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Chapter 8

Ecumene Redefined: Concepts of (Inter)national Religious Unity in British, Dutch and Swedish Parliamentary Debates, 1880–2020

Joris van Eijnatten and Pasi Ihalainen

Although historically often centred on nation states, religion has played an important role in the formation of international relations. The Catholic Church, in particular, has traditionally seen itself as universal and supranational by definition. Increasingly from the early nineteenth century onwards, Protestant churches, began to open up to international cooperation and the transfer of ideas. In predominantly Protestant countries, many leading advocates of internationalism were motivated by religious beliefs, while religious organizations have had a strong record in international activities ranging from missionary work to humanitarianism (see Chapter 11) and peace movements (Green 2017: 17).

These changes in perception of the role of religion in the world touch on the complex interrelationship between nationalism and internationalism. Yet the evolving discourse on internationalism has rarely been analysed in terms of religion, which has been all but marginalized since secularization theses became dominant in mainstream historical scholarship. As Hugh McLeod has argued, relations between church and state and long-term experiences of secularization have diverged radically between different national contexts. The connection between secularization and modernization is not 'natural'; it needs to be explored empirically, and the timing of wide-ranging transformations postponed, possibly to the 1960s (McLeod 2000; McLeod 2003: 1–26).

This contribution to the long-term conceptual history of internationalism is a first attempt to take a comparative approach to the valence of religion on international issues in political and, more

particularly, parliamentary discourse. We have chosen to focus our analysis on parliaments because they have constituted forums in which the representatives of a wide spectrum of values influencing the national political communities – ranging from professional clerics and religious activists to merely cultural Christians and non-believers – have expressed their views. Their arguments have been presented in a highly comparative long-term setting, in the most appreciated forum of political debate in each country – and this extensive data has recently become available digitally, which makes its computer-assisted distant reading possible.

We approach parliamentary debates in terms of religious thought, by focusing on the Christian interpretation of the originally Greek notion of the ecumene (*oikoumenè*, meaning 'the inhabited world'). This is the idea that Christians form a unity, a single religious community that transcends theological and institutional barriers – at first at the denominational and national but later also at the international and even interfaith level. The idea of the ecumene carries with it a spatial dimension, not just because of its etymological origins, but because a territorial understanding of Christendom is integral to most expressions of historical Christianity. That territorial understanding has ranged from the local and national to the global and has always been closely bound up with notions of continuity and truth.

This chapter examines how the relationship between religious unity and territory has been conceptualized in the parliamentary discourse of three Northwest European countries from the late nineteenth century to the present. For the sake of comparability, and based on our previous research on politico-religious discourses in these countries, we have chosen three states that have, historically, identified themselves as Protestant: Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden. Despite the apparent commonality of these 'Protestant' nations, they were in some respects quite different. Sweden was fundamentally Lutheran until the late twentieth century, Britain predominantly Anglican and the Netherlands partly Calvinist.[1] Britain and the Netherlands were multireligious empires that facilitated religious toleration at an early stage in their history, mainly for pragmatic reasons. Sweden was a religiously uniform country where religious pluralism arose late. In the Netherlands, church and state were separated de jure (if not de facto) in 1796, in Sweden only in 2000, while Britain still recognizes a state religion related to the monarchy until the present day.

Until 1922 Britain had to cope with a large majority of Roman Catholics in Ireland and Catholic minorities elsewhere, small but relatively influential Protestant groups outside the Church of England and the non-Christian world religions of the Empire. The Netherlands possessed a

substantial Catholic minority (around 35% of the population) and ruled colonies with predominantly Muslim majorities. Sweden became a destination of immigrants with diverse religious backgrounds increasingly from the 1960s onwards. All three societies secularized rapidly during the twentieth century, especially after the Second World War, but at the same time needed to address religious issues both at home (due to immigration) and abroad (where secularization often was not an issue).

To understand how and why, in each of these countries, the relationship between religious unity and territory was conceptualized, at first within and subsequently beyond the nation state, we begin our exploration in the later nineteenth century. Throughout the early modern period and in much of the nineteenth century, the national community had been conceptualized predominantly through the established, dominant or state church. In the late nineteenth century, however, traditional associations between the state and mainstream Protestantism gradually began to weaken. Religion was often still tied explicitly to nationhood, while international aspects of religion began to be put on the agenda more emphatically than before.

Reading 'Ecumenical' from Distance

In what follows, we focus on parliamentary debates on 'the ecumene' cropping up every now and then in discussions on the values of the nation. First we traced a number of relevant terms over a longer period of time using a custom-made keyword search method that allowed us to visualize historical patterns.[2] These terms figure in what we expected to be the broad 'semantic field' covering religious unity in relation to territory; the keywords include 'between churches', 'between religions', 'interreligious', 'interfaith', 'religious freedom', 'religious liberty', 'toleration', 'anti-Catholicism', 'state religion', 'state church', 'people's church' and, of course, 'ecumenism' itself. Experimenting with these alternatives – derived from our previous experience in empirical research on religious nationalism (Van Eijnatten 2003; Ihalainen 2005) – we learned that 'ecumenism' best indicated the semantic field of internationalism in the context of religiously motivated debate. We therefore chose to limit our analysis to its uses, rather than to all phrases containing the word 'international' as such, which would not have captured the religious aspects of international thought so distinctly. We decided to explore words that occurred in the same context with 'ecumenical', although we are aware that this approach captures only one aspect of the debates.

In what follows we present two series of visualizations: Firstly, a comparison between the number of references to the 'national' church in Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden and the word 'ecumenical' in their respective parliaments between the nineteenth century and the present (Figures 1–3). Secondly, we present an analysis of the expansion of the semantic field of ecumenical in the British House of Commons (Figures 4–6). In the figures, the relative frequencies are the number of hits in relation to the total number of words per year. The curve is a 'smoothing' curve based on a local polynomial regression function (LOESS) which allows one to better see patterns. We used the LOESS function in statsmodels v0.12.0. Note that the y-axes differ.

<Insert Figure 8.1 here.>

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It became possible to conceptualize religion in more international ways in predominantly Protestant contexts once the associations between 'religion' or 'church' and the 'nation' or 'state' that had dominated early modern thought started to weaken. This possibility can be inferred from the extent of the debates on the relationship between church and state in all the three countries studied here. Figure 8.1 illustrates how discourse mentioning the 'established church' peaked in the British parliament in the mid-nineteenth century but declined rather dramatically at the beginning of the twentieth (although by no means disappearing). A similar pattern can be discerned in the Netherlands (Figure 8.2), with parallel timing, though discourse on the Reformed Church remained more common there until the 1980s. At the same time, it will be clear that the Dutch set less store by the idea of a 'national church' than either Britain or Sweden: *staatskerk* was hardly used, and the most common word to denote the historically privileged church, *Hervormde Kerk* (Reformed Church) did not occur as frequently as comparable terms did elsewhere. In Sweden, the four estates conducted substantial debate on the state church (*statskyrkan*) among in the 1850s but the real peak in the debate occurred later than in the other two countries, as illustrated in Figure 8.3. Swedish parliamentarians often referred to the state church at the end of the nineteenth century. Debate still took place in the 1950s, as in the Netherlands, and in Sweden it waned only with the separation of church and state in 2000.

The word 'ecumenical' as such had already emerged in nineteenth-century parliamentary discourse but its frequency rose in Britain only in the late 1960s. The discourse on ecumenism would remain

relevant for some parliamentarians until the early twenty-first century. In the Netherlands the term peaked earlier, in the 1950s, and again in the 1960s, after which it declined. The Swedish parliamentarians joined the discourse on ecumenical matters at the same time as their British and Dutch colleagues, and when they did their usage of the term was quite spectacular – reflecting the rise of the ecumenical movement, to which Swedish activists such as Nathan Söderblom, the Lutheran Archbishop of Sweden, had contributed considerably, both nationally and internationally. As in Britain and the Netherlands there was a peak in word usage in the 1960s in Sweden, but a second, much higher one followed in the 1970s; after that the frequency counts indicate continuity on a lower level. The data thus suggests rather similar patterns for all three countries with some differences in timing. In a nutshell, the dominant discourse on the national church in the nineteenth century was gradually replaced in parliaments with one on ecumenism, especially in the 1960s, after which that discourse too waned. In what follows we explore possible explanations for this through contextualized instances on the microlevel.

Another way of looking at the word 'ecumenical' in the twentieth century is by distant reading to examine words that 'behave' in a similar fashion, i.e. they occur in contexts similar to the one in which 'ecumenical' occurs. Taking the British House of Commons as a case study, we find three patterns (figures 4–6). The radial graph shows the similarity score of each word in relation to 'scenario', for all values equal to or higher than 0.45 where the word frequency is higher than 10.

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Parliamentary discourse on the ecumenical has gradually become highly diversified and polyvocal in the course of the twentieth century. Between 1921 and 1960 (when the term first starts to occur reasonably often), words that behave similarly to 'ecumenical' begin to be related less exclusively to words which were related to the older conceptualizations of the Protestant nation such as 'Anglican', 'Evangelical' and 'Protestantism'. Increasingly, they also related to 'Christian', 'communion' and 'Jesus'; to 'pope' and 'papacy'; to 'patriarch' and to 'Islam' (Figure 8.4). In the 1960s and 1970s, the list of words expands considerably. The most significant ones refer to ecumenism between the Protestant denominations most relevant to Britain ('Methodism', 'Evangelical'; 'nonconformist' refers to all 'non-established' churches so it includes non-Protestants) although synonyms for ecumenism also began to appear at this point ('Christendom',

‘interdenominational’). Antonyms likewise appear, such as ‘fundamentalist’, ‘secular’, and ‘atheism’ and ’atheists’, reflecting strong secularist and anti-secularist trends in that period (Figure 8.5). Finally, the period 1981–2005 saw the rise of the word ‘interfaith’ as an alternative for the previously specifically Christian term ecumenism; non-Christian religions now appear in the debates, such as Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. Similarly, the attribute ‘Abrahamic’ brought Christianity, Judaism and Islam together in a way unthinkable in the nineteenth century (Figure 8.6). Ecumenism had clearly been extended well beyond Protestant denominations within a nation state.

Our contextualizing close reading starts with typically nineteenth-century conceptualizations of religious nationhood that either supposed an identity between church, state and people and insisted on religious unity or, alternatively, challenged the necessity of complete (Protestant) conformity and called for an ecumenical approach at the national level. We proceed by investigating discourses on an ecumenical spirit, world peace and universal understanding. These emerged in all three national contexts after the First World War with the rise of what could be called religious internationalism, evolving during the 1960s into an outspoken ‘ecumenism’. The political fragmentation of the world after 1989, together with secularization, immigration and multiculturalism, contributed to the waning of Christian discourse on the ecumene, while the need to control religious extremism became a more recent major concern in international relations.

Religious Nationhood until the First World War: Church, State and People United

Until the nineteenth century, British parliamentarians followed the general European trend inherited from the nation-centred Protestant Reformations by using the terms 'state religion' and 'state church' to denote their conceptual understanding of a religious unity that was primarily national. The supposition was that a historically embedded religious unity guaranteed the political continuity of the state, and vice versa (Ihalainen 2005; Van Eijnatten 2003). In Britain, this understanding had traditionally been criticized by dissenting Christians who pointed out 'that there are only two pretences on which the state church – the Protestant Church – can exist … The one is religious – the other is political' (John Bright, Liberal and Quaker, HC, 1868: 649). The latter, political (i.e. territorial) conception was usually referred to implicitly: on British soil it was most frequently expressed through official names like 'Church of England' (or of Ireland, of Scotland or in Wales), or characteristically British terms like 'established church'. Although British legislation gave more freedom and equality to dissenting churches, Establishment was supported until the twenty-first century, the most fervent supporters usually being Conservatives: 'it should be borne in mind that the Church of England is our state Church', was something that could still be said in 2014 (Fiona Bruce, Congleton, Con, HL, 2014: 569).

Theological currents such as the Oxford Movement, which approached Catholicism, supported the rise of more ecumenical ways of conceptualizing the national community. Often the USA was used as proof that a reterritorialized ecumenicity did no harm to the state, as in a rhetorical question posed in 1895: 'What had been the result [there] of the absence of an Established Church upon religious unity?' (F. S. Powell, Wigan, HC, 1895: 91). The answer in this instance was negative: cutting the ties between church and state did not break unity since, in the end, all citizens were Christians. Outside America, however, most nineteenth-century politicians would not have agreed with this position but believed in institutional guarantees for religious unity. A common response from the supporters of Establishment in Britain, as in many Lutheran countries, was 'comprehension', the inclusion of as many opinions as theologically possible within the established church 'by enlarging the terms of ecclesiastical communion',[3] and thus preserving institutional ecumenicity on the national level. 'Nothing could be worse than to curtail the charity and comprehension of our great national Church', said one MP in 1903 (C. A. Cripps, Lancashire, Stretford, HC, 1903: 755).

In a Germanic linguistic context other words were in use to denote the symbiosis of church and state, apart from such obvious terms as *staatskerk* (Dutch) and *statskyrka* (Swedish). In the Dutch parliament, the notion of the *volkskerk* ('people's church') first cropped up in 1887, following a secession from the national *Hervormde Kerk* (Reformed Church). The government then still had every intention of regarding the *Hervormde Kerk* as the 'historical Reformed Church in the Netherlands'. According to dissenting Calvinists, however, its status was based on the unlawful intrusion of the state on church prerogative (Alexander F. de Savornin Lohman, Die Anti-Revolutionaire Partij (ARP), SG2, 6 December 1887: 357–58). Once the shock of the secession had abated, the *Hervormde Church* to all intents and purposes became one (very big) church among others. Yet the idea of a *volkskerk* remained powerful, and sometimes cropped up in parliament in the context of discussions about the state's role in paying the clergy's wages, financing theological faculties, providing access to church buildings and caring for the poor.

Supporters of the *volkskerk* idea had a conservative interpretation of the state of affairs: 'In the last century three principles have influenced the people [*het volksleven*]: liberalism in politics, modernism in the church and [religious] neutrality at school.' They saw the result of this threefold influence as disastrous for Christianity, for the state and for the people (Ankerman, SG2, CHU, 10 December 1913: 671–72). Once in a while books were quoted in parliament, such as one entitled 'The Great Importance of the Reformed Church as the People's Church' (Roessingh, SG2, 8 March 1909: 1466; P. J. Kromsigt, *Het hooge belang der Hervormde kerk als volkskerk*, 1909). Such MPs invariably identified Christianity with their own brand of Protestantism, which they considered historically rooted in the nation; religious internationalism, when it emerged after the First World War, came from those less bound to the traditional mainstream confessions. The Calvinist concept of a religious community that was inclusive of coreligionists elsewhere enabled the rise of international perspectives, especially in comparison with almost uniformly Lutheran Scandinavian countries.

In Sweden, the territorial implications of religious unity were expressed in a similar vein, though uniformity was greater. Only the true Evangelical Lutheran religion that, according to the national narrative, had been defended on battlefields for centuries, was capable of guaranteeing 'the bliss and prosperity of the entire nation' (Herman Reinhold Fleming, Nobility, 20 March 1840: 375, 377). The notion of the people's church (*folkkyrkan*), borrowed from the Danish and German contexts, was used as a synonym for the state church: the Swedish Church had 'become a state church or, as our southern neighbours so characteristically call this, a people's church'. This

implied 'a unification between her and the civic order of this people or the state' (Frithiof Grafström, FK, 11 April 1877: 23:15). Supporters of free churches used the expression also in the opposite, deinstitutionalized sense, the introduction of people's church implying a separation between church and state, but the majority rejected such a prospect (Simon Boëthius, AK, 17 February 1898: 7:17). Antipathy towards Catholics was particularly prominent in Sweden's religious monoculture: 'animosity towards popery has developed almost into a national hate [*nationalhat*]', said one nobleman in 1853 (Gustaf Löwenhjelm, Nobility, 16 June 1853: 211–12). Contemporaries were aware of the differences in policies regarding toleration, warning that Sweden was lagging behind 'the happiest and most civilized countries in Europe, England and Holland' (Lars Vilhelm Henschen, Burgher Estate, 7 January 1854: 354–56; on toleration, see Alwall 2000: 151; incidentally, the example illustrates the historical relevance of our comparison). But as late as 1920, conservative politicians continued to stress that 'the Swedish Church has been the Swedish people itself', and lamented attempts to eliminate 'Christianity from our public life, from our societal life' (Karl Johan Ekman, The Right, FK, 20 March 1918: 23:19; FK, 17 January 1920: 4:9) and abolish 'Christianity as a state religion and to have "religious liberty" instead' (Erik Räf, AK, 20 March 1918: 31:21). International aspects were rarely referred to in parliamentary debates on the church. This would change quite dramatically in the interwar era.

Global Christendom in the Interwar Era: Ecumenism, World Peace and Universal Understanding

Religious unity was increasingly reconceptualized in all three countries after the tragedies of the First World War, no longer so strongly from a historical and national perspective, but from a future-oriented and international one. The visible transcendence of Protestant churches rooted in national pasts gave way to the worldly immanence of progressive institutions seeking the redemption of humanity as a whole.

In the Netherlands during the interwar era, this international ecumenism typically cut across political and religious differences, although outspoken supporters almost exclusively tended towards the theological and political left. In 1934, during discussions on the defence budget and when tensions in international relations were rising due to Hitler's ascendancy, one MP called upon both the government and the churches to take 'moral disarmament' much more seriously (Jan Faber, SDAP, SG2, 28 November 1934: 610). He spoke in the context of the League of Nations

Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments (1932–34) and referred to the difficulties encountered by the 'emerging ecumenical movement', the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches and 'The Association Church and Peace'. The latter was *Kerk en Vrede*, the Dutch daughter organization of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, founded in 1914 by the English Quaker Henry Hodgkin and the German Lutheran Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze. Reflecting an international trend, Jan Faber's plea was meant to put a 'soul' into politics;[4] in theological terms, it was to further God's reign on earth.

Faber represented a substantial constituency of mostly but not exclusively Protestant believers, including many ministers of the church. Church and Peace was the largest Christian pacifist association of the Dutch interbellum. Founded by two theologians, the Remonstrant Gerrit Jan Heering and Johannes Hugenholtz, it counted around 9,000 members in 1933. Heering's inspiration is clear from two of his writings, both of which were quoted during parliamentary sessions: *The Church as Social Conscience* (1921) and the *Fall of Christianity* (1928) (*De kerk als maatschappelijk geweten*, *Zondeval van het Christendom*, translated into German and English). Hugenholtz, a sympathizer of the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP), founded the International Union of Antimilitarist Ministers and Clergymen in Amsterdam in 1928. This antimilitarism, sometimes larded with ecumenism, was characteristic of those members of parliament who backed a petition for disarmament supported by 80,000 signatories, including Protestants and Catholics, submitted by Church and Peace to parliament in 1930. They included Albert van der Heide, one of the 'red reverends' (*rode dominees*). Pointing to the international dimension of the ethical issue addressed by the petition, he claimed that it represented 'people of different confessions who agreed that they supported national and international disarmament on religious grounds' in Switzerland, England, France, America and 'the Nordic countries' (Van der Heide, SG2, 22 October 1930: 218).

Insofar as they were overtly Christian, these international peace initiatives were voiced only by a minority: such interventions during the interbellum were few. There was rather substantial criticism of this reconceptualization of religious unity based on internationalism. A representative of the largest Protestant party regarded the internationalism of Church and Peace supporters as an unpatriotic sacrifice of national sovereignty, and saw in their antimilitarism a capitulation to foreign aggression. Yet even this MP believed in the immanent work of the spirit: it was the calling of the Dutch people, he claimed, to foster peace between nations, taking recourse to violence if all other options proved fruitless (Paul Briët, ARP, SG2, 17 December 1930: 96–97). Some outspoken

supporters of international ecumenism rejected disarmament. A member of the conservative Christian Historical Union (CHU) thought that both the nation and global Christianity were best served, not by shooting down the budget for a couple of cruisers, but by eradicating 'nationalism, mutual friction, economic difficulties, absolute misunderstandings, chauvinism' (J. R. Slotemaker de Bruïne, SG2, 23 October 1930: 234). The response illustrates the fact that religious internationalism cut across confessional and ideological lines.

In the Swedish parliament, in the meantime, debates focused primarily on loosening the ties between church and state as suggested by the political left, but religious unity was similarly reconceptualized, as an immanent force that in principle was not restricted to ecclesiastical institutions sanctified by history. One MP remarked, 'as a free church the Lutheran Church would fulfil a good Christian mission in our country' (Wilhelm Gullberg of the Liberals, a free church preacher, FK, 3 May 1919: 33:49). For a utopian leftist, Christianity in general was a better substitute for 'the pure evangelical religion' in state government (Carl Lindhagen, Leftist Social Democrat, FK, 23 March 1923: 22:73; 27 February 1924: 15:36). The 1930s saw the strengthening of the notion of 'a free and energetic people's church' that constituted an alternative to the church as a visible institution of the state (Axel Lindqvist, AK, 8 May 1938: 35:53) supported by appeals to 'a humanly understood Christianity' and a 'modern spiritual culture' (Rickard Lindström, FK, 13 June 1936: 43:118). Thanks to its conservative origins, this idea of a 'Swedish people's church' was also acceptable to the rightist defenders of 'the Evangelical-Lutheran faith' (Viktor Sandström, FK, 21 April 1937: 26:63). Leading clerics including Archbishop Nathan Söderblom extended this train of thought to the international order, which was not always welcomed by Swedish MPs. Söderblom was engaged in the Young Church Movement (*Ungkyrkorörelsen*), which, inspired by student awakenings in Britain, had initially aimed at remaking the Swedish Church into a tool of God to reach the Swedish people and then, by extension, the world (Aronson 2009). One Social Democrat critic of 'ecumenical politics' regarded Söderblom's efforts as an imitation of Anglican and even Catholic practices, as well as an attempt to combat Social Democracy on the international level (Arthur Engberg, AK, 20 April 1921: 31:90; 15 March 1922: 17:71). Nevertheless, more idealistic visions were also present: a utopian socialist believed in 'a happy agreement between peoples to introduce Christianity into the world order' (Carl Lindhagen, FK, 31 January 1925, motion 182, 4–5). The rise of ecumenism within the Swedish Church is evident from the readiness with which it was associated with Protestantism in general, rather than

only Lutheranism as had been conventional (Ernst Klefbeck, a Social Democratic clergyman, FK, 27 February 1932: 15:22).

As a concept, 'ecumenism' spilled over from religion into politics, a metaphorical – often ironic – use of the term that occurred also in the Netherlands and in Britain. Interparty cooperation across ideological divisions was typically styled as 'ecumenical'. Although in some cases it carried the pejorative associations of an unholy alliance, and domination by Social Democrats (Knut Petersson, Liberals, FK, 23 March 1938: 23:108), this conceptual valence was similar to ecumenism proper: unity needed to be achieved to further the cause of a common humanity, and to supersede historically given ideologies and institutions.

Despite the limited acceptance of ecumenist ideas, international ecumenism was heavily indebted to Swedish actors. The Church of Sweden supported the multilateral soft power diplomacy that was typical of Swedish politicians acting through secular institutions in the interwar era. In autumn 1919, the World Alliance convened in Oud Wassenaar in the Netherlands, bringing together representatives from Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Churches. The conference appointed Archbishop Söderblom to organize a formal international ecumenical body. The leader of the Swedish Church launched a meeting in Geneva and an ecumenical conference in Stockholm in 1925, which led to the founding of the Ecumenical Council in Geneva in 1930 and, in 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC – although agreements had already been reached in 1937; Thompson 2006: 55–56; Gorman 2010: 58–59). In Britain, similar trends of religiously motivated internationalism were represented by the Oldham group of Christian intellectuals who believed in the potential of Christian faith to support social and cultural renewal in an era of totalitarianism (Wood 2019).

Changing Concepts of Christendom in a Postwar World

In British parliamentary debates, the first reference to 'ecumenical' international activities appeared rather late, only in 1944 when the late Archbishop Randall Davidson was thanked for his 'ecumenical outlook' by a Labour politician and Methodist lay preacher (Ernest Lamb, HL, 1 November 1944: 771). The term had the connotation of being left-wing and nonconformist, just as in the Netherlands and Sweden, which may explain the reticence expressed in 1961 by the Bishop of Chelmsford when he conceded that the word 'ecumenical' seemed 'to have come to stay for lack of any alternative'. He regarded it as 'a movement towards the recovery of unity, so that we may indeed be a whole Church of Christ, of one world-wide Christian fellowship'. If that was to be achieved, the territorial impact of the spirit would have to extend to all levels of society. But 'so far, the Ecumenical Movement has made its main impact upon the leaders of the Christian Churches: So far, I submit the Ecumenical Movement has made singularly little impact upon ordinary Church members at the local level in the towns and villages of our country' (Falkner Allison, HL, 10 May 1961: 289). This was going to change somewhat during the 1960s.

In the course of the decade several others observed 'the atmosphere of increasing good will between Churches' (Lance Mallalieu, Labour, HC, 5 December 1968: 1944). In the context of the Cold War and the Soviet threat, religious reconciliation within the Western bloc was encouraged. Decolonization, immigration and accelerating secularization led to calls for pragmatic toleration between believers. Even Conservative MPs – the traditional advocates of the established church – noted 'the greater understanding and the infinitely greater tolerance between Churches than ever before', rejoicing in 'the present ecumenical age, with much happier relationships between Churches' (William van Straubenzee, Con, HC, 31 October 1968: 313). By the end of the 1960s, a Roman Catholic MP likewise expressed his fondness for 'this wonderful ecumenical movement which has made such terrific, such unexpected, such staggering progress' (Frank Pakenham, Labour, HL, 30 January 1969: 1303). Church of England bishops talked about 'these days of growing ecumenical understanding' (Gerald Elison, the Bishop of Chester, HL, 8 May 1969: 1303) and Methodists praised interdenominational 'ecumenicity' (Donald Soper, a Methodist minister, HL, 30 January 1969: 1308). A peer supporting the Labour Party hoped 'ecumenism' would change not just educational practices but, ultimately, the world itself (Lord Chancellor Gerald Gardiner, HL, 15 November 1967: 698). MPs welcomed the advances of the ecumenical movement in the form of the WCC (Arthur Gore, Conservative, HL, 10 May 1961: 234; Fletcher, HC, 14 December 1962: 767), 'the ecumenical attitude' of Christians helping refugees (Frank

Pakenham, HL, 6 May 1964: 1285) and the gathering force of 'the ecumenical movement all over the world' (Lance Mallalieu, HC, 23 February 1965: 330). Religious unity extended to the whole world in the discourse of the 1960s, as much as the world was assimilated into the nation. Experiences of rising immigration led to the suggestion that church leaders should make an ecumenical appeal against racial and religious hatred (Norman St John-Stevas, Con, HC, 23 March 1965: 411), and that school curricula should cover not only the various Christian denominations but also other faiths, including Judaism (Barnett Janner, a Labour MP with a Jewish background, HC, 4 November 1966: 879).

Surprisingly similar trends can be found in the Netherlands and Sweden. The epochal sense that universal understanding was finally possible had already reached the Netherlands in the mid-1950s. The word 'ecumenical' had cropped up in the Dutch parliament in the context of colonial politics, when an MP admonished the government to choose between the 'solidarity of all religions', emphatically including Islam, and the 'general destructive danger' of communism all over the world (Gijsbert Vonk, SDAP, SG2, 12 November 1946: 176). In the confines of the Cold War metanarrative and decolonization, the idea of inter-Christian and even interreligious dialogue was in the air and soon became a multipurpose tool in the hands of parliamentarians. At the same time, there were those who noted sarcastically that the reason Catholics and Protestants were allowed to give spiritual care, and humanists were not, was not ecumenical dialogue, of which they were incapable, but simply their inescapable social presence (Gerard van Walsum; in 1946 traded the conservative CHU for the Labour Party, SG1, 16 April 1952: 687–88).

Invoking the Dutch Ecumenical Council, established in 1946 as a domestic expression of the WCC, MPs stressed the need to actively address social issues from the perspective of the churches. This resulted in discussions about disarmament (De Dreu, SG1, 23 March 1954: 385–86) requests for broadcasting time for the churches (Krol, SG2, 10 March 1955: 2564–65), and debates on a great many other topics, ranging from the atomic bomb and the moral drawbacks of economic growth to poverty and reconciliation with communist regimes. Even if discussions were often limited to domestic issues, they emphatically implied a reterritorialized concept of religious unity that included the national in the international. In the debate on broadcasting, references were made to 'ecumenism' as a concept enabling a broader understanding of theological concepts such as 'church' and 'priesthood of all believers' than the institutional churches allowed for. Thus, 'cooperation on an ecumenical level' was not the same as sticking church labels on religious activities, while the 'ecumenical congress' in Evanston (the Second Assembly of the World

Council of Churches, 1954) had wise things to say on the nature of mission (Verwey-Jonker, SDAP, SG1, 18 October 1955: 2035–36).

More conservative MPs did not dispute the importance of either television broadcasting or ecumenism, but typically argued that one should not go so far as to put the church on a par with associations supporting 'cultural, artistic, humanitarian and other respectable and friendly objectives'. For now, in our post-materialist era, the church

> is the conscience of the people [*volk*]. She now understands her apostolic task, here in this country, and in others beyond it. The churches agree with each other on this task and the 'ecumenical movement' is a powerful and not to be underestimated factor in humanity's passage to a future that, more than ever, will depend on the spirit (Johannes de Zwaan, CHU, SG2, 18 October 1955: 2038).

In the 1960s, references to a reconceptualized ecumene were also made with respect to another offspring of the WCC, the Foundation for Ecumenical Aid to Churches and Refugees (Stichting Oecumenische Hulp aan Kerken en Vluchtelingen, 1952–2000; e.g. Minister for Agriculture Marijnen, SG2, 19 January 1961: 3617; debate regarding famine in Congo) and to John XXIII, who was remembered as a 'reconciliatory and ecumenical' pope (Jonkman, SG1, 5 June 1963: Buitengewone Zitting, 3). At the beginning of the parliamentary year, churches prayed for parliament in a combined service: 'proof of the progressively developing ecumenical idea' (Jonkman, SG1, 17 September 1963: 5). Only members of a traditional splinter party, the Reformed Political Party (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij, SGP) which consciously cultivated the older idea of the ecumene as a unified Dutch national body hallowed by a history that bore the mark of divine leadership, saw in the ecumenical movement a conspiracy to create a united Europe under the leadership of Rome (Van Dis, SGP, SG2, 1 October 1963: 57–59).

After the founding of the Ecumenical Council of Churches (Oecumenische Raad van Kerken) in 1968 as the successor to the Ecumenical Council after the Roman Catholics joined it, the word 'ecumenical' remained laden with progressive meaning: with the pursuit of 'horizontal' salvation and God's reign on earth, and not so much with saving individual souls. MPs with a distinct religious drive, committed to third-world development, liberation theology and human solidarity, invoked the WCC, the Dutch Interdenominational Peace Forum (Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad, IKV) and the Dutch branch of the Roman Catholic peace movement Pax Christi (Dolf Coppes, a Catholic ex-priest, Die Politieke Partij Radikalen, SG2, 26 February 1975: 3055–56).[5] Sweden

saw a similar broadening of perspectives, related to the ascendancy of Social Democracy in politics: The churches began to organize an annual 'ecumenical development week' to 'create opinion about the responsibility of Christendom and society in trying to decrease gaps between the rich and poor in the world' (Thorvald Källstad, Liberal, RD, 7 November 1973: 127:74). The ecumenical development week stimulated 'local parishes to deepen their international engagement and intensify efforts to inform and awaken consciousness about the situation of the developing countries and the responsibility of the Swedish people' (Jan-Erik Wickström, Liberal, 8 November 1973: 129:78). Questions such as the atomic weapons and the status of Christians in the Eastern bloc were taken up by the churches, just as in the Netherlands.

In Sweden, aversion to Roman Catholicism survived longer than in either Britain or the Netherlands, as evidenced by a parliamentary controversy on allowing Catholics to establish monasteries as late as the 1950s (On the Religious Liberty Act, 1951). Many members continued to adhere to the unity of the Swedish nation and the Lutheran religion, viewing Catholicism as a foreign other. The Swedish Church went no further than to welcome Finnish Lutherans, who had belonged to the same church until 1809, emphasizing 'the living ecumenicity that has long been characteristic in Evangelical Lutheran Christendom and particularly in the Nordic countries' (Proposal for a Law on Religious Liberty, 23 February 1951: 146). Ecumenicity beyond nationhood became much more acceptable during the 1960s, which reflects a rapid change in values. One MP highlighted the WCC as 'the most extensive and profound international community which we currently have', involving 198 different Christian churches, advancing understanding and community between them, and inspiring the United Nations (Augustinus Keijer, AK, 12 March 1962: 12:57–58). Another praised 'the ecumenical work which now more than ever is needed at the international level', while supporting funding membership of the Lutheran World Union (Eric Nelander, who belonged to the Salvation Army, AK, 29 March 1963: 13:57).

Domestically, Social Democratic MPs who dominated the political scene pressed for 'toleration and an ecumenical inclination' within the Church of Sweden (John Lundberg and Åke Zetterberg, AK, 7 May 1963: 20:22). As one MP and clergyman put it: 'most within the Swedish Christendom welcome ecumenical approaches between churches' (Mårten Werner, Conservatives, RD, 23 February 1972: 27:82). Not surprisingly, the question of separation between church and state returned to the centre of the debate in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Although right-wing MPs continued to view the 'deep relation between church and state' as a key element of Swedish democracy (Gunde Raneskog, Centre, RD, 10 March 1978: 93:56) making use of a

concept at the core of Swedish national identity (Göran Åstrand, Conservative, RD, 18 January 1989: 52:58), a majority of parliamentary parties were ready to see 'a divorce between church and state' (Bertil Fiskesjö, Centre, RD, 7 April 1988: 95:98). By 1998, the Social Democrats would conclude that the relationship created between church, crown and state by the Reformation should be changed as 'in our century these bonds have loosened, and modern democracy has given the people and nation the first place in relation to the king and the church'. That was a clear if somewhat belated institutional departure from the ecumene defined as a historical expression of religious nationhood (Parson Pär-Axel Sahlberg, RD, 18 November 1998: 17:50).

As we saw, conceptual and discursive changes since the 1960s typically preceded institutional rearrangements. In Sweden, some had long seen 'an ecumenical consensus' between the churches, and the parliament and had rejected 'a cultural conservative notion' of confessional teaching in schools (Jan-Erik Wikström, Liberals, a free church activist, RD, 21 November 1973: 143:87). Suggestions had been put forward for an ecumenical TV programme that would include non-Lutheran churches and 'even other religions' and 'thereby give a perspective of the world that could increase understanding for other people – and also for immigrants in our country – and for other cultures' (Eva Åsbrink, Social Democrats, doctor of theology, RD, 5 December 1972: 131:106). Rising immigration played an important part in reterritorializing religious unity in Sweden as elsewhere. As early as the 1960s, religious education in schools had been deemed more necessary than ever, in this era of 'internationalization in all fields of life', which called for a deeper knowledge of the 'different directions within Christianity, non-Lutheran orientations within Christendom and not least the rising importance of the ecumenical movement', as well as the 'non-Christian philosophies of religion and life' (Thorvald Källstad, Liberal, RD, 20 March 1963: 11:77). These debates pointed towards a third conceptualization of religious unity in relation to territoriality: the decline of Christianity and the fragmentation of Western dominance.

A Fragmented World since the 1970s: Immigration, Multiculturalism and the Waning of the Ecumene

In Britain, the process of reconceptualizing the ecumene in terms of global humanity took an interesting turn in connection with debates on membership of the European Economic Community in 1971, when the Bishop of Southwark summarized the reasons for the British Council of

Churches to support membership. Two world wars had taught Britons that they were inseparably bound up with Europe, he argued:

> the old European disunity and insistence upon nationalism has shown itself to be disastrous, not merely politically and militarily, but also economically … one of the losses [of the Reformation] was that we broke away from European Christendom. That was a great disaster, because Christendom is much more than ecumenical relationships between Churches: it is a whole culture. I hope that, as a result of going into Europe, we may be able to share together our common European inheritance. We must think of ourselves first as Europeans and not as Frenchmen or Britishers (Mervyn Stockwood, HL, 27 July 1971: 260–61).

Protestant Christianity indeed seemed to have shifted from supporting nationalism to advocating of international cooperation and even common European identity. In the 1970s Europe, and not least Britain, no longer reflected such ideals. The Christian culture in which the European and global ecumene had been grounded had lost much of its influence.

Nevertheless, like the idea of religious nationhood, the vision of a global Christendom lingered on, though more inclusively towards non-Christian religions. School education was one key area through which the concept of ecumene was operationalized in Britain, as in 1960s Sweden. The Bishop of Guildford argued in 1979 that the curriculum 'needs to be both international in its choice of content and global in its perspective', covering 'the whole ecumene, which we share with people of all other races in all other countries across the world' (David Brown, Bishop of Guildford with a missionary background, HL, 24 January 1979: 1411). A leading Catholic peer concluded in 1977: 'In our ecumenism the religions of the world are getting together and the Christians are finding the same God the Father as the Jews have, and the same God the Father as have the Mohammedans' (Miles Fitzalan-Howard, HL, 18 May 1977: 817–18). At some point, of course, it needs to be asked whether the concept of the ecumene, rooted as it was in Christendom, was still a viable concept in a society where most people hardly could explain what Christianity itself entailed.

The less conservative theologians in parliament were inclined to circumvent this question. Robert Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury, insisted in 1988 that 'improved relations between Churches and, in places, between communities of faiths' provided welcome networks of consultation, in addition to the diplomatic ones (Robert Runcie, HL, 23 November 1988: 37–38). Conservative MPs, by contrast, remained critical of a school education that tended to 'blur the distinctions

between religions' and disregard the fact that 'the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian' (Harry Greenway, HC, 19 July 1990: 1175). In their view, such education was 'more obsessed with interfaith dialogue than with any study of our own Christian faith', and neglected the Christian tradition only to prevent Muslims and Jews from being offended (Olga Maitland, HC, 16 July 1992: 1249). This inward turn to a Christianity that no longer had a substantial purchase on society, was characteristic of a minority of MPs in all three countries. That the Church of England was 'thoroughly ecumenical in outlook' was hardly to the point (Michael Alison, Con, HC, 21 January 1991: 15). More important was its active role in 'interfaith co-operation' (John Habgood, former Archbishop of York, HL, 22 May 2002: 782) although that observation laid it bare to left-wing criticism concerning the value of a state church in a 'multi-creed society' (Tony Banks, HC, 28 October 1986: 214; Tony Benn, HC, 29 October 1993: 1109).

If the global ecumene had become a relic of the past, there were three ways forward for the future. Firstly, the fragmentation of culture could be accepted as a fact of life. Religious tradition would be kept intact, but could not be used to pursue a territorialized religious unity. The free churches had already proposed this solution in the nineteenth century, with one significant difference: The cultural context was now de-Christianized and secular. Secondly, the fragmentation of culture could be rejected. The pursuit of territorialized religious unity would remain worthwhile, but its religious basis would be extremely tenuous, if not negligible. The third option was simply to keep intact the (fictitious) concepts of the past, and to emphasize either religious nationhood or global Christendom.

Insofar as they were interested in religion at all, most parliamentarians tended to support the second option. After the end of the Cold War and before 9/11, to free Christians from misconceptions about Islam, they advocated 'inter-religious ecumenical dialogue' (Frank Judd, former director of Oxfam, HL, 18 January 1994: 591). It had become British government policy to avoid 'viewing the world as divided between religions' and demonizing Islam (Derek Fatchett, Labour, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, HC, 18 March 1998: 1264). According to a Muslim peer, 'the interfaith movement throughout the world', especially that between Catholicism and Islam, 'should awaken world leaders to the new spirit of co-operation between the faiths that can be an effective base for peace between nations' (Nazir Ahmed, Labour, HL, 15 October 1999: 686–88). It is worth quoting this de-Christianized version of the global ecumene extensively:

> We can no longer afford to ignore religions as a significant factor in communal and international relations. Many conflicts around the world could be made amenable to resolution if the right religious approach were made. I say 'the right religious approach' because I am mindful of the long history of wars and massacres committed in the name of religion. The protagonists preferred to meet on the field of battle rather than the debating chamber. Humanity appears to be moving away from this painful path of hostility and hatred. Almost all the significant religious leaders of the world are calling for peace among nations and mutual respect between religions. We no longer hear the blood-curdling cry for religious conquest and coercion. The Parliament of the World's Religions gathered in one assembly not long ago the spokesmen of all religions to promote peace and harmony across the religious divide. They celebrated diversity of faiths and underlined the common human values enshrined in all the world's religions (HL, 15 October 1999: 686–87).

The irony was that the pursuit of territorial unity on the basis of religion was lopsided: while religion appealed to majorities abroad, its hold on the larger communities at home had become insignificant. As one MP put it, in the context of the war on Iraq and Samuel P. Huntington's work on 'the clash of civilizations', 'we have entered into a new hundred years war – a war not between religions, but certainly based on religion' (David Heath, Liberal Democrats, HC, 8 March 2003: 888). Nevertheless, MPs (many of them clergy) invoked a de-Christianized ecumene even in the aftermath of the clash of civilisations exemplified by 9/11, optimistically regarding solidarity as the way to put terrorism to an end (Shirley Williams, Liberal Democrats, HL, 4 October 2001: 124) or welcoming the 'debate between religions as well as between nations' as the way forward (David Smith, the Bishop of Bradford, HL, 4 October 2001: 165). MPs applauded the fact that 'overtures of friendship have been made between churches and mosques' (Kathleen Richardson, a Methodist minister, HL, 4 October 2001: 178) and emphasized that 'dialogue between religions and states, between religions and within religions' was essential to the pursuit of peace and the war on terror (Colin Moynihan, Con, HL, 9 April 2003: 234). Achieving peace between religions was seen as the way to achieve world peace (Peter Forster, the Bishop of Chester, HL, 22 October 2003: 1612).

In Sweden, too, Christian Democrats, striving to avoid confrontations between religions and ethnic groups, created an interreligious council (Helena Höij, RD, 10 May 2006: 120:3). A Conservative MP welcomed the better visibility of 'all the children of Abraham' (Christians, Jews, Muslims) in Sweden and Europe (Hans Wallmark, RD, 26 April 2007: 99:12). Foreign Minister Carl Bildt

(Conservatives) even suggested creating a European body that would 'promote dialogue between religions, cultures and nations' (RD, 18 February 2009: 72:6). In 2015, before the immigration crisis of that year, then Foreign Minister Margot Wallström (Social Democrats) expressed respect for the contribution of Islam to 'our common civilisation', claiming that 'we have worked for decades for toleration, diversity and understanding between religions – those in our country and those all over the world' (RD, 20 March 2015: 76:19).

Two terms used in the context of the de-Christianized ecumene were 'multicultural' and 'interreligious' (or interfaith). 'Multiculturalism' cropped up in the Netherlands after 1976, mainly in the context of a policy on minorities concerning such issues as primary education and health care in 'a Netherlands that has become multicoloured and multicultural', 'multiracial and multiform', with different 'cultural ethnic groups', and '260,000 Muslims and 57,000 Hindus' (various MPs, SG2, 13 February 1984: 52:1–71). 'Interreligious' turned up once in 1955 with reference to French and British colonial law, which gave a fuller legal status to Islam and Christianity than Dutch law did to Catholicism (Lemaire, SG2, 24 November 1955: 2259). The term began to be used only much later in parliamentary discourse, from the very late 1990s onwards, in the context of deradicalization policies abroad and at home. In 2015, Foreign Minister Bert Koenders observed that 'interreligious tolerance is very important. I already mentioned antisemitism, anti-Islam, anti-Christendom; we see that these manifestations of the old wars of religion are returning in the Middle East' (Koenders, 24 March 2015, SG1: 25-8-7). In other words, the erstwhile Christian ecumene had given way to an international policy of containing religious extremism: it had become a secular conversation on mutual forbearance in a fragmented world with some radical communities of faith, devoid of its once deeply Christian overtones.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have addressed the role of religion in interdenominational national and international relations and demonstrated how it has been radically redefined during the past 150 years. The key questions were when, how and why mainstream Protestant religion became conceptualized in ways that were inclusive of religious diversity at home and abroad, and how this relates to the overall history of internationalisms. We have explored how politicians in three Northwest European countries traditionally considered 'Protestant' at first reconceptualized the

relationship between religion and national identity or political citizenship and then, gradually, the religious aspects of international relations.

We chose to focus especially on 'ecumene' as the most obvious international theological concept of Christianity and on three Protestant countries that have all experienced long-lasting early modern constructions of supposed confessional unity in a nation state but also significantly contributed to the rise of ecumenism in the twentieth century. We analysed four periods of debate – one on the national church in the late nineteenth century, one on emerging ecumenism in the interwar era, one on postwar ecumenism and one on the fragmented world since the 1970s. These entailed gradual redefinitions of religion with reference to territorial and disciplinary boundaries so that the fiction of a religiously uniform nation state was replaced with attempts to include the fact of diverse religious communities first nationally and then internationally. This process entailed major reconceptualizations of the ecumene and hence the international.

Our analysis, which combined distant reading of big data with contextual close reading, demonstrated that the traditional religious concept of nationhood identifying the church with the nation and state survived for a surprisingly long time in parliamentary discourse; the major changes only began in the 1960s. Christian ecumenical thinking at first made gradual progress within nations, starting with Protestants not belonging to the established, privileged or state church. Forward-looking religiously motivated internationalism, conceptualized as ecumenical cooperation aiming at world peace and universal understanding, only started to emerge after the First World War and long remained a leftist minority phenomenon criticized by conservatives.

Discourses on ecumenism shifted dramatically in all three countries in the fragmenting world of the 1960s at a time when decolonization, immigration, emerging multiculturalism, the disappearance of older religious unity and the secularization of political discourse increasingly challenged traditional religion at home and the context of the Cold War encouraged reconciliation. While the world was at first integrated with the nation, the nation became then increasingly integrated with the world. Since the 1960s, awareness about the coexistence of competing but declining religions in Western societies has supported the rise of more inclusive understandings of ecumenism, extending the initially Christian concepts to cover all faiths. Confrontations with radical Islam have encouraged a search for mutual understanding between religions and the joint international endeavour to confine religious fanaticism.

Notes

1 In the Dutch context, 'Calvinism' is somewhat of a misnomer, if only because it was rarely used. Much more common is 'Reformed', which in Dutch comes in several historically quite specific variations (e.g. *hervormd*, *gereformeerd*, *calvinistisch*).

2 The data for the research consists of three sets of plenary debates, made accessible on parliament or other websites, through search interfaces and downloadable datasets for Britain: https://hansard.parliament.uk/; Netherlands: https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/historisch, http://search.politicalmashup.nl; Sweden: http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/riksdagsbiblioteket/litteratur-och-tjanster/sammanstallning-litteratur-och-tjanster/riksdagstryck/; http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/. Other search tools used for the sections include the Hansard Corpus https://www.english-corpora.org/hansard/ for Britain and the Swedish parliament website.

A word on methodology: we have used off-the-shelf technologies in the programming language Python. For Ngrams we removed punctuation, made lists of words (retaining stopwords), and included only Ngrams with a frequency higher than 4, using the NLTK library (http://www.nltk.org/api/nltk.html#nltk.util.ngrams). For word vectors (embeddings) we employed the Gensim library (https://radimrehurek.com/gensim/models/word2vec.html). The following Word2Vec parameters were used: size=160, window=10, iter=12, min_count=3, workers=3.

3 'Comprehension, n.'. OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com (accessed 30 May 2019).

4 The World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches, established in 1914, was regarded by its supporters as a way to give a 'soul' to the League of Nations.

5 *Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad*: The IKV (1974–2004) aimed to influence politics through action groups. The organization made its name by keeping in touch with Christians on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, and by organizing two impressive demonstrations against nuclear weapons in 1981 and 1983 for which they twice mobilized about a half million protesters.

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