

Studying religion in the 21st century

Conceptual challenges

An explosion of research

A wide variety of initiatives – drawn mostly from Europe
Note the shift from projects to programmes – denoting a *systematic* approach to the study of religion, supported by strikingly generous funding. Why?

Starting with the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme – its genesis, development, leadership and very real achievements

‘Defining’ the field of religion in the UK

One among many . . .

The Future of the Religious Past: Elements and Forms for the 21st Century (The Netherlands)

http://www.nwo.nl/nwohome.nsf/pages/NWOP_68YGPN_Eng

Religion, the State and Society: National Research Programme, NRP 58 (Switzerland)

www.nfp58.ch/e_index.cfm

The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere: A comparative study of the five Nordic countries (Norway)

<http://www.kifo.no/index.cfm?id=266100>

Religion and Diversity Project, Ottawa (Canada)

www.religionanddiversity.ca/

European parallels

6th and 7th FP programmes of the EC – 22 projects (at least) which deal in some way with religion

Note the emphasis on policy-making, with particularly close attention paid to social cohesion. Why?

A variety of fields (politics, democracy, law, education, welfare), in which key values (tolerance, acceptance, respect, rights, responsibilities, inclusion, exclusion) are explored

Some examples

RELIGARE Religious diversity and secular models in Europe:
Innovative approaches to law and policy

<http://www.religareproject.eu>

VEIL Values, equality and differences in liberal
democracies: Debates about female Muslim headscarves
in Europe <http://www.veilproject.eu>

FACIT Faith based organisations and exclusion in European
cities <http://www.facit.be>

WAVE Welfare and values in Europe: Transitions related to
religion, minorities and gender

<http://www.crs.uu.se/> Click on 'Research' then on 'Concluded
projects'.

University-wide programmes

‘Religion in the 21st Century’

University of Copenhagen (2003-07) – one of four Research Priority Areas established by the university

- 70 initiatives of various kinds

‘The Impact of Religion: Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy’, Uppsala University (2008-18)

- funded jointly by the Swedish Research Council and the University
- 40 researchers from 6 faculties

A step change in activity

Quantity and quality:

- the number of scholars, publications, conferences, conference papers, e-mail lists etc. is considerable
- growing impact outside as well as inside the academy
- new knowledge
- a new generation of scholars – capacity building
- new possibilities for collaboration
- new fields of study

Examples of new fields/collaborations

The interface of law and religion – increasingly important

- constitutional law – who is/ is not recognised?
- human rights – competing agendas/ who decides?
- family law – addressing the ‘unimaginable’

Healthcare and religion

- the contradictory nature of the field
- the growing importance of spirituality versus the fear of visible religion
- the case of a Devon nurse (2010)

A series of conceptual challenges

State versus market – the implications of territory

[Public versus private]

[Religious versus secular – a note on the post-secular]

The contingent nature of all of these – the tensions between the concepts listed above are all worked out in specific contexts, which (in itself) makes a difference to the outcome

A related question: the approaches of different disciplines

State versus market

State churches (Europe) versus free standing congregations (the US)

Public utility versus private initiative

- in *both* welfare and religion – one of the key findings of WREP and WaVE

To what extent can the public utility endure?

At one level an institutional question

Underlying mentalities, however, are harder to shift, and inform public expectations of (say) healthcare and religion

(Inter-)related questions

What is the relationship between territory and choice?

- drawing on David Martin's recent work on Pentecostalism
- a contingent question

Will the nation state (a territorial unit) endure in the face of economic, political and legal pressures?

- a continuing discussion both within and beyond the EU

Territory and choice 1

David Martin (2011):

‘On a global scale, the big contrast is between transnational voluntarism, and those forms of religion based on a closed market, which regard certain territories as their peculiar and sacred preserve, and assume an isomorphic relation between kin, ethnicity and faith.’

The consequences for choice, change or conversion – all of which alter in meaning accordingly

Territory and choice 2

The global variations run along a scale from North America, where changing one's religion is normal, to Western Europe and Australasia where it is accepted but not all that frequent, to the Arabian Peninsula, which is by definition Islamic territory

With this in mind, what tools/concepts will help us most in understanding the European case?

GD – the persistence of the public utility and the mentality that goes with this, despite the onset of the market

Two models of church life

One governed by choice, encouraged by a growing religious market, especially in larger cities where parish boundaries most easily erode

One in which latent belief and nominal membership dominate the scene, sentiments activated at particular moments in individual or collective life or for particular reasons (vicarious religion)

The two models are in partial tension but they also overlap

- a gradual rebalancing

The persistence of the nation state

A question that goes well beyond religion, which lies at the heart of the debate about Europe/ the EU

Different understandings of the nation state

Implications for methodology

LW – methodological nationalism

Did we endorse or escape this in the WREP and WaVE projects? What about NOREL?

Is there an alternative?

LW – religion and the market (two recent papers)

Linda Woodhead 1

‘Religion: From state to market’ (2010)

The market is a ‘good’ thing; it is largely liberating,
especially for women

Eight consequences of this market for religion

GD – this is largely a matter of emphasis

Evaluating holistic spirituality; the importance of the middle
ground

A growing market in religion – but in Europe (in the Nordic
countries) this takes place in distinctive territory

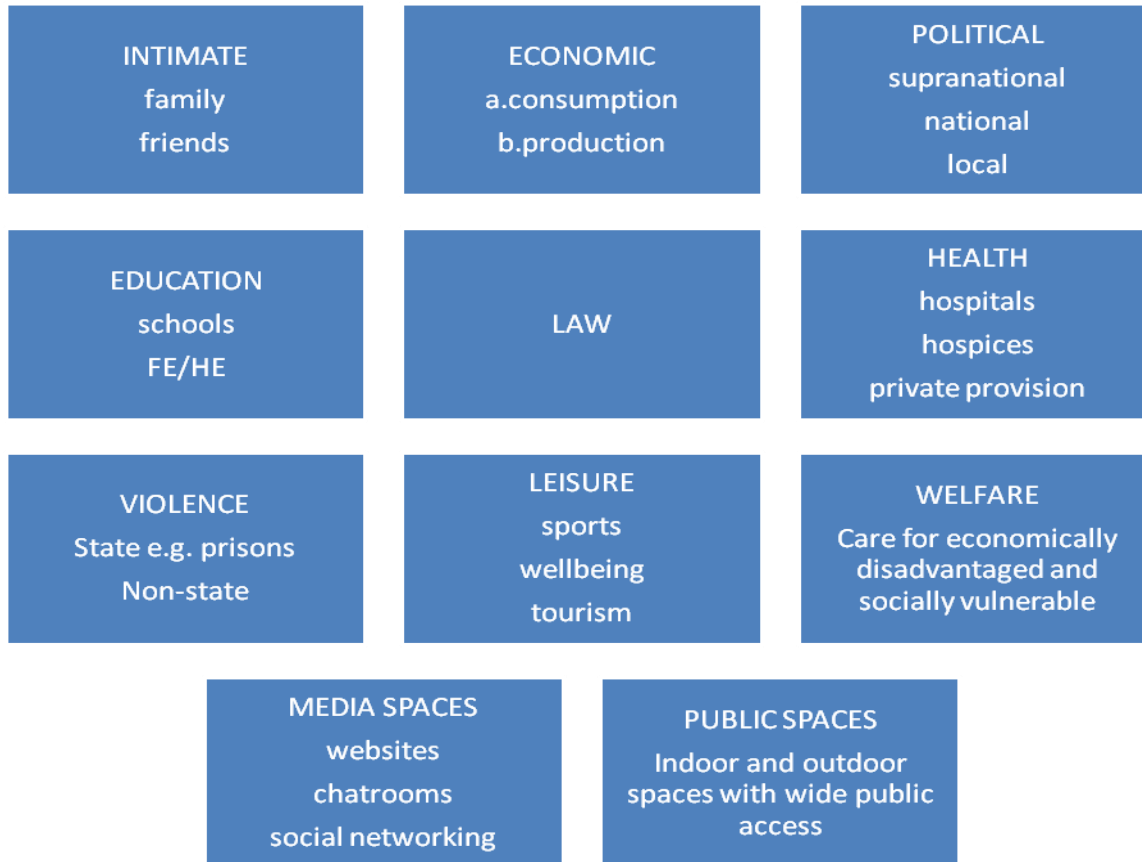
Linda Woodhead 2

‘Accommodating Religion in Public Space: Looking beyond existing models’

- a paper prepared within the context of RELIGARE
- critical of existing models
- a new approach: ‘domains’ rather than levels

The idea of levels is no longer satisfactory – given that the state extends right down into civil society and ‘private’ life, just as ‘private’ life and civil society constantly interfere with state matters

Domains of public religion



Religious versus secular 1

Are these mutually constituted or diametrically opposed
Comparative approaches – the secular is as varied as the
religious

The secular as pro-active rather than residual

Some examples:

Britain/ England (see next slide), France and Norway

Both France and Norway have powerful secular lobbies but
they are very different from each other

All of these are very different from the US

Religious versus secular 2

Increasing emphasis on the secular (rather than the religious) as the focus of study

Secularity versus secularism

See Yahya Birt, Dilwar Hussain and Ataulloh Siddiqui (eds), *British Secularism and Religion* (Kube Publishing 2011)

The default case

What is considered 'normal' and for what reasons?

A Greek illustration

A modern democracy

In a modern democracy, religion should neither dominate, nor disappear

Gone are the days of an over-bearing Establishment; equally suspect is a secular state that allows no space for the seriously religious

How to strike the right balance in 21st century Europe?

- revisiting the research questions
- an inter-disciplinary endeavour
- the challenge to social science

Revisiting the research question

The assumption that secularization is a necessary feature of modernization and that both processes will occur in the rest of the world as they have done (more or less) in Europe is false

The underlying question:

Is Europe secular because it is modern, or is Europe secular because it is European?

The importance of middle-range theory – integrating theory and empirical research

An inter-disciplinary endeavour

Bearing in mind that inter-disciplinary activity has many parallels to comparative work; both are:

Demanding – in terms of time/ patience/ effort

- inevitable misunderstandings

Rewarding – in terms of:

- new contacts/ new friends/ new teams
- new horizons/ new ways of thinking/ new insights
- seeing your own country/discipline in perspective

Engaging the mainstream 1

A further step: the need to penetrate the philosophical *core* of the mainstreams of economic, political and social science and to enquire what difference the serious study of religion might make to their ways of working

A challenge in that most of them have emerged from the European Enlightenment – and are, therefore, underpinned by a markedly secular philosophy of social science

- some notable exceptions

Engaging the mainstream 2

Jürgen Habermas makes precisely this point (2006) in terms of his own writing

Insisting (in 2008) that others have a similar responsibility – i.e. to rethink the foundations of their respective fields in order to accommodate the implications of religion in their analyses of modern societies

- accepting religion as it is, not as we would like it to be
- driven by the data, not by the assumptions of overly secular social science