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The persistence of faiths

Ben Jupp

Religious faith, according to St Paul, is ‘the conviction of things not seen.’¹ Such faith has long seemed out of place in the modern world. The Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century assumed that it would inevitably be replaced with reason and science, and knowledge based on observation.

To some extent they were right. For two centuries the power, and apparent appeal, of religions has been steadily declining. In Britain, active membership of religious organisations declined from 9.8 million to 8.3 million between 1970 and 1995.² Membership of Protestant denominations has fallen from 22 per cent of British adults in 1900 to just 6 per cent today.³

Yet, instead of disappearing, religious faith has persisted. Belief is not dead, even if many churches are empty. One 1996 poll found that 68 per cent of the British population consider themselves Christians. Of these, 71 per cent believe in the resurrection.⁴ The extensive 1990 *European values study* found that 53 per cent of British people regularly feel the need for prayer, meditation or contemplation, up from 50 per cent in 1981. The array of books about the New Age attests to people’s continuing desire to explore and nurture their spirituality. So does the public’s willingness to investigate, albeit briefly, some of the 16,000 new religious movements now operating in Britain. Only 4.4 per cent of the population emerge from the *European values* data as committed atheists.

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The assumptions of the Enlightenment have also been undermined by the crisis of confidence in reason and science that has come at the end of a century in which science has given the world not just useful consumer gadgets and pharmaceuticals, but also atom bombs, gas chambers and toxic wastes. That crisis has also affected public policy. Rational, ethically neutral approaches to policy making have turned out to be singularly bad at coping with problems such as widespread stress and a lack of sense of belonging.

We are now at a point when a new relationship needs to be forged, not just between science and religion (nearly two fifths of scientists in the United States continue to believe in a personal God), but between religion and politics. Six factors are forcing the pace.

Firstly, religious belief amplifies the growing voice of ethical concerns in politics. This century, most political debate has been about interests, particularly economic interests and rights. Even when arguments – such as the socialist case for equality – were primarily ethical, they were nevertheless dressed up in the language of objective science, not subjective morals. Today, ideological thinking has lost its prominence and the public has also lost its faith in apparently neutral expertise. We now recognise that scientific research is inextricably linked to ethical positions about, for instance, the sanctity of life, the worth of the environment or the possession of military technology. Arguments about teaching have increasingly centred around values rather than just academic achievement. In health care, new, quasi-religious questions are being asked about the patient's role in healing.

'We need ways for common ethical judgements to be made at one step removed from party politics. Referenda may present the most legitimate means of shaping common moral rules, as both Italy and Ireland have suggested in employing them to help formulate divorce and abortion policies'

Secondly, the major religions are showing much greater confidence in putting forward political and policy arguments. The Church of

England's report *Faith in the city* in 1985, the joint Churches report *Unemployment and the future of work*, the Methodist report *The cities*, and the many calls for a more moral society from Chief Rabbi Jonathon Sacks are all examples.

Thirdly, much of the best innovation in the provision of local health, homelessness, community regeneration and drug related services is now being shaped by people with strong religious beliefs. Projects such as the Marylebone Health Centre, the Kaleidoscope drugs project in Kingston, Surrey, and the Bromley-by-Bow community centre in East London have been pioneers in taking account of the full range of human needs when providing care. This resurgence of religious engagement with the wider community has coincided with the withdrawal of the state from direct provision of an many services.

Fourthly, the growing confidence of Britain's ethnic minorities, who tend to take religion more seriously than the rest of the population, has raised questions around everything from blasphemy laws to the right of Islamic schools to receive state funding in the same way as Christian and Jewish schools.

Fifthly, there are signs in many fields that people increasingly want a spiritual dimension to many aspects of their lives, including leisure, work and consumption. A striking example is the rising demand for training courses aimed at helping people understand their true self or soul. Paul Heelas, author of *The New Age movement*, estimates that 500 organisations now offer this sort of training for businesses.⁵

Finally, there has been a marked return to spiritual language in politics. President Clinton, for example, has used an explicitly religious language of covenants. Perhaps even more striking has been the environmental movement's combination of scientific analysis and policy prescription with an overtly spiritual assessment of where the world has gone wrong.

The place of religion

These symptoms of revival in the significance of religion do not imply a return to the days when politics and religion were inseparable. There

is no longer the prospect of any one religion exercising great power, like the papacy in the Middle Ages, or Shi'ite and Sunni Islam in contemporary Iran or Saudi Arabia. As the data in this *Quarterly* shows, less than 14 per cent of the country are members of any formal Christian church, and no other faith groups have active memberships of more than 2 per cent of the population. The point is rather that the religious or spiritual voice is again clamouring to be heard, to be part of things rather than excluded. The challenge is to find an appropriate place in political life for the many different religions that now coexist. In what follows, I suggest three broad principles that will need to be followed if we are to enjoy the benefits of a cross-fertilisation between religion and politics, while also respecting the very different needs of each.

'The assumptions of the Enlightenment have been undermined by the crisis of confidence in reason and science that has come at the end of a century in which science has given the world atom bombs, gas chambers and toxic wastes'

The first principle is recognition. When governments make judgements about complex moral issues, they should explicitly draw on religious knowledge. Debates about cloning, for example, should not be left to scientific experts and secular ethicists alone. Such religious contributions to debates should, however, be subjected to proper criticism. In other words, a public argument about unemployment that does not include a religious contribution will be inadequate, but equally, a religious contribution that does not stand up in terms of the rigour of its facts and arguments will deserve to be slated. There is also a more general principle to be followed. Religious beliefs do not fit neatly into political camps. Views on abortion and marriage, for instance, split all parties. Increasingly, we need ways for common ethical judgements to be made at one step removed from party politics. Free votes in the House of Commons are one method, open public inquiries (for example, into reproductive technology) are another. But wider reaching referenda may present the most legitimate means of shaping common

moral rules, as both Italy and Ireland have suggested in employing them to help formulate divorce and abortion policies.

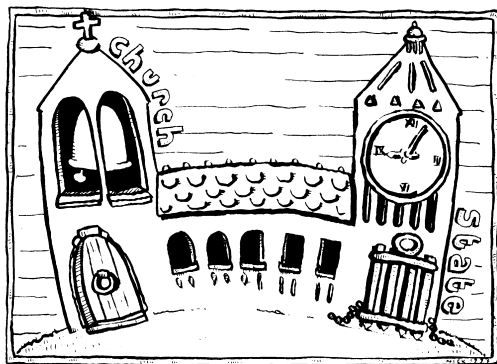
The second principle is neutrality between religions. Governments necessarily take stances on specific issues of law such as marriage, but this need not lead to favouritism towards one religion in regard to service provision. The state should treat religious and secular groups equally, so that, for example, at a local level religious organisations should be able to offer their own distinctive services in health, schooling or care. In education, unless all schools are to become secular, it will not be sustainable to restrict access to public funds to mainstream Christianity and Judaism. For the same reasons, the favoured status of the Church of England is increasingly inappropriate. As Eileen Barker argues in this *Quarterly*, governments should resist the temptation to outlaw specific religious groups by using spurious arguments about brainwashing or fraud. Movements such as the Scientologists are not best dealt with by heavy handed crack-downs. Charity law should not discriminate against some religious groups, just because their ideas seem alien, but equally it is no longer right to give tax incentives for promoting religions any more than we do for promoting business or politics.

‘A public argument about unemployment that does not include a religious contribution will be inadequate. Equally, a religious contribution that does not stand up in terms of the rigour of its facts and arguments will deserve to be slated’

Neutrality is rarely an easy concept to put into practice. What counts as neutrality for some people may be blasphemous for others, yet in a liberal society there must be a presumption in favour of free speech. In schools, we should support the teaching of comparative religion, even if some faiths believe that they have a right to protect their children from the potentially disturbing beliefs of other religions. These principles are vital because in societies containing many different structures of belief, mutual misunderstanding is one of the greatest dangers.

The third principle is respect. If mainstream society does not respect the strongly held faith of believers, this can become a source of conflict. Every society needs to decide just how to balance free speech and blasphemy. Liberal societies will always presume in favour of free speech. But we should endeavour to give fundamentalists sufficient respect to keep them within the community, rather than simply belittling their concerns. Religious knowledge should also be respected by including it within the national curriculum and teaching religions not as dry artefacts in history, but as living belief systems that provide meanings and values that lie beyond the reach of science and ideology.

In the past, religions went wildly astray when they came too close to power. They became corrupt, oppressive and dogmatic. Dangers still exist. The attempts by Christian fundamentalist groups in America to control school governing bodies and local committees of the Republican Party remind us that members of religions may seek to impose their entire morality on a society. But the individualisation and proliferation of faiths in Britain helps protect religions from such intolerance and corruption. In a world of many religions our greater danger is not that religion will be too powerful, but rather that a vital source of care and insights will be pushed too far to the margins, impoverishing our civic and political culture when it could be enriching it.



Notes

1. Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 1.
2. Office for National Statistics, 1997, *Social trends* 27, The Stationary Office, London.
3. Bruce S, 1996, 'Religion in Britain at the close of the twentieth century: a challenge to the silver lining perspective' in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol 11, no 3, 264.
4. NOP, 1996, poll on belief in the resurrection conducted for *Heart of the matter*, BBC Television.
5. Heelas P cited in 'Company culture. Sinister brainwashing at work?' in *Cosmopolitan*, April 1997.

When religion meets politics

Bhikhu Parekh

Religion and politics have always been uneasy partners. In modern multi-faith societies that still value the spiritual dimension, we need new ground rules to govern their relationship.

Thanks to events such as the rise of religious militancy in many parts of the world, the growing influence of fundamentalism in the United States, the Rushdie affair in Britain and *l'affaire du foulard* in France (the disputes about girls wearing Islamic headscarves to school), the role of religion in political life has become the subject of much agonised debate the world over. The debate is conducted in different countries according to their history, traditions, the stability and power of the institution of the state, and the nature of the religion involved. Religions such as Christianity, which have a separation between religion and the state built into them, which stress beliefs more than behaviour and which have no rigid code of laws, can be more easily privatised and accommodated within a secular political system than those such as Islam, which differ from them in all these respects. Some religions such as Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism are communal in nature, are inextricably intertwined with the history, practices and

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values of specific communities, and raise questions that are at once both more manageable and more intractable than those raised by such transcendental and universal religions as Islam and Christianity. The question as to the role of religion in political life does not, therefore, permit identical answers in different societies. While one should not ignore this basic fact, some questions are common to all religions and societies. It is these that I will address.

‘Religion provides a valuable counterweight to the state, nurturing sensibilities and values it ignores. Just as we need opposition parties to check the government of the day, we need powerful non-state institutions to check the state’

Whatever the character of religion, it cannot be kept out of political life. We can separate the church (or its equivalent) and the state by demarcating their areas of jurisdiction. We can also, albeit less easily, separate religion and the state by requiring that the state should have no religious affiliations or favourites. But we cannot separate religion and politics. Politics is an activity in which we deliberate on and decide how we should live as a community. This is also one of the major concerns of every religion. However unworldly its orientation might be, every religion has a moral core, and an inescapable political dimension. If I am expected to be ‘my brother’s keeper’ or to ‘love my neighbour’ or be an integral part of the *umma* (the universal Islamic community), or if I believe that everyone is created by God, it deeply matters to me how others live and are treated by their fellow humans and the state. Religion cannot be isolated from social life or, since the latter is tied up with political life, from political life either. Religious people sincerely wish to live out their beliefs and do not see this as an exclusively private or even personal matter. In the United States, 90 per cent of congressmen said they consulted their religious beliefs before voting on important issues, a phenomenon echoed in other societies. Excluding religion from political life is therefore logically and morally incoherent. What is more, it is impractical in a democracy. If people seek a political

articulation of their beliefs, it is difficult to see how we can forbid them to do so. Such a response is not only undemocratic but alienates religious people from democratic institutions and even turns them into its enemies. If these institutions have no place for them and treat them with contempt, they are likely to reciprocate in a similar spirit.

Religious offerings

Religion not only cannot be excluded from political life, but should not be. Historically, religion has been a source of many an emancipatory movement. Anti-slavery, anti-*laissez faire* capitalist, anti-fascist and temperance movements were often led by religious leaders or those with deep religious commitments. This is also the case with recent movements such as India's struggle for independence under Gandhi, the 1960s civil rights campaigns in the United States, anti-racist movements in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and elsewhere, campaigns for global justice and nuclear disarmament, and protest against the Gulf War, especially in the United States. This is not to say that secular people did not play a crucial role in these and other movements, or that religion has not for centuries justified slavery, capitalism, wars, crusades and, more recently, the cold war. Although religion has been a force for evil, it has also been a force for good, generating a kind of energy, commitment, passion and willingness to suffer that sometimes has been lacking in wholly secular motivations. Nothing in human life is an unmixed good, not even liberty and equality, and we ought not to judge the historical role of religion in a one sided manner.

Religion also provides a valuable counterweight to the state, nurturing sensibilities and values it ignores. Just as we need opposition parties to check the government of the day, we need powerful non-state institutions

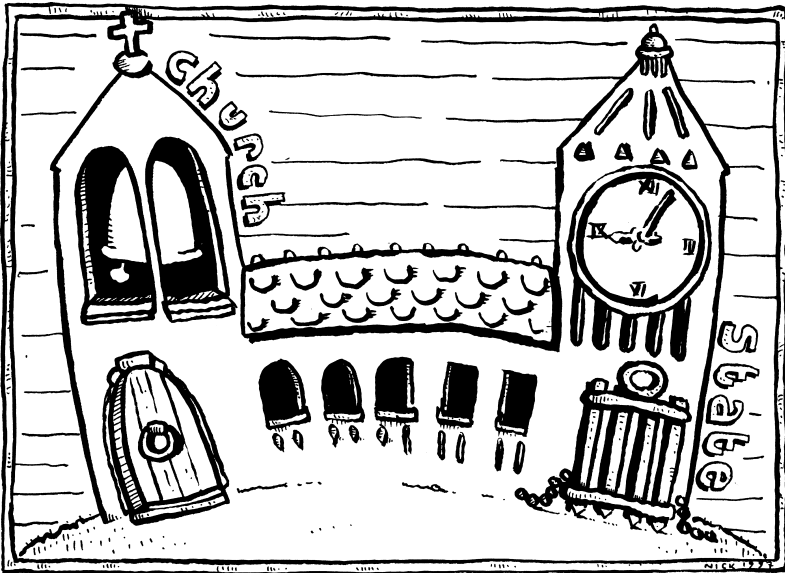
'Religion should not be left to sulk and scowl menacingly from outside the public realm but should be welcomed in and subjected to the latter's educational and political discipline'

to check the state. The state has traditionally claimed to monopolise morality, regarding its interests as being of the highest importance and deserving of the greatest sacrifices. This attitude needs constant questioning. Religion is ideally equipped to be an alternative source of morality and loyalty. Nationalism is a case in point.

This is not to say religion does not nurture nationalism; it has done for centuries and continues to do so in countries such as Serbia and Sri Lanka. However, such corruption is inconsistent with its essentially transcendental and universal character and inevitably arouses unease and a sense of guilt, as was evident in the internal debates and divisions within the Serbian Orthodox Church and among Sri Lankan Buddhists. When the then Archbishop of Canterbury courageously prayed for the Argentinean and British dead in the aftermath of the Falklands War, to the considerable annoyance of Margaret Thatcher, he eloquently expressed universalist sentiments and affirmed the fundamental fact that humanity is ultimately far more important than national citizenship.

Modern social and political life inevitably encourages a quasi-utilitarian attitude to morality. When the main concern is to get on in life, to pursue pleasure and promote self-interest, the rigours of moral life are found to be burdens, leading to a tendency to cut moral corners, bend moral principles to the requirements of personal conveniences and legitimise these acts with sophistry. Here again, religion at its best has much to contribute. It stresses the quality of the human soul and forces people to pause and examine the kind of human beings they have become. It insists, too, on fundamental values and demands that they should not be compromised, at least not without compelling reasons. When the Roman Catholic Church insists on the sanctity of life and rules out all forms of abortion, it is clearly being absolutist, unworldly, unrealistic and even unreasonable. However, it does serve the indispensable function of affirming an important value, nagging our consciences and forcing us to consider issues we would happily prefer to suppress and ignore. We may, and in this and other matters should, challenge the Church's opinions but this does not detract from the fact that it affirms and safeguards important values or that its voice deserves to be heard with respect.

From its very beginning, the modern state has been abstracted from society and has tended to be bureaucratic and remote. While this has enabled it to rise above social, ethnic, religious and other divisions as well as to institutionalise great values, such as equality before the law, liberty and common citizenship, it has also been a source of many of its weaknesses. Although the modern state's administrative and moral reach is wider than that of its earlier counterparts, it is also shallower and more tenuous. The state remains external to society; it is not involved in close interactions with other social institutions and its interventions are necessarily crude and arouse deep fears. As a result, it is inherently incapable of nurturing the moral life of the community or qualities such as moral self-discipline, a sense of personal responsibility, family values, love of the good which alone gives depth and energy to moral life, the spirit of mutual concern and a sense of social obligation. The resulting moral vacuum needs to be filled or the communal life suffers and the state itself becomes either hollow or excessively



overbearing and authoritarian. Along with the family, schools, voluntary associations and other social institutions, religion plays an important part in filling the vacuum and sustaining the deeper springs of morality. That a large number of human beings do consciously or unconsciously derive their moral values and love of the good from religion reinforces its role in public life.

Religion clearly has a vital role to play in social and political life, but we ought not to ignore its darker side. It arouses powerful passions that militate against the spirit of compromise which is vital to political life. It is often dogmatic and sometimes deeply conservative and it fails to take account of changes in the social climate and people's moral aspirations. Almost all religions have a deep anti-feminist bias and frown upon women's legitimate aspirations. When a religion has not undergone a long process of deep criticism and reformation, as is the case with contemporary Islam, it can more readily throw up fundamentalist movements that not only destabilise society, but lead to egregious violence.

Making the relationship work

The question is how we can both assign religion its legitimate place in public life and avoid the disasters it can easily create. This is not to ask how it can be tamed or made respectable, for then religion both loses its integrity and remains unable to fulfil the kind of role which it alone can play. Rather, we need to explore how it can retain characteristic qualities and yet remain sensitive to the constraints and dilemmas of the world, be both transcendental and worldly, be committed to basic moral and spiritual values and yet be prepared to adjust to human limitations, remain impatient with lazy moral and political compromises and yet gracefully appreciate their point.

'Although religion has been a force for evil, it has also been a force for good, generating a kind of energy, commitment, passion and willingness to suffer that was sometimes lacking in wholly secular motivations'

This is too complex a question to answer within the space of a short article. I will therefore end with three general observations. First, rather than marginalise religion or treat it with the contempt shown by many liberals and secularists, we ought to respect it and encourage it to make its distinct contribution to public life. In so doing, we not only benefit from its insights but also give it a stake in the maintenance of a free and open society and subject it to the discipline of public life. When religion enters the public realm, it engages in conversations with other religions as well as with secular people and is forced both to justify its views and principles and to show others why they are wrong. This necessarily provokes internal debates within its ranks, looses up its rigidity and forces it to become moderate and respectful of opposing views.

Second, when religion enters politics, it cannot do so on its own terms and must accept the constraints of political life. These are three-fold. A society generally includes several religions as well as people who belong to none. Religious people must therefore talk in a language intelligible and accessible to all their fellow citizens. This does not mean they may not derive their values from religious sources or invoke the authority of the latter, but rather that they must translate these into terms that others can comprehend and debate.

Furthermore, a religion cannot obviously impose its views on others. It must persuade them, appreciate what John Rawls calls 'the burdens of public judgement' (that is, that honest people weigh up available evidence and interpret and apply agreed values very differently), and learn to accept and live with deep disagreements. Being an institution which prescribes one law for all, the state necessarily pursues goals which require coercion. It cannot be concerned with matters such as the salvation of the soul, personal beliefs, the quality of human motives or individual conscience. Since almost all religions recognise there can be no compulsion in matters of religion, a religion that ignores these constraints is untrue both to itself and to the political community.

Finally, since religion plays an important direct or indirect role in moral and political life, the community as a whole has a deep collective interest in it. Religion should therefore be an integral part of the school curriculum and taught like other subjects. Just as we appreciate the

value of civic and political education, we need to appreciate the public importance of religious education. It is not the job of schools to challenge or subvert their pupils' religious beliefs as militant secularists and nervous liberals argue, nor to reinforce them as the orthodox argue. Instead, it is their job to discuss religious beliefs in a comparative, analytical and respectful manner. Pupils should learn to appreciate the nature and complexities of religion as a distinct form of human consciousness and experience, as well as how major religions originated, developed in history, shaped and in turn were shaped by the cultural climate of wider society, came to be interpreted in a certain manner and became subjects of internal disputes. Such an approach enables pupils to hold and examine their religious beliefs in a responsible manner. Families and religious institutions may wish to indoctrinate children and should be free to do so, but schools are necessarily different. Excluding religion from schools, as the United States has done over the last few decades, produces future citizens without knowledge of religion or the ability to handle religious disagreements and dilemmas, thereby making them vulnerable to manipulation by irresponsible demagogues.

'When the main concern is to get on in life, to pursue pleasure and promote self-interest, there is a tendency to cut moral corners and bend moral principles to the requirements of personal conveniences. Religion stresses the quality of the human soul and forces people to pause and examine the kind of human beings they have become'

Since religion makes a valuable contribution to public and political life, we should design the latter so that religion is allowed to add its distinctive voice to political conversation. It can play this role only if it accepts the constraints of public life and if its adherents have gone through the kind of enlightened education sketched earlier. We should never expect religion to be respectable and compliant, for its basic concerns are quite different from and even in tension with those of politics. It will therefore always remain a little awkward, not always

easy to accommodate, often speaking in an irritating and occasionally incomprehensible language. Far from regretting this, we should value it, for it shows that religion is being true to itself and retains its distance from the dominant culture. To be awkward and a source of creative tension, however, is quite different from being subversive, overbearing and intolerant or demanding to play the game of politics by its own rules. When that happens, religion corrupts both itself and the political life, and needs to be checked in the interest of both. Richard John Neuhaus, a Jewish philosopher, remarked a few years ago, 'When I hear the term "Christian America", I see the barbed wire.' He was right, for no state should officially identify itself with a specific religion. However, the best way to avoid Neuhaus' nightmare is not to let religion sulk and scowl menacingly from outside the public realm but to welcome it and subject it to the latter's educational and political discipline.

Belief in business

Bob Tyrrell

Business and religion sometimes look like enemies. But can religion now help business to reinvent itself?

If asked to place the worlds of politics, art, intellectual pursuit, business and religion on a continuum, most people would probably place business and religion at opposite ends. Business is about making money, increasing efficiency and material betterment. It's about making our lives more comfortable. The object of the exercise in traditional Christianity and most other religions could be described as achieving spiritual development and the salvation of our souls. This often involves making things more uncomfortable for ourselves. It is not altogether surprising then that for many the pursuit of business objectives is anathema to the pursuit of religious ends. At worst, business is seen as a corrupting influence that needs to be kept at arm's length from the religious sphere. On the other hand, the role of religion suffers from polarised caricature. That many people yearn for simplification and a transcendent pattern in their lives or in the organisation of society may be understandable. But that doesn't stop the search for an overarching organising perspective and integration of life's many

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purposes and mysteries from being either dismissed as a pipe dream or read as a sign of pathologically totalitarian leanings.

In practice, the separation of the worlds in which people live has never been complete, nor even thought desirable. The Bible and the Koran are replete with examples of the endorsement by God and his prophets of the pursuit of business. Although always a subject of profound empirical dispute, the suggested link between Protestantism and the rise of capitalism in the West implies a symbiotic relationship rather than an antagonistic one between economic development and a certain kind of religious belief. More directly, the history of business is littered with examples of great entrepreneurs for whom business was a 'religious' endeavour. For many business people the highest ethical standards inform their behaviour and a great part of their motivation for engaging in business is the alleviation of the suffering of their fellow human beings. In this regard, the names of the great Quaker companies such as Rowntree and Cadbury stand out. People do not live by bread alone but it may help to facilitate spiritual development.

The business of religion

While some have always maintained that business and religion are intimately connected, there is evidence that more businesses are responding to prescriptions to take a wider, more ethical, even a religious view of their purpose. In contemporary management literature there has recently been a distinct tendency to look and, ostensibly, to discover the Holy Grail of business success in attributes of the firm that are consistent with religious values. For example, in their highly influential and widely discussed book, *Built to last: successful habits of visionary companies*, James Collins and Jerry Porras investigated what enabled companies to achieve continued commercial success over generations. As they put it, 'truly great companies understand the difference between what should never change and what should be open for change, between what is generally *sacred* and what is not' (my emphasis). They identified a common core ideology combining both values and purpose. In most cases the values were strongly ethical in nature: corporate



social responsibility (Merck), service to the customer above all else (Nordstrom), encouraging individual ability and initiative (Sony), and nurturing and promulgating wholesome American values (Disney).

Even more illustrative of the current recognition by business people in the United States of the relevance of religious values is the spate of business titles dealing with the subject. Among those published in 1996 were *The new bottom line*, *Leading with soul*, *Managing from the heart* and, most interesting of all by virtue of achieving a place over several weeks in the New York Times bestseller list, *Jesus: chief executive officer*.

In lots of ways today there are echoes of the language of religion appearing in the world of business. It's almost as if new sources of energy are being sought to sustain the business machine. No self-respecting business today would be without its *mission* statement. The central role that trust, loyalty, purpose, service and ethics are now playing in the vocabulary of managers testifies to the fact that the corporation's cultural and moral capital is being increasingly recognised as a productive resource alongside the more familiar categories of capital.

In Great Britain, for example, the RSA's Tomorrow's Company Inquiry (1995), sponsored by over twenty prominent firms, published a manifesto that maintained that successful companies in the future would only be those adopting an inclusive approach. Inclusiveness suggests that all stakeholders – customers, employees, local communities and future generations as well as today's shareholders – benefit from the activities

of business. The inquiry led to the establishment of the Centre for Tomorrow's Company which subsequently studied a sample of companies over a four year period and found that those practising an inclusive approach also produced the best returns to shareholders.

Critical to all those who promote the role of religious precepts and ethics in enterprise is the belief that doing well commercially does not necessarily imply a tradeoff with doing good, that God and Mammon are on the same side.

The genesis of a new partnership

If I am right that the language and practices of religion and business are in some senses coming closer together, that these two 'diametrically opposite' ends of the spectrum are venturing into each other's territory, what accounts for this? There are three factors.

First, in an enterprise economy we are now all 'customers' for everything. Ironically, in the present context many religious leaders, like everyone else, have felt the need to take a cue from business and increase the selling appeal of their product. The notion of benefits in the afterlife is too long term for most people. Abstract arguments about faith and the mysteries of religious experience are too metaphysical for a post-Enlightenment age used to subjecting propositions to the critique of reason. Being called a sinner and exhorted to a life of self-denial is guaranteed to disengage most audiences in today's markets. As a consequence, religious movements are developing with characteristics which would have been thought anathema to traditional religious precepts even twenty years ago.

Many New Age religious movements are emerging and finding success in recruiting adherents by promoting the secular utility of their practices. Meditate and become more effective as an individual. Pick and mix your package of beliefs and practices to suit you as an individual. Modern religious mantras revolve around the benefits individuals will reap in their lives today. The prescription for success for contemporary religions is to tailor their offers to suit the needs and circumstances of the individual.

'Modern religious mantras revolve around the benefits individuals will reap in their lives today. Meditate and become more effective as an individual. Pick and mix your package of beliefs and practices to suit you as an individual'

The most conspicuous way in which a number of the traditional religions have attempted to adapt to the new consumerist pressures is to acknowledge the legitimacy of the place of self-fulfilment in people's religious lives. This has not been easy for them. The Church of England's 1995 report, *Search for faith*, reflected the fear and anguish the process is creating within the church. To the extent that reconciliation with traditional Christian precepts is achieved, it is done by arguing that through self-fulfilment individuals can achieve a transcendent concept of self and realise how it embraces the welfare of others and a spiritual dimension to the experience of the self. The trouble is that the proposition is one for which the supporting empirical evidence is pretty slender. Moreover, in so far as the emphasis on self-fulfilment is not simply a semantic or marketing device, it is in many ways diametrically opposed to the traditional doctrines of the Church of England: far from emerging from a process of self-fulfilment, spiritual development is only said to be achieved through self-denial. However, without a concession to contemporary individualism the chances of getting any kind of hearing from significant numbers of people would be about zero.

'In an increasingly privatised economy there are more occasions where we come into contact not with public servants, but with private employees. As the traditional sources of social and spiritual support come under strain we turn to private sector professionals to meet this class of needs'

Second, circumstances have conspired to expand the area that business now occupies. In an increasingly privatised economy, there are more occasions where we come into contact not with public servants

but with private employees. Most importantly, as the traditional sources of social and spiritual support come under strain we turn to (increasingly private sector) professionals to meet this class of needs. The result is that the quantity and quality of the area of the business domain has expanded. Coupled with the widespread decline in the reverence with which we regard other traditional institutions, including the traditional churches, it is perhaps unsurprising that individuals may be open to the possibility of achieving greater meaning and depth from the relationships they have with businesses.

If there is reason to be sceptical about the autonomous development of demands on the part of individuals for deep and meaningful relationships with their business service suppliers, there is little doubt that this is what businesses want. For example, excellence in customer service is being elevated into a quasi-religious obligation and experience. In his recent bestselling book, *The loyalty effect*, management consultant Fred Reichheld argues that giving customers outstanding service and achieving 'long-term shared destiny relationships' with them ought to be regarded as moral imperatives by the firm and its employees.

The third reason why business and religion may be converging is the emerging crisis of legitimacy of increasingly powerful global businesses. There is mounting concern that the actions of business are undermining the physical and social infrastructure of the environment in which they operate, threatening its sustainability and social cohesion. It is therefore entirely natural that individuals within companies and outside them will look to business to bring ethical and sustainability criteria to their decisions. This is why we hear businessmen such as John Neill, Chief Executive of Unipart, say that while he can no longer guarantee his employees a job for life, he does acknowledge his moral responsibility to offer them the training and related support to give them a decent chance of lifetime employability.

The sceptics' response

Not everyone agrees with this interpretation, however. According to the alternative view, ours has become a winner-take-all economy where even



being a runner-up, let alone falling towards the back of the field, produces meagre rewards. Crucially, the opinion-forming middle classes are beginning to get the wrong result from the game. For the middle manager in business the process known euphemistically as downsizing means that even if you are a survivor today there is nowhere to go tomorrow but sideways, down or, eventually, out. For those in the professions with a pride and sense of vocation in their calling the equally euphemistic process of multi-skilling in practice often means becoming a jobbing office handyman.

All of these developments threaten an alienation of the middle ranks of business as they experience something akin to a 'proletarianisation' of their class. Either they 'get given ethics', for which read 'make sure we start getting the right result from this game', or, according to some commentators, there is a significant probability they will revolt.

In his fascinating biography Lord Skidelsky notes that Keynes was acutely aware of how much the economy depended on the moral capital

that religious beliefs conferred. He quotes him as saying, 'I begin to see that our generation ... owed a great deal to our fathers' religion. And the young ... who are brought up without it will never get so much out of life. They're trivial: like dogs in their lusts. We had the best of both worlds. We destroyed Christianity and yet had its benefits.'

To the sceptics, much of what I have described reflects a belated and superficial response to the problem Keynes foresaw. The world is one where the moral sense of individuals has atrophied and the process of business development and growth has contributed to a depletion of moral capital. The fashion for corporate ethics is nothing more than a cynical strategy to keep business out of trouble, not a reflection of a deeply held religious impulse.

Meanwhile, the indulgence of individualism by church leaders is a tactic which will ultimately undermine the integrity of their calling and leave the church offering a form of entertainment which is on a level little above that of TV game shows. The rich, full and varied life individuals once led will become progressively and dangerously narrow and obsessed by instant gratification. The plural society will become distinctly singular.

Reasons to be cheerful

It is not necessarily the case that we have to concede the ground to the sceptics. Consider the possible end result of the great preoccupation on the part of business with understanding and delivering what the consumer values. Research shows consumers want quality, convenience, good service and low prices. But it also shows consumers want products that are environmentally safe and produced by companies that are ethically and socially responsible.

The sceptics can still come back on this. When it comes to a trade-off, they claim, the choice individuals make invariably comes down on the side of the narrower, more selfish values. This is often described as human nature. The ethical values that individuals profess therefore amount in practice to nothing more than a bit of fashionable conscience appeasement.

However, the evidence for the sceptic's case is at most equivocal. A company such as Shell is pretty convinced that business ethics are a subject their customers take seriously. To that extent it may be reasonable to view the move to embrace ethics and religious values in business as a demand-led move. So, even if we take the sceptical position that businesses are improving their corporate ethics in order to keep out of trouble, so long as the competitive pressures to deliver consumer *value* remains, ethics too will remain a central factor on the business decision making agenda.

Secondly, and much more broadly, if the natural state of the world is genuinely a plural one, if there is a natural capacity in our cognitive framework to sustain several intelligences and a variety of social currencies, if there is no inexorable mechanism by which our moral sensibilities are becoming atrophied and reduced to an economic calculation of self-interest then, to that extent, it may still be possible to reconstruct them.

'In practice, the separation of the worlds in which people live has never been complete. The Bible and the Koran are replete with examples of the endorsement by God and his prophets of the pursuit of business'

These are clearly some very big 'ifs'. The biggest derives from the long held view, popularised by Orwell, for example, that something in the process of material progress erodes our ability to hold 'soft' beliefs with conviction. This would certainly be a Marxist view. While the super-structure of beliefs, values and informal systems of social support is a prominent feature of pre-revolutionary capitalist society, the inexorable impact of capitalist economic development is to expose the false nature of this form of cognition and consciousness. More recently, a whole raft of Conservative philosophers have condemned the Enlightenment project for its pernicious moral effects. That project aspired to find a rational basis for moral behaviour. Having failed in that constructive quest, the rational assault on our traditional moral beliefs has

nevertheless continued, leading ultimately to the nihilistic postmodernism of today.

If the pessimists are right and there is some mechanism reducing the degree of plurality in our society, polity and in individuals' lives, then we can expect surviving religions to become progressively more consumerist and the business embrace of corporate ethics soon to be shown to be a superficial and instrumental one, short lived and uninformed by any fundamental religious impulse.

I believe, or at least hope, they are wrong. I welcome the attempt to reconstruct a language of moral and religious values, however corny and anachronistic it feels at first. I also exhort our religious leaders to come off the back foot and be confident in their promotion of religious values that promise something other than immediate self-gratification. I also applaud supporting acts to our traditional institutions of moral leadership, wherever these acts come from.

It is commonplace these days to point to how much forces such as globalisation, the decline of the nation state and a widespread and generalised increase in irreverence undermine the scope for traditional authorities to exercise leadership. Among these authorities, business is one that retains more than a residual respect and trust from the public, probably because it delivers the goods that modern society seeks. It is an irony that the promoters of Mammon hold one of the keys to our contemporary moral salvation. But it is an irony I am happy to live with.

The individualisation of British belief

Grace Davie

Far from becoming a secular society, Britain is a nation of believers. But belief isn't what it used to be.

Though religion is rarely out of the headlines, the stories often seem contradictory. We hear confident church pronouncements on unemployment and cities which suggest religious values should have a place in our society and economy.¹ Yet the two largest Christian denominations in this country publish attendance figures heralded by 'crisis' headlines.² What, then, are the parameters of British religion?

What do the British believe?

The data on British religion are unequivocal.³ Only 14 per cent of the British population now claims membership of a Christian church in an active sense (see Table 1), though the national variations masked by this overall percentage are considerable. There is, however, some difficulty about the meaning of the term 'membership' since it means different things to different people – an increasingly pertinent factor given the growing pluralism of Britain's religious life. Membership should, moreover, be distinguished from practice; sometimes the two

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Table 1 Church summary

Church members	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Anglican	2,297,871	2,179,458	2,016,943	1,871,977	1,760,070
Baptist¹	235,884	239,780	243,051	230,858	229,276
Roman Catholic	2,605,255	2,454,253	2,279,065	2,198,694	2,002,758
Independent¹	240,200	227,782	225,634	221,444	210,200
Methodist¹	576,791	520,557	474,290	443,323	420,836
New Churches¹	12,060	25,250	80,494	125,869	164,317
Orthodox	196,850	203,165	223,721	265,968	283,897
Other Churches¹	137,083	131,510	126,127	121,681	119,453
Pentecostal¹	101,648	126,343	136,582	158,505	183,109
Presbyterian	1,589,085	1,437,775	1,322,029	1,213,920	1,120,383
Total	7,992,727	7,545,873	7,127,936	6,852,239	6,494,299
of which					
Free Churches	1,303,666	1,270,862	1,286,178	1,301,680	1,327,191
Percentage total is of adult population	18.5	16.9	15.5	14.7	13.9

Churches/ congregations	Number of denominations					
	1994	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Anglican	9	19,794	19,399	19,025	18,824	18,799
Baptist¹	8	3,592	3,317	3,359	3,589	3,582
Roman Catholic	15	4,136	4,161	4,266	4,340	4,394
Independent¹	25	4,362	4,276	4,181	4,116	4,021
Methodist¹	6	9,055	8,480	7,982	7,562	7,250
New Churches¹	15 ²	182	345	1,156	1,628	1,995
Orthodox	20	135	151	180	199	219
Other Churches¹	43	1,970	1,988	1,999	2,006	2,018
Pentecostal¹	67	1,628	1,924	2,034	2,136	2,288
Presbyterian	14	6,213	5,921	5,667	5,484	5,281
Total	222	51,067	49,962	49,849	49,884	49,847
of which						
Free Churches	149	20,789	20,330	20,711	21,037	21,154

Source: Brierley P and Wraight H, 1995, *The UK Christian handbook*, Christian Research Association, London, 240.

1. The six components of the free churches.

2. Estimate.

coincide, but not necessarily so. These caveats aside, it remains abundantly clear that both church membership in an active sense and regular church attendance have become minority pursuits in contemporary Britain and no amount of discussion regarding the niceties of the terminology used is able to disguise this fact. Nor is the situation likely to alter in the foreseeable future.

Membership of the principal Christian denominations has declined sharply in the post-war period and continues to do so (see Table 2). The rate of decline is, however, uneven and some denominations have managed – temporarily at least – to arrest the trend. Some of the fall in membership in the mainstream denominations has been offset by extremely rapid growth in a range of new churches, among Pentecostals and by a steady increase in the Orthodox population. These fast growing congregations are, however, small. Any changes in their numbers – though sometimes extremely noticeable in percentage terms – make

Table 2 Church summary: trends since 1975.
Figures for years after 1975 as a proportion of 1975 figure

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Anglican	100	95	88	81	70
Baptist	100	102	103	98	97
Roman Catholic	100	94	87	84	77
Independent¹	100	95	94	92	88
Methodist¹	100	90	82	77	73
New Churches¹	100	109	567	944	1,267
Orthodox	100	103	114	135	144
Other Churches¹	100	96	92	89	87
Pentecostal¹	100	124	134	156	180
Presbyterian	100	90	83	76	71
Total	100	94	89	86	81
of which					
Free Churches	100	97	99	100	102

Source: Brierley P and Wraight H, 1995, *The UK Christian handbook*, Christian Research Association, London, 242.

1. The six components of the free churches.

little impression on the membership statistics of the Christian churches taken as a whole. Two further points are worth noting within the overall percentages of the active Christian population. Firstly, the Roman Catholics have for some time outnumbered the Anglicans (though both are now losing ground steadily) and secondly, taken together, the 'other Protestants' category (that is, the whole range of free churches together with the Presbyterians) have active membership figures which are higher than either the Roman Catholics or the Anglicans within the United Kingdom taken as a whole.

In terms of statistical patterns, the presence of other-faith communities in Britain is similar to the expanding Christian communities: the proportional growth is considerable but the overall figures remain small. There is, moreover, significant diversity within this category which needs constant recognition, for not all the groups have expanded in the post-war period. The Jewish community, for example, used to be larger than it is today. It is also significant that the other-faith communities in Britain are noticeably more varied than their European counterparts in that England now hosts a sizeable Sikh and Hindu population in addition to a sizeable Muslim presence. That members of all these communities come in the main from the Indian subcontinent reflects the nature of British imperial connections. These connections have similarly influenced the Christian presence in modern Britain. The Christian Afro-Caribbean population arrived in this country for the same, largely economic, reasons as the Asian communities, establishing in recent decades a number of thriving congregations which are among the most lively of the Christian churches in this country.

Unlike the figures so far discussed for the Christian churches of Britain, the other-faith populations (see Table 3) concern community size rather than active religious membership. The equivalent figures for the principal Christian groups in this country (the upper half of the same table), denote a methodological shift. They deal with nominal attachment rather than active participation. Here the latent influence of the Church of England really begins to show: its nominal membership remains of a different order from that of any other denomination in this country.

Table 3 Religious community.

Total religious community in millions¹

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Anglican²	28.2 ²	27.7	27.1	26.6	26.2
Baptist	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6
Roman Catholic²	5.6	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.7
Independent	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4
Methodist	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.3
New Churches	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.3
Orthodox	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5
Other Churches	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2
Pentecostal	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4
Presbyterian	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.6
Total Trinitarian Churches	40.2	39.8	39.1	38.6	38.2
Church of Scientology	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4
Other non-Trinitarian Churches	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.8
Hindus	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Jews	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Muslims	0.4	0.6	0.9	1.0	1.2
Sikhs	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.5
Other religions	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3
Total non-Trinitarian Churches and other religions	2.1	2.6	3.2	3.6	3.9
Total all religions	42.3	42.4	42.3	42.2	42.1
Percentage of population:					
Trinitarian Churches	72	71	69	67	65
Non-Trinitarian Churches and other religions	4	5	6	6	7
Total all religions	76	76	75	73	72

Source: Brierley P and Wraight H, 1995, *The UK Christian handbook*, Christian Research Association, London, 284.

1. Best estimates given where precise records are not available.

2. Baptised membership.

Nominal allegiance is by no means the same as no allegiance at all. These categories have quite different implications, not only for the sociologist, but also for those responsible for pastoral care. In Britain, nominal allegiance is by far the most prevalent form of religious attachment and while no allegiance is moderately rare, it remains less so than in many European countries. The description of the Church of England as the church from which the English choose to stay away still – though for how much longer is difficult to say – catches the religious mood of a significant proportion of the English, if not the British, population.

All in all, the considerable diversity both within the actively Christian communities and between a growing range of faiths, largely brought about by immigration, overlays a predominantly Christian nominalism which is symbolised by a passive attachment of many to their state churches. In England, nominalism takes Anglican forms. Presbyterianism, in the form of the Church of Scotland, plays a similar role north of the border. In contrast, secularism – at least in any developed sense – remains the creed of a relatively small, though vocal, minority.

The distinction between nominalism and active religiosity can be reinforced if we turn to patterns of religious belief, rather than belonging, in this country. The evidence for some sort of religious belief is persuasive. A clutch of studies⁴ agrees that in the early post-war decades, the British were by a considerable majority a believing people. The 1948 study *Puzzled people*, for example, found that four out of five women and two out of three men assented to the possibility of there being a God, and most of the rest expressed doubt rather than disbelief. Uncompromising disbelievers in a deity accounted for one in twenty. The enquiries revealed a high incidence of private prayer, much sympathy for religious education, a fair amount of antipathy towards organised religion and a truly wonderful confusion of doctrine. It is easy to see how elements of common religion which are antithetical to Christianity became incorporated into such beliefs, for it seems orthodox Christian theology played a relatively small part in the everyday thinking of most British people.

How far do these results hold some 40 to 50 years later? The broadest of recent enquiries was the *European values study*, first carried out in 1981 and repeated in 1990⁵ (see Table 4). Notably, 71 per cent report

Table 4 Indicators of religious commitment.
Great Britain compared with the European average, percentages

Indicators of religious disposition	Great Britain		European average	
	1981	1990	1981	1990
Often think about meaning and purposes of life	34	36	30	33
Often think about death	15	19	18	20
Need moments of prayer, etc	50	53	57	60
Define self as a religious person	58	54	62	63
Draw comfort or strength from religion	46	44	48	48
God is important in my life	50	44	51	52

Indicators of orthodox beliefs	Great Britain		European average	
	1981	1990	1981	1990
Believe in personal god	31	32	32	39
Believe in a spirit or life force	39	41	36	30
Believe in:				
God	76	71	73	72
Sin	69	68	57	54
Soul	59	64	57	61
Heaven	57	53	40	42
Life after death	45	44	43	44
The devil	30	30	25	26
Hell	27	25	23	23

Source: Timms N, 1992, *Family and citizenship: values in contemporary Britain*, Dartmouth, Aldershot.

believing in God (76 per cent in 1981); 54 per cent (58 per cent in 1981) define themselves as religious people; 53 per cent (compared to the earlier 50 per cent) regularly feel the need for prayer, meditation or contemplation; and 44 per cent (compared with 46 per cent) draw comfort or strength in religion. Conversely, only 4.4 per cent (4 per cent

in 1981) of the population emerge as confirmed atheists. Such data can be correlated with a wide variety of socioeconomic indicators. It is also the case that women are consistently more religious than men, as are older people than the young. More local studies, such as one of 1,600 people in Leeds, confirm these findings.⁶

An additional study which took place in Islington, London in the late 1960s⁷ includes one of the most revealing quotes of the literature. When respondents were probed about their belief in God, they were asked, 'Do you believe in a God who can change the course of events on earth?' To which one respondent replied, 'No, just the ordinary one.' Answers such as these point up the paradox at the heart of the whole question. What is the significance, sociological or otherwise, of an *ordinary* God? Is this, or is this not, evidence of religious belief? The conclusion of the Islington study illustrates this point and provides, in addition, a number of clues towards understanding at least some of the processes involved:

'The section above suggests the tentative conclusion that religious belief, when not associated with active membership of a church, tends to be associated with superstitious belief while church attendance tends to be antithetical to superstition. Moreover, we have some evidence that for those people who do not go to church yet say they are religious and pray often, religious belief has moved quite far from the orthodox church position and is really much closer to what would normally be called superstition.'⁸

Religious practice encourages the believer to resist elements antithetical to Christian doctrine. Given the marked decline in practice, such resistance is diminished. No longer anchored by regular practice, belief drifts further and further away from orthodoxy. Belief persists although it is increasingly 'contaminated' by elements inconsistent with, even antithetical to, Christian teaching.

This detachment of belief from regular practice is a far greater challenge to the churches than the secular society in which we are thought

to live. At the very least, it demands the sustained attention of scholars from a variety of disciplines. It is a European phenomenon, widely shared by most northern European countries for some time and rapidly becoming the norm in southern Europe as well. How can this be explained?

Modernity and the state of religion

Traditional explanations⁹ are broadly as follows. The key is to be found in the Reformation which hastened the rise both of individualism and of rationality, currents which were to change fundamentally the nature of religion and its place in the modern world. The process should not be oversimplified; it is both complex and long term. An underlying pattern can nonetheless be discerned, which took four centuries to complete. For at least three of these, religious controversy dominated much of Europe's political, military and cultural life. It took the form of competing convictions about the nature of God and his (sic) relationship to the individual believer, notably Catholic and Protestant understandings about the right (and only) way to salvation. Gradually a *modus vivendi* emerged as greater toleration of difference became the norm. But toleration is itself two-edged; it implies a lack of conviction, a capacity to live and let live which becomes not only dominant but pervasive. A further epistemological shift is, it seems, inevitable. In the late modern period the concept of God becomes increasingly subjective – individuals simply pick and mix from the diversity on offer. Religion, like so many other things, has entered the world of options, lifestyles and preferences. For the great majority, serious convictions are not only rejected from a personal point of view, they become difficult to comprehend altogether.

The theory of a gradual decline of the importance of religion alongside modernisation has become known as the secularisation thesis. It developed within a European framework and for a certain stage in Europe's religious development there is certainly a convincing fit between the argument and the data. As Europe's economic and political life developed, it was evident that religion diminished in public

significance. Religious aspirations continued to exist but were increasingly relegated to the private sphere. Bit by bit, however, the thesis rather than the data began to dominate the agenda. The fit became theoretically necessary rather than empirically founded. Europe's religious life was considered a prototype of global religiosity. What Europe did today everyone else would do tomorrow. Secularisation was a necessary part of modernisation and as the world modernised, it would automatically secularise.

But if this was the case, how was it possible to accommodate the very different situation found in the United States? The answer lay in presenting the American experience as an exception. Academic enquiry centred on elucidating the specificities within American society which could account for the successful cohabitation of religion and modernity.

Yet as the rest of the world remains as furiously religious as ever while modernising, it seems increasingly likely that Europe rather than the United States may be exceptional.¹⁰ Starting from this assumption, the argument has to proceed rather differently. European patterns of religion must be seen as one strand among many others which make up what it means to be European. European religion is not a model for export. It is something distinct that we are only just beginning to comprehend. Like it or not, we must include Britain within it.

Even in the European context we must be careful how we interpret the secularisation thesis. Some may assume that because religion has declined in public significance, the next step will be for people to lose all private religious belief. But the data suggests individual religious belief is not ceasing. Most Europeans no longer belong to churches or other religious institutions, but they continue to hold beliefs, albeit of an increasingly individualised and unorthodox nature.

Politics without religious prescriptions

One question which remains specific to Britain is that of how a population which holds individualised beliefs might respond to a new government attributing some of its inspiration to religious values. The British seem anxious to find a political leadership which will embody



certain values that appear to be slipping away in modern Britain. They are not, in contrast, willing to tolerate a leadership that tells them what to do, especially if this implies crossing the boundaries from public to private life. Vicarious is the best way to describe this ambivalence. It is easily illustrated. We expect the bishops of the established Church to uphold the creeds in which most of us have ceased to believe in any serious sense.¹¹ We expect the royal family to embody ideals of family life which the rest of us discarded decades ago. We respect a political leadership inspired by religious as well as political ideologies, provided the implications are not imposed too rigorously on our private lives. We want to have our cake and eat it – in religion, as in so much else.

Grace Davie is the author of Religion in Britain since 1945: believing without belonging (Blackwell).

Notes

1. For example, Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, 1985, *Faith in the city*, Church House Publishing, London; and Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, 1997, *Unemployment and the future of work: an enquiry for the churches*, Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, London.
2. For example, 'Biggest drift from Anglican services in two decades', *The Times*, 7 February 1997.
3. Brierley P and Wraight H, 1995, *The UK Christian handbook*, Christian Research Association, London.
4. For example, Gorer G, 1995, *Exploring English character*, Cresset Press, London; and Gorer G, 1965, *Death, grief and mourning in contemporary Britain*, Cresset Press, London; Mass Observation, 1948, *Puzzled people: a study of popular attitudes in religion, ethics, progress and politics in a London borough*, Victor Gollancz, London, 156.
5. Timms N, 1992, *Family and citizenship: values in contemporary Britain*, Dartmouth, Aldershot.
6. Krarup H, 1982, 'Interview schedule: basic frequencies by question' in *Conventional religion and common religion in Leeds*, Religious Research Papers 12, University of Leeds, Leeds.
7. Abercrombie N, Baker J, Brett J and Foster J, 1970, 'Superstition and religion: the God of the gaps', in Martin D and Hill M, eds, *A sociological yearbook of religion*, SCM, London, vol 3, 91–129.
8. See note 7, 124.
9. For example, Bruce S, 1996, *Religion in the modern world. From cathedrals to cults*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
10. See Casanova J, 1994, *Public religions in the modern world*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.
11. See Davie G, 1997, 'Christian belief in modern Britain: the tradition becomes vicarious' in Platten S, James G and Chandler A, *New Soundings: essays on developing tradition*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London.

Fundamentalism

Karen Armstrong

The late twentieth century has seen an extraordinary eruption of conservative, extremist religion all over the world. It is not confined to any one religious tradition, but has appeared in all the major faiths. It is a highly politicised form of religiosity and often results in violence. In recent years we have witnessed the *fatwa* issued by the late Ayatollah Khomeini against Salman Rushdie, suicide bombings by Muslim extremists, a massacre of Arab worshippers in a Hebron mosque by a member of a far right Jewish religious group, the killing of doctors and nurses who work in abortion clinics by Protestant fundamentalists in the United States, the gassing of commuters on the Tokyo underground by the Aum Shindri Kyo sect. The catalogue of atrocities seems endless and is continually increasing. How can we explain this upsurge of violent, embattled faith, apparently so at odds with the original impulse of the major religions, which all stress the paramount importance of justice and compassion? It is not only secularists who view these extremists with bewilderment and dismay; their own co-religionists usually regard their actions with horror.

This phenomenon is not a passing fad, but an essential part of the modern and postmodern world. Religious fundamentalism (an unsatisfactory but ubiquitous term) will be with us well into the third millennium. It has taken journalists and commentators by surprise.

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In the 1950s and 1960s, religion seemed to be an increasingly marginal activity; secularism and the separation of religion and politics seemed to be the order of the day. Faith was becoming privatised, a matter for the home and heart; it was thought it should not influence state or foreign policy. In Europe, particularly, the mixture of Christianity and politics had often been lethal, resulting in the Crusades, the Inquisition and state persecution. Progress and enlightenment seemed to demand that religion be pushed back into an isolated sphere.

But in the 1970s and 1980s this secularist confidence was rudely shattered as religion began to dominate the headlines in a way that would formerly have been inconceivable. An obscure Muslim cleric brought down the Shah's despotic but apparently strong regime in Iran in 1979; the religious Right in the United States surged into prominence with President Ronald Reagan, who proved a disappointment to them but who shared many of their beliefs; the Arab-Israeli conflict, which had originally been fuelled on both sides by a defiantly secular ideology, became increasingly open – on both sides – to the influence of religious extremists who are adamantly opposed to the concessions demanded by any peace process. In other parts of the world we have seen an upsurge of fundamentalist Buddhism, Sikhism and even a fundamentalist Confucianism. All these movements have been determined to push religion out of the shadows and back onto centre stage. They have succeeded.

To many bemused commentators this violent religiosity seems abhorrent, atavistic and fanatical – a throwback to an earlier unenlightened age. But fundamentalists movements are usually highly innovative adaptations to the dramatic changes of modernity. True, fundamentalists often look back nostalgically to a golden age in the distant past. Protestant fundamentalists in the United States hark back to the Pilgrim Fathers; Muslims to the age of the Prophet Muhammad or to Imam Husain, the Shi'i hero who died a martyr to despotism and tyranny; Jewish fundamentalists in Israel look back to Joshua, the implacable military conqueror of the Promised Land. But while they draw strength from these past glories, fundamentalists are evolving a distinctively modern form of faith, if only because many of their innovations are

explicit rejections of the modern, secular ethos. Further, fundamentalists are keen to exploit modern technology, relying heavily on television, radio, computers, cassettes and the internet to spread their message. More importantly, their ideology is the product of the modern world and could have appeared in no other age but our own.

Most religious people believe their faith is timeless and has remained essentially unchanged throughout the centuries. But expressions of religion are in constant flux. Each tradition can be seen as a continuous dialogue between a transcendent reality and mundane events in this world. When society changes, religious ideas and practices change too, as people struggle to make their tradition speak to their unique conditions. An obvious example is the period of the reformation in Europe, when both Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians found that the old medieval pieties no longer spoke to them. They had to find new religious forms and doctrines to express the novelty of life in the early modern period. The same process is at work today – perhaps in an accelerated form, since our society more than any other has institutionalised change. Our modernity is different from any other, because we have founded a civilisation based not on an agrarian surplus but on technology and industry. This has involved far-reaching transformations that permeate every aspect of our lives. To make their religion speak to them in these strange conditions, people all over the world have had to make a creative effort to formulate their faith anew. Some have embraced modernity, seeking to integrate the new insights of science, sociology, pluralism, secularism, anthropology and psychology. Others are profoundly disturbed by these changes and believe the world they knew is coming to an end. These latter are the people whom we call fundamentalists.

Fundamentalism first appeared in the early twentieth century in the United States, the showcase of modernity. In 1920, conservative Protestants coined the term fundamentalism, using it as a badge of pride to describe their attempt to hold on to the ‘fundamentals’ of their faith. They were appalled by their more liberal co-religionists, who had taken on board the new scientific methods of biblical criticism, which seemed drastically to change the biblical message, as well as Darwin’s

theory of evolution, with its worrying implications for the biblical account of creation. But their objections were not purely doctrinal. The new American fundamentalists were possessed by deep fear and outrage. They felt they were living in a chaotic world and were witnessing the collapse of all their received ideas. They resented the growing power of the liberal intellectuals, who looked with disdain at their more traditional religiosity. They resented their increasing loss of prestige and influence in America, feeling displaced and marginalised. They were appalled by the loss of the old Puritan values and the new permissiveness, which they attributed to foreign influence. Fundamentalists felt colonised by the intelligentsia and liberal Christians of the Eastern seaboard, who were imposing alien ideas and mores upon them. Many of these ideas had come from Europe. Worse still, European Catholics and Jews were pouring into America, undermining the old Protestant hegemony. America was no longer God's chosen Protestant country; it was not even a Christian country any longer. It was in thrall to foreigners, prey to pluralism, liberalism and a blasphemous secularism, which tried to banish religion from public life and make it a purely voluntary matter. How could Christians, who believed their faith made total demands, acquiesce in its relegation to the limited private sphere?

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The fundamentalists' answer was to fight back: to ban the teaching of evolution in schools, to stress the infallibility of the Scriptures, to eschew all foreign influence and to fight against the changes of this impious modernity. Some withdrew from the mainstream churches and from American life to create a safe enclave in a hostile world. They created their own churches, colleges, radio stations and universities. Others decided to fight their way into the political arena and, in the 1970s, they seemed to be making headway. Today, fundamentalist

Reconstructionists, who foresee the imminent collapse of the current secularist regime in the United States, are preparing themselves to step in and take control, bringing their country's economy, polity and mores into line with the biblical ideal. A small minority see their country as wholly under foreign control: they call the United States government the ZOCJ (the Zionist Occupied Government), promote racist Aryan values and have formed Christian militias to fight the secularist state and to prepare for an imminent Armageddon. These militias represent only the most extreme wing of the Protestant reaction to modernity, but what one might call mainstream fundamentalism has made great strides in the United States. It is not the preserve of the lunatic fringe: it has been estimated that at least 25 per cent of the population adhere to fundamentalist norms and beliefs.

But fundamentalism is not confined to the United States. As Western ideas, modernity, science, polity, economics and industry spread to other parts of the world, fundamentalism grew up alongside it in passionate protest. It began to hit the Muslim countries of the Middle East, for example, in the 1960s. Even though fundamentalists in the different faiths often have very negative perceptions of one another, they actually have a great deal in common. The underlying similarities between American Protestant fundamentalism and radical Iranian Shi'ism, for example, are striking and uncanny.

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All over the world, fundamentalists are filled with fear and dismay, since they see a world hopelessly cast adrift. They protest against secularism and pluralism and are gripped by a paranoid fear of foreign influence. It is a state of mind that can easily tip over into violence. Hatred of foreigners is especially marked in countries which have either been colonised or heavily controlled by a Western power. Western

modernity was often imposed insensitively by the colonialists or their local allies and has been experienced as an entirely alien, dislocating force, which has cut the people off from their cultural roots. It is not surprising that people are attracted to the fundamentalist solution of returning to the pre-colonial days, when Islam or Hinduism reigned supreme and (it is thought) everything was right with the world. Thus in many of the world faiths, fundamentalists have resorted to the same strategies as the Americans. Some have retreated to a safe haven, away from the contaminating influence of modernity. Examples are the ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in New York or Tel Aviv, or the takfir w'al hijra group, who withdrew from Anwar Sadat's Egypt during the 1970s to create an alternative Islamic society. Often fundamentalist solutions seem like the shadow-self of modernity, a deliberate evocation of everything that modernity is not. An obvious example is the fundamentalist perception of gender roles. Since the emancipation of women has been one of the hallmarks of modernity, fundamentalists are stressing women's traditional role. Islamic women are urged to wear concealing clothing as part of their rejection of an identity imposed by the West and the embracing of a traditional Muslim identity. Protestant fundamentalists in the United States have also called for a modest uniform to be made obligatory for their nation's women.

Not all fundamentalists have chosen to retreat from the world as they have in the United States and elsewhere. Some have been determined to seize political power and in countries such as Iran, Algeria and the Sudan they have – to varying degrees – been able to do so.

It is unlikely that fundamentalism will take strong hold in Britain. True, the evangelical churches are growing while the more liberal churches are losing members. But traditional religion is not as strong in Britain or in northern Europe as in other parts of the world. Only 35 per cent of the British population claim to believe in God, compared with over 90 per cent in the United States. Further, fundamentalism is a protest movement, which appeals to the displaced, the oppressed, the powerless and the marginalised. In countries such as the United States and Iran, religion has long fuelled popular movements against the establishment. But in Britain since the eighteenth century, religion has

been increasingly identified with the establishment and ordinary people have turned to other ideologies to express their dissatisfaction.

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However, that does not mean the government and people of Britain can ignore fundamentalism or dismiss it as irrelevant to the world's concerns. We have seen that fundamentalists have already forced the world to take religion more seriously and have even staged successful revolutions to oust secularist governments. In the United States, the fundamentalist movement seems to be in eclipse again, after its successes in the 1980s. The ludicrous scandals of the American televangelists have brought discredit on this type of religiosity. But historians point out that American history has been characterised by waves of revivalist fervour and that the current quietening of fundamentalists is unlikely to be permanent.

Furthermore, shapers of foreign policy must not dismiss what appear to be the bizarre beliefs or delusions of a few crazies. This was the mistake made by the United States in the years leading up to the Iranian revolution: they constantly underestimated the growth of support for Khomeini and militant Islam until it was too late. In the Middle East, it is no use ignoring the growing body of religious opinion that is increasingly hostile to the West and, in the Arab–Israeli conflict, deeply hostile to the Oslo Accords. At present, it is the secularists on both sides of that conflict who are most committed to peace. But some form of dialogue must be set up with the religious too or peace efforts will be unavailing.

It is difficult for secularist or conventionally religious policy makers to take some fundamentalist beliefs seriously, since they seem to belong to another world. Strongly characteristic of monotheistic fundamentalism,

for example, is the conviction that the End of Days is at hand; Iranian Shi'is at the time of the revolution looked forward to the return of the Hidden Imam, their messiah figure; Jewish fundamentalists in Israel believe their settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip are preparing the way for the advent of the Messiah; in America, fundamentalists are convinced that the Second Coming of Jesus is nigh and interpret current events in the light of a literal reading of the biblical prophecy. Fundamentalists' perception of escalating crisis and the collapse of their world makes such apocalyptic speculation irresistible. This world is finished, its situation so desperate that only God himself can bring redemption. But this millenarianism is manichean in spirit. It sees earthly enemies and threats as not merely wrong-headed, immoral or inconvenient, but as the embodiment of absolute evil. Thus the Iranian revolutionaries dubbed America the Great Satan. When confronted with this kind of enemy, some – a minority – feel no compunction about killing it.

Fundamentalist violence and hatred is abhorrent. It is not surprising it is roundly condemned by the more liberal religious people. Secularists sometimes feel it confirms their negative view of religion as a primitive, dangerous activity. But while we deplore fundamentalist atrocity, we should also reflect on the disdain and contempt which have helped to create it. The outrage and anger felt by fundamentalists as they encounter Western modernity has been caused in part by a good deal of arrogance and insensitivity. Colonialists often made their contempt for the 'native' painfully clear: Western policies in such countries as Egypt and Iran often did more to exploit than to benefit the people; in the United States, the liberal Christians and the secularist intelligentsia were often less than kind in their ridiculing of conservatives. In the past 100 years, divided societies have evolved. There is a deep gulf between America's liberal and conservative Christians. A similar gulf exists in many developing countries between a Westernised elite and the mass of the people. A dual world has been created where countries are split into polarised societies whose adherents cannot understand one another. If this gulf is not to become wholly impassable, religious people and secularists, fundamentalists and liberals must

make an effort to engage in some kind of dialogue and learn one another's language before it is too late.

This will not be easy. The millenarian speculation of many fundamentalists seems light years away from conventional political theory, for example. But policy makers must take it seriously because it colours the political views of many people on crucial issues. At present, American fundamentalists and secularists all sing 'God bless America'. Yet their patriotism and politics are poles apart. American fundamentalists have very mixed feelings indeed about democracy. They have long seen the United Nations as a satanic body. They view the growing European Union with deep misgiving – it is the revived Roman Empire, foretold by Revelation, which will be dominated by the Antichrist and bring the Great Tribulation on the world. Thirty per cent of Americans hold these apocalyptic views, which probably already influence official government policy. They are passionately pro-Israel, for example, because the Bible teaches them that unless the Jews are in control of their Holy Land, Jesus cannot return. The born-again Christian lobby is probably far more influential in securing American support for Israel than the so-called Jewish lobby. No government can ignore such a massive constituency.

But above all, we must remember that fundamentalist visions and beliefs reflect fears that are too widespread in the world for any government safely to ignore. Fundamentalism is more than a political protest against the West or the prevailing establishment. It represents a huge disappointment with and dissociation from modernity. It also reflects a deep-seated fear of modern institutions and has paranoid visions of demonic enemies everywhere. It is alarming that so many people in so many different parts are so pessimistic about the world that they can only find hope in fantasies of apocalyptic catastrophe. Fundamentalism shows a growing sense of grievance, resentment, displacement, disorientation and anomie that any humane, enlightened government must attempt to address.

*Karen Armstrong is currently writing a full length book on fundamentalism. For details of her earlier A history of God (Mandarin), see **Book marks**.*

Green spirit

Satish Kumar

Environmentalism cannot be reduced to the scientific analysis of nature. It needs to be enriched with spiritual understanding of the links between humans and the myriad of other forms of life.

Given the fullness of the environmentalist agenda, it is surprising that many modern approaches are one dimensional. They are purely scientific. As a result, they are utilitarian, lacking depth and wholeness. This sort of scientific environmentalism started with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent spring* in 1962. The Club of Rome report, *Limits to growth* (1972), added impetus. *Blueprint for survival* by *Ecologist* magazine continued the momentum. And the 1972 UN conference on the environment in Stockholm became a landmark event. Since then, governments, the media, the scientific community and a large number of non-governmental organisations and professional environmentalists have implied they could treat the symptoms of environmental crisis, control pollution, conserve resources and manage nature better for long-term human benefit. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Ness has called this 'shallow ecology'.

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Less recognised but running in parallel to scientific environmentalism has been a search for spiritual ecology. A small number of people started to look at more fundamental causes of the environmental crisis in the mid 1960s and questioned the values and culture which gave birth to the desire for unlimited economic growth and unquestioning consumerism. E F Schumacher gave voice to this approach in his classic essay, *Buddhist economics*.¹ He was perhaps the only eminent Western economist who dared to put those two words together. His fellow economists asked him what Buddhism has to do with economics. Schumacher simply replied, 'Economics without spiritual values is like sex without love.'

In line with Schumacher, Ivan Illich also contributed, in the 1970s, to the school of thought which based economics and ecology on ethical and religious foundations. Both Schumacher and Illich derived much inspiration from the thought of Mahatma Gandhi, from Buddhism, and from other Eastern and Western religious traditions.

It was pointed out that the scientific view of environmentalism is based on the separation of subject from object – the observer from the observed. Whereas spiritual ecology sees a seamless continuum between the observer and the observed. The scientific environmentalists talk about nature, whereas for the spiritual ecologist there is no separation between nature and humanity. There is no such thing as the environment out there, of which humans are in charge. We are part and parcel of the environment. It is a case of understanding the relationship between innumerable life forms, of which human life is just one.

Shy of the word 'spiritual', Arne Ness called this kind of thinking 'deep ecology', which is a much more acceptable term to people who are working within the rational paradigm. He moved away from the utilitarian, dualistic and materialistic ecology and closer to spiritual ecology. He too has been influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, along-side Spinoza. Moreover, his mountaineering experience in the Himalayas and his encounter with the traditional cultures of Nepal transformed him from an academic philosopher to a deep ecologist.

Greening from great religions

Christians have found it difficult to embrace this non-dualistic ecology because Genesis speaks of human beings having dominion over nature: God created the world and made humankind its guardian. Many scientists who practised Christianity in their private lives denied divinity in the material world. The idea of original sin and the world being a place of suffering made them put religion and science in two separate compartments.

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Even so, we do have St Francis. He is prophet, avatar and patron saint of ecology. He did not talk about animals but he talked with them. He understood the spirit of wolves and birds. For him, the sun was our brother, the moon our sister and the entire universe one family. In St Francis, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity converged. If God is divine, his creation has to be divine, too. There can be no greater sin than polluting and misusing nature, which is a gift from God to all his creatures. This awareness is also found in the Celtic tradition of Christianity and in the writings of Hildegard of Bingen.



For the Hindus, God is not outside nature. The universe is a dance of Shiva. As the dance and the dancer cannot be separated, the creator cannot be separated from the creation. Every blade of grass, every drop of water, every breath of wind and every flame of fire is imbued with God. Everything is sacred. Earth is sacred, water is sacred, air and fire are sacred, space and time are sacred. Because nature is sacred, it is good in itself. We may not manipulate it or pollute it, exploit it or deplete it. This is the principle of *ahimsa*. As humans cannot create life, they have no right to destroy it. This is the attitude of reverence, as Albert Schweitzer put it – reverence for life.

The utilitarian view of scientific environmentalism believes that trees are there for human use, they have economic value. They must be managed, conserved and cared for. But the reverential view of spiritual ecology speaks of trees having intrinsic value independent of human use. *Ahimsa* goes further than not harming other living beings. This is emphasised in the Jain religion which insists upon the reduction and limitation of human needs, whereas the utilitarian approach advocates an expansion of human needs even though it may be camouflaged under the guise of sustainability.

‘Implementing spiritual ecology cannot be legislated for. Preaching from the pulpits will be of no help. Dialogue is the only way to find common ground among those who care for the earth and its people’

Religious teachers in all the traditions talk about pursuing quality and moving away from quantity. They teach people to become aware of

when enough is enough. The Taoists in China say that when you know what is enough you will realise that you already have enough. But when you don't know how much is enough then however much you have you will never have enough. The definition of being rich is not that you possess vast quantities of objects and goods, but rather you are rich when you know that you don't need any more. This wisdom to differentiate between greed and need stems from a spiritual outlook. According to Mahatma Gandhi: 'Earth provides enough for everyone's need but not enough for anyone's greed.'

Islam has a similar attitude to material possessions. Simple living and high thinking was one of the teachings of the Sufi poet Rumi who sang the glory of divine abundance and yet rejoiced in the gift of contentment. If we read the poetry of Rumi in an ecological context, he is another patron saint of ecology like St Francis.

The Jewish tradition points in the same direction when it says, 'Give me neither poverty nor riches', because material acquisition is the mother of poverty, and when one is able to live in the heaven of contentment, the hell of poverty and greed vanishes instantly.

'The scientific view of environmentalism is based on the separation of the observer from the observed. Spiritual ecology sees a seamless continuum between nature and humanity. It is a case of understanding the relationship between innumerable life forms, of which human life is just one'

All the religious traditions work at a psychological level to tackle the ecology of relationship with oneself, with fellow humans and with nature at large. When we are able to come to terms with our own inner soul and be at ease with our inner consciousness we will be able to develop a different kind of social and political order. But scientific environmentalists argue that time is running out; we cannot afford the luxury of bringing about an inner transformation of consciousness. The path of spiritual ecology is too slow. Immediate action by governments to implement laws to protect the environment are urgently needed.

This sense of urgency and impatience ignores the fact that in the last 30 or so years governments have enacted many environmental laws and environmentalists have produced thousands of books analysing the environmental predicament and forecasting doom and collapse, yet they have not been able to stem the tide of economic globalisation, population explosion, or the destruction of biodiversity. Taking stock will enable us to look at the whole picture with a long-term view.

From modernism to immaterialism

One important source of long-term thinking is found in the cultures of native peoples around the world. The scientific civilisation of Europe has tended to consider illiterate, oral and pagan traditions of tribal peoples as savage, backward, undeveloped and inferior. This is a fundamental folly of the modern mind. The tribal societies of Australia, the Americas, Africa and Asia have lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years. A sense of beauty, wilderness, unity and interdependence is deeply embedded in the wisdom of traditional societies. The Navahos believed that when a generation takes an action or makes a decision it should think of how that action or decision will effect the seventh generation. The Hopis considered the earth as their grandmother and the sky as their grandfather.

The Aboriginal peoples of Australia saw human existence rooted in dream time, with no beginning and no end. Dream time is not linear time, it is cyclical. Everything moves in cycles, everything returns. Scientific environmentalists only scratch the surface when they talk about recycling. Their deeper belief is in progress, which is linear. In evolution, which is also linear. In development and growth, again, both linear. The Enlightenment and the Age of Reason still inform the analysis and actions of scientific environmentalism. This will not help us to move out of our ecological impasse. We need to find some other philosophical tools and we can find them in the cultures of native peoples.

Industrial societies are living in a state of anguish, confusion and fear. People find themselves walking on a treadmill. The economy is



booming and yet there is no 'feel good factor'. The supermarkets are full of food and yet people are spiritually starved. Highways are filled with high speed cars but people feel they are getting nowhere. We have everything and yet we have nothing. The Jeffersonian ideal of the pursuit of happiness is proving to be an endless quest and its attainment is still a mirage.

And so people are driven to all kinds of desperate acts. Cults, sects, virtual reality, drugs and umpteen other forms of escapism are attracting people to move out of their everyday lives which are disenchanting, empty of meaning and without a sense of belonging. Alongside this escapism there is a growing quest to find fulfilment in a deeper relationship with everything around us. People are returning to work the land and grow organic food. They are developing a sense of community within their neighbourhood. They are recreating a sense of place and a sense of home. Instead of flying to the Bahamas for holidays, people are walking the coastal paths or the moors in their own country.

Out of a transformed personal life social, political and ecological actions are also emerging. Meditation, veggie-box economies and climbing the trees to stop road building are various dimensions of the same spiritual reality. The Dalai Lama is having an impact. The Barbican theatre in London was sold out weeks before his arrival to give a Buddhist initiation. The Dalai Lama and Vaclav Havel are symbols of a spirituality which is engaged with ecology, social cohesion and human well-being. The Industrial Revolution, mass production, cyberspace, virtual reality and the depletion of the ozone layer are the products of mechanistic and reductionistic science. The solution to the problems created by that paradigm have to come from somewhere else.



‘Science and spirituality are not mutually exclusive. Science deals with what is quantifiable and measurable. Spirit is concerned with meaning and quality. When matter and meaning and meaning merge we have a complete picture’

Religious establishments have no solutions. They are too much entrenched in the protection of their established orders and have too great a vested interest in the unecological economic system. The light must emerge from the fringes. Thomas Berry, Matthew Fox, Martin Palmer, Wendell Berry, Vandana Shiva, Rupert Sheldrake and other similar courageous and rebellious individuals, along with organisations like Schumacher College, Eco-Village Network, New Economics Foundation, and community supported agriculture, are the signs of an

emerging spirituality which is embedded in holistic and interconnected living systems. The World Wildlife Fund recently found occasion to organise a great gathering of religious leaders in Assisi. It was a wonderful way to draw the attention of the world to the religious dimension of environmentalism.

Making a critique of scientific environmentalism is not to condemn it. Science and spirituality, in my view, are not mutually exclusive, but complementary – they need each other. Science deals with what is quantifiable and measurable. It is concerned with matter. Spirit is concerned with meaning and with quality. When matter and meaning merge we have a complete picture. Spirit needs matter, without matter spirit is useless. It cannot manifest. As a vessel is needed to hold water, matter is needed to embody the spirit. The matter-spirit split helps no one. The mind-body dichotomy has created more problems than it has solved. Now to save the planet and celebrate nature we need urgently to heal this split. Spiritual ecology may be a way to overcome Cartesian dualism and appreciate the poetry of connexity. We don't have to go to a church, a temple or a mosque to practice spiritual ecology. When we look at the world with our spiritual eyes, rivers and mountains become our mosques, forests and fields become our synagogues, trees become our temples, celebration of the seasons becomes the communion and appreciation of beauty becomes the prayer. Thus spiritual ecology is a way of re-enchanting everyday life in its luminous simplicity.

Implementing spiritual ecology cannot be legislated for. Preaching from the pulpits will be of no help. Physicist David Bohm was a spiritual ecologist who suggested instead the way of dialogue: enabling each other to be aware of the human spirit, paying attention to it, focusing on it and engaging in constructive conversation with all manner of people with humility.

In the spirit of dialogue there is no place for any kind of missionary zeal for the cause of spiritual ecology. There is no place for trying to convert people to a set dogma or creed. It is a matter of initiating conversations to find common ground among those who care for the earth and its people.

Resurgence is an international magazine for ecological and spiritual discussion which was launched in 1966. The Schumacher College is an international centre for ecological studies.

Note

1. Schumacher EF, 1968, 'Buddhist economics' in *Resurgence*, vol 1, no 11.

How religions have gone forth and multiplied

Ninian Smart

Religions are multiplying and faiths intermingling. Sub-Saharan Africa alone already has about 12,000 independent churches, of which more than 3,000 are in South Africa. Fifteen years ago, a survey of a square mile of London found 41 new religious movements. Old faiths are colonising new territory: Muslims are common in London and Berlin, there are Yoruba in Los Angeles practising their classic religion, Melbourne has a substantial Greek Orthodox population, Umbanda flourishes in Rio de Janeiro and all the religions of the former Soviet Union gather in Moscow. Nor are these the only features of the new religious world. Old religions spawn new faiths. They also affect each other. Catholic monks practise Zen, Sri Lankan Buddhism has a Young Men's Buddhist Association, Hinduism includes hymn singing based on a Western model.

The impact of empire building

Religions have always changed and proliferated. Ancient Rome and India were particularly fertile. But the present wave is bound up with the impact of European empires whose science, education and missionary activity have challenged virtually all other religions and cultures.

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Consider Egypt: when Napoleon brought his army, scientists and scholars to the country in 1798, it opened up a period of reflection for Egyptians. As the nineteenth century developed Egyptians saw that military science depended on general science which depended on modern education and that required the institutions of the modern state. The need to defend traditional culture demanded its reshaping. In religion, the consequence was the flourishing of Islamic modernism as formulated by Muhammad' Abduh (1849–1905). Similar forces influenced all non-Western countries. For instance, India's new nationalism was expressed in part through a universalist Hindu-generated ideology which paved the way to liberation.

Migration of people and ideas

The Second World War achieved even more to unify the world. It bred the jet engine, which revolutionised travel. It created advanced communication systems. It generated huge shifts in population. It helped new religions to emerge and old ones to turn up in new places.

Some instances of religious proliferation are due mainly to migrations. In Britain, Islam has become powerful after spreading from south Asia. There are analogous developments from Algeria in France, from Turkey in Germany, central Asia and the Caucasus in Russia. There are remnants of the indentured labour of Hindu and Islamic people in southern and east Africa and Fiji, and of the Chinese in Singapore, Indonesia, South East Asia and California. There are Japanese practitioners of Buddhism (Pure Land and Nichiren especially) in California.

But conversions among indigenous populations have been more striking. We often think of Christian missionary activity as the main converting force, but conversion to Eastern religions has also taken place in the West. For instance, there are Ramakrishna Vedanta missions, the Krishna Consciousness and sundry guru-led movements including Transcendental Meditation, the Radha Soami Satsang and Ananda Marga. Parallel to these Hindu movements are different strands of Buddhism, both the devotional forms but more often the core contemplative types. There are powerful Zen centres in Los Angeles and

San Francisco, and others across Europe and in English-speaking Commonwealth countries. A vital factor in Buddhism's influence has been the flight of the Dalai Lama to India where he became a world symbol of Buddhism.

'The cultures of small scale peoples were simply too weak to cope with the powerful Western invader. Indigenous peoples thought ritual forces could enervate bullets and disarm guns. They were tragically wrong'

Since the 1960s, Westerners have often found Buddhist and Hindu contemplative groups attractive because they are disillusioned with traditional Christianity and Judaism. Either they do not believe the respective doctrines or find their practices stuffy and uninspiring. By contrast, the distant religions seem refreshing and novel. Also, in an individualist age, they no longer feel social pressures to conform and do not fear excommunication. Although individualism might be thought to militate against gurus, the guru does for some people supply a kind of one-to-one relationship, plus a sense of security. Further, the practice of contemplation fits in with more general quests for self-improvement.

Although the Unification Church (which combines elements of evangelical Christianity, Confucianism and Korean shamanism) has made its mark, Confucianism and Taoism have had little impact. Interest has been confined to intellectual analysis.

Islam has been less successful at conversion in the West. There is some interest in Sufism. There are also some movements born within the culture of Islam, such as Subud and also Baha'i, which has established itself in America and many other countries in Africa and Asia. But overall, most of the relatively few converts to Islam in the West are the consequence of marriage.

We can see a broad pattern of Eastern religions at work sporadically, but not unsuccessfully, in the West. They are reinforced by further generations of migrants.

Reactions to change and modernity

New religions grow in times of change. This was true in nineteenth century America: hence the Mormons and Christian Science. In Britain, there were similarly movements such as Anglo-Catholicism and the British Israelites, in Japan, Tenrikyo and Soka Gakkai. In India, the great inclusive grasp of the Hindu tradition has kept new phenomena within it, such as the Arya Samaj, the Aurobindo Ashram and the Meher Baba movement, and there are hundreds of other new groups.

Like change in old faiths, the new religious movements should be seen in the context of modernisation. The Arya Samaj was a conscious response to new trends brought in by the British. Being very much more fundamentalist about the Veda and providing rites which could restore Hindus to the ancient path, it became important in the Hindu diaspora. More intellectually, Aurobindo's remarkable and articulate philosophy wedded Hindu thought to evolution theory.

'Religions have always changed and proliferated. But the present wave is bound up with the impact of European empires whose science, education and missionary activity have challenged virtually all other religions and cultures'

The proliferation of new movements in the Pacific is more recent. Small scale societies, such as those in New Guinea and on the islands of the South Pacific, were very vulnerable to incoming forces: Western science, guns, new kinds of bureaucracy, missionaries, new types of education. The effects were often overwhelming. There were choices to make: succumb to Christianity, try to blend old and new forces or retreat into traditional ways. Succumbing was the most obvious. Much of the Pacific became Christian and dressed in the style of their conqueror. But others chose the blending model. It was this option which helped to create the new religious movements in the South Pacific, notably the so-called cargo cults in Papua New Guinea. People began to interpret Christianity and alien life through profoundly local practices. They would see the arrival of goods from the Americas as deeply

significant. Ritualistic airfields were created to accommodate the return of their magical prosperity.

The experience of the cargo cults contained a lesson for the other small scale peoples. Their cultures were simply too weak to cope with the powerful invader. Indigenous peoples thought ritual forces could enervate bullets and disarm guns. They were tragically wrong. There was an analogous fallacy in the Ghost Dance revivalists among the Native American peoples of the Great Basin and Plains. They thought 'ghost shirts' could magically protect them from the bullets of the white conquerors. Both small and large societies which have incorporated world views heavily suffused with ritualistic means of changing the world have been invariably defeated by more scientific cultures. This has led such societies to new forms of syncretism with modern values.

'As new religions interact with ancient ones, they form a creative part of our era. We are no longer in a world where differing cultures can remain separate. Even the smallest nation is now in touch with the rest of the world'

The conquest of Africa by European powers, mainly during the nineteenth century, led to African self-consciousness. This generated the sense of a distinctly African religion. A parallel cultural awakening, especially in British-ruled Africa, was caused by the translation of the Bible into local languages. White missionaries, imperial, tough, dedicated, had decreed that certain social phenomena were wrong – paganism, witchcraft and polygamy, for instance. However, the Old Testament included polygamy and about one third of the Gospels told of how Jesus conducted the sort of faith healing involved in witchcraft. It was therefore no surprise if many turned to classical African religions, or at least some of their concepts and manners, and blended them with the Christian faith in independent movements under black African leadership. They are now an important force on the continent, especially in the new political set up in South Africa. One of them, L'Eglise de Jesus Christ par le Prophete Simon Kimbangu in the lower

Congo, became, in 1970, a member of the World Council of Churches. But most are not recognised by the Christian establishment despite the sizeable membership of some such as the amaNazaretha Church founded in 1911 among the Zulus in Natal.

The future

New religions will continue to surface. Some could become great. In the West, many people now have personal religions. They may not go to church but they are concerned with spirituality. There are also many new elements, including Wicca or neo-pagan witchcraft, which celebrate pre-Christian values and all those tendencies known as New Age. The internet will facilitate further choice. The great surge of evangelical forms of Protestantism in Latin America may threaten the old Catholicism.

Why do new religions emerge? I have indicated some of the answers: the influence of new ideas, travel and change, the restlessness of the human spirit and the fact that spirituality is part of its makeup. But what are we to make of a partly unified but pluralistic world in which religions intermingle more than ever before? It seems there are three possible responses. One is simply to espouse a commitment to tolerance. Second, we can be drawn to the theory of ultimate unity if we accept that all religions point to the same truth and simply set out different paths to attaining it. Third, we might think different religious teachings happily complement each other.

Maybe it is most important to recognise that faiths will be increasingly diverse and intermingled. Under these conditions the notion that we should tolerate all of those who are tolerant and, doubtless, a few of those who are not, is in line with the democratic ideal. This diversity also strengthens the case for separating the church or mosque and state. In general, disestablishment should be the norm in democratic societies.

But we should also accept that as new religions interact with ancient ones, they form a creative part of our era. We are no longer in a world where differing cultures can remain separate. Even the smallest nation is now in touch with the rest of the world.

Past perfect: the only vision of our great religions

Don Cupitt

Can we create religions fit for the future?

When did heritage gain its current sense? No longer is it that of heritage as patrimony, living culture or tradition, but heritage as dead culture, a lost world lovingly recreated and recycled as a marketable tourist attraction. The assumption is that what all modern people most need to do in their leisure time is retreat to an idealised version of the past. In government language, there used to be ancient monuments entrusted to the care of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. There used to be a Minister for the Arts together with local folk museums and the like. Now all those things have been swallowed by a single expression: national heritage. When did this happen, and why?

Heritage is a highly postmodern concept, used in a context where culture has died, history has ended and the canon is closed. No real further development can take place. Heritage is what the state opera, ballet and circus used to purvey in Soviet Moscow – the lost past preserved in amber, recycled just to prove we can still do it. Heritage is culture sealed in the immutability of death, as reassuringly unchanging as Radio 4 and the archetypal English village where cricket is still played on the green.

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'What people ask of their beliefs and of all their many religious concerns is not that they be true, but that they be reassuring and consoling, that they have the authentic period feel'

Somewhere along the line, art stopped and heritage began. The word's first use in precisely the current sense must belong to the early 1980s, while its adoption into official vocabulary began in the late 1980s. The explanation for its remarkable success must be that it resolved a painful contradiction. Like so many governments of the Right, Mrs Thatcher's administration was using a rhetoric of conservatism, tradition and family to mask the massively destructive consequences of a programme of forced economic modernisation. Whole communities with their traditional ways of life were being destroyed. The rate of decline of organised religion, which for generations had stood at about 1 per cent per annum on several different indices, now suddenly doubled. The country seemed to be in moral crisis.

In this context, large-scale 'heritagisation' was just what was needed. It allowed us to feel our past was not wholly lost, but still around and still working. Unprofitable industries and vanished ways of life could now be relaunched profitably to provide nostalgic pleasure for many and jobs and business for a few. Everybody gained. It all worked out so well that almost the whole face of Britain is now being heritagised. It started with the parish church and the pub, then the village and the market town. Yea, now the national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, ancient woodlands and hedgerows – indeed, the whole countryside, the half million listed buildings and all the surviving remains of former industries and transport systems such as mills, canals, lime kilns and steam railways. Even the cities failed to escape, each and every one of them. Today, brown road signs enjoin us to start feeling respectful as we approach Historic Coventry. *Coventry*. Can Letchworth or Milton Keynes be far behind?

Our present heritagisation frenzy gets us involved in some quaint inconsistencies, such as when we campaign against new wind farms

while simultaneously struggling to restore old windmills. But it also relevant to debates about religion in several ways.

Heritage starts with religion

Religion began this process of heritagisation. Some time around 1830, with the Gothic revival in architecture and the Catholic revival in the Church, the leading spirits decided that religion was unable to cope with liberalism, the belief in progress and the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution. The cultural changes impending were too great for the Christian tradition to adapt to them. The only way to create a world in which Christianity could still feel true was by taking flight into an idealised medieval past. And that is the way it has remained to this day. Our past is the only future we want, the only future in which we can really feel at home.

Secondly, the way in which our modern heritagisation swallows up and transforms the past is recognisably a postmodern continuation of what religion has always done with at least some of the past, and especially its own. Religion transforms real history into an idealised, iconic, mythical history, history as consolation, reassurance and inspiration. Heritagisation takes this religious treatment of the past and spreads it across the entire culture, so that every institution in Britain eventually becomes a kind of church, all ground holy ground and every activity a ritual.

Thirdly, when religion becomes embedded within a whole culture that is 'sacralised', nostalgic and reality-denying, questions about religious truth cannot be taken seriously. When Darwinian Professor Richard Dawkins argues that we ought not to hold astrological beliefs because astrological beliefs are not true and it doesn't do us any good to be guided by false beliefs, people are astonished and indignant. They think Dawkins' arguments are silly. What people ask of their beliefs and of all their many religious or para-religious concerns is not that they be true but that they be reassuring and consoling. Not that they be true but that they have the authentic period feel. We have contrived to create a culture in which truth is not even interesting. People live in

and by fictions. They live in a variety of imaginary worlds and hold whatever beliefs please them most. If they want to believe in aliens or *feng shui*, they will. Why not? What evidence is there that in our world a strictly rational person has any advantage over others?

It follows then that religion is heavily implicated in all the difficulties of our postmodern cultural condition. If people in general no longer feel any great obligation to be rational in their beliefs, then that is because religion itself decided around two centuries ago that it could not continue on a basis of strict rationality. If people no longer believe in progress then at least part of the reason is that around 150 years ago religion gave up trying to live strictly in and by the truth of its own time and gave up believing in its own historical destiny. It chose instead tradition and a return into a recreated imaginary past. By these choices, religion has effectively licensed general irrationalism and the general heritagisation of the culture.

All this had led to a curious paradox. The end of modernity is the end of belief in progress and therefore a return of the old religious belief in degradation, the decay of the world. People have become convinced that we live in an age of decline, in which our own composers, architects and artists cannot hope to equal the great achievements of the past. We conserve things so determinedly because we are convinced we cannot surpass them. Middle England's scornful attitude towards contemporary art and thought is thus both very postmodern and very archaic and mythical.

What future religion?

So many years is it since the world's ancient major religions even wanted to have any future that is difficult to discuss what that might be. The great tradition of religious art, architecture, speculative thought and institutional development came to an end somewhere between 1700 and 1860. It simply could not cope with the rise of liberalism, science and the new industrial civilisation. The faiths, too, dropped out, preferring their own pasts to the evolving world they saw around them. Today we see the longer-term result: extreme religious disorder,

irrationalism and the accelerating decline of what remains of the old faiths. Two examples are the very rapid decay of the Roman Catholic Church in what used to be its chief strongholds – the Americas North and South, and western Europe – and the abrupt wipe-out of the old faiths in the tiger economies of south and east Asia.

In another generation or two, what remains of the old religions will look very like ethno-nationalism, concerned only with preserving folk ways of life and historic identities. In some places they will be politically trouble-some and will need to be handled with care. They will matter a lot to their own adherents but will not contribute anything to the sum of human wisdom or human values. Indeed, it is already the case that during the past 30 years religion has lost most of its old moral authority.

At present, we see no sign of ‘great’ religion re-emerging anywhere in the world. The future seems to be one of continuing decline into fundamentalism and other forms of non-rational and non-creative belief. If we regard this prospect as a major disaster for humanity, what should we do about it? Three main possibilities are currently being explored.

‘Heritage is a highly postmodern concept, used in a context where culture has died, history has ended and the canon is closed. Somewhere along the line, art stopped and heritage began’

The first involves thoroughly demythologising one of the ancient faiths by interpreting away its false super-natural beliefs and modernising its ethics. This has been attempted in several faiths. In American Judaism, there are the examples of movements such as Reconstructionism, Polydoxy and Jewish Humanism, all of which try to continue the Jewish tradition after the end of supernatural belief. In Great Britain, genuinely rational (that is, creedless) religious movements exist in the form of the Quaker Universalist Group and the Sea of Faith. But the present cultural climate remains very hostile to reason in religion. In the Church of England, priests can dabble in fundamentalism and

occultism with impunity, whereas a priest like Anthony Freeman, who tries to present a clear and rationalised interpretation of Christianity, is liable to be dismissed without any due process or recompense.

The second possibility is to attempt an eclectic salvage operation, perhaps combining elements of Eastern spirituality with Western religious-humanist ethics. Buddhist philosophy (especially in the Madhyamika or Middle Way tradition that stems from Nagarjuna) has begun to have a great impact in the West. Its influence may continue to grow as it becomes more widely known.

The third option is simply to attempt a fresh start. Martin Heidegger tried to rethink the human condition after Nietzsche and the end of metaphysics. Perhaps we now need to attempt something similar, rethinking *homo religiosus* in the light of the modern natural and social sciences, and recent thought about language.

A few people are already attempting something like this. One friend of mine, an American professor of religion, argues that the only grand narrative left to us which has even the slightest plausibility is the scientific one that runs from the big bang to the dawn of human history. So he simply recites that and then adds an eco-humanist ethical appendix along the lines of the covenant with Noah in Genesis: strive to live at peace with each other and with the Earth. I smiled at meeting someone even more way-out than I am, someone who preaches pure biological naturalism as religion. But at least he is not irrational.

In our heritagised culture there may seem to be little future for religious truth. People want the past, they want authority and they want reassurance. They appear to think that no fully contemporary religious language does or can exist. Yet wouldn't it be wonderful to have again a religion that an honest person can believe is actually true? If truth has a future, then perhaps the future has a future, after all.

*Don Cupitt's most recent book is Solar Ethics (SCM Press). His next book, After God: the future of religion (Weidenfeld & Nicholson), will be published in August. See **Book marks** for details.*

The New Age: a religion for the future?

Paul Heelas

The New Age movement is a vibrant form of spirituality which has grown as more British people withdraw from the major religions. It is not 'new', since it has been profoundly influenced by long-standing Eastern spiritualities, but participants are promised a new, spiritually informed life. Neither is the New Age strictly a movement. It consists of a great array of activities and teachings from the Jungian, the shamanic and New Age books and CDs, to seminars, workshops and rituals. However, they all share the common aim of helping people move from being deeply flawed into the realm of the perfect.

The basic assumption is that there are two ways of being human. The first, the ego or lower self, is the way people are by virtue of their socialisation. The ego is the product of parenting, education, religious tradition, the demands of capitalistic production and the lures of consumer culture. The ego – we are told – does not work. It is unnatural and mechanistic, suffering from all those 'diseases' generated by the struggle to succeed in mainstream society. Yet it is dominant in contemporary Western ways of living.

New Agers claim a completely different mode of being is possible, one in which people are in touch with what they are by nature. The

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higher self, the Source or the God/Goddess within are among the terms used to refer to the spirituality held to lie at the heart of human experience and identity, and indeed the natural order as a whole. It is what we are when we are born, before we become contaminated by cultural values and institutional arrangements. Deploying any number of disciplines to re-establish contact with inner spirituality, the New Age quests for liberation. The more one can detach oneself from the shackles of the ego level of life, the more one can experience the life of the spirit.

Lives of the spirit

New Age teachings can be thought of as a spectrum, ranging from world rejection to world affirmation. How the spiritual realm is envisaged varies accordingly. World rejecting participants are intent on distancing themselves from everything this world has to offer, even bliss or tranquillity. Spirituality is valued in and of itself, with no conventional pay offs. Very few New Agers, however, aim at comprehensive world rejection. More follow world rejecting, counter-cultural forms of life, avoiding what they see as the more contaminating aspects of the mainstream – schools, business and employment – while continuing to draw on other material resources such as old vans and cigarettes. Unlike radical world rejecters, counter-culturalists see the spiritual realm as being able to enhance greatly the quality of life. They believe it helps people to be authentic, vital, creative, loving, compassionate, wise, harmonious or healed.

‘New Agers believe we are born with a higher self which becomes contaminated by cultural values and institutional arrangements. Deploying any number of disciplines to re-establish contact with inner spirituality, the New Age quests for liberation’

Yet even counter-culturalists are relatively rare in Britain today. Far more take up the stance part time. These are people with mainstream

careers who turn to the New Age in their evenings, weekends or holidays. Like the full timer, they seek spirituality in order to become whole.

Towards to the world affirming end of our spectrum, many New Agers are seeking the best of both worlds – the inner and the outer. On the one hand, spirituality is valued as a way of transforming the quality of the inner, psychological life. On the other, importance is attached to the idea that what lies within can be used to obtain the best of what the outer world has to offer – material prosperity, career advancement and status in the community.

Finally, at the world affirming pole, spirituality is seen as a straight forward means to external success. The emphasis is on power, on tapping what lies within to obtain results in what amounts to – anthropologically speaking – magical fashion. The radical world rejecter sees capitalistic modernity as irredeemably flawed, while the radical world affirmer supposes it can be made to work even better. Inner spirituality informs very different new worlds from that of an intrinsically spiritual realm to living as a spiritually informed person, enjoying inner growth alongside external life, and maximising what capitalism has to offer.

The religion of the future?

The New Age is not of great numerical significance today, even in the United States where it has been suggested that there were only 20,000 active participants in 1992.¹ However, its potential for growth is great for several reasons.

One is the general individualisation of religious belief in the West (see **The individualisation of British belief** for further details). Some 100 years ago. Durkheim distinguished between ‘a religion handed down by tradition’ and ‘a free, private, optional religion, fashioned according to one’s own needs and understanding.’² The former, essentially the religion of the church or the chapel, is not doing well. For example, during the twentieth century, membership of the Protestant denominations has declined from 22 per cent of British adults to just 6 per cent.³ The 1997 *Church statistics* report shows a drop of 36,000 (to 1,045,000) Church of England Sunday worshippers and a fall of 55,000 (to 1,087,889) Roman Catholic Mass attendees between 1994 and 1995.



Yet religion may be flourishing beyond the confines of church and chapel. Robert Wuthnow says, 'The religion practised by an increasing number of Americans may be entirely of their own manufacture – a kind of eclectic synthesis of Christianity, popular psychology, *Reader's digest* folklore and personal superstitions, all wrapped in the anecdotes of the individual's biography.'⁴ We can call this phenomenon individualised religion. Rather than belonging to a particular, institutionalised tradition, a religious life is pursued by people finding their own, DIY ways of tackling matters of ultimate and spiritual concern.

Not enough research has been done to confirm that this kind of religion is increasing as Wuthnow and others suggest. But we can safely say it is doing reasonably well, at least in comparison with the traditional religions. One of the indicators of this is the popularity of spiritual beliefs not typically associated with church religion: 42 per cent of the adult British population believe 'there is some sort of spirit or vital force which controls life' (up from 37 per cent in 1957); 36 per cent report having had a religious or spiritual experience; the number of books in the 'body, mind and spirit' sections of bookshops is growing, as is the popularity of belief in angels and the range of television programmes such as *The X files* which deals with the mysteries of life; 70 per cent of Americans now have faith in 'prophetic dreams, reincarnation or UFOs', while 20 per cent believe they are at risk of being abducted by aliens. The realms of alternative healing (34 per cent of the adult population in Britain tried an 'alternative therapy' between 1984 and 1987) and environmentalism (the earth being sacred for deep ecologists) provide further evidence.⁵

New Age teachings are likely to appeal to people seeking their own ways of being religious. Far from demanding that participants belong to a particular tradition, the New Age maintains that the same spirituality

is found at the heart of all traditions from Zen to shamanism. The message is that participants should find out – by way of their own experience – which of these religions, or which combination, works best for them.

It's not just the openness of the New Age movement to individual exploration which makes it attractive; many British people's broad belief in some kind of vital spirit or search for alternative ways of organising their lives fits well into the framework of its thinking.

The future of the New Age looks promising because it appeals to some of the central values of our times. Many value freedom. The New Age promises freedom from the traditions and institutionalised forms of life which, it holds, have become internalised as the ego. Many value experience. The New Age emphasises the quality of experience over the supposed validity of doctrine or dogma. Many value their authenticity, power, self-belief and exercising autonomous agency. The New Age focuses on inner-directed capacities and sacralises the self.

I expect New Age spirituality to become increasingly significant. The movement itself is certainly expanding. In contrast to the 1960s, there are now literally thousands of events – primarily catering for those who engage on a part-time basis – in Britain alone. But I also strongly suspect that the New Age movement *per se* is not where most of the action will take place. There is no sign of a substantial increase in people attracted to fully-fledged you-are-a-spiritual-being New Age provisions. Instead, there are clear signs of various domains of our culture moving in the direction of New Age values and experiences. Those forms of Christianity which are currently proving most successful are those charismatic evangelical movements which are New Age-like in that they emphasise the experience of the power of God as the Holy Spirit within. Within the world of management training, greater importance has been attached to unlocking human potential. Environmentalism increasingly stresses the intrinsic worth, even the sacredness of nature. In health care, there has been a shift in emphasis from the clinical to the alternative. In our general vocabulary, humanity now designates the assumption that all people, in some sacralised, inviolate



sense, are one. In short, the New Age, albeit in diluted forms, may well become the spirituality of the future.

'If New Agers held their values strongly, they could shape society in new and valuable ways. At the moment, too many do not transfer the utopian experiences they acquire during occasional, circumscribed events to those practical, down-to-earth, everyday activities'

Precisely because of its dilution and diverse nature, however it is unclear whether the New Age movement will impact on our society in the way more formalised religions have in the past. At the moment, New Age activity varies from intensive retreats in the wilderness, to just reading New Age books, watching films, listening to music or taking drugs. It certainly provides pockets of enchantment in our somewhat jaded culture. Essentially, though, that enchantment is part time. The evidence suggests the fastest growing area of New Age activity concerns precisely those activities which people with mainstream jobs can pursue in their leisure time before returning to their everyday lives.

This New Age involvement could still enhance people's values. Typically, these are to do with nature, humankindness in which there are no strangers, equality, authenticity, love, cooperation, responsibility for one's self, and forgiveness. If many people held these values strongly, they could shape society in valuable ways. But at the moment, too few New Agers transfer the utopian experiences they acquire during occasional, circumscribed events to those practical, down-to-earth, everyday activities.

Paul Heelas is author of The New Age movement (Blackwell).

Notes

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Cult status

Eileen Barker

What should we make of the new religious movements?

There have been new religions for as long as history has been recorded. Two thousand years ago, Christianity was a new religion; 500 years later, Islam was. In some periods the movements have been more visible than in others. Northern and central Europe saw a mushrooming of new religions in the 1530s, Britain between 1620 to 1650 and at the turn of the nineteenth century, and there have been the Great Awakenings in the mid eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in North America.

‘Diversification and the peaceful coexistence of pluralism are not the same things. The presence of new religions may well lead a democratic society to introduce new laws to cope with excesses that had not presented themselves in earlier times’

The current wave of new religions became visible in the West during the 1960s. The number of movements is impressive. INFORM’s register distinguishes over 16,000 different groups in total.¹ In Britain,

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several hundreds of thousands of people have had some contact with one or other of the movements and many more will have been indirectly affected by some of their ideas. When, however, we turn to their core membership, the statistics are less impressive. Even after 30 years of operating in Britain, hardly any of the better known movements, such as Hare Krishna, the 'Moonies', or the Scientologists, have, at any one time, more than a few hundred core members who devote their lives to the movements, as nuns or monks might do to an Anglican or Roman Catholic order. The main reason is that although most of these movements have tried to convert new members, few of those whom they approach have succumbed for more than a short period, and the rate of turnover has tended to be very high (thus giving the lie to allegations of irresistible and irreversible techniques of mind control).

There have been times and places when new religions have been allowed to exist in relative peace. But they have sometimes been brutally suppressed – thrown to the lions or burnt at the stake. That they are frequently treated with suspicion, fear and hatred is not altogether surprising as they are usually offering an alternative to mainstream society. They often do so with a fervour, enthusiasm and certainty which can be, at the very least, irritating, or at worst, a serious danger to those associated with them.

'That the new religious movements are frequently treated with suspicion, fear and hatred is not altogether surprising as they are usually offering an alternative to mainstream society. They often do so with a fervour, enthusiasm and certainty which can be, at the very least, irritating, or at worst, a serious danger to those associated with them'

It was not long before the current new religious movements (NRMs) generated a vociferous opposition, consisting largely of relatives of those who had abandoned their middle class homes and careers to follow one or other of the gurus, Messiahs, teachers or prophets who appeared on the scene. 'Anti-cult' groups were formed and these supplied the ever

ready media with lurid atrocity tales about brain washing, sexual orgies, child abuse, financial skul-duggery, drugs trafficking, gun-running, political intrigue and the occasional suicide or gory murder. When, in 1978, the tragic details of the suicide and murder of over 900 followers of Jim Jones in the Guyana jungle hit the headlines, the world became aware of a horrifying new threat. All new religions were labelled as destructive cults and treated in the media with the utmost mistrust and distaste, the sins of the few being indiscriminately visited upon all. On a more official level, the *Cottrell report* to the European Parliament in 1994 may have called for strong action to curtail the movements, but the 1980 *Hill report* to the Ontario Government and the Dutch Government's 1984 *Wittereen report* had been generally reassuring. Restrictions had been imposed on foreigners entering the UK to study or work for Scientology in 1968, but following the government commissioned Foster report, they were lifted in 1980. Despite some condemnatory rhetoric, Western governments tended to take the position that, unattractive as some of the movements may be in their beliefs and practices, if they did not contravene the laws of the land, their members had just as much right as anyone else to the freedoms entailed in the citizenship of a pluralistic democratic society.

The face of the new faiths

One cannot generalise about these movements. Unlike nineteenth century sects, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists, nearly all of which came from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the post-war movements include ideas drawn from Eastern traditions, Paganism, witchcraft, psychoanalysis and science fiction. Members of some NRMs live in close knit communities and work full time for their movement; others live in a suburban semi-detached and work in unrelated jobs. Some, such as the Rajneeshes, have encouraged love-ins or, like the erstwhile Children of God's 'hookers for Jesus', have engaged in 'flirty fishing'; others, such as the Brahma Kumaris, advocate lives of strict celibacy. Movements finance themselves through tithing, soliciting for donations, running businesses or offering courses

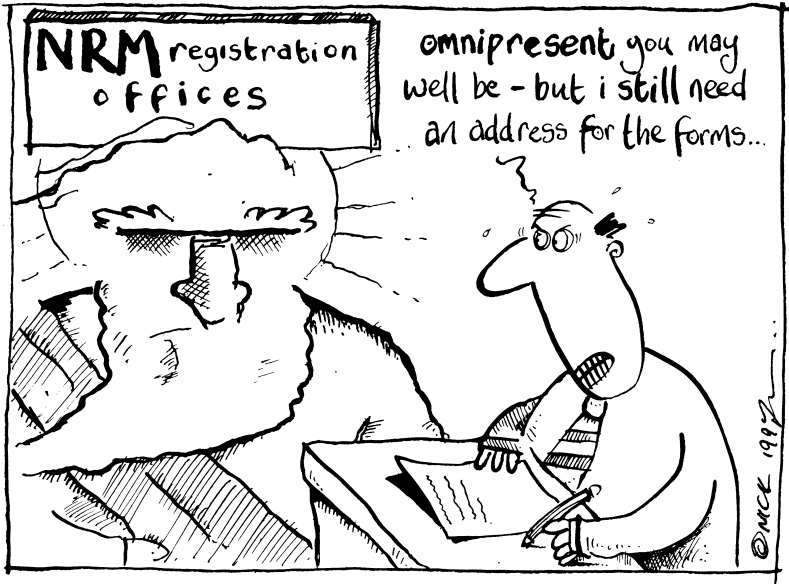
to members or clients. Some movements are extremely rich, others are very poor. Some movements have a disastrous effect on their members, others bring benefits.

Despite the diversity, some characteristics are found frequently among the newest of the new religions – just because they are new and religious. First, almost by definition, the membership consists of first generation converts and converts to any religion are typically far more enthusiastic than people who have been born into a religious tradition. Converts are likely to be attracted from atypical sections of society. In the past, this has often been the poor and oppressed. Many contemporary NRMs have, however, drawn disproportionately from middle class, well educated young adults in their late teens and early twenties who are willing, eager and free to devote their lives to some ideal.

Next, the beliefs and practices of NRMs tend to be presented as relatively simple certainties, with clear distinctions between Truth and Falsehood, Right and Wrong, Godly and Satanic or Us and Them. Another common feature of NRMs is that the founder is accorded by his (sometimes her) followers a charismatic authority, unbound by rules or traditions. This means the leader, who may be revered as a teacher, prophet, guru, Messiah or god, may have the right to decide what sort of work the members do, where and with whom they live, whether or with whom they marry, have sexual relations and children, even, in theory if rarely in practice, whether they live or die.

After even a single generation, there are likely to be considerable changes in most new religions. The enthusiastic young converts will now be middle aged; their children will be consuming the scarce resources of time and money, and, quite possibly, questioning their parents' beliefs and practices. Charismatic leaders die (though some promise not to do so), and new, often bureaucratic, structures replace them. Interpretations of what are acceptable beliefs and practices may accommodate changing circumstances – for instance, disappointed millenarian expectations may have to be rationalised. The sharp us-them boundary becomes increasingly blurred and the new religion starts to resemble an old religion.

Even if an NRM is accommodating to the world, it is quite possible society itself will preserve them-us boundaries and black and white



interpretations of reality, with the movements defined as the sinful 'them' and society the virtuous 'us'. And recently there have been a number of incidents that have brought a heightened awareness to the public and governmental officials of potential dangers from the movements. First, there was the tragedy in Waco, Texas in 1993 when four US Federal agents and 80 Branch Davidian followers of David Koresh died. In 1995, Aum Shinrikyo released sarin gas into the Tokyo underground, killing twelve people and afflicting over 5,500 others totally unconnected with the movement. Most recently, in March 1997, 39 members of Heaven's Gate took their own lives in California.

Cult control

One result of these and other atrocities, such as the World Trade Centre and Oklahoma bombings, is increasing activity throughout Europe and North America dedicated to trying to control 'destructive cults'. A parliamentary commission in France issued a report, *Les sectes en*

France, in January 1996 which concluded there was no need for new legislation but suggested the present law should be applied far more stringently to the movements. The most questionable aspect of the report was that it relied heavily on negatively selective evidence presented by anti-cultists, rather than scholars who had been studying the movements, and it contained a considerable number of inaccuracies. Although not technically a source of law, it has already been quoted in court decisions and used as a pretext for denying one of the movements it names the possibility of renting or buying accommodation. Further governmentally sanctioned reports are currently being drawn up in Belgium, Germany and Switzerland, and for the European Parliament.

‘The leader, who may be revered as a teacher, prophet, guru, Messiah or god, may have the right to decide what sort of work the members do, where and with whom they live, whether or with whom they marry, have sexual relations and children – even whether they live or die’

In Germany, Scientologists are now banned from public office by the Bavarian government and excluded from membership of Helmut Kohl’s Christian Democratic Union and some of their children are prevented from attending public schools. In 1995, the British Home Secretary, Michael Howard, refused to allow Sun Myung Moon an entry visa – an action repeated in some other European countries. Then, at an open anti-cult meeting in 1996, a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office said he regretted that the government had been neutral about ‘cults’ in the past (to call them ‘new religions’ was, he believed, an insult to religion), and he hoped it would be more anti-cult in the future.

Changes that promised greater freedom followed the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when a surge of new (and old) religions flooded into the former socialist countries. It was not long, however, before the problems the Mother Churches were facing, the economic and

political upheavals and general uncertainties of everyday life, and a surge of nationalism led many to point to the new religions as a threat not only to the hapless individuals who were being lured by material as well as spiritual offerings, but also to the security of society itself. Membership of a foreign religion (which includes Baptists as well as Krishna devotees) has been labelled not only heretical, but treasonable as well. New governmental acts restricting foreign religions and 'destructive cults' are currently being presented to the Duma and the Ukrainian parliament, and regional authorities in Russia are refusing foreign religions the rights accorded by the present constitution. In April 1995, a Hare Krishna Temple in Yerevan, Armenia was desecrated, property stolen or destroyed and several devotees severely injured (three had died in Soviet jails). A few days later, paramilitaries beat up, imprisoned and confiscated property of a number of other groups of foreign origin. In Russia in March 1997, a woman was hammered to death and some of her children severely injured because she was suspected of dabbling in witchcraft.

The most obvious way a society can control any religion is simply to ban it. It might ban all religions, as during the Soviet period in Albania, or just a selected few. As most societies in Europe pay at least lip service to religious freedom, there are usually more subtle ways of excluding those religions which are, for whatever reason, considered undesirable. Compulsory registration is increasingly popular because authorities can make it difficult for religions to meet the criteria. The rules of registration that discriminate against NRMs include those which require a large number of members (few new religions will be able to muster a list of 10,000), or a history in the country of, say, 100 years.

The significance of registration varies. In some countries, a religion is not allowed to operate at all if it is not registered. In others, it will not make much difference – some religions prefer not to be registered as this means they are less likely to be controlled and will have freedoms such as that of educating their children in the way they want. More commonly, the advantages of registration outweigh the disadvantages. A movement may be entitled to tax exemption or state subsidies. If it

fails to register, a religion may find it cannot hire venues for meetings or congregate in residential houses.

Another way to control new religions that has been used extensively in the United States and to a lesser extent in Europe, is civil actions in the courts. Crippling sums have been awarded by juries to ex-members for the distress that a movement is judged to have given them. ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), for example, was ordered to pay US\$9 million for the distress it had caused a young American devotee and her parents, although this sum was substantially reduced on appeal. In Britain, a prominent case was the libel action lost by the Unification Church (the 'Moonies') when it sued the *Daily Mail* for saying it brainwashed its members and split up families. Such cases have seriously jeopardised the new religions' chances of survival in the states and countries concerned.

The challenge of pluralism

There are many reasons why we might expect the demand for and receptivity to a number of small new religious movements to persist in a global society that promises the freedoms of democracy. The media, geographical and social mobility, travel, immigration and changing family and educational mores all encourage individuals to seek their own, rather than their parents', interpretations of reality. What served to make sense of this world and, perhaps, the next for an older generation does not automatically satisfy a younger one. But diversification and the peaceful coexistence of pluralism are not the same things.

The presence of new religions and some of their activities may well lead a democratic society to introduce new laws to cope with excesses that had not presented themselves as problems in earlier times. But if we want to preserve the rights of individuals as they are laid down in the United Nations Universal Declaration and the European Convention of Human Rights, such laws must apply equally to all citizens, whatever their beliefs.

The challenge of pluralism, particularly when it includes those who would themselves destroy peaceful coexistence, is not an easy one to

face. The new religions provide but one sharp reminder of the precarious and potentially volatile nature of religion in the modern and post-modern world.

Note

1. INFORM is a charity, based at the London School of Economics, which was founded in 1988 with the support of the British government and mainstream churches. It provides information about new religious movements (NRMs) which is as accurate, unbiased and as up-to-date as possible.

Yasmin Alibhai Brown on being a Muslim in Britain

Ben Jupp

‘There are lots of reports about the Muslim community in Britain feeling under siege. But the real fissure is not between Christians and Muslims, but between people of faith and the secular, liberal community. One of the contributory factors is that the Church has changed. Christianity in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century became a tool of politics in the way that no other religion ever has. It was tied to the idea of colonial conquest, eternal progress and the greater civilisation of the West. I grew up under a colonial system in which Christianity was the instrument used to negate and deride our belief.

Now, for the first time, I can think about Christianity in its original form: the good Samaritan faith. With the end of the British empire and the declining power of the Church in Britain, Christianity is far less attached to politics in a traditional sense. Take the reaction of the churches to the new asylum law. The churches have done more than anyone else to fight these iniquitous laws. The Jewish community and some black groups have opposed these laws, but many ethnic minority groups have done nothing. Across Europe, most so-called radicals have failed to confront attempts to reduce asylum rights in the way that Christian groups have. I’m incredibly impressed by that.

Senior Researcher at Demos.

‘It is the most educated Muslims who are feeling the most aggrieved. A lot of bright university graduates are joining fanatical movements. Some are beginning to reject everything from democracy to fundamental human rights simply because they see these as Western’

I respect people who have no faith. But I find it hard to get on with those who are arrogant about this fact and think they know better than people with faith. It would be a great shame if politicians were now to recapture Christianity as a political force. Politics should definitely be separated from religion. But in all the other spheres of life, morality and ethics now matter more than ever. People are right to challenge the assumption that has grown up over the past 40 years that decisions should be reached in a purely instrumental way. I think we need to question, for example, those who divorce just because they want to, forgetting the responsibilities they owe the kids they’ve brought into the world.

‘Muslims would not have reacted to the Rushdie affair in the way they did had someone listened to them and respected their misgivings. The whole book burning episode took place nine months after fruitless attempts to discuss the problem’

My views have been shaped greatly by personal experience. I felt quite comfortable within the liberal camp until the Salman Rushdie affair. I thought those who believed in religion were backward. The Rushdie affair changed all that. I was shocked by the way that liberals, who proclaimed their belief in freedom of thought and expression, were completely unwilling to listen to the voice of very powerless people who felt offended by a book. Muslims would not have reacted in the way they did had someone listened to them and respected their misgivings. The whole book burning episode took place nine months after fruitless attempts to discuss the problem. I knew the way that all

Muslims were being portrayed was quite unfair – these supposedly dangerous people were my mum, my aunts and my uncles. My liberal associates were talking about them in terms of pure hatred. But it was not just the hatred which angered me. It was also the way liberals totally misunderstood people's continuing need for religion, particularly among members of Muslim groups who are still finding it hard to find their place in British society.

The Muslim community is talked about offensively in this country in a way which is undreamed of for other groups. There is a licence to offend which is freely used by intellectuals such as Bernard Levin and Conor Cruise O'Brien. Combine that with the fact that unemployment and poverty are much higher for Muslims and it is not surprising a sense of grievance is emerging which is partly justified, and partly not. Disturbingly, it is the most educated Muslims who are feeling most aggrieved. A lot of bright university graduates are joining fanatical movements. The sense of persecution has grown among some to such an extent that they are beginning to reject everything, including democracy and fundamental human rights, simply because they see these as Western.

For the last two years I've been praying for the first time in my life. My faith has developed out of anger. Looking back, the Rushdie affair was a defining moment in which both sides in the liberalism debate woke up. For the first time we now have a core of Muslim intellectuals. They are not theology scholars, although we do have these, but intellectuals in the broader sense – people such as Tariq Modood, Rana Kabbani and Zaki Badawi. We realised we were totally unprepared for the attacks which followed *The satanic verses* and without a proper intellectual movement we were going to be demolished. We are now also able to criticise our own community. No culture should be without criticism. It festers and destroys itself. Because we earned respect by speaking out when Islam is attacked, it is easier for us to point out the bad things which are going on in our community in the name of Islam.

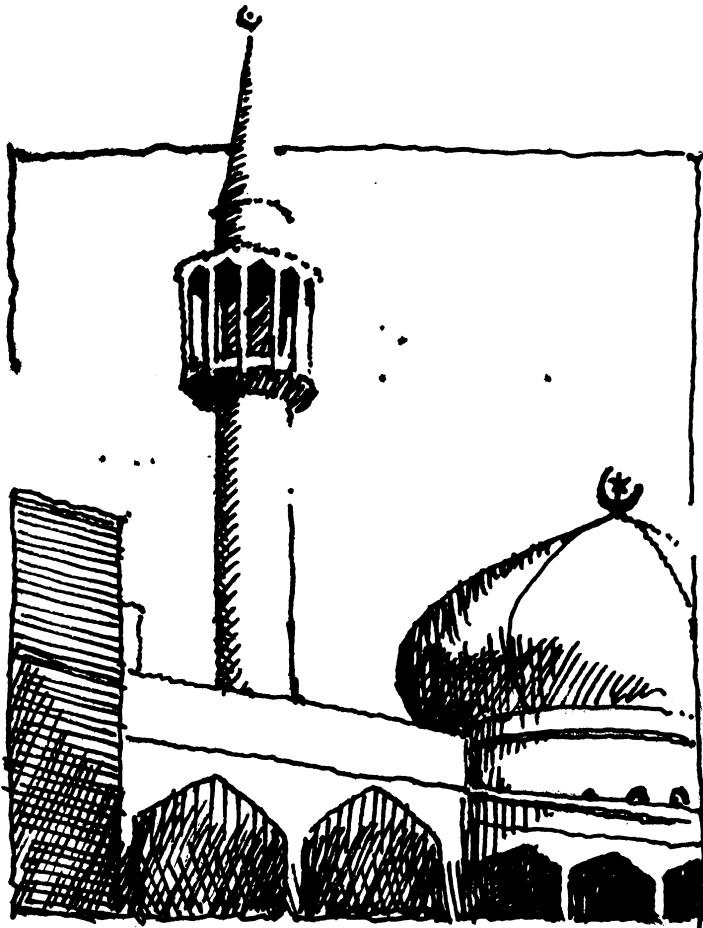
What common demands follow? Many of us are torn. If we want equal treatment, we should surely be entitled to our own schools in the same way that Christian and Jewish communities are. Yet, strategically,

it would be the worst thing in the world for us. If we remove ourselves from non-Muslim society, phobia against us will grow, as will our own sense of grievance. The teaching in many Islamic schools may not be that different, as some secularists fear, but physically separate education would create a them-and-us situation. The only fair and rational policy is to get rid of all state funded religious schools.

We also need to look to politics, since the Muslim community is greatly underrepresented in Parliament. Yet party political representation is not the only answer to our exclusion from British society. Look at the Jewish community. They have made progress by infiltrating every aspect of public life. That is what we need, to have Muslims not just as MPs, but in publishing, the media and the legal profession, for instance. Some Muslims are joining these professions. But I fear that younger people may not follow this because of their sense of alienation and an associated sense of belonging more to some pan-Islamic, romantic movement, than British society.

'I can now think about Christianity in its original form: the good Samaritan faith. The churches have done more than anyone else to fight the iniquitous new asylum law. None of the immigrant groups have done anything significant. So-called radical groups have failed to confront attempts to reduce asylum rights'

Western culture and Islam need to develop mutual respect and dialogue. Some of the negative attitudes towards women and some political statements being made in our name are unacceptable. We have to learn to grant our young people more autonomy because they are of two worlds. But there are also ideas which members of other communities can learn from Muslims. One thing that I have started to value about my people is their ability not to be absorbed by the crass commercial culture that has grown in Britain over the last twenty years. Our kids haven't fallen for the need to spend a thousand pounds on new clothes. There is still an incredible simplicity and ability to live



beyond the material in the Muslim community, even among the youngest kids. Ten and eleven year olds say without any coercion that they want to fast and are able to fast, able to develop that side of their character. Muslims make amazing sacrifices for the family, partly because they are bound together by a common fear of God. Such bonds can also deliver practical benefits. For example, I attribute the exceptionally low

incidence of depression in my community – the Ishmaili community – to the extensive social support network available, even to marginal members of the community.

Looking ahead, however, it is hard to be optimistic. A lot of us feel the treatment of Muslims in Bosnia indicates that what once happened to the Jews could happen to us. Most non-Muslims can't take that seriously because they do not understand how important Bosnia has been in our collective psyche. But the issue has come up in conversation during practically all the occasions on which I've visited Muslim friends over the past two or three years. Attacks on Muslims in Germany and the Czech Republic enhance this anxiety. Even the most Westernised Muslims have at the back of their heads this image that it could happen to us, and that if it does, nobody will lift a finger.'

Yasmin Alibhai Brown is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research and has written extensively on Islam in Britain. This article is based on a conversation with Ben Jupp.

Faith, hope and community

Tom Bentley* and Helen Hayes†

What role can religion play in regenerating inner cities?

Religious calls to heed the plight of the urban poor are not new. In 1883, *The bitter cry of outcast London*, written by a Congregationalist minister, provoked a Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes. Christian organisations also played a central role in the philanthropy and social welfare provision of nineteenth century Britain. But in an increasingly multi-faith society where religious belief has declined, religion's role in urban policy has become less clear. Eleven years after *Faith in the city*, the controversial report of the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, the publications *The cities: a Methodist report and Unemployment and the future of work*, by the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, offer theological perspectives on the problems faced by deprived urban areas.

But the significance of religion for cities lies in its continued local presence and integration into everyday experience, rather than its symbolic places of worship or formal relationship with the state. Churches, mosques, religious councils and networks already deliver education, healthcare, child care, support for the homeless, and drug and alcohol services and often innovate new, integrated models of

*.†Researchers at Demos.

urban regeneration and service delivery. Why should urban religion be so closely associated with tackling wider social problems?

The first reason is that belief often carries a developed social conscience and explicit social ethics: to care for the suffering and disadvantaged, to treat all people equally and to contribute from one's own resources to help those in need. This altruism and propensity to give is expressed in numerous ways. Many of the new social entrepreneurs¹ are motivated by religious values which seem to reinforce their commitment to others and their ability to motivate and inspire. Other organisations, such as BIA Quaker Social Action which runs recycling and job creation schemes in London, are not explicitly religious in their operation but are inspired by a strongly shared commitment to the poor. For example, the Quaker group recycles electrical appliances like cookers and refrigerators to provide both work and equipment for people on low incomes. However, they refuse to give goods away because they insist everybody has something to contribute and are reluctant to encourage a passive culture of dependence.

Second, the severity of conditions in many urban neighbourhoods means spiritual and pastoral care often directly involves religious institutions in social welfare. It is hard to address the spiritual life of people whose lives are dominated by poverty, lack of work or homelessness without also addressing these problems. As a result, urban churches have found themselves grappling with social and economic problems not found in more affluent areas.

Third, urban areas foster cooperation because of the physical closeness and interdependence of their religious communities. Densely populated urban districts, often with diverse ethnic populations and complex, varied local histories mean that different religious institutions often find themselves struggling to meet similar problems with limited resources in a confined geographical space. A good example is the building in Brick Lane, east London, which began life as a chapel for the French Huguenots in the early nineteenth century, was then converted into a synagogue for the growing Jewish population and is now a mosque used by many of the area's Bangladeshi and Somali residents. Combined with the challenge of empty pews faced by many mainstream urban

churches, the imperative to get involved in partnerships providing wider community services can be compelling. Frequently, these initiatives create frameworks for exactly the kind of approaches required for effective urban regeneration: a long-term presence in an area, multi-faceted service delivery with integrated facilities, a wide range of external partners and often a unifying ethos which motivates staff and users alike. One example is St Bartholomew's church in East Ham which was demolished in 1984 and rebuilt as a multi-use centre, combining health-care, sheltered housing, day care for the elderly and a hall for local community groups and a coffee bar – all alongside a flourishing church. The centre is also used one night a week to provide night shelter for the homeless as part of a network of local churches.

A fourth factor is the authority and experience gained from the continued presence in deprived urban neighbourhoods. Clerics are professionals who actually live alongside their clients, sharing much of their experience and developing trust. A major benefit of long-term relationships and support is a rounded and stable capacity to help people articulate their own views and needs more forcefully. For example, one of the most effective religious interventions in the poverty debate in recent years was the series of poverty hearings organised by Church Action on Poverty, which drew national church leaders and politicians. Such testimony, where inner city residents speak for themselves about their experience, can and should be a powerful tool in regeneration strategies, as in the Bradford Urban Hearings of 1993.

A sustained presence also greatly enhances the potential of local religion to act as a focus for networks of social capital – the norms of trust, cooperation and expectation which underpin both economic activity and strong civil society. Many state services require people to fit into prescribed procedures and conform to fixed rules, a process which impedes the development of trust and mutual understanding. Facilities such as the Bromley-by-Bow Centre, an integrated community centre housed in a United Reform Church where religious business takes place at weekends, takes a different approach. By establishing a relationship over time and recognising the complexity of its clients' needs, the centre has found ways of tackling problems which neither

limit people's expectations or achievements, nor impose unrealistic conditions. The results have often been impressive, not only in terms of improving social conditions, housing, employment prospects and so on, but also in developing strong, overlapping networks of social capital between communities which might otherwise remain suspicious of each other.

Finally, religious organisations often create an ethos which enhances the value of services delivered within the community. The Bromley-by-Bow Centre, for example, emphasises creativity and excellence in all its activities. Because the centre has always accommodated local artists and brought them into contact with local residents, art has become an important way of enabling people to transcend the struggles and limitations of daily life. Theological values are bound up in this ethos. Another example is the Buddhist settlement in London's Bethnal Green. Establishing a cluster of community businesses – wholefood, book and gift shops, an alternative healing centre and a vegetarian restaurant – sustains the religious community and serves the local population while projecting a consistent ethos which acts as a unifying force for Buddhists and as an interface between them and others in the area.

When religious organisations engage with the problems of people beyond their doors, an ethos of spiritual transcendence can also enable a more earthly, grounded form of transcendence – the raising of people's expectations and achievements and the gradual improvement of their daily lives.

Checks and balances

The involvement of religion does, however, raise complex questions about the legitimacy of religious organisations and their values. First, religion can be divisive as well as inclusive. While the emphasis in many cities is on ecumenism and inter-faith partnership, the potential for conflict is great. This is partly because religions need to maintain their own identities and may feel threatened by partnership. For example, should a church community centre make space for the local



Bangladeshi population to hold classes in the Koran? On what basis are these decisions made? How can conflicts be resolved?

It is striking that those religious organisations which work hardest to be inclusive – Bromley-by-Bow, for example, refuses to exclude people for racism, although it also insists on challenging it – are often the most effective, partly because they act as neutral ground.

Second, there can be problems of accountability. Organisations which receive state contracts to deliver services are expected to pass complex audits and fulfil the requirements of public sector accountability. This can be onerous for small scale community organisations, especially those attempting innovative solutions to regeneration. It can be doubly difficult for organisations which are inspired by an ultimate accountability to God. The Department of the Environment now houses the Inner Cities Religious Council, a group working to promote inter-faith partnership and to advise faith groups on regeneration funding, partly to overcome these problems. But they do not address the skew or bias towards specific constituencies that religious values might bring to service delivery.

Even organisations which do not openly claim ideological or religious identity can cause problems of this kind. For example, the Citizens' Organising Foundation facilitates 'broad-based organising' in urban

areas, aiming to 'empower' citizens, and equip them with the collective force to push their concerns up political agendas. Because of their concern with inclusiveness and grass roots activism, the Foundation eschews association with explicit political or theological values. However, it does have strong links with churches and its facilitators are part of a tightly organised and highly focused support structure, raising questions about exactly what kind of ethos and values prevail behind the scenes. While the aims and principles may be entirely appropriate, it is sometimes difficult to know. At the very least, honesty about an organisation's aims and origins should be required for them to play a wider role in service delivery or to enter into partnerships with the state. Honesty might also require a broader political culture in which religious perspectives on social issues were more welcome.

'Trust in national institutions has plummeted over the last decade. Local organisations which maintain an open, inclusive relationship with their surrounding communities, providing wider social benefits as well as fulfilling religious roles, can be important foundations for public respect and participation'

Finally, local involvement in social issues can cause conflict within wider religious communities. In the Christian church, urban radicalism has often caused conflict and division over both theology and political action. *Faith in the city* helped to form a contemporary urban movement in the church, but has also crystallised opposition among other church members opposed to what they see as a dilution of gospel truths, a failure to evangelise and an inappropriate warmth for other faiths.

However, there are good reasons for local religious groups to develop social and political links with their host communities in these ways, not least that it is an important source of popular legitimacy. Trust in national institutions has plummeted over the last decade, especially among younger generations. This drop has coincided with the continued decline of church attendance. However, public respect

for local institutions and professions remains steady. Organisations which maintain an open, inclusive relationship with their surrounding communities, providing wider social benefits as well as fulfilling religious roles, can be important foundations for public respect and participation.

Religion inevitably raises issues of doubt, legitimacy and exclusion, but if different religious practitioners – and especially the hierarchies which control them – can rise to the challenge, local religious centres could play an increasingly valuable role in the communal life of cities.

Note

1. Leadbeater C, 1997, *The rise of the social entrepreneur*, Demos, London.

I'm not a believer. So why do I go to church?

Melanie Howard

A personal view of churches' role in fostering community.

My church going habit started somewhat cynically five years ago when I was looking for a school place for my eldest daughter. The word on the street was that the best bet for a full-time nursery place in my area (Hackney, London) was the church school. It had an excellent reputation but places were scarce. Regular church going and a letter from the vicar were the only way to guarantee my daughter got in.

I was interested for other reasons, too. The shock of serious illness in my immediate family made me more receptive to some of the messages I heard in church. The vicar ran an open house; children were welcome and he happily entertained doubters like me – ‘agnostics anonymous’ he called us. Sermons were always thought provoking. And international inequalities and the role of the church in solving social issues were frequently on the agenda.

Now, years into this relationship, the enduring motive for my regular pilgrimage is that the church is the only place in the neighbourhood where it is possible to meet a local community of people from

Co-Director of the Future Foundation and co-author of the recent Demos report, *Tomorrow's women*.

a wide range of backgrounds. The congregation includes Afro-Caribbeans, Nigerians, middle class professionals, working class families, the unemployed, single parents, older residents and young people. The facilities are used throughout the week by a girls' youth club, a pensioners' lunch club, Brownies and Guides, women's groups, for spiritual development meetings, and as a night shelter for the homeless during the winter. It is a real centre for local activities and groups of all kinds.

'The vicar ran an open house – he happily entertained doubters like me. "Agnostics anonymous" he called us'

By contrast, all the other local gatherings seem to be exclusive to a particular type of person. The neighbourhood association meetings have been sporadic as they depend on specific issues such as planning implications, traffic calming measures and concern for local conservation to whip up enthusiasm. Social networks tend to fall within specific strata such as the expectant and new mothers attracted by the National Childbirth Trust. And the perpetual discord of vested interest groups such as the Hackney Labour Party is enough to put most people off.

In church there is a feeling of continuity and consistency, a musty echo of the past – albeit a past I was never a part of but which the act of communal worship seems to evoke. There is a genuine and open



acceptance of each person in the congregation. Everyone is encouraged to contribute what they can, whatever its nature.

Since I started attending church, the communitarianism promoted by American sociologist Amitai Etzioni – the notion that the route to supporting healthy societies lies with fostering stronger communal identity – has gained wider debate and some acceptance. It seems to me that the Church is a forum which currently provides a successful model of how his project might work in our fracturing and fragmenting society. It would be a shame if the perceived need for total faith blinded a wider range (as many as 60 per cent of people in Great Britain hold some belief in God) to the benefits the Church has to offer. All of us share an interest in finding ways of creating the social glue which enables us to live as citizens with our neighbours rather than as consumers driven by self-interest. Now that the numbers enrolling at inner city churches are rising again, perhaps we need to look more closely at what this institution, so beleaguered and little valued by the majority, has to offer for a new way forward.

Politics in denial

Luke Bretherton and John Casson†*

To talk politics is to do theology. The sooner we realise it, the better.

To dare to live without God has been the great project of the modern world. But we are learning that political systems find it hard to maintain cohesion, accountability and authority without an accepted notion of the common good. They cannot make neutral, managerial decisions about issues which continually push into the political area that are about ultimate meanings, not technical trade-offs.

Take the recent attempt to reform divorce law. Several years' preparation by the Law Commission culminated in the Lord Chancellor's 1996 Family Law Bill which attempted to make the law work more tidily and efficiently. Legal expertise had considered this a problem of legal process and approached it simply as a technical question.

'Religion as we know it is an invention of our modern world, the name given to a space in society for private spiritual life, morals and credal belief'

*Christian ethics PhD student at King's College, London.

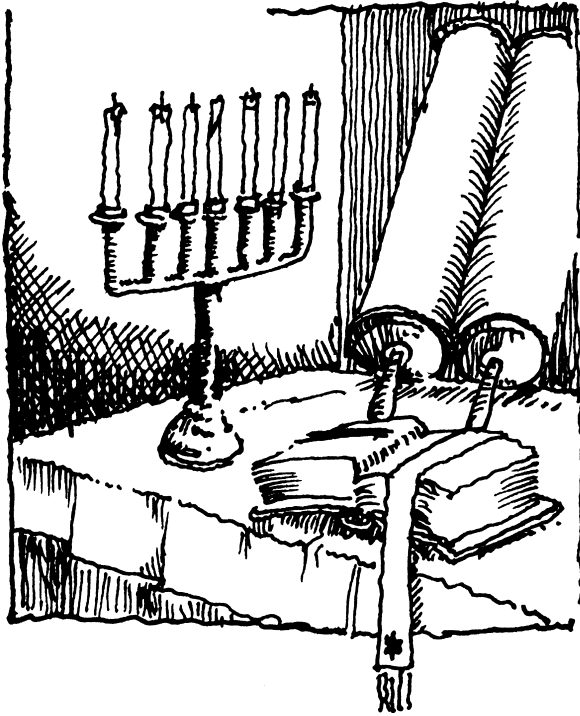
†Research assistant in the Divinity Faculty of the University of Cambridge.

The Lord Chancellor did not anticipate much controversy. He was wrong. The *Daily Mail* and startled politicians roused by the media wrought havoc on the bill's passage through Parliament, claiming it would fatally speed the erosion of marriage as an institution. The debate saw the 'experts' ranged against campaigners and MPs with competing visions of family life. The political process struggled to provide an adequate basis for consensus about a just policy and to frame the debate in terms of basic moral assumptions about the nature and purpose of marriage. The opinion of the majority of the public was largely ignored, sometimes manipulated and often uncertain on this complex issue. The debate did little to guide it. In the end, Parliament produced legislation and policy which owed more to Westminster tactics and political expediency than anything else.

Parliament's inability to handle such issues is unsurprising, since we have long pretended we could ignore public arguments about questions of faith and belief. Our political process fails to make explicit the presuppositions about morality that are involved in everything from tax breaks to the treatment of asylum seekers. We talk instead about what is best for the country in a utilitarian way, or leave panels of experts to decide on issues for us. In this, the intellectual tradition which we call modernity has left its mark most clearly on us.

Modernity in its most essential nature has insisted on a fundamental split between public and private. It restricts faith to a realm of private opinion – a reaction, from the seventeenth century on, against authoritarianism and warfare between Catholics and Protestants. The public realm of policy and law became the neutral sphere of objective truth and demonstrable facts. Religion as we know it is an invention of our modern world, the name given to a space in society for private spiritual life, morals and credal belief. Christianity, Islam and other faiths are driven from the public square and only co-opted as bit players when convenient. Their values are then deployed detached from the presuppositions on which they rest.

The modern state is directed and judged on the basis of planning and forecasting using the 'objective science' of economics. All ethical categories which might pose questions of purpose and meaning are



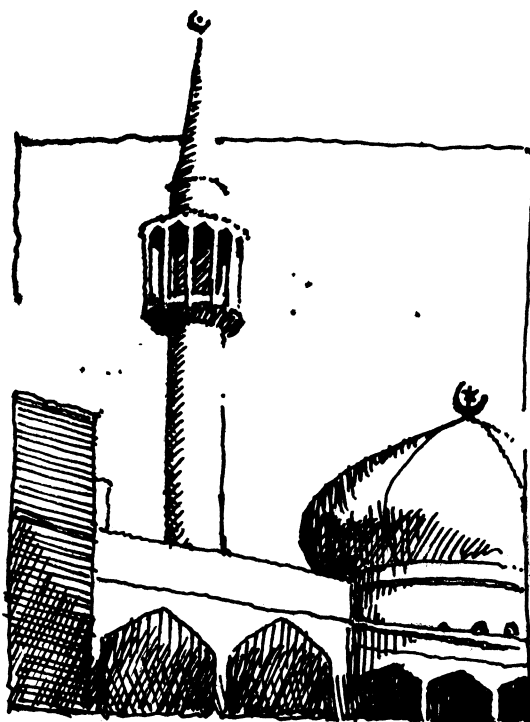
stripped out. To take just one example, while genetic scientists clone a sheep, raising profound questions of ultimate meaning, the scientists repeatedly disclaim that their categories of technological knowledge can answer or even acknowledge ethical, even theological questions. As Nietzsche noted, a world after God keeps itself busy, hoping to make up for the loss of the discredited categories of meaning and purpose by frenzied work and play.

The trouble is that the public square is not neutral, as modernists had hoped, but operates on the basis of fundamental metaphysical assumptions about the nature of reality, about what it means to be human, about the *telos* of human society. Far from offering freedom from any particular faith and moral system, secularism simply replaces one system with another as the basis of our common life. When schools

teach secular values detached from their roots, they are not so much preserving neutrality as asserting the marginalisation of religion to the private fringes.

'Christianity betrays itself when it attempts to enter public discourse on any ground other than its own distinctive premise that Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again. Tolerance is not the absence of a view, but the giving of space to an alternative'

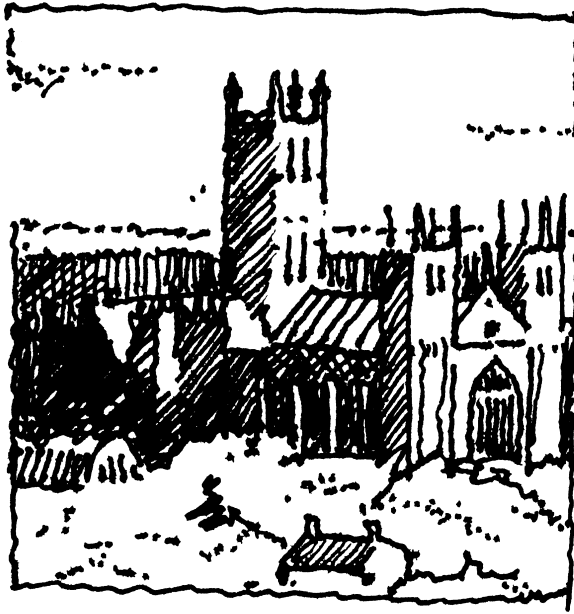
A great debate has started about what the moral basis of our society should be, now that secularism has been exposed as just another form



of morality. There are first those who, like John Finnis, retain a faith in reason and some kind of natural law inherent in the order of things to be able to provide an account of moral principles. Secondly, there are the anti-perfectionist liberals, such as Thomas Nagel and Ronald Dworkin, who attempt to identify neutral values. Basic human rights, for example, are seen as neutral between other competing conceptions of the good. Thirdly, there are those who take a pragmatist view, like John Rawls who argues that even though we cannot share a common basis for our values, we do, by dint of historical accident, share certain notions and language. For Rawls, this enables members of a pluralistic society to work together politically and share a common notion of justice. Fourthly, there are the anti-foundationalists, such as Alasdair McIntyre, who argue it is pointless trying to find some common ground between competing traditions or communities. Notions like justice and even rationality itself only make sense within a particular tradition of thought. These traditions can only speak to each other in terms of what is coherent to their tradition.

The approach to remoralisation which seems to be most favoured by government is to try to find a set of values which everybody shares. The Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority (SCAA) consultation in 1996 of a national statement of values for our children's education precisely illustrates the issues we have been describing. The government instituted a process to tackle perceived moral relativism in which 150 of the great and the good were asked to produce a contemporary 'ten commandments'.

But the SCAA approach revealed a fundamental weakness in all such ventures. It attempted to produce a set of values detached from any premises about the world. Resting on broad consensus alone, these values in a vacuum fail precisely at the point at which they should be useful: when interests conflict and vague consensus is inadequate. The SCAA list of ten things which we value has been criticised for its woolliness – but it could not be anything else. In effect, it wanted the last seven commandments without reference to the first three. Without a god, be that god Reason or Yahweh, there is no anchor or end to which loving thy neighbour or not stealing is directed.



Establishing moral rules for society which are meaningful, which help us decide between competing claims, requires thorough and honest debate. Civil peace, cohesion and a healthy political process will not grow out of an indifferent tolerance of the 'I'm okay, you're okay' kind. We must not accept that there is no choice or lapse into a vague appeal to disembodied values. Without a political process that facilitates genuine debate, the danger is that accountability, cohesion and participation can only be provided by manipulation and emotivism, as the abortion issue demonstrates.

Far from making dialogue impossible, committed positions are a precondition for genuine conversation. Christianity, or any other faith, has nothing to say when its contribution is shaped decisively by one or other of its conversation partners. To claim Allah or Jesus Christ as sovereign is to make a public statement which relativises all other claims to authority, be they political or ideological. Such claims cannot be kept to

the private realm. Christianity betrays itself when it attempts to enter public discourse on any ground other than its own distinctive premise that Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again. Tolerance is not the absence of a view, but the giving of space to an alternative. Toleration historically was founded on confidence in a particular vision of the nature, origin and destiny of human life. As the Salman Rushdie case illustrates, resisting the strident claims of others requires explicit commitment to an alternative vision of the good.

Pennies from heaven

Paul S Williams

Religion and ethics have long been regarded as methodologically irrelevant to economics. Economists see their discipline as a science, concerned with the testing of theories and hypotheses, with facts rather than ethics or moral values. Normative economics, which is concerned with policy prescription rather than the description of economic behaviour, is conducted within the highly individualistic framework of utilitarian welfare economics in which social welfare depends on individual welfare alone. While other social sciences have been deeply affected by the postmodern revolution in thinking which has undermined any stark distinction between facts and values, mainstream economics has so far remained largely impervious, perhaps the last great bastion of the Enlightenment.

There are signs, however, that change is on the way. Economists operating within the confines of orthodox theory have begun to develop models which assume motivations other than purely selfish ones, while also taking seriously the impact of culture and values on economic performance.¹ Some would argue economics may be undergoing a paradigm shift as it re-examines its assumptions about human motivation and the objectives of economic policy.

Senior Economist, The Henley Centre for Forecasting.

The views expressed in this article are the author's alone and do not represent those of The Henley Centre.

This increasing recognition that economics and economic policy making cannot be value neutral has coincided with the rising involvement of religious groups in political and economic affairs. Last autumn, the Catholic church published *The common good*, a major piece of teaching on issues of social and economic policy in which it urged Catholics to vote for candidates explicitly on the basis of church teaching. In January, the Catholic leader in Britain, Cardinal Hume, sparked a major row following his suggestion that Catholics should not vote for candidates who actively support abortion. Muslim leaders have since issued their equivalent, *Election '97: a guide for Muslims*, to serve as a voting guide for Britain's 2 million followers of Islam. More recently, the Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, has published *The Politics of Love* (see **Book marks** on page 143) in which he espouses Judaeo Christian morality as the solution to our excessively individualistic and morality relativistic society.

But perhaps the biggest changes have taken place among evangelicals. Despite spectacular success in social and economic reform in the nineteenth century with leaders like Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, Josephine Butler and Hugh Price-Hughes, evangelicals withdrew from social action at the turn of the century both in response to the liberal social gospel, which was felt to undermine traditional Christian beliefs concerning eternal salvation, and also because of the privatisation of Christianity. Salvation was viewed more in other-worldly terms and social concern became less an issue of public politics than one of private charity. Attitudes began to change after the second world war and both of these obstacles have now been removed. The missionary theologian, Lesslie Newbigin, has been extremely influential in evangelical circles in arguing that Christianity cannot accept the relegation to the private sphere imposed by secularism.² At a meeting of around 2,700 evangelical Christians from over 150 nations in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, evangelicals were penitent for having regarded 'evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive'.³ Consequently, the twenty-odd years that have followed this declaration have witnessed the publication of a voluminous and growing literature on the relationship between Christianity, economics and politics. British evangelicals have increasingly sought to

integrate their faith with their work and public life, notable examples being Margaret Thatcher's Policy Advisor, Brian Griffiths, and Oxford economist Donald Hay.

An ethical economic agenda

What do these different groups believe about economics? Although there are disagreements and differences of emphasis, there is also a considerable degree of consensus (see Table). The key insight shared by Christian, Jewish and Islamic groups is the notion of *stewardship* as a controlling principle for all economic activity. Stewardship is based on the understanding that the fundamental nature of economic activity is to act as responsible trustees of the resources given to us in God's creation. This implies that property rights cannot be absolute, but are qualified by a warning against the idolatry of materialism and consumerism, an obligation to those who have little and a responsibility to care for God's creation. There is a strong work ethic in that work is seen as the primary means through which stewardship is exercised, which means that all have the right and the obligation to work, all should have a measure of responsibility and control over resources, labour should not be viewed merely as a cost but as an invitation to cooperate in the task of stewardship, and all are accountable to God for their stewardship.

Market economies are accepted as the most efficient organisational form but criticised in their workings because of the consumerist culture and 'efficiency ideology' they currently promote. The treatment of people by mainstream economics also receives some criticism. Humankind is regarded as having dignity through being created in God's image, but having fallen through sin. Consequently, while self-seeking 'rational economic man' is part of the truth, the concept is seen as undervaluing (and disincentivising) the altruistic aspects of human nature and as being too individualistic. Other aspects of capitalism receiving fairly universal condemnation include its treatment of labour as a cost, the extent of unemployment and poverty, most aspects of the Third World debt crisis and the treatment of the environment.

The economics of religions					
	Liberal Protestants	Catholics	Evangelicals	Jews	Muslims
Areas of agreement	1. Religious values should shape policy 2. Stewardship as a key economic principle 3. Work as the primary means of exercising stewardship 4. A market economy needing correction to protect the weak and powerless				
Key emphases	Arms trade Third World debt	Minimum wage	Unemployment, inflation	Work qualified by Sabbath	Constraining greed
	← Structural morality		← Transaction morality		
	← Income inequalities		← Qualified interest ban		
Role of the state	Strong interventionist	Decentralised subsidiarity	Decentralised and accountable	Minimal	Minimal, but some seek an Islamic state

Source: P.S.Williams, 1997

What of the differences? Jewish and Islamic economists (and some evangelicals) favour some kind of qualified ban on interest based on the Old Testament prohibitions against usury.⁴ While accepting an element of reward for risk, they reject the idea that interest should be paid for deferred consumption or for loss of liquidity. Saving is regarded as a moral obligation, part of the exercise of stewardship in which responsibility for future generations and the wider community is acknowledged. For Jews, these restrictions generally only apply to lending to other Jews. Islamic economists typically seek a blanket ban and propose a variety of alternative provisions for the funding of investment, all of which seek to involve the financier personally in the investment, whether in risk (and profit) sharing or loss sharing.⁵

Apart from this issue, groups on the right of the table tend to be more concerned with the personal morality of those involved in economic transactions. They seek to impose moral restraint on the strong and contractual protection for the weaker party (for example, by allowing a cooling off period in which contracts can be revoked) against fraud, price-fixing, and unjust pricing (for example, exploiting short-term shortages by raising prices to the disadvantage of the poor).

By contrast, Christian groups (including most evangelicals) have tended to focus more on structural evils, such as income inequalities, unemployment, inflation and Third World debt. There is also a strand of thought in all the Christian groups which regards poverty as in some way being a spiritually higher or morally superior state, an idea which is absent in either Judaism or Islam. More recently, this pietistic concept has been taken up into the various theologies of liberation, of which there are liberal, Catholic and evangelical varieties, all taking the position of an oppressed underclass as their starting point in thinking and acting in the economic and political arena.⁶

Finally, liberal Protestants are divided from all the other groups in two important respects: they support a highly interventionist role for the state and rely on reason as their main authority in developing their approach. All the other groups tend to argue for a much more decentralised, minimal state (though not of the Hayekian variety) and develop

their approaches to economics primarily through interaction with sacred texts and official church teaching.

Religion, economics and politics

The various approaches to economics held by these different groups do not feed straightforwardly into political positions. But a rising tide of religious engagement will undoubtedly influence policy making. There are seven distinct ways in which religious groups have been active and are likely to remain active as influences of society in general and public policy in particular.

Individual involvement

Changing views within religious groups and a breakdown in the old liberal consensus that questions of belief be entirely privatised have together persuaded many religious believers to be far more concerned about the way their faith interacts with how they do their job. Some of these individuals, such as Andrew Dilnot, director of the Institute of Fiscal Studies, are major decision makers.

Ethical investment

An estimated £6 billion are thought to be invested in ethical funds. Although this is a small proportion of total investment funds (they total around £750 billion), more and more institutions are beginning to apply ethical screening to their investments.

The ethical consumer

Harder to package and control than investment, consumer spending is nevertheless a rising ethical concern among religious groups.

Social entrepreneurship

Religious groups are particularly well placed to develop innovative responses to problems of deprivation, poverty and unemployment at the local level. Evidence suggests religious community schemes are

often more effective than their secular counterparts and can have significant impacts on local regeneration (see **Faith, hope and community** on page 97).

Religious capitalism

Increasingly, religious believers who are dissatisfied with business and economic morals are forming companies of their own to pursue a different set of goals with a distinctively religious or ethical corporate ethos. One example is People and Places International, a Christian architectural outfit working on the Millennial Village alongside others.

Pressure groups

Religious organisations have become much more adept at using the political process to advance their concerns. Most notable in recent years has been the cross-denominational coalition with the shopworkers' union, the Keep Sunday Special (KSS) campaign, which brought about the only major Commons defeat of the Thatcher government.

Public policy making

A number of Christian organisations appear to be leading the way in actively promoting their ideas in the public policy arena. These range from the Relationships Foundation which was set up by the Jubilee Centre (an interdenominational Christian think tank which lead the KSS campaign) and CARE for the Family, which has recently funded parliamentary researchers for both Christian and non-Christian members of parliament.

The rising influence of religious ideas will tend to blur some of the traditional left–right divisions over the coming years. Increasingly, public policy battles will be fought over differing views of the person and the status of morality. Both right and left-leaning liberals who hold to a radical individualism in which morality is entirely privatised may find themselves united against a communitarian centre which insists that morality cannot be privatised and that individual freedom depends on a moral framework defining social norms of behaviour for the common good.

Notes

1. For example, in 1995, *Entrepreneurship and business culture*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot; also Sen A, 1987, *On ethics and economics*, Blackwell, Oxford, and Hay D, 1989, *Economics today: a Christian critique*, Apollos, Leicester.
2. Newbiggin L, 1989, *The gospel in a pluralist society*, SPCK, London.
3. International Congress on World Evangelisation, 1974, *Lausanne covenant*, Section 5. International Congress on World Evangelisation, July 1974, Lausanne, Switzerland.
4. See Wilson R, 1996, *Economics, ethics and religion: Jewish, Christian and Muslim economic thought*, Macmillan, London.
5. See Fahim Khan M, 1995, *Essays in Islamic economics*, Islamic Foundation, Leicester.
6. The key text in this tradition is Guttierrez G, 1974, *A theology of liberation: history, politics and salvation*, SCM, London.

Clash of religions

Perri 6

Pessimists who warn of worsening conflicts between civilisations and religions are wrong. In fact the world has learned to be more tolerant than ever.

Religious fervour is often the inspiration for politics. Whether the nature of that inspiration is malign or benign does much to shape the quality of political life. In recent years, some neo-conservatives have begun to draw gloomy conclusions about the trends in fundamentalist religious politics. The latest and most influential pundit of this kind is Samuel P Huntington. His essay, *The clash of civilisations*,¹ subsequent book length version,² and other articles³ have attracted extraordinary attention. Described by Henry Kissinger as ‘one of the most important books since the end of the cold war’, its thesis, that bitter cultural and religious conflict between civilisations will dominate the next century, has attracted some very unsavoury friends. Among these in Europe have been the anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant Right, which is frightened by Algeria, the Middle East or by occasional outbreaks of urban disorder associated with religion or race in European cities. In the United States, his message that ‘universalist’ values in foreign policy are imperialist has fuelled the strain of isolationism which relies on prejudice

Research Director at Demos.

against foreigners as 'different' and better kept at arm's length, and his insistence that cultures are at bottom religious and incompatible has played well in the defensive, white Bible Belt.

The slipperiness of the argument is that it is ostensibly about international relations. Nowhere does Huntington devote space to considering the implications for what goes on in countries and cities where people of different religions and cultures live cheek by jowl. Yet, if there is to be a grand clash across the globe, it is hard to understand how that would not create, probably long before the onset of international hostilities, serious conflict within the most multi-cultural cities where religions and races mix. And that, of course, is why Mr Huntington has such unsavoury friends.

Huntington's argument

The heart of Mr Huntington's argument can be stated in the following propositions.

Culture is fundamentally religious

He divides the world's cultures into Sinic or Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Western which is principally Christian, Latin American which is religiously syncretistic, Orthodox, which comprises principally Russia and Balkan Europe, and sub-Saharan African cultures. Although he allows some weight in characterising western civilisation by the rule of law, the classical legacy, pluralism and civil society, he insists that its single most important characteristic is Christianity.

Cultures are discrete entities

Even cultural borrowings are domesticated, tamed and absorbed by the host culture. With some exceptions such as Latin America, mixing Catholicism and other religions cannot result in stability. Cultures are like billiard balls in that they have unchanging fundamental religious colouring and interact by colliding with one another.

Cultures are now diverging and stressing their differences

The effect of the end of the cold war is that the weak geo-political forces for co-existence and convergence, or at least for containing differences, represented by the US–USSR conflict have gone and every culture is now engaged in identity politics, re-awakening, indigenisation, or stressing its distinctive – usually religious – fundamentals.

Cultures tend almost inevitably to conflict with one another

They tend to overwhelm motivations for tolerance and openness. ‘Culture follows power,’ says Huntington. Indigenisation will lead to conflict even if there are economic reasons for openness. Stressing difference tends to military expansion and conflict. Huntington’s examples are Bosnia, Chechnya, the Middle East and Kashmir.

Cultures are fundamentally incompatible

For Huntington, what follows from the religious basis – discreteness, divergence and tendency to conflict – is that cultures are basically not compatible.

Tolerance is fragile, if it is possible at all

Another way of stating the same point, although the formulation is not used by Huntington, is that if tolerance is possible at all, it is a provisional, fragile, temporary truce, and only sustained in special conditions such as those of the cold war.

Critical encounter between cultures is imperialist

The burden of Huntington’s main recommendation is that in foreign policy, Western countries should refrain from asserting universalist values. To do so, he claims, can only be a kind of cultural neo-imperialism that will advance conflict. Presumably, the same argument would have to be extended to relations between cultures within countries and cities.

He concludes that the only alternative to conflict between incompatible cultures is mutual isolation and a refusal to engage with one another’s values.

A counterblast

Each of Huntington's propositions is wrong and the argument as a whole pernicious:

Cultures are not fundamentally religious

To write out 70 years of communism from Russian culture and describe it as Orthodox is only slightly more absurd than asserting that Christianity is more important than the *mélange* of capitalism, individualism, egalitarianism, Enlightenment, technologism, romanticism, avantgarde arts and peculiar urbanism in the cultural makeup of Europe and North America. Cultures are complex, as profane as they are sacred, responsive to changes in every sphere of life, and only in rather special cases – like America's Bible Belt and Iran – does religion become the dominant characteristic of a culture.

Cultures are not closed, discrete entities

A great deal of twentieth century anthropology and sociology has been devoted to demonstrating this fact. Western mathematics is of Arabic origin, and Western classical music comes as much from Muslim Spain and Byzantine Orthodox traditions as it does from indigenous sources. To assert that all borrowings are assimilated is trivial, but if it is intended to suggest the recipient culture is not changed by them, then it is simply silly. The Moguls changed India enormously, and so did the British.

Cultures are not generally diverging any more today than they have done in the past

On the contrary, global media, international trade in services, urbanism, widespread professional mobility and ever greater cultural borrowing in music and the visual arts through to business ethics are forces at least as powerful as those of indigenisation. The most aggressive of fundamentalists are learning to conduct debate on television and radio, to create web sites, to organise modern mutual savings

organisations, and network using modern transport and e-mail. The course of life – including longer primary education and periods of retirement – is actually becoming culturally accepted in ever more parts of the globe.

There is nothing inherent about cultural or religious conflict

In India, many religions have rubbed along tolerably well for centuries, until political forces consciously decided it served their ends to stir up antagonism. Huntington's own acceptance of Latin American cultural melting shows that cultures can live along side one another, even partly merging. In fact, most of the world's conflict are within cultures, not between them. The most bitter wars have been between Christian sects in Europe and between nations of similar cultures in every part of the world from the first and second world wars to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Not one of Huntington's examples supports his case. The two sides in Kashmir are not greatly different in culture, but differ on their view of the nation to which the region ought to belong. Chechnya fought for national independence, not for some Islamic cause. Some of the hardest fought of the wars of the Yugoslav succession were between Serbs and Croats, whose tongues are often regarded by serious linguists as dialects rather than different languages, and whose cultural differences – notwithstanding the semiofficial Catholicism of one state and occasional flirtations with Orthodoxy of the other – are very slight. Bosnia was a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state and the Muslims for much of the war preferred to fight for that tolerant condition before only belatedly and reluctantly organising around religion. If religious culture explained very much about conflict in the Middle East, then we would expect to have seen a great deal more Arab unity against Israel than there has ever been. Instead, the principal conflicts have been between political nationalism of various hues.

There is nothing intrinsically fragile about tolerance

On the contrary, today we have more effective institutions for maintaining tolerance, more powerful economic reasons for tolerance and

more people culturally attuned to tolerance because they live alongside people from different cultures, than human history has ever previously known. Apart from the simple imperatives of international and local trade, the spread of at least some form of democracy to ever more countries is one of the most effective instruments for tolerance. True, there are examples of intolerant democracies – Hitler won the 1933 election – but these are the exception rather than the rule. For instance, the rhetoric, organising practices, need for party positioning, and constitutional rights of democracy in the United States have been key in securing greater tolerance by whites of the African-American population. Moreover, people sicken of intolerance. When Locke wrote his *Letter on toleration*, he spoke for a generation sickened by the violence of religious intolerance – as many are in Bosnia, Northern Ireland and the Punjab (two more cases of intra-cultural conflict) are today. Huntington's claim that intolerance is inevitable and sustainable simply flies in the face of historical evidence.

Refusing to engage with one another's values is much more dangerous than any advocacy of universalist values has been

Criticism, debate, engagement and lively encounter between cultures has generally resulted in greater mutual understanding and tolerance. This is well understood in Islam, for in much of north Africa and the Middle East prior to the sixteenth century, Christians and Jews were sufficiently well understood from disputations and publishing that they were treated as *dhimmi*, or 'protected peoples' in Muslim cities, tolerated, taxed but exempt from military service. Of course, anyone's initial reaction to criticism of their practices will be defensive and, in some cases, paranoid. But over time, these reactions tend to diminish, as thousands of ecumenical and inter-faith groups in Britain's cities can testify: some have gone on to create inter-faith centres of worship. The conflicts that have occurred between civilisations have almost never arisen from criticism of one set of values by another. The Crusades may be a partial exception, but there was more than enough greed, land lust

and princely rivalry involved to explain the behaviour of many of the participants. The Opium Wars were about greed, pure and simple, and the Gulf War was about oil, not liberal values in conflict with Iraqi Ba'athism.

Religion will always be involved in politics. But political thought which argues that we can only abandon hope for tolerance and settle into the moral bunker is damaging both to decent politics and reasonable religious sentiment. In the name of modesty about the way we argue for our ethics, Huntington has given intellectual authority to some very nasty politics and intellectual respectability to bigotry.

Notes

1. Huntington SP, 1993, 'The clash of civilisations', *Foreign affairs*, vol 72, summer.
2. Huntington SP, 1996, *The clash of civilisations and the remaking of world order*, Simon & Schuster, New York.
3. Huntington SP, 1997, 'The west and the rest', *Prospect*, February, 34–39.

Exodus: a story for our times

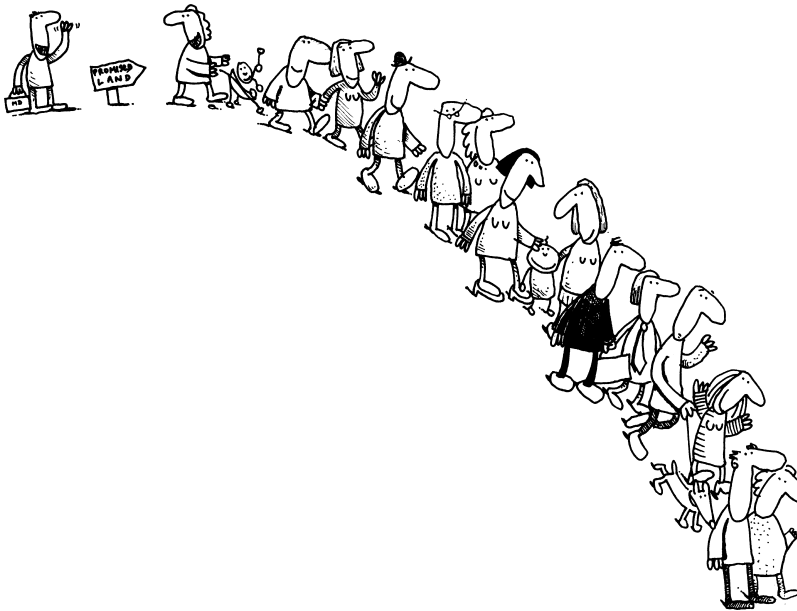
Kamikaze

In the beginning

You all know the old old story – about the generation which came through the wilderness, through the desert. A generation which moved between worlds and between ages, and was transformed along the way. It opens with a once free people whose dreams have become buried beneath a heavy Empire, a massive Age pressing its members into new forms of slavery, an imperial project which eventually threatens the lives of its own children. The story of how the Generation begins with requests for release, which the Great House itself, mighty Pharaoh – even while staggering under the Plagues raining down upon it – refuses. The Heart of the Empire hardens and the rebellion rises, wave upon wave.

‘It’s not easy to have a 500 year old dream die in your own life time. To end an age and start a new one means first you feel that old dream and that old world turn dry and hollow inside you, then you have to deal with its vicious opposition to every step you take to make it better’

Has worked on a number of practical environmental and community projects in North America and comes from a family with a long history of religious involvement.



The new generation sways in the New Spirit being poured out upon it, its leaders – raised in the palace itself – bring forward yet another petition, and a new-old dream, a new vision of the good, begins to form. Round after round of this dance takes place until the Angel of Death passes over, and the children of the new nation exit the old world – expelled or liberated, depending on the perspective. The rag-tag band – called the dirty ones, the rejected, freebooters, rabble – crosses the sea to safety and turns to witness its Deliverance, as the waters' gates close over the pursuit sent by Pharaoh. They hold a great celebration in honour of their escape, their liberation.

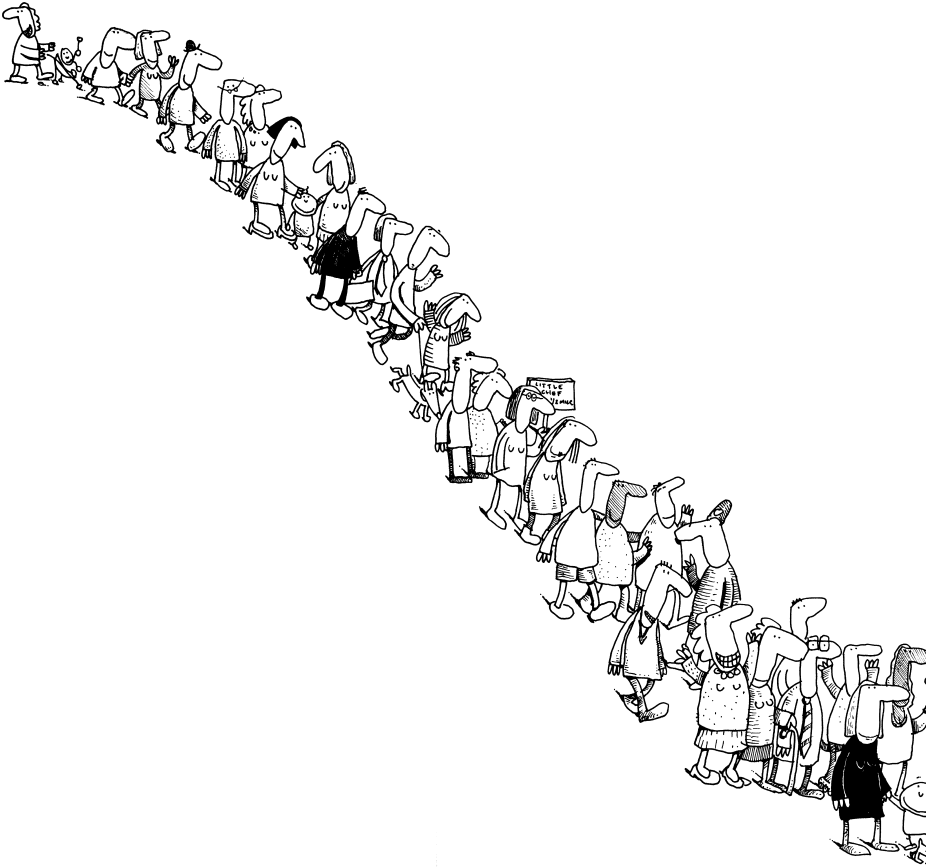
The generation, moving now as tribes, wanders in a vast wilderness and is slowly stripped of its old ways, slave ways. They learn to open new ways in the desert, they seek and find new sources of sustenance, they discover long-forgotten ruins and learn from other outcast tribes. They face challenge after challenge, each one changing them, transforming them into a people fit for a new way of life. They slowly, painfully, shed

the old top-down methods of governance and centralised economic control, begin to form new relationships with each other, and receive new understandings of – and names for – all that they regard as good and holy. They reach the River bordering the land promised to them and even go so far as to scout it, but they lack the confidence, the faith, to take on the giants who live there. They fail in their initial attempt at entry, and are condemned to years more in the desert.

Forced to return to their Wilderness Wanderings, they find that the leaders who initiated their liberation have disappeared. Lost and fearful, their new-found faith collapses and they fall back, back into the only thing they know – worship of the old gods and the desire to revive the old way of life. They create a Golden Calf, and after initial euphoria, find that it turns bitter in their mouths, splits them against themselves and produces great suffering. At this point they commit themselves fully to their new way of life, embodied in Ten new realities and relationships, a Covenant building on those made previously with their ancestors, but made with a God who carries a new name, and Who has helped them to new understanding.

By this point, the oldest members of the original, rebellious generation begin to die – a generation forever of two minds, torn between the new dream and nostalgic memories of the happier side of slavery. Yet those born into the wilderness, those who possess no other dreams than the new ones, who know no promises except those leading to a new home – this generation, the real generation Exodus, marches forth.

As they gather to finally cross the River, the new understanding, the new commitments, are spelled out again – this time both in simple terms, able to be memorised by themselves and their children, and in full detailed descriptions of their political, economic and social lives. They are instructed not to veer to the Left or the Right, but to follow the new way, the new vision, ahead. If they are to enter into the promise, they must explicitly drop both the old, slave ways, and the do-as-you-will days of wilderness wandering. They are told that this new Way is no longer too high above for them to aspire to, nor too far ahead of them to reach. The Story says that this generation finds the courage to make those commitments, crosses the river and enters



into the Promised Land. This generation is our generation. This story is our story.

I had a dream

I had a dream a while back. I was in a great marble temple, which was collapsing on our heads. For a while there was a lot of running about and the sky-is-falling panic, but then it began to calm down, and form a pattern. People grouped themselves into teams and began systematically catching the falling blocks, removing others that looked ready to fall, and passed the pieces down to others. These chunks were then broken down into smaller blocks and used them to construct new buildings – literally within the old temple. The New World, the new way of life is rising from within our cities, our systems, our own selves – and a lot of it is being made from the rubble of the old.

‘They face challenge after challenge, each one changing them, transforming them into a People fit for a new way of life. They slowly, painfully begin to form new relationships with each other, and receive new understandings of – and names for – all that they regard as good and holy’

It’s not easy to have a 500 year old dream die in your own life time, something that’s passed down to you by everyone and everything you know as a child, something that literally made up everything around you – your buildings, your tools, the places you work, the way you voted, how you thought and spoke. Everything. To end an age and start a new one means first you feel that old dream and that old world turn dry and hollow inside you, and become completely foreign and threatening outside. And then you have to deal not only with its collapsing on your head, but with its vicious opposition to every step you try to take to make it better. And along the way you have to find new words, to create new ways, making it up as you go, trying every damned alley you run into, looking for a way out of the wilderness and into the dream you carry around in your head.

There is a generational aspect to this, where large numbers of people experience the same things at the same time, and something as strong as a change of ages inevitably shapes them. History has what you might call social carriers and if they happen to talk among themselves at all, you'll get a story – and that story has to be strong enough to carry their experience and answer the basic questions, where are we coming from, where are we going to, what happens next, who am I and who are 'we'?

The Exodus is probably the unrivalled story of collective historical movement, of movement from oppression through liberation through the difficult creation of a new way of life. And it has been understood in exactly this way a number of times before, for example, during the Reformation and the American Revolution. Further back, prophets like Isaiah clearly read Israel's Exile in Babylon as a second Exodus. The Gospels themselves present Christ as embodying the Exodus journey in himself – from when he was called as an infant out of Egypt, through the Transfiguration where he meets and speaks with Moses and the miraculous feeding of the multitudes in the wilderness, right through the Passover meal and the miraculous deliverance – and he, in turn, drew constantly on the words of Isaiah and the Exodus.

'Now we have this wonderful opportunity of the Millennium, either to build stately pleasure domes in Greenwich, or to act more in tune with our deeper dreams and hopes. Little things like forgiving the debts we've made with at least the poorest nations of the world'

Black Americans found the Exodus story central to understanding their history and this sense has often spilled out from that community into the wider culture. Martin Luther King powerfully identified himself and his people as actors in a new Exodus. From 1955's Montgomery bus boycott speeches onwards you can hear him heating it up, culminating in the 'I've been to the Mountain-top' speech of 1968, just before he died. The mountain-top reference in that speech is not something most of us understood explicitly, but somehow we all knew vaguely

what he was referring to – the fact that Moses, who led the Israelites out of Egypt, into and through the wilderness, eventually climbed the mountain, looked over into the Promised Land, and – since he was not to be permitted to enter into it – died on that mountain. King not only seemed to know where he was in the unfolding story, he used it to shape his own actions – so that his death led to a deeper understanding, so that his people wouldn't lose hope, so that we would eventually, someday, enter in. Millions of people have never forgotten that moment and hold within them that dream. Dozens of other black artists and leaders drew on the same great story – Bob Marley and the song Exodus, obviously, but before that even, the first real reggae breakthrough song in the West came in 1968 from Desmond Dekker and the Aces, and was called The Israelites.

Today, the Exodus story enables us to connect the sheer oppressiveness of the 1950s to the rebellions and liberation of the 1960s to the scattering and explorations of the 1970s to the greedy reaction of the 1980s to the gathering confidence of the 1990s. It enables us to connect the seeds of change in Martin Luther King and Elvis Presley, the movements of the 1960s from Chicago to Czechoslovakia, the reverses of the 1970s and 1980s, to the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the slow unleashing of new energies. Signs of its presence as a story can be found in surprising places such as when President Clinton said, 'Guided by the ancient vision of a Promised Land, let us set our sights upon a Land of New Promise', or in the murmurings that are mounting in anticipation of the millennium.

Miracles of the new exodus

The Jubilee Year was part and parcel of the Sabbath Commandment in the Exodus story. Every 50 years (the year after the seven times seventh year), people were to do certain special things. They were to free all slaves. Let the land rest for the entire year. Cancel all debts. Return land and houses to their original owners. Gather together with their families and remember the story of the Exodus, and think about who they were as a people. It was a time to make a new start, to set a free and fair base for all people and for our relationship with the Earth, to remember who we were and what we should be.

The idea – always hard to carry out – is in Leviticus in detail, pops up again in Jeremiah, and when Christ stood up to preach for the first time, he unrolled the scroll to Isaiah:61 where it speaks directly of this: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to Proclaim a Year of Favour from the Lord.’ He then sat down and announced that this text was fulfilled today. He proclaimed a Jubilee Year.

Now we have this wonderful opportunity of the Millennium, either to build stately pleasure domes in Greenwich, or to act more in tune with our deeper dreams and hopes. Little things like burying the last handguns. Writing the last chapter in our decades-long quest to eliminate nuclear weapons. Housing the homeless. Forgiving the debts we’ve made with at least the poorest nations of the world. Letting every non-violent prisoner free.

And we can remember, too. The British have watched other nations remembering uncomfortably – the war built not just of the Japanese and Germans but also now the Swiss, the French. The guilt of the Australians and Americans for their treatment of native peoples. Perhaps for our Jubilee the royal family should make one tour in which we admit and ask forgiveness for the suffering caused in various places by our imperial adventure – from our role in the Irish potato famine to the expulsion of the Acadians to the fire-bombing of Dresden to disasters we’ve visited on Africa, India and Asia.

‘The Exodus story enables us to connect the sheer oppressiveness of the 1950s to the rebellions and liberation of the 1960s to the scattering and explorations of the 1970s to the greedy reaction of the 1980s to the gathering confidence of the 1990s’

The Bible tells us that our names for God changed as our relationships, our covenants changed – El Shaddai for a while, then some other names, then Yahweh (‘IAm’) for Moses and company; then Abba (close

to 'daddy') for Jesus. We shouldn't be frightened to hear today about the Great Spirit, Mother Earth, the Cosmic Energy, even the Force. The Bible itself tells us, hundreds of times, that God usually comes in surprises, comes in from the margins. If you listen for the thunder, you get a still, small voice. If you put your faith in the Levites, here comes a Samaritan or a Persian. If you're entranced by the King, here comes some raggy man from the hills. If you look to the poor, here comes a tax collector or a centurion. Like a good mystery story, this Mystery always has a surprise. Too often we just sit and say, 'nothing new under the sun.' Isaiah:43 has a section called Miracles of the New Exodus which says, 'Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges; can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the desert and rivers in wastelands.' It's never a good idea to decide that God can't do something new.

Book marks

A history of God

Karen Armstrong

Armstrong traces how Judaism, Islam and Christianity have understood God from the time of Abraham to the present day. Her analysis of complex events and ideas flows beautifully. While acknowledging the very different conceptions of God that each religion has developed, perhaps her greatest achievement is to show how each religious tradition also contains within itself the full range of philosophical positions. Very similar mystical ideas can be found in each, for example.

Armstrong is testing God against history. She concludes that human beings have always created faiths for themselves in order to cultivate their sense of the wonder and ineffable significance of life. To that extent, God is enduring. However, she argues that this requires and imagination which may be lacking from our contemporary world given the extent of aimlessness, anomie and violence around us.

Armstrong's command of history and theology is astonishing and the book is an excellent starting point for those of particular religious persuasions who seek to understand how their tradition relates to other world religions.

(Mandarin, London, 1993)

HH

Quarks, chaos and Christianity: questions to science and religion

John Polkinghorne

Physics and religion are not at odds with each other according to Polkinghorne, a former Cambridge professor of mathematical physics and now a clergyman. Polkinghorne writes about physics and God as a believer in both. He argues, for example, that the intelligibility of the universe suggests an intelligent being created it and that prayer can change nature because physical laws contain indeterminacy. They do not predetermine every aspect of the future (as if the universe were wound up by God and set running in a single direction) and therefore changes due to prayer do not violate the laws of physics.

But *Quarks, chaos and Christianity* takes only a very timid step into the world of quantum physics. It does not give nearly as detailed or convincing an interpretation of the way in which physics could inform theology as Paul Davies' *God and the new physics* (Dent, 1993). More interesting as an insight into the mind of an intelligent man searching for truth in science and religion than for its contribution to physics or theology.

(*Triangle, London, 1994*)

BJ

Muslim-Christian dialogue in the twentieth century

Ataullah Siddiqui

Muslims and Christians have been talking to each other about their faith for much of this century but most of the initiative, and analysis, has been by Christians. *Muslim-Christian dialogue in the twentieth century* starts to correct this emphasis. It outlines the history of such dialogue, describes the experiences and attitudes of Muslims who have been involved and briefly discusses the perspective of Muslim organisations to dialogue with Christians.

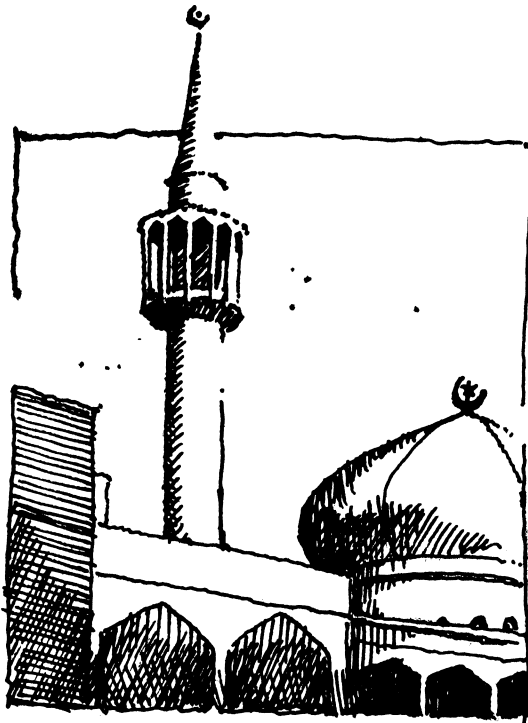
Siddiqui argues that Muslims have been wary of dialogue, fearing, sometimes rightly, that Christians see it as a means of converting

Muslims, that those Christians without such a perspective are pursuing a liberal, secular agenda in disguise and that the churches have an advantage because Muslims do not have individuals or organisations which can talk with a truly representative voice for all Muslims.

This study is disappointingly dry. Yet it provides the non-Muslim reader with a good example of the often subtle difference between Muslim and Christian based scholarship, and the unusual experience for Christians of reading an analysis of their religion as alien.

(Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1997)

BJ



After God: the future of religion

Don Cupitt

After God has three sections. In the first, Cupitt argues that people started to believe in God, rather than a diffusion of spirits, as a necessary response to forming fixed settlements and farming: 'The gods embodied, and indeed just *were*, the massive concentrations of spiritual authority and disciplinary power that were needed in order to evolve the first state societies.' It's speculative, but convincing.

The second section charts the rise of those intellectual insights into the nature of thought, language and belief which ultimately destroyed the rational basis for belief in God. Cupitt places great emphasis on academic arguments in undermining popular belief – too much in my view. But he provides a fantastic, high speed history of modern philosophy.

The final section, in which Cupitt proposes the basis for a new, rational religion, is the least convincing. He invites us to live *as if* under the eye of God, to try to reach a state of blissful void, and to pour ourselves out and move on in our lives and beliefs in a way analogous to the flux which the rest of nature is in. For example, he claims 'we no longer actually need roots, identity, stability or a provenance', the things traditionally provided by the old religions. Many will disagree, but most will appreciate the clarity with which he puts his argument.

(Basic Books, London, August 1997)

BJ

The sociology of religious movements

William Sims Bainbridge

Religion constantly changes, argues Bainbridge. Just as old Roman and Greek religions died, so may today's great religions. Yet new movements always rise to meet people's fundamental need for religion, such as making sense of death. The main problem is that Bainbridge has a vision of sociology as a formal science. The frequent deference to formal models and desire to use computer simulations is at odds with the rich religious diversity outlined in his specific examples. Bainbridge's

search for explicitly scientific theories of religious behaviour seems ultimately unrealisable. It is telling that *general* theories of religion are only outlined with examples from America and Britain.

The strangest part of *The sociology of religious movements* is a favourable and very partial chapter on The Family – the new religious movement which rose to fame because members have sex with potential recruits. If Bainbridge cannot objectively interpret religious trends, how is his scientific sociology of religion possible?

(Routledge, London, 1997)

BJ

Young Muslims in Britain: attitudes, educational needs and policy implications

Muhammad Anwar

As the children of Muslim immigrants grow up in a culture very different from that which informed their parents' beliefs, will great tensions develop between generations with very different attitudes? *Young Muslims in Britain: attitudes, educational needs and policy implications* indicates that some attitudes tend to be slightly different: views on single sex schools, Asian girls wearing western clothes, the importance of arranged marriages in a girl's country of origin and the frequency of praying are examples. Other views are remarkably similar, such as a common emphasis on the importance of the honour of one's family.

Anwar proceeds to argue that education authorities should support Muslim schools for voluntary aided status, provide opportunities in schools for teaching Islam to Muslim children, allow prayer time for Muslim students and teachers and do more to meet the needs of young Muslims. But the argument is weakened by his use of data which is more than ten years old and by occasional unsubstantiated assertions such as 'young Muslims are [increasingly] questioning the double standards of the West and as a reaction are becoming "good Muslims"'

(The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, 1994)

BJ

The politics of hope

Jonathan Sacks

An elegantly written attempt to develop a communitarian political agenda from a Judaeo-Christian perspective. Sacks describes the breakdown of civil society and public morals and ascribes their decline to the rise of libertarianism. He argues that the application of liberal and libertarian principles to the realm of civil society has fatally undermined civic associations, local community attachments and public morality. This has led to the moral anarchy and social disorder of rising crime and divorce, mental illness, violence, unsafe public spaces and lack of respect for tradition and moral authority.

This discord arises from the confusion of two great philosophical traditions – the Greek and the Jewish. The Greek story of humans as political animals leads through the theory of Hobbes and Locke to association through *contract*, while the Jewish conception of association through *covenant* leads to a social world of voluntary commitment, moral obligation and community. Drawing widely on classical political and religious thought and especially heavily on communitarians such as Michael Walzer and Michael Sandel, this book reasserts the moral value of tradition and authority drawn from communal identity. It claims that the attempt to apply universal principles to contingent, historical forms of life is misplaced and seeks to reassert principles drawn from Sacks' own moral and religious world view.

Like much communitarian thought, this work fails to acknowledge that many people have rejected traditional communities because of their capacity to oppress and control. While Sacks fluently acknowledges that morality cannot be derived from religious faith and that we need to ground it in principles that are more widely shared, his attempt to do so from the base of the Judaeo-Christian tradition seems rather brittle.

(Jonathan Cape, London, 1997)

TB

Fire from heaven: the rise of Pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty first century

Harvey Cox

Cox traces the rise of Pentecostalism from a small prayer meeting in Los Angeles in 1906 and shows how pioneers of the new Pentecostalism attracted opposition from more established religious leaders opposed to the anti-hierarchical and desegregated nature of its gatherings. One reason for the rapid spread of Pentecostalism was its ability to tap into people's primal spirituality, a phenomenon which Cox argues is not new, but increasingly important at a time when traditional religion and scientific rationality are in decline. Speaking in tongues, trances and a fixation with the millennium are all expressions of this spirituality and Cox locates its appeal in archetypal forms of religiosity which were suppressed either by tradition or by the social and cultural dislocation caused by urbanisation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While *Fire from heaven* examines the spread of Pentecostalism across the world, it is particularly strong on the main tension within American Pentecostalism: the growth of 'health and wealth' theology, where pastors measure their success by numbers and cash flow.

Cox argues that Pentecostal 'experientialism' is one of two dominant responses to the decline of scientific rationality and traditional religion (the other is fundamentalism). Spirituality builds around the person rather than traditions, scriptures or institutions and religion is a 'tool box' rather than a pre-packaged answer to life's challenges.

Fire from heaven combines a compelling historical account with absorbing personal description and a convincing explanation of the social and cultural underpinnings of the Pentecostal movement. If you need something to persuade you that religion is not a spent force, this book is it.

(Cassell, London, 1996)

TB



The hallelujah revolution: the rise of the new Christians

Ian Cotton

Cotton traces the development of 'evangelical charismatic' Christianity and places it in the context of wider developments in technology, culture and social organisation in the late twentieth century. The book uses personal accounts and transcripts of conversations with evangelical charismatics to paint a picture of their operations and profiles groups like Ichthus and the March for Jesus which can be understood as part of a broader post-industrial, premillennial, New Age culture.

Cotton argues that the focus on Jesus as personal saviour, the physical experience of the holy spirit and the crossing of boundaries and uniting of opposites is part of a historical transition from a secular, rational age towards a resurgence of mysticism and irrational attachment. He emphasises that the Christianity he studies is unlike traditional religious organisation, not least in its grass roots, do-it-yourself character and ability to grow by starting with very small house groups and networks, unfettered by doctrinal orthodoxy or organisational hierarchy.

(Warner Books, London, 1995)

TB

The cities: a Methodist report

The most significant church contribution to public debate on urban deprivation since *Faith in the city* in the mid 1980s, and far better. It presents a clear, concise, accurate and comprehensive coverage of British urban policy over three decades and a discerning analysis of current single regeneration budget (SRB) funding. The report details findings from a series of consultations on urban issues in Newcastle, Cardiff and Glasgow. It then presents a 'vision for Britain's cities'.

Although its goals are predictable – greater economic prosperity and vitality, a more equal, more socially just society, a greater sense of personal security, a cleaner, more sustainable city environment and an enhanced role for the church in community life – its suggestions for achieving them are imaginative. Church hearings which enable local people to tell politicians and journalists what living in poverty is really like are just one example.

The theology is not set out until the final section, which provides a potted history of theology in cities from Babylon and Alexandria to Florence, Amsterdam and Manchester, and suggests a contemporary urban theology built around the themes of creation, incarnation, the cross, resurrection and pilgrimage.

(NCH Action for children, London, 1997)

HH

The soul of politics

Jim Wallis

Writing from the perspective of a religious community in the heart of the ghetto in Washington DC, Wallis' argument is that the problems he sees everyday can only be solved through a political morality which transcends old ideological divisions. *The soul of politics* is full of facts and testimonies from sources as diverse as the US Census and the LA riots. Despite charting the patriarchy which has perpetuated rape camps in Bosnia and persistently condemned women and homosexuals, Wallis' story is ultimately hopeful. He explains how spiritual and religious values can contribute to a politics which talks to non-believers and makes his case through examples of change.

(Fount Paperbacks, London, 1994)

HH

An introduction to Hinduism

Gavin Flood

A historical and thematic survey of Hinduism. Since Hinduism has no unified belief system or set of rituals, no one historical founder and no centralised authority or bureaucratic structure, this is not an easy task. However, Flood successfully draws out a series of prototypical beliefs and practices: the belief in a transcendent God with many manifestations; the Veda (a large body of sacred literature in Sanskrit); the Dharma (a word encompassing duty, ethics, law and natural law), which is revealed in the Veda; a non-credal tradition where practice takes precedence over belief; a high degree of stratification by order and gender; and an emphasis on mediation between the sacred and the profane.

Flood's book is a valuable introduction to a tradition which has furnished modern Western cultures with concepts and ethics it now takes for granted, such as Karma, reincarnation and vegetarianism.

(Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996)

HH



Religion and gender

Ursula King

Feminism has had relatively little to say about the influence of religion, other than to see it as malign. This book rectifies the gap, with a wide range of approaches and subject matter, from Morny Joy on women's invocations of the divine in Judaism and Christianity, to Naomi Goldenberg's psychoanalytic reflections on the resurgence of Goddess religions. It includes both an analysis of research methods in gender

studies and specific examples of empirical investigations of new religious movements in Africa, and women and religion in Japan.

(Blackwell, Oxford 1995)

HH

Reviewed by Helen Hayes, Ben Jupp and Tom Bentley

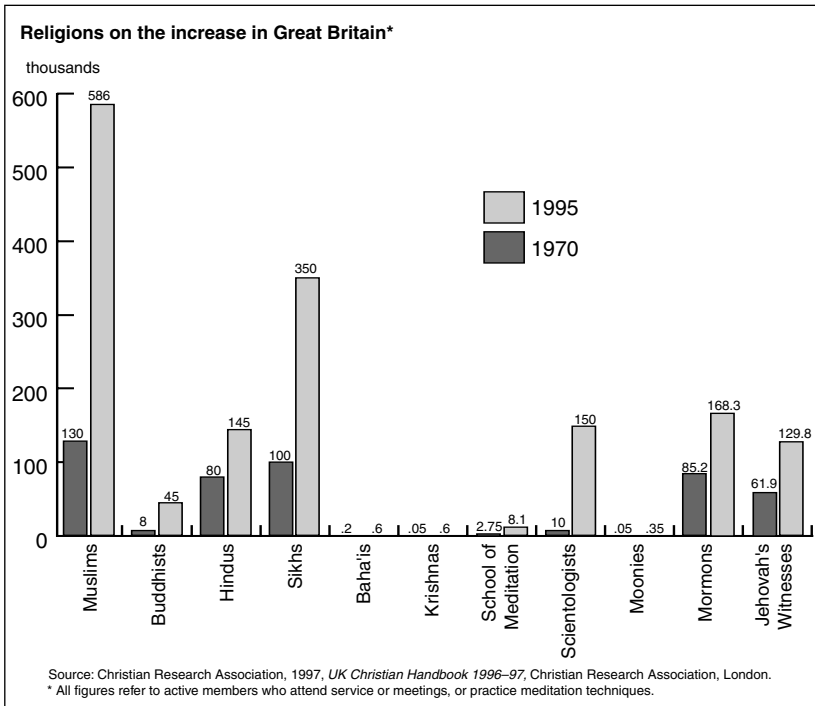
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Facts

- The proportion of Americans who considered religion to be very important in their lives declined from 75% in the 1950s to 56% in the 1980s.¹
- **There are a total of 1,667 different religious groups in North America. Of these, 836 are ‘non-conventional’ religions.**²
- Over the last 25 years 1 million people have ‘dabbled in’ or ‘flirted with’ one or more of the new British religious movements which have developed into their present form since WWII.³
- **Conservative estimates suggest there are over 250,000 witches and pagans in the UK and many more hundreds of thousands of people with a serious interest in astrology, alternative healing techniques and psychic powers.**⁴
- The Unification Church (Moonies) has about 350 full-time ‘core’ members in Britain, roughly two thirds of whom are British. A further 100 or so are ‘practising’ members who, while not working full time for the movement, accept the teachings, attend services and donate money on a regular basis. About 8,000 have signed an ‘associate membership’ form, although fewer than 1 in 10 of these have any continuing contact with the movement.⁵



- **Most of the new religious movements in Britain have less than 1,000 fully committed members. The larger groups include the Jesus Fellowship, the Children of God (Family of Love), ECKANKAR (Hare Krishna) and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.**
- The Transcendental Meditation Office of Information and Inspiration says that by 1994, about 170,000 people in Britain had learned TM (described by the office as a relaxation technique rather than a religion) during a 4 day one-to-one course, with about 6,000 more currently taking the course every year. Some 400 practitioners have moved to live in the movement's Ideal Village which contains a dome for

meditation meetings, an alternative therapy clinic and several Maharishi schools (named after the founder of TM) in Skelmersdale, Lancashire. Practitioners of TM report improvements in insomnia, migraines, anxiety and depression.⁶

- **In Britain, 12% of the population go to church once a week or more (as compared to 19% in other Western European countries and 40% in the United States), 8% attend church on a monthly basis and 13% regard themselves as core members. 11% read the Bible every day and as many as 44% pray daily.**⁷
- 1 in every 30 Jews is a convert to Judaism. While some (perhaps 10%) adopt Judaism for convenience, for example, in order to marry a Jewish partner, research suggests other much deeper reasons. Converts often report being impressed by Jewish history and Judaism's intellectual tradition.⁸
- **Earthly goods: in a typical month, 22% of Americans give money to their church, 18% to a charity other than their church, and 23% to both – a total of 63% of the American people. But most Americans give less than US\$500 a year – about US\$25 a month, similar to giving by British people to charity.**⁹
- Marketing tips to pull in the flocks: irregular churchgoers in Sydney, Australia, say they look for a brisk, 1 hour service (78%) and a short, simple sermon (76%) when they do go to church. Off-street parking (63%), the ability to go with a friend (49%) and no reading to do in the service (43%) are also significant.¹⁰
- **Art and soul: sociologist Andrew Greeley found that 56% of American Catholics had attended at least 1 fine arts exhibition in the last year, compared with only 44% of Protestants. Greeley thinks the reason for this difference is that Catholics are regularly exposed to sacramental and religious imagery that draws on art.**¹¹

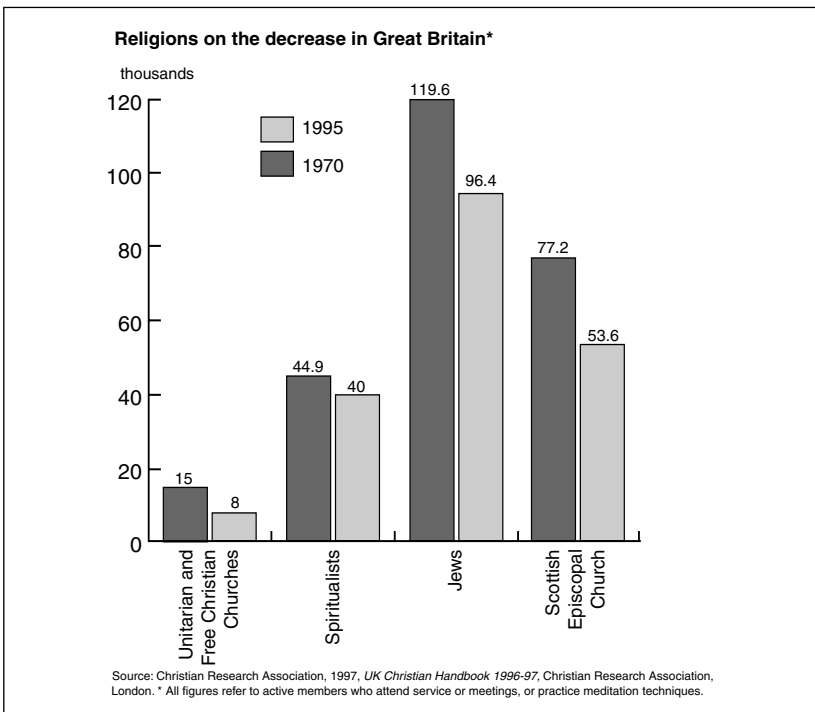
- Before WWII, the world population of Jews was 18 million. Currently it is 13 million. 5.8 million live in the United States, 4.5 million in Israel. There are 360,000 Jews in Canada, 300,000 in the UK and 60,000 in Germany. Numbers have grown in Canada, Germany and Israel largely due to immigration. However, as Israeli Jews have three times as many children as their American counter-parts, the number of Jews in Israel is likely to exceed those in the United States by the year 2005.¹²
- **In 1995, there were 1.9 billion Christians in the world (34% of the population), the largest denominational group being Roman Catholics (54% of the total). The Church is growing by 100,000 people every day, one third of whom are children. The key growth areas are Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.**¹³
- The Church is growing proportionately faster than the world's population: +1.8% per year to +1.6% respectively.¹⁴
- **1 in 8 Americans say they have seen or sensed the presence of an angel.**¹⁵
- Of those who report mystical religious experiences, 61% say they occurred when they were alone.¹⁶
- **The combined number of pilgrims to Jerusalem, Lourdes and Mount Athos each year is less than one tenth of the 40 million people who go to Disney theme parks.**¹⁷
- The global ratio of evangelical Christians to other Christians has declined from 99:100 in 1430, to 49:100 in 1790, to 9:100 in 1993.¹⁸
- **Trinitarian (those believing in the Trinity) church membership declined from 9 million to 6.49 million between 1970 and 1994, from just under 20% to only 14% of the population. Within this overall figure, Pentecostal membership rose from 82,396 to 183,109, while new church membership rose from almost 0 to 112,000. In the**

1990 to 1994 period, despite decline in many areas, over 1,200 new churches were established in Britain.¹⁹

- Heavenly features: 61% of the British population believe in God, 50% in heaven, 37% in miracles, 25% in angels and 24% in hell and the devil.²⁰ 55% of the British population believe in life after death and 37% that God is concerned personally with individuals.²¹
- **50% of British people believe in the resurrection.²²**
- 68% of British people consider themselves Christians. Of these, 71% believe in the Resurrection.²³
- **Paranormal perceptions: 45% of people believe in thought transference (communication between two minds without any external means), 31% in ghosts, 39% in faith healing, 21% in astrology and 21% in horoscopes.²⁴**
- 58% of the US population profess the need to experience spiritual growth and one third claim to have had a religious or mystical experience.²⁵
- **Of religious people, those who feel closest to God report greater happiness and well-being, especially if they think of God as omnipotent. The benefits of church for health and happiness are greatest for those who are otherwise socially isolated.²⁶**
- In 1996, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association staged their largest ever satellite outreach event, culminating in a global presentation of the gospel to a potential audience thought to be in excess of 2 billion people.²⁷
- **As many as 82% of Americans believe in the healing power of personal prayer.²⁸**
- Fundamentalist Christianity in the United States appears to co-exist happily with many aspects of risk society capitalism such as hard sell advertising. For instance, a television advertisement screened in Georgia for

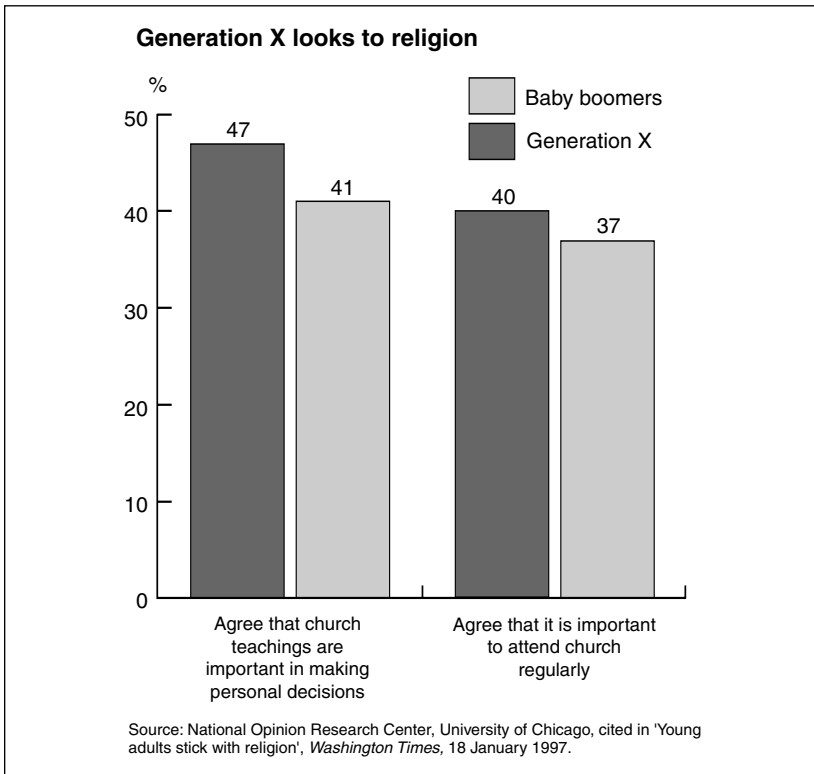
Volkswagen cars concluded with the phrase 'God is our co-driver'.²⁹

- **Keeping the faith: 39.3% of scientists in the United States believe in a personal God, a figure which is close to the 41.8% recorded in 1916. The 1916 study had predicted that disbelief would increase as scientific education increased.**³⁰
- The primary reason given by young adults who become involved with a new religious movement is the need to make a gesture of independence.³¹
- **The British middle classes go to church more – 17% go weekly, compared with 9% of semi-skilled and unskilled**



manual workers and their families (though working class individuals score higher on other religious indicators). Women are more active in religion than men – the difference is greatest for saying prayers, followed by church attendance. Though religious activity declines to the age of 30, there is a continuous increase thereafter to old age – basic belief in the afterlife, for example, reaches 100% of old people.³²

- 11% of the American public consider the greatest threat to world stability to be religion fanaticism; 27% consider it to be nationalism and ethnic hatred.³³



- **Noah would need to have loaded 460 organisms per second into the Ark to get 2 of each species on board within the 24 hour period described in the Bible. He would also have had to cope with thousands of tons of excreta every day.**³⁴
- 1 in 8 first year Australian university biology students believe the literal meaning of the Bible.³⁵
- **Almost half the American public now believes Genesis is more accurate than Darwin. The majority of Britons do not strongly agree that religion in the West has been superseded by science.**³⁶
- It is thought that fundamentalist groups now control the boards of more than 2,000 US schools. Nearly 60% of Americans think creationist theories should be taught in their (secular) schools.³⁷
- **Creationist Victorians thought fossils were put on earth by God as a test of faith.**³⁸
- As many as one third of schools in England and Wales are owned by the Catholic and Anglican churches.³⁹
- **Gordon Brown MP mentioned the word 'church' ten times in a press conference on the morning of the launch of the church report on unemployment during the general election campaign.**⁴⁰
- The head of the School of Earth Sciences at the University of Melbourne is suing a creationist who believes he has found Noah's Ark about 12 miles from the summit of Mount Ararat, Turkey.⁴¹

Notes

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11. See note 8.
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13. *Leadership Magazine*, summer 1995.
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26. See note 7.
27. See note 25 (Leach, 1996).
28. See note 25 (Leach, 1996).
29. See note 25 (Leach, 1996).

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31. 'Cults: conversion and coercion', *The Guardian*, 1 April 1997.
32. See note 7.
33. The Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press, 1993, 'America's place in the world', The Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press, Washington DC, cited in Kasser M and Cohut A, eds, 1996, *Estranged friends? The transatlantic consequences of social change*, The Council on Foreign Relations Press, New York.
34. 'Creative tension', *The Independent*, 8 April 1997.
35. See note 34.
36. See note 34.
37. See note 34.
38. See note 34.
39. 'Catholics warn against legacy of divided society', *Times educational supplement*, 11 April 1997.
40. 'Politics isn't working' [op-ed] in *New Statesman*, 11 April 1997, 5.
41. See note 34.

Signs of the times

Sunday sermon
the Age of Enlightenment
penitent self-flagellation
faith
Transcendental Meditation
elected pope
parish church
minister
missionaries
Creation
the promised land
The Bible
Christian democrat
prophecy
soul
repent
policy objectives
drawing lots
resurrect
Original Sin
crucifix
Isaiah
environmentalism
amen
Judaeo-Christianity
frankincense and myrrh

I'm ok, you're ok
the New Age
group therapy
faiths
buddhish
self-appointed guru
www.god.org
personal trainer
mission statement
Gaia
the new millennium
The Celestine Prophecy
Christian socialist
scenario
spirit
recycle
covenants
scratch cards
re-engineer
Born slippy
crystal
Mystic Meg
deep ecology
ahimsa
DIY religion
Spice

celibacy
Jonestown
Judgement Day
Lourdes
the Madonna
papal nuncios

'flirty fishing'
Heaven's Gate
Independence Day
Harvey Nichols
Madonna
televangelists

Demos news

Matters of life and death: the world view from evolutionary psychology

**edited by Oliver Curry, Helena Cronin and John Ashworth
(Dec 1996)**

Bringing together the world's leading thinkers in the maturing field of evolutionary psychology, this *Quarterly* provoked dissent (Suzanne Moore in *The Independent*), bemusement (Kenan Malik in the *New Statesman*) and excitement (Cosmo Forbes in the *Daily Express*). *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Financial Times* also covered this issue which was debated among Sir Samuel Brittan, Michael Ignatieff and Colin Tudge at the London School of Economics.

The proposal: giving marriage back to the people by Helen Wilkinson with additional research by Alison Beeney (Feb 1997)

Launched at the beginning of National Marriage Week, *The proposal* argued that marriage can only be revived if it is remade for the modern age. Calls for the freedom for people to write their own vows and to choose their own wedding location and who marries them attracted news coverage in all the broadsheets and mid-market tabloids, and on BBC *Breakfast News* and *Newsnight*, among many others. Columnists in

The Daily Telegraph, The Evening Standard, The Times, The Daily Express, The Independent on Sunday and The Guardian also covered the report.

Saving sense: a new approach to encourage saving

by Ben Jupp (Feb 1997)

Charting the failure of government tax breaks to generate new saving, the report builds new policy proposals around an understanding of cultural and behavioural factors. Recommendations including releasing quarterly savings figures, running a DSS advertising campaign and giving free individual financial advice secured detailed coverage in the *Observer* and the *New Statesman*, on Radio 4's *The World Tonight* and Radio 5 Live's *Money Slot*, as well as news stories in *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph* and a number of specialist journals.

The rise of the social entrepreneur

by Charles Leadbeater (Feb 1997)

Argues that social entrepreneurs will be as important in the next decade as business entrepreneurs were in the 1980s. Drawing on five case studies, the report sets out how this new breed of innovators can come together more effectively, identifies which policies will support their growth and shows how the corporate sector can best get involved. Early coverage included *Newsnight*, *BBC Breakfast News* and *The Independent* and *The Financial Times*.

Tomorrow's women

by Helen Wilkinson and Melanie Howard, with Sarah Gregory, Helen Hayes and Rowena Young (Mar 1997)

Drawing on extensive data, this report shows how women's lives may differ as much from each other in 2010 as men's and women's have in the past. Challenging the assumption that all women will continue to enjoy the changes brought about by the women's movement, the report was launched at a major conference with speakers as diverse as Anita Roddick, Marjorie Scardino, Jo Brand and Peter Hitchens. While all

the national dailies together with *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Independent on Sunday* covered the report, it also attracted interest from the BBC World Service and American, South African, New Zealand and Australian broadcasters. The conference was covered by the BBC *Six O'Clock News*, *Sky News* and *The Financial Times* among others.

The British spring: a manifesto for the election after next

Various (Mar 1997)

Launched informally, this manifesto sought to inject innovative policy ideas into an election which was thinner on concrete proposals than ever before. Covering everything from homelessness and education to fun and defence, *The British spring* has received positive feedback from all quarters and was picked up by the *New Statesman*, *The Daily Express*, *The Financial Times* and *The Observer*.

Life after politics: new thinking for the 21st century edited by Geoff Mulgan (Fontana Press, Feb 1997)

Bringing together some of the best of Demos' work since its launch in 1993, this comprehensive anthology of essays provides an invaluable resource for thinking about how politics and society are developing. Hotly debated at a one day conference for subscribers, *The Times Education Supplement* said the collection was, 'sober, hard-headed and thoughtful ... should be read by anyone planning to live beyond the year 2000'. Also reviewed in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*.

General media coverage

Demos gathered numerous profiles prior to the general election. *The Sunday Times*, *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Observer* and *Punch* have variously picked over our style, our names, our writing ... even our research, our policy proposals and long term objectives. Increasingly, international titles such as *Time* magazine, *Newsweek* and Italian, French

and Scandinavian newspapers have followed our work, as have a wide range of lifestyle magazines (*Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Choice*) at home.

Demos' Research Director, Perri 6, wrote and presented the last in BBC2's series of Counterblasts, *All for a good cause* (19 March). Arguing that charities are now big business and should be treated as such. Perri took to Whitby High Street to make his case, supported by Polly Toynbee and Stephen Alambritis (Federation of Small Businesses), among others.

www.demos.co.uk

We have greatly expanded our website and continue to develop its potential. As well as carrying details of all our past publications, the site shows what is coming up. In the next few months, we plan to offer introductions to new publications that can be downloaded at the click of a button, previews of speeches, papers and articles you won't find elsewhere, and sufficient links to related sites to make ours a valuable research gateway. We are on the verge of launching a redesign and see the site as an ever-evolving output – so do let us know what you think about it.

The subscribers' slot

We are currently planning two future issues of the *Quarterly*. If you would like to contribute, write and tell us (in no more than 250 words) what makes for the good life and how its benefits can be extended more broadly, or what solutions would best tackle social exclusion. We will print the most considered responses – but do include a daytime telephone number so we can talk to you about your ideas in more detail. Please send submissions to Rowena Young at Demos.

Recent publications

The British spring: a manifesto for the election after next (£5.00)

Argues that after a century of decline, Britain can feel confident again. Offers a plethora of imaginative policy ideas covering areas as diverse as jobs and the environment, homelessness and fun, defence and schools.

The rise of the social entrepreneur by Charles Leadbeater (£9.95)

This book examines the growing band of social entrepreneurs who are working in the space between the public and private sectors to develop innovative answers to many of Britain's most pressing social problems, such as homelessness, drug dependency and joblessness.

The common sense of community by Dick Atkinson (£5.95)

Presents a practical vision for revitalising local communities based on the development of clusters of local self-governing institutions (such as schools, housing associations and voluntary organisations) working together.

**The proposal: giving marriage back to the people
by Helen Wilkinson with Alison Beaney (£4.95)**

This project report demonstrates how marriage can be remade for the modern age by giving people the freedom to write their own vows choose their own location and decide who presides over the ceremony.

**Matters of life and death, Demos Quarterly,
Issue 10 (£5.00)**

Brings to gether the world's leading thinkers in the maturing field of evolutionary psychology to show how we can know far more about how people behave and societies work by understanding how evolution shapes our body and minds.