euthanasia, about which there is a new proposal to make euthanasia possible without the until now existing condition of unbearable suffering. The debate is about the question when we can speak of a 'completed live'. At the end of the debate the whole audience (about 80 people) formulated a resolution in which the Green group in parliament is asked to make a vote possible in which every member of the group can vote from his or her own conviction.

6. Workshop NWO (Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research) on Politicising of Religion in science and policymaking in The Hague, November 2016.

Speakers: Erica Meijers and Martijn de Koning, social scientist from the University of Amsterdam, doing research on 'Globalising Culture and the Quest for Belonging'.

Chair: Thijl Sunnier, full professor in cultural anthropology, esp. 'the Islam in European Societies' at the Free University Amsterdam.

Erica Meijers presented our publication and its backgrounds, while Martijn de Koning talked about the way his research on Islam is hindered by the political interpretation of religion. Afterwards different issues were discussed about the way politics and religion can be intertwined in such a way that academic research becomes difficult. Some liberal Muslim students doing research on Islamic law, are forbidden by the university to take part in the public debate, to protect them and their research from being bashed. The debate is becoming very polarized and politics should protect research and make an open debate possible.

Northern Ireland

Seminar 'Religion, humanism and the ethical basis for political activism', organized by the Green Foundation Ireland, at Queen's University Belfast, July 2016.

Speakers: Erica Meijers (keynote) and Nuala Ahern; panel with: Tanya Jones, Politician, Green Party Northern Ireland; Brian Ashworth, Pastor, Kingdom Harvest Church; Terry Mosely, Northern Ireland Humanist Association; Matt Williams, Adjunct Lecturer, Union Theological College & Youthlink Northern Ireland and Peter Doran, lecturer International Institute for Sustainable Development, Queens University Belfast,

Chair: John Barry, professor of Green Economy, Queen's University.

John Barry opened the seminar by noting that the publication of *Green Values, Religion and Secularism* was a recognition of the need to take seriously the religious dimension of public life which continued to shape even 'secular' practice in many, often positive, ways.

Erica Meijers presented a paper called 'Critique of Heaven and Earth' in which she interpreted the view on Religion and Politics by Karl Marx. She said that the observation that the Enlightenment project embodied in the French Revolution should not be taken for granted.

It should not be presented as completed, since it has only been realised on a political level, not on the level of society as a whole. The way the populist right tend to use the Enlightenment as a fixed project against religion (especially against Islam) cannot be justified.

The Panel Debate involved five participants, who, by way of opening the discussion, were each invited to make a brief response to the issues raised during the day and the book in particular. Tanya Jones made an impassioned plea for a consideration of our common humanity and the need for it to direct our political project in the face of destructive and often oppressive policies. Brian Ashworth set out to encourage a more appreciative attitude towards the participatory democracy that operates in N-Ireland. Terry Mosely called for a renewed attention to the wonder of nature and humanity in all of their complexity, arguing that this positive stance, not a dismissal of religious belief, forms the basis of humanist thought and engagement in Green issues in particular. Matt Williams pointed out that biblically, Christianity can be seen to encourage public, rigorous, and non-violent engagement. Peter Doran took Michel Foucault as an example of somebody thoroughly opposed to religion in its dominant institutionalised form, but who saw the importance of a connection with the self through the earth that could be engaged with through spiritual practice.

Poland



Debate on the relation between progressive political powers and religion. Do have to be against religiosity when you are progressive? Can we build alliances for some specific causes and disagree in others? Organised by the Polish Green Foundation, Warsaw October 2016.

Speakers: Erica Meijers, Adam Ostolski, lecturer at the Institute of Sociology at the University of Warsaw, co-chair of the Green Party in Poland and member of the board of the Magazine *Krytyka Polityczna*; Łukasz Skurczyński, journalist, theologian and member of the (very small) Evangelical Reformed Church of Poland; Tomasz Piątek, publicist in *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

Chair: Mateusz Luft, journalist *Kontakt Magazine*.

The event took place during the days of women protest against the abortion law in Poland, which made the strategy of the protesters to an important topic. What alliances are possible between political parties and religion? Political parties should not cooperate with religious institutions, argued Adam Ostolski, but individuals of all religions are welcome, since 'we have to activate and respect all the motivations, which inspire peoples hospitality and caring for the planet.' In his opinion, shallow secularism cannot be the answer to the challenges of modern times. The language of civilization and religious values has been taken over by the right. The role of the left should be to give a voice to people whose rights are denied.

Different examples of positive contributions of religion to progressive politics were mentioned, like the struggle against apartheid by Christians, the rich eco-theological tradition in protestant churches, animal rights in Buddhism and the initial meaning of ritual slaughter, aiming originally at respecting animals as much as possible.

Negative connections between politics and religion were also discussed, like terrorism by extremist Muslims. Meijers argued that the processes of radicalisation in Europe should not be looked from the point of view of religion, but as a result of constant political and social rejection of immigrants.

Other topics discussed by the panel: how strictly should the separation of church and state be; is the ecological encyclical *Laudato si* by Pope Francis a sign of real change in the Roman Catholic Church? Are the monotheistic religions not to be rejected by women for their patriarchal attitude which is rationalistic and disrespectful of the female body and sexuality?

Turkey

A seminar in cooperation with the department of sociology of the Nişantaşı University Istanbul was foreseen in 2015, but the political developments in Turkey made it impossible to realize this plan in 2016. Nil Mutluer and the Green Foundation Turkey were not able to work on this project.

4. Conclusions



Conclusions

Green Values, Religion and Secularism and their relationship to each other are important to the Green movement. The readiness of the participating political foundations to work with us on these themes show this, and we also encountered great interest from party members, activists and politicians. However, the subject has proved to be a difficult theme for the Green movement in Europe. There is diffidence when it comes to debating questions revolving around religion and spirituality. Although most Greens agree that it is not sufficient to proclaim the necessity of a separation of Church and State and the freedom of religion, they find it difficult to take a clear stand in such questions as ritual slaughtering or the presence of religious symbols in the public forum.

This is precisely the reason why we should discuss these questions: were exactly lay the limits between state and religion; is it or is it not desirable at all to draw a clear line here? A separation of Church and State does not mean a defence of the visibility of religion in the public forum, but where are the limits, if any? How do we give space to religions that are relatively unknown to a large part of the population and that are poorly represented within the Greens as well? Do we as Greens and leftists have a bias against religion? When is mistrust against religion justified? In a changing society, these questions – which often touch our personal history and our emotions – cannot be avoided by Green parties.

It was never an objective of this project to solve any of the questions raised in the realm of values, religion and secularism. The aim of the project was twofold: in the first place find out what the most important issues regarding religion and secularism were for the Green foundations working together; secondly to put those questions on the agenda of the Green movement as a whole.

To start with the first one, the most important conclusion is that there is an enormous variety in questions and approaches of the relation between religion and secularism within the European Green galaxy. This seems obvious, but we often forget about it, tending to speak in a general way of 'religion' and 'secularism'. The diversity shown in the book underline the importance of listening to each other and of being as precise as possible when we talk about religion. There is not one (hi)story, and there is not one answer either. Every situation and every context deserves our careful attention before we come with a judgement or a solution. It could be argued that there is no European Green position possible when it comes to questions of religion and secularism, and that might be true. But exchanging experiences and stories can help us to understand our own context better and see more clearly where the pitfalls lie. There are also issues such as religion and schooling, which is a topic to be decided by the member states; and ritual slaughter, which is an issues for the EU as a whole, since EU standards are being discussed by the European institutions.

We have listed the most important topics in the chapter on 'emerging themes', so we will not go into them again here. It is clear that they need further clarification and investigation. During the project, we found several experts and academics that were more than ready to work together with Green parties to do this. Trinity College Dublin and Panteion University Athens are two universities which have said that the wish to hold conferences on the topics raised by the publication.

The second aim was to put those questions on the agenda of the Green movement in Europe. Well, we did, as the list of events shows. While Scholars, activists and especially young people are very eager to debate religion and politics, it was more difficult to mobilize political parties and politicians to participate in these events, although their input is very much welcomed. It must be said that it is not easy to articulate questions about religion and secularism in a political way. But since our society is made up with people who have changing views on the world and their place in it, new religious movements and insights touch the way our society functions. Therefore, political questions related to religion have to be put forward and explored; this can help us as Green parties to take a clear stand on many urgent issues.

Green parties however, – and they are no exception - are still inclined to stand back from topics involving religious and spiritual attitudes. There is a fear of the topic of religion that is not so easy to overcome. One year with debates and seminars is not enough to change this. Therefore we hope that the recommendations in this report are looked at very seriously by the European Green Party, the Green European Foundation and national foundations and parties. Religion will not disappear from our societies, nor from our political agendas. We need to take seriously the challenges that it brings, rather than giving a superficial and unreflecting response.

In this sections we present a few statements and recommendations for Green Parties on the topics that were most debated in the book and during the events. They are meant as an impetus towards furthering the debate, both on a European level and nationally. More ideas can be extracted from the book. After the general recommendations, we propose some important fields for research and debate.

5. Recommendations and topics for further research and discussion



General Recommendations

Religion is diverse and has a different position and history everywhere. Political parties and politicians should take care not to speak in a general way about religion, but to be precise on the definition they use. If one definition of religion prevails over others this can harm minority groups.

Secularism is a notion which has a lot of different meanings in different contexts. Political parties should be as precise as possible about their definition and interpretation of the term, especially in international discussions. Religion is a battlefield. Political parties should inform themselves carefully before taking a stand in issues regarding religion and religious communities.

If topics come up in which religion play a role, take up contact with the communities involved before taking a stand. Discern clearly between questions of Church and State on the one hand, and discussion on Religion and Politics in the public arena on the other.

Religion in the Public Forum

Exchange views internationally among Greens to have a clear view of where you see the limits for religious symbols in public life (if any), ranging from the cloths of judges to schoolteachers and pupils, bus drivers and regular citizens.

Do more research on the concept of secularism (*laïcité*) and what it means exactly. Prevent it from being used as a means to marginalize minorities (e.g. Muslims) in society.

Defend the importance of the public forum in society, where every citizen can express himself freely and where people with different background scan actually meet and work together.

Religion in Society

Do research as Greens to map the different educational systems and organize a Green congress in which those different approaches are compared, to exchange best practices and develop some Green principles on education and spiritual or religious or ethical education. Investigate the way Greens look at the concept of emancipation and how it relates to religious and secular concepts of individual development. What different (and new) strategies of emancipation (e.g. of women and LHTBQ+) can be found in our society? How do they relate to the existing ideas on emancipation within the Greens? Take action to build bridges between the Greens and minority groups by inviting them to meetings, congresses, as party members, and organize events or manifestations together. Minority groups are also vulnerable within Green parties, whether they are secular or religious. Develop and defend a policy on plurality and democracy, in which religion is included.

Look for alliances with religious groups and communities, for instance on topics like the defence of refugees and the struggle against poverty.

Religion and Ecology

Both ecological activist and religious people often see the human being as a relational being, not as the centre of the universe. By doing research or organizing a seminar on the Green view on the human being, new alliances can be made and colliding views on the human being, playing a role in a lot of Green debates on for instance technology and climate change, can be clarified. Organize meetings with religious groups on climate change or other ecological issues to find out if there is any common ground and if cooperation is possible.

Religion and Green parties

Follow the German Commission on Religion and State in their points of departure for debates on religion and state: to work towards the realisation of religious freedom as a human right in all its dimensions; the individual right to live your faith; the right to abandon your faith, and finally the collective freedom of religion.

Organize a party event or a debate during a party council on questions related to religion, without having to pass a resolution. Make space for an open debate without having the pressure of a decision to stimulate empathy for the different outlooks on life in the party. This can be proven valuable when topics come up where a decision is needed.

Organize your own party in a way that there is space for minorities; develop technics of discussions and decision making to guarantee their voices are heard. Set up a platform or advisory board for questions related to religion and secularism with participants from different religious and secular traditions. Set up an European commission to exchange views and information with other European parties about the views in other contexts, especially if the same topic is at stake (like abortion, ritual slaughtering etc.)

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