



Religious diversity in Europe: The challenges of past and present

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This book assesses historical and contemporary representations of religious diversity in Europe and how the past is mediated to the present and future generations. Indeed, present-day representations of this issue often invoke and refer to the past. Europe has a troubled history with religion, as manifested, for example, in the Wars of Religion. Nevertheless, Europeans have also learned to live together, and perhaps this was more often the case than we assume. In order to properly understand and grasp the full significance of contemporary representations of religion, we must also therefore have a reasonable understanding of the past. This chapter briefly outlines some of the salient features of Europe's long and complex history of religious coexistence and toleration, less as a yardstick to measure the accuracy of historical representations – though this objective, even if never fully attainable, is not entirely absent – and more as a means of comprehending and historically contextualizing these contemporary representations. It not only looks at Europe as the original centre of (or heir to) Christendom, but also explores the experiences of al-Andalus and the Ottoman Empire. Throughout this chapter, we will be focusing not only on practices and attitudes but also on the norms, beliefs and values held by a diverse set of actors and institutions.

A history of (in)tolerance, war and peace-making

'We have learned that tolerance is the soul of Europe,' the German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared at a ceremony to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation on 31 October 2017, in Wittenberg (Merkel 2017). The place and timing of the statement suggest that she was mainly referring to religious toleration, without excluding tolerance in other walks of life.²

The underlying idea is that tolerance is Europe's answer to its remarkable diversity, an idea that is also expressed in the European Union's (EU's) motto, 'Unity in Diversity', which it adopted in 2005. It is perhaps worth pausing for a moment to look at these two assumptions. Is Europe really so diverse? Compared to South and Southeast Asia with their multitude of languages, ethnicities and religions, one may wonder. In fact, rather than being particularly diverse, one could argue that Europe, if anything,

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is obsessed with a drive towards unity and has an innate fear of diversity (Pasture 2015). From that perspective, perhaps the opposite is true: that *intolerance* lies at the heart of Europe's soul. The origins of this intolerance lie in the particular history of Christendom, in which an intense alliance was forged between church and state and their interests became closely aligned. It also explains why Europe never completely endorsed freedom of religion in the way the United States did – after all, tolerance is not the opposite of intolerance (although calling it its *counterfeit*, as Thomas Paine did, may be overstating it as well) (Paine 1791: 78).

The learning process invoked basically refers to the tolerance that allegedly emerged after the Wars of Religion. According to the standard narrative, these wars ended with the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which ushered in a new, stable European order based on sovereign states with fixed territorial boundaries, the 'Westphalian model' that is still referred to in most textbooks and analyses of the international system. It was also responsible, so the story goes, for the rise of religious toleration, for which the Enlightenment is mainly credited. Both narratives are highly problematic historically. The alleged Westphalian order, for example, is a nineteenth-century myth that describes an idealized political model that has no basis in the actual peace treaties or in political practice. Neither did it bring an end to religious violence, certainly not if one takes a pan-European perspective (e.g. Nexon 2009: 265–88). And as for its contribution to the rise of toleration, arguments in favour of religious freedom and tolerance had been formulated by various thinkers long before the Enlightenment, including Christian ones.³

The narrative furthermore ignores Europe's non-Christian and particularly Islamic pasts, and thus implicitly equates Europe with the history of Christendom, excluding other religions (Asad 2003). In this chapter, we will be focusing on how both Christendom and Europe's Islamic empires dealt with religious diversity, offering examples of their 'tolerance' and intolerance, and discussing their different ways of living together. While Classical Antiquity is usually associated with a tolerant attitude towards religious diversity (notwithstanding the persecution of Christians) (Marcos 2018), Christendom is notorious for its intolerance which goes back to the recognition of Christianity as a state religion in the late Roman Empire (Edict of Thessalonica in 380 AD). This also applies to the Christian kingdoms that were constituted in Western Europe in the Early Middle Ages, although at that stage religion appears to have been more of a social commitment than a belief system, and society seems to have been far more open to foreigners and religious diversity than in later times (Classen 2018; see also Brown 2013). It was not until the eleventh or twelfth centuries that Europe turned into a 'persecuting society' (Moore 2006). With few exceptions, European states demanded adherence to Catholicism as a sign of obedience (even though the different interpretations of religion allowed for considerable variation in practice).

The fear of diversity applied, among others, to 'heretics' as well as pagans and 'infidels', which explains why non-Christian advisors or experts (doctors, astronomers, mathematicians, etc.) were rarely to be found at European courts. Likewise, non-Christian merchants in Medieval and Early Modern Europe hardly travelled inland. This even extended to the Arabs, great travellers and merchants who in Asia and Africa ventured far beyond Islamic territories. Jews, however, could be found throughout



Christendom since Roman times. Though often harassed and persecuted, they were respected as people of the 'Old Covenant' and enjoyed the protection of canon law even if they were also condemned for their rejection of the New Covenant (*Sicut iudaei*, c. 1120) (Levy 2016). Sometimes they enjoyed royal protection in exchange for loyalty and for their services as moneylenders and scholars. Especially when Europe became more urbanized and moved towards more organized feudal states, however, Jews became systematically and massively persecuted. In 1290 they were expelled from England, and later also from France and Spain after the Reconquista (Moore 2000; [1987] 2006; see also Kaplan 2007: 294–330; Nirenberg 1996, 2014). Romani, although mostly Christians, faced similar difficulties. Itinerant descendants of military clans from northern India, they arrived in Europe in the fourteenth century, as wandering vagrants, tolerated sometimes with fascination, but more often despised, persecuted and expelled (Taylor 2014).

There were nevertheless times and places in Christendom, such as medieval Sicily, Hungary (between c. 1200 and c. 1300) and Christian Spain (until c. 1500), in which Muslims and Christians lived together in (relative) peace, and Catholic monarchs recognized Muslims as legitimate citizens, granting them a similar status to that afforded to Christians in Muslim countries (Catlos 2014). Resisting calls from the hierarchy to impose religious uniformity, the Catholic kings of the Polish-Lithuanian Union in 1368 granted religious freedom to all: Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, Shamanistic and Islamic Tatars (who settled in Lithuania in the fourteenth century), and increasingly Christian dissidents or heretics, such as Hussites, Lutherans, Calvinists and Anabaptists. It would be wrong though to consider the Polish kings as 'enlightened' advocates of religious freedom, as their power was tightly restrained by the powerful nobility (Forst 2018).

Tolerance beyond Christendom

While in Christendom most of the time 'infidels' and heretics were persecuted, the situation in Europe's Muslim areas appears different. Although the history of the Islamic view on religious diversity is complex and varied from one place to the next and at different times in history, in Medieval and Early Modern times Muslim states adopted Islam as the state religion, while not only tolerating and protecting, but also discriminating against other religions to varying degrees.

The Umayyads conquered Visigoth Spain in the eighth century. In addition to instituting the *Sharia* as the political and judicial fundament of the state, they also laid the ground for a brilliant Arabic-Islamic culture. Non-Muslims received protection in return for paying a *jizya* (religious tax). They were nevertheless held in a subordinate position and were limited in what they could and could not do. They were also compelled to wear cultural markers that set them apart from the Muslims. They could not proselytize because for Muslims apostasy was punishable by death. The degree of protection and discrimination varied over time such that in the twelfth century non-Muslims were even banished (although in practice most stayed while enduring harsher discrimination) and although pogroms of Christians and especially Jews did occur, they remained rare compared to Christian Europe. In fact Christians and Jews

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were able to make significant contributions to the blossoming of arts and sciences. The conquest of al-Andalus by the Catholic monarchs eventually put an end to this relative toleration. Although initially a system of coexistence developed that was similar to that applied in al-Andalus, recognizing the right of Muslims to emigrate or to remain subject to restrictions (see Chapter 8 of this book), intolerance soon prevailed after the fall of the last independent Muslim state on the Iberian Peninsula, the Nasrid kingdom (Emirate) of Granada in January 1492. The Jews were expelled almost immediately in March 1492, and in the following decades Muslims were also forced to convert or emigrate; the Inquisition ruthlessly persecuted alleged false conversions. In 1609, converted Muslims (*Moriscos*) were also expelled. While some Jewish entrepreneurs set up businesses in major Western European ports such as Bordeaux, Livorno and Amsterdam, most Jews escaped to North Africa or the Ottoman Empire, where they were welcomed with open arms. Some found refuge in Poland-Lithuania (Kaplan 2007).

The Ottoman Empire, which from the fourteenth century onwards expanded across Eastern Europe and reached its maximum extent in 1683 at the gates of Vienna, was in effect a multireligious state in which diversity was 'managed' rather than suppressed; similar to al-Andalus or the Ancient Roman, the Russian and the Mongol Empires, the Ottomans believed that toleration contributed to internal peace and stability and was beneficial to the welfare of the empire. While guaranteeing the supremacy of Islam as the rock on which the state was built, they largely followed local customs of organization and granted certain freedoms, including freedom of worship, to the many religious and cultural minorities, albeit in exchange for the payment of religious taxes and the observance of certain codes of conduct under which Muslims were treated differently from those of other creeds. The specific degree of protection, liberty and discrimination varied widely across the empire, depending on the particular time, political context and the changes in the interpretation of Ottoman law. Although until the mid-seventeenth century the Ottomans sometimes captured Christian boys to raise them as Muslim soldiers in the elite corps of the Janissaries (where they could rise to the highest position in the empire), for most 'infidels' Ottoman rule was to be preferred over Catholic suzerainty, as in the Habsburg Empire. The Greek-Orthodox Church even enjoyed a privileged position at the centre of Ottoman power: it was allowed to levy its own taxes and the patriarch was appointed by the sultan. The Ottomans welcomed Jews as well as Christian refugees of all sorts, fleeing from the Wars of Religion. Although not always actively encouraged by the sultans, some non-Muslims did convert to Islam. Conversion in the opposite direction, however, was effectively prohibited, as it was everywhere else in the Muslim world. Overall an 'ecumenism of everyday life' existed, although from the late sixteenth century onwards a process of 'Ottoman confessionalization' (Tijana Krstić) took place, along similar lines to post-Reformation Christendom (see Gara 2017 for a brilliant discussion of the literature; also Barkey 2008: 110–11).

While in Christian Europe, Islam figured prominently in apocalyptic visions and the Ottoman invasions still haunt the imagination of the old Habsburg lands, the wars were more a clash of empires than faiths. Ottoman armies, for example, had a considerable number of Christian soldiers, even in positions of command (Almond 2009: 151–80). In spite of initial papal opposition, the French and the English



concluded lasting alliances with the Ottoman Turks. Religion did not stand in the way of trade either. In fact, a rich imaginary of Islam as Europe's 'other' existed which was threatening to be sure, but at times also very much admired (Malcolm 2019).

European Christendom between toleration and genocide

Although most wars in Europe's turbulent history had other origins, religion only slowly ceased to be a major issue during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Kaplan 2007). Overall the authority of secular powers over the different religions was reinforced: Protestant Churches became state or 'national' churches in Protestant countries, while the monarch's authority over the church in Catholic states also increased. However, secular authorities also supported concerted efforts by the different confessions (churches) to impose orthodoxy (Ocker 2018; Nexon 2009; Gorski 2000). These campaigns achieved mixed results however: all authority was somewhat tainted and people had learned to think for themselves, particularly in Protestant areas (Marshall 2018).

In practice, therefore, limited multi-confessionalism, or 'tolerated diversity', became the norm in most of Europe. The American historian Wayne P. Te Brake (2017) distinguishes a plethora of different arrangements to secure peace after religious war. In reality, however, in most of these, religious homogeneity remained the ideal and the solution often tried to put this ideal into practice, albeit symbolically, for example, by imposing segregation, repression or, by contrast, partial integration of dissidents (involving restrictions on the public expression of religion). Sometimes other solutions were reached in which one church was favoured over others, or in which two, or more, different churches were granted equal status, or which included diverse forms of 'ad hoc tolerance' (Te Brake 2017; see also Kaplan 2007; Friedeburg 2011). But they never encompassed all churches, excluding new and radical religious communities.

Two of the states that became best known for their tolerant attitude towards religion were the Polish-Lithuanian Union and the Dutch Republic. The Dutch respected freedom of conscience and everyone was free to believe what they wanted in private, but the extent to which these beliefs could be practised in public depended on many factors. Commercial interests came before confessional concerns. Jews in Amsterdam were allowed to build a huge synagogue, but they could not join the guilds. Catholics were considered a liability, as were Anabaptists, and could at most practise their faith in 'hidden churches'. Elsewhere in Europe religious freedom was more restricted, although in many places mixed communities found ways of living together, mostly peacefully. In some, this meant living 'together apart', in separate communities. For Jews, and in very rare instances also Muslims, this implied living in a ghetto, a measure which also afforded them a degree of protection (Safley 2011; Kaplan 2007).

One should also emphasize that the general trend was not necessary towards extending toleration and when rulers felt strong enough, they rolled it back, as was the case of King Louis XIV of France, who in 1685 repealed the Edict of Nantes of 1598 that had granted religious freedom to Protestants. The dialectic between tolerance and persecution was played out in full in the British Isles, leading to the emergence of ideas

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about civil and religious liberty and later to the extension of the freedom of worship to Nonconformists in 1689 (Toleration Act), which paved the way for 'Protestant pluralism' (Coffey 2000; Stevens 2018; Walsham 2008; Worden 2013).

Tolerance emerged mainly to guarantee a stable and peaceful political order and to maximize the contribution of all towards economic and political prosperity. But it was also advanced on philosophical grounds. The most radical proponents of religious freedom were members of the Radical Reformation such as Thomas Helweys and Roger Williams, who claimed that God was an advocate of separate religious and secular powers and of full religious freedom. Many of their arguments in favour of religious freedom were based on the ideas of ancient church fathers such as Tertullian and Lactantius as well as Medieval thinkers. More moderate theologians, such as the Swiss Reformed theologian Thomas Erastus, advocated that a strong monarch acting as God's representative should grant religious freedom in order to guarantee peace and stability. Increasingly, 'Enlightened' philosophers expressed doubts about the validity of religious claims altogether (Forst 2011; Laursen and Nederman 1998; Wilken 2019; Sorkin 2008; Zagorin 2003). Together with freedom of thought, they also called for control over the churches and over the Catholic Church in particular. Some Catholic thinkers actually welcomed the prospect of 'modernizing' the church (Lehner 2016). Enlightened monarchs followed suit. Emperor Joseph II of Austria, for example, issued a Toleration Edict in 1781–2 allowing Lutherans, Calvinists, Orthodox and Jews to hold private religious ceremonies.

The American Revolution, in response to the actual pluralism that had emerged in the New World and inspired by a mixture of Radical Reformation, Evangelical and Enlightened ideas, went even further and imposed the separation of church and state and religious freedom in the newly established United States of America (although a Christian nationalist current emerged which argued that the United States had been founded on Christian principles (Green 2010; Haselby 2015)).⁴ In Europe the French Revolution adopted the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789), which declared that all sovereignty originated with the people, and introduced freedom of opinion and religion. However, while pursuing a policy of active de-Christianization of state and society, the revolutionaries went so far as to create an alternative secular state religion (The Cult of Reason). The latter proved premature and soon afterwards Napoleon reinstated the Catholic Church as the 'majority church', although he maintained the freedom of religion. The Congress of Vienna (1815) restored the Ancien Régime while modernizing the international order; in the process the power balance between church and state was tipped a little further in favour of the latter.

Secular Christendom in context

In the nineteenth century, religion apparently faded as political drive, class, ethnicity and nation came to the fore (see e.g. McLeod 2000; McLeod and Ustorf 2003; Hempton and McLeod 2017). Nevertheless, religion remained an important social and political factor in much of Europe and continued to impact upon the state, so giving rise to 'secular Christendom'. From the 1860s onwards nation and religion became

increasingly intermingled. In continental Western Europe in the 1870s–90s conflicts arose between secularists and both the Reformed and (especially) the Catholic Church, which actively opposed liberal values and ideas of self-determination, democracy and sovereignty. In France this resulted in the separation between church and state and the obligation of the state to remain ‘neutral’ (*laïcité*), while more informal separations between church and state took hold in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria (the Habsburg Empire) and, eventually, also Italy. Confessional political parties in these countries took on the defence of church interests, supporting their claims to remain active in education, social and health care. Secularists acted as a different ‘confession’ but pursuing an agenda of political secularization (Weir 2014). Different convictional movements constituted competing life-worlds, sometimes developing into extensive ‘pillarized’ communities in which ‘believers’ were nourished ‘from the cradle to the grave’ (Kaiser and Clark 2003; Hellemans 1990, 2020). After the First World War, the Vatican regained political clout as an international political actor, establishing concordats with various countries to secure the interests of the church (Chamedes 2019).

In the 1920s and 1930s, a period of strong political polarization between right and left, churches across Europe largely came down on the side of authoritarianism, Fascism and even Nazism. The Vatican actively and successfully promoted authoritarian Catholic confessional states, as happened in Hungary, Poland, Austria, Portugal and Spain, among others. This also encouraged anti-Semitism, particularly because Jews were branded as communists and secularists. At the same time, however, some Christian movements and individuals developed theologies and practices that upheld democracy and liberty (Chamedes 2019; Chappel 2018; Conway 2006; Hanebrink 2006, 2018; Weir 2015).

Meanwhile since the eighteenth century, conflicts emerged in the Ottoman Empire between Muslims and non-Muslims as a result of the latter’s better economic and commercial connections with the burgeoning European economies. This led to more closed, ‘bounded’ ethno-religious identities, and each religious community was given a degree of autonomy to regulate its own affairs (often referred to as the ‘millet-system’, although it was never as systematic as imagined). Tensions were further fuelled by Western European economic success and religious-political interventions by Russia and other European empires in defence of Christian minorities. The Ottomans reacted by ‘modernizing’ and centralizing their state apparatus (Tanzimat Reforms, 1838–76), although in the end this only heightened the frictions between the ethno-religious communities. The introduction of religious equality introduced religious freedom, including for Christian missionaries, but stripped the minorities as well as the Muslim majority of their communal privileges, provoking frustration among all. For their part, the educational reforms fostered a spirit of competition and rivalry between ethnic and religious communities. Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) in contrast promoted a modern Pan-Islamist ideology as the common source of identity for the empire, at the expense of non-Muslims. The Young Turks in the twentieth century reacted by formulating a secularist-nationalist alternative. This also failed to unite the various different populations and resulted in the ‘genocide’ of the Armenians. The new nation states that emerged in the wake of the disintegrating empire similarly tried to establish

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a common identity based on the fusion of religion and nation. Once again, the most common result was more suffering and death. The relatively peaceful coexistence that had existed between ethnic and religious communities in the Ottoman Empire was erased from memory and replaced by one of discrimination and conflict (Barkey 2008: 277–97; Gara 2017; Mazower 2000; Hajdarpasić 2008; Todorova 1997: 180).

It would be a mistake, however, to limit religious nationalism in Europe to the Balkans. Increasingly churches associated themselves with nations, while the new nation states and nation-empires themselves began to exorcise minorities (see e.g. Wood 2016; Weitz 2008). In spite of this, in most of Central and Western Europe nationalism in the nineteenth- and twentieth century appears more secular. Most Protestant countries retained their state churches, albeit merely symbolically, leaving room for religious dissent. This did not vaccinate them against racism however. The call for ethnic (and religious) homogenization in Germany and other parts of Central Europe ultimately culminated in the genocide of Jews and Romani. It is clear that the underlying anti-Judaism leading to the Holocaust was part of a centuries-old European tradition. However, anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism received a new impulse in the nineteenth century through scientific racism, which impregnated secular ideologies at least as much as religious ones, most of all National Socialism in Germany, but also Marxism-Leninism in the USSR.

Meanwhile Christian churches, albeit with certain ambiguities, supported European imperialism and colonialism, and its underlying racist ideology. Nevertheless, respect for other religions in the colonies began to emerge in the late nineteenth century, first in Protestant, and later also in Catholic missionary circles. They also gave local people leadership roles in the local churches, and gradually and to varying degrees distanced themselves from colonialism. This allowed them to survive and even expand after decolonization.

The Second World War signalled the end of empire in Europe (although it took fifteen more years to acknowledge that colonial empires were also doomed), giving way to more homogenous nation states. The idea that ethnic and religious diversity constituted a risk for stability and peace remained strong initially, and the new nation states idealized ethnic and religious homogeneity (Ther 2015). The communists in Eastern Europe pursued their own purification politics by oppressing religion, which was considered divisive for both class and state interests. Forced secularization and ethnic and religious assimilation policies went hand in hand in communist countries, such as Bulgaria where the communist regime imposed dire measures on Muslims and Romani. Elsewhere in communist Europe religious freedom was also suppressed, even in Yugoslavia, which, in spite of this, largely retained its multireligious character (Mazower 2000: 116–42).

A new start?

After the Second World War, Western Europe tried to distance itself from its tumultuous past in a different way. Most countries adopted the European Convention of Human Rights, which protected religious freedom as an *individual* human right

and provided for the creation of a European Court of Human Rights to enforce its principles (albeit initially excluding the colonies). The freedom to believe, which included changing religion, and respect for the autonomy of religious institutions in matters of internal organization and doctrine became important features of state-church relations in Western Europe. Nevertheless, the impact of religion on politics and society remained high, as seen by the fact that the Cold War was presented as a conflict between secular materialism and Christian humanism (Betts 2020: 125–72). The Catholic Church continued its anti-communist crusade, backing authoritarian regimes in Spain and Portugal, while only belatedly accepting democracy elsewhere (Chamedes 2019: 265–9; Chappel 2018: 144ff.; Müller 2011: 132–43). Although Western European nation states emphasized their autonomy vis-à-vis the churches, multiple ties remained and Christian Democracy emerged as the most powerful political movement in continental Western Europe. The ‘pillars’ – which organized people into separate sociopolitical ‘mental worlds’ according to their world view (Hellemans 2020) – blossomed and, in the case of Christian pillars, were financed by official church taxes or even state subsidies. In Protestant countries with a state church, however, the monarchs – as formal heads of the state and the church – abstained from interfering in ecclesiastical affairs, limiting their role to confirming any decisions with regards to church organization and dogma. In the UK, a pluralistic model of church-state relations emerged in which diversity is valued as a source of national identity. One manifestation of this is that public servants are allowed to wear religious symbols (Ferrari 2013; see also Roy 2017):

Although religion was at the heart of a lasting conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, in general Christian churches set out on a path of reconciliation and ecumenism, thereby reversing the mutual antagonism that had previously characterized their relations, as well as the anti-Semitism that had been part of Christian culture until 1945. Although late compared to Protestant churches, perhaps the most stunning *volte-face* was that of the Catholic Church which around the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962–5) cast off the anti-modernist approach that it had adopted a century earlier and accepted political and religious freedom, although in fact the church maintained its claims upon the truth and the obligation of the state to support it (see esp. Schindler and Healy 2015).

While the political reshaping of Europe after the Second World War and in particular the breakthrough of the nation state created smaller but culturally more homogenous political spaces, this homogeneity has since been shattered by at least three different processes, which are largely unrelated but do interact, and are significant with regards to religious coexistence: secularization, or rather the de-Christianization of politics and society; ‘Easternization’ or, more broadly, the impact of New Age and new spiritualities; and immigration of people with other faiths.

De-Christianization refers above all to the declining impact of Christian churches on society, especially since the late 1950s, affecting politics and moral and social life. It was also manifested in declining adherence to churches and participation in traditional Christian rituals and practices. In communist countries, the state, while in theory recognizing religious freedom, in practice actively promoted atheism and discriminated against religions, limiting their ways of expression and barring religious

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people from promotion at work. In Western Europe this decline happened more spontaneously, although particularly in France secularism was also actively promoted (Stanley 2018: 79–101). Although the debate on causes is still open, rising educational levels and prosperity increased the autonomy and liberty of individuals: it was no accident that especially young women took on a vanguard role (Brown 2001; McLeod 2010). From the 1980s onwards the ‘pillarized’ systems eroded; in Italy Christian Democracy collapsed. In Germany, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands the ‘pillars’ largely remained intact, although their ideological sharpness became increasingly blurred (Hellemans 1990, 2020). French ideas about political secularism – the alleged ‘neutrality’ of the state – widely spread over Western Europe, leading to what Joseph Weiler (2005) termed ‘Christianophobia’ in the EU, where references to Europe’s Christian past became viewed as problematic.

Surveys of Western Europe since the 1960s indicate a pronounced decline in Christianity, although the pace of decline has varied from one country to the next. Recent surveys that include Eastern Europe show that in most Central and Eastern countries the share of Christian affiliation has remained more or less stable in recent decades (Dargent 2017; Pew Research Center 2018a, 2018b; Inglehart 2020). In some Eastern European countries, and especially Orthodox countries where the association between nation and church has been re-established after the fall of communism (Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria), both participation and affiliation numbers in contrast have even been increasing, although the politicization of religion can also cause a backlash. The surveys moreover show changing patterns in belief in God that to a certain extent mirror those of religious affiliation and participation. Furthermore, while differences certainly remain, traditional distinctions between Protestants and Catholics – such as those regarding the paths to salvation (by faith alone or also by ‘good deeds’) – have lost much of their power to divide. Most Catholics and Protestants in Western Europe today believe that the similarities outweigh the differences (Pew Research Center 2017). These figures suggest that in Europe today there are various forms of ‘believing without belonging’ (Dargent 2017; Davie 2000).

Secularization and de-Christianization were, however, also expressed in an increase in atheism and agnosticism as well as adherence to alternative spiritual movements. The numbers of atheists and agnostics have augmented particularly in Northern and Western Europe since 1970, despite a decline after the demise of communism in Eastern Europe (see Table 1.1). New spiritualities – including local esoteric traditions,

Table 1.1 Agnostics and Atheists in Europe per UN Region (Percentages, 1900–2020)

UN Region	1900	1970	2000	2015	2020*
Western Europe	0.19	4.74	10.23	12.59	13.20
Southern Europe	0.13	4.70	5.06	5.63	5.78
Northern Europe	0.70	5.80	9.47	10.15	10.78
Eastern Europe	0.11	18.60	7.76	4.45	4.16

Amero-Indian shamanistic practices and highly secularized Indic religions – in Europe remain a minority interest. Nevertheless some 15–40 per cent in Western Europe declare that they believe in a ‘higher power’ or spiritual force, and in some surveys in Central and Eastern Europe over a third express a belief in reincarnation, an idea originating in Indic religions (Pew Research Center 2018a: 42–5, 119–38, 2018b: 19–20, 24; see also Campbell 2007; Pasture 2011). Interestingly, this development has led to a remarkable ‘secularization’ of religious symbols. This process started especially in popular (youth) culture and New Spirituality, which appropriated religious signs from different cultures, often enabling people to piece together some form of individual spirituality (Lee 2015).

The 1950s and 1960s saw an influx of migrants into (North)Western Europe. Intra-European migration from Eastern and Mediterranean countries to Western Europe remains hardly visible in the statistics, but did lead to perceptions of cultural difference even if newcomers shared the same faith as the population of the host country. Most non-European migrants were either postcolonial refugees or ‘guest workers’ for the expanding industries. Most of them were usually Christians or, to a lesser extent, Muslims as well as Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs. Conversion does not appear to have been a major reason for the spread of non-European religions in Europe, including Islam. The Muslims belonged to different Islamic currents, and there were also ethnic divisions between them. The ways in which they integrated into European societies diverged, ranging from assimilation to radical opposition and many variants in between (creating many ‘Euro-Islams’, to use a concept that is usually interpreted in a normative and in our view inadequate way) (Dressing, Jeldtoft and Woodhead 2013; al-Azmeh and Fokas 2007; esp. Nielsen 2007 and Cesari 2007; al-Sayyad and Castells 2002; Bistolfi and Zabbal 1995) (see Table 1.2).

The unexpected collapse of the Soviet Empire and the subsequent ‘liberation’ of Eastern Europe reintroduced real religious and political liberty in these countries. Religious groups, which with the exception of Poland tended to be made up of quite small, non-institutionalized communities, became massively engaged in the civic protests. In some countries, most obviously in Poland, this was paralleled by a restoration of religious life and a revival which lasted for decades. A similar revival, however, did not take place in the Baltic States or indeed in most other Eastern

Table 1.2 Muslims in Europe per UN Region (Percentages, 1900–2020)

UN Region	1900	1970	2000	2015	2020*
Western Europe	0.05	1.21	5.87	7.29	7.74
Southern Europe	2.75	3.14	6.59	7.61	8.26
Northern Europe	0.00	0.77	2.93	5.50	6.09
Eastern Europe	4.35	4.18	5.74	6.43	6.81

* Estimate

Data source: Johnson and Grim (2020) (accessed 20 July 2020). It should be noted that the classification of UN regions is rather counter-intuitive. The UK, for example, is classified as part of Northern Europe. See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/#fn2>.

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Table 1.3 Religious Diversity in Europe (Index, 2010)

Country	Index	Country	Index	Country	Index
Netherlands	6.4	Slovenia	4.0	Greece	2.5
Bosnia-Herzegovina	6.0	Spain	3.9	Andorra	2.2
France	5.9	Austria	3.8	Lithuania	2.1
Belgium	5.7	Albania	3.7	San Marino	1.8
Latvia	5.7	Switzerland	3.7	Ireland	1.7
North Macedonia	5.6	Bulgaria	3.5	Liechtenstein	1.7
Estonia	5.5	Finland	3.5	Serbia	1.6
Sweden	5.4	Hungary	3.5	Croatia	1.4
Germany	5.3	Denmark	3.3	Portugal	1.4
UK	5.1	Italy	3.3	Poland	1.2
Luxembourg	4.9	Norway	3.1	Iceland	1.1
Russia	4.9	Ukraine	3.1	Malta	0.7
Belarus	4.7	Slovakia	2.9	Moldova	0.6
Czech Republic	4.1	Monaco	2.8	Romania	0.1
Montenegro	4.0	Kosovo	2.6	Vatican City	-

Data source: Pew Research Center (2014). Johnson and Grim (2020) contains more recent statistics, but the figures are calculated very differently and the results are not as convincing (e.g. with Sweden as the religiously most diverse state in Europe).

European countries. With the break-up of Yugoslavia, a series of nationalist-religious conflicts erupted, leading to ethnic cleansing and even genocide. Of the countries since the end of this war, only Bosnia-Herzegovina and North Macedonia retain a somewhat precarious multi-ethnic and multireligious character. Another result of the fall of communism was that most former Eastern Bloc countries experienced an exodus of workers and young people in search of opportunities in Western Europe, increasing the sense of diversity there (see Table 1.3).

Religion in a multicultural society

Although already in the making since the end of the 1960s and initially mainly in response to the enlargement of the European Community, the EU embraced multiculturalism as an ideal in the late 1990s (Prügl and Thiel 2009; Kastoryano 2009; Lähdesmäki 2012). Around the same time, however, multiculturalism became a target for extreme right-wing and emerging populist movements, even though until then it had hardly ever been actively encouraged as a political project (Schinkel 2017: 5–6; Chin 2017: 80–138). In fact, religious diversity, including the presence of Muslims, was not perceived as an issue until the end of the 1980s. The relative unimportance of this question is nicely illustrated by the European Values Study, which until 1989 did not even ask Europeans about their opinions about migrants and different religions. Culture, in a broad sense, began to be considered an issue in the 1980s, and only

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since the 2000s has this been narrowed down to religion, and especially Islam (Chin 2017: 3–4; Allievi 2005; Yilmaz 2016).

Religious communities had modified their stance towards others some time earlier. Some churches had been arguing for dialogue and unity for decades; ecumenism came to the fore with the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948 and the ecumenical shift of the Catholic Church with the Second Vatican Council. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, interfaith and interconfessional movements emerged in an effort to combat religious extremism by establishing a dialogue based on mutual respect, appreciating difference as a positive value in itself (see Chapters 8 and 9).

The new EU member states, however, did not all share the same imaginary based upon the rejection of a past beset by nationalism and genocide, as symbolized by the Holocaust, which had emerged in the 1980s as the ultimate symbol of Europe's depravity against which the EU and its predecessors had been created. This was particularly true of the new member states from the East. Former communist European countries preferred to emphasize their own suffering under the Soviet yoke (Littoz-Monnet 2012; Leggewie 2011; Trimčev et al. 2020). Likewise, the ethically liberal and secular(ist) narrative of EU values incited increasing opposition. The debate in 2004 on the preamble to a proposed 'EU Constitution' (which was eventually dropped) laid bare tensions between those who thought it should contain a reference to Christian values and history and those who emphasized the humanistic-secular values of the Enlightenment and cherished the 'secular' nature of the political. An anti-Islamic dimension increasingly entered the debate, which crystallized around the possible accession of Turkey to the EU. Opponents of Turkey's membership highlighted either the legacy of Christendom or that of Enlightened secularism, and often both, disregarding the fact that Turkey was a secular state (in some ways even more so than most EU countries). Within this debate, the German-Syrian sociologist Bassam Tibi (1998: 154) proposed the idea – reminiscent of the traditional Islamic way of dealing with diversity – that Europe had a common *Leitkultur* (leading culture) which he associated with modernity: 'democracy, secularism, the Enlightenment, human rights and civil society'. In this context, religions (not without cause) were exposed as illiberal, undemocratic and intolerant, especially towards LGBTQ, and as regards liberal values of self-determination. Others, by contrast, associated European *Leitkultur* with (Judeo-)Christian values, or with a combination of Christian and secular, enlightened thinking. This leads to various and often paradoxical political stances, especially with regards to gender-related issues, for example, when wearing certain (allegedly religious) clothing is prohibited. Gender has indeed moved to the centre of the debate on the place of religion in society, and exposes the complex and divergent ways both are imagined (Furseth 2018).

Since the 2000s wearing religious clothing and symbols in the public space (a space that has gradually enlarged) has become contentious throughout Europe. The argument focuses on the need of the state in a multicultural society to remain 'neutral' – including teachers and pupils in public schools – but has increasingly spilled over to other domains such as the workplace and even 'public' free-time zones such as swimming pools. Especially female religious clothing, in particular the hijab, is viewed as inherently oppressing and opposite to Western values. In this perspective signs of worship have become contentious as well. Minarets were prohibited as were the calls to

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prayer by the muezzin. While Muslims were particularly targeted, other religions also shared the same fate in similar circumstances, although in general Christian symbols were spared: Christian church towers or church bells never faced the same criticism; the (disappearing) wearing of cassocks, habits or nuns' veils was not targeted either (it should be noted though that in public positions in France and Belgium all religious signs are prohibited). European courts have sanctioned discrimination mainly by interpreting Christian symbols (even the crucifix) as part of European 'culture' and denying their 'proselytizing' capacities, thus 'secularizing' them, as Elayne Oliphant (2012) observes (see also Roy 2020, 144–50; Bhuta 2014; Moyn 2014; Martínez-Torrón 2016; a different philosophical perspective in Forst 2011: 543–71). In the wake of the murder of a French schoolteacher by Islamist terrorists on 16 October 2020, the French government demanded clear adherence to its 'republican values', criticizing intellectuals and proponents of interfaith dialogue. Freedom of religion itself has come under fire – in 2013 several local councils in Moldova, for example, made it illegal to hold Islamic rites in public. Some forms of religious harassment have increased by about 70 per cent in Europe since 2007, often affecting not just religious people but society at large (Diamant 2019; Sägemesser et al. 2018: 28–34). Religiously unaffiliated and non-religious people have also come under attack, as in Greece, while Islamist terrorists targeted particularly the freedom of expression (Villa 2019).

Populist Islamophobia has also resuscitated narratives of a decline of the Christian Occident. In fact, such narratives had already appeared during the final days of the communist regime in former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the late 1980s when Muslims were depicted as a threat to European civilization. Such rhetoric underpinned the expulsion in 1989 of approximately 350,000 Muslim 'Turks' (descendants of people that had migrated from Central Asia to the Balkans in the fourteenth–fifteenth century) and motivated anti-Muslim violence during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. In this respect the discourses of Serbian leaders such as Slobodan Milošević in 1989 are identical to those of contemporary populists such as Victor Orbán, the present prime minister of Hungary, in defence of 'European Christian civilization' (Mark et al. 2019: 154–72). These claims about a Christian European civilization under threat also appeared in Western Europe, as espoused by German Christian Democrats in Bavaria (Germany), British Brexiteers and the Italian populists of Matteo Salvini (see Chapter 6).

Even if they vary considerably between different populist parties, these discourses about a Christian European *Leitkultur* may suggest a growing politicization of religion (Caiani and Carvalho 2021). But they should not be confused with signs of re-Christianization or desecularization. In fact, the references to Europe's Christian past among populists are anything but consistent, and rarely mention faith. They illustrate what Olivier Roy termed, with regards to Muslim fundamentalists, as 'holy ignorance', the individualist, cultural-emotional reaction against secularization and elitism that underpins radicalization and fundamentalism of different persuasions (Roy 2010; Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy 2016; De Cesari 2020: 26–46). Moreover, Christian churches often resist such instrumentalization of Christian symbols, expressing their solidarity with embattled Muslims and Jews. That is not always the case though. Some local churches, most notably the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria and the Catholic Church in Poland and Hungary, strongly oppose Muslim immigration,

which they describe as an ‘invasion’ (Sägesser et al. 2018: 28–34). In doing so, they actually support populist Islamophobia. One should, however, refrain from dismissing these resistances too easily: they are actually very much in line with a long tradition of confessional politics, and point to the continued prevalence of a persistent religious ‘social imaginary’ that is mobilized more effectively by populists than by the Christian Democratic parties, who often appear too much a part of the elite culture (Van den Hemel 2019). Other signs of a revival of political Christianity can be seen in the pro-life and anti-LGBTQ movements. Gender equality and sexual democracy have become core values of Western secular ethics (in Western Europe often presented as a litmus test for migrants, especially Muslims, and often also viewed as taking precedence over religious freedom: Furseth 2018), but they incite increasing opposition, particularly in Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary) as well as in France and Italy (Bialasiewicz and Gentile 2020).

This raises the question about the degree of religious toleration in Europe. Surveys highlight huge differences in acceptance of the other, especially non-Christians, and reveal a deep East-West divide – with Greece clearly situated in the East. Notwithstanding the variations between the different surveys, the trends and relative positions largely correspond. It is interesting to note that people in Western Europe generally believe that religious discrimination is more widespread in their country than discrimination on the grounds of gender, age or disability, but less than for race/skin colour (Romani being perceived as the most discriminated against group), while Eastern Europeans think there is less religious discrimination. As regards acceptance of the other, the answers strongly suggest that religious discrimination may be far more widespread in Eastern than in Western Europe. But no doubt realities are more complex than these self-assessments suggest (GESIS 2019).

The surveys show that prejudices and negative stereotypes towards Muslims and, to a lesser extent, Jews, still hold strong support, even if they seem in general to be on the decline: in Western Europe 20–40 per cent, for example, agree that Muslims want to impose religious law in their country (Belgians in particular appear deeply alienated from the Muslim population), while about 11–36 per cent (median 21 per cent) hold negative stereotypes towards Jews. Those with negative attitudes towards religious others tend to reject all those of different persuasions, even if their specific attitudes towards Muslims (most difficult to accept as family members or neighbours), Jews, Indic religions, other Christians or even atheists do not entirely coincide. In general Europeans are more tolerant towards atheists and non-religious people than towards religious people, more tolerant towards Jews than towards Muslims, and more tolerant in terms of accepting the religious other as a neighbour than as a family member. Catholics are usually less tolerant than Protestants, but those who were raised Christian but left the church have more tolerant attitudes towards Muslims and Jews than those who were raised in a non-religious environment (Pew Research Center 2018a: 42). Acceptance of other Christians is quite common, also at a more intimate level. Ignorance about the others’ religion, however, is widespread everywhere. There is extensive, though very divergent, support for restrictions on Muslim’s ‘religious’ clothing and especially face coverings (though in Portugal and Sweden about half of the population say

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‘Muslim women should be allowed to wear whatever religious clothing they want’) (Pew Research Center 2017, 2018a).

Conclusions

This overview of different ways of dealing with religious diversity in Europe cannot be summarized in terms of the usual narrative that increasing tolerance has emerged as a reaction to the intolerance of religions and their mutual exclusivism. Today secularism is viewed as the most effective way of dealing with religious and cultural diversity, but the term refers to quite different realities, and the more radical manifestations actually may hamper the inclusion of religious minorities (see also the introduction to this volume). Though not central to the analysis, our review of this issue moreover shows that arguments for toleration can be found within religious traditions themselves. It also makes clear that the concepts of tolerance or toleration can mean different things, and rarely imply that differing world views are considered of equal worth, in the past or in the present. Christendom, with its close but ambivalent association between the secular and the sacred, privileges homogeneity, but has always included countervailing forces.

The ‘secularization’ of politics in Europe has continued the search for homogeneity in different guises, to the point that, as Zygmunt Bauman (1991: 8, 53–74) argues, ‘intolerance is, therefore, the natural inclination of modern practice’, even if religion is not currently the driving force behind it. One may, however, also observe that it is easy to overestimate the significance of religion: it is just one of many sources of identity and alliance, perhaps not even the main one. And before arguing that religion surely mattered more in the past than in the present it is worth reminding that it did not always have the same meaning: for centuries religion referred more to relations and practices than to belief, and the meaning of belief itself also changed dramatically, transcending the traditional boundaries of faith (Shagan 2019).

We also looked at ways in which Muslim regimes dealt with religious difference. Muslims and Christians are often seen as opposites, particularly in contemporary representations. While evolution is mostly associated with Christendom – narrated in terms of progress – the worlds of Islam are usually (as will also appear in following chapters) portrayed as static. They are then viewed as either eternal enemies of Christendom and ‘the West’, or idealized for their capacity for *convivencia*, which in reality allowed for very divergent practices. Our analysis, by contrast, shows that both worlds changed profoundly over time and were characterized by unequal patterns of coexistence and inclusion, sometimes relatively peaceful, co-operative even, but also often violent, sometimes extremely so, while not exactly weaving a story of continuing progress in either case. Moreover, as one moves away from Medieval and Early Modern times, more similarities between faiths emerge: while Islamic empires disappeared from Europe, they were confronted with European, and later American, imperialism elsewhere. Muslim reactions throughout the globe varied from absolute rejection and opposition, to accommodation, and modernization – sometimes by not only reinventing fundamentalist traditions, but also by supporting secularism (as in



Turkey) and democracy: similar processes can be observed in 'Christian' and modern Europe as well. It is also worth noting that today there are more Muslims living in democracies than in autocratic regimes (the same perhaps cannot be said for atheists or Christians). Muslim democracies moreover appear more inclusive than European states, for example, by respecting the traditions and customs of different faiths and world views, such as recognizing their respective feast days (Stepan 2011, 2014).

Meanwhile, the longing for homogeneity remained a key component of European politics at least until the early post-Second World War period, although 'secularized' and dissociated from its origins. It is particularly visible in the population policies that became associated with the ideal of the nation state (even if they were first introduced in modern European *empires* of the late-nineteenth- and twentieth century). The current situation in the late twentieth-/early twenty-first century is sometimes labelled post-secular, but what that exactly means is open for debate (Beckford 2012; Hjelm 2015). One thing that is certain is that the social significance of Christianity in Europe (and in Canada and Australia, but not elsewhere) has declined considerably, to the point of it becoming a marginal social and political factor in some countries, although in recent times Christian references have been re-emerging as political and cultural signifiers. Secularism has also lost a lot of ground, but has made a forceful comeback in reaction to mainly Islamist terrorism and an increased public visibility of religions, in particular Islam. As will become clearer in the following chapters, currents in society that embrace more pluralist visions of society also certainly exist. Sometimes even the boundaries between religions and between the religious and the secular evaporate or are transcended, where religion becomes immanent or non-believers adopt religious symbols and spiritual practices. The contemporary religious landscape has become multiple and complex, even inconsistent, escaping any simplistic label.

So, tolerance unfortunately is not the soul of Europe. European history has too often been characterized by violence and intolerance to warrant such a claim, even if, in reaction, Europeans – using quite different arguments – have developed philosophies and practices that enable peaceful coexistence. But especially they have learned – although they also tend to forget – that dialogue is possible, which may lead to practical arrangements which may not be ideal, but guarantee peace and ways of living together nevertheless. Tolerance remains no less a challenge though in the twenty-first century than it did in the tenth, sixteenth or twentieth.

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