Moderate secularism, religion as identity and respect for religion

TARIQ MODOOD[1]

One of the features of the 'cultural turn' in social studies and of identity politics is that, while many think one or both may have gone too far, it is now commonplace that the classical liberal separation of culture and politics or the positivist–materialist distinctions between social structure and culture are mistaken. Yet religion – usually considered by social scientists to be an aspect of culture – continues to be uniquely held by some to be an aspect of social life that must be kept separate from at least the state, maybe from politics in general and perhaps even from public affairs at large, including the conversations that citizens have amongst themselves about their society. This religion–politics separationist view, which is clearly normative rather than scientific, can take quite different forms, either as an idea or as practice, and can be more or less restrictive, I shall call 'secularism'. While acknowledging the variety of forms it can take, I want to argue that one of the most important distinctions we need to make is between moderate and radical secularism. The failure to make this distinction is not just bad theory or bad social science but can lead to prejudicial, intolerant and exclusionary politics. I am particularly concerned with the prejudice and exclusion in relation to Muslims recently settled in Britain and the rest of western Europe, but the points I wish to make have much more general application.

The chapter has three parts. Firstly, I argue at an abstract level that it is not necessary to insist on absolute separation between religion and politics, though of course it is a possible interpretation of secularism. Secondly, radical separation does not make sense in terms of historical actuality and contemporary adjustments. Thirdly, given that secularism

---

[1] A version of this chapter was published as 'Moderate Secularism, Religion as Identity and Respect for Religion', Political Quarterly, Vol. 81/1 (January 2010), pp. 4–14.

does not necessarily mean the absence of state–religion connections, I explore five possible reasons for the state to be interested in religion.

1.   Radical and moderate secularism

If secularism is a doctrine of separation then we need to distinguish between modes of separation. Two modes of activity are separate when they have no connection with each other (absolute separation); but activities can still be distinct from each other even though there may be points of overlap (relative separation). The person who denies that politics and religion are absolutely separate can still allow for relative separation. For example, in contemporary Islam there are ideological arguments for the absolute subordination of politics to religious leaders, as (say) propounded by the Ayatollah Khomeni in his concept of the *vilayat-i-faqih*, but this is not mainstream Islam. Historically, Islam has been given a certain official status and pre-eminence in states in which Muslims ruled (just as Christianity or a particular Christian denomination had pre-eminence where Christians ruled). In these states Islam was the basis of state ceremonials and insignia, and public hostility against Islam was a punishable offence (sometimes a capital offence). Islam was the basis of jurisprudence but not positive law. The state functions – legislation, decrees, law enforcement, taxation, military power, foreign policy and so on – were all regarded as the prerogative of the ruler(s), of political power, which was regarded as having its own imperatives, skills, etc., and was rarely held by saints or spiritual leaders. Moreover, rulers had a duty to protect minorities. Similarly, while there have been Christians who have believed in or practised theocratic rule (e.g., Calvin in Geneva), this is not mainstream Christianity, at least not for some centuries.

Just as it is possible to distinguish between theocracy and mainstream Islam, and theocracy and modern Christianity, so it is possible to distinguish between radical or ideological secularism, which argues for an absolute separation between state and religion, and the moderate forms that exist where secularism has become the order of the day, particularly western Europe, with the partial exception of France. In nearly all of western Europe there are points of symbolic, institutional, policy and fiscal linkages between the state and aspects of Christianity. Secularism has increasingly grown in power and scope, but a historically evolved and evolving compromise with religion is the defining feature of western European secularism, rather than the absolute separation of

Table 1. *Radical and moderate views regarding the separation of religion and the state*

Religion–state	Radical secularism	Radical public 'religionism'	Moderate secularism	Moderate public 'religionism'
1. Absolute separation	Yes	No	No	No
2. No separation	No	Yes	No	No
3. Relative separation	No	No	Yes	Yes

religion and politics. Secularism does today enjoy a hegemony in western Europe, but it is a moderate rather than a radical, a pragmatic rather than an ideological, secularism. Indeed, paradoxical as it may seem, Table 1 shows that mainstream Islam and mainstream secularism are philosophically closer to each other than either is to its radical versions.

2. Is there a mainstream Western secularism?

Having established at an abstract level that mutual autonomy does not require separation, I would like to take further the point I have already begun making that while separation of religion and state/politics is a possible interpretation of secularism, it does not make sense in terms of historical actuality and contemporary adjustments. Rajeev Bhargava argues that 'in a secular state, a formal or legal union or alliance between state and religion is impermissible' and that 'for mainstream Western secularism, separation means mutual exclusion'.[2] What does he mean by 'mainstream Western secularism'? His argument is that the secularism in the West has best developed in the United States and France, albeit in different ways. Americans have given primacy to religious liberty and the French to equality of citizenship but in their differing ways they have come up with the best thinking on secularism that the West has to offer. 'These are the liberal and republican conceptions of secularism. Since these are the most dominant and defensible Western versions of

[2] R. Bhargava, 'Political Secularism', in John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig and Anne Phillips (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 636–55; reproduced in G. Levey and T. Modood (eds.) *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 82–109.

secularism, I shall put them together and henceforth designate them as the mainstream conception of secularism.'[3] Bhargava is critical of this conception of Western secularism, which understands secularism in terms of separation and 'mutual exclusion'; this is common ground between us and so, in my terms, he is a 'moderate' not a 'radical' secularist. He has principled arguments about the nature of secularism and believes that the Indian polity today better exemplifies these arguments than any Western polity (points which I do not address here). My concern here is with his characterisation of Western secularism. I believe he is mistaken in arguing that the US and France are the best that the West has got to offer; nor are they the dominant/mainstream conceptions. His argument is based on a poor understanding of the British experience (which I know best) and of the western European experience more generally. Most of western, especially north-western Europe, where France is the exception not the rule, is best understood in more evolutionary and moderate terms than Bhargava's characterisation of Western secularism. They have several important features to do with a more pragmatic politics; with a sense of history, tradition and identity; and, most importantly, there is an accommodative character which is an essential feature of some historical and contemporary secularisms *in practice*. It is true that some political theorists and radical secularists have a strong tendency to abstract that out when talking about models and principles of secularism. If this tendency can be countered, British and other European experience ceases to be an inferior, non-mainstream instance of secularism but becomes mainstream and politically and normatively significant, if not superior to other versions.

Accommodative or moderate secularism, no less than liberal and republican secularism, can be justified in liberal, egalitarian, democratic terms, and in relation to a conception of citizenship. Yet it has developed a historical practice in which, explicitly or implicitly, organised religion is treated as *a potential public good* which the state can in some circumstances assist in realising. This can take not only the form of an input into a legislative forum, such as the House of Lords, on moral and welfare issues; but also to being social partners to the state in the delivery of education, health and care services; to building social capital; or to churches belonging to 'the people'. So, even those who do not attend these churches, or even sign up to their doctrines, feel they have a right to use them for weddings and funerals. All this is part of what secularism

---

[3] R. Bhargava, 'Political Secularism', in G. Levey and T. Modood (eds.) *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship*, p. 93.

means in most west European countries and it is quite clear that this is often lost in the models of secularism deployed by some normative theorists and public intellectuals. This is clearer today partly because of the development of our thinking in relation to the challenges of multicultural equality and the accommodation of Muslims, which highlight the limitations of the privatisation conception of liberal equality, and which sharpen the distinction between moderate/inclusive secularism and radical/ideological secularism. I have in my work expressly related the accommodative spirit of moderate secularism to the contemporary demands of multiculturalism.[4]

I would argue that it is quite possible in a country like Britain to treat the claims of all religions in accordance with multicultural equality without having to abolish the established status of the Church of England, given that it has come to be a very 'weak' form of establishment and the Church has come to play a positive ecumenical and multi-faith role.[5] Some other relevant considerations are nicely captured by John Madeley in his characterisation of an important strand in contemporary antidisestablishmentarianism: 'a residual opposition to and prejudice against what is seen as the unnecessary destruction or removal of those sets of arrangements, which have been found in many parts of Europe to make for the accommodation of religious diversity. It is not a doctrinal or ideological "-ism", more a rationalisation for a particular brand of cultural conservationism, which does not like to see old landmarks unnecessarily done away with and claims they are not to be valued as mere heritage but because they actually serve useful purposes . . . virtual quasi-establishment.'[6] There is nothing in this that necessarily jeopardises equality of respect. Indeed, in approaching the reform of institutions, multiculturalists should be particularly sensitive to the ways that the historical and the inherited can be valued in a variety of ways, including giving people a sense of belonging and national identity.

Faced with an emergent multi-faith situation or where there is a political will to incorporate previously marginalised faiths and sects and to challenge the privileged status of some religions, the context-sensitive and conservationist response may be to pluralise the state–religion link

---

[4] T. Modood, *Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007) and 'Is There a Crisis of Secularism in Western Europe?' *The Immanent Frame*, August 2011: http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/08/24/is-there-a-crisis-of-secularism-in-western-europe.

[5] T. Modood (ed.), *Church, State and Religious Minorities* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997); B. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 257–61.

[6] J. Madeley, 'Religion, Politics and Society in Europe: Still the Century of Antidisestablishmentarianism?' *European Political Science*, Vol. 5 (2006), p. 404.

rather than sever it. This indeed is what is happening across many countries in western Europe – despite critics on both the Left and the Right, especially among the radical secularists and the Islamophobic populists.[7] In relation to the British case one can see it in a lot of incremental, ad hoc and experimental steps. For example, some years ago Prince Charles, the heir to the throne and to the office of Supreme Governor of the Church of England, let it be known he would, as monarch, prefer the title 'Defender of Faith' to the historic title 'Defender of *the* Faith'.[8] More recently, in 2004 the Queen used her Christmas television and radio broadcast – an important national occasion, especially for the older generation, on one of the most important Christian days of the year – to affirm the religious diversity of Britain. Her message was, in the words of Grace Davie, '[r]eligious diversity is something which enriches society; it should be seen as a strength, not a threat; the broadcast moreover was accompanied by shots of the Queen visiting a Sikh temple and a Muslim center. It is important to put these remarks in context. The affirmation of diversity as such is not a new idea in British society; what is new is the gradual recognition that religious differences should be foregrounded in such affirmations. Paradoxically, a bastion of privilege such as the monarchy turns out to be a key and very positive opinion former in this particular debate.'[9]

If such examples are regarded as merely symbolic then one should note how British governments have felt the need to create multi-faith consultative bodies. The Conservatives created an Inner Cities Religious Council in 1992, chaired by a junior minister, which was replaced by New Labour in 2006 with a body having a much broader remit, the Faith Communities Consultative Council. Moreover, the new Department for Communities and Local Government, which is represented in the Cabinet, has a division devoted to faith communities. Or better still, consider an example of a high-level proposal (not yet acted upon and which may not be acted upon) that combines the symbolic and practical at a constitutional level, namely the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords (2000). It argued that the House of Lords, the UK upper chamber, should be 'a relatively non-polemical forum for national debate, informed by the range of different

[7] T. Modood and R. Kastoryano, 'Secularism and the Accommodation of Muslims in Europe', in T. Modood, A. Triandafyllidou and R. Zapata-Barrero (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship: A European Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[8] J. Dimbleby, *Prince of Wales, A Biography* (London: Little Brown, 1994), p. 528.

[9] G. Davie, 'Pluralism, Tolerance, and Democracy: Theory and Practice in Europe', in T. Banchoff (ed.), *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 232–3.

perspectives which its members should have'. Members should, among other things, have 'the ability to bring a philosophical, moral or spiritual perspective to bear'. The Royal Commission believed that it was time to end the hereditary principle of membership of the House but it did not recommend a wholly elected chamber. It thought that its ideals would be better met if part of the House continued to be unelected. The latter includes one of the elements of 'establishment', namely the right of twenty-six Anglican bishops to sit in the Lords. The Royal Commission endorsed this principle but argued that the number of Anglican bishops should be reduced to sixteen and that they should be joined by five representatives of other Christian denominations in England, five seats should be allocated to other Christian denominations in the rest of the UK and a further five should be used to include the presence of non-Christians. Hence, the Commission sought to make up the democratic deficit that arises when national forums are completely dominated by party politicians by proposing not just an increase in the width of religious representation but also in the numerical increase from twenty-six to thirty-one seats.

Such proposals might be regarded as a form of reforming or pluralising establishment without abolishing it. It suggests that 'weak establishment' can be the basis for moving towards 'multicultural equality' without constitutional disestablishment.[10] I am not contending that some version of establishment (weak or plural) is the only way or the best way of institutionalising religious pluralism in Britain or similar countries. My point is that a reformed establishment can be one way of institutionalising religious pluralism. In certain historical and political circumstances, it may indeed be a good way: we should be wary of ruling it out by arguments that appeal to 'the dominant and defensible western versions of secularism'.[11] Stronger still: such institutional accommodation of minority or marginal faiths runs with the grain of mainstream western European historical practice.

3. Why the state might be interested in religion

Having then established that the separation of state and religion is neither a necessary feature of secularism in terms of abstract logic nor in terms of mainstream practice, I would now like to consider some of the reasons why the state might be interested in religion. I leave aside

[10] Cf. V. Bader, *Secularism or Democracy: Associational Governance of Religious Diversity* (Amsterdam University Press, 2007).
[11] Bhargava, 'Political Secularism', 93.

state attacks on religion such as those by the Jacobins, Soviet Union or Communist China that are characteristic of totalitarian secularism. I shall confine myself to democratic examples and to affirmative reasons. I offer here five types of policy reasons in a typology of my own devising. The issue I am exploring is: what kind of reason is a particular proposal or institutional purpose appealing to, what distinguishes it and what kind of legitimacy might it have? I am not arguing that these lines of reasoning lead to obvious policy results – that would require a much greater degree of contextualisation than I offer here – and I am not trying to determine policies. While I appreciate of course that all actual cases can consist of a mix of reasons, my typology of reasons is as follows:

i.   Truth
ii   Danger
iii. Usefulness
iv. Identity
v.   Worthy of respect.

I shall discuss them in this order but will give most attention to the last two: religion as identity and respect for religion.

4.   Policy based on religion as truth

If we consider 'policy' here to mean the state as a whole (i.e., as a holistic structure), then the idea that it is based on a putative truth as understood by a religion is clearly not compatible with democracy and certainly not a democratic multiculturalism. This is not necessarily because it is religious but because it is a totalitarian ideology; the same would apply to totalitarian secularism. As is the case with Plato's ideal republic based on the truth as understood by a philosophical Guardian, such totalitarian states would also fail to respect the autonomy and integrity of politics and/or religion.

   There is a real sense, as Plato noted, that democracy is based on opinions not truth. Having said that, it does not follow that there may be no scope for truth. Consider the famous declaration from the US Declaration of Independence (1776): 'we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'. This truth, however, was not reiterated in the Constitution (1787) itself and so is at least one step

removed from specific policies and laws; as I earlier suggested, this is similar to most Muslim-majority states, which do conceive of the relationship between Islam and the state, namely as foundational rather than in terms of positive law.

What about specific policies that are alleged to be based on religious truth, such as policies relating to abortion or genetic engineering? I am not sure, but in principle I think such policies probably would be acceptable if the policy proposal were subject to a democratic process, implemented within a framework of individual rights and allowed for exemptions on grounds of conscience.[12]

So, specific policies based on religious truth are probably compatible with democracy and multiculturalism, but in any case some of the remaining ways in which policies relate to religion are compatible. Of any proposal based on religious truth, we might want to ask if it is justifiable by reference to any of the others below, rather than dismiss it per se.

Just as we can study physics without having a view as to whether God exists, so the state may not have a view on whether God exists or whether any religion is true. But that does not mean that the state is not interested in religion.

5.   Policy based on religion as danger

This might seem odd to include here as I had said I was only interested in 'affirmative' reasons. I include it because where religion in general, or a particular religion or aspect of a religion, is thought to be dangerous and in need of state control – for instance, because otherwise social peace or unity is at serious risk – control might mean supporting favoured religious institutions. We see this in the case of how one of the most intolerant (semi-) democratic secular states, Turkey, has a whole government department devoted to propagating, funding and staffing a particular version of Islam.[13] The French state does something similar in relation to versions of Catholicism, Protestantism and Judaism and is trying to do the same with Islam.[14] The British government has for some years been seriously considering whether and how it needs to be involved in the training of imams, and on a more dramatic scale, it had to work with Catholics and Protestants, clerics as well as others, in order to end political violence in Northern Ireland.

---

[12] See Bader, *Secularism or Democracy.*

[13] Interestingly, under the rule of the moderate Islamist party, the Truth and Development Party (AKP), Turkey has recently started moving away from its intolerant state secularism towards a more Western European version.

[14] J. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State and Public Space* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

So, you do not have to think religion is benign in order to support it or interact with it; in any event, support and interaction involve regulation.

6. Policy based on religion as utility

Religion may be a very personal thing but it can produce social outcomes, some of which may be desirable or undesirable in the view of the state, and so the state might wish to encourage or discourage religion. For example, suppose it were true that religious people are less likely to commit crime or less likely to have a marriage breakdown, with all of its attendant problems; this may be regarded as a reason to encourage the relevant religion regardless of whether one believed in it or not oneself. Some people have believed that whilst adults can do without religion, it nevertheless is pedagogically important; that it may be a good way to inculcate morals because it provides an imaginative scaffolding for moral precepts, or assists the development of the imagination in general.[15] A research project I have been involved in shows that amongst young British Pakistani working-class males there are high drop-out rates from school but the rates are lower amongst those who say they practise Islam.[16] So, any of these may be, at least hypothetically, reasons for the state to support religious institutions in the hope that, however indirectly, certain outcomes would follow that would lessen the scale of certain social problems and reduce the cost of remedies to the public purse.

More directly, the state may observe religious organisations as serving the needy – the poor, the aged, the homeless, etc. – either just within their own communities or more generally and these may be economical ways of providing certain services which the market could not provide and which the state could provide less economically or with more political difficulties. So the state may choose to fund these religious organisations.[17]

---

[15] R. G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis or The Map of Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 1924), pp. 124–5.

[16] C. Dwyer, T. Modood, G. Sanghera, B. Shah and S. Thapar-Björkert, 'Educational Achievement and Career Aspiration among Young British Pakistanis', in T. Modood and J. Salt, *Global Migration, Ethnicity and Britishness* (London: Palgrave, 2001), Pt III, pp. 177–204; cf., T. Modood, 'Capitals, Ethnic Identity and Educational Qualifications', *Cultural Trends*, Vol. 13/2, No. 50 (June, 2004), pp. 87–105.

[17] Some of this thinking is part of Prime Minister Cameron's 'Big Society' idea, which, ironically, by empowering and resourcing local neighborhoods and religious

7. Policy based on religion as identity

This may work in relation to identity at a number of levels.

7.1. Individual identity

For example: I am an X (e.g., a taxpayer) and so want Y (e.g. a certain kind of school). The same identity appeal can be generalised: we are X and so want Y.

7.2. Public or civic identity

This may refer to an identity as a polity or a country: we are a Christian country and so Christianity should be taught in schools or be referred to in the Constitution and so on. This does not have to be a particularly conservative argument. The same logic is present in the following: we are no longer a Christian country and have to remake the national identity to reflect new inclusions, or we need to have multi-faith schools or a plurality of schools within the state system and reflected in the national curriculum.

7.3. Minority identity

The state may note that certain religious groups and identities are stigmatised. An example is the finding of the recent Pew Survey (2008) of public opinion that a quarter of Britons and Americans, nearly four in ten French, and half of the Spaniards, Germans and Poles surveyed displayed hostility to Muslims. As with other kinds of stigmatised, marginalised or oppressed minorities, there may be a project to turn these negative identities into positive ones. This would be particularly important if the minorities in question valued this aspect of their identity and especially if they valued it more than was the norm in that society. This is precisely the case in Britain, for example. The 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey shows that while those who say they have no religion are disproportionately from the advantaged and the powerful (i.e., they are more likely to be white, male and middle class) and only 17 per cent of whites say that religion is important to their self-identity, the numbers for black and South Asian respondents are 44 and 61 per cent respectively.[18] Religion, then, is clearly an ethnic feature of Britain, not just in the sense that most whites are Christians

---

communities, seems to be an example of the 'state multiculturalism' policies he deplores (T. Modood, 'Multiculturalism and Integration: Struggling with Confusions', in H. Mahamdallie, *Defending Multiculturalism* (London: Bookmarks, 2011).

[18] M. O'Beirne, *Religion in England and Wales: Findings from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey* (London: Home Office Research Study 274, 2004), p. 18.

and most non-whites are not, but in terms of the personal, social and political *salience* and *significance* of religion.

State action in this context could include:

a. Anti-discrimination measures in relation to religious groups
b. Even-handedness in relation to resources

Where one or some religions, perhaps for historical reasons, have a certain status, these may need to be made available to the previously absent or excluded minority faiths too. This can be done without strict 'equality'. For example, as the leading Anglican prelate, the Archbishop of Canterbury crowns the British monarch. Other faiths could be invited to share in this ceremony in some way without necessarily all having the same grand role (and even if they did, the question would be in what order). In other cases one might judge that even-handedness required granting a special status to some religious groups but not to the population in general. This could be an exemption such as those enjoyed by the male, turban-wearing Sikhs in Britain in relation to the laws on motorcycle/bicycle helmets and 'hard hats' on building sites. Moreover, one can imagine that some special provisions might be created for a minority as a disadvantaged group, perhaps even without there being a corresponding provision for the majority faith. For instance, in Britain certain advisory and consultative bodies have been created in relation to Muslims but not other religious groups because it is perceived that Muslims have certain problems (e.g., 'radicalisation') that others do not have. This is comparable to the fact that we have a Minister for Women but not a Minister for Men. Another example would be that in March 2008, Britain repealed the blasphemy law, which related only to Christianity, because of the general feeling, shared by many Christians, that it did not need this protection, while an offence of religious hatred has been created because of a perception of vulnerability on the part of some minorities (though technically Christians are covered by it).

It should be noted that minority identity protection or recognition can apply not just where the majority is of one religion but also where it is non-religious. Some people seem to think that if there is not one populous religion then there is an absence of hegemony or domination, but there could be a secularist or even an anti-religion hegemony in relation to which a minority provision may be sought.

c. Criterion of inclusivity

Just as we sometimes use gender, race and ethnicity as criteria to test the inclusivity of an institution (e.g., a workplace, a university or a

legislature), so it may be thought appropriate to use religious identity. Just as a civil service under-represented by female managers might need a remedial policy, so similarly it might need a policy to address the under-representation of Muslims in senior posts. The issue is not confined to numerical presence but crucially extends to the symbolic remaking of public/common/national identities. Minority religious identities may need to be explicitly recognised in our sense of what the country is and will be in the future. This is about minorities such as Muslims as co-citizens and worthy of respect as co-citizens; it is not in any way an endorsement of a particular religion such as Islam (that would be the first case, policy based on religion as truth).

d. Dialogue/multilogue

The whole process of minority identity recognition should be dialogical, or more precisely, multilogical, because there are many parties and all are entitled to speak. That is the way of finding out about identities, negotiating compromises, the remaking of new identities and so on, but also of identifying the problems and discussing and finding solutions.

Someone might be opposed to minority identity and recognition for a number of reasons and I would like to address one, namely that minority identities are decomposing and becoming privatised so the kind of identities needed for recognition or accommodation are not available. Actually, I draw on this sociology myself and, while I think it complicates recognition, I don't believe it kills it off.[19]

In his seminal essay, 'New Ethnicities', Stuart Hall argued that there has been a shift from taken-for-granted, singular cultural, ethnic and collective identities to self-conscious identities – the 'innocent black subject' is a thing of the past (if that).[20] People are active in identity formation; indeed, racial and ethnic identities are not merely ascribed, they are a form of agency in all senses of the term. Interestingly, this means, though Hall did not draw this implication, that a commonly drawn contrast between race as ascription and religion as choice no longer holds.

Not only are these identities impure, hybridic, fluid and varied but for some their significance will be *associational* rather than merely or primarily *behavioural*. For example, in the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, virtually everybody with an ethnic minority background said their ethnic identity was important to them and large majorities said

---

[19] Modood, *Multiculturalism*.
[20] S. Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in J. Donald and A. Rattansi, eds., *'Race', Culture and Difference* (London: Sage, 1992), pp. 252–9.

their religious identity was important to them, but some of these individuals did nothing distinctively 'ethnic' in behavioural or 'religious' terms.[21] This can have policy implications; for example, while about 50 per cent of Muslims wanted Muslim faith schools within the state sector, only half of these individuals said they would send their own children to one if it was available locally (in 1994). This may not be just about abstract fairness (if Christians have state-funded schools, so should Muslims). Some Muslims can see their own identities in some ways as negativised (i.e., there is something wrong with Muslims). Perhaps some kind of sentiment such as 'Most Muslims are problematic but you are ok!' It blocks the way for the 'ok Muslims' too for they may think: if that is the way you think about Muslims or if joining you is to accept that view then I cannot join you.

Perhaps 'new ethnicities' identities are not so radically new. For example, participation in religious activities can be for a variety of reasons, including some that could be regarded as less than fully religious. For example, it is interesting that in describing how he came as an adult to embrace the Christian faith, Barack Obama does not mention Jesus or the Resurrection but rather, the hope and dignity it has given to African Americans to survive their personal and social suffering, to find 'a way out of no way'. Or consider how some Jewish synagogue attendance or Hanukkah or Sabbath observation may be for family and community rather than faith reasons – and so may raise time off and bank holiday-type issues for someone who is not a deep believer. In any case, 'new ethnicity' associational identities have a particular political force at the moment with some minority identities.

Olivier Roy has applied this kind of sociology to Muslims internationally. He suggests that Muslims, especially younger Muslims and those in the West, are much less likely than their parents or previous generations to do or believe things just because it is the done thing in their faith community.[22] They are less likely to be customary or conventional or obedient Muslims and more likely to think about and question what it means to be Muslim and to come up with their own answers, which may radically vary amongst themselves as well as with customary or authoritative Islam. I think this is right but calling it 'individualisation', as Roy does, is quite misleading, for in some contexts that is seen as a corollary of 'privatisation' and 'secularisation'.

---

[21] T. Modood, R. Berthoud, J. Lakey et al., *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997), pp. 334–8.

[22] O. Roy, *Globalised Islam* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2004).

These identities are not private. Increased personal and associational agency is a constitutive feature of these identities but the questions being asked by the relevant individuals – What does it mean to be a Muslim? What kind of a Muslim am I? – typically are open to public projections of identity commitment and contestations. What are at stake are indeed public identities and so contemporary British and other Muslim assertiveness can at least partly be understood in terms of identity politics and accommodated within a civic multiculturalism and existing secularist institutional accommodation of religion.

8. Policy based on respect for religion

There is an image of religion as organisations or communities around competing truths, which are mutually intolerant, which perhaps even hate each other's guts. There is some truth in that, in some times and places, but the opposite is more important. Let me illustrate this by reference to the decision of my late father, a devout and pious Muslim, that I should attend the daily Christian non-denominational worship at my secondary school. When I told him that I could be exempted from it, like the Jewish children, if he sent in a letter requesting this, he asked what they did during this time each morning. When I told him that some read comics, some took the opportunity to catch up with home-work and some even arrived late, he said I should join the assembly. He said that as Christians mainly believe what we believe, I should join in fully but whenever it was said that Jesus was the Son of God, I should say to myself, 'no, he is not'. It is a view that can perhaps be expressed as it is better to be in the presence of religion than not and so the value of religion does not simply reside in one's own religion. One's own religious heritage is to be cherished and honoured but so are those of others and the demise of any religion is a loss of some sort.

I would suggest that historically it has been a prevalent view in the Middle East and South Asia that respect for the religion of others has extended to joining in the religious celebrations of others, borrowing from others, syncretism and so on.[23] Respect for religion does not, however, require syncretism and can be found amongst contemporary Muslims in the West. Reporting on a recent Gallup World Poll, Dalia Mogahed and Zsolt Nyiri write of Muslims in Paris and London that

---

[23] E.g., M. Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

their 'expectations of respect for Islam and its symbols extend to an expectation of respect for religion in general' and add that recently 'Shahid Malik, a British Muslim MP, even complained about what he called the "policy wonks" who wished to strip the public sphere of all Christian religious symbols.'[24] It is an attitude that the West (where mono-religion has been the historical norm) can certainly learn from, as I think some people of my generation realised and which is evidenced in the interest in the spiritualities of 'the East'. Respect for religion is clearly beyond mere toleration but also beyond utility for this valuing of religion and respect for the religion of others, even while not requiring participation, is based on a sense that religion is a fundamental good in itself and part of our humanity at a personal, social and civilisational level: it is an ethical good and so to be respected as a feature of human character just as we might respect truth-seeking, the cultivation of the intellect or the imagination, or artistic creativity or self-discipline, not just because of its utility or truth. We can think of religion as a good of this sort regardless of whether one is a believer or not, just as we can think of music or science as a good whether we are musical or scientific or not. A person, a society, a culture, a country would be poorer without religion. It is part of good living and, while not all can cultivate it fully, some do and they should be honoured and supported by others.

This view could be part of Religion as Truth but is not dependent upon it or any kind of theism because it can be a feature of some form of ethical humanism. I think it can be justified within a philosophy of human plurality and multi-dimensionality of the kind to be found in, for example, R. G. Collingwood's *Speculum Mentis* or Michael Oakeshott's *Experience and its Modes*.

Respect for religion is, however, clearly more than respect recognition or recognition of religious minorities, and while I am mainly concerned to argue for the latter I am open to the former, especially as I believe that respect for religion is quite common amongst religious believers (the opposite of much so-called 'new atheism') and I worry about an intolerant secularist hegemony. There may once have been a time in Europe when a powerful, authoritarian church or churches stifled dissent, individuality, free debate, science, pluralism and so on, but that is not the present danger. Since the 1960s, European cultural, intellectual and political life – the public

---

[24] D. Mogahed and Z. Nyiri, 'Reinventing Integration: Muslims in the West', *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 29/2 (2007), www.harvardir.org/articles/1619/ (last accessed 8 February 2008).

sphere in the fullest sense of the word – is increasingly becoming dominated by secularism, with secularist networks and organisations controlling most of the levers of power. The accommodative character of secularism itself is being dismissed as archaic, especially on the centre-left. Thus, respect for religion is made difficult and seems outlandish but may be necessary as one of the sources of counter-hegemony and a more genuine pluralism. Hence, respect for religion is compatible with and may be a requirement of a democratic political culture.

I appreciate that this may seem to be, and indeed may be a form of, 'privileging' religion. For in this idea that the state may wish to show respect for religion, I am going beyond not just toleration and freedom of religion but also beyond civic recognition. Nor am I simply pointing to the existence of overlaps and linkages between the state and religion. The sense of 'privilege' may not, however, be as strong as it may seem. After all, the autonomy of politics is the privileging of the non-religious, so this is perhaps qualifying that non-secular privileging. Moreover, it is far from an exclusive privileging. States regularly 'privilege' the nation, ethnicity, science, the arts, sport, economy and so on in relation to the centrality they give it in policy-making, the public resources devoted to it or the prestige placed upon it. So, if showing respect for religion is a privileging of religion, it is of a multiplex, multilogical sort; and it is based on the recognition that the secular is already dominant in many contemporary states.

In any case, I offer my comments on respect for religion more tentatively than in relation to some of the other elements of my typology. While each of them may have a place within a moderate secularism, we clearly need to separate the five positions and differentiate between their normative justifications and policy implications, but we may still wish to appeal to more than one of them at a time or for different policy measures; or perhaps to appeal to some of them without repudiating the others.

References

Bader, V., *Secularism or Democracy: Associational Governance of Religious Diversity* (Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

Bhargava, R., 'Political Secularism', in John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig and Anne Phillips (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 636–55; reproduced in G. Levey and T. Modood (eds.) *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 82–109.

Bowen, J., *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State and Public Space* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

Collingwood, R. G., *Speculum Mentis or The Map of Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 1924).

Davie, G., 'Pluralism, Tolerance, and Democracy: Theory and Practice in Europe', in T. Banchoff (ed.) *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Dimbleby, D., *Prince of Wales, A Biography* (London: Little Brown, 1994).

Hall, S., 'New Ethnicities', in Donald, J. and Rattansi, A. (eds.), *'Race', Culture and Difference* (London: Sage, 1992).

Madeley, J., 'Religion, Politics and Society in Europe: Still the Century of Antidisestablishmentarianism?' *European Political Science*, Vol. 5 (2006), pp. 395–406.

Mazower, M., *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

Modood, T. and Salt, J., *Global Migration, Ethnicity and Britishness* (Geneva: Centre for Security Policy, 2001), Pt III, pp. 177–204.

Modood, T. (ed.), *Church, State and Religious Minorities* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997).

  'Capitals, Ethnic Identity and Educational Qualifications', *Cultural Trends*, Vol. 13/2, No. 50 (June 2004), pp. 87–105. no 50, June.

  Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

  'Multiculturalism and Integration: Struggling with Confusions', in H. Mahamdallie, *Defending Multiculturalism* (London: Bookmarks, 2011).

  'Is There a Crisis of Secularism in Western Europe?' *The Immanent Frame*, August 2011: http://blogs.ssrc.orh/tif/2011/08/24/is.there-a-crisis-of-secularsim-in-western-europe/.

Modood, T., Berthoud, R., Lakey, J., Nazroo, J., Smith, P., Virdee, S. and Beishon, S., *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997).

Modood, T. and Kastoryano, R., 'Secularism and the Accommodation of Muslims in Europe', in Modood, T., Triandafyllidou, A. and Zapata-Barrero, R. (eds.) *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship: A European Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

Mogahed, D. and Nyiri, Z., 'Reinventing Integration: Muslims in the West', *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 29/2 (2007), www.harvardir.org/articles/1619/.

Oakeshott, M., *Experience and its Modes* (Cambridge University Press, 1933).

O'Beirne, M., *Religion in England and Wales: Findings from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey* (London: Home Office Research Study 274, 2004).

Parekh, B., *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

Pew Global Attitudes Survey, *Unfavourable Views of Jews and Muslims on the Increase in Europe* (2008), available at http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/262.pdf.

Roy, O., *Globalised Islam* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2004).

Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords, *A House for the Future* (London: HMSO, 2000).