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# Religion, Security and Global Uncertainties

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Report from a Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellowship



# Executive Summary and Recommendations

*The Religion and Global Uncertainties 1914-2014* project is funded under a Research Council UK Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellowship. This report offers a synopsis of the research findings from Phase 1 of this project, which examined the relationship between religion and security, including terrorism and so-called 'religious violence'. This phase had two key objectives:

- To provide guidance on identifying circumstances in which religion (either on its own or in combination with other factors) is likely to give rise to security challenges.
- To provide a constructive interrogation of some underexplored assumptions relating to religion and security.

We conducted a series of interviews with leading academics which then informed discussion at 'roundtables' of academics and representative research 'users' in Belfast and London. The working paper and roundtable outcomes then fed into the discussion points of a symposium on religion and security, which brought together a diverse group of leading academics and 'critical friends' from the media and different faith communities. These activities took place between October 2013 and January 2014.

**Our main conclusions and recommendations are:**

- 1. Religious literacy and a wider vocabulary are needed by all.** We must consider and explain what we mean by terms such as religion and security before we develop policy, research or media reports based on them. We must not assume that we all have the same or even compatible understandings.
- 2. Religion plays an ambivalent role when it comes to threatening or promoting security.** That is, in certain situations it can be a threat, in other situations it promotes security. As a consequence, it is crucial that practitioners (policymakers, academics and journalists) get a deep understanding of a particular context before they evaluate or seek to predict the role of religion in security issues.
- 3. There is no simple 'cause and effect' perspective whereby 'dangerous' ideas lead people to violent action.** In fact research indicates that there is an infinitely complex combination of contingencies that can bring conflict and spark violence, including many different social triggers, flashpoints, contexts and characteristics of the protagonists involved. Accordingly, seeking simple and short-term solutions can be counterproductive and lead to greater problems in the future.
- 4. It is particularly important to encourage an ethic of inclusivity to help forestall violent responses.** Seek to consult with a broad diversity of representatives within communities, including the youth, the marginalised and the most alienated. After all, these groups are considered to be the most likely to become 'radicalised'.
- 5. Practical initiatives can be developed based on previous examples of good practice.** For example, the successful 'bottom up' approach developed by ECONI (Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland - now the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland) is seen to have

encouraged and brought positive change from within the Evangelical Christian tradition. Similarly, through consultation with communities involved, we can identify problems with failed strategies to ensure success in the future.

**6. We can also identify specific badges and flashpoints within certain communities that have tended to re-ignite conflict or cause a shift from tension to violence.** However, history also suggests that ill-judged or mistimed attempts to remove flashpoints, can prove counterproductive and provoke the very confrontations they were intended to prevent.

**7. Religious leaders are potentially effective agents for overcoming community tensions** and for promoting or countering challenges to domestic and international security, especially in reaching alienated and marginalised groups. However policy-makers, politicians and activists within civil society and the public sector seem reluctant to engage with these agents, particularly in the West where we tend to want to keep a divide between state and religion. This needs to be remedied.

**8. Academics and policy-makers need to develop long term strategic partnerships, informed by proper knowledge of their respective capabilities and requirements.**

**9. The religious literacy of journalists should be promoted and improved** through training, access to better religion sources, and the establishment of an Institute for Religious Literacy and the Media.

**10. Self-appointed 'experts' can mislead.** Identified contacts at regular intervals should be regularly reassessed to ensure a dynamic, ever-changing and diverse group of representatives involved in decision-making.

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## *The Religion and Global Uncertainties 1914-2014*

project is funded under a Research Council UK Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellowship, support which is gratefully acknowledged. This paper offers a synopsis of the findings from phase 1 of this project.<sup>1</sup> This phase examines the relationship between religion and security, including terrorism and so-called 'religious violence'. The aim is to encourage more critical exploration of the commonly assumed link between 'religion' and 'security' as well as more consideration of what is actually meant by these commonly used terms. It will be argued that representations of conflicts and violence could be more measured, nuanced and complete if more interaction, connected thinking and dialogue took place between academics, policy-makers, journalists and most importantly, the communities involved. The importance of such conversations for politicians and policy-makers was well articulated for us by John Glen, MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Global Uncertainties, in his remarks at a roundtable event in London in October 2013:

From a politician's point of view, anything that can be done to give more colour and depth to the portrayal of religion and what the core interests of those different religions, groups, are and how they are represented in our media and what the difference is between what they actually think and what the media view appears to be, is of great interest. Because I think it would give us all great insights into the gap which I perceive exists. The radicalised fringes of some religions are unfortunately the legacy that most people have in their embedded understanding of what religion actually means. The common ground of shared values is often lost, because politicians and media often tend to go to extremes. And I just reflect on ... the painstaking work over many, many years [in Northern Ireland] before you get to that handshake in terms of different communities coming to terms with the past, is I think a good example of where people have come to terms with religion, but of course it also reminds us that this isn't just about religion. And I am sceptical about how effective it is to evaluate religion as a concept

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<sup>1</sup>: Coinciding with the centenary of the First World War, phase 2 of this project is exploring historic and contemporary understandings of martyrdom and 'sacrificial death'. This phase also examines how, what and why we choose to commemorate. For this phase, interviews are being conducted with a diverse range of participants from different faith communities in Ireland and across the UK.

without looking at the wider forces around culture, political representation, and disaffection that go hand in hand, particularly in a mature democracy. So any analysis of religion must take account of those political, representation factors which I think condition the way religion is sometimes appropriated as a vehicle to motivate in those unsatisfactory societal constructs which don't give representation sufficiently to certain groups. A final thing I'd say is, one of the things we really lack in parliament is the space, I think, to actually look at these things in a grown-up way, underpinned with substantive research. The tendency to always need to respond to a journalist's call or to make a speech that merely scratches the surface is a very difficult one to resist. So anything that can be done to give more depth to our understanding and to make this important topic more accessible I think is welcome.

Similarly, it is urgent for journalists to 'get religion' and 'complicate' their use of this term. An example advanced by one participant in support of this 'urgent need' was the common media misrepresentation of a Sufi festival in Egypt as an Islamic march. Using another example, one interviewee had similar views:

**'... (T)o attribute that war [Bosnia], as many, many analysts did, to religion is very easy to do and it is very shabby analysis, and very similar to tribes in Libya or ethnic groups in Rwanda, between Hutu and Tutsi, it's so much more complicated and it's basically what journalists do to simplify things for readers who don't really give a \*\*\*\*, frankly, and much prefer this idea of violent Muslims, backward Africans and savage people from Yugoslavia. So I think it often borders on racism quite frankly, if not directly so.'**  
Brian McQuinn interview

Between March and July 2013, we conducted a series of 18 interviews with researchers funded under the Global Uncertainties programme, designed to explore their understanding of religion as it impinged on their work, particularly in relation to matters of 'security'. An additional four interviews were then conducted to include more research relating to Ireland and also Christianity in order to address the imbalance in our sample, which reflected the predominant focus on Islamic communities and related issues within the Global Uncertainties programme.<sup>2</sup> These additional interviews also served to provide an external critical perspective of the Global Uncertainties programme itself.

Extracts from these interviews were then compiled into a working paper which informed discussion at 'roundtables' of academics and representative research 'users' in Belfast and London in October 2013. The working paper and roundtable outcomes then fed into the discussion points of a three-day symposium on religion and security in January 2014, which brought together a diverse group of leading academics and 'critical friends' from the media and different faith communities.

Collating responses from all these project activities, the sections below outline and discuss our findings on the following subjects: What is Religion; The Religious and the Secular; Religion and Security, and Beyond the Academic Dance. These sections are complemented by the short essays provided by selected participants at our symposium. The paper will conclude with a summary of the implications of our findings so far for further research and for policy-making.

2: It should be noted that the parallel second strand in our own research is designed to contribute to redressing the imbalance posed by focus on the Islamic tradition with particular reference to issues of martyrdom and sacrificial death.

# 1. What is Religion?

## 1.1 Introduction

Our interviewees displayed considerable collective uncertainty as to whether and how religion could be defined. Some have given the matter substantial thought, but have concluded that a workable definition was either impossible or undesirable insofar as it could constrain observation of empirical historical or contemporary realities. Others, who were not specialist scholars of religion, but studied religion as part of a mix of other cultural, political and social factors sometimes acknowledged that they had not given the matter much consideration. Indeed, for some participants, our research has prompted them to reflect on and consider the importance of religion, and its interpretation in their area of study, so our project has influenced the field in this respect.

Nevertheless some interviewees did offer definitions, including the following:

Sean Connolly (following Keith Thomas): 'a set of beliefs that gives you an overall explanation of the universe in terms of some form of supernatural which ... normally has associated with it devotional practices and rules of behaviour.'

Kate Cooper (following Émile Durkheim) 'religion doesn't necessarily have to be about belief in supernatural beings - fundamentally it is the collective feeling that accountability to other human beings reflects something deeper - a reality that is invisible or lies beyond human understanding. This feeling can be reinforced and developed by various cultural means - through art, ritual, poetry, or philosophical reasoning.'

Gladys Ganiel: 'a system of beliefs including belief in God or the supernatural that are expressed through specific rituals and symbols that are perceived to have overall moral significance.'

Caroline Rooney: 'an awareness of belief in spiritual being beyond merely material existence that entails, say, a sense of sacred.'

A further approach was suggested by Norman Hamilton, a participant at the symposium:

'Might it, in broad terms, be possible to define religion as essentially a set of accepted rituals and practices with no necessary belief system built into them or accompanying them? However, and this is I think important, particular groupings can add or even require a set of beliefs to be added to validate the religious identity.'

In previous work John Wolffe has identified three broad categories – official religion, unofficial religion, and quasi-religion. Writing with explicit reference to British Christianity, he characterised these respectively as 'specific ecclesiastical structures', 'a broad range of beliefs ... with supernatural references, but going well beyond the framework of orthodox Christianity' and 'other areas of human ideology and experience which seem to be of equal or even greater social importance and emotional power'. He acknowledged that these three categories often merge into each other (Wolffe, 1994, pp. 8-12).

Feedback from the roundtables pointed in two – somewhat contradictory directions. On the one hand it was suggested that while confusion over definition is very understandable it is nevertheless unhelpful – researchers who study religion, even as an ancillary rather than central aspect of their work have an obligation to be clear as to what it is they are writing about. On the other hand roundtable participants themselves added further significant dimensions to the definitional mix. In particular religious practitioners felt that the academics quoted in the working paper were in general missing important dimensions of religion as experienced by people of faith, and detected a secular reductionism and unconscious bias in some of the researcher comments. The challenge is obviously to bring 'outsider' and 'insider' perspectives into a coherent synthesis, although one participant wondered whether the attempt to do so would come up against the problem of ultimately incompatible epistemologies. Some also expressed a dislike for the very category 'religion' or at least advocated the value of exploring alternative categories such as 'faith' or 'the sacred'.

The balance of opinion was nevertheless in favour of seeking to communicate the complex, diverse and multi-layered ways in which religion operates,



both historically and in the contemporary world. Too much public discourse – among journalists and policy-makers quite as much as among academics – tends implicitly to presuppose (but seldom explicitly to articulate and justify) monolithic conceptions of religion, which may be very different from each other – for example lukewarm Anglicanism or radical Islam. The obvious challenge though is how to communicate an alternative discourse that highlights complexity in a manner that does not appear merely muddled or confusing to the uninitiated reader.

The suggested way forward is to encourage individuals, both academics and practitioners, to be more self-consciously explicit about their own use of the word ‘religion’ and any preferred alternatives. A generally agreed definition is likely to continue to elude us, and even if it could be found would risk becoming a straitjacket that limits genuine understanding. However if individuals can be clear about their own usage unwitting confusion is likely to be substantially reduced and stereotypes more readily exposed. Roundtable participants nevertheless had only limited enthusiasm for abstract definitions and pointed to the value of providing illustrative examples and ‘stories’. Qualitative research done by academics, or careful investigative journalism, can let the voices of people ‘on the ground’ speak for themselves about what religion means in their everyday lives. (For an example of this approach see Mitchell and Ganiel 2011.)

The following two short essays put forward alternative approaches to understanding religion, that highlight its rootedness in everyday life, explored by Graham Harvey from an academic perspective and by Anjum Anwar from her grassroots knowledge of the experience of Muslims in Blackburn. The implication of both these contributions is that endeavours to compartmentalise and ‘tame’ religion – whether intellectually by closely defining it, or politically by limiting its influence – are liable to be counterproductive, but that societies that understand and accept the presence of religion in their midst have nothing to fear from it.

## 1.2 Defining Religion - Graham Harvey

Everybody except scholars of religion appears to know what ‘religion’ means. Supported by dictionary definitions people can express the assumption that religion means ‘belief in deities’ or other beings unknown to secular scientists. There is respectable academic authority for such a notion: the first Professor of Anthropology at Oxford University, Edward Tylor, defined religion as ‘belief in spirits’. Similarly, there is respectable legal authority for using this definition: the UN Declaration of Human Rights links religious freedom to similar freedoms of thought and conscience. Embedded in these iterations of the equation ‘religion = belief’ are taken-for-granted ideas that religious beliefs are personal and private, and that they (and the identities that form from and around them) should be separated from ‘secular’ public life, especially in political arenas.

One of the jobs of scholars is to interrogate the taken-for-granted. Scholars of religion have recently devoted considerable energy to researching the origins, use, salience and effects of the standard definition of religion. Some of this energy has been devoted to considering alternative understandings. In what follows, I outline a line of argument I have pursued in *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (Durham: Acumen 2013). I will do so under three headings: ‘religion for nation states’, ‘going elsewhere’, and ‘post-state religioning’.

### 1.2.1 Religion for nation states

It is now generally agreed that the prevalent definition of religion as belief emerged in the early modern era as an integral element of the process of defining the constitution of nation states and the desirable qualities of their rulers and citizens. Early modern conflicts conventionally interpreted as ‘the Wars of Religion’ have been more satisfactorily described as ‘the Wars of State Making’ (King, 2007) or ‘wars about different conceptions of the commonwealth in which religion is involved’ (Mark Greengrass interview). That is, these conflicts were not fundamentally about religion but about social and political organisation. Transnational affiliations and affections labelled ‘Protestant’ or ‘Catholic’ were deemed to require restriction in order for people to become citizens of the emerging nation states. The privatisation and interiorisation of religion (as belief) allowed citizens to

participate fully in political and social life while holding distinctive personal ideas that, when duly policed, would not infect public life. In relation to questions of security, a common narrative that associates religiously motivated violence with 'extremism' and 'fundamentalism' reiterates the delegitimation of (public) religion. That is, not only does 'religion = belief' animate the notion that religion should be private (and 'nice') but also that only State authorities should wield power (and the weapons that realise power).

### 1.2.2 Going elsewhere

On the other hand it is widely asserted that religion is diffused throughout every aspect of life (just as gender, age, ethnicity or ability might be). In order to explore the claim further I have written in my book about 'going elsewhere', an approach that is also relevant to rethinking the polemics around 'religiously motivated violence'. Perhaps the performance of violence expresses resistance to the fundamental idea of nation state power politics, refusing to accept the individualisation and interiorisation of religion and resisting the forced evacuation of religion from public life. Perhaps. But my 'elsewhere' efforts have focused mostly on trying to understand better those basic claims that religion is everywhere and everything for many religionists. The assumption that 'religion = belief' restricts what scholars of religion can talk about – and is counter-productive if we are to understand what religion means to people in the real world. But is there an alternative place ('elsewhere') from which to see what is happening?

Scholars have sought to counter the inherited Euro-centric (but now globalised) definition of religion (as 'belief in spirits') by deploying Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and other terms such as dharma, din and halakah. These terms have helped to highlight an alternative conception of religion as doing rather than believing and led to a focus on 'lived' or 'vernacular' religion.

Beyond these alternatives to 'belief', my preferred 'elsewhere' is a definition proffered by a Maori scholar in which 'the purpose of religious activity' for his people is said to be 'doing violence with impunity' (Tawhai, 2002). I devote a large part of my recent book to unpacking this statement. Briefly put, it is not a justification of politically- or religiously-motivated violence but arises from a perceived need to face up to the inescapable everyday violence that follows from eating (and other

acts) within this multi-species planet. Religious activity is a mode of inter-species communication within the larger diverse non-human world. In experimenting with this and related ideas, mostly drawn from indigenous cultures, I seek a new language for discussing everyday religious living – one that does not get diverted into symbolism, representation, metaphysics, 'nice-ness' and other themes. In the context of 'religion and security' debates, I suggest that 'elsewhere' approaches will greatly improve our understanding of people (individuals and communities) whose ideas, practices and lives were not shaped by the early modern and Enlightenment European experience of nation state making and who very probably contest its globalising trajectory.

### 1.2.3 Post-state religioning

**If, as I argue, the prevailing and authorised Western definition of religion was deliberately moulded within the Wars of State Making and their aftermath, and if the nation state is now increasingly superseded by globalised authorities (such as multinational and transnational companies and markets), how might we approach questions about religion and security? In such a world I suggest that a definition of religion that honours the transnational identities, allegiances and performances of pre-modern and 'elsewhere' societies is also highly relevant to the contemporary Western situation. Not only have we been employing an outdated definition of religion but we have also been theorising in an imaginary world rather than in the real world of bodies and acts, and of relations between multiple species. Our security in this era of globalisation might be enhanced rather than diminished by recognising and even enhancing the interconnections which we call religions.**

## 1.3 Case Study: Religion in Muslim Real Life

**Our Cathedral is in the heart of a multi-cultural setting in the town centre of Blackburn. The population of Blackburn with Darwen is approximately 147,713 of which 25% of the total population is made up of Pakistanis and Indians. The borough has a young average age profile. 28.7% of its population is aged under 20 e.g. 42,434. Since 9/11 the Muslim communities of**



Blackburn have become much more proactive in investigating their own religion. We have seen many more mosques set up; in total we have 44 mosques in Blackburn with Darwen and there are several Islamic book shops in Blackburn. Blackburn also has one of the top achieving Islamic Schools in the country and a high proportion of its Church of England schools have pupil populations that are over 90% Muslim or Asian.

So what does the Muslim population of Blackburn think about their religion? For many people religion is a way of life, which cannot be separated from their daily responsibilities and duties, but for many others it is a private affair. One can do 'religion' but then also take part in secular activities which sometimes may be contrary to one's professed religious beliefs. For example, one can go to the mosque for prayers and then share a pint with friends. Such apparent inconsistency has caused intergenerational conflict within Muslim communities, especially where there is no open discussion of what religion actually stands for. Is it something that can be left at home or is it a way of life, which must be practised at all times?

Due to much religious illiteracy there is confusion between religion and culture. For example, does what one wears have a bearing on one's beliefs. Does one need to wear Asian clothing to be a Muslim? Can someone without a beard or a head scarf be a Muslim? Does one need a long beard to lead a congregation in prayers? These are some of the difficulties that Muslims have to grapple with on daily basis. To make religion easily accessible and less confusing for their communities, mosques have become 'regionalised,' providing for communities from a particular area of the sub-continent. It is like plucking a whole village from India and Pakistan and planting it in Blackburn. This system allows cultural practices to continue, but although these are sometimes in direct conflict with religious beliefs, children growing up in the UK will learn these cultural practices as part of their religion.

For example, forced marriages have absolutely no link to religion, but parents have nevertheless used religion as blackmail to force their children to contract unsuitable marriages, leading, in many cases, to family breakups, violence and even death.

Since 9/11 Muslim communities have explored their religion more deeply and critically and there has been a rise in religious education for both men and women in Blackburn with Darwen. This of course is because Muslim communities have found themselves under the microscope frequently, and for the wrong reasons. Terrorism and its impact on Muslim communities has forced difficult conversations to take place between the Muslim communities of Blackburn and statutory and non-statutory organisations, for example the police, churches, schools, voluntary sector and stimulated much interfaith work. There has consequently been a noticeable change in the way Muslims – especially younger people - see their religion. Muslim youth have become much more proactive in researching their religion, what it means to them, how does religion fit in with their daily lives and how best to integrate with the host communities without diluting their own values. Regrettably however, sudden changes in their life styles e.g. something as simple as saying "Assalamualykum" (Islamic greetings) instead of "good morning" at an educational institute may be construed negatively by many. Meanwhile the religious leadership has become aware that they stand to be challenged by the new young intelligentsia – which can only be good, as for too long mosque committees have been monopolised by the 'over aged members.'

International events have also impacted on the views of Muslims about their religion. Iraq, Gaza, and the Arab spring have all allowed people to look at their religion in a different light. Some view the onslaught of media attention to Islam as being very negative, and it has created a view that religion needs to be protected. However, we have seen many young people in Blackburn and

the surrounding areas standing on street corners and explaining to passers-by what their religion means to them, and how it impacts their lives. This 'explanation' of what religion means to these young Muslims has led to certain amount of demystification for those who probably have little knowledge about Islam, other than what is seen in the media.

Remarks made by Jack Straw on the veil and grooming for sex have prompted Muslims to question their own understanding of religion and how to respond to many difficult questions. However, it has to be said that many Muslims in this area feel that their religion is under attack by an aggressive form of secularisation which causes them to retreat into themselves or become very suspicious of authority.

Religion is perceived more and more as a way of life, and, indeed, the word religion is used less and less and faith or deen (a way of life) is used more and more. People in Blackburn are standing up to disown the acts of those elements in their communities who bring disrepute to religion. The last case of grooming for sex saw a large number of people referring to their religion to back up their arguments that this behaviour was not only unacceptable but will be rooted out. In fact, religion has never been as popular as it is now. Although there is still much religious illiteracy, there is a movement in the young to understand their religion and for the first time people with different interpretations of Islam are coming together for an internal dialogue that was non-existent in the past.

## 1.4 Discussion

We see here that Anwar prefers the term 'faith' to 'religion'. In discussion, she described faith as being much about loyalty and as the 'lived experience' of religion. Other project participants have observed how individual faith or spirituality is challenging more traditional forms of institutional religion. Faith is seen to represent the former, religion is seen to represent the latter. However

alternative 'signifiers' such as 'faith' or 'the sacred' (see the contribution by Matthew Francis below regarding the latter), are liable to run into the same problems as 'religion' if used to signify the same complex phenomena. Terms are also relational and equivalential, meaning that a certain definition of religion will be reflected in compatible and equivalent meanings of the secular, the sacred, spirituality and so on.

Even if we agreed on a definition, then how would we persuade others? That is, how would we make it 'hegemonic'? This would require us to take a 'higher ground'. Also, if it is agreed that religion is dynamic, such a solution would still be only temporary. Moreover, many participants point to the contextual nature of such terms, and we are advised that we should not - or perhaps cannot - define religion in isolation. As one interviewee explains:

**'Religion isn't a kind of a gunpowder that you put into the mix and watch the explosion take place. It's in a chemical process, interacting and bonded with the other elements, social and political and cultural that are within the society.'**  
Mark Greengrass interview

Indeed, some argued that many religious rituals may be considered as more cultural than religious as they are, or become, performed without religious consciousness, contemplation or understanding.

One interviewee suggested:

**'I think that certain people for instance have a sense of what might be called something like cosmic mystery or something like that, but without any religious belief. Other people enact religious rituals without considering themselves to be really believers.'**  
Caroline Rooney interview

Another interviewee explored this ‘ritual’ aspect of religion:

‘If you are taught the same thing every day for an hour, when the educational purpose has long been lost, in the sense that you are quite familiar with whatever they are talking about, then it takes on this ritualised element ... (A)s soon as it does become a ritual then it takes on the sort of more mysterious and more other-worldly dimension in the sense that the purpose of what you are doing no longer becomes clear, which means that therefore it has to do with something else. ... So in that sense they (religion and ritual) are related but they are not bound together. And they are ultimately ... the root of how new ideologies are born.’

Brian McQuinn interview

Nevertheless, although conversations about the definition of religion do not – and probably should not – result in a generally agreed outcome it is important that they take place, both within academia and in the public sphere. Terms such as ‘religion’, ‘faith’ and ‘the sacred’ are indeed discursive, contextual and dynamic, but it is essential to encourage awareness of this complexity and thus, the need for academics, journalists and policy-makers to consider how they are using these terms and what they mean to them. Moreover, as several interviewees pointed out, much contemporary discussion of religion is grounded in definitions and understandings arising in the modern West: an acknowledgement that definitions themselves are fluid and subjective is an essential preliminary for developing a better appreciation of the role of religion in pre-modern and non-Western societies.

Enhanced general awareness of such complexities will help ensure that religion is less quickly and crudely diagnosed as the cause of instability and conflict, and will also help bust myths and avoid stereotypes about religion and associated faith communities. There also needs to be more dialogue about religion amongst a wide range of academics, journalists and policy-makers, and perhaps more importantly, between these groups. It is vital

that faith communities are also included in such interaction and dialogue, but we should also avoid simply using the usual gatekeepers who are often assumed to speak for whole communities. Instead, we must ensure that we represent the diversity that exists within faith communities as well as their younger generations. For example, as Anjum Anwar observes above, young Muslims are challenging the ‘old guard’, but their voices are seldom heard as politicians and journalists relentlessly consult with gatekeepers selected to reflect their own often already decided perception of Islam and Muslims. The irony is that by excluding alienated, marginalised and young members of a community, policy-makers are excluding precisely the people whom they have deemed most likely to be radicalised. They are indeed making them feel more alienated by leaving them out, thus exacerbating the problem that they are seeking to resolve.

As Rob Gleave observes below, social exclusion is a key social trigger for violent action.

Moreover there is a danger that self-appointed experts from outside a tradition can dangerously distort perceptions:

‘... one of the things that struck me in that period after 9/11, I did quite a lot of interviews with politicians and policy-makers and newspaper editors through London at that time. And nearly to a man and woman they were all experts on the Qu’ran. Of course, nobody had actually read the Qu’ran. And they were talking about what the Qu’ran said from “insightful people”, ... so the whole debate about British Muslims as being part of the community could be re-framed very easily without any work, without any theology, by the notion that suddenly this group could, could, be understood through a security lens rather than through a community lens or anything of that sort...’

Stuart Croft interview

## 2. The Religious and the Secular

### 2.1 Introduction

The interviews and subsequent discussions on the religious and the secular reflect a state of debate that might be described as ‘complex and rich’. It is a challenge to convey the subtleties to a target audience that, as John Glen indicates, is prepared to think ‘in a grown-up way’ but lacks time or inclination to immerse itself in detail.

In making the attempt it will first be helpful to identify the subjective factors that contribute to widely varying assessments of the significance of religion in the contemporary world. Some of these are overtly polemical, notably the somewhat schizophrenic tendency of secularists both to attack religion as dangerously influential and to dismiss it as marginal and irrelevant. Apologists for religion are apt to privilege what they perceive as its constructive influences and to play down aspects others might see as problematic. There are also instances of what one of our interviewees characterised as ‘shabby analysis’, using religion as a convenient shorthand to characterise conflicts that actually have much more complex roots, as for example in the still standard convention of employing the terms ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ to label the community divisions in Northern Ireland, or imposing simplistic religious categories on the confused alignments of the former Yugoslavia. While professional rigour and objectivity limits the impact of such states of mind on academic research, their influence can still be discerned. Moreover, when, as in contemporary Northern Ireland, they are institutionalised as a basis for sharing power and resources, they are liable to be perpetuated.

More subtly and independently of the researcher’s personal religious or anti-religious views, the way in which a subject is framed and defined will inevitably influence the conclusions that are drawn. A project focused primarily or exclusively on religion will have a different perspective from one with a central focus on say, political change or military strategy. Nevertheless, one of the interesting features of our interviews was a realisation among some researchers working on ‘non-religious’ topics relating to Africa and Asia that ‘religion’ had a tendency to ‘creep in’ to their work.

A broad definition of religion encompassing ideas of the sacred, ultimate value and/or cultural identification accords it a much wider significance than one limited to specific organised structures and theological belief systems. Such an approach results, for example, in some researchers viewing much political ideology and activity – notably nationalism – as religious, whereas others would draw a clear distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘politics’.

Location is also crucial: research on Western Europe is liable to point to the declining, even marginal, significance of religion; that on the global South is prone to emphasise religious resurgence. Some researchers on non-European contexts perceived the characteristic preoccupation of Western academics with ‘secularisation’ as itself a reflection of the limitations of their cultural and intellectual environment.

The contributions that follow explore some of the complexities of the interface between religion and the secular, and in particular question the widespread tendency to view them as in straightforward binary opposition to each other. Thus Kate Cooper attributes the invention of the idea of the secular to St Augustine in the fifth century. As she comments in her interview, ‘I think there are some ways in which that invention of the secular during my period is helping me to get insights about the artificiality of the distinction between secular and sacred in our own modern society’. Caroline Rooney observes in relation to contemporary trends in North Africa and the Middle East that ‘secularisation and religious resurgence are not opposites because there are ways in which they mirror each other, as well as mistranslate each other.’ They develop these insights in the following short essays. The subsequent two contributions, from Paul-Francois Tremlett and Sean Connolly then seek further to develop understanding of the secular.

## 2.2 Religion, Conflict, and ‘The Secular’: The View from Early Christianity - Kate Cooper

Religion seems destined to feature prominently for the foreseeable future, both as an aspect of global conflict, and as a target of journalistic musing on why conflict happens. Yet modern discussion of religion often reflects a disturbing lack of awareness of historical background, which can lead to counter-productive feelings of indignation when members of faith communities feel that their traditions are being treated dismissively.

The discussion that follows will seek to correct common misconceptions about the role of religion in identity-based conflict by seeking to ‘place’ the emergence of core ideas in the on-going debate about the religious and scientific world-views since the Enlightenment, with special reference to Christianity’s emergence as a subversive tradition within the pagan Roman Empire.

### 2.2.1 False: Religion is based on ‘irrational beliefs’

**Modern discussions of religion often assume that all religions are characterised by belief in supernatural beings, and that this belief is what distinguishes members of a religious community from non-members. This is untrue in two ways.**

The first point is the ethnographic observation that not all religions include a belief in supernatural beings as part of their lore. The second point is a historical one. The three monotheistic traditions based on the God of Israel’s promise to Abraham (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) each carry a strong idea of faith or covenant with the God of Israel. But historically, this faith or covenant was not a question of whether the God of Israel did or did not exist.

The Abrahamic faith traditions arose in an ancient Mediterranean context in which the idea that many gods existed was not in doubt. To have faith (Greek: *pistis*, Latin: *fides*, Hebrew: *emunah*, Arabic: *iman*) was not to believe that a god existed: no one believed that other people’s gods did not exist! Rather, it was a way of pledging loyalty to one or more chosen gods among others. Monotheism meant choosing only one god and forsaking all others.

In the ancient Mediterranean, the vocabulary used for religious faith derived from the vocabulary used for military loyalty. Indeed, the second-century term ‘soldier of Christ’ (*miles Christi*) makes the comparison explicit. Other terminology for relationships of allegiance, loyalty, and trust was also used, such as banking terminology (for example the Latin word *credo* – to place faith or entrust – which is cognate to our modern English word ‘credit’).

When the early Christians used the term *pistis* or *fides* in the sense of ‘belief’ they were not believing in the existence of their chosen God, which was accepted even by the followers of rival gods. Rather, they were trusting in their God and believing in his promises. They placed their trust in him as one who would fulfil the promises he had made to his followers, in exactly the same way the member of a war-band might trust that a beloved commander would never let his men down.

### 2.2.2 False: Religion is irrational

A surprising proportion of modern discussion of religious phenomena, including assessments of the relationship between religion and conflict, propose a model of ‘religion’ as intrinsically irrational. This is a by-product of the great conflicts of the early modern period and the Enlightenment, when scientists and philosophers sought to free scholarship from oversight by religious leaders (at a time when universities were under the oversight of Christian bishops). Most influential in the English-speaking world was David Hume’s 1748 essay *Of Miracles*, which saw Christianity as characterised by belief in the miraculous – defined as ‘a violation of the laws of nature’ (Hume 1748/2000). A popular form of this view has passed into journalistic culture in a way that is often unhelpful. The idea that ‘they are all crazy’ can make analysis seem unnecessary and it can also spark angry reactions that serve to escalate conflict.

Historically, the demystifying (or reductionist) impulse played a key role in allowing the early champions of scientific inquiry to call attention to the way religious institutions emphasised mystery and metaphysics (knowledge based on revelation rather than empirical observation) in order to prohibit free scientific enquiry and protect the power of the religious gatekeepers. This was a point made forcefully in the early twentieth century by none other than Sigmund Freud. In his 1927 treatise, *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud argued for a distinction between priestly and empirical forms of knowledge.



Priestly knowledge, Freud argued, involves revelations which cannot be tested through scientific enquiry, and propositions of this kind are susceptible to abuse by the powerful in a way that forms of knowledge that are accountable to reason and testing are not. But Freud did not claim that all revelation is false *per se*. Rather, he argued that when an individual or institution claims to possess truth that is not susceptible to independent testing, this concentrates power dynamics around relationships of obedience, and undermines the tempering force of individual reason and independent critical judgement.

This idea of the accountability of scientific enquiry remains one of the cherished principles of the legacy of the Enlightenment. But it should not be confused with a proof that religion is false or irrational. Not long after Freud's essay, in 1936, the philosopher A.J. Ayer argued that empirical and metaphysical truth claims exist alongside one another without intersecting, as if they were in parallel planes (Ayer 1936). In the same way that the truth of metaphysical statements cannot be proved by empirical means, it can also not be disproved.

So it is true to say that arguments for and against religious concepts and values operate on different terms than empirical arguments. Metaphysical statements cannot be defended by empirical proofs, yet this holds true for both positive and negative statements. Like the beliefs it challenges, atheism is fundamentally a claim based in metaphysics, not empirical observation. 'Non-religious' views are no more 'logical' or 'rational' than 'religious' views.

### 2.3.3 False: the idea of 'the secular' is inimical to religion

**The idea that inter-group conflict is caused by religion often carries with it an assumption that the 'secular' value of tolerance has its roots in the rejection of religion. Nothing could be further from the truth: the idea of 'the secular' is in fact a Christian theological idea with historical roots in the Donatist Controversy of the fifth century.**

Our modern idea of the secular sphere has its historical roots in the efforts of Christian bishops to de-fuse violence. Then as now, many social conflicts were articulated in terms that 'spoke' to the sense of identity that bound religious groupings together. It was the fifth-

century bishop Augustine of Hippo who conceived of the idea of the secular as a pastoral tool when faced with the escalating urban unrest of the cities of coastal Roman Africa – now north-eastern Algeria and northern Tunisia.

Augustine was reacting to the strong theocratic turn of the Roman Empire under the Theodosian dynasty at the end of the fourth century, at a time when conformity to the Emperor's catholic faith was becoming a requirement for citizen status and access to the legal protection citizenship afforded.

Augustine's theological concept of the secular can be summarised in the following way. In this age (*saeculum*), no human being can fully know God's will – perfect knowledge of God is unattainable in the *saeculum* and will be revealed at the end of time (Markus 1970). In the *saeculum* a theocratic state may claim the prerogative to encourage or even compel righteousness amongst its subjects, but there are aspects of human society, such as justice and the rule of law, which must be recognised even by those who hold opposing views of the sacred. In light of this, it is fitting for human institutions to avoid unnecessary acts of aggression against the patrimony of minority faith traditions. Prohibition is made against cultic practices which are believed to be directly harmful to the state (such as propitiation of hostile gods), but where possible members of minority sub-cultures should be allowed to live quietly and without harassment.

Augustine is the originator of the idea of the secular as an arena in which a social boundary is imposed on theological judgement. Correspondingly, the principle of mutual respect is allowed to take precedence over the desire to impose uniformity in the practice of righteousness. This dovetails with his theological view that in the present age human knowledge is incomplete.

Modern people often imagine that human beings are naturally a-religious and that religious traditions add an optional layer of meaning – and conflict – into human experience. But in the Mediterranean world out of which the Abrahamic religions emerged, the understanding of the human condition was entirely different. All parties agreed that the sacred was everywhere, and indeed that invisible supernatural powers – gods, angels and demons – were everywhere. Different faith communities might disagree about how to understand the sacred, but there was no conception of a world in which the sacred had no place – where it was absent or had been 'stripped away'.



Understood in this historical sense, the neutrality of the secular is the dynamic neutrality of a 'safe space' established between conflicting world-views to diminish the likelihood of reciprocal abuse. Our modern idea of the secular often mistakes it for a passive or 'natural' social vacuum - as the result of an absence of beliefs and values, rather than a hard-won neutrality zone protected for the sake of an important principle.

It is important to remember that the idea of the secular has its roots not in the Enlightenment but in Abrahamic monotheism. Rather than being inimical to religion, the idea of the secular is an attempt to bring religion to its best expression. In its origin, the idea of the secular is the religious idea that religion can and should seek to fulfil an ecumenical vision of justice. This notion of self-restraint has enormous social value, and remains as a priceless element of the ethical legacy of Abrahamic monotheism.

#### **2.2.4 True: Religious ideas and traditions can usefully be understood as a form of symbolic capital**

In my own work on early Christian martyrdom one of the most interesting questions is how the martyr's authority has often been appropriated by others. Who can speak on behalf of fallen heroes and heroines? Often, competing parties claim the role of the bearer of memory, and communities must choose which version to remember and revere. What are the criteria for judging between competing meanings - and rival interpreters - of a martyr's death? Can a community control which ideas and values receive the electric charge of the martyr's memorable act of self-sacrifice? Writing about modern suicide terrorism, Robert Pape (2005) has emphasised the communicative power of violence - those who are willing to die for a cause often do so in hope that their death will have a shock value that allows their message to reach a wider public. Following French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, historians of religion often use the terms 'symbolic capital' and 'symbolic power' to talk about how religious concepts can be used to reinforce existing social structures (Bourdieu 1991).

Such concepts can also be used subversively by minority groups to claim moral authority for a minority point of view. A classic instance is the emergence of Christian martyr narratives under the (pagan) Roman Empire (Cooper 2014). In fact, it is a case which illustrates both subversive and establishment uses of symbolic capital, since as Christianity itself became the dominant culture,

the civic authorities - themselves now Christian - began to claim the moral authority of the martyrs on behalf of established institutions (Cooper 2005).

#### **2.2.5 True: Acts of self-sacrifice have far-reaching emotional power and communicative potential**

**If there is a single outstanding lesson to be learned from early Christianity where religion and violence is concerned, it is a sense of the virtually unlimited communicative potential of actions of self-sacrifice.** Of course, this is not news: after all, the story of the unjust death of Jesus by the order of a Roman governor has generated a vibrant strand of thought and culture for nearly two thousand years.

The idea of martyrdom confers moral authenticity on a cause by associating it with the courage and good faith of an individual's self sacrifice. The emotional logic at the core of the martyr idea is both powerful and unstable. Selfless single-mindedness amplifies the value of an idea in a way that is imaginatively stimulating, in part because of the seeming irrationality of the choice to die.

Another element of the volatile power of martyrdom is the fact that once dead the martyr can no longer speak for him- or herself, creating the opportunity for others to speak on the martyr's behalf. Over time, the cause to which the martyr's memory is attached evolves, and may become the object of rival interpretations. The martyr has surprisingly little control of how the act of sacrifice is remembered or what ends, ultimately, it is made to serve.

## **2.3 From Religion and Security to Religion and Liberty - Caroline Rooney**

**'What is enlightenment?' Debates on 'religion and security', in particular, tend to presume a Western Enlightenment value system that has been placed under threat by regressive Islamist forces.** In the West the term 'enlightenment' has come to be equated with a scientific rationality associated with secular society, but this constitutes an ideological reduction that obscures earlier meanings ascribed to the term (Rooney, 2007). In his famous essay, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' (1784), Immanuel Kant promoted the idea of enlightenment as primarily a matter of freedom of

spirit. He urged us to overcome our servile subservience to social guardians and authority figures, asserting: '*Sapere aude!* [Have courage to make use of your own understanding!] is thus the motto of enlightenment'. (p.17) It will surprise many that there is some common ground between Kant's anti-authoritarian message and that of Sayyid Qutb's attempt to promote a radical form of Islam. Qutb (1906-66) was a member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood who was hanged for political subversion. His significance today lies in the influence of his writings on not only the Muslim Brotherhood but also al-Qaeda. That there might be some connection between Kant, exemplar of the Western secular Enlightenment, and al-Qaeda seems unthinkable. But audacious thinking is called for: *sapere aude!*

In his book *Milestones*, Qutb describes the secular and 'ignorant' or 'unenlightened' state of *Jahiliyyah* as 'one man's lordship over another', and he argues that Islam is concerned less with the defense or securitisation of a belief system on the part of its adherents than with establishing itself as the key means to freedom of spirit through acknowledging the power of God as antithetical to the impositions of human master/slave relations (pp.11, 24, 26, 57, 70, 73, 75-6, 94-5). It is true that for Qutb 'freedom and spirit' is inspired by God whereas for Kant it is more a case of intellectual free-thinking. That said, both Kant and Qutb regard their different versions of freedom of spirit to be essential to human dignity as a universal goal. Kant concludes his essay stating that 'the calling and propensity to think freely' eventually works back 'even on the principles of government, which finds it profitable to treat the human being, who is now more than a machine, in keeping with his dignity' (emphases in text, p. 22). Qutb states: 'the humiliation of the common man under the communist systems and the exploitation of individuals [...] under the capitalist systems are but a corollary of rebellion against God's authority and the denial of the dignity of man given to him by God.' (p. 11) We shall return to this question of dignity. First, however, some thought needs to be given to how potentially shared concerns have come to be so drastically polarised, the good intentions of both Kant and Qutb ending up far from their anti-authoritarian starting points.

### 2.3.1 Market Fundamentalism and the Commodification of Islam

Kant's notion of freedom is freedom from dependency on others which readily translates into self-sufficiency. If this

ethic is applied to government, it leads to neoliberalism: or economic freedom as regulation by the state becomes minimal. George Soros writes: '[P]eople came to believe in what former US president Ronald Reagan called the *magic of the marketplace* and I call *market fundamentalism*. Fundamentalists believe that markets tend towards equilibrium and the common interest is best served by allowing participants to pursue their self-interest.' (Soros, 2008) This conviction has a religious dimension insofar as the market is seen to function as a self-generating power that is a law unto itself: capitalism become godlike.

My research suggests that in a parallel manner Islamism constitutes the commodification of Islam. (Rooney, 2014a) Although Islamism advocates, in true fundamentalist fashion, a return to original principles, it is in fact a modern phenomenon that has arisen in tandem with capitalist globalisation. The following statement by Qutb in *Milestones* is particularly telling: 'In the scale of God, the true weight is the weight of faith; in God's market the only commodity in demand is the commodity of faith.' (p. 151) Qutb obsessively sets Islam up in resentful rivalry with Western modernity at the same time that he insists that Islam derives only from itself and is therefore completely self-sufficient. The kind of Islam Qutb is concerned with is very homogenous in that it depends on the cloning of an original model of Islam that is not to be deviated from. But cloning leads to commodification: commodities as replicas of an original and originating design.

**So, on the one hand we have market fundamentalism and on the other hand we have designer Islam. Each aspires to universality through their respective claims to independent self-sufficiency and they end up competing for predominance.** Moreover, while each system specifies its necessity in terms of human freedom, ironically they run into the very authoritarianism they are supposedly set up against. Neoliberalism has been identified as a form of authoritarianism by various commentators (Rooney, 2013), for being a law unto itself that is not only beyond political governance but actually requires governments to defend its imperatives, using violence against popular dissent if need be. And the Islam advocated by Qutb, for all his talk of Islam as a force for human freedom, paradoxically ends up more authoritarian than the authoritarianism it is intended to bring down: it is as if for Qutb Islam constitutes absolutely legitimate authoritarianism, and is thereby free to exercise violence

in disregard of 'mere' manmade laws. The assumption that freedom and dignity entail self-sufficiency overlooks the admission of human frailties, both vulnerabilities and failures, together with actual human needs for inter-dependence. Moreover, both Kant and Qutub deploy an arrogant tone in denouncing servitude, this arrogance being much more a question of pride than of dignity.

### 2.3.2 Case Study:

#### Dignity/ Karama and the Creative Commons

The revolutionary impetus of the recent Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings has strongly and widely expressed itself in terms of both anti-authoritarianism and in terms of a demand for dignity. While many of those involved in these uprisings consider them to be against both neoliberal authoritarianism and Islamic authoritarianism, these two forms of authoritarianism arguably continue to try to hijack the revolutionary momentum in a rivalrous manner, and the West vacillates between the two sides as if they were the only options. While there have been various contradictory attempts to characterise the uprisings as pro-secular or pro-Islamic, what is ignored is what the uprisings exposed. Briefly, dignity was not expressed in terms of arrogance and pride, but in terms of the humility of our collective inter-dependence, a matter of human vulnerability. That is to say, karama or dignity is, unlike pride not so much a question of egocentric self-worth so much as a matter of according recognition to all, especially the most downtrodden and marginalised. Moreover, in spite of the attempts to characterise the uprisings in terms of an anti-religious stance for secular democracy, what has been ignored is how they brought to the fore a different kind of Muslim spirituality to that of Islamism, one much more in keeping with the popular Sufi traditions of North Africa (Rooney, 2014b). For example, in Cairo the revolution drew on the grassroots creativity of Sufi *mulids*, festivals which celebrate the overcoming of the bounded self and which mock the pretensions of the elite (Mehrez, 2012). What has yet to be adequately understood is how the creative commons acted to re-sacralise the collective against the colonising endeavours of both market

**fundamentalism and Islamic auto-capitalisation. The unheard message coming from the common ground is that the sacred cannot be colonised by either form of fundamentalism.**

### 2.3.3 Policy Directives

Policies should be informed by:

1. A re-conceptualisation of democracy that would entail not reducing the political to the economic and religion to merely a matter of security (either as a threat to be defended against or as something to be defended) but sees it as potentially a source of liberty and collective dignity.
2. Awareness of the dangers of abstract schema that serve to entrench oppositional polarities (eg 'democracy' and 'Islam') at the expense of seeking out what John Glen aptly refers to as 'common values' (which often exist in actuality).
3. Active engagement with transnational perspectives on the above.

## 2.4 Re-Thinking Secularisation, Secularism and the Secular: Religion and Modernity - Paul-François Tremlett

Secularisation, secularism and the secular are frequently defined negatively in terms of an anticipated or desirable decline, separation or absence of religion. For example, secularisation or the secularisation thesis in sociology refers to a prediction, made by no one in particular but by and large shared by sociologists, anthropologists and historians since Auguste Comte in the mid-nineteenth century, that religion would steadily be supplanted by science as a mode of knowledge about the world, as societies made the painful (but allegedly necessary) transition to modernity. Secularism, on the other hand, refers to the desirable or necessary separation of powers in government to reduce or indeed eliminate the role for religious institutions in politics, while the secular connotes a condition or state of affairs where the public role or influence of religion is

checked. So it follows that in a secular society, religious beliefs must be entertained privately as a matter of conscience and it is in the secluded room of the mind that they must stay.

For supporters of the secularisation thesis, it is precisely the difficulties that attend to the transmission of such private mental states – given the fact that transmission (learning) by definition is both a public and a political thing and in a secular society any public or political expression of religion is problematic – that completes the circle back to the secularisation thesis and the predicted decline of religion. Without transmission religion will surely become extinct, although extinction turns out to be nothing to do with science but rather a question of social reproduction and as such, a question of power. Moreover, even for those disposed to argue against the secularisation thesis that there has been some kind of shift from institutional to spiritual forms of religiosity whereby the decline in institutional religious belonging is counter-balanced by the adoption of new forms of individualised spirituality such as the New Age or hybrid improvisations of Eastern traditions, the same problem exists. How do these new religious forms reproduce themselves through time given the absence of formal mechanisms of transmission? The answer is simple – they cannot. If this argument is accepted, the secular emerges as an environment in which secularism and secularisation will lead to the extinction of religion through the disabling of religion's institutions of transmission.

**However, wherever evidence is carefully collated, weighed and evaluated, a rather different and indeed more complex picture of religion and modern society emerges.** Most if not all the assumptions underlying the above derive from an evolutionary theory of societal progress and development for which religion was the glue or social cement of pre-modern societies but which, as societies made the transition to modernity, would be replaced by consumption, education and nationalism which together would combine to provide the new national citizens with shared narratives, practices and pursuits through which they would be able to imagine themselves as sharing a way of life with common values and aspirations.

**The truth was not that religion was replaced or even particularly displaced by mass education, nationalism or consumption but rather that these other practices – without precedent from the past –**

**indicated the emergence of a completely new society.**

The shift from agriculture to factory production, the mass movement of populations to urban environments, the emergence of new institutions and new forms of knowledge such as prisons, asylums and psychiatry and new forms of experience such as tourism and photography rapidly transformed sensibilities of time, space and the body. Michel Foucault tried to capture these dramatic transformations through the notion of 'bio-power' which marked the point at which population became an object of knowledge precipitating the emergence of disciplines such as politics, sociology, geography and biology.

From Foucault's perspective this is the secular – the secular is the (far from static) sum of these cognitive and bodily dispositions embedded in the new social spaces, trades unions and political parties, highways and cars, railways and railway carriages, telegraphs, shopping arcades, school examinations and newspapers. Importantly, these new institutions, social practices and articulations of power, government and the citizen were not and are not inimical to religion. Rather, they have augured new possibilities for religion and non-religion, from new forms of authority and authenticity as Eastern traditions re-invented themselves and moved West to the emergence of secular, humanist and atheist associations. Moreover, as the revolutions of digital post-modernity pose new problems for belonging, solidarity and hope, religion can be seen to be on the move again from the cyber Qu'ran to the mega-church, the purifications of the fundamentalist to the vernacular improvisations of the new spiritual entrepreneur. The medium becomes the message, and the new media of modernity have and continue to transform not merely the experience of religion but the experience of others and even of oneself.

When viewed in this light, the secular is not hostile to religion but nor is it as detached, aloof or value-free as some of its defenders sometimes claim it is. The secular is an organisation of power and one that does not forbid, dominate or exclude religion but actually produces it. We have become comfortable with the cliché, first coined by Max Weber (1864-1920), that modernity is not progress but constitutes instead a kind of disenchantment. It is precisely this modern, secular sense of disenchantment that generates the possibility for religion as enchantment. This sensibility is central to how today people talk about and experience religion.



The question of religion cannot be addressed without materialist analysis of processes of rapid economic, political and societal change. Analysis of the places and situations where religion flourishes are critical to this enterprise. It can only be fruitfully pursued by recognising the mutual implications not only of religion, the secular and the modern but also, increasingly, the global uncertainties of the post-modern.

## 2.5 Secularism and the secular: religion's evil twin? - Sean Connolly

**The idea of 'the secular' has been the dark matter in our discussions: the implied antithesis to the 'religion' that was our central focus. But the longer we have gone on the more it has seemed that it deserved discussion in its own right.**

**What has become increasingly clear is that the term 'secular' was being used in four separate ways:**

- (i) Initially, as Kate Cooper reminds us, the secular was nothing to do with not being religious. Instead it was a sphere inhabited by religious believers: a place where debate on matters of faith was suspended in order to concentrate on something else.**
- (ii) Secondly, there is militant atheism: a positive rejection of religion as a delusory and divisive force and an instrument of oppression. This was the stance of those who defined themselves as secularists in nineteenth-century Britain. Today it is represented by polemicists such as Richard Dawkins.**
- (iii) Thirdly, and to be sharply distinguished from the strident anti-religious outlook of (ii), there are those for whom religion is simply not an issue. These are people who do not think in religious terms; their vision of the world is materialistic and human centred. But they do not feel any particular animosity towards religion, or a desire to crusade against it.**
- (iv) What complicates matters is that there is another position, somewhere between (ii) and (iii), which is that of people who are not hostile, or even unsympathetic, to religion in what they consider its proper place, but who become uncomfortable or even suspicious in the face of displays of what they categorise as excessive religious enthusiasm. Such a response may be peculiar to British society; certainly it contrasts sharply with attitudes in much of the United**

States, where a rigorous separation of church and state is accompanied by an acceptance of public professions of personal religious commitment as normal, and, in the case of politicians, even expected. But I would suggest that it is this group, rather than the much smaller body of strident opponents of religion, that was in the minds of two of our leading exponents of political spin. Alistair Campbell famously told Tony Blair that 'we don't do God'. David Cameron says that he has 'a sort of fairly classic Church of England faith, a faith that grows hotter and colder by moments'. A further comment, assuring us that he does not at moments of crisis 'drop to my knees and pray for guidance', reads even more clearly as a response to the discomfort felt by many in the United Kingdom at some of the tales emerging from the Bush II White House.

The major problem with this proposed four-part taxonomy is that it defines religion and its opposite primarily in terms of belief: secular means not having religious beliefs. As Graham Harvey very eloquently points out, there are many cultures, past and present, in which religion is best defined, not in terms of doctrines, but of performance, as a way of living in the world. Even closer to home the value of a rigid secular/religious distinction is called into question by much recent work on the place of religion in western society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The traditional view, going back to Max Weber, was that economic, technological and economic progress inevitably produced a 'disenchantment of the world'. If the calendar custom of rural France declined during the late nineteenth century, one historian argued, this was because 'phosphates, chemical fertilisers and schooling had spelled the beginning of the end' (Weber, 1976, p. 355). More recent writers point to the contemporary United States as providing compelling evidence that there is no necessary causal connection between industrialisation, urban living, or the dissemination of sophisticated technology, and the decline of religious belief. In Western Europe, too, contradictory tendencies were at work. If political instability and social upheaval weakened the attachment of some to traditional religion, it led others to turn to the one source of stability in a world in flux. The nineteenth century was thus an era of religious decline and at the same time of religious revival. The many who abandoned regular church attendance, meanwhile, did not thereby become secularist in the militant sense outlined in (ii) above. They continued to turn to religion to mark major events in the life cycle: births, marriages in funerals. And they continued to

believe in an afterlife, or in second sight, or that certain actions are lucky or unlucky, or in any one of a range of other concepts incompatible with a world view purged of the supernatural.

This new history of Western religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries undoubtedly highlights the limitations of secularisation and secular as ways of describing changes in behaviour and outlook. Alongside that reassessment, however, it is necessary to take account of equally important recent work on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here too there has been a radical re-evaluation of traditional, reductionist perspectives. For a long time historians were intent on discovering all the different ways in which the Reformation and Counter Reformations could be understood: in terms of the growth of individualism, the rise of capitalism, of the expansion of the centralising state, the taming of an unruly popular culture – everything, in fact, except religion. This interpretational trend was in part a reaction against earlier heroic narratives from within the different confessions, in part a consequence of the dominance of academic Marxism, in part, no doubt, a reflection of the personal secular outlook of the majority of the historians involved. More recently, on the other hand, there has been a greater willingness to examine both Protestantism and the Catholic response as movements specifically within religious culture. The introduction of seminaries for the training of ministers, the regimentation of church attendance within a tighter parochial structure, the new emphasis on systematic instruction through the sermon and the catechism, were all part of the shift towards a new ideal of uniform religious practice and belief. The verdict of most historians on the outcome of this massive effort to regiment and indoctrinate, equally, has been more favourable than in the past. Levels of understanding and commitment were inevitably uneven. But baroque Catholicism and the different varieties of Protestantism did make it the norm for men and women to have a basic knowledge of Christian doctrine, and to attend church regularly.

All this has important implications for our discussion. First, it raises questions about some of the more extreme critiques of the concept of secularisation. Such critiques point to the continued prominence of religion, and even the potential for religious revival, at least up to the 1960s. But their evidence must be read in a context within which the newest work on the religious culture of early modern

Europe has significantly raised the bar in terms of our concept of what constitutes a religious society. A renewed appreciation of the level of popular piety successfully inculcated by the major denominations up to the second half of the eighteenth century makes it more difficult to deny the significance of the subsequent catastrophic fall in both church attendance and religious commitment. European Catholicism and Protestantism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries retained an impressive capacity for self-renewal, as seen in the revival movements in both traditions, ultramontanist and evangelicalism respectively. But in terms of their place within society as a whole they were not what they had been.

Secondly, this historical perspective takes us back to the issues of definition with which we began, where religion and the secular were distinguished primarily in terms of the presence or absence of belief. That perspective, we can now see, is the product of the Reformation and Counter Reformation. It was at that point that religious identity came to be defined primarily in terms of doctrine; the primary pastoral instrument of both movements was the catechism. Subsequently the dichotomy between belief and unbelief was given focus by the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. So it is indeed true, as Graham Harvey has reminded us, that to define religion and the secular primarily in terms of belief is to adopt a narrowly Western and modern perspective. From another point of view, however, this is a perspective that accurately reflects the world we live in, in the aftermath of these great cultural and intellectual shifts. We can recognise its limitations. We certainly need to become alert to the potential for misunderstanding and conflict with other societies, which have a different concept of the proper place of religion in society. What we cannot do is by some act of will to reshape the basic categories within which we ourselves think and respond.

This final point has a relevance to the broader issue of religion and global insecurity. The Enlightenment, partly the source of the dichotomy of the religious and the secular just discussed, has had a bad press of late. Its rhetoric of rational progress cut off important areas of experience and opened the door to much exploitation, within Europe and beyond. But not all of its legacy can be so easily dismissed. In sharp contrast to the principles of the confessional state, the thinkers of the Enlightenment looked to the values of a commercial, associational society – tolerance, politeness, sociability,



the development of relationships of exchange and cooperation – as a means of promoting the peaceful coexistence and interaction of differing groups. And, within western society at least, its optimistic predictions have been largely borne out. That is precisely why modern Western Europe is a culture in which, for most people, religion is not a potential cause of conflict. **Today, faced with a new set of conflicts rooted in differences of culture and belief, we have to reconsider the relationship between religious groups and society as a whole. For some the answer is to institutionalise difference, in schools, in public life, perhaps even in the legal system. But is reconsecration the way forward? An alternative view would be that we should think twice before we dispense with core Enlightenment values – education, interaction and exchange – that have in the past proved effective in creating a broadly tolerant, secular society.**

## 2.6 Discussion

Discussion of this subject highlighted a diversity of views. On the one hand it was argued that there is an urgent need for people to understand religion because in the early twenty-first century we are facing a paradigm shift away from modernity and its 'secular' values. Others, however, thought that claims that religion is resurgent should not be exaggerated and that the ideas and values of modernity remain the essential framework for understanding the present-day world.

This debate is indicative of a state of flux on the ground in which long-term trends are difficult to discern. In the Middle East and the Maghreb, the upheavals evoked by Arab Spring are creating a new and uncertain landscape:

**'I think that aspects of the Arab Spring, especially the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, together with the upsurge of youth culture, have served to create something of a considerable epistemic shift that I think is serving to reconfigure the ground of this question in ways that will take some time to unravel.'**

(Caroline Rooney interview)

Many interviewees also emphasised the adaptability and fluidity of religions in the modern world:

**'When you look at the growth of Pentecostalism or Charismatic Christianity over the last century, ... if you date the modern Pentecostal movement to about 1905, the research states they [now] make up about 25% of the Christian population... rather than modernity bringing secularisation and being the 'deathknell' for religion, religions are simply adapting so they fit better within modernity... people have an individualistic experience of God. They might speak in tongues or feel they have a personal relationship with him and this very much appeals to the modern individual.'**

(Gladys Ganiel interview)

So again, it is emphasised that a nuanced picture is required when examining religion and the secular. Within all cultures, there are ebbs and flows and challenges and counter-challenges. Many interviewees indeed challenged the assumption that there is a polarity between secularisation and 'religious resurgence'. There is a 'sort of paradox where we seem to be both more secularised and more religious at the same time.' (Lynne Cameron interview).

How should states and governments best respond to this situation? Two interviewees argued that the British/English model offered a good balance:

**'I am very aware of different approaches in France and England, the first being a secular state, quite an aggressive one in which the insistence is on integration within that state and acceptance of the state's rules, as opposed to England which has accepted a sense of religious pluralism as being something which is more negotiated locally and which the state does not really have too much to say about. And, for what it's worth, my sense is that the English approach has got more to it than the French one. I think the French one has caused some difficulties, most notably and publicly over the veil and the leaving it to local communities to sort out seems to me just almost instinctively to have better mileage to it.'**

(Mark Greengrass interview)

‘ ... a purely secular state is not something that Muslims can recognise as authentic. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that they want one in which religion seeps from every Ministry. They want to be able to have a religious state which is religious but not necessarily doctrinally narrow. ... Part of the reason why many Muslims admire the role of religion in the UK context is because we have a religious state – from their perspective we have a religious state which is identifiably Christian but it doesn’t necessarily mean that religion controls all elements of policy. I have seen that on numerous occasions, that the idea of an established church but which is separated from the political sphere, but has an influence upon it, is really much what many Muslims would like to see within the Muslim world.’

(Robert Gleave interview)

Despite these observations, there are many examples that demonstrate the limitations and tensions within the British model. The case of the demands for a Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate, Maajid Nawaz, to stand down for tweeting a controversial cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed, is a recent example of the tension between so-called secular or liberal democratic values and religious belief in Britain. In terms of liberal democracy, a major issue here was the call for Maajid Nawaz to stand down immediately, rather than for his candidacy to be decided through the formal voting process at the next election.

There are also tensions caused by policy - and between policies - in key areas of government. For example, current education policy advances a compulsory national school curriculum that conflicts with the religious principles upheld by certain religious schools. If such religious schools are approved as ‘free’ under the current government’s free schools policy, the question has been raised of how free are or should such religious schools be?

Other examples include the negative media and political reaction to the suggestion by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, that limited legal space should be given to Muslim communities to regulate themselves on the basis of Sharī’ah law. There have also been many high profile court cases over religious dress and wearing of religious symbols, disputes over gender segregation by religious groups in colleges, as well as the prosecution of Christian B&B proprietors because of their refusal to allow a gay couple to share a bed.

# 3. Religion and Security

## 3.1 Introduction

As part of the Global Uncertainties programme, a key objective of our examination of the relationship between religion and security is to identify implications for policy-making. Here, there are two lines of enquiry that our discussions have explored. First, can we say anything that would be useful to those ‘horizon scanning’ for future security challenges, or considering the potential consequences of specific political, social or even military interventions? While highlighting the specificities and contingencies of each unique context, we have aimed to develop some guidelines for identifying situations in which religion (either on its own or in combination with other factors) is likely to give rise to security challenges. Arguably such an approach could have mitigated some of the mistakes made by the British government in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland, or by the West during and after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. And where a religion-related security challenge already exists, can we say anything about factors to consider in addressing it? Are interventions (as in the Prevent programme) designed to encourage ‘moderates’ and isolate ‘extremists’ helpful, or are they ultimately counterproductive? How can constructive religious leadership best be facilitated and supported?

Second, it seems that an understanding of issues relating to religion can provide a useful springboard for constructive interrogation of some underexplored assumptions relating to security. In particular there is the question of the appropriate balance between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ security, the former signifying the systems and personnel, from airport scanners to commando raids, intended to neutralise immediate threats to public safety; the latter longer- term endeavours to promote stability and mitigate the root causes of conflict and terrorism. When members of specific religious groups – for example Catholics in the past or Muslims in the present – become a particular focus of hard security measures this is liable to add to a sense of alienation that makes the building of soft security much harder. This process can be reinforced by the tendency of religion to foster strong discourses of persecution and martyrdom, which may well impinge on wider community cultures, as for example in Ireland in the aftermath of

the Easter Rising of 1916, and more recently following Bloody Sunday in 1972 and the IRA hunger strikes of the early 1980s. This line of investigation is being pursued in our own parallel research on martyrdom and sacrificial death.

Like ‘religion’, ‘security’ also proved to be in many ways an ambiguous and contested concept. It should first be noted that the issues raised in the previous two sections have substantial implicit relevance, given that perceptions that ‘religion’ is a threat to ‘security’ are often rooted in partial, polemical and Western-centric understandings of its character and significance. An obvious example is the drawing of a simplistic connection between Islamic belief and the radical and violent actions of a small minority of Muslims, a perception that fuels Western Islamophobia, which in turn stimulates Islamism in the Muslim world. In these polarised constructions of the religious ‘other’ lie perceptions of substantial threats to global security. (Conversely, as some interviewees emphasised, outside of the West, it is Western foreign policies that are often seen as the major threat to global security and to the security of their communities.)

The identification of patterns of (mis)perception that distort and exaggerate the role of religion does not, however, negate the evidence for instances in which it can become a specific security threat. A few of our interviewees highlighted the historical record of Christianity and Islam in appearing to legitimate war and violence.

The follow short essays endeavour to bring some specificity and objectivity into discussion of the links between religious (and other) beliefs and violent action. John Wolffe argues from history that there are confrontational patterns of thought and behaviour that can lie dormant and marginal for long periods of time but can be triggered, sometimes quite suddenly, by particular events and circumstances. Matthew Francis explores how use of the concept of ‘the sacred’ (both religious and secular) can help to clarify understanding of the triggers for violence. Robert Gleave affirms – with reference to Islam – that there is no simple causality between religious doctrines and violent actions, but gives an example of what he has described as an ‘intellectual

framework which can be triggered by particular social circumstances' (interview). Conversely, Gladys Ganiel draws on her research on Northern Ireland to examine ways in which religion contribute to processes of reconciliation in conflict situations.

### 3.2 'Religion' and 'Security' - Reflections from History - John Wolffe

**A key insight from history is that there is no inevitable relationship between religious difference, conflict and insecurity. There are countless historical examples – from locations and periods as diverse as the ancient Middle East, early modern Europe, and contemporary London – of people of varied religious commitments living peaceful, albeit sometimes segregated lives. The essential problem is therefore one of seeking to understand why and how such situations of stable coexistence break down, sometimes with alarming speed, such that religion – or more specifically religious difference – becomes a threat to security. The historical situations and contingencies in question are all unique but some recurrent patterns can be identified.**

1. A climate of insecurity that initially arises from non-religious causes, such as rapid economic and social change (for example in early industrial Europe), natural disaster (the Irish Famine), political crisis (the power vacuum in France following the untimely death of Henry II in 1558), or military threat (the Cold War), leading to a tendency to seek security in the re-assertion of religious identities, which then come into conflict with each other.
2. Movements of internal religious revival (for example Protestant evangelicalism, ultramontane Catholicism and Deobandi Islam) which stir the activism of hitherto nominal adherents and assert absolute claims are liable to provoke confrontations with rival movements or with a state that perceives them as a threat to stability and security.
3. The historic political ascendancy of a particular religious tradition (as of Anglicanism in Ireland until disestablishment in 1870) is liable to lead to lasting resentment among those who have felt oppressed and insecurity among those whose previous dominance is challenged or superseded.
4. The successful imposition of religious uniformity (as in France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, or in present-day Saudi Arabia) may create a sense of security that can be quite enduring, but is liable ultimately to prove fragile. Moreover the consequent creation of religious refugees (as in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe) can lead to instability at the international level.
5. Where religious differences are reflected in segregated localities within a city (as in Belfast or Jerusalem) or confessional 'frontiers' within a nation state (as in Canada, Germany or Nigeria) the risk of conflict and insecurity in contested border areas is substantially increased. Vicious circles are liable to develop whereby minorities feel that they have to move to ensure personal security. Nevertheless history suggest that it is possible for confessional divisions of this kind to be successfully managed in the long term, for example, in Canada, Germany and Switzerland (or locally in Liverpool), so their upsurge at particular periods and locations should not be seen as inevitable.
6. While nationalism is still widely perceived as a primarily secular ideology, in combination with religion – as in nineteenth century Europe or the present-day Middle East – it can become a potent source of conflict both within and between states. In its earlier (1940s-1960s) phases the Israel-Palestine conflict was essentially secular in character, but subsequently (1970s-2000s) in a context of regional religious resurgence, the contrasting predominant religious allegiances of the opposing parties have become more conspicuous factors.
7. Gradual secularisation may well mitigate potential for religious conflict, but rapid secularisation (as in the Netherlands) or ideological secularism (as in France) can lead to antagonism towards remaining religious minorities, leading these in their turn to become more assertive.
8. The 'cock up theory' of history is highly significant in this connection. While religious conflicts have often been inflamed by ideology or self-interest, there are also numerous historical examples of cases in which well-intentioned, but misjudged or mistimed attempts to mitigate them have destabilised a delicate balance on the ground. For example, the Gordon Riots in London in 1780 were provoked by government proposals to relax penal legislation against Catholics; arguably in the aftermath of the Western invasion of Iraq in 2003 Shia-Sunni tensions were inflamed even more than under ruthless repression of the preceding Saddam Hussein regime.



I would suggest that a list of factors such as the above could be of service to policy-makers and the media in alerting them to contexts in which they would be well-advised to seek a proper understanding of the religious influences that may be at work. Otherwise what Gilles Kepel has called 'the revenge of God' (Kepel, 1993) may well occur in unexpected times and places. **Where religious tensions already exist, the above points also suggest that attempts to find a 'quick fix' can easily become counterproductive – repression even if successful in the short-term is liable to store up problems for the long term; segregation can entrench confrontation for generations; premature attempts to promote greater toleration risk provoking a backlash. In such circumstances the only solution may be containment, until the passage of time removes the factors originally stimulating confrontation and painstaking work on the ground to restore mutual understanding and trust has borne fruit. Hence efforts to achieve a heightened awareness of the roots of such problems in order to inform preventative measures – or at least to avoid inflammatory actions - will have considerable long-term benefits.**

Second, by looking at 'security' through the lens of religion, awareness of the subjective and shifting nature of the concept is heightened. Strong religious commitments and identifications are a potent source of security for their adherents, but can seem threatening to opponents. In particular, religious institutions that governments perceive as a threat to security may reflect the failure of those very governments to provide an adequate sense of security for their citizens, or a particular section of them. Attempts to control varieties of religion deemed to be a threat to 'security' (such as Catholicism in early modern England) are likely to be counterproductive and augment a sense of 'insecurity'. The best foundation for security in relation to religion as in other matters is the building of mutual trust and understanding, which is always subject to transgression by the maverick group or individual. But the quest for perfect 'security' is the chasing of an illusion, which is likely only to foster insecurity.

### 3.3 Ideology, Decision-Making and Uncertainty: A Progress Report - Matthew Francis

Kim Knott and I are currently studying religion and security within a deliberately broad discussion of ideology, decision-making and uncertainty, I here outline our approach and some of our progress to date. The overarching theme of our research is 'The role of ideology, belief and commitment in motivations, justifications and catalysts for action in the face of uncertainty'. It aims to consolidate research from across several core areas, make interdisciplinary links between researchers, and draw in a range of external stakeholders all focused on two practical challenges:

- In what ways can the role of ideologies, beliefs and commitments best be represented, conceptualised and modelled such that it is able to contribute to more rounded and reliable research on global uncertainties?
- What needs to be done to ensure that ensuing concepts, models and resources make a contribution to policy and practice on issues relating to global uncertainty, such as terrorism, cybersecurity, financial risk, regional instability etc?

Our starting point has been to acknowledge that whilst sometimes overlooked or marginalised in scientific research, ideologies and beliefs often feature prominently in personal and group accounts of decision-making either as causal drivers or as explanations for the actions that follow. Examples include the role of Islamist beliefs in radicalisation and terrorism, and the culture war being fought in the US courts on evolution versus creationism. Even in cases where actions seem to be motivated by expediency, power or financial and/or territorial gain, ideologies and beliefs may underpin material interests, may be offered as justifications or may contribute to a broad canvas of different influences. Ethnic commitments and loyalties, for example, may partly explain participation in organised crime. Nationalist political beliefs may be part of a suite of causes behind gun-running, computer hacking or money laundering. Ideologies and beliefs, as part of a number of factors, thus play a complex role in a move to violence and we are seeking to model this in a way that contributes to more reliable research and policy.

Through expert-led, keyword-driven and snowballed literature searches we have amassed a sizeable collection of research from not only sociologists and scholars of religion, but also mathematicians, criminal, forensic and social psychologists, historians, anthropologists, computational scientists, linguists and other scholars in politics, international relations, peace and security studies and so on. Our reading and summation of the key themes arising from these works is still very much a work in progress. However, it would not be jumping the gun to say that the role of religion in violent action is still very much contested. On the one hand, we have seen excellent research which highlights the role that religious rituals play in hardening sacred ideas, to which I shall return later, whilst on the other a broad body of research, including some on Pashto Taliban fighters, concludes that religion plays at most an ancillary role, if any at all.

In addition to our ongoing review of the literature we have also brought together a number of academics and practitioners (from government and non-governmental organisations). As well as providing us with further ideas for research and themes that we ought to consider in our scoping review, these have also provided excellent forums to test out the research and language which are useful in practice as well drawing attention to common approaches and themes through listening and comparing what others are doing. On a practical, but no less important level) these events have been useful to non-academic participants to make connections with new research and to academic participants for 'real-world' examples that test, confirm or suggest new research agendas. There is clearly appetite for more of these small-scale discussion forums.

### 3.3.1 The sacred: A useful alternative concept?

The contested definition of religion plays an important part in these debates and some of the divergent conclusions that I mentioned earlier are no doubt attributable to inconsistent working definitions. Indeed we have found the term 'religion' to be less than helpful in defining what is special about some forms of violence. The term suffers from negative loading in some quarters (e.g. Sam Harris, 2006), from being seen as a complete (or increasing) irrelevance (e.g. Robert Pape, 2005) as well as from being too vaguely defined and from being made to carry too great a burden of explanation. In this last case we could take the work of Mark Juergensmeyer (2003) as an example, who in *Terror in the Mind of God* provides some

excellent case-studies of what are commonly understood as religious movements which turned to violence. While 'religion' is a useful label that conveys something meaningful in everyday conversation, it is too vague in Juergensmeyer's account meaningfully to separate from other equally significant identity markers like ethno/nationalist identity, for example.

Hence we have found that using the alternative concept of the sacred is helpful in understanding how beliefs can lead to violent actions. By 'sacred' we mean something set apart and special (an understanding that comes from the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, 1858-1917). For example, a ring can become, through a ritual (a wedding ceremony) special and set apart from other jewellery. If we lost some jewellery we might be upset, but if we lost a wedding ring we might take exceptional steps to recover it – excessive retracing of our steps, or dismantling flooring and waste plumbing to see if it can be found. The ring is not special in and of itself, but because we have ascribed a specialness to it.

In terms of ideologies and beliefs, the sacred can be seen as those convictions which are more than just very important to us, they are non-negotiable. Often (but not always) a response to threatened or actual transgression of these non-negotiable beliefs can be violent, such as armed conflict over the crossing of national borders or book burning over media portrayals of religious leaders. These sacred ideals can be secular as well as religious. For example, in writing about the Rushdie Affair (Francis and Knott, 2011) we looked at how the idea of freedom of speech was held as a sacred, non-negotiable right by the liberal-secularists who defended Rushdie in the British Press. By using the sacred to explore the affair we were able to show how both sides were driven by transgressions of what they perceived to be non-negotiable ideals, demonstrating similar motivations often hidden through accounts focusing on the Islamic, secular and liberal identities of the protagonists.

**In general we have found that thinking about the sacred and security, rather than religion and security, helps overcome some of the issues thrown up by differing definitions of religion, confusion about the changing nature and power of institutional religion and debate over how belief and belonging in religion has altered over time.**



The usefulness of the concept is affirmed by another project participant:

**I suppose in terms of Tahrir Square ... I notice that quite a lot of commentators and the press, Western journalists and so on, were speaking of the Egyptian revolution in secular terms. They were celebrating it as a movement for secular democracy. But many of those who were actually in Tahrir Square speak of their experience of it as an experience of sacred. So, there is this question here of projection and this question of how this sense of the sacred might stand to be elaborated.**

(Caroline Rooney interview)

### 3.4 Does Religious Ideology Lead to Violence? - Robert Gleave

An understanding of the theological and ideological background of Islamist groups is crucial to any analysis of them as a security threat. This may seem like an unambitious proposal, since many of the more popular commentators on the threat posed by Islamist groups identify their system of religious belief as the prime motivator of violence. On the other hand, within the academic world, there has been a tendency to downplay the role of ideas and ideological factors in the explanation of instances of religious violence. If theological niceties are essentially irrelevant in this analysis (as is often argued), then religious identity can be understood as a purely social phenomenon. I wish to chart a path between these two - namely that ideology (and specifically religious beliefs) are a crucial element for the proper description of Islamist groups which promote violence, and their propensity to enact violence themselves is explained by a raft of factors, amongst which are ideological doctrines which permit violent acts to be carried out. Intellectual history then becomes an optional, not essential element of any assessment. The intellectual historian does not want to make a judgement between good and bad religion, but does want to argue that some forms of Muslim theology have a greater potential to pose a security risk than others (otherwise, why bother studying Muslim theology to understand security issues at all?).

**I do not, of course, wish to promote a simplistic notion of the influence of ideology and theological commitment to violent action. This has been the characteristic of much scaremongering and essentialist descriptions of Islam as an inherently violent religion. Even if someone believes in principle that it is permissible to shed the blood of an infidel, they will not necessarily go ahead and kill them at the first opportunity. A number of factors contribute to the commission of an individual act of violence – and theology need not be one of them, even when the individual perpetrator is a committed Muslim believer.**

The notion that bad theology causes violent action underlies most of the deradicalisation programmes operative in the Muslim world, and in Western Europe also. 'If only we can correct their mistaken belief, then they will pose no threat to our security' as one Middle Eastern security officer once remarked to me. This simplistic model also underlies much of the rhetoric around the Prevent programme in the UK, and the promotion by Tony Blair and his Foundation of 'good' religion over 'bad' religion – good Islam over bad Islam.

It is tempting to argue that violence is not the fault of 'Islam' per se, but rather of bad Islam. But this is an essentialising argument simply to counter that of the Islamophobes. At the same time, my inner liberal does not want to make a judgement between good and bad Islam; and the intellectual historian feels this has no role in academic enquiry. It is all, then, a bit of a muddle – and I am still searching for a clearer understanding of how my research into the detailed theology of Islamist groups might inform discussions of security.

One of the case studies of Islamist violence might help to mark a clearer route out. What made some Wāḥḥābī-Salafīs in the Saudi Arabia in the early 1990s abandon their allegiance to the Saudi state and establish the network of ideologues and operatives which we today know as al-Qaeda? At least part of the explanation is, I would argue, a shift in Wāḥḥābī-Salafī ideology which came primarily through the internal development of the Salafī intellectual tradition. Salafism, the belief that the correct understanding of Islam is only to be understood in the practice of the early generations of Islam, was not the obvious seedbed for later Islamic radicalism. Salafīs were not political or rebellious in the 1960s, like the Muslim Brotherhood, led by Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906-49) and

subsequently by Sayyid Qutb (1906-66) in Egypt. They were, rather politically subservient, arguing that rebellion against a ruler, even a bad ruler, was a sin. It was the perfect ideology to accompany a conservative religious elite such as the Saudi ruling family.

In the 1960s, a Syrian-educated Salafi thinker named Muhammad Nāsir al-Albānī (1914-99), was based in Saudi Arabia, working for some time at the emerging Islamic university of Medina. He was deeply committed to the Salafī view that anything which is not explicitly sanctioned by a revelatory text and affirmed by the early generations of Muslim thinkers, cannot be considered a legitimate element of the true Islam. This commitment to textual obedience led him to adopt some views which were considered quite strange by more traditional thinkers. On one question, he was viewed by some as deviating from the way of the Salaf – he found a report from the Prophet Muhammad in which the Prophet states that God might extract from hellfire those who have not performed a single meritorious act. On the basis of this report (*hadīth*), al-Albānī argued that it was possible for someone to enter heaven not on the basis of works, but on faith alone. This does not make works irrelevant, but rather than making them a condition of faith, he made them a condition of the completion of faith – the technical difference between a *shart sihhah* (a condition of validity) and *shart kamāl* (a condition of completeness) as it appeared in later Salafī discussions. You can have faith without works, but it will be an incomplete faith (apparently), for al-Albānī.

The reaction to al-Albānī's position was vociferous – and the full debate is not relevant here – but rather, the various Salafi positions which emerged around the faith–works relationship laid the groundwork for the eventual emergence of al-Qaeda. The debate threw up various positions, all based around different interpretations of revelatory texts, and though al-Albānī's own position did not dominate, he is credited with starting the discussion. One of the discussions was around what actions, if committed, would make one an unbeliever (*a kāfir*). It is the obverse question of what makes one a believer, and therefore systematically linked to the question of what constitutes faith. The primary contender for a declaration of unbelief was 'considering God's law, the Sharī'ah, invalid'. This would, it was argued, negate all that Islam stood for, and hence render an individual an unbeliever. An obvious implication of this position was that any ruler who ruled with laws which were contrary to the Sharī'ah

must be considered an unbeliever and therefore unfit to rule. He would therefore need to be overthrown if possible, or fought against. These positions were well developed in the late 1980s, and in 1990 when the Saudi state allowed US troops onto Saudi soil, some Salafīs considered this to be a breach of the Sharī'ah, thereby rendering the Saudi state illegitimate – and the rest, as they say, is history.

I argue that understanding the debate initiated by al-Albānī, and the positions laid out by the Salafīs in reaction to his and his followers' *shart kamāl* position is not only important for understanding the emergence of al-Qaeda, but also for understanding the movement's continued activism, and even its tactics and operations. A full analysis of the other ideological, social and political factors at work would require a longer paper. **Suffice it to say here, that the ideological framework created by Salafis in the 1970s and 1980s enabled the emergence of a major threat to global security which was triggered by the 1991 Gulf War, and any explanation which ignores this theological debate around faith and works will not, in my view, fully understand either the emergence of al-Qaeda, or their operational rationale, or their potential threat. Neither will they learn lessons about future possible security threats from Islamist and Jihadi movements. And that is why I continue to argue for the importance of understanding the ideological and theological basis of Islamist violent groups – not because there is a simple theology-action relationship – but because an explanation which ignores the ideological sophistication and complexity of these movements is an impoverished and ultimately deficient one for either academic or policy purposes.**

### 3.5 Religion & Security: Can Religion Contribute to Peace and Reconciliation? - Gladys Ganiel

Perhaps the most cherished 'beliefs' of modern sociologists have been that been that the secularisation of society is inevitable, and that religion is inherently violent. These 'doctrines' have trickled down into the popular consciousness and the media to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to find people – whether academics or practitioners – who can conceive of religion contributing to peace and reconciliation.

But these stereotypical views of religion have in fact been challenged by other scholars and practitioners (Marsden, 2012, Wellman and Lombardi, 2012, Brewer, Higgins and Teeney, 2011). In my own research, rather than dismissing religion as a tool that can be manipulated to justify violence, I have instead focused on identifying the types of religious structures and religious beliefs that are more likely to contribute to peace and reconciliation (Ganiel, 2014, 2008; Tarusarira and Ganiel, 2012).

By **religious structures** I mean the various 'institutional' forms that religion takes within society. These institutional forms always have a particular relationship with political power, depending on the context. So, for example, a particular religious institution or denomination may have a close relationship with political power – like the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland until relatively recently. Or a religious group may be oppressed or deliberately marginalised by political power-holders, like the Christian Alliance in present day Zimbabwe.

I have identified three patterns when it comes to understanding relationships between religious structures and political power:

1. If the relationship between political power (usually represented by the state) and a religious institution (such as a particular Christian denomination) becomes very close, religion is usually co-opted to serve the interests of political actors. Religious actors lose their ability to critique political power, because they have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo in order to maintain the social and political privileges their religion enjoys. The types of religious structures that are most likely to be co-opted by political power are institutions like a particular Christian denomination and its 'official' representatives (i.e. high ranking clergy or representatives).
2. Other religious structures are less likely to be co-opted by political power, including ecumenical, parachurch or interfaith agencies, congregations, and religious special interest groups. These institutions have much more flexibility than 'institutional' religions, meaning they have more freedom to critique political power-holders and a greater capacity to act quickly as needs arise on the ground. Religious actors are more likely to contribute to peace or reconciliation in cases where structurally they are free to critique all political power-holders.

3. 'Institutional' religion is less likely to offer concrete contributions to peace and reconciliation than the religious actors which work through networks of institutions. Networks of individuals and organisations, working together from the margins, are more effective than isolated individuals or groups working on their own.

By **religious beliefs** I mean the ideas that are particular to religions. Religions incorporate a wide range of ideas, not all of which are even known by their adherents, and which have varied social or political consequences if acted upon. In my book *Evangelicalism and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (2008) I argued that there are three key beliefs that are especially important in violently divided contexts:

1. Beliefs about the 'right' relationship between church (or religion) and state
2. Beliefs about pluralism
3. Beliefs about when violence is justified

Based on my fieldwork in Northern Ireland, I contrasted 'traditional' evangelicals' Calvinist ideas around these three key beliefs with what I called 'mediating' evangelicals' Anabaptist ideas. It was possible to see how their different ideas could have different social and political consequences:

| Type of Evangelical (N. Ireland)  | Relationship Church and State  | Pluralism   | Violence   | Possible consequences?  |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Traditional (Calvinist influence) | The 'right' religion should have a privileged relationship with state power, because if the state does not uphold God's laws, God will punish the nation.  | Because the security and success of the state depends on upholding 'right' religion (God's laws), other religions are not desirable.  | Violence is justified (as a last resort) if the state is not upholding God's laws, or if other religions threaten the social or political order. | Superiority complex, co-option by political power, intolerant of other religions or groups, violence against state or other religions/groups justifiable. |
| Mediating (Anabaptist influence)  | No religion should have a privileged relationship with state power, because the state cannot be expected to execute God's laws on earth. Rather, the church should 'model' how to live for the benefit of the rest of society. | Within a pluralist state, all religions should be free from interference by the state, and people should be free to choose their religion. Other religions therefore are at worst tolerated; at best, celebrated. | Violence is either never justified, or justified only in self-defence.   | Tolerant of other religions/groups and violence almost never justified. Risk of pietism or marginalisation to the point of becoming inconsequential.      |

There is something disconcerting about literally putting people's beliefs into boxes (or putting them in the sociological equivalent, the table, as I have done above). Boxes simplify and reduce complexity too much. At the same time, identifying the particular beliefs that are important in particular contexts allows us to see examples, to use Robert Gleave's phrase, of an 'intellectual framework which can be triggered by particular social circumstances.' A recent example of traditional Calvinist beliefs triggered by a particular social circumstance (the removal of the Union flag from Belfast City Hall in December 2012) can be seen in Northern Ireland in prominent flag protester Jamie Bryson's 'For God and Ulster' post on his blog ([www.jamiebryson.blogspot.co.uk/#!http://jamiebryson.blogspot.com/2013/10/for-god-and-ulster-traditional-loyalism.html](http://www.jamiebryson.blogspot.co.uk/#!http://jamiebryson.blogspot.com/2013/10/for-god-and-ulster-traditional-loyalism.html)). I provide this example to support my argument that

religious beliefs matter in violent and divided societies, even if a conflict is not solely or essentially 'religious' or even if people are not regular churchgoers (a point Bryson also makes).

By way of contrast, in Northern Ireland evangelicals whose religious beliefs are broadly Anabaptist, or who have been influenced by Anabaptist ideas, have contributed disproportionately to peace and reconciliation initiatives. Simply put, people of faith whose religious ideas include separating religion from political power, affirming pluralism, and advocating nonviolence are more likely to become involved in peace and reconciliation activism.

Finally, people's religious **beliefs and practices can change**. This process of change can be crucial in violent

and divided contexts, if it prompts religiously-motivated people to organise themselves to work for peace and reconciliation. **Again based on my fieldwork in Northern Ireland, I concluded that change is most effective if it is internal, coming from people who are religious practitioners acting out of religious conviction, rather than as a response to outside pressures from government, media or popular opinion.**

### 3.5.1 Case Study:

#### ECONI

Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI), an organisation formed in the mid-1980s to promote peacebuilding among evangelicals, is one of Northern Ireland's best examples of how religious practitioners can stimulate change. Many of my interviewees spoke of how ideas they first heard through ECONI led to changes in their identity and a commitment to engage in peacebuilding. I have identified five aspects of ECONI's work that were crucial:

- It was a special-interest organisation, meaning that structurally it had the freedom and flexibility to critique, reflect, and respond quickly to needs on the ground.
- It self-identified as evangelical, a key and influential demographic within Protestantism/ Unionism/Loyalism. Its evangelical identity gave it credibility among people for whom religion was a very important part of their lives.
- It was self-critical of evangelicalism, using the Bible to critique the way Northern Irish evangelicalism had aligned itself with political power. So for ECONI, the slogan 'For God and Ulster' literally became 'For God and His Glory Alone.' This ability to use the religious resources of one's own tradition to justify peacebuilding (i.e. evangelicalism's high regard for the bible) is crucial.
- ECONI's self-critical reflection led to repentance – not asking the 'Other' to repent but rather admitting the 'sins' of one's own community. This opened doors for relationships with people from Catholic backgrounds.

- ECONI developed religious ideas that were relatively unique within Northern Irish evangelicalism, drawing on Anabaptist traditions in its beliefs around the relationship between church and state, pluralism and violence.

Significantly, during the 1990s ECONI received substantial funding from the British state through the Community Relations Council, illustrating a 'productive partnership' between religious actors and the state. I found that among some of my more conservative or traditional evangelical interviewees, this made them view ECONI with suspicion – highlighting the dangers of co-option or the appearance of co-option. With the withdrawal of core funding in the early 2000s, ECONI (now Contemporary Christianity) has struggled to maintain its public profile or to make its distinct voice heard in current debate in the public sphere. At the same time, while ECONI was funded, it was an effective advocate for peace and reconciliation because it was able to draw on religious resources that resonated with a substantial section of Protestantism/ Unionism/Loyalism, demonstrating that the best strategy is not to banish religious voices from the public sphere.

## 3.6 Further Reflections

### 3.6.1 Religion as a source of stability and security

Researchers interviewed for the project gave other examples of situations where religion and religious leadership could offer stability and significant contributions to reconciliation in conflict situations. Although there was recognition of the danger of religion being exploited by oppressive regimes, there was also affirmation of the value of alliances (as in Britain) between religious groups and a liberal state. This line of thinking is consistent with a key conclusion of the most substantial academic work yet to appear exploring the interface between religion and security, that more 'productive partnerships' are needed between 'religious actors and states' (Wellman and Lombardi, 2012, p.290). However,



as Ganiel observes, politicians are often reluctant to work with religious leaders, and when they do decide to collaborate with them their choice of partners tends to be influenced by their own agendas rather than an objective understanding of conditions on the ground. Similarly, as Riley-Smith argues below, bureaucrats and politicians in the UK appear to “put in a half-hearted performance and gain nothing from the engagement”.

Political and social instability can open up space for religion, sometimes working in positive ways to help bring about progressive change, peace and reconciliation. At such times, religion can bring security – in the sense of order and stability – as it often involves regular rituals and a code of moral conduct that structures and punctuates life. Crucially, in times of crisis and peril, it also brings hope:

**‘I see religion in Sub-Saharan Africa as providing people with an ideational system that enables them to explain the unexplainable. That when you lose control over your life, so that Aids, extreme poverty, loss of livelihoods, unexplained death, etc, all of these things are ways in which people have lost control over their lives, and so that religion is a response, as indeed I think it was historically in the West. When you have lost control over your life, religion offers you at least the hope that there is some other way in which you can have some degree of influence over these powerful things that are happening to you, powerful negative events that may be happening to you, and so that the rise of Pentecostalism in Africa, which is quite dramatic, and really is the Christian correspondence of the rise of some forms of Islamic fundamentalism, both of these are ways to try and regain some degree, some sense of control over uncontrollable negative forces in one’s life.’**

(David Leonard interview)

### 3.6.2 What is ‘security’ anyway?

Regarding the notion of security itself, there was a consensus that we must think carefully before we use this commonly used term. Whose security are we worried about? That of the Western world? The communities

being torn and destroyed by conflict? Are we talking about human security or state security? We are all aware of how failing states often threaten and persecute their own communities in order to quell uprisings and resistance. As Leonard observes:

**‘Religion is often a response to the failure of the state to deal with human security .... And that if the state experiences religion as a threat to its security, rather than human security, that often is a consequence of its own failures. Once the breakdown occurs, there may become negative consequences for human security more generally, if the state and religious group fall in conflict with one another, as we are seeing with Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria. But Boko Haram arises in a situation in which the Nigerian state has spectacularly failed to provide for the human security of the Nigerian population.’**

(David Leonard interview)

Security tends primarily to be viewed from the perspective of governing authorities, who whether in nineteenth century Ireland, Poland in the 1980s, or contemporary Egypt or Nigeria, are liable to see assertive grass-roots religious movements as a security ‘threat’. However, in their origins and development such movements were often fuelled by a failure of states themselves to provide adequate security, either because of weakness or because they were manifestly partisan. In such a context religion is a potent source of cultural security, social and practical support, and even an alternative legal framework, for a community that feels threatened or oppressed, or at least vulnerable in the face of instability and a weak or failing state.

As indicated, in the Western world, there is a tendency for security to mean the security of the West against a threatening ‘Other’ and to represent ‘Western-centric’ assumptions, prejudices and pursuits. Indeed, many respondents were critical and suspicious of our use of the term ‘security’ in our questions about whether religion was a threat to security:



‘You see that I have some trouble with the ‘what is a threat to international security’ part of it anyway because in some ways I think the threat to international security with respect to religion arises from the way in which various international actors understand and respond to religious resurgences, and if you define them as threatening, then they become threatening, because you start repressive actions towards them and then they are reciprocated.’  
(David Leonard interview)

As for another interviewee:

‘It just makes me very annoyed when people keep saying that our security is threatened by religious extremism when we have created that whole thing, and don’t take any responsibility for it whatsoever. .... I mean this is a Western sort of lens which I think is highly unfortunate, that we get to define what’s a threat and how it’s a threat. I think that if we weren’t threatening the whole of the world with neo-liberalism then possibly the so-called Islamic extremism wouldn’t need to exist.’  
(Colette Harris interview).

Thus, Western perceptions of an international security threat can be a self-fulfilling prophecy that actually creates, reinforces or exacerbates frontiers, tensions and conflicts.

### 3.6.3 So is religion a threat to security?

Perhaps the following statement best reflects the consensus of views on this question:

‘... religion plays an ambivalent role when it comes to threatening or promoting security, and by ambivalent, I mean in certain situations it’s a threat, in other situations it promotes security. And it’s really hard to isolate hard and fast rules to determine that. And what that means is that scholars and policymakers need to work really hard to get a deep understanding of a particular context before they can evaluate, much less predict when religion will be used to threaten security...’  
(Gladys Ganiel interview)

Similarly, Lawrence Freedman argues:

... if you look at any of the main religions, and some of the less main ones, you can see how the same apparent set of beliefs can be employed in quite different ways by different groups... It is when religion is used as a mobilising force that it potentially becomes destabilising. Sometimes in a good way. Instability isn’t always bad. And once it is used as a mobilising force then by its nature as being about both truth and error, religion can become dangerous.  
(Lawrence Freedman interview)

In general, our participants have the view that religion in itself was seldom a threat to security. Rather problems arise when religion operates in tandem with other factors, especially political ones, or, as Rooney puts it, provides ‘competitive branding’ for divisions with political, cultural or territorial roots. At the extreme it can provide spurious legitimacy for violent action by marginalised and/or unbalanced individuals, who may in fact have been stimulated by wider social norms that glorify violence:

‘And it is not Islam that is glorifying the violence, it’s actually the computer games, all the mainstream stuff we have in society, as well as a local context of gang violence and also the domestic violence these young people might

be seeing or experiencing at home. So, violence is something very normal for them. So really it's not necessarily the concept for example of jihad that suddenly makes somebody become violently radical.'

(Basia Spalek interview)

Also, religion is often used to conceal other non-religious motives and to justify aggression and violence:

'... killing in the name of religion is morally more comfortable. So, if you want to kill someone because you want to have his house, well it's not a very nice thing. But if you want to kill him because he is an infidel and he is God's enemy, and God wants you to kill him, then it's a morally laudable thing and you can have his house as well.'

(István T. Kristó-Nagy interview)

Used in this way religion is an effective tool because it 'hardens conflict' by providing 'emotional ammunition'. (István T. Kristó-Nagy interview).

As indicated above, Gleave's research is beginning to question the widespread assumption that there is a direct and simple link between 'dangerous' religious ideas and violent action:

'What we are beginning to realise is that there is no simple causality between a religious doctrine which appears to promote violence and violent action. There is no simple causality there. Because religious doctrines are many and diverse and they don't all promote violence.... Our initial findings are that there is a whole number of reasons why one interpretation becomes more popular in a particular context than another. And that there is no inherent link, even with the most violent religious texts, the ones which you would think were the most easy to make the link between text and action. ... And part of the

problem is that there is a popular notion and there is a government policy understanding that there is a very simple cause and effect element between ideas and action; and that's why we have to expel Abu Qatada, because he is preaching dangerous ideas and dangerous ideas lead people to simple violent action. And my feeling is that that simple cause and effect mechanism, on which much government policy is based, could be fundamentally flawed in that there are many, many elements which go into radicalisation and it is not purely about trying to promote a nice, fluffy, comfortable Islam which is not dangerous to try and replace the dangerous Islam.'

(Robert Gleave interview).

The other elements that are thought to contribute to radicalisation include disenfranchisement and exclusion, economic marginalisation and poverty, and threats to identity, including secularisation. All these are rooted in a failure of government sufficiently 'to encourage an ethic of inclusivity'.

Gleave observes that 'bad theology causes bad action', as evidenced in the counter-radicalisation processes in the United States. Thus, he argues that there is much to be gained from examining medieval Islamic thought because this gives depth and context to the present-day understandings of academics, policy-makers, journalists and others. Arcane and medieval debates may seem insignificant but can be the root cause of serious present day conflicts and tensions. They can help us identify what is negotiable or unnegotiable, and identify crucial historic disagreements about what should be negotiable or otherwise.

### 3.6.4 Clash of Civilisations or Peaceful Coexistence?

It is certainly the case that particular religious cultures are less negotiable and more resilient to change than others. Many ancient discourses remain today because of their resistance to change, becoming rigid and sedimented by a regime's successful 'high-filtering' of external influences. Saudi Arabia was given as such an example of a 'highly filtered' culture in terms of non-Islamic outside influences.

Here, we are reminded that regimes are not the same as a region. In such regions, revolutionary change and counter-regime forces can be challenging regimes and rigid hegemonic discourses that have successfully quashed resistance and outside interference for centuries. Again, we must offer nuanced accounts and avoid unhelpful generalisations.

Examples were given of the zero-tolerance approach to Christian symbols by such Islamic regimes. But we are also warned against allowing such observations to be unhelpfully advanced as examples of a 'clash of civilisations'. Such a phrase feeds stereotypes and prejudices and only serves to reinforce divisions:

**'And those fears become motivated by those that wish to create trouble and there are always some of those, but within church and belief structures as well as outside them ... So if you say we have a problem with this or that procession or this or that cultic object or whatever, and it is because there is a problem between Catholics and Protestants, then you are already on a slippery slope towards violence.'**

(Mark Greengrass interview)

As Greengrass observes, there are many historical examples of how coexistence is entirely feasible. The major problem can be that 'flashpoints', however small and insignificant that they may seem to others, can very quickly reignite past conflicts:

**'... if you go to the banks of ... Lake Constance, there is a region where Protestants and Catholics have existed side by side for three generations each accepting rules and regulations about the appointment of clergy, the sharing of churches, the burying of dead and the educating of children. However, there are clearly 'flashpoints' which occur, both in terms of calendar year and in terms of the kinds of objects and elements that become problematic, such as particular clothing, where you can see very clearly that they lead to a climate of fear and tension.'**

(Mark Greengrass interview)

We also need to consider how transformative and performative speech acts complicate simple cause-effect theories. For example, speeches by President George W. Bush on the 'Axis of Evil' and the 'War on Terror' actualised an international campaign and transformed not only Western foreign policy but also carved new frontiers of identity between 'us' as victims in the 'Christian West', and 'them', the 'Islamic threatening and violent Other'.

There is also the influence of charismatic and effective leaders. How much does the messenger influence our response to the message?

### 3.7 Discussion

**In sum, if governments do not understand the complex ideological and historical landscape behind security policy, then they are in trouble. Governments and security forces seem to be searching for simple equations to explain why 'stuff happens', but there are infinite causalities as each case of violent action can be different. There needs to be deeper and wider scrutiny of conflicts and so-called religious violence, grounded in an appreciation of complexity and the recognition that the application of simple 'cause and effect' solutions must be avoided. We will not find a simple answer, a generic 'one size fits all' solution, nor will we be able to identify and correct that 'one mistaken belief'. Seeking simple and short-term solutions can actually lead to the application of 'cock up' strategies that make things worse.**

Participants are concerned that simple cause and effect solutions and the search for 'acceptable' versions of Islam are very much ingrained in the decision-making processes of government. However, there some practical steps can be taken. We can carefully examine mistakes or successes in the past to inform future strategy. For example, Prevent was in general unsuccessful precisely because it was an 'outsider' top-down approach led by central government, which involved a process of identifying certain 'acceptable' gatekeepers and then failing to involve a diversity of others in future consultations. By contrast, as described by Ganiel, a successful 'bottom up' approach was developed by ECONI (Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland - now the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland), which is seen to have encouraged and brought positive

change from within the evangelical Christian tradition. Ganiel judges that institutional or denominational influences in Northern Ireland are less likely to contribute to peacebuilding than initiatives of this kind. However, the challenge for government and other 'outside' agencies is how to stimulate and encourage such work without appearing to impose a counterproductive degree of control.

A further difficulty arises from the vested interest of sections of the media in negative representations of religion and in particular, from advancing certain faith groups as potentially violent threats to society:

**'When individuals and groups have come up against deeply entrenched positions it is very hard to move those entrenched positions if those positions are entrenched by very powerful voices. And there has clearly, for example, been a lot of money to be made in newspapers by selling Islamophobic stories. And where you have got a commercial organisation that has found a way of making money they tend to continue.'**

(Stuart Croft interview)

Such negative images can be self-fulfilling prophecies as they cause or accentuate the sense of alienation that may lead to a violent response.

## 4. Moving Beyond the Academic Dance

The phrase ‘academic dance’ was used by one participant at the Belfast roundtable to convey his sense that in some of the conversations reported in the working paper, academics were essentially talking to each other in a rarified discourse of little or no interest to the wider world. A participant at the London roundtable queried the underlying presupposition of the project that academics have something useful to contribute to thinking ‘on the ground’ insofar as this might be deemed ‘arrogant’. Both points were put graciously, are well taken, and deserve to be weighed carefully, particularly as it is a key aim of this project to promote and present an opportunity for knowledge exchange between academics and practitioners (of a variety of kinds) rather than knowledge transfer outwards from academics. As well as being indeed legitimately criticised as arrogant, knowledge transfer would be in danger of raising and answering the wrong type of questions, while knowledge exchange is essential if we are to achieve effective strategic engagement with policy-makers and other practitioners and identify and address the key questions ‘on the ground’ and in ‘the wider world’. To this end, Neil Jarman considers the best strategies for academics to use in order to have an impact on policy and practice in the ‘real world’. Reinforcing the comments of John Glen, MP above, this is followed by an essay by Tristram Riley-Smith, which emphasises the crucial importance of encouraging policy-makers to ‘do God’ insofar as they need to engage with academics studying religion and with faith communities themselves, and also advances stages for effective strategic engagement between them. Similarly, Jenny Taylor then explores why journalists do not ‘get religion’ and suggests steps that can be taken to encourage and help them to do so.

### 4.1 Beyond the Academic Dance: From Research to Policy and Practice - Neil Jarman

Academics are increasingly expected to try to ensure that their research can show some level of impact, i.e. that it has some relevance beyond the walls of the academy and may inform and/or influence policy and/or practice in some way. This can be a challenge for some (many?) academics. It may be seen as a critical response to the

traditional academic focus on the development of ideas and knowledge without any underpinning expectation of a marketisation (of whatever form) of its value. It will also require people to think, focus and write in different ways and it may push people to think and work in ways in which they may not want to work.

This raises questions of whether and how far it is the role of academics to influence policy and practice or whether it should be up to others to interpret and apply academic studies. However, leaving others to interpret one’s findings will always have a risk.

It also raises the question of what actually does it mean to have an impact? Does impact mean a direct and visible influence on policy? Or being cited by government, political parties or in the media? Or can it involve less tangible forms of influence? But how are such impacts identified and valued? And how can one assess impact if one’s own work is one among a number of studies saying similar things?

A focus on making an impact also raises questions about whom one should one target and how? Academics may aim to target ministers, departments or political parties directly. They may target them indirectly through the use of the media or they may aim to inform others who will lobby and advocate for change. Or they may aim to target all of these.

Drawing on my own experience of trying to have a positive impact on policy over the past twenty years both as an academic and through the work of the Institute for Conflict Research, a policy orientated NGO based in Belfast, I highlight a number of points to consider:

1. **Say something relevant:** Academic questions and interests are not always the same of those of policy makers. They may intersect, but they may not. Academics may need to re-consider how their research can be adapted to address a specific policy issue rather than an intellectual question. My research on parades in Northern Ireland explored anthropological perspectives on symbols, visual displays and the meaning of the events. When the parades became contested in 1995 I refocused my work to consider the issues underlying the conflict, a colleague and then I wrote a report drawing on some 6 years of fieldwork to set out some of the factors underpinning the disputes in order to inform the policy and political debate.



2. **Clarify the target audience:** Academic research may be used to influence a wide range of people, and both directly and indirectly. What is emphasised and how research is presented will depend on who the target is. In 2004 ICR published a report on the emerging influx of migrant workers in Northern Ireland. It was well received but had little apparent impact on government policy. A year later I wrote a follow up paper on policy developments and progress or lack thereof. This was not formally published but sent to key people in government departments. I was later told that the paper had been read by a senior civil servant and in turn had informed changes to departmental policy.
3. **Saying it at the right time:** Academics and policy makers work to different timeframes. If academics want to inform policy they will have to work to the policy maker's time table. We identified a narrow window when the report on parades might have maximum impact i.e. as people began debating the next cycle of parades; a few weeks later and the agenda would have moved on. This meant pressurising a senior academic colleague in order to be able to meet our timetable. The timing of the publication meant that the report was the lead story on all media outlets in NI.
4. **Develop a shared knowledge base:** Parading has long been a major social, political and cultural activity in Northern Ireland, but there was still a serious lack of accurate information about when, where and why parades took place. Our report helped to provide basic background information to inform wider discussions.
5. **Right place, right time:** Academics can always contribute to an ongoing debate, but may have more impact if they can identify an emerging problem before it hits the policy agenda or if they can adapt previous research to inform an emerging debate.
6. **Getting the tone and scope right:** Academics often produce more material than can be conveyed effectively to, or consumed, by policy makers. ICR's work on forced labour in Northern Ireland resulted in a 30,000 word report, which was published online. But for hard copy publication targeting the policy community required 4 pages - a 3 page / 1,800 word summary, with a 300 word summary of the summary on the front page.
7. **Simplicity versus Complexity:** It is important to make a small number of clear and relevant points in the first instance, whether in written or verbal format. If interest is aroused points can be elaborated later.
8. **Targeting the right people:** The parades report

was picked up by the Labour Party, who were then in opposition. We then worked closely with the Secretary of State as she sought to respond to the tensions over parades. We later worked with the newly formed Parades Commission to offer ideas and critical responses to policy proposals and to introduce them to key people on the ground.

9. **Ongoing work:** Impact and public engagement is an ongoing process and means continuing to engage outside the academy on a regular basis. This may involve responding to journalists, writing articles, appearing on radio and TV, speaking at non-academic conferences, working with NGOs, meeting with civil servants etc.
10. **Retaining academic independence:** Academic research is often cited because it is independent of political or other influence. But can one become involved in influencing policy and also retain one's academic independence? Some have argued that the role of the academic is to offer an independent analysis of social problems and policy but not to offer solutions. Is it possible to do both?

## 4.2 Wrestling with Angels: Security Policy-Making and Religion - Tristram Riley-Smith

Ministers say that the first duty of any government is the security of its people. But this obligation falls to the sacred realm as well. There is a rich cultural heritage from around the world of spells, prayers, rites and sacrifices designed to protect us from harm. This is exemplified in the Second Collect, For Peace, in the Anglican service of Evensong: 'O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed: Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; ... and also that by thee we - being defended from the fear of our enemies - may pass our time in rest and quietness ...'

It is not surprising that priests provide their own ministry of defence. For thousands of years, religion has helped to shape people's identity and ethnicity, and it has habitually become entangled with political and economic power. This can lead, as we are well aware, to religion becoming embroiled in conflict and violence. But those ethical codes that are a common component of doctrine also make 'faith' a strong force for good in matters of peace and reconciliation.

**Given these realities, the policy-maker needs to understand and engage with people of faith, not least when dealing with matters of national security.**

This is easier said than done. In some societies, for instance, doctrine exerts a strong influence on policies and politics. The Supreme Leader of the (Shi'ite) Islamic Republic of Iran operates as the highest ranking political and religious authority in the land.<sup>3</sup> In Saudi Arabia, under the Kingdom's Basic Law, the Qu'ran and Sunnah are the nation's constitution. There is a complicated relationship between the State of Israel and the Jewish faith, with religious conservatives blocking the formation of a national constitution because they argue that the Torah must have primacy. In 'Christendom', the Vatican City State is ruled by the Pope with all senior state functionaries being Catholic clergymen. Russia is moving in the opposite direction to much of Europe, emerging from Soviet atheism to embrace the Russian Orthodox Church as a key element of national identity.<sup>4</sup> Even in the United States, with its constitutional separation of Church and State, the power and influence of Protestant faith-groups is substantial (Riley-Smith, 2010, Chapter 3).

The United Kingdom occupies the other end of the spectrum. Our bureaucrats and politicians appear largely indifferent or uncomprehending in their attitude to religion. They rarely wrestle with angels; but when they do so they put in a half-hearted performance and gain nothing from the engagement.

This gap in comprehension is surprising. After all, the Head of State is also Supreme Governor of the Church of England: every coin bears the cryptic message 'F.D.' proclaiming Queen Elizabeth to be *Fidei Defensor* – 'Defender of the Faith'. Furthermore, twenty-six 'Lords Spiritual' sit – ex officio – in the second chamber of our legislature playing 'a full and active role in the life and work of the Upper House' (according to the Church of England's website).

In the coalition Government, Baroness Warsi – the former Minister for Faith and Communities – has expressed concern about public policy being secularised; governments should 'do God', she believes (<http://sayeedawarsi.com/2010/09/15/baroness-warsi-speaks-to-the-bishops-of-the-church-of-england>). But in contrast with the USA, most British politicians avoid demonstrating their faith if they have any. Winston Churchill described himself as a flying buttress supporting the Church of England from the outside; and Tony Blair said, when interviewed after his retirement from the premiership, 'If I talked, as Prime Minister, about my faith I would have been thought to be a nutter!' There is indeed little political incentive to do so. British society is increasingly secular and agnostic: church-going is low (less than 7% of the population), and in December 2006 only 33% of those questioned described themselves as 'a religious person', while 63%, said that they were not religious (including more than half of those who described themselves as Christian!). Nevertheless committed religious believers remain a significant minority in Britain and make up a majority of the population in many other countries.

It is even rarer to find civil servants who will make any explicit connection between their work and their faith. Recent history reveals one significant exception in Sir Michael Quinlan (1930-2009): as Deputy Secretary for Policy and Programmes at the Ministry of Defence from in late 1970s, he paid attention to the moral dimension in his work, grounding policy in religious concepts of Just War (Guthrie and Quinlan, 2007). But in general, a rational, 'enlightened', legalistic, pragmatic, sceptical tradition leads the Civil Service to impose a distance from religious doctrine; one obvious explanation is to be found in the deeply-ingrained emphasis on professional impartiality. Of course, there are creditable examples of scholars being consulted and listened to, and there are diligent public servants who devote time to reading the relevant literature; but these engagements are usually ad hoc, and few and far between.

3: Article 4 of the 1979 Constitution states that "all civil, criminal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and all other statutes and regulations (must) be keeping with Islamic measures;...the Islamic legal scholars of the watch council (*shura yi nigahban*) will keep watch over this." Article 10 describes the role of the Supreme Leader in these terms: "during the absence of the removed Twelfth Imam (may God hasten his reappearance) government and leadership of the community in the Islamic Republic of Iran belong to the rightful God fearing... legal scholar (*Faqih*) who is recognised and acknowledged as the Islamic leader by the majority of the population."

4: Between 1991 and 2005, according to the Russian Institute for Comparative Social Research, the proportion of "believers" increased from 23% to 53%, while the percentage of "atheists" fell from 35% to 6%. According to the European Values Survey of 1999/2000, 92% of Russians describe themselves as "Orthodox".

It is as if the political and policy classes have installed thick, sound-proofed glass between their world and the world of faith: some can lip-read, but few pass on knowledge that they gain. This presents a serious challenge: how can policy-makers harness religious thought and action to help build benign, safe and secure communities; and how can security practitioners fully understand the part that religion plays in threats?

The answer lies in making a deliberate effort to understand complex belief systems – both in their own right and within a wider social, political and psychological context. Such an initiative should aim to empathise with men and women of faith, accommodating subjective belief within objective bureaucratic calculations. I understand the reluctance of policy-makers to reach out to specific individuals, lest they make the wrong choice or unwittingly alienate those belief-groups that they are trying to understand. This is easier where there are well-established leadership structures, and more difficult with Sunni Islam or Evangelical Christianity where focus is placed on the individual's engagement with God, and where imams and pastors operate in a dynamic free market.

To begin with, then, policy-makers should work constructively with that substantial body of talent represented by our academic research-base – theologians, historians, philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists *inter alia*. If they feel the need for political cover (in the best tradition of the Civil Service) they could set their compass by reference to those values articulated by the then Minister for Faith Communities: support people who want to believe, and protect people from bigotry and violence. (Speech to “Faith in Politics” Conference, Churchill College Cambridge, 12 November 2013. (<http://sayeedawarsi.com/2013/11/12/speech-at-the-university-of-cambridge-churchill-archives-faith-in-politics-conference>))

**I would avoid being over-prescriptive about how this engagement takes place – there are many different ways in which contact can be made and knowledge can be exchanged. But at a strategic level, my analysis has led me to conclude that there are four stages to strategic engagement, each of which deserves care, attention and investment:**

- 1. provide access to information about the requirements of policy-makers and capabilities of subject-matter experts;**
- 2. exchange knowledge through ‘speed-dating’ events where relationships of trust can start to be established;**
- 3. make commitments where longer-term, strategic partnerships can be built, with both sides making an investment of time and effort to support collaborative research and dialogue;**
- 4. deliver outputs where these efforts are turned into products such as guidance notes of value to policy-makers and practitioners.**

**I would also argue that dedicated intermediaries are needed to support this process.** There are logistical reasons for this – policy-makers and subject-matter experts have many pressing demands on their time. But there is also a qualitative contribution that the best intermediaries can make – a knowledge and understanding of both worlds, allowing sympathetic translation of messages and therefore effective communication. I have been told that Michael Quinlan performed just such a role, on retirement from Government, through his work with the Conference on Christian Approaches to Defence and Disarmament, bridging the gap and supporting an effective exchange of ideas. We could usefully identify a band of ‘go-betweens’ like this to raise the standards of knowledge and dialogue.

Our policy-makers need to wrestle with angels. Let’s provide them with a cohort of coaches to help them put in a performance worthy of Jacob himself.

### 4.3 Why Journalists Don’t Get Religion - Jenny Taylor

Journalism has a fourfold problem with religion or as it is more accurate to say, the actuality of the religious underpinning of world affairs. Sixty years ago, there were ‘Church Correspondents’ who covered the appointment of bishops, investment scandals in the Church of England, and the opening of the new Church Mission Society building in Waterloo Road (even in the *Guardian*!). But this byline has morphed since the Rushdie fatwa announced the advent of religio-political alternatives to Christianity: the *Sunday Times* appointed Rosie Kinchen its first Religious and Social Affairs Correspondent in

2011; the *Telegraph* has John Bingham in the same role. The *Times* and the BBC have not moved yet beyond 'Religious Affairs Correspondents': an incoherent epithet which does not know where the line, if there is a line, should be drawn.

That religion has effects, and different religions have different effects is still not universally acknowledged especially in the media. Religion was regarded as a matter of mere opinion, and opinion was for editorials and feature articles, not the news. But we have come a long way since the year 1991 when Bernard Levin wrote for his weekly *Times* column that Christians should stop whining about persecution; no one had been persecuted for their faith since Roman times except the Jews. He changed his tune very fast after being inundated by evidence to the contrary, not all of it from my office. But it has taken more than 20 years for persecution to become an item on the regular hourly broadcast bulletins: think of Prince Charles's recent intervention over Islam's persecution of Christians, and BBC Today's series on the same subject over Christmas 2013. The *Spectator* ran a cover story in September 2013, 'The War on Christians', with a cartoon of a huge bomb blast rearing up in the shape of a turbaned extremist and a tiny Christian figure in flight bearing his cross ([www.spectator.co.uk/features/9041841/the-war-on-christians](http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/9041841/the-war-on-christians)).

Things are beginning to change. Journalists are having to 'get religion'. Up until recently it was a badge of honour to ignore religion, or treat it as a kind of Punch and Judy pantomime. Vicars rhymes with knickers, after all, Bernard Levin once said. Religion was either in the closet, or it was a joke. Intelligent people had consigned it to history and crucially important stories either did not get told at all, or got wildly distorted. The reasons are fourfold:

First is personal prejudice often acquired at your mother's knee, and certainly at university. The Christian Union was after all for weeds and social lepers.

Secondly, there was cultural inurement: until the advent of US-style reality TV, the British were private about their feelings and their faith. You don't after all discuss religion, sex and politics in the club or at dinner.

Third, that native diffidence became ideological. The death-of-religion theory from Nietzsche (1844-1900)

through to Max Weber (1864-1920) whose work hit the academy fully in the 1950s after being translated in 1930, began to impact sociology, philosophy and history. This rendered any serious media attention to religion's force or efficacy - except for a survey proving its further demise - dangerously subjective, naïve, unprofessional. No one wanted to be thought a fundamentalist. Reporters kept their faith buttoned up. Christian civil servants exerted a denying self-censorship. To bring faith into your work, and especially into the media equation, from a prime-ministerial press briefing down, elicited the knee-jerk 'We don't do God'.

That led further to and was caused by the fourth problem: epistemology. This is the view that to know anything, you have to stand back from a commitment to the thing known. You can dismantle or deconstruct it (science) but not 'know' it in any other way (love). What started as fairness, became 'neutrality' across the board. As you covered the left-right adversarial model of politics (which conveniently characterised modernity's binary simplicities: good/bad, black/white, male/female, exemplified by Westminster) so you covered religion. Thus you got atheism versus belief; the National Secular Society versus the Christian Institute; Islam versus Christianity and even worse, Islam versus the West. The explicitly religious dimension of al-Qaeda for instance was constantly reinterpreted from within a frame-work of modernity as something else: an underdog revolt against poverty perhaps, or some form of justifiable anti-Americanism.

In summary, religion was something you looked AT, not something you looked WITH. The scientific worldview was what you looked WITH: a set of tacit assumptions about the truth being one kind of knowing, through or by which to examine events, even those perpetrated with quite overt faith motivation. It determined what you reported, whom you used as sources, and what angle you took. Without a belief that there was objective truth out there to be discovered, which encompassed motivation (or as Weber put it, the meanings people gave to their motivation) as well as actions, stories inevitably got distorted or more conveniently, missed altogether. When 9/11 happened, according to Paul Marshall (Marshall, Gilbert and Ahmanson, 2008) the US literally did not know what had hit it.

If all religion is mere opinion, the dominant opinion is what the story gets pegged to, usually unwittingly.



That translates as power. It has resulted in some very dangerous and lopsided reporting: Obama supported the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, so news coverage all over the Western world, from Canada to Germany downplayed the outrage of church burnings carried out as reprisals by the Brotherhood. Yet the 'coup' against Morsi was supported as much by the Sheikh of Al-Azhar University as by the Coptic Pope, but no one reported their joint appearance on a platform with General Sisi. ([www.patheos.com/blogs/getreligion/2013/08/so-what-did-pope-tawadros-say-and-when-did-he-say-it](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/getreligion/2013/08/so-what-did-pope-tawadros-say-and-when-did-he-say-it)).

#### Case Study:

##### The Newham 'Megamosque'

**But all that is beginning to change, slowly. Emily Buchanan, the BBC World Affairs Correspondent, initially reluctant to cover the struggle against the so-called megamosque in Newham as more than merely Christian nimbyism – the unwitting default position of a dominant binary discourse – eventually did a number of to-camera pieces on the day of the council debate, about the inherently anti-social nature of its promoters. Planning permission was refused. The truth is that the first petition against the mosque was run by Muslims. No journalist except me was present at the planning inquiry on 17 February 2011 to hear an Oxford sheikh describing the Tablighi Jama'at, the mosque's builders, as 'secretive, supremacist and sexist'. (On Tablighi Jama'at, see Pieri, 2012).**

Religious literacy is knowledge that not only factors religion more coherently and comprehensively into all our newsrooms and stories, but recognises that, as the leading historian Simon Schama acknowledged on BBC Radio 4's Start the Week, on 30 December 2013: 'It is religion that shapes allegiance, it is not a reflection of it.' ([http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/stw/stw\\_20131230-1030a.mp3](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/stw/stw_20131230-1030a.mp3))

**In view of this paradigm shift undergirding our whole culture I believe what is needed now, as a matter of urgency, is**

- a) training for journalists in political religion and social impacts of different religions;

- b) immersion in and reorientation through cases where the religious fall-out is best illustrated. Many journalists don't travel!

- c) Religion is the germ of culture. All journalists need training in cultural analysis to cope with globalisation and mass migration. Not all civilisations are empirically based for example. Rumour acts as fact in some religious societies. Not all sources will 'tell the truth' in the Western way.

- d) Access to better religion sources for journalists and investment in the provision of it.

- e) Making a priority the acquisition of a more instinctual response about when to 'get religion' as well as to 'get religion out'. Reporting of wars as 'sectarian' or 'tribal' when the fault lines may have formed years before due to the inaccessibility of resources, or inequitable allocation of power, exacerbates volatility. Al-Jazeera recently ran an excellent piece on how international reporters parachuting into the recent conflagration in South Sudan ([www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2014/01/south-sudan-media-conflict-201411715339555750.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2014/01/south-sudan-media-conflict-201411715339555750.html)) made matters worse with simplistic or even racist caricatures of ethnicity and religion. A similar case was observed by Lapid Media in BBC coverage of Central African Republic ([www.lapidmedia.com/car-brave-reporting-marred-misuse-religious-categories](http://www.lapidmedia.com/car-brave-reporting-marred-misuse-religious-categories)).

- f) An Institute for Religious Literacy and the Media to be established within the academy, to embody and encourage the foregoing.

## 4.4 Discussion

In our various conversations, there was a general consensus that there is much value and indeed urgency in encouraging journalists to 'get religion', in order to overcome the negative and irresponsible media representations of religion and faith communities that are common in the UK popular tabloid press. Indeed, knowledge exchange and effective engagement with the media has presented us with particular challenges, given that a reflective and critical 'behind the news' approach needs to be squared with the understandable need of both print and broadcast journalists for an immediate story. 'Bad news' sells papers, so stories about what



is (correctly or incorrectly) presumed to be religious-motivated violence gets more space than more positive depictions of the role of religion.

In our London roundtable, it was discussed how misrepresentations of faith communities also resulted from what was reported and what was not or 'hidden'. For example, Muslims who are arrested for grooming have made the national headlines, but such offences by 'non-Muslims' have not been reported at all or are relegated to the back pages of local newspapers. Similarly, Muslims who are arrested as suspected terrorists have hit the front pages, but following discharges without conviction are found in the back pages if anywhere.

However, we cannot generalise about 'the media' in the same way as we cannot generalise about other groups in society. As one participant emphasised:

**'Because I have seen quite a lot of positive local media representations which have been quite positive at the local community level. Nationally, of course you have the *Daily Mail* and certain aspects of media which seem to be quite irresponsible, but there is quite a lot of very responsible and enlightening journalism as well.'**  
(Gavin Moorhead, London roundtable event)

Similar to the problem posed by the small and unrepresentative sample of experts and community leaders used by government, it was argued that the media tends to fish in a very small pond for academic support. Academics were warned against becoming a 'talking head', responding to both media and government needs for academic credence for their sound bites and already formulated stories. Rather, academics should be proactive and use media opportunities to promote their own work and its conclusions.

Academics may well struggle to achieve positive and pro-active interventions in policy-making when the security agenda is already set, and set at the highest levels of both national and international political decision-making. However, we should note and be encouraged by John Glen, MP's views on the importance of dialogue and interaction with central government, and despite the challenges that they observe, Jarman, Riley-Smith and Taylor have provided us with very useful ideas for nurturing engagement with policy-makers and journalists respectively.

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### Selected websites and blogs

Gladys Ganiel blog: [www.gladysganiel.com](http://www.gladysganiel.com)

Islamic Reformulations: [www.islamicreformulations.net](http://www.islamicreformulations.net)

Kate Cooper blog post about our symposium: <http://kateantiquity.com/2014/01/31/northern-lights>

Lapido Media: [www.lapidomedia.com](http://www.lapidomedia.com)

Religion, Martyrdom and Global Uncertainties 1914-2014 (includes films of symposium discussions): [www.open.ac.uk/religion-global-uncertainties](http://www.open.ac.uk/religion-global-uncertainties)

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