

AFTERWORD

Religion in the English public sphere

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When football, cricket or rugby fans sing *Jerusalem* in support of England's national team, their inspirations may be altogether secular. After all, for many English people today, sports arouse more passion than theological disputes or, it would seem, dreams of a more perfect society. *Jerusalem* has been dubbed an unofficial English national anthem. But perhaps the religious connection is not altogether severed. Few are likely to recognize the words of Hubert Parry's anthem as William Blake's 'And did those feet in ancient time'. Yet the song is nonetheless an example of religious heritage – and religiously inspired artistic creativity – informing the contemporary English public sphere (and indeed English nationalism).

Of course, singing *Jerusalem* isn't leading many sports fans to church. And Blake is a fairly distant influence. This should remind us that the relationship of religion to the public sphere is complex and sometimes indirect, that it may be real even when attenuated, and that understanding it involves more than asking whether any religion is dominant. Religious voices may help shape secular – that is, worldly – engagements. Blake, for example, helped shape a distinctively English tradition of political radicalism. This was not mainly religious, but it would not have been the same without religious contributions.

Blake was both religious and what might today be termed 'spiritual' in a non-denominational sense. He was influenced by largely unorthodox currents of Christianity from Swedenborg and various strands of Methodism to the endearingly and very Englishly named Muggletonians.¹ He was also shaped by neo-Platonism and by anger at what was happening to the England of his day. In turn, he helped shape both the global inheritance of art and literature and specifically English history – and an English present in which even distant religious echoes offer language and ideas that can potentially transcend the limits of mundane realities.

Today as well, we see people undertaking worldly actions shaped by religious ideals and motivations. For example, in 2015 and 2016, as a 'refugee crisis' gripped

media and public imagination, thousands of African migrants were trapped in Calais trying to make their way to the UK. The governments of the UK and Europe proved unable to respond with simple humanity. But a movement of volunteers from England, disproportionately organised through faith communities, responded to the migrants' desperate need for care. The care was worldly: food, clothes, shelter, warmth. But the motivation, and for many the meaning, was at least partly religious. And while this was direct care for suffering strangers, it was also a public message – about the importance of common humanity and the failures of governments.

The chapters in this book reveal many of the very different kinds of questions that can be asked about religion in the public sphere. These include immediate questions about policy and profound questions about the future of faith, of life, and of the world itself. The questions – and the answers offered – help us see the continuing importance of religion in the public sphere, even when religion is far from dominant.

Public religion in England and the UK

Religion was long a dynamic part of specifically English and more broadly UK public life. This was true not just of distant history, religious wars, and archbishops quarrelling with kings. Religion often divided the constituent nations of the UK. It was a source of political contention and also of inspiration for reform. Faith was pivotal to Gladstone's brand of Liberalism; Church and King helped define the Tory tradition; religion was more important to the Labour movement than is often recalled. As E.P. Thompson famously noted in *The Making of the English Working Class*, in the nineteenth century a range of Christian denominations both promoted labour discipline and gave workers capacity to organise based on literacy and experience in public speaking.²

Christianity remained both a resource and an object of dispute through the twentieth century. The established Church was central and internally diverse. But it did not stand alone, as Christianity produced a field of contending theologies and movements. Catholicism was important despite attempts to suppress it. An equally powerful Evangelical tradition inspired street preaching, the Salvation Army, and appeals to the Gospel as a source for social justice.³ There was also a tradition of active infidelity stretching back to figures like Thomas Paine and animating calls to dis-establish the Church of England.⁴ England had no shortage of atheists, agnostics, and intellectuals who declared themselves Rationalists rather than religious.⁵ Yet it was a distinguished Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, who coined the phrase 'welfare state', joining with a range of secular as well as religious radicals – importantly from the LSE – to put it on the agenda for post-war England – and Britain as a whole.⁶

The welfare state became a shared project for the UK, an expression of common citizenship and mutual obligation. It was all the more meaningful amid the widespread privations of the immediate post-war period. It drew on national solidarity

previously expressed in military service during two great wars and it helped replace the fading Empire. It also provided a systematic set of state services to replace or compliment haphazard private charity – and provided these as matters of right for which no one had to feel personally beholden. Not least, as Empire and war had done before, it helped to unite the citizens of a country divided into different constituent nations.

Division among the constituent nations of the United Kingdom has grown at the same time as other anxieties over cultural difference and identity. There is searching for a sense of belonging, often illusory in a world of great mobility and rapid change. There is worry about those who seem not to belong, heightened by high rates of immigration and reinforced by racism. Smaller nations and minority populations seek recognition and sometimes autonomy. But Englishness is also a resurgent concern. Politicised, it played a central role in breaking the relationship of the UK to the EU: Brexit was opposed by Scotland and Northern Ireland.⁷ But uncertainties and frustrations about English identity appear in many not always political contexts. The established Church of England has a global dimension but remains clearly national – not least inside the (somewhat) United Kingdom. Not surprisingly, as the chapters in this book suggest, these are central issues for contemporary public religion.

Scotland had its own distinctive inheritance from the Reformation, with a conservative, sometimes repressive, Church of Scotland dominant and publicly prominent until suffering precipitous decline in engagement since the late twentieth century. Wales was distinctively marked by the Dissenting, Nonconformist culture of low church chapels in tension with the Anglican hierarchy – over class and language as much as theology. Local political life – say election to school boards – was often a site of denominational conflict. Britain's domination of Ireland was always in part a project of Protestants against Catholics, extending the religious conflicts of the Reformation era (and the long refusal of Catholic Emancipation in England). Northern Ireland inherited this conflict and remains divided in sectarian terms (though it is not clear the local identity politics is really a reflection of religious commitment as distinct from ethno-political and class markers).⁸ These differences in religious history continue to shape distinctive national cultures.

Interestingly the presence of non-Christian religions is much greater in England than in Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland. Judaism has a long history in the UK, and always especially in England. Disraeli is a prominent exemplar. It is both numerically bigger in England – perhaps half a per cent of the population, while only a tenth of a per cent in Scotland, and less in Northern Ireland and Wales – and much more prominent in public life. Muslims are about 5 per cent of the English population, 1.4 per cent of Scotland and less in Wales and Northern Ireland. Concentration of Muslims in several large cities – an eighth of the population of London – makes them more visible. Conflict and anxieties over security entangle them in public affairs (as Gwen Griffiths-Dickson describes in this volume).⁹ Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and others have smaller numbers, but share the enhanced visibility of recently enlarged minorities in a country that was once, and recently, more ethno-racially homogenous.

At the same time, religious self-identification and ritual participation are higher in minority communities. But participation in services and communal rituals is not the same as engagement in the overall public sphere. For the most part, the newly English faiths have been ‘subcultural’. That is, adherents have been drawn from and active within ethnically defined communities or they have sought to grow as religious communities without making a claim to change the public sphere in general. Their attention is commonly focused on morality in interpersonal relations and family life, on mutual support and what in the Christian tradition has been called the ‘Gospel of success’, and on faith understood as a matter of personal commitment rather than public engagement.

Multiculturalism and national solidarity

Two related largely secular foci have become prominent reasons for the invocation of religion in British, especially English, public life. One is to celebrate Englishness (or sometimes, less often, Britishness and indeed that rather illusory identity, citizenship of the UK). The other is to express either enthusiasm for or anxiety about multiculturalism. In short, there is the religion of Englishness; there is the invocation of equality for all religions; and there is the fear of religious others, currently focused most of all on Muslims.

For many in the UK, multiculturalism has become an important part of national self-understanding. This extends both the UK’s multinational constitution (and troubled history) and a hard-won national emphasis on toleration. Recall that during and immediately after the Reformation, Britain could hardly be called a tolerant country. But over time, Britain did become more tolerant and during the years of New Labour multiculturalism was elevated to stand as a major virtue of ‘Cool Britannia’. But this also produced a backlash. This appears in criticisms of multiculturalism’s actual or alleged faults – notably compartmentalising minorities in separate communities and impeding assimilation, and on the back of this creating a context for ‘radical Islam’ to thrive and produce terrorists.

These concerns are now central to considerations of religion in the public sphere, as chapters in this book suggest. For Tariq Modood, the key question is how a multicultural society can achieve equality for its different members and for different faiths.¹⁰ Modood points out that this is especially challenging because the vitality of both minority religion and secularism or unbelief comes at the same time as a decline in active Christianity. He also rightly emphasises the fact that in considering minority religions, the UK public sphere almost always embeds religion in a notion of ethno-religious identity and community rather than taking up religion by itself. As he has explored at more length elsewhere, it is a significant, not a purely accidental change that national and regional labels for immigrant groups – Pakistani, Asian – have been so widely replaced by religious labels like Muslim.¹¹ It confounds religion with race and ethnicity, but also puts religion in the forefront of questions about how the UK is united or divided. Of course, well beyond immigrant or minority groups, religious identities are only partly about religion. They

are labels for groups that may be distinct in various ways and have a range of concerns that are not strictly religious.

It is significant that religious minorities appear in England mainly in ethno-racially marked form (unlike, say, Protestants or Catholics in Northern Ireland). Observers of contemporary Christianity are apt to report 'believing without belonging', but in some cases there may also be enforced belonging even without believing – as some citizens are ascribed belonging to religious minorities whether they are religiously active or not.¹² It's ironic that Britons prone to distance themselves from their own Christian heritage see immigrants from Muslim societies as simply and automatically Muslim (and use the ill-defined category 'radicalisation' to refer both to intense religious engagement and politicised, potentially violent, religion). Still, majority reactions to religious difference are seldom simply religious, without being coloured by racism and resentments or anxieties about immigration.

Pluralism and diversity are facts, whatever we make of them, whether we valorise multiculturalism or not. In our responses to these facts we are called not only to consider political values, questions of national identity, or anxieties about terrorism. We are necessarily called to respond in ways that uphold the individual dignity of all. This obligates us to more than mere toleration. It also means that simply indicating that we are all subject to secular law is not enough. We need both knowledge of each other and the opportunity to pursue self-knowledge. In the West, multicultural justice and dignity are pursued mainly in egalitarian and individualistic terms. There are other approaches. Chinese discussions of 'all under heaven' (tianxia) stress an ethical appreciation for cultural diversity, but in terms of just hierarchy not equality, and in relational rather than individual terms.¹³ Islamic thought is perhaps closer to Western than Chinese, but is internally diverse.¹⁴ Tolerance is religiously mandated as good, but not entirely on terms of individualistic equality as distinct from, say, respect for plural 'religions of the book'. Egalitarian individualism is more central to secularist imagination. But, as Saba Mahmood has importantly argued, there is little evidence that this has brought effective multiculturalism. Indeed, she suggests, throughout the Middle East, modern secular governance has exacerbated religious tensions rather than reduced them.¹⁵ In Western public spheres as well, there are sometimes tensions not just over specific values but over the approach to accommodation. Is religious diversity and indeed some other forms of diversity merely tolerated because of individual rights to free thought? Or are there more positive forms of recognition, even appreciation? This cannot be simply a blanket instruction along the lines of 'all are to be appreciated', for though that is egalitarian, it is actually no recognition at all. Appreciation could be relatively superficial, e.g., for the beauty of ceremonies. Or it can be deeper, for the paths different religions open to shared values, from peace to care for the environment. Because religion, taken seriously, engages people at the core of their identities, it challenges us. It is not mere consumer choice. I can take you seriously and not care about whether you like falafel. But I cannot take you seriously and not care about a faith that is basic to who you are. In individual relationships and at the scale of citizenship, this means we have obligations to learn together.

Much stands in the way of a harmonious vision of a society of equal respect and mutual learning. Questions of violence and security are sadly prominent. The religious label – Islam – marks security concerns for many. This reflects a global wave of violence in the name of God, as Jerry White’s title notes. But it has become extraordinarily prominent in the British public sphere – as the very composition of chapters in this book reflects.

White takes up strategy in its more or less conventional sense, and much of his chapter is about strategy in general, not the specific challenges of strategy focused on violence related to religion. He suggests that despite the frequency with which the name of God is invoked in connection with violent acts, in general ‘religion is not the cause of violence, and religion-related violence ... is not “religious violence”’.¹⁶ This may be an overstatement, but it is a caution against abstracting religion too much from its social context and imagining that religious factors alone – e.g., what sacred texts say – can offer a full explanation of religiously linked violence. One of the leading authorities on the relationship of religion to violence, Mark Juergensmeyer, points to a range of not-specifically-religious factors from resentments based on the perception that governments favour other groups than one’s own to the deep role of gender – and especially masculinity – in shaping violence linked to religion.¹⁷ But he also shows that such violence is shaped by its religious provenance, that it has a symbolic as well as a material dimension, that this importantly informs the way in which religious violence is publicly performed, and that ideas like sacrifice are influential.

Grasping the ways in which religion is linked to violence is important, and would be a useful complement to White’s discussion of strategy. Of course, as White notes in passing, religion can also play a role in peace-building. Indeed, in both individual and collective roles religion is central to active mobilisations for peace; the relationship to violence is hardly the whole story. But from Juergensmeyer I want to draw one particular relevant point: that much religiously linked violence is emphatically public. It is, as Juergensmeyer says, a public performance of violence, as well as of religious identity, and it is not merely in public but commonly intended as an intervention into the public sphere. The capacity to make it a public expression and not merely a private act is pivotal – and among other things that it does not merely involve a notion of religious devotion, which could be private, but of religious expression.

White’s account of strategy is developed with reference to a general idea of what ‘we’, presumably citizens of affected societies, might want to do. And indeed, there is much for a variety of individuals and organisations to do to improve awareness and relationships, perhaps to reduce the frequency with which religiously linked anger or resentment grows acute. But as specifically public violence, religiously linked performances distinctively challenge modern states, their claims to manage a monopoly of violence, and keep their citizens safe. Put another way, when the threat of actuality of terrorism enters the public sphere, there is a common expectation that government should *do something*.

Gwen Griffith-Dickson addresses ‘strategy’ in this way, with reference to a specific way in which the UK government has felt itself called on to respond to terrorism

and the public discussion about what it has called its strategy. Successive governments have felt a strong demand not merely to respond, say with intensified police work, but to declare a strategy. The main result has been the ‘Prevent Strategy’, initiated by the Labour government in 2003 but reformulated and aggressively promoted under the Coalition in and after 2011.¹⁸ Seeking to identify those ‘at risk’ of radicalisation (a more or less undefined category), implementation of the Prevent Strategy comes close to policing ideas (or, indeed, crosses that line). ‘Radical Islam’ has been positioned as a central threat, and this has affected more general discussions of religion. Some atheists and secularists, for example, have presented the connections of Islam to violence as an indictment of religious belief more generally. In addition, the government has sought to mobilise religious actors in civil society as part of its policing effort, blurring the boundaries between religion and government, and subjecting religious organisations to a ‘British Values Test’.

Griffiths-Dickson examines some of the specific characteristics of religion that create an uneasy relationship with the state and potentially make it controversial in the public sphere. It claims a higher loyalty, for example, raising questions about whether its members fully accept state sovereignty and whether they think religious identity more important than national belonging. Relatedly, religions are commonly transnational, embedding adherents in loyalties and networks beyond their countries. Finally, religion addresses difficult ethical issues and raises the question of whether people will seek to impose answers they reach on the basis of religion on others. Current tensions in the UK public sphere result, however, not just from these general issues but from a ‘manipulative promulgation of values’. The state, or at least certain ministers or other state actors, has taken on the task of articulating what count as ‘British values’ or the properly shared values of the country. This implies that the state seeks to hold citizens accountable for living up to ideals it states. Yet, Griffiths-Dickson suggests, it is much more properly the role of citizens to hold the state to account, and of religions to encourage adherents to ‘speak truth to power’.

Debates like this are never only about religious diversity. They are also about the terms of solidarity. As Modood notes, the Commission on Religion and Belief called for ‘leaders of faith communities and ethical traditions’ to launch a national conversation to create a shared understanding of the values that should shape public life. This removes government from the issue but it leaves unclear how much to demand shared values and how much to respect different approaches to the common good.¹⁹ For many there is a vague functionalist expectation that religion ought to be a source of unity and cohesion. This makes religious diversity and disagreement all the harder to accept.

But anxiety over religious diversity – and immigrants – may have helped encourage more people to associate their English heritage with Christianity. A once clearly religious symbol, the Cross of St. George, has been appropriated as a mainly secular nationalist sign. For the Prime Minister to call Britain a ‘Christian country’ – as David Cameron did in a 2015 Christmas message – may be tendentious but didn’t play as shocking.²⁰ Still, claims that England is a Christian nation that attempt to be unifying are often divisive – challenging not only minority

religions but the plurality of English citizens who are not religiously active. The National Secular Society weighed in with criticism, of course, but the very existence of the National Secular Society is testimony to religion's continuing public salience.²¹

Much public religion in the UK is harnessed to state ritual. Royal weddings, state funerals, and Remembrance Day are examples.²² There are choral concerts, especially near holidays. Indeed, there are holidays on holy days. There are inquiries into moral questions in which bishops and other prominent clergy offer national guidance – say on how and whether to temper the one-dimension pursuit of profit. These occasions are generally dominated by the established Church, though a Catholic Archbishop or Chief Rabbi may appear. There is also sometimes representation of other religious traditions. And it has to be said that the Church of England has taken on a substantial mission in interfaith relations.²³

There is also an 'inheritance' of religious places, performances, and practices. We might think of the chapels of otherwise mainly secular Oxbridge colleges, prayers before regimental dinners, and toasts to 'the Queen, the Church, and this honourable society' at the Inns of the Court. Only recently there was a row when Belfast's atheist mayor skipped prayers before her installation dinner.²⁴ This situation is occasionally questioned as Christian hegemony over other faiths. At least as often it is defended as part of the ceremonial tradition that makes England the great country it is – with little or no reference to actual religious content.

Compartmentalisation and decline

Religion hasn't vanished, but it has both declined and been compartmentalised. Many dimensions of modern life are managed by technical reason and secular expertise, and religious people do not differ greatly from non-religious peers in expecting science and medicine to govern health care, economic and business knowledge to govern markets, and military knowledge to govern the armed forces. For many, if religion matters in these public domains it is for considering questions of ultimate value – the importance of helping the poor, for example, or the virtues of peace – rather than questions of how to do things. This is not simply a matter of the domain of religion shrinking, but of the domain of secular institutions and technical reason expanding.

Much of the private and public presence of religion is a matter of mere ceremony without deep conviction or episodic engagement at times of stress or life transitions. But it should not be thought that this is all. On the contrary, there are also committed members of a range of religions, people whose private and public lives are guided by the values of their religions, people whose gifts to charity or volunteer labour or care for both family and strangers is the product of religious dedication. It may be a minority of UK citizens who are deeply engaged in living religious lives, but it is neither a miniscule nor an irrelevant minority.

For many, religion is understood as an essentially private matter. Religion may in fact be valued precisely because it is private and personal – a 'haven in a heartless

world', as Christopher Lasch once put it.²⁵ Lasch was referring not just to religion but first and foremost to family and also to community – that is to dimensions of life people expected to be nurturing when more 'public' domains are not. Private life appears not merely as deprivation of public influence but as refuge from the harshness of more public life.

At the same time, the common assertion that religion should be confined to private life is also a rationale for tolerance: religion is a matter of personal preference and taste and so should be allowed free reign, at least insofar as it remains properly private and doesn't attempt to exert a public role. This is religion considered as a consumer choice. Moreover, sometimes withdrawal of religion from public life is experienced positively, as keeping religion free from contamination by necessarily corrupt politics or economics. Indeed, privatisation may be one of the reasons why rates of religious participation are low in countries with established churches: when people think of religion as a matter of personal conscience and choice they don't like being instructed by the state.

As consumers, Britons choose to engage religious institutions and clergy at many important points of private life. They reach out for religion to consecrate weddings, to mark loss and conduct funerals. Indeed, even those not otherwise actively religious take up religious 'affordances' at these moments of transition. This may point to a particular thinness of secular capacities for grappling with issues of love and deep commitment, death and loss. Religion matters at life's turning points partly because without a more communal, institutional engagement, the purely private seems impoverished. But for most, engagement with religion remains compartmentalised, a consumer choice for an event, not a determination of how to live one's whole life.

Paradoxically, John Milbank suggests, the very extreme of religious individualism may have contributed to the current, widely unexpected, renewal of religious intolerance.²⁶ Widespread efforts to remake the public sphere in terms of extreme liberalism and ubiquitous individual free choice have entered a deep crisis. This has brought a kind of privatisation of freedom that undermined many other public projects and left religious engagements as 'the last genuine public ventures left standing'. In particular, religion has the advantage that it can transcend national boundaries and offer projects commensurate with a global age. In Milbank's view, national politics has been 'emptied'. He doesn't say of what, exactly, but I think perhaps of faith in their secular utopian projects – like egalitarian prosperity and the mutual support of a welfare state. Instead, we have sharply increased inequality coupled ironically with ubiquitous reliance on a language of individual rights – without capacities, without obligations. This makes communal projects hard – including traditional religious communal projects. But it creates a vacuum into which illiberal religion can move.

Milbank rightly suggests that the individualism, egalitarianism, and universalism of much secular liberalism has Christian roots. But he also points importantly to the loss of emphasis on 'situated and relational persons' whose very 'irreplaceable uniqueness' derives from their embedding in a more complex reality, note from an atomistic interchangeability.²⁷ In today's anxieties over Islam, Milbank sees echoes

of early modern fears of Catholicism: rejection of religion that was too social, too governmental, and too international. He worries that in response liberalism seeks to move beyond 'mere' toleration to a totally non-judgemental approach to rights. This, however, he fears will be unable to offer any real recognition to religion as a positive social good, and thus any real satisfaction to a serious believer. So long as we live in a depraved world, a more minimal standard of toleration may be the only path to peace.

Much of what appears to be public religion is arguably the aggregation of private responses more than engagement with a specifically public agenda. Religious ceremony, texts, and songs offer solace or recognition when something momentous occurs. Vigils and services after mass murders offer ritual to address the human propensity to evil. People turn to religion to grapple with collective as well as personal loss from war or natural disasters. As Grace Davie suggests, those not active in religious practice may participate in a sort of 'vicarious religion', appreciating the maintenance of religious institutions by the engagements of others.²⁸

But there are recurrent invocations of religion in support of public values. These are common in morally charged debates about crime, the status of children, or the future of marriage and the family. They tend to be unproblematic so long as the public values are consensual. However, the common denominator of agreement may be falling ever lower. At some point, removing all the specific theological or doctrinal content from prayer renders phrasings so neutral as to lose much of their religious meaning. Often consensus requires that values be only vaguely formulated. To pray for peace is uncontroversial – unless the UK is actually weighing war as a policy. To pray for social justice is unexceptionable – unless it is implied that social justice would require economic redistribution or government limits on the power of private business.

The issue of public morality, especially drawing on religion to encourage public morality, long has been vexed in the UK. There is at once a desire for morality and a considerable anxiety about it. There is desire for a stronger, more moral approach to the economy, foreign policy, and social justice. And there is fear – or contempt – of 'moralising' by public figures.

Somewhat paradoxically, given both low rates of personal religious participation and suspicion of strong public invocations of religious morality, there is wide (though not universal) acceptance of an established church. The Church does not draw heavily on public revenue but is granted special rights to participate in government – notably seats in the House of Lords. When this is questioned, as Modood notes, the response is as apt to be a proposal to secure multicultural fairness by giving a few leaders of other religions rights similar to Anglican bishops, as it is to be a push to exclude these religious places from the legislature. Perhaps the Church of England is accepted more because it is 'of England' than because it is 'the Church'.

It is not common in Britain for public leaders to display personal religious conviction – as it is in the United States and in a range of countries around the world. To Britons as to most Europeans it is mildly shocking that Americans open

every session of Congress and state legislatures with prayers. When British leaders – say Tony Blair – foreground their faith as a basis for moral choices many Britons respond with embarrassment. It's as though a basic, tacit understanding of what belongs where has been violated. It would be easier for everyone, many people seem to say, if political leaders just kept their religious views private.

There is worry that public invocation of religious conviction is somehow unfair, an appeal to sources not available to others – like personal revelation.²⁹ There is worry about any attempt to persuade on a basis other than reason. At the same time, there is often suspicion of cynical manipulation, as though expression of religious morality is a tactic not based on true conviction. Still, there would also be concern if someone elected to public office tried to hide religious convictions. In a media-saturated culture, voters believe they elect the whole person. We condemn as hypocrisy the Victorian effort to construct and maintain public identities – selves – quite separate from private life.³⁰ The separation between public and private we cling to in regard to religion is at odds with the more general trend demanding transparency and authenticity in an integrated construction of self.

Economic morality

Some of the longest standing and most influential debates about public morality have concerned economic matters. The effort to build social democracy and the welfare state was mainly secular, but always had a moral dimension, and as noted above often had strong religious support. Debates about the increased inequality of recent years, or about the widespread use of tax havens and other legal and illegal means of avoiding taxation, are also moral debates. Religious leaders weigh in about greed, unbridled accumulation, inequality, and shady business practices. In Britain, there is also debate and widespread suspicion about philanthropy (influenced no doubt by dubious late-life claims to forgiveness of past sins on the basis of gifts to the Church, Oxbridge colleges, or other charities). At the same time, religious leaders continue that doing good with wealth is central to its justification.³¹ Mark 10:25 and Matthew 19:24 are quoted both by devout Christians and others who think Biblical references will aid their arguments. Both the offences and the proposed solutions are secular, but the sense of injustice has a religious heritage as well as, for some, an actively religious dimension today.

Debates over morality and economy have been both influential and a source of confusion since the seventeenth and especially eighteenth centuries. To oversimplify, an older way of thinking assumed that vice and sin were 'natural' to humankind's fallen state and uncorrected causal tendencies in the world. One of religion's roles was to counter this by teaching moral discipline against sinful temptations and higher moral values – virtues – like justice, charity, and temperance.

British thinkers were central to developing the modern idea of an economic system regulated mainly by its own internal causal relations – like supply and

demand – and more likely to be upset than helped by ‘external’ interventions like government policies and religious dictates. This view separated private motivations – like greed – from the functions performed by economic actions – like buying cheap and selling dear, or reinvesting profits in greater productivity. In Mandeville’s famous phrase, private vices could become public virtues.³²

As modern capitalism developed, many argued that the economy did more good by channelling self-interest than any teaching of morality could. Even Karl Marx, who had a less optimistic view of the good capitalism did, was sympathetic to the view that mere moral injunctions were of little significance when opposed to economic interests, especially as integrated into the totalising system of capitalism. This way of thinking survives in widespread contempt for ‘moralising’ as an effort to demand behaviour contrary to interests or what markets will do ‘naturally’.

Paradoxically, this idea that markets should be kept clearly distinct from morality is often attributed to the ‘Scottish Moralists’ and especially Adam Smith. Smith was, of course, Professor of Moral Philosophy and author of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. He saw rather more role for morality than is sometimes suggested, including in markets. Smith did famously describe the extent to which markets could move of themselves in an orderly and beneficial way, as though guided by an ‘invisible hand’. He agreed that most of the time markets would produce better moral outcomes – more good – on their own than would the alternative of state intervention (a view likely shaped by the corruption and low quality of economic interventions attempted by the states of his day). But he didn’t preach complete amorality – nor the Margaret Thatcher–Gordon Gekko–Boris Johnson doctrine that greed is good. He argued that markets are morally positive insofar as they ‘channel’ otherwise problematic individual appetites and ‘teach’ individuals to behave in ways that serve the common good (which, by the way, he thought depended on relative equality of market actors). He offered a version of the older Mandevillian argument that with right sorts of institutional set-up markets could turn private vices into public virtues.

What Smith and Mandeville argued was that morality was not just a matter of individual motives and choices but of collective outcomes. The common good was a moral good, and markets could serve it by stimulating and organising wealth-production.³³ At the same time, though, Smith recognised that markets depended on the moral behaviour of individuals – for example, honesty and respect for property and contract. He sought a more nuanced judgement than an all or nothing separation.

The idea of a complete separation – no morality in matters of economics – is partly just self-serving ideology on the part of those who fear moral limits on their acquisitiveness. But it also reflects a wider modern idea, that there is a necessary differentiation of value spheres. The belief that religion should be compartmentalised is widespread. It should be kept separate from politics and economics. This view of religion is reinforced by the central ideological distinction between politics and markets; calls for moral intervention into economic matters are often calls for government intervention. Media scandal may focus on individuals or

private corporations – say when the Paradise Papers revealed members of the Royal family and prominent firms like Apple to have benefitted from tax shelters. But in general, solutions must involve government enforcing their illegality, not simply individuals refraining from using them on the moral basis of personal morality. The suspicion of public religion and ‘moralising’ today has partly to do with this.

Higher values

Public invocation of religious morality is commonly at odds with another aspect of modern, market society. It claims that some goods are higher than others, some values are higher than mere market value. Market thinking suggests that all goods translate into monetary values. If we value peace more than peanuts, then we have to be prepared to pay for it. But there is no intrinsic difference of kind, only of quantity.

Most, perhaps all, religions say otherwise – and not only religions of course but a variety of other evaluative frameworks – indeed, aesthetic as well as moral. Perhaps, indeed, commonplace market thinking is wrong about its own claim that all values are flat and commensurable. Perhaps the commitment to translate value into money, to perform rational calculations, to celebrate individual choice as decisive is in fact a framework of higher values. Be that as it may, religious thought in a variety of different traditions, offers what Charles Taylor has called ‘higher goods’, or ‘strong horizons’ of moral evaluation.³⁴ These are the basic or higher values that put others into perspective. Peace is not like peanuts, and by juxtaposing them we are reminded of this.

Indeed, matters of war and peace are often linked to suggestions of higher values. The argument that peace is a higher value than material advantage is one. So is suggesting that duty and courage are nobler than mere self-interested calculation. Speaking of the sacrifice of soldiers is another, with the frequent if troubling suggestion that even life may be a lesser good than the sacred future of the nation. The moral status of nations is endlessly contested, but doesn’t stop moving people for that. And it connects the themes of war and peace to that of social solidarity itself – as for example Remembrance Day becomes a celebration of being British as well as of those who died in past wars. Leaders head into wars claiming they hold the future of the nation as a sacred trust. Pacifists may accuse them of violating the higher values of the country. But in sacralising the nation we link it closely to religion. Religions are mobilised in support, or nationalism becomes a kind of religion.³⁵

Making distinctions between sacred and profane is basic to religion. This is not simply a distinction between more and less useful. We don’t need religion to think about whether lower interest rates will bring higher growth rates. But we may need religion – or some secular analogues – to be reminded that not all questions about values are of this kind. Secular thinkers ‘flattened’ their perception of higher and lower values into a fungible notion of value, which was readily measured by

price. This made it harder for us to discern what is really valuable. Faith is harder, Taylor suggests, in a world that isn't clear that there are higher goods and deeper commitments than simply personal tastes and consumer preferences. But the impact is not only on faith. The kind of strong horizons of evaluation religion offers are important much more generally, to non-believers as well as to the religious. Achieving a strong sense of self and moral agency depends on being able to make judgements about kinds of value not only quantities.

Of course, making such distinctions invites controversy, for they are claims to give perspective to basic judgements. Made in public such claims cannot be simply neutral towards others. Treating some values as higher can involve saying they are constitutive to our way of life, or our national order, as well as simply to the moral good. The idea of individual freedom is treated this way in the UK and much of the West, but not everywhere in the world. Specific freedoms like freedom of thought, or speech, or conscience, or indeed religion may be given a sort of higher standing. Debates over abortion involve claims as to whether 'life', or the potential for 'a good life', or 'control over one's own body', or 'a woman's right to choose' counts as a higher good and indeed if, as seems possible, they all do then how we should balance them. To speak of rights evokes higher goods. The idea of human rights involves a moral claim about higher goods on a transnational scale. Arguably, these are higher (or perhaps we should say, lower) 'bads'. One can view 'poverty' as a *bad* so basic that it constitutes a strong horizon of evaluation. This could be true on a global scale and linked to basic ideas about human flourishing and the very value of humanity. It could be suggested inside a country that it is simply not acceptable to tolerate poverty among one's fellow citizens.

Most economic questions involve, as it were, ordinary goods not higher goods. But perhaps this is not true of all. For most of modern economics as an intellectual discipline and most of the practice of economic policy in modern countries, growth is treated as a strong horizon of evaluation. It is a good that puts others into perspective. One might reasonably ask, growth in what? Is it wealth, or human well-being, or productivity that constitutes the higher good of growth and as these suggest, higher goods can be debated. But as environmental thinkers – including some, but still relatively unconventional, economists – can testify, it is very hard to be taken seriously among economic policy-makers when arguing against growth.

Increasingly, religious citizens are in the forefront of suggesting that the well-being of our planet is a higher good. This is partly economic. Many see unfettered capitalism as endangering the planet and with it the future of humanity – and perhaps all life. There are different ways to conceptualise this moral obligation in religious terms. In traditional Christian language, one could say climate change threatens God's creation. One could call on human beings to be better 'stewards' of what they have been 'given'. In their discussion published here, Rowan Williams and Bruno Latour argue forcefully against speaking in this way of 'stewardship'. This imports too much baggage from discussions of property and ownership. We do not own the earth, they argue. To speak of stewardship involves both hubris and the reproduction of somehow standing outside nature.

We live in the ecology; we don't stand above it and supervise it. We need both a sense of the sacred and a sense of immediate engagement.

The rhetoric of stewardship is one example of the problems Williams and Latour see in the very language and intellectual categories in which we think. In the public sphere, religion is often harnessed to reproduction of ways of thinking, but it should transcend this. Part of the role of religion in the public sphere is to help us reach beyond received and everyday understandings, or those embedded in academic fields like economics.³⁶ Both Williams and Latour are drawn to the notion of Gaia. Among other things, this may be useful, they suggest, in going beyond the divisions of logos and mythos, science and religion which stand in the way of fully grasping earth's predicament and our places in it. Truly grasping also means a complicated relation to time, about which religious thinking (if not necessarily received religious understanding) can be helpful. Thinking and living the ecological present requires combining a sense of urgency and potential apocalypse with an orientation to doing what is right that is neither defeated by hopelessness nor embedded in a simple everyday sense of continually creating the next steps of an indefinitely ongoing future.

The future of religion in the public sphere

In the modern West generally, and certainly in England and the UK, it is no longer plausible to imagine a public sphere of consensual religious belief. This doesn't stop people from trying. As it happens, such imaginings mislead about the past as well as present and future. When the public sphere was most animated with religion it was often animated with religious conflict. The great conflicts of the seventeenth century were among Christians, but that common denominator hardly kept them civil. Likewise, the nineteenth-century struggles over whether English Protestants would give Catholics the vote were struggles among Christians. It is not only recently that religion has become a focus of conflict – and sometimes repression.

As James Walters suggests in his introduction, it is accordingly not surprising that people might imagine a world without religion in order to be optimistic about moving beyond religious conflict. As he also notes, many have not merely imagined such a world but imagined they saw the real world moving clearly in that direction. But it hasn't. First there has been no simple process of spreading unbelief and religious disengagement. To the extent something like this could be observed, it was in Europe (including the UK for this generalisation), and Europe was globally exceptional. As Jose Casanova observes in his magisterial survey of *Public Religions in the Modern World*, the attempt to legislate religious conformity has been associated with declining participations.³⁷ Countries officially recognising state religions have led the way. But even there, religion didn't quite disappear, even before the growth of immigrant religion.

One of the most basic facts of the modern world – and a secular age – is plurality. There are myriad ways to be religious and myriad ways to inhabit and understand the world without relying on religion. There are also far more 'in-

between' positions than commonly understood or identified in most survey research. I've mentioned one that is relatively easy to grasp: the ways people episodically engage religious institutions, less out of shifting belief than in search of ways of working through major life events – or death. But there are a host of ways in which people seek out personal as well as collective paths of understanding, belonging, ritualising, or spiritually experience the world at large and their specific social worlds. Indeed, Matthew Engelke has pointed to many ways in which explicit non-believers – members of Britain's Humanist movement create rituals, congregations and other ways of living or even worshipping together – learn from religious practice without adopting religious belief.³⁸

This is a central point of my discussion with Charles Taylor in this book.³⁹ As Taylor says, the famous phrase 'clash of civilisations' is misleading partly because there are so many clashes *within* civilisations. One of the oddities of the way religion appears in the UK public sphere is that this is obscured. It is as though all the clashes are between monolithic religions.

This misleading view is encouraged when religions are seen as more or less internally uniform sets of beliefs. But this is neither accurate for religion generally nor clear about the ways religions matter in the public sphere. They matter because they motivate their members, because as communities and networks that enable them to take action, they shape their experience and understanding, and they open them to each other as well as to God. Religious traditions teach a variety of lessons and offer texts (and music, poetry, dance) to which people can turn in need or when searching. But beyond motivations and networks, religions call the attention of both members and non-members to important themes and questions. These are not just on specifically religious topics. They concern the morality of money and migration, the importance of civility and ethics in the media, the nature of community and the obligations we owe each other, how we should think about race relations and how we should think about sex and gender. And so, religion inevitably informs the way people engage in public.

As Charles Taylor has famously argued, we live in a Secular Age.⁴⁰ This is the product of an extraordinary transformation in thought and culture. It changes how we live and it changes what it means to be religious for those who are. It may make it harder, since there are simply so many options. Faiths become minority matters, not only because of unbelief but also because of pluralism. But in a secular age, faith may also be meaningful in new ways because it is less 'automatic' and is infused with new sorts of knowledge.

The coming of a secular age is not simply the passing away of belief. In the first place, that notion implies what Taylor calls a 'subtraction story', as though one could remove religion and everything else would remain pretty much the same. But the real history involved a transformation of all kinds of thought, self-understanding, political practice, and communication. It was the making of modernity. Second, the most important sense in which our age is secular is less the absence of religion than the centrality of worldly ways of organising ourselves. Science, technology, capitalism and states are of basic importance, for religious people as well as non-

religious. Religious people also live in a secular age, engage its institutions and public debates, and try to influence them. Third, as I've noted, religion is not simply a set of beliefs. It is a way of being in the world. Non-religion is not simply the absence of religious beliefs.

The place of religion in modern thought was changed not by subtraction but transformation. Religious commitment was intensified in the early modern era, as ordinary lay people were called on to practice devotion in ways previously restricted to monks and priests. Religion also became publically prominent in dramatic new ways. The early history of the printing press filled the public sphere with sermons and what now seem abstruse debates over theological matters.⁴¹ States were intensively involved in religion throughout the Reformation and attendant wars. Religious migrants from troubled Europe shaped religious culture in the US and elsewhere. If the seventeenth century saw massive religious conflict, the eighteenth century saw greater peace among religious communities, and of course the Enlightenment roots of much modern secular thought. But the nineteenth century again saw a renewal of religion; indeed it was in many ways a heyday for lay religious participation, including for example with the spread of pilgrimages in Catholic countries. I mention this as a reminder that 'modernity' brought new kinds of importance for religion as well as new competition and in some places decline. There was no simple linear path of retreat from the public sphere or decline in religion altogether. No simple linear path is likely in the future either.

Taylor's account of the coming of a secular age – of early modernity – is important partly because we now live in another era of comparably great transformations. The paths will not be the same, but the changes are likely to be comparably great. There will no doubt be creative efforts to make existing frameworks work in new circumstances. But more often than not, these will be incorporated into a process of unpredictable and deeply interconnected changes.

Indeed, one role for religion in a modern society and public sphere is to encourage awareness that 'what is' does not exhaust what is possible. This is not just awareness of history and future but also recognition of the possibility of radical novelty. This need not be religious. Hannah Arendt saw this possibility in revolution and especially in the creation of a new state and a new constitutional order out of the promises founders made to each other.⁴² But religion can be a potent challenge to the idea that what is must always be.

This is important not least in intellectual life. While much research is rightly focused on examining and understanding actually existing empirical conditions, even our grasp of what is currently real is limited if we fail to connect it to an understanding of what is possible. Moreover, in order to understand a changing world and educate students to guide as well as cope with changes, universities themselves are called upon to balance respect for established knowledge and ways of thinking with their own innovation.

James Walters opens this book with a reminder that religion has a place in academia. It is a topic of study, to be sure. In some universities, it is almost part of the taken-for-granted ceremonial furniture. But religion is more. For one thing, religion

should not be just ‘a’ topic of study, but an aspect of many topics of study. One of the ironies of the compartmentalisation of religion in secular universities is that it is too often ignored in courses on, say, international relations or climate change. Religion is also part of the lives of many teachers and probably more students. And just as it would be an injustice to ask religious people to leave their religion behind when they enter the public sphere, so students and faculty at universities are drawn to integrate different dimensions of their lives – including to integrate faith and intellectual life. Helping in this process is one of the missions of the LSE Faith Centre. But the Faith Centre also has the mission to bring living religious traditions and new religious explorations into the life of the university. In this connection, the Faith Centre’s mission is not only to religious members of the university. It is a mission to the university as a whole and therefore, in part, to people who will never be religious – and people who will disagree energetically with much of what is presented. Such disagreement is part of life in our intensely plural world. It can be frustrating, but it is also part of learning.

Notes

- 1 See E.P. Thompson’s lovely exploration in *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- 2 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (rev. ed., Penguin, 1968)
- 3 D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to 1980s* (Routledge, 1988). See also D. Martin, *The Making of an Unlikely Sociologist* (SPCK, 2014).
- 4 E. Royle, *The Infidel Tradition from Paine to Bradlaugh* (Macmillan, 1976).
- 5 B. Russell, ‘Am I an Atheist or an Agnostic?’ 1947 essay posted in *Sceptis*: http://sceptis.net/eng/articles/id_6.php.
- 6 W. Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (Shepherd-Walwyn, this ed., 1976).
- 7 See Craig Calhoun, ‘Populism, Nationalism, and Brexit’, pp. 57–76 in W. Outhwaite, ed. *Brexit: Sociological Responses* (Anthem, 2017).
- 8 Divisions within Christianity are sometimes downplayed in accounts of Christian Britain confronting a new religious diversity. For example, in Michael Keene, *GCSE Religious Studies: Religion in Life and Society Student Book* (2002: 75), students learn that: ‘The UK has a very strong spiritual heritage related to the Christian religion and this remains the dominant religion in the UK.’ The book goes on to suggest that Britain was a ‘single-faith’ country until the end of the second world war when immigration made it multi-faith. This at once elides the varieties of Christianity – whose conflicts have actually been responsible for more religious violence in the UK than all others combined – and obscures the history of Jews in Britain.
- 9 G. Griffiths-Dickson, ‘Religion, Security, and Strategy: An Unholy Trinity’ (chapter 6, this volume).
- 10 T. Modood, ‘Equality for Secular Beliefs and Minority Faiths?’, Chapter 3 of this volume.
- 11 T. Modood, *Multicultural Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
- 12 Grace Davie, ‘Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?’ *Social Compass* 37 (1990): 455–469.
- 13 See, e.g., essays in Ban Wang, *Chinese Visions of World Order*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017; and Zhao Tingyang, “All Under Heaven and Methodological Relationism,” in F. Dallmayr and T. Zhao, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Thought*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2012.
- 14 See Abdul Aziz Said and Meen Sharify-Funk, *Cultural Diversity and Islam*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003.

- 15 Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- 16 J. White, 'The Genesis of Strategy', this volume, quote from ms., p. 4.
- 17 M. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (University of California Press, Rev ed., 2003).
- 18 Along with Prepare, Protect, and Pursue, Prevent is a dimension of the government's broader counter-terrorism strategy which is called Contest. The Coalition 'upgrading' of the policy included, not least, requirements that people deemed to be 'at risk' of 'radicalisation' be referred to law enforcement authorities and threats of punishment for institutional leaders who did not comply. This was controversial especially in educational institutions for its apparent demand that teachers report on their students' classroom discussions.
- 19 Modood, chapter 3, this volume, p. 9.
- 20 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/christmas-2015-prime-ministers-message>. Cameron said the same thing with even more emphasis in 2014: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/17-april/comment/opinion/my-faith-in-the-church-of-england>.
- 21 http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/12/23/david-cameras-christian-christmas-message_n_8871980.html.
- 22 See my William Temple Lecture for 2014, 'Religion, Government, and the Public Good', *Temple Tracts*, 2.2 (2016).
- 23 This is manifested at LSE where the Anglican Chaplain convenes and animates an active interfaith community of Muslims, Jews, students from other Christian denominations and indeed all comers. It matters in this that the Reverend Walters engages not from the ostensible neutrality of a place above or outside the plurality of religious faiths and perspectives but as a leader of a faith community with a distinctive commitment to mutual understandings and shared work with members of others.
- 24 <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/row-after-belfasts-atheist-mayor-skips-prayers-before-dinner-at-installation-36096373.html>.
- 25 Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Norton, 1977).
- 26 J. Milbank, 'The Decline of Religious Freedom and the Return of Religious Influence' (chapter 2, this volume).
- 27 *Ibid.*, esp. fn. 3.
- 28 G. Davie, 'Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge', pp. 21–35 in Nancy T. Ammerman, ed. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 29 This concern is widespread, for example driving Jurgen Habermas to see incommensurability between religious and secular thought that requires restrictions on the public roles religion can play. In the first place, it is hardly that the case that religious arguments about, say, the immorality or war or extreme inequality derive entirely from personal revelation. More generally, as Charles Taylor has argued to Habermas, there is no reason to think differences between religious and secular thought are any deeper or less bridgeable than differences among some different secular positions, or between civilisations like China and the West. See their respective contributions to E. Mendieta and J. Van Antwerpen, eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (Columbia University Press, 2011).
- 30 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Knopf, 1977).
- 31 J. Sacks, *Dignity and Difference* (Continuum, 2004).
- 32 B. de Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees, Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (Liberty Fund, orig. 1732); see also A. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton University Press); and L. Dumont, *From Mandeville to Marx: The Triumph of Economic Ideology* (University of Chicago Press, 1977).
- 33 Smith is often reduced to caricature as an ideologist of free markets and the invisible hand, and opposed for example to Bentham and the idea of using the very visible hand of government and law to make society better. But both were influenced by the Dutch thinker Helvetius, who held that it was ineffective simply to exhort people to do good, especially when doing good came at personal expense. Rather, he said, there should be a

search for material conditions that would cause the achievement of morality – i.e., the common good. Smith and Bentham proposed different material conditions, and succeeding generations have acted on each.

- 34 His most focused discussion of this theme is in *Sources of the Self* (Harvard University Press, 1989).
- 35 See the brilliant opening discussion of Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1991; rev. ed., 2006).
- 36 During the dialogue I chose not to interrupt to clarify, but here I must note that while the LSE does teach economics, both in ways that may be guilty of being too conventional and in ways that press against convention, it does not offer a master of business administration as Professor Latour at one point suggests, and its students study a range of fields.
- 37 J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- 38 See, e.g., ‘Christianity and Secular Humanism’, *Current Anthropology* 55 (2014): s10.
- 39 Taylor and Calhoun: ‘Dialogue: The Future of Faith’, this volume.
- 40 C.M. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007).
- 41 D. Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2000); R. Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse* (Harvard University Press, 1991).
- 42 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958) and *On Revolution* (Viking, 1963).