

# Religion in Britain: Challenges for Higher Education

## Stimulus paper

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# Stimulus Paper Series

**The Leadership Foundation is pleased to present this latest series of 'Stimulus Papers' which are intended to inform thinking, choices and decisions at institutional and system levels in UK higher education. The themes addressed fall into different clusters including higher education leadership, business models for higher education, leading the student experience and leadership and equality of opportunity in higher education. We hope these papers will stimulate discussion and debate, as well as giving an insight into some of the new and emerging issues relevant to higher education today.**

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## Foreword

The Leadership Foundation has commissioned an interesting and timely pair of papers from Tariq Modood and Craig Calhoun. Together they bring their expertise in the social sciences to examine issues concerned with the place of religion in contemporary society and in turn the part it plays in higher education. Both papers cover similar territory and similar concepts. Craig Calhoun's paper draws not only on social science but also on his experience of being the head of a higher education institution where many of these issues are not just matters of intellectual debate but require practical solutions on a daily basis. Students, members of academic staff and those who lead and manage higher education institutions address the questions that the authors raise in different ways.

The papers demonstrate how religion is intertwined with a range of issues and themes in society including the inter-relationship of religion, politics and life choices. They also reveal how religion is not well integrated within higher education institutions generally since many are secular in terms of their foundation and ethos. Only the recently established Cathedrals Group comprising 16 institutions has a formal link with religion that looks back to their founding by the churches for the purpose of training teachers. Similarly, some of the colleges of Oxford, Cambridge and Durham have formal links with the Church of England that stem from their origins in the training of Anglican clergy. Clearly this has implications for the formal curriculum and the student experience.

It is against this background that the papers draw on a number of major themes that stimulate a range of questions appropriate for debate and action. Among them are: what are the roles of chaplains and chaplaincies in a multifaith community? Is it appropriate for chaplaincies to be established for churches and denominations that are typically English? Should religion be considered as a component of racial equality and diversity policies?

The growth in student numbers and increased recruitment of international students brings many students who are adherents of non-Western faiths. In this respect we must ask what the implications are for higher education? What cultural assumptions can no longer be made? Finally, we might ask, where do atheists fit in campus life? Taken together, these questions and issues raise implications that need careful consideration by staff and students.

In terms of academic disciplines, there is an opportunity to address religious illiteracy among students and staff as opportunities arise where insights from different faiths can inform academic debate and understanding. Ethical issues can become part of the formal curriculum in the sciences and in medicine. In the arts and humanities, consideration can be given to the way religion has shaped different traditions of literature and the arts. In the teaching of history, the impact of Methodism, for example, on life, work and politics can provide insights into key debates for students and their teachers.

Meanwhile, many senior leaders in higher education have to deal with the provision of space on campus for religious activities. This should be a relatively easy matter to resolve compared with handling the pronouncements of politicians on freedom of speech and the extent to which university authorities might become involved in matters concerning the choice of speakers and the activities of student societies. As Craig Calhoun notes, these are complex issues that institutions will regularly confront when students and staff become involved in the local community and religion becomes part of civic engagement.

The themes pursued in these papers also have relevance for governing bodies. Here they must not be drawn into narrow operational issues but instead will need to use their independence and advisory role to consider the implications that such questions hold for leadership, governance and management. This in itself provides a strong case for the Leadership Foundation publishing these papers and being centrally involved in stimulating major debates between religious groups and those who live, work and study in higher education institutions.

**Professor Sir Robert Burgess**  
**Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Leicester**

## Introduction

These two papers, by Tariq Modood and Craig Calhoun respectively, address aspects of religion in contemporary Britain, raising questions about what is considered public and what private, and the need to consider this in the public institutions of higher education.

Modood's paper focuses on the changing nature of public religion and secularism in Britain. It sets out some of the relevant changes that are giving religion a new public character, some of the controversies associated with this, and the kind of and rationale for institutional accommodation that already exists and may need to be extended. It does so in relation to the state and the public space in general, and without focusing on higher education. It thus aims to provide a context for discussions about the place of religion in British higher education and how such discussions may be approached.

Calhoun's paper prompts questions about the ways in which universities may be failing to live up to their aspirations to be a public good and to foster equality and inclusivity. He considers some of the challenges posed for higher education institutions and their leaders in coming to terms with the fact that the presence of religion in universities, with all its ambivalences and tensions, cannot be thought to be merely of interest to religious believers alone.

We hope that taken together, the two papers are helpful in starting a debate within the sector, and in particular among its leaders, in thinking again about the place of public religion and public secularity in higher education. These institutions are changing and so need to be revisited as places of learning and understanding, as contributors to the good of society and in relation to the composition of, relations among and responsibilities towards students.

# 'We don't do God'? the changing nature of public religion

Professor Tariq Modood, University of Bristol

## Secular states and public religions

For many in Britain and the rest of Western Europe, the claim that our states are or should be secular is suggestive of an absolute separation of religion and the state. This common assumption, however, is quite misleading about European realities. For example, every state in the EU gives funding either to religious schools or for religious education in state schools, and over a third collect taxes or help raise money for (some) religions. Additionally, a third give funding to charitable religious institutions and one in five has an 'established' state religion, such as the Lutheran Church in Denmark and the Church of England in the UK. What Western European states and publics largely insist on is that this state control and support must not compromise the autonomy of politics and statecraft: it must be largely justifiable in political terms, not just for religious reasons, and it must not restrict (but may support) political authority and state action. Autonomy does not mean strict separation of the US-type; it is consistent with some control over, some interference in, some support for, some cooperation with (selected) religious organisations and religious purposes, as is the case in every single Western European state - which after all are the seed-bed for modern, Western political secularisms. For most Western European states, the autonomy of the state goes hand in hand with the autonomy of churches and associated religious freedoms, with people free to believe, worship and form religious organisations within the law. Hence, political secularism in Western Europe is best understood not in terms of 'separation', nor in terms of one-sided control but in terms of mutual autonomy and mutual support<sup>1</sup>. It is a 'moderate secularism', albeit taking different forms and being institutionalised in different ways in each Western European state depending upon its distinctive history, religious demography, state tradition and political culture. Britain is very much a part of this European mainstream culture<sup>2</sup>.

## Western European moderate secularism

Without going extensively into the character of moderate secular states, it is important to understand three important features of it that illuminate the kind of public space it gives to organised religion, and which can be helpful in considering the ethos that might guide public institutions in a country such as Britain.

### 1. Religion is a public, not just a private good.

It is understood that organised religion can play a significant role in relation to ethical voice, social wellbeing, cultural heritage, national ceremonies and national identity. This can take the form of its input into a legislative forum, such as the House of Lords, or to moral and welfare issues; but also to being a social partner to the state in the delivery of education, and health and care services; or more intangibly, in building social capital and the production of attitudes that create, for example, family stability or economic hope. Of course the public good that

1

Stepan (2000)

2

Modood (2010)

religion can contribute is contextual; religion can in other contexts be socially divisive and can lead to civil and international wars. Hence religion can also be a public bad. The point is that the good or bad that religion produces is not confined to private lives but is socially and politically significant in many different ways.

## **2. A national church (or churches), as key organisers of this public good, belong to the people/country, not just its members and clergy.**

Non-members of the national church can nevertheless feel 'ownership' of or association with it through a sense of it meeting, for instance, certain standards that are not expected of religious organisations in general. For example, when the Church of England's ruling body, the Synod, failed in 2012 to achieve the two-thirds majority necessary to allow the creation of women bishops, many secular commentators felt that it had let the country down, while the absence of women clergy in the Roman Catholic Church or women imams is not part of a national conversation. This loud criticism by those who are not active Anglicans played a part in the Church reversing its decision in 2014. Similarly, the Lutheran Church in Denmark is almost universally thought by Danes to be a central element of Danish national identity, even though a minority say they believe in its doctrines and even fewer attend worship. In these and other 'moderate secular' countries, such individuals, even if they be atheists, feel they have a right to use the national church for occasions such as weddings and funerals. Of course the national religion(s) are far from being the only religions contributing to the public good, but their historically central, indeed privileged character means that more is expected of them.

## **3. It is legitimate for the state to be involved in bringing out the element of public good associated with organised religion (and not just protecting the public good from the dangers that organised religion can pose).**

If organised religions are recognised as being public goods, then, depending on the circumstances, it might be decided that they are best achieved through some state–religion connections rather than strict separation. This is a contingent matter but clearly the experience of Western Europe is that some connections are better than none. Of course, as has been said, religion can also be a 'public bad' – it can for example in some circumstances be a basis for prejudice, discrimination, intolerance, sectarianism, social conflict and violence, so the state has a responsibility to check the bad as well as enhance the good<sup>3</sup>. As with public goods, so with public bads: the interests of the state will not be primarily theological or a mere preference for or against one religion regardless of the consequences, but will instead be motivated by fostering and maintaining tangible and intangible public – or what we might call 'secular' – good. The key consideration for the state will not be secular 'purity' but that the means and ends are consistent with secular rationales and are effective, without being constrained by a fetish for 'separation'. In recent years, concern with Islamist terrorism and 'radicalisation' have led states such as the UK to extol and condemn certain kinds of Islam, to co-opt certain Muslim groups into governance, and to engage in matters of imam training and the schooling of Muslim children. Moreover, if religious organisations are supported with public funds or tasked by the state to carry out some educational or welfare duties, then the state will want to ensure



that such organisations do not compromise key policy goals. Thus, religious organisations are increasingly subject to requirements such as equal access or non-discrimination.

There is also a more radical secularism in European political culture, which is self-consciously exemplified in French *laïcité*. This form of secularism is less about accommodating religion than about maintaining a republican national space in which religion is not present, while ensuring personal religious freedom outside the civic space. This civic space encompasses not just political and judicial institutions but also schools and, as far as some of its advocates are concerned, extends also to public culture – streets, parks and shops. While this is clearly an aspect of European public and political culture, and perhaps even central to the self-image of Western Europe in the minds of many intellectuals and academics, it must be seen in context; namely, that it is not the mainstream political secularism of Western Europe.

## Multiculturalism

In a number of countries since about the 1960s, a new way of thinking and organising minority–majority relations has emerged. Initially associated with the new social movements and identity politics of gender, race and sexuality, in Western Europe it is identified with the institutional accommodation of post-immigration ethno-religious minorities, or what we might call multiculturalism<sup>4</sup>. This marks a new conception of equality, that is to say, not just anti-discrimination, sameness of treatment and toleration of ‘difference’, but respect for difference; not equal rights despite differences but equality as the accommodation of difference in the public space, which therefore comes to be shared rather than dominated by the majority. Instead of creating a sharp distinction between the public sphere of rights and civic relations and a private sphere (of male–female relations, sexual orientations or religious beliefs), we acknowledge that the public sphere reflects various norms and interests of, for example, masculinity, heterosexuality, Anglophones, Christians, and that equality therefore requires the abandonment of the pretence of ‘difference-blindness’ and allowing others, the marginalised minorities, to also be visible and explicitly accommodated in the public sphere. Whilst this will sometimes require enforcing uniformity of treatment and eliminating discrimination on grounds such as religious affiliation, it will in addition sometimes require the recognition of distinct disadvantages (such as measures to increase the number of women in the legislature) or special needs (eg, the provision of halal meat in state schools). Finally, multiculturalism as a mode of post-immigration integration involves not just the reversal of marginalisation but also a remaking of national citizenship so that all can have a sense of belonging to it; for example, creating a sense of being French that Jews and Muslims, as well as Catholics and secularists, can envisage for themselves<sup>5</sup>.

In this century, especially since the emergence of international Islamist networks of terrorism and attacks in the West, multiculturalism has become an unpopular concept with politicians and publics. Nevertheless, there is good evidence that multiculturalist policies and accommodations are not being reversed<sup>6</sup>, and that there could be said to exist a ‘multiculturalist sensibility’<sup>7</sup>: a multiculturalist approach that has been extended from what we might call ethno-racial diversity

**4**  
Modood (2007)

**5**  
Modood (2007)

**6**  
Kymlicka (2012)

**7**  
Kivisto (2012)

to ethno-religious pluralism. The important point is that despite the unpopularity of the term 'multiculturalism', doubts about certain policies and anxieties about certain minorities, there is present today within mainstream public discourses a particular way, alongside others, of conceiving of this diversity, namely not in terms of toleration (ie, putting up with something negative), but rather of feeling that minorities need to be included without having to assimilate, without having to conform to the norms and attitudes of the majority. This multiculturalist sensibility did not arise in the context of religious difference, where various regimes of governance, including moderate secularism, have accommodated religious pluralism in limited ways and with limited reference to a concept of equality. Yet this multiculturalist sensibility, the idea that 'difference' is not an unfortunate fact to be put up with but is worthy of equality and respect, has travelled in different directions from its origins and is now apparent in how some, especially Muslim, minorities see the field of religious diversity.

Multiculturalism is clearly beyond toleration and state neutrality, for it involves active support for cultural difference, active discouragement against hostility and disapproval and the re-making of the public sphere in order to fully include marginalised identities. Perhaps because of this, some pro-diversity advocates are reluctant to extend multiculturalism to include religious groups. One argument is that 'woman', 'Black' and 'gay' are ascribed, involuntary identities while being, say, a Muslim is about chosen beliefs, and that Muslims therefore need or ought to have less legal protection than the other kinds of identities. Matters, however, are not that simple. The position of Muslims today in countries such as Britain is similar to the other identities of 'difference' as Muslims catch up with and engage with the contemporary concept of equality. No one chooses to be or not to be born into a Muslim family. Similarly, no one chooses to be born into a society where to look like a Muslim or to be a Muslim creates suspicion, hostility or failure to get the job you applied for. Of course, how Muslims respond to these circumstances will vary. Some will organise resistance, while others will try to stop looking like Muslims (the equivalent of 'passing' for white); some will build an ideology out of their subordination, others will not, just as a woman can choose to be a feminist or not. Again, some Muslims may define their Islam in terms of piety rather than politics, just as some women may see no politics in their gender, while for others their gender will be at the centre of their politics.

This multiculturalism or multiculturalist sensibility can manifest itself in listening to the demands of religious groups, in encouraging dialogue between religious groups and society, and in treating religious discrimination and incitement to religious hatred seriously, and enforcing the law through an agency such as the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission. Moreover, it may also express itself in, say, the funding of Muslim schools, bringing Muslims into governance and promoting inter-faith relations at all levels, including in state ceremonies such as Remembrance Day.

## Changes in religious demography

One of the striking features of social change in Britain (and at different speeds across Western Europe more generally) across the 20th century is the decline of religion in general and of public religion in particular. This process is often called ‘secularisation’. There seems to be no endogenous slowing down in the decline of secularisation in relation to organised religion, attendance at church services and traditional Christian belief and practice. Focusing on Britain, nominal Christians in the British Social Attitudes (BSA) surveys declined from 67% in 1983 to 42% in 2013, though in the 2001 and 2011 censuses they were 71% and 59% respectively (less than half of 16–24 year-olds were Christian in 2011). Church attendance of at least once a month has steadily declined from about 20% in 1983 to about 15% in 2008 amongst white people and with each younger age cohort<sup>8</sup>. In contrast, the proportions stating in the BSA surveys that they had no religion were 31% in 1983 and 51% in 2013, though in the 2011 Census it was 25% (with just over a third of 16–24 year-olds). This is not to say that religion has disappeared or is about to, but for many it has become more in the form of ‘belief without belonging’<sup>9</sup>, spirituality<sup>10</sup> or ‘implicit religion’<sup>11</sup>. For example, while belief in a personal god has gone down from over 40% in the middle of the 20th century to less than 30% by its end, belief in a spirit or life source has remained steady at around 35%–40%, and belief in the soul has actually increased from less than 60% in the early 1980s to an additional 5–10% in recent years<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, nearly a quarter of atheists share this belief<sup>13</sup>. Those who are consistently non-religious in identification, belief and behaviour are only about 9%. Identification with a faith tradition, especially for Christians, often does not mean strict observance or collective worship but may have a ‘vicarious’ character<sup>14</sup> and can exist alongside a ‘values gap’ between the laity and the clergy<sup>15</sup>. Whilst the young and the highly educated are two groups that are less likely to be religious, nevertheless the majority of university students say they are religious<sup>16</sup>.

The other major change in religious demography has been driven by immigration – not just the settlement of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs from the 1950s onwards – but also more recently the growth of Black-led, especially West African, Pentecostalist churches, and the over-crowded Catholic churches as Poles joined their congregations (the Polish inflow of about 600,000 between 2004 and 2008 was the most concentrated single migration from one source into Britain ever). Non-Christian minorities in the 2011 Census comprise 7.4% of the population, consisting of Muslims (4.8%), Hindus (1.5%), Sikhs (0.8%), Jews (0.5%) and others (0.8%). Looking at these statistics together, these changes have altered the religious geography of Britain, taking London from one of the least religious areas to one of the most, and making the large towns and cities more religious than the small towns and the countryside, and thus reversing the traditional picture. If we add to this the fact that religious people have larger families (the more conservative, the larger), the growth of religion in Britain, after its long decline through most of the 20th century, looks set to be a fact about 21st-century Britain, although it may be disproportionately non-white and inner-city. The religious composition will be unprecedented. For example, 12.4% of 5-9 year-olds in England and Wales in the 2011 Census are of a non-Christian faith (three-quarters being Muslims), suggesting that in 10 years’ time, around one in eight new adults will be of a minority faith, with the figure for London double

**8**

Voas &amp; Crockett (2005); BRIN (2011); Kaufmann, Goujon &amp; Skirbekk (2012)

**9**

Davie (2015)

**10**

Heelas &amp; Woodhead (2005)

**11**

Bailey (1997)

**12**

BRIN (2011)

**13**

Spencer &amp; Weldin (2012)

**14**

Davie (2015)

**15**

Woodhead (2013)

**16**

Weller, Hooley &amp; Moore (2011); Guest, Aune, Sharma &amp; Warner (2013)

**17**

Modood, Berthoud, Lakey, Nazroo, Smith, Virdee & Beishon (1997)

**18**

GfK NOP (2006); see also Mirza, Senthilkumaran & Jafar (2007)

the English average. While in general, young people are less likely to be religious than older people, amongst ethnic minorities, expressions of commitment by the young can be exceptionally high: more than a third of Indians and African Asians, and two-thirds of Pakistani and Bangladeshi 16-34 year-olds said that religion was very important to how they led their lives, compared with a fifth of Caribbeans and 5% of whites<sup>17</sup>. In the case of Muslims, the importance attached to religion by young people has been rising and overtaking that of their elders<sup>18</sup>.

## Minority identities

The decline of congregational worship amongst Christians, especially Anglicans and the historic Protestant churches such as Baptist, Methodist and so on across the 20th century has been followed by a decline in belief, or at least doctrine, and also in religion-based social identities in Britain (but not Northern Ireland). On the other hand, post-immigration minority groups are always more conscious, and made more conscious by others, of their 'difference', of their identity. While this can focus on a colour aspect (such as Black) or a national origin (such as Indian), for most minorities in Britain, religion has assumed a primacy or at least a salience. Moreover, for some religions – perhaps all except Protestantism – the faith and/or identity is expressed not or not only in terms of personal beliefs but also in shared practices. This can take a variety of forms such as diet but the most visible (and currently the most controversial) is dress. Christianity has slowly but progressively come to say that it is really about beliefs and good work, and you don't need to dress in a particular way (or eat in a particular way, or that you can't eat certain kinds of food) in order to be a Christian. For example, you do not even have to wear a cross. Many (perhaps most) religious people in the world do not understand their religion in this way and some of those people are now British. They believe that they have a religious or a religious-ethical duty to dress in a certain way (or to eat or not to eat certain foods). Sikh turbans and Islamic headscarves are now an unexceptional feature of British cities and part of those minority faiths. Indeed, they are part of those minority identities since such dress codes and other practices are observed by community members who may be uncertain of their beliefs. For some, the practices and the identity they express can be more concrete than personal faith; even where there is decline or vagueness about belief, a sense of belonging may persist.

Two points are being made here. First, Britain is seeing a flourishing of religious or ethno-religious or religion-based identities; these are most prominent among post-immigration minorities. Identity assertions usually cause identity reactions, and this is partly happening in relation to some white non-believers beginning to describe themselves as (culturally) Christian (though not as much as in Germany) and perhaps even more asserting a reactive secularist identity (though not on the extreme scale of France).

The second point is that most religions require the observance of rules of piety, and Britain is experiencing such practice-based religions re-entering the public space after quite a long period in which such religion has been eroded away or transformed into private belief. Both these trends give the impression of continuing and each has implications for the public sphere.

## The public sphere

There has, then, been a transformation of the Christian population, with a minority regularly attending services – perhaps not even a majority calling themselves Christians – but a majority thinking of themselves as spiritual or having some Christian vestiges, including some beliefs in the supernatural. This is perfectly compatible with political secularism if not with scientism or other rationalistic philosophies. Whether the decline of traditional religion is being replaced by no religion or new ways of being religious or spiritual, neither is currently creating a challenge to political secularism. Non-traditional forms of Christian or post-Christian religion are in the main expressions of a privatised conception of religion and lack attempts to connect with or reform political institutions and government policies in a major way; they are not seeking recognition or political accommodation or political power. It may be that this post-Christian tendency might be leading to a decline in support of existing state-religion connections. The post-Christian tendency, especially if allied to a more militant secularism, may withdraw support from or seek to reduce some of the existing state-religion connections of moderate secularism, such as, say, religious representatives in the House of Lords or state-funded faith schools. This in effect would be to move from a moderate secularism to a more radical secularism; it certainly could not be construed as some sort of ‘post-secular’ religiosity challenging political secularism.

This, however, is not the case in relation to the growing presence of non-Christian religions or Christian churches as a result of immigration. The initial public claims from these groups were within newly instituted discourses and policy frameworks of race. The majority of this post-immigration ethno-religious population is Muslim but the shift towards Muslimness was partly facilitated by an evolving and expansive set of identity politics and equality discourses in general and multiculturalism in particular, as for example these minority identities transmuted or expanded from colour identities (eg, Black) to ethnic identities (such as Pakistani) to religious identities (such as Muslim). There has at the same time been a growth in numbers, a global rise in Muslim consciousness, and of course the post-9/11 rise in saliency in relation to all things Islamic. Public campaigns for inclusion and equality, conflicts over faith schools, women’s dress and gender more generally, not to mention all the issues to do with the ‘war on terror’ and Islamist radicalism, have made religion much more prominent in terms of public affairs (ie, the things that intellectuals, politicians and current affairs programmes talk about). This is partly due simply to the stresses and strains of accommodating new or previously marginalised minorities and is not peculiar to religion or Muslims as such. Specifically, it parallels campaigns in relation to ethno-racial, gender and sexual orientation equality.

In the case of some religious groups, though, this is complicated by the fact that their seeking inclusion and equality entails not just parity with Christians (eg, if there are state-funded Catholic schools why can’t there also be the same for Sikhs?) but things that exceed Christian requirements (for example, the inclusion of religious dress codes in schools and workplaces). This obliges religious minorities to contend with and negotiate a majoritarian culture in which for many religion is deemed private<sup>19</sup>. What is undeniable is that some religious minorities

**20**  
Archbishop of Canterbury's  
Commission on Urban Priority  
Areas (1985)

**21**  
Lewis (1993)

**22**  
Hansard (27 November 2014)

are making claims of public recognition and respect that, even when they can be met with modest policy and resource commitments, some people – perhaps a growing number at the moment – are uncomfortable with and believe are over-religionising (and specifically over-Islamising) the public sphere. Added to this, some groups today find themselves being perceived in ways that intertwine racial and religious stereotyping, most notably in the phenomenon of Islamophobia. These tensions may be with us for a while.

There are, however, positive forces at work in limiting these tensions. For example, the Anglican Church has been contributing to the (re-emergent) public character of religion, through the 'social liberalism' strand of the report *Faith in the City*<sup>20</sup> (published in 1985) and campaigns such as Make Poverty History. It is seen also in the way that the Anglican Church, supported by the Queen and the Prince of Wales, has been welcoming and supporting of the minority faiths and their concerns, nudging the country from a post-Christian agnosticism towards a multi-faith inclusion into a broad and moderate secularism. Christians in general have been accommodating of non-Christian faiths, with Anglicans in particular, given their responsibilities as a national church, making an effort to be inclusive. For example, when in early 1989 during *The Satanic Verses* controversy, Muslims were as friendless as any minority has ever been, the Bishop of Bradford played an important role in getting his city to understand the pain and anger some Muslims felt<sup>21</sup>. The same spirit is at work in the recent call by Lord Harries, the former Bishop of Oxford, that the next Coronation and the new monarch's reign should not be exclusively Anglican but should be extended to reflect the multi-faith character of Britain today<sup>22</sup>.

Given that Britain, unlike say France, has a moderate, public religion-inclusive secularism, the transition to public multi-faithism can and is happening without the same degree of radical secularist anguish (not that French secularism is all about public exclusions and prohibitions; it includes state-funded cathedrals and state-funded Catholic schools). So, to speak of a 'crisis of secularism', as some do, does not fit the nature of British state-religion connections, with their compromises and mutual supports and cooperative spirit. Nevertheless, some re-thinking and pluralising of this moderate secularism are required and are happening. It is difficult to say what alliances can be sustained in a triangular relationship between a Christian legacy, growing religious minorities and anxious secularists, but I think it should be noted that amongst religious communities, including Christians, there is a growing sense that there is no dominant religion, but that all religions are to some extent minorities because if we were to identify some kind of hegemonic ideology in the country, it would not be religious. In a sense, all religions are minorities and they need to deepen the habit of cooperation lest divided they fall. Despite the evident tensions in this triangular relationship, it would be wrong to conclude that British moderate secularism cannot continue in a way that includes and has the support of most of the people at each point of the triangle.

One of the sites of the public sphere that some of these issues are playing themselves out is higher education. Higher education institutions will need to ensure that members of minority faiths are treated with appropriate respect and accommodation by other students and staff. This may prove challenging,

given that higher education has given faith and inclusion little and declining consideration in the second half of the 20th century and has a culture of secularity in which criticising and mocking the religious may not be regarded as a violation of rights or even offensive. Furthermore, an institution, far from being 'hands-off' about religion, may perceive the need to promote good inter-faith relations just as it might wish to do in relation to good 'race relations' – especially as the two are interrelated. Controversies about female dress, respect for religion versus freedom of speech, gender-segregated seating at the request of visiting preachers, provision of prayer space, and hostility between groups of students defined by religion and/or ethnicity have already arisen – not to mention issues of radicalism and terrorist networks. It is clear that higher education has not known how to handle them and has done so contradictorily and in ways that have offended groups of students or members of the public and have not shown higher education governance in a good light in the media. These challenges will grow dramatically over the next few years.

Hefce has in recent years funded research and leadership training on these issues<sup>23</sup>. A central concept that has emerged is the idea of 'religious literacy'. The diagnosis is that the decline of public religion in Britain in the second half of the 20th century has meant that British society, including higher education and its leaders, have little understanding of religion. They do not understand the importance that religion has for some individuals and groups, in terms of a sense of the spiritual and/or in the structure of their family and social lives, and as a source of ethical orientation and/or community membership, or solidarity with groups in other parts of the world. Such religious people are 'foreign' or strangers to many in higher education's leadership – at best a problem to be managed, not people to be sympathetically and empathically understood and accommodated. Many decision-makers in Britain today are 'illiterate' when it comes to people of faith and their motivations and symbolic worlds. They lack 'religious literacy'. To this it should be added that in Britain, religion is intertwined with race and ethnicity, not only because religion is more a feature of ethnic minorities than of the white British, but also because it can be a feature of minority identities and especially of how minorities are perceived and treated. For example, the contemporary ways in which Muslims are stereotyped as backward and illiberal directly parallels and overlaps with racial stereotypes in ways that have led some scholars to argue that groups such as Muslims have been 'racialised'; that is to say, they are treated as if they were a racial group<sup>24</sup>. Hence, Islamophobia is now studied as a form of racism<sup>25</sup>. One implication, then, is that 'religious literacy' must not be understood in a narrowly religious way but in a context of wider social divisions and group power relations, especially racism, ethno-religious exclusions and inclusions, and the struggle for multicultural equality.

**23**

Dinham and Jones (2012)

**24**

Modood (2005)

**25**

Sayyid &amp; Vakil (2010); Klug (2012)

## Conclusion

When historians look back at post-war Commonwealth immigration, they will note of course the ethnic transformation that some like Enoch Powell correctly foresaw but wrongfully and dangerously diagnosed as leading to 'a race war'; but they will also note the religious transformation of this country that no one at the time foresaw. These two transformations are working their effects across so many features of social, economic and political life but one that we have been slow to recognise is what it means in terms of the place of religion and belief in British public life<sup>26</sup>. Unfortunately, for too many politicians and others this question is too dominated by issues of extremism, violence and terrorism. Such phenomena are exceptional and it is a great mistake to judge religion, not to mention Muslims and Islam, in such fearful terms. We need to think of not just the harm that some militants can do but about the good that religion has to offer, not just to individuals but to communities and society as a whole; not just about religious minorities as fringe movements but about their place in the mainstream.

One aspect of this institutional re-thinking and the challenge of mainstream inclusion is about the place of religion and belief in higher education, and its implications for higher education governance and the duty of care in relation to students and staff. Higher education has progressively given importance to sexual equality, especially in relation to recruitment, promotion and training for leadership roles, as well as identifying and eliminating forms of sexism in the institutional culture or in the classroom. The sector has also acknowledged that similar issues arise in relation to racial equality and ethnicity, though these have not been pursued in the same way. Partly in relation to pursuing the latter further in an expanded way, and partly because of its own importance, it is time to think about religious illiteracy and equality.



# Religion, the public sphere and higher education

**Professor Craig Calhoun, London School of Economics and Political Science**

Britain has long been a highly secular country in which religion has a paradoxically prominent public face. This comes in ceremonies such as royal weddings and funerals, and in the public statements of senior Anglican clergy, especially the Archbishop of Canterbury. Churches are visible landmarks and even tourist attractions. But this public face is not matched by either public engagement or private participation.

That religion should be an issue in higher education therefore takes many by surprise. Surely, they assume, the role of religion at universities is similarly ceremonial? Oxbridge colleges have chapels, choirs and chaplains, but isn't this mainly about architecture, music and a sense of heritage? One doesn't expect the gowned students to be 'enthusiasts' – after all, elite distaste for enthusiasm stretches back to the excesses of the Reformation. Newer universities often wear their secularism as a badge of distinction. Yet religion is an issue (or really, several) on UK campuses, and religion does deserve more serious attention both from academics in a range of fields and from university leaders.

## The 'vaguely Christian' UK

Public expressions of personal faith are not prominent in British public life, the way they are for example in the US, or indeed in many African or Latin American countries. Nor are religious voices central to public debates, except when the debates are about religion and especially, these days, about Islam. The partial exceptions to this are noteworthy. Religious voices, including centrally Anglican voices but also those of the Roman Catholic Church and others, help articulate an ethical orientation to capitalism, inequality and multiculturalism. Bishops encourage citizens to vote as a general public duty, yet even then may be accused of partisan motives. 'Low-church' denominations have less national voice, though Methodists address agendas of social progress, and Baptists focus on family and social issues such as safeguarding children. Non-denominational groups such as the Salvation Army retain a public presence, though contributing more to social services than public debate. Some seemingly secular issues are commonly addressed in religious terms: homosexuality for example. There are also debates in which religion figures as a kind of evidence, as resistance to women bishops was seen as demonstration of continued institutionalised sexism.

Public knowledge of the place of religion in British history is scant. People vaguely know about the 17th century (but 'vaguely' is the key word, even for academics). Asking about 19th-century religious renewal, even Anglo-Catholicism, would draw a blank from most. Few would recall even a relatively recent and once very prominent figure such as William Temple, a particularly active and socially liberal Archbishop of Canterbury, who wrote best-sellers and actually coined the term

**27**

Modood (2015). References in the text are all to this paper, to which the present one is a companion.

**28**

In *GCSE Religious Studies: Religion in Life and Society Student Book* by Michael Keene (2002, with periodic reprintings), students learn that: 'The UK has a very strong spiritual heritage related to the Christian religion and this remains the dominant religion in the UK. At the same time the UK is more of a multi-faith community than any other country in the European Union and the religions within it show a remarkable strength and vigour' (Keene, 2002:75). The book goes on to suggest that Britain was a 'single-faith' country until the end of the second world war when immigration made it multi-faith. This at once elides the varieties of Christian faith – whose conflicts have actually been responsible for more religious violence in the UK than all others combined – and obscures the history of Jews in Britain. The book suggests that multi-faith issues occur mainly between Christians and others and not among the others. It also confounds religion-as-ethnicity with active religious participation – and thus doesn't discuss the 77% who describe themselves to the YouGov poll as 'not very' or 'not at all' religious. Of course some of these may 'believe without belonging', as Grace Davie (2000) puts it, though this belief is not always Christian.

**29**

The Evangelical Alliance is ecumenical and cross-denominational. There is also an evangelical movement within the Anglican Church. Describing the later fully would require sorting out the extent to which evangelicalism is linked to charismatic practices (for some not all), institutional or political conservatism (definitely but not exclusively), or represented by specific groups like Fulcrum, programmes like Reform and Renewal, or the oversight of the Bishop of Maidstone (partly). Suffice it to say that the label 'Christian' masks a variety of forms of faith and practice on and off university campuses.

'welfare state'. The thin grasp of religion's place in British history raises an issue for higher education. Religion is unevenly taught and studied, and even where theology and religion are subjects, knowledge of them is poorly integrated into other fields, from international relations and government to history and sociology.

Nonetheless, a vague sense persists that 'we' British are Christian – and this doesn't change when the 'we' is narrowed to English, Scottish, Northern Irish or Welsh. Being English remains loosely identified with being Anglican. As Modood<sup>27</sup> suggests, this masks the growing prominence of religion in the UK that does not fit this dominant image. His emphasis, and that of the media and public discourse in Britain, falls particularly on non-Christians, especially those linked to faiths seen as non-Western. While Sikhs, Buddhists and Hindus are all visible, public attention falls mainly on Muslims. These are the face of non-British religion and, significantly, a not-very-British higher level of religiosity. Of course, Britons are urged to recognise that Islam should now be considered a British religion, one of many<sup>28</sup>.

Somewhat obscured from this public image, as it happens, are the substantial numbers of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians in Britain. The evangelical movement has old roots in Britain and is spread across a mixture of denominations and independent churches.<sup>29</sup> It figures on campuses through groups like the Christian Unions. Pentecostals are mostly immigrants or their immediate descendants. Their churches are architecturally unassuming, though numerous – indeed often converted shops. They make few demands for the attention of outside publics. But their numbers and church attendance have increased dramatically in recent years. And their relative invisibility reveals something significant about the way religion figures in British public life. It is usually either a matter of elite-led official religiosity – the Anglican hierarchy with an occasional appearance by a Catholic cardinal – or it is about multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is a discourse dominated by Islam and recent immigration, and organised largely in terms of ethnicity, especially non-Western ethnicity. Continental Europeans aren't the issue (ubiquitous English jokes about the French aside). Nor is race. And the mostly invisible Pentecostal congregants are largely Black (though also East Asian and White British).

In the discourse of multiculturalism, religions are used as names for ethnically marked populations: Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, Christians and Muslims. Blacks by contrast are labelled with a racial term. Because blackness is sometimes claimed more widely, the clarification 'people of African or Afro-Caribbean descent' may be offered. But the prominence of churches in Black communities is relatively unremarked<sup>30</sup>. The dominant discussion also underestimates the proportion of UK citizens who do not consider themselves religious: about a quarter in the last census. There are also literally hundreds of small sects and new religious movements. Not least, there is ambiguity about the place of national identity – English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish (or maybe British) – in relation to multiculturalism and to differences in religious history, practice and identity. Obviously religion shaped the Troubles in Northern Ireland, though equally obviously they weren't just about religion. Once particularly devout, Scotland is now particularly non-practising. Chapel still plays a role in Welsh life but is no longer distinctively central. And the recent resurgence of English nationalism seems minimally marked by Anglicanism, though it does demonstrate a certain vague Christian

identity, occasionally made manifest but not much less vague by display of the Cross of St George. As Modood suggests, a vague sense of connection to the Church of England is as much identification with the state as with religion – but the once-more-clearly-religious marker signifies also a claim to the nation as distinct from the state.

Religious identities are only partly about religion. They are labels for groups that may be distinct in various ways and have a range of concerns that are not strictly religious. Still, as Grace Davie suggests, those not active in religious practice may participate in a sort of ‘vicarious religion’, appreciating the maintenance of religious institutions by the engagements of others<sup>31</sup>.

## Religion and dissent in universities

Free speech is an important value for universities, and the idea that it is threatened creates concern. It is commonly forgotten that religion figures not only in the history of suppression of dissent, but as one of the most important bases for such dissent, pushing forward free speech doctrines. Today, there is anxiety that some religious leaders preach intolerance. This is deepened when crowds or hecklers protest speakers or prevent them from being heard. At the same time, there is also worry that banning such speakers and others deemed ‘extremist’ is itself a betrayal of commitments to free speech.

The same issue surfaces in debates over Israel, since many worry that a boycott of Israel would amount to a block on free speech. British Jews are concerned about Israel and anti-Semitism, for example, as well as about maintaining community and religious practice in the community (though for some the latter may be a case of vicarious religion). Many British students who identify with the Left have taken support for Palestine as a major cause. Their calls to boycott Israel, and sometimes the content of their statements, provoke accusations of antisemitism. Relations to Israel and Palestine are thus one of the biggest challenges for UK universities in which religion gets mentioned, but for most participants in disputes or campaigns, they are only indirectly about religion. It is worth noting that the pro-Palestinian activists are neither mainly Palestinian nor Muslim, but secular British.

Today, fear of extremism is a major and distorting issue. Though ‘extremism’ seems a neutral term, Muslims are disproportionately targeted and recognise this. Government policies such as PREVENT – and especially the 2015 legislation expanding its reach and academic responsibilities under it – raise fears of public complicity in religious intolerance<sup>32</sup>. That the repression is not aimed at religion as such but at political violence and ‘extremism’ doesn’t eliminate the difficulty. The religious and the secular are not neatly separate.

The same is true of gender, and helps make it a prominent focus of dissent in universities. To many, gender seems a purely secular matter to be addressed in discussions of personal identity or social justice. But the understanding of others is deeply informed by religion, or at least framed in religious terms. When the LSE created a new Faith Centre, for example, anxieties focused on facilities for Muslims to wash before prayer. Some of this reflected simple unfamiliarity, but focus fell

### 30

The difficulty of fully seeing Black religion is a special case of the racial structure of British self-understanding that Paul Gilroy analysed in *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1991 [1987]), though he didn't much address religion. Black religion is recognised more when it is ‘exotic’ – examples being Rastafarianism or Islam.

### 31

Davie (2006)

### 32

In the government's 2014 revision of the strategy, the category ‘extremism’ was still largely undefined, but examples were almost entirely linked to Islam. Proposals also placed major burdens of enforcement on universities, though some other features were moderated after objections in the House of Lords. Statutory guidance could still pose significant threats to both free speech and more specific forms of academic freedom.

on the fact that the spaces for washing separated men and women – as though this weren't also true of washrooms across the campus. Some alumni wrote in, panicked that we were about to introduce gender segregation in lectures. Of course we weren't, but the issue was given plausibility by the fact that some Muslims sought gender segregation at least in events they sponsored.

Gender segregation is of course not uniquely a Muslim practice. Neither is gender differentiation in rituals like washing before prayer necessarily associated with deeper social inequality – though in some contexts it is. Often gender bias in religion is less a matter of core theological commitments than of customs appropriated from specific cultural contexts. Religiously expressed gender bias may fade with social change – or it may be renewed as a marker of cultural distinction; this is a matter for research and indeed choices and struggles within religious communities. But today, gender hierarchies are often justified in religious terms and this is challenging to universities committed to equality. Anglican dithering over the appointment of women bishops is not the same as segregation of the sexes in meetings, but both raise concerns. As Modood notes, it is interesting and perhaps evidence of the embrace of the Church of England as a public institution, that its reluctance to appoint women bishops received a good deal more attention than outright exclusion of women from clerical roles in other religions. This likely follows from reluctance of those who consider themselves multicultural, tolerant and progressive to level direct accusations against those they consider subaltern minorities. Those concerned about gender equality feel uncomfortable articulating a position more frequently heard from the anti-immigrant right. And non-religious English people still take controversy in the Church of England to be somehow about 'us', while the practices of religious minorities are about 'them'. However, reluctance to speak openly about religiously expressed gender bias doesn't mean the issue lacks force.

Sexuality is also a broader concern often exacerbated by religious intolerance. Like gender roles, it has public importance for some people of faith that may seem disproportionate to scriptural or theological underpinnings. Both have become litmus tests for maintaining religious values against secular society. They are associated with defence of the traditional family and more generally treated as defining values for traditional identities. Discussion of different 'non-binary' sexual and gender identities is growing on universities campuses. Liberating for some students, it is unsettling for others. Condemnation of homosexuality is especially prominent, with both religious leaders and lay people citing sacred sources for it (often contested by others). And of course issues of gender and sexuality have an embodied immediacy not matched by more abstract concerns. Homophobia in particular is often visceral, and by no means limited to immigrants or adherents of non-Western religions. Gender and sexuality are challenging issues for universities that struggle to combine respect for religion with clarity that a lack of respect or denigration based on gender or sexuality cannot be countenanced.

At the same time, some religious congregations and student groups are specifically welcoming and supportive of sexual minorities. More generally, religious voices are prominent in calls for solidarity and cooperation. Some are active in the pursuit of social justice; many are prominent in peace movements. Not least, religiously motivated students are active in efforts to secure harmony among different

religious groups, and lead in efforts to promote greater knowledge of religions beyond their own. They often seek to provide public goods on campuses such as neighbourhood tutoring, peer counselling and mediation.

## Religion as a public good

The public sphere is not simply the government or a realm of public ownership. It is the mutual engagement of citizens – and often others – in debate and the formation of culture as well as voting and decision-making<sup>33</sup>. It is defined by openness of participation, inclusivity and reach of connections, and the capacity to shape shared ways of life so that these are not mere inheritances. While public policy is organised to pursue the public good, the public sphere includes discussions that help define what should count as the public good. For many participants in such discussions, religion is a vital inspiration; religious communities are often important settings for such discussion<sup>34</sup>.

For these reasons, Modood rightly stresses that religion is a public and not only a private good. Attempts to exclude it from the public sphere are intrinsically repressive to it; toleration of private belief is not a substitute. One might think this would be clear in Britain with its long history of Catholic exclusion, but many persist in thinking that exclusion of religion from the public sphere is a necessary dimension of secularism<sup>35</sup>. This view is more prominent and extreme in the French tradition of *laïcité*, with its anticlerical roots, and in countries it has influenced, such as Turkey, though today it is contested there. As I suggested at the beginning, Britain is not in this respect clearly secular. It retains an established church that is publicly very visible. For lapsed Anglicans, this may be easy to dismiss as not seriously religious at all, but for those of other faiths, the one-sided presence of Christian public symbolism is telling. Britain is secular in a way that makes more room for some beliefs than others. At the same time, though, some minority religions get much more public attention because they are objects of public anxiety. Islam is the obvious example, extremely prominent in media and politics though including less than 5% of the population.

Public engagement with religion – including in universities – offers opportunities for both learning and achieving the public good. Weakening it, without replacement, reduces these. As Modood indicates, European states sometimes seem more committed to keeping religion out of the public sphere than to promoting strong public values for all citizens<sup>36</sup>. This pattern has arguably become more common not because of increased anti-religious zealotry but because of a decline in the clarity with which the positive public values of the republican and socialist traditions are embraced and promoted<sup>37</sup>. In a pluralist society, public religious engagement could support the exploration of major issues, as indeed it does to some extent in the UK with regard to the nature of contemporary capitalism and the legitimacy of extreme inequality. Its absence means that advancing public values from gender equity to civility and tolerance is inhibited. Laws and formal regulations can be used but they are poor tools. Shared public communication and open interaction are better. The substantial segregation of ethnic communities – some of which are also defined by religion – is one of the greatest barriers to strongly shared citizenship and public values in Britain. This is not an intrinsic result of any of the cultures involved

**33**

I have discussed the concept in Calhoun (2013).

**34**

See Sagovsky & McGrail (2015) for examples of how religious and non-religious discussions of the public good inform each other.

**35**

Debate about religion in public and in universities would be advanced by clearer thinking about secularism, which is not the simple absence of religion but itself a complex ideology and cultural transformation. See Taylor (2007) and Calhoun et al (2011).

**36**

I've slightly softened Modood's (2015) phrasing; he suggests that European states 'often are' rather than 'sometimes seem' but I think this underestimates the public values embedded in existing, more republican state institutions and cultures – including, eg, public education.

**37**

See, eg, Rosanvallon (2011).

**38**

See Blau (1974). That members of smaller subgroups have more out-group relations than larger ones is a purely quantitative effect of relative size, everything else held equal. Of course it can be exacerbated by prejudice or other factors.

**39**

Wooldridge & Newcombe (2011). The Cathedrals Group is recurrently engaged in considerations, often informed by research, of just what it means to be a religious university in contemporary Britain.

**40**

Dormor (2011). For a more general analysis of student religious life, see Guest, Aune, Sharmer & Warner (2013).

or of immigration. It is shaped by residential and employment patterns but often reinforced by public policy. Alas, universities do too little to overcome the segregation, mainly because access to universities is sharply biased, being based largely on prior educational opportunities.

In universities, the creation of successfully integrative academic communities means encouraging abundant activities that cross religious boundaries. If universities accept too much tacit segregation of students into subcultures, they reduce the learning they offer and the contribution they make to the larger society. However the pursuit of integration shouldn't block attempts by minorities to create their own cohesive groups. Without some level of self-segregation, those in small minorities will always have relationships mainly with members of the majority – and so will the majority. So the burden of integration falls disproportionately on the minorities. If their members want to maintain any level of collective identity or solidarity, they have to work at it, while the majority do not<sup>38</sup>. This doesn't mean that universities should not pursue connections and communication across religions or other groupings; these remain important. The point is that members of minorities may need some level of in-group solidarity and recognition as a basis for extending themselves into wider relations. Despite this, it is common for casual observers to criticise the self-segregation of minorities and not of majorities.

## Religion and knowledge of religion in UK universities

Religious students are spread widely in UK universities but only a handful of our universities are overtly religious. Most of these are Anglican. The Cathedrals Group organises those UK universities and university colleges with 'religious foundations' and has one ecumenical, four Roman Catholic and 11 Anglican members. While some are relatively small and focused on theology (Heythrop College in the University of London), others are larger and teach a wider range of subjects (Winchester University). Most have roots in teacher education as well as religion. They are united today by ethical and spiritual foci, a strong commitment to value-led enquiry and support for choirs. A common theme is to contrast 'the strong ethics and values-based leadership of the Christian-based institutions with the rhetoric of increased marketisation of universities, students as consumers/ customers, and an overtly secular focus on learning'<sup>39</sup>.

The Christian foundations of some of the older English universities have faded, but not to insignificance. Nearly 10% of Cambridge students worship at least weekly in a college chapel, though attendance varies a great deal among colleges<sup>40</sup>. More generally, there are more actively engaged Anglican students even at avowedly secular institutions such as the LSE than their professors may realise. The Church of Scotland also maintains a campus presence – and indeed specific colleges in Scotland's universities – despite nationally low participation in organised religion. Religious engagement is an important part of satisfying academic life for many students (though without research it is impossible to know how many).

Chaplains play an important role in most UK universities (though out of the sight of most academics). The Church of England has chaplains at nearly every English university. The Church of Scotland has eight chaplains, though appointed by their individual university authorities. Roman Catholic chaplains are nearly as widely distributed and many campuses have other Christian chaplains as well. A growing number have chaplains or more or less equivalent provisions of support for non-Christian students, including Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and others<sup>41</sup>. These may be part time or full time, or in some cases multi-person services, and are variably resourced, mostly with funds from outside universities themselves. Chaplaincy is seldom a focus of controversy today, though there is potential for clashes over their ambiguous status as members of both universities and separate religious institutions.

Many chaplains find themselves ministering not only to religious students or those from their own faiths or indeed about matters specific to religion, but to the needs of a variety of students on questions practical as well as spiritual, such as how to face life after graduation. They are sometimes consulted by academic colleagues with an interest in understanding their students' religious engagements, but few academics actually discuss religion with their students or with chaplains. This is not only evidence of secularism. What an American study noted is also true of Britain: 'the extent to which professors are engaged with students' extracurricular lives has declined with the increasing scale of universities, the emphasis on research productivity, and the growth in numbers of non-faculty advisors and other student services professionals'<sup>42</sup>. Even when delivered in entirely secular ways, this is still often termed 'pastoral care' in UK universities; chaplains are important to it, and academics offer less than they once did.

University leaders should ask whether students find the support and connections they seek. But this is not only a matter of emotional support or assistance in resolving personal questions. It is also a matter of learning. Chaplains carry some of the burden of promoting general knowledge of religion – one's own and those of others – that has sometimes been termed 'religious literacy'<sup>43</sup>. This is not something universities should 'outsource' entirely to religious specialists. It would be helpful for academics across many fields and other crucial staff such as counsellors and librarians and managers of residences and administrators supporting courses to have better knowledge of religion in Britain (and in the world) today. This would include knowledge of people for whom it doesn't matter and others for whom it matters mainly through passionate rejection. It would include better understanding of the way religion has figured in history and how it figures in social relations and policy today as well as of knowledge of different religions themselves.

This need for knowledge requires new intellectual sources because religions, religious expressions, and even irreligion have all changed. Islam gets perhaps the most attention because of the political consequences of recent revitalisation movements, but theological innovation and accommodation to diaspora is important alongside old divisions such as Shi'a and Sunni. Judaism is rent by partially overlapping tensions over Orthodoxy, secularisation, different Sephardic and Askenazi cultures, and the influences of a range of host societies. Catholicism is transformed by growth in Africa and Latin America. Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism have renewed an old theme of Protestant ethic in very new ways,

**41**

This of course involves learning on the part of universities and representatives of religious traditions in which chaplaincy has not been developed in the same way. See discussion in Gilliat-Ray, Pattison & Ali (2013).

**42**

Calhoun (2007)

**43**

See Dinham & Francis (2015), which is informed largely by UK experience and studies, as well as earlier reports by Dinham and colleagues addressed specifically to UK higher education leaders.

## 44

See Engelke (2014).

linking personal salvation to self-discipline and business success, not least (but not only) among immigrants and in the developing world. Hinduism has seen renewals of devotion as well as political mobilisation. Buddhists have reworked the relationship between secular and spiritual pursuits in new, often philanthropic (but also networking) organisations such as Nichiren Shoshu and Tzu Chi.

If religious traditions have changed, so has self-declared unbelief. Self-conscious secularism – or atheism or humanism – is both a topic for religious literacy and an issue for universities. Humanism has grown more prominent in the UK as a form of community and as an ideology that borrows practices familiar from religion, such as collective singing, but without professions of faith in a god<sup>44</sup>. Atheists have recently grown more active – even militant – within universities, often making free speech an issue as they seek to challenge the faith and beliefs of religious students. Some of the ‘new atheists’ have taken a cue from controversies over religious cartoons in Denmark and France and made a point of mocking religious convictions and symbols. This can be as much a disruption to campus harmony as any clash between religions. The LSE experienced its own small episode of this in 2013 when members of the Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society approached Muslim students at Freshers’ Fair wearing T-shirts taken to mock Jesus and Mohammed, and were asked by general secretary of the Students Union either to cover the offending T-shirts or to leave. Harmony was restored eventually but not without acrimony, accusations and threatened lawsuits.

What most gives public prominence to the place of religion on UK campuses today is the novel diversity of religious engagements. This can mean something very different at different institutions. At some (like my own), international students make up a large part of those most actively engaged both in their own religions and in efforts to learn about others. Still, UK students and perhaps especially the children of immigrants to the UK are prominent in faith-based organisations. Elsewhere, proportions of international students are not as high as at LSE. But very commonly, it is immigrant populations for whom religion is most visibly an active concern, and who provoke the concern of others. Relations with off-campus religious organisations can be positive or a source of anxiety. In what may be an appropriate role for representatives of an established church, Anglican chaplains are commonly leaders of multi-faith dialogues and communities, tacitly given responsibility for helping everyone get along. Indeed, getting along may well be the biggest religious issue at most universities.

One challenge for UK universities is to develop broader learning communities in which religion is a legitimate and generally not a divisive topic for discussion and enquiry. The focus may be ethics or values, with religion important as one source among several, not always the topic in itself. Another challenge is that students should get to know members of other religions (not just about other religions) and collaborate with them in activities not thematically religious from sports to social activities to activist campaigns. This in turn requires some practical ethics (and perhaps counselling on ethical questions). Still another challenge is to make religion one of the topics on which the public engagement of academics informs the broader public. This cannot be achieved just in compartmentalised discussions among specialists on religion or the students most devoted to – or questioning about – their own religion. It is a matter for both research and



teaching, and it needs to include attention to religion as an aspect of community, class, health, economic activity, public policy, geopolitical conflict and much else.

The challenge, in other words, is not just for religion to be the main focus of discussion on some occasions and to handle those occasions without exacerbating conflict. It is for religion to be part of discussions of many topics on other occasions without dominating or derailing the discussion. This is consistent with Gordon Brown's statement of 'a framework which affirms the need for a debate on values but asserts the three responsibilities men and women of faith accept in politics – to seek common ground, to use our God-given right to reason, and to be prepared to accept the outcomes'<sup>45</sup>.

This is easier said than done, of course, but it is important. Academics themselves don't always have the knowledge of religion that would be helpful for this purpose. Both neglect and compartmentalisation contribute to the limits of our knowledge. So sometimes does distaste (which itself is not just a reflection of disinterest or different beliefs but also of personal trajectories moving away from parental or community religious beliefs, and sometimes of a class-tinged understanding of what respectable people talk and even think about). In this as in other aspects of academic life – such as our images of how to teach which are almost always more heavily influenced by how we were taught than by research – all of us are products of our youth. We update our knowledge in our areas of specialism more than we update our tacit understanding of other aspects of social life, such as the religious life of our students. Academics in or past middle age sometimes find it hard to fully realise that we aren't living in the 1970s anymore.

## Conclusion

The place of religion in the public sphere is an issue for universities because they run public programmes. It is an issue because it shapes the relations of students to each other. It is an issue because many students make religion important to their personal lives and wellbeing on campuses. It is an issue because it either is or isn't well-represented in what we teach.

Because it is important to many students, but perhaps even more because it is important to public affairs from local to global scales, it is crucial for universities to recognise religion – and the place of religion in public life – as matters worthy of their intellectual attention. Religion needs attention in scholarship, research and teaching because it is important in the world. Paying attention will help universities respond better to the ways religion is important in public and for their students. Universities will deal better with religion if we approach it as something that belongs in our intellectual discussions rather than an external factor with which we have to cope.

**45**

Brown (2011)

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