

Faith in the Nation

Religion, identity and the public realm
in Britain today



With a Foreword by The Prime Minister, Rt Hon Gordon
Brown MP

Edited by

Zaki Cooper and Guy Lodge

© ippr 2008

Institute for Public Policy Research

Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
About the contributors.....	v
Foreword	1
<i>by the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP</i>	
Introduction	3
<i>by Zaki Cooper and Guy Lodge</i>	
Anglicanism.....	15
<i>by Dr John Sentamu, Archbishop of York</i>	
Catholicism.....	27
<i>by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster</i>	
Judaism	33
<i>by Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi</i>	
Islam.....	39
<i>by Dilwar Hussain, Policy Research Centre, Islamic Foundation</i>	
Hinduism	47
<i>by Ramesh Kallidai, Secretary General, Hindu Forum of Britain</i>	
Sikhism	55
<i>by Dr Indarjit Singh OBE, Director, Network of Sikh Organisations</i>	
Conclusion: Secular or sacred? Towards a new settlement between faith and the public realm	61
<i>by Professor Michael Kenny</i>	

Introduction

by Zaki Cooper and Guy Lodge

Faith in the Nation is a unique offering from ippr, as it brings together for the first time a group of senior faith leaders in the same publication to express their views on Britishness, multiculturalism and the role of religion in the public realm. ippr sees these as vital topics to air at the current time, particularly as there are signs of a growing estrangement between the faith communities and a society increasingly characterised by individualism, cultural diversity and various kinds of fragmentation.

This publication is timely, too, given the increasing salience of a number of moral questions and policy issues that relate intimately to religious convictions and commitments. A growing sense of antagonism between some religious voices and a chorus of liberal secularists in the media and elsewhere is spilling over into political debate on such topics as faith schools and human embryology, and has arguably had a stunting impact upon our understanding of the place of faith in democratic society.

An additional rationale for this collection stems from ippr's interest and involvement in debates about the meaning and importance of national identities in our politics and public life. We sense that current debates about Britishness have tended to neglect the integral role of religious traditions and perspectives within the forging of British identity and culture. We have therefore asked all our contributors to reflect on how their own community has been received within, and has contributed to, British society.

Faith, politics and nationhood

It is often said that we now live in an age defined by identity. Many British people assert their faith as one of their primary forms of self-understanding. The 2001 Census, which for the first time asked respondents for their religion, showed that 77.2 per cent of British people identified themselves with a faith. Indeed, that Census and a

number of other surveys show that even if British people are not practising regularly, many feel as if they are affiliated to a religious community. In the 2001 Census the vast majority of those identifying with a faith, 71.8 per cent, did so with Christianity. But many thousands of others ticked the box of one of our minority religions, including Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Sikhism.

But this is not the only reason why faith has begun to matter in politics and public policy. The devices that were detonated by a group of Muslim suicide bombers in London on 7 July 2005, following on from the tragic events of 11 September 2001 in the United States, placed the issue of religious extremism, and radical Islam in particular, firmly on the political agenda. Intense debates have followed – about whether strong religious identification is necessarily in tension with loyalty to Britain, and about whether the UK's national culture and institutions need to do more by way of granting recognition to, and space for, non-Christian cultures. This collection presents an important opportunity to explore whether religious affiliation aids or prevents a healthy process of cultural integration. The latter is now regarded by all sides of the political argument as vital for a society that has seen a significant number of newly arrived migrants land on its shores in recent years.

In fact, the presence of minority faiths in Britain, as a result of migration patterns, is by no means new and, in the case of some faith groups, dates back centuries. The process of inward migration has happened fairly continually since the 1950s. Since that time Britain has changed from a country with one dominant faith to one comprising a large number of faith groups. Britain is a multi-faith and multi-ethnic society. Indeed, when London successfully won its bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games, one of its selling points was the diversity of British society, the perfect microcosm for a global games.

The growth of religion in Britain and across the globe is in stark contrast to most of the predictions made in the 1960s by sociologists, the majority of whom foresaw the inexorable decline of religion. The opposite has happened: there has been a sharp rise in religious affiliations, practices and beliefs. As the American sociologist Peter Berger remarked in his seminal work *The Desecularisation of the World*: 'The world today, with some exceptions ... is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever' (Berger 1999: 2).

The increasing presence and import of religion, both in terms of the identities held by many citizens and in terms of challenges facing public-policymakers, is an important backdrop to this publication. Given the tense stand-off that has developed between ardent secularists and some members of the faith communities, and the neglected potential for discussion of faith and Britishness, we thought it important to promote a more sensitive and less polemical discussion of these issues. More dialogue of this sort needs to happen between the faith communities and different branches of government, as well as with the secular public culture at large; and a deeper dialogue needs to happen between the faith communities themselves, some members of which are relatively unfamiliar with the convictions and interests of other faiths. When commissioning these authors, we were especially interested in whether the media spotlight that has recently fallen upon sharp disagreements about whether there is a role for faith in politics and the public square reflects a deepening estrangement between faith communities and a society shaped by the imperatives of commercial culture, ethno-cultural diversity and a proliferation of lifestyle choices.

Our underlying conviction is that people of faith can and should be constructively engaged by proponents of the secular public sphere, in order to tap the considerable potential that religion offers a society in which other sources of social capital are declining. More specifically, we hope that this publication will help raise the profile of an important question, considered by ippr's Michael Kenny in his concluding chapter: should public officials and authorities be encouraged to become more aware of and familiar with faith, just as many have become more aware of the presence and needs of a wider range of ethno-cultural minorities in British society?

In a context in which there is some evidence that faith communities feel more alienated and apart from the cultural mainstream, we want political progressives and liberals (even those confident in their own secularist outlook) to consider whether this is a healthy and necessary state of affairs. Not only are we in danger of overlooking the distinctive and important contribution that some faith-based activities make to the life and cohesion of communities, but we are also in danger of overlooking vital sources of civic mobilisation and social campaigning. At the same time, we should be clear and open about the real tensions

that exist between the outlook and values of some religiously minded groups and individuals and the ethics of the democratic secular state, which rests upon foundational principles such as freedom of speech, the equality of all before the law, and the right to freedom from discrimination enjoyed by women, lesbians and gays. Whether these values all represent insuperable sources of offence to religious communities – as some of their supporters and opponents maintain – is an issue on which there needs to be more careful reflection.

While commentary has tended to focus exclusively upon supposed sources of fundamental disagreement between the secular public domain and religion, sources of connection and mutual benefit have been somewhat neglected. One of these, we maintain, is the history of Britain's diverse cultural heritage, and the ways in which different faith communities have become accepted presences within it. Another is the complex of experiences and stories that underpin our sense of what it is to be British. Political leaders and others have for a while now been seeking to examine the nature of British identity, and emphasising the need for a common British identity. This has been prompted by the fact that the meaning of Britishness has in recent times become a lot less certain. Whereas once the definitions revolved around the Empire and its institutions (which acted as the glue in the fabric of society), current conceptions are more fluid, pointing towards shared values and the English language. The Government, recognising this, announced in 2008 its desire to forge ahead with a British statement of values.

Communities of faith, many comprising significant numbers of people who are relatively recent arrivals in the UK, have an important perspective on the Britishness debate. They all have experience of balancing different faith and national identities. At their best, faith communities can act as agents of integration, providing the framework for a sense of belonging for ethnic and religious minorities. At their worst, they can foster feelings of separate identity that pull people away from a sense of commitment to the common good.

The distinguished group of faith leaders who have written in this publication have been invited to draw on their respective communities' perspectives, insights and experiences in reflecting on these issues. Some of them are religiously ordained, others are community representatives and figureheads. They write as leading figures in their

communities, all of which are diverse and complex organisms. We have included contributions from leaders who belong to the five largest faiths in the UK: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, although that is not to diminish the contribution of some of the other faith groups in the UK, such as the Bahai's, Buddhists, Jains and Zoroastrians. Reflecting on these contributions, ippr's Michael Kenny provides some concluding insights into the potential policy implications of the issues raised.

Faith and nation – some common themes

By providing faith leaders with a platform to reflect on the relationship between faith and identity, and on the contribution their communities have made to the development of the British story, this publication raises some important issues which we hope will enrich current debate. Although their answers at times differ, it is striking to note the areas of common agreement that surface through the contributors' personal accounts. Below we summarise some of the main themes that arise in the essays that follow.

The role of religion in shaping the British national story

All the faith leaders in this collection emphasise the significant contribution that faith communities have made in helping craft the British national story. Religion, they argue, constitutes an important component of Britishness. The history of Britain is, of course, intertwined with the development of Christianity and this Christian tradition has shaped much of our language, customs and values. As Dr John Sentamu, the Archbishop of York, argues, faith and national identity in Britain have been intimately and institutionally linked for centuries. The historian Linda Colley has argued that the Protestant religion was an integral factor in forging a sense of British national identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Colley 1992). The frustrating thing from Sentamu's perspective is that there is too little awareness of this Christian heritage in contemporary debate.

In his essay, Sentamu reasserts the case for an established Church, so that it can continue to 'serve' the nation, including Britons of other faiths and non-believers, as a whole. He senses little support for disestablishment within other faith groups, a view supported by some of the faith leaders writing here, who show how the set of arrangements

that grew out of the establishment of the Church of England have quietly adapted to allow recognition for a host of other denominations and non-Christian faiths.

All the contributors express an appreciation of the capacity of British culture to allow space for different religious traditions to flourish within it. And all illustrate the impact that Britain's evolution to a multi-faith society has had on our national identity. Faith groups, for example, have transformed the built environment of Britain through the establishment of an array of institutional places of worship, such as churches, mosques and gurdwaras, the latter, for example, numbering more than 200 in Britain today. They have all contributed towards the dynamism of the UK's economy, enriched its culture, and can all boast followers who have achieved great success.

Sir Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, reminds us of the huge contribution the Jewish community has made, for example through its role in the worlds of business, creating leading British brands like Marks and Spencer and Tesco, and culture, with writers such as Harold Pinter, and historians Simon Sharma and Martin Gilbert. Ramesh Kallidai, Secretary General of the Hindu Forum of Britain, shows how Hindus have greatly influenced British society in terms of music, arts, diet and language. Words such as 'pukka' and 'guru' have become part of everyday speech, curry is now a cornerstone of contemporary British cuisine, and thousands of Britons enjoy yoga, the ancient Hindu system of well-being. Meanwhile Dr Indarjit Singh, Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations, reflects on the enormous popularity of the England Sikh left-arm spinner, Monty Panesar.

The challenge of integration

Such examples bear witness to the significant progress that each faith group has made on the road towards cultural integration. That faith groups have made such progress on integration is no accident. All the faith leaders writing here highlight how their faiths teach the importance of civic responsibilities that go beyond the immediate community. All of them can point in their scriptures and holy books to the importance of contributing towards the state and the common good.

Nevertheless, the essays remind us that the move towards successful integration has been a struggle. Many members of faith groups have encountered intolerance and suspicion from sections of

the host community. Sir Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, reflecting on the experience of Jewish integration, writes: 'the process was not painless. Britain had prejudice as well as pride.' Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, reminds us that Catholics were a minority debarred for more than two hundred years from all positions of authority.

The challenge of integration still exists, and importantly this is not just an issue affecting the Muslim community. There is a tendency to overlook the difficult experiences that many Sikhs, Hindus and other 'world faiths' have had in securing recognition in Britain. Echoing Trevor Phillips's stark warning in 2005 that we are 'sleepwalking into segregation', some of the contributors here express concern about the worrying sign that some of our communities, including faith groups, may, to borrow the sociologist Robert Puttnam's terminology, have strong 'bonding capital' but insufficiently developed 'bridging capital'; in other words, while the internal cohesion of individual communities is high, they may not have well-developed links to the rest of society.

Migration is also a central theme to the story of integration – and it is the flows of migration that shape the actual experiences of many. Some faith groups can trace their presence in Britain back to the early modern period; and most have only become significant in numerical terms since the end of the Second World War (an exception is the Jewish community, a presence since 1656, and its major growth taking place between 1880 and 1920). The story of these minority groups, as these essays demonstrate, has a familiar pattern. It is one of arrival, followed by moves towards integration, with the communities establishing institutions and building their socio-economic strength. This is then followed by consolidation, when the communities have to struggle with challenges such as retaining their faith identity, and with prejudice and discrimination.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor contends that the issue of integration is made more pressing as a result of the recent migrations from Eastern Europe, Africa and South America over the past few years. The arrival into Britain of over half a million Catholics from Poland alone, he suggests, will certainly change the face of British Catholicism and Britain more widely. Indeed, many of these essays remind readers that the history of Britain is a history of immigration. The British tradition

is conspicuously multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-denominational. As Daniel Defoe put it in his 1701 poem *The True Born Englishman*, ‘from a mixture all kinds began, that heter’ogeneous thing an Englishman’. The essays here show the role immigrant groups have played in enriching Britishness, and so discredit the claim made by some that immigration and diversity undermine the notion of a shared national identity.

Fostering a shared sense of Britishness and social justice

Successful integration and a loyalty to a shared British national identity can, however, be undermined by social and economic inequality. Some worrying correlations persist between socio-economic circumstances and religious background among different ethnic minorities in the UK, and pose important challenges for those committed to equality and social justice. Dilwar Hussain, Head of the Policy Research Centre at the Islamic Foundation, writes that the lack of educational achievement in sections of his community has had ‘a devastating consequence on employment, community development and even self esteem’ of British Muslims.

A sense of public estrangement? Religion and British national culture

These personal accounts provide compelling evidence that on the whole, most members of religious groups do not feel that they are subject to unfair or arbitrary discrimination because of their beliefs or background. This said, they also contain evidence that faith communities can feel increasingly estranged from certain aspects of British culture. The reasons for this perception vary importantly between different communities. Some Muslims worry about being framed as inveterate opponents of Western values and as potential security threats. For many Hindus and Sikhs, discomfort arises from a perception that their particular needs have been overlooked and a belief that they are, in the words of Ramesh Kallidai, ‘something of an afterthought in public policy and interfaith dialogue’.

Despite such differences there are concerns across faith groups that the position of religion within the national public culture has become more marginal. This perception stems from a complex mixture of factors, including recoil at the rise of hedonistic and narcissistic lifestyles, the decline of traditional family structures, and the steady

secularisation of the national culture that has taken place over the last few decades. A more recent cause reflects concerns that the state has come to adopt a more determinedly 'faith-blind' approach in relation to faith communities, while the development of a rights-based culture, and the extension of egalitarian principles, has come to be regarded by some religious groups as representing a worrying infraction upon the rights of religious organisations to pursue their own convictions (even despite their entitlement to exemptions from some employment regulations). A number of policy debates have flared up over same-sex couples and Catholic adoption agencies, and the Government's desire to advance scientific developments in the fields of embryology and human reproductive technologies, for instance, pitting some members of faith communities against the moral compass of the political elite.

Consequently, some of the contributors are relatively downbeat about some aspects of modern Britain: Murphy-O'Connor writes that, 'Catholics are not alone in watching with dismay as the liberal society shows signs of degenerating into the libertine society', while Sacks suggests rather alarmingly that Britain, in his view, is a much less tolerant society than it was fifty years ago. Of course there is nothing particularly new about faith leaders holding such views. At any point in history, faith leaders have struggled with aspects of modernity, and the Church has often played a role as a social critic. Such perspectives, it should be noted, are, however, balanced by the overriding message contained in these essays, which maintains that by and large Britain remains a welcoming place for people of different faiths and ethnicities.

Faith and secularism

Many of the faith leaders express concern about what they see as the emergence of a more aggressive and well-organised secularism in recent years. Murphy-O'Connor's essay is especially critical of the way he believes that some secularists have come to caricature the role of religion. He writes that: '... religious belief of any kind tends now to be treated more as a private eccentricity than as the central and formative element in British society'. He laments the rise of a fundamentalist streak within the secularist position, which, he suggests, is as intolerant and damaging as religious fundamentalism: 'the intolerance of liberal sceptics can be as repressive as the intolerance of the religious believers'. Such secularisation, he argues, should strengthen and bind

faith communities together. Singh, in his essay, contends that the concept of secularism has been transformed from a belief that in society no one religion should dominate, to one in which religious beliefs and convictions are said to offer nothing positive.

And it's the failure of some to appreciate the role played by faith-based social activism in British society that is something that frustrates the contributors. All emphasise the important role their communities play up and down the country. Sentamu talks about the 'faithful capital' produced by religious groups, citing the 23 million hours of voluntary service undertaken by members of the Church of England each year. Indeed many of Britain's leading charities were founded by Christians, including: Oxfam, Shelter, Amnesty International, Alcoholics Anonymous, Samaritans, Help the Aged, NSPCC, RSPCA, VSO, Relate, National Trust, The Children's Society, National Children's Homes, Barnado's and the modern hospice movement. Acquiring a greater understanding – through greater faith literacy – of the contribution and place of faith in British society is an issue raised throughout this collection.

Critiquing multiculturalism

A theme that arises in several of these contributions concerns a sense of unease with the multicultural framework which, some believe, has shaped how the political elite has responded to the multiplication of religions and cultures associated with inward migration over the last few decades. This has not, it is suggested, generated a durable framework for cultural integration and may have resulted in the tendency to treat cultural and faith groups as static silos, rather than dynamic communities possessing complex and changeable identities.

On the surface, such a critique of multiculturalism is perhaps surprising, especially among minority faiths. However, what is actually being criticised is the idea and experience of cultural segregation, what has been termed 'mosaic multiculturalism' (see Pearce 2007: 51). And this is what Sacks has in mind when he writes that: 'Multiculturalism leads not to integration but to segregation. It deconstructs everything that goes into making a national identity.' Other contributors argue that we need more nuanced and sinuous conceptions of multiculturalism. Dilwar Hussain warns against pursuing a 'straw man' version of multiculturalism which poses a 'singular and

static policy framework’, which he rightly reminds us has never really existed. He argues that, ‘The social model needs to be an ever-changing one and I prefer to think of the process of integration as far more complex and fluid, through which a new narrative of the collective “we” is constantly being re-defined, giving rise to a new vision of being British (and in the context of this discussion a new vision of being Muslim naturally comes into the picture).’

A stronger sense of Britishness

Concerns about multiculturalism are, however, balanced by the view – shared by all contributors in this volume – that society needs to work together to articulate a stronger common sense of British identity. Britishness, they argue, offers an appropriate framework for the integration of ethnic and religious minorities. In contrast, they suggest, a narrowly-defined multiculturalism that promotes ‘parallel lives’ or a form of cultural homogeneity that favours assimilation are both anathema to a multi-national and multi-faith Britain. Britishness can act as a bridge between the legitimate claims of faith identities and a common shared set of national loyalties, which are essential for promoting community cohesion and social solidarity.

Contrary to those who argue that loyalty to a faith group compromises British identity, these contributions show that religious identities can exist alongside, and be consistent with, a common sense of Britishness. In a multi-national state, Britishness has always had to accommodate different national loyalties, and all the faith leaders represented here dismiss the notion that there is any zero-sum relationship between their religious identity and their British identity; hence the use of hyphenated identities, such as ‘British-Muslim’. Faith and national identity are and must be complementary. They can be mutually reinforcing, rather than parasitic competitors.

Sacks, who provides perhaps the strongest call for strengthening national identity, says that all faith groups can unite under the roof of the British story, so long as it is honestly relayed, encompassing the failings and the successes. Sensitively told, he suggests, it is a story of hope.

Towards the secular multi-faith state

This short collection finishes with a concluding essay by ippr’s Michael Kenny who reflects on how religion has re-emerged in national debate,

and how this has prompted discussion about the sort of relationship that should exist between faith and state. Kenny's essay discusses the ways in which the Manichean character of current debates about the role of faith in the public realm stunts our thinking about religion and the different roles that faith plays in the lives of people and their communities. He identifies an abiding suspicion towards, and lack of understanding of, faith within some of our public institutions, as well as the hostility of some religious communities towards the values of the liberal democratic state, as important obstacles that need to be overcome. And he makes the case for a more faith-sensitive, though not necessarily faith-sympathetic, stance to be adopted by democracies like Britain. The nuanced and engaged approach that Kenny recommends is consonant with the argument put forward by other authors in this volume for the importance of different religious traditions and communities to the heritage and culture of the UK. iipr plans to develop the ideas outlined in this concluding essay in an innovative programme of research to be conducted throughout 2009.

Finally, we would like to register our gratitude to the writers of all the articles, and hope that this publication serves as an illuminating contribution to an emerging debate.

References

- Berger P (1999) *The Desecularisation of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, Grand Rapids, Mich, W.B Eerdmans Pub Co.
- Colley L (1992) *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* Yale University Press
- Pearce N (2007) 'Not less immigration, but more integration' in Johnson N (ed.) *Britishness: towards a progressive citizenship* London: The Smith Institute