



FACULTY OF ORIENTAL STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

# Oxford Armenian Studies

Michaelmas Term 2013

## Armenian Religion, Society, Politics Seminar

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This lecture series will explore the contemporary crossroads where religion, society and politics intersect in Armenia and the Diaspora. Nineteenth century sociologists had suggested that *rationality* and *modernisation* of society would decrease levels of religiosity and religion would lose social significance. Others declared the "death of God" or predicted that God would be "turned into a cultural artefact" in the "Post-Christian era". Yet, in recent years, religion has not only "returned", but is increasingly the centre of politics and societal conflicts. Even as scholarship on the effects of these historic mega-trends on the Armenian Church and society are scarce, the seminar will deal with the impact of the long process of "secularisation" of the Armenian Church starting with the *Millet* system in the Ottoman Empire and later under Soviet rule. The dual process of "societal secularisation" (global trend) and state-imposed "institutional secularisation" (and to some extent "laicization") of the Armenian Church have had long lasting effects on church-society, church-state and church-politics relations and continue to define contemporary relations. Informed by these historic developments, the lecture series will start with a broad introduction and then delve into particular issues and problems in the religion-society-politics nexus in contemporary Armenia and the Diaspora.

**Tuesdays, 6:30 - 8:00 PM, Oriental Institute, Lecture Room 1**

**22 October (Week 2)**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE ARMENIAN CHURCH: PAST AND PRESENT**

The history of the Armenian Church is intimately intertwined with the history of the Armenian people. This session will explore the Church's role over the centuries not only in religious matters, but also in political, educational, cultural and social institutions that defined the communal life of Armenians living in different empires. Particular attention will be given to the "secularising" effects of the state-imposed constitutions -- the *Polozhenie* (Statute) of 1836 in the Russian Empire and the National Constitutions of 1863 in the Ottoman Empire -- and how these coalesce with the secularisation of society in modern times.

### **5 November (Week 4)**

#### **THE SOVIET REGIME AND DECLINE OF THE CHURCH AND RELIGION**

This lecture will discuss the establishment of Soviet rule in Armenia and the near extinction of the institutional church, especially in the 1920's, 30's and 40's. The Church suffered heavily under decades of Soviet rule, anti-religious propaganda and was stripped bare to its liturgical functions. This process furthered the "secularisation" of the church that had started in the 19th century. Particular focus will be on the relationship between the Armenian Church and the Soviet-State in the context of the 'Repatriation' of Armenians from the Diaspora to Soviet Armenia in the mid-1940s.

### **19 November (Week 6)**

#### **THE SOVIET REGIME AND THE 'SECULARISATION' OF THE CHURCH**

The persecution of the Church eased after Stalin's death in 1953. This session will focus on the effects of decades of state-sponsored atheistic indoctrination on both society and the Church in Soviet Armenia and the USSR. It will pay particular attention to the state of the church in the 1950's, the conflict between the two Hierarchical Sees of Ejmiatsin and Cilicia and the long tenure of Romania-born Catholicos Vazgen I of Armenians, which had ushered a new period in the life of the Church, albeit with new sets of issues.

### **3 December (Week 8)**

#### **POST-SOVIET SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DISLOCATION AND "RETURN" OF RELIGION**

The transition from decades of "ungodliness" under Communism to "knowledge of God" in a newly independent country appeared to be more complex, problematic and difficult. Neither the society nor the religious establishment were prepared to accept the unexpected realities of freedom and liberty. This session will present some of the key dimensions of this process. Starting with a brief presentation of the *glasnost* and *perestroika* period for context, it will then focus on the critical issues since Armenia's independence.

## **Hilary Term 2014**

### **28 January 2014 (Week 2)**

#### **CHURCH AND STATE RELATIONS**

Despite expectations that the Church would be free of state influence in non-Communist Armenia, Church-State relations have been problematic since 1991. This lecture will present a discussion of the process of how the Church was 'rehabilitated', the mutual exploitation of each institution of the other, and the main legal and political conflicts in Church-State relations since independence.

### **11 February 2014 (Week 4)**

#### **CHURCH AND SOCIETY RELATIONS**

This lecture will discuss the unprecedented processes of rapid and long-term transitions in virtually all aspects of life in post-Soviet Armenia — social, political, economic, religious, cultural. Like in other former Soviet republics, the old socio-political boundaries changed in Armenia: a process of social relocation and strengthening of old identity references were quickly in place. Even as the Church was expected to provide much-needed guidance in filling

the ideological and spiritual gap left behind by the failure of the Communist ideology, the Church was ill-prepared — in terms of human and material resources — to respond to the growing interest of people in religion and spirituality.

### **25 February (Week 6)**

#### **DIASPORA POLITICS AND THE ARMENIAN CHURCH**

More Armenians live outside the Republic of Armenia than inside. For centuries communities in dispersion have been a source of human and financial wealth, prestige, power and political influence for the Armenian Church. This lecture will focus on church and politics in the Diaspora, especially during the Cold War era and its effects on contemporary church-society relations. Besides the Catholicosate of All Armenians in Ejmiatsin, three of the four Hierarchical Sees of the Armenian Church are located in the Diaspora (Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Turkey) with their own monastic orders, churches and dioceses. Politics and power relations in the Church continue to present many challenges to communities in the Diaspora today.

### **11 March (Week 8)**

#### **CHURCH AND RELIGION IN THE DIASPORA: MIDDLE EAST, EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA**

This final lecture will focus on issues peculiar to the Diaspora communities and the existing problems in church-politics-society relations. Even as the Armenian Church's impact on individual religiosity in Armenia is minimal, the role and function of the church in the geographically dispersed communities of the diaspora is more complex and multilayered. It will conclude with some thoughts on the future prospects in the Diaspora and how in various parts of the world priorities and processes defer in response to local/regional conditions.

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For further details about the seminar please contact [Dr Hratch Tchilingirian](mailto:hratch.tchilingirian@orinst.ox.ac.uk): [hratch.tchilingirian@orinst.ox.ac.uk](mailto:hratch.tchilingirian@orinst.ox.ac.uk) or [Prof. Theo van Lint](mailto:theo.vanlint@orinst.ox.ac.uk), Calouste Gulbenkian Professor of Armenian Studies: [theo.vanlint@orinst.ox.ac.uk](mailto:theo.vanlint@orinst.ox.ac.uk)