A society is secular when its socio-political organisation and its religious authorities are distinct and separate from one another. But that does not mean there is no relationship between them. Western European secular states emerged within a twofold context of affirming diversity: in matters of belief and religious identity, and in the body politic. This affirmation contrasted with preceding contexts of societal uniformity, where there was only one form of political expression and a single religious identity and, importantly, that each inferred the other, necessarily.

As modernity and secularity advanced, so the contemporary context emerged of a state having multiple religious and political identity options within it, resulting in a variety of religion-state relational modus operandi. These included national State Churches (e.g. Denmark), states that officially privileged a select group of Churches or Church (e.g. Germany; England; Swiss Cantons such as Bern, Zürich & Vaud), and states that pursued the separation of political and religious identity (e.g. France; Swiss Cantons such as Geneva & Neuchatel).

The emergence of European secular societies was marked by the advocacy of tolerant appreciation, if not also affirmation, of the value of diversity-in-unity as the peaceable alternative to any imposed uniformity. National belonging became the common point of reference, holding religious diversities together in the context of shared citizenship.

However, today the issue of religion-state relations is not as settled as perhaps was only recently assumed. On the one hand, increasing diversities of Christian identity are present in many societies; on the other hand, there is also the presence of all the major world religions virtually everywhere, as well as many other religious traditions, beliefs and identities, or none. In light of this, our fifth IREI conference will address the relation of religion and state within secular society. It will explore a range of contemporary issues as well as draw on historical studies. Topics will encompass a focus on practical issues in the context of Switzerland and Europe more generally, as well as address more general theoretical issues, including:

- Changes to Landeskirche contexts & laws [with cross-Cantonal comparison & conversations]
- Change and Adjustment for the Landeskirchen: the loss of hegemonic privilege; the challenge of new modus operandi within secular society
• Challenges facing the dominant religious (Christian) culture which is declining / fragmenting
• The presence of immigrant Christian communities / Churches [intra-religious diversity]
• The presence of immigrant other religious communities [multi-religious diversity]
• The presence of variant identities & communities of specific other religions [intra-religious diversity]
• Interreligious engagement as a cross-religion modus vivendi within secular society
• Religious and Interreligious engagement with secular society
• Theology in the Public Square within a secular & multi-faith context: problems and prospects

The conference will include open public lectures and discussions as well as sessions for academic papers and scholarly exchange. It will include scholars and officials from Switzerland as well as scholars from other European countries and from further afield.

**Programme Outline - tbc**

**Wednesday, 7 November**  
Swiss Programme – Evening Public Lecture(s)

**Thursday, 8 November**  
10:00 – 17:15  
*Swiss programme:*  
The new religious landscape as a cause of new challenges regarding the Swiss cantonal policies on religion.

**Friday, 9 November**  
08.45 – 17.45  
*Academic programme:*  
Plenary & student session

Conference Dinner  
19:45

**Saturday, 10 November**  
09:30 – 12:30  
*Academic programme:*  
Plenary & student session (if required)

**Conference Organization:** Prof Dr Angela Berlis, Prof Dr Dr Douglas Pratt and Pfr Dr Matthias Inniger (Canton Bern), with the support of Prof Dr Dr Paul Weller (Coventry, Derby & Oxford Universities), and others of the *Institut für Christkatholische Theologie, University of Bern, Switzerland.*

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**Academic Programme – Call for Papers**

The organizers welcome expressions of interest and offers of papers for the Academic programme. Papers are invited that examine any aspect of the place and role of religion(s) within contemporary everyday secular society and from historical perspectives. All suggestions and offers will be carefully considered.

**Academic Programme Format:** Primarily the presentation of short papers (20-25 minutes), allowing time for discussion, to be given in plenary session, together with opportunity for small group meetings in respect to one or more ‘parallel’ paper sessions, depending on the number of papers offered.

**Languages:** Primarily English, together with German. A prepared paper in German may need to be supplied also in an English version (or summary); it is unlikely that the reverse will be necessary.

**Submission of proposals:** Please submit your proposal, containing a title and abstract (no more than half a page), by **15 July, 2018** to Professor (George) Douglas Pratt: d.pratt@auckland.ac.nz copied (cc.) to george.pratt@theol.unibe.ch. Advice of acceptance will be made by 1 September 2018.

With collegial regards,  
Angela Berlis and Douglas Pratt  
*Conference Convenors*