

# The Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion

## 1. Introducing the Centre

Since its establishment in 2014, the Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion has gained a distinctive reputation among academics, faith communities and policymakers for combining academic expertise and public engagement on religion and politics at local, national and international levels. The unique bidisciplinary approach developed by the Center has contributed to its recognition. More specifically, it combines social sciences and religious studies to explore the relevance of religion in different political and social aspects of life. Our approach is distinctive for two reasons:

- Firstly, most other related research centres, in the UK and worldwide, address the role of religion in politics from either one discipline or another, not the two simultaneously, ie. being committed to *explore the same topic* through two different disciplinary perspectives and work a common methodology.
- Secondly, we aim at moving beyond the binary of ‘Global North vs. South,’ or the supposed ‘East-West divide.’ With the help of our significant network of Cadbury’s Honorary Fellows, and through our direct engagement with experts from the Global South, we have insight into the local implications of global challenges and can draw on a range of resources to bring non-Western perspectives to the table.
- Three core areas provide the focus and cohesion to the Centre’s work: *Religion and Global Politics* focusses on issues that cut across national and international contexts such as religion, secularism and democracy, religion and political violence, freedom of religion or belief and global human rights.
- At the opposite end of the spectrum, *Cities, Communities and Cohesion* explores the impact of religion on the ground in local communities in shaping attitudes, building bridges and barriers, working with local authorities and faith groups and exploring issues such as faith and social engagement, race and integration.
- Finally, *The Changing Roles of Faith* looks at how religion and its societal roles are rapidly transforming across the international, national, and local levels.

## 2. Past and ongoing activities

### *Research Programs:*

- Our centre serves as the home for scholarship on *Islam in the West* made visible at [euro-islam.info](http://euro-islam.info) which is recognized by scholars and practitioners as the site of reference on Islam and religious diversity in Western Europe.
- Editorial leadership of the Brill journal *perspectives on Religion and Politics* (The first issue, released in the Summer 2019 is an essay from Jose Casanova on secularism based on his Cadbury lectures delivered in May 2018. Upcoming issues for 2020: Russian orthodoxy and secularism (Kristin Stoeckl), Chinese Secularism in a comparative perspective (Mayfair Yang)
- Cooperation with Georgetown and Bar Ilan Universities on the topic of *religion, secularization and democracy* in western and non western contexts, with a focus on state-religion interactions.
- Research project on *Pluralism and the Islamic Tradition* (with the Foundation for Religious Sciences, Bologna and the Islamic Studies Centre at the University of Palermo); (started in June 2019) to develop in a major international cooperation between universities across the Muslim world, Europe and the USA.

In term of *education*, we presently have some 10 PhD students trained according to the aforementioned bidisciplinary approach and working on research topics related to the Centre's core themes, such as comparing Islamism and liberation theology, the role of religious values in modern governance . Our expertise has also been channelled into the design of an innovative religion and politics curriculum for the religious studies and government departments of the Australian Catholic University in both Melbourne and Sydney. In Birmingham, we have been developing our bidisciplinary approach with partnership in and out of the classroom with colleagues from the school of political science and international affairs.

In term of *public impact*:

The *Faith Leaders Training Initiative* (FLTI) started in 2019 and is a new and innovative training programme delivered in four major UK cities (London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds) for faith leaders of all kinds. The Centre is delivering this training for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) along with a group of partners from Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Sikh faith networks.

### 3. Upcoming projects

Our new projects for 2020-2025:

- 1) Research project **on Religion, Nationalism and Populism**: cooperation with Georgetown University, Harvard University, Australian Catholic University, University of Delhi.
- 2) Research project on the **religious dimension of the refugee crisis** with Amman University, Bilgi University, Georgetown University.
- 3) **Biopolitics and religion** in the time of pandemics: looking at the influence of COVID19 on the interactions between religion and public health and religion and civic engagement in the UK, Mali, Sierra Leone, India, Turkey.
- 4) *Curriculum development and creation of online resources* to cooperate with other universities delivering Masters program on religion, politics and conflict resolution.