

Introduction: A Framework for Discussion

The introduction to this book is divided into two sections. The first establishes the factors that must be taken into account if we are to understand the complexities of religion in twenty-first century Britain. In so doing, it draws extensively on two decades of research and writing in the field which began with the first edition of *Religion in Britain since 1945* and has continued since (see Davie 1994, 2000, 2002, 2006, 2007a). The second section sets out the plan for the book as a whole, indicating how the ideas already introduced reflect both the material covered in the first edition and more recent developments in the field.

Religion in Modern Britain: The Factors to Take into Account

There are six rather different features, which – taken together – contribute to a better understanding of the place of religion in modern Britain, seeing this as a distinctive variation on a European theme. The crucial point to remember is that they push and pull in different directions. The six factors are:

1. the role of the historic churches in shaping British culture;
2. an awareness that these churches still have a place at particular moments in the lives of British people, though they are no longer able to influence – let alone discipline – the beliefs and behaviour of the great majority of the population;

4 *Chapter 1*

3. an observable change in the actively religious constituencies of Britain, which operate increasingly on a model of choice, rather than a model of obligation or duty;
4. the arrival into Britain of groups of people from many different parts of the world, and with very different religious aspirations from those seen in the host society;
5. the reactions of Britain's secular elites to the increasing salience of religion in public as well as private life;
6. a growing realization that the patterns of religious life in modern Europe (including Britain) should be considered an 'exceptional case' in global terms – they are not a global prototype.

Each of these will be taken in turn in the paragraphs that follow. They will be drawn together in a short conclusion to this section.

Cultural heritage

The starting point reflects the undisputed role of Christianity in shaping British culture over the long term, remembering that other factors (notably Greek rationalism and Roman organization) must also be kept in mind. One example will suffice to illustrate this fact: the Christian tradition has had an irreversible effect in determining the most basic categories of human existence (time and space) in this part of the world. Both week and year follow the Christian cycle, even if the major festivals of the Christian calendar are beginning to lose their resonance for large sections of the population. Many of them are nonetheless retained as a framework for public holidays. Sunday, moreover, remains distinctive despite the fact that the notion of a 'day of rest' has largely been discarded.

The same is true of space. Wherever you look in Britain, Christian churches predominate, some of which retain huge symbolic value for the populations that surround them. And from the largest city to the smallest village, British people orient themselves with reference to religious buildings even if they seldom enter them for worship. The whole of Britain, moreover, is divided into parishes – a territorial model with civic as well as religious implications. For centuries, the parish determined the parameters of life for the great majority of British people from the cradle to the grave. Its significance has diminished over time, but the residues still resonate, sometimes in unexpected ways. This is not to deny that in some parts of the country (notably the larger cities) the skyline is fast becoming an indicator of growing religious diversity. Britain is changing, but the legacies of the past remain deeply embedded in both the physical and cultural environment.

The historic churches

The physical and cultural presence of the historic churches is one thing; a hands-on role in the everyday lives of British people quite another. Commentators of all kinds agree that the latter is no longer a realistic, or indeed a desirable, aspiration. That does not mean that these institutions have entirely lost their significance as markers of religious identity. But how should we understand their current role? It is at this point that I have drawn time and time again on one of the key themes of *Religion in Britain since 1945* – the notion of ‘believing without belonging’. My thinking, however, has continued to develop, requiring a second conceptual tool, termed ‘vicarious religion’ (Davie 2000, 2007b, 2008). Both concepts have helped me to understand the continuing role of traditional religious institutions in a society which is both increasingly secular and increasingly diverse and will be developed at length. Only an outline is given here.

One of the most striking features of religious life in this country remains the mismatch between different measurements of religiousness. There exists, first of all, a set of indicators which measure firm commitments to (i) institutional life and (ii) *credal* statements of religion (in this case Christianity). These indicators, moreover, are closely related to each other in so far as institutional commitments – in the form of regular religious practice – both reflect and confirm religious belief in its ‘orthodox’ forms.¹ The believing Christian attends church to express his or her belief and to receive affirmation that this is the right thing to do. Conversely, repeated exposure to the institution and its teaching necessarily disciplines belief.

No observer of the current religious scene disputes the fact that these dimensions of British religion are interrelated and in serious decline. Fewer British people go to church than used to and fewer believe in a credal sense (see Chapters 3 and 4 for an extended discussion of these profiles). As a result, the idea of a common narrative (of Christian liturgy or of Christian language and metaphor) becomes more and more tenuous almost by the day. What, then, are the consequences of this situation? The complex relationship between belief in a wider sense and practice is central to this discussion, for it is abundantly clear that a manifest reduction in the ‘hard’ indicators of religious life has not, in the short term at least, had a similar effect on the less rigorous dimensions of religiousness. For the time being at least, the latter remain relatively strong though by no means immutable. Between half and two-thirds of British people assent to ‘belief in God’ in more general terms, and roughly similar proportions touch base with the institutional churches at some point in their lives, often at times of crisis. It is precisely this state of affairs which was captured by the phrase ‘believing without belonging’. And given the rapidity with which this passed into both the sociological and pastoral literature, it clearly struck a chord.

Right from the start, however, I had misgivings – mainly because the expression ‘believing without belonging’ separates one kind of religiousness (belief) from another (belonging). It evokes less well the point already made: namely that both belief and belonging can be ‘hard’ or ‘soft’. The notion of ‘vicarious religion’ was developed with this in mind. By vicarious is meant the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but appear to approve of what the minority is doing. The first half of the definition is relatively straightforward and reflects the everyday meaning of the term ‘vicarious’ – that is, to do something on behalf of someone else. The second half is best explored by means of examples. It captures rather better than ‘believing without belonging’ the legacy of a historically dominant church.

Religion can operate vicariously in a wide variety of ways. For example, churches and church leaders perform ritual on behalf of others (at the time of a birth or a death for instance); if these services are denied, this causes offence – the more so amongst those who do not attend church with any regularity. Church leaders and churchgoers believe on behalf of others and incur criticism if they do not do this properly. Once again it is, very often, the occasional churchgoer who articulates this disquiet most clearly, and the more senior the church leader, the worse the problem gets. Third, church leaders and churchgoers are expected to embody moral codes on behalf of others, even when those codes have been abandoned by large sections of the populations that they serve. Churches, finally, can offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies. If the latter were not the case, it is hard to understand the persistent scrutiny of their positions on a wide variety of topical issues, from changing views regarding the nature of sexuality to the difficult moral questions surrounding birth and death – which reflect in turn the meaning of life itself. All of these points will be expanded in Chapter 4.

An alternative way of illustrating the nature of vicarious religion is to consider the place of religion and the continuing role of religious institutions in European societies when they face the unexpected or the tragic. The reactions provoked by the death of Princess Diana in August 1997 offer a revealing illustration: what happened in Britain in the week following the car accident in Paris cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as either rational or secular, but nor was it conventionally religious. So what was it? One point is clear: a great deal of the improvised and markedly heterogeneous rituals that emerged at that time took place in the vicinity of centrally placed churches. It was these churches, moreover, that housed books of condolence and facilities for lighting candles – ordinary people queued for hours to make use of these resources – and it was the established church (the Church of England) that took responsibility for her funeral.

Even more important, however, is the fact that the reactions to Princess Diana's death (or any number of more recent equivalents) are simply 'writ-large' versions of what goes on in the everyday lives of individuals and communities all the time. People die, sometimes unexpectedly, and communities suffer, sometimes with little apparent justification. What is to be done on these occasions and who is to do it? Once again the taken-for-grantedness of this situation is the crucial point: the presence of the churches and their availability to ordinary people are simply assumed.

From obligation to consumption

Where, though, does this leave Britain's diminishing, but still significant churchgoers – those who maintain the tradition on behalf of the people described in the previous section? Here an observable change is clearly taking place, best summarized as a gradual shift from a culture of obligation or duty to a culture of consumption or choice. What was once simply imposed on substantial sections of the population (with all the negative connotations of this word), or inherited (which has a rather more positive spin), becomes instead a matter of personal choice. Religiously active individuals now go to a church or to another religious organization because they choose to, sometimes for a short period or sometimes for longer, sometimes regularly and sometimes occasionally, but they feel little *obligation* either to attend that church in the first place or to continue if they no longer want to.

As such, this pattern is entirely compatible with vicariousness: the historic churches need to be there in order that those who wish may attend them if they feel inclined. Their nature, however, gradually alters – a shift that is discernible in both practice and belief, not to mention the connections between them. There is, for example, an easily documentable change in the patterns of baptism in the Church of England. The overall number of baptisms has dropped dramatically in the post-war period, evidence once again of institutional decline. In England, though not yet in the Nordic countries, or indeed in parts of southern Europe, baptism is no longer seen as a ritual associated with birth, but has become increasingly a sign of membership in a chosen voluntary community. In other words membership of the historic churches is changing in nature. They are becoming more like the growing number of free or independent churches that can be found all over Britain, though more so in some places than in others. Voluntarism is beginning to establish itself *de facto*, regardless of the constitutional legacies of the church in question.

A second point follows from this. What are the most popular choices of twenty-first century Britons when it comes to religious attendance? The answers to this question are doubly interesting in the sense that they not only indicate the strengths and weaknesses of the present situation, but

reveal that the predictions of an earlier generation (both scholars and church people) were largely incorrect. In the current period the actively religious are disproportionately drawn to two kinds of religious organization: charismatic evangelical churches on the one hand and cathedrals or city-centre churches on the other. The former epitomizes firm commitments, strong fellowship and conservative teaching, balanced by the warmth of a charismatic experience. The latter allows a much more individual (even anonymous) expression of religious commitment: in ‘cathedral-type’ churches the appeal is often associated with the beauty of the building, the quality of the music and the traditional nature of the liturgy. The important point to grasp is that in both cases there is a noticeable *experiential* element, albeit very differently expressed.

In the mid post-war decades, something rather different was envisaged. Conservative teaching was out of fashion and cathedrals were often classed as ‘dinosaurs’ – less and less relevant to the modern world and disproportionately expensive to maintain. They are still expensive to maintain, but the data indicate that they are increasingly attractive to late modern populations, whether they come as regular worshippers, less regular worshippers, tourists or pilgrims – noting that the lines between these categories are distinctly porous. Conversely, rather more liberal forms of Protestantism, noticeably fashionable in the 1960s, have not fulfilled their promise. There are, of course, important exceptions to this rule but by and large the purely cerebral has less appeal in the twenty-first century than many people thought would be the case.

It is abundantly clear, moreover, that a large sections of current ‘religion’ lies outside the churches altogether – indeed for growing numbers of people, even the word ‘religious’ is considered negatively. A new vocabulary has emerged. Specifically, the many and varied forms of the ‘spiritual’ now present in Britain must be taken into account, as indeed must the increasing tendency towards ‘bricolage’ – that is the building of individual packages (both religious and spiritual), which reflect the diversity of late modern lifestyles rather better than historic forms of religiousness. And once started, the logic of choice is relentless. It is almost certain to include a range of secular options which are as diverse as their religious counterparts. No longer are we in a situation where limited forms of religiousness confront their unbelieving alter egos. We find instead an almost infinite range of possibilities spreading along a continuum, which creeps incrementally from the religious or spiritual at one end to the more rather than less secular at the other. The grey areas towards the middle need very careful scrutiny.

A footnote concludes this discussion, which will be developed at length in Chapter 7. It raises an important conceptual question. To what extent can this situation be described as a ‘market’, and what are the implications of this vocabulary for our understanding of religion in modern Britain? Is it helpful to talk in these terms or do we need a more subtle frame of reference?

New arrivals

The fourth factor introduces a very different kind of diversity; it reflects the growing importance of other-faith populations now present in many parts of Britain, brought about by immigration. The initial influx was linked to an urgent need for labour in the mid post-war decades as west European economies, including Britain, expanded fast. Significantly this population is now in its third or fourth generation, to the extent that many of those who arrived as part of the labour force some 40 to 50 years ago are now about to retire. A second point should also be kept in mind. Compared with their counterparts in Europe, Britain's other-faith communities are relatively diverse and include Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus from the sub-continent as well as a distinctive group of Christians from West Africa and the Caribbean.² It is important to note that the small but significant Jewish population came earlier and for rather different reasons.³

An entirely different constituency found its way to Britain at a later stage. The 2004 (or in some cases 2007) enlargements of the European Union permitted the relatively easy movement of people from the east to the west of Europe which resulted in an influx of European workers, notably a sizeable Polish contingent. Once again the motivation was largely economic and involved push as well as pull factors. Wages in the east remained low and, at least in the initial stages, Britain was noticeably more welcoming than the member states of continental Europe.⁴ Polish migrants, moreover, were a relatively skilled group of workers who were able to make their way in Britain; many (if not all) of them weathered the dip in the economy following the 2008 financial crisis. That said the incentives to return home continue to grow as the Polish economy expands.

New arrivals, whatever their motivation, bring with them new ways of being religious – an argument that is more easily appreciated in a comparative perspective. The crucial point to grasp is that the consequences of growing religious diversity vary from place to place, and depend as much on the host society as on the new arrivals themselves. Britain and France offer an instructive example. As we have seen, immigration in Britain is relatively varied both in terms of provenance and in terms of faith communities. Britain is also a country where ethnicity and religion criss-cross each other in a bewildering variety of ways. Third, Britain has traditionally been more ready than many of her European neighbours, to embrace diversity – a tradition that stretches back to a colonial past where 'indirect rule', through or by means of a local elite, was the norm. The situation in France is different: here immigration has come largely from the Maghreb, as a result of which France houses one of the largest Muslim communities in Europe – an almost entirely Arab population. Rightly or wrongly, Arab and Muslim have become interchangeable terms in popular parlance in France. France,

moreover, firmly rejects the notion of communitarianism (*communautarisme*), in the sense that French citizens are welcomed as such but their primary allegiance is to France, not to an intermediate group, be it religious or another. Once again the resonance with colonial policy is clear: French rule in the colonies meant ‘direct rule’ from Paris.

Beneath these differences lies however a common factor: the growing presence of other faith communities in general and of the Muslim population in particular, is challenging some deeply held assumptions. The notion that faith is a private matter and should, therefore, be proscribed from public life – notably from the state, from the education system, from the work place and from welfare – is widespread in Britain as it is in most of Europe. Conversely, many of those who are currently arriving in this part of the world have markedly different convictions, and offer – simply by their presence – a challenge to the status quo. The implications of this statement involve almost every aspect of British society, not least the law.

Secular reactions

The interactions between host society and the newly arrived described in the previous section raise an additional question: that is the extent to which secular elites make use of these sometimes difficult negotiations to articulate alternatives (ideological, constitutional and institutional) to religion. In order to understand this point fully, it is important to grasp three things. First, that the secular requires our attention as much as the religious; it is impossible to study one without the other. Second, that the more strident secular voices – often those of an atypical elite – have very largely emerged as a *reaction* to the renewed attention to religion in public debate. And third, that these groups, just like their religious counterparts, vary markedly from place to place – unsurprisingly given that the nature of the religious and the nature of the secular go hand in hand.

Key in this respect is an appreciation of the secularization process – specifically, an awareness that this has taken place differently in different European countries (Martin 1978). For example, what in Britain, and indeed in most of northern Europe, occurred gradually (starting with a de-clericalization of the churches from within at the time of the Reformation), became in France a delayed and much more ideological clash between a hegemonic, heavily clerical church and a much more militant secular state. The result was ‘la guerre des deux Frances’ (Catholic and *laïque*), which dominated French political life well into the twentieth century. The legacies still remain in the form of a self-consciously secular elite, and a lingering suspicion concerning religion of all kinds – the more so when this threatens the public sphere. The fact that these threats are no longer Catholic but Muslim does not alter the underlying reaction.

Britain has evolved differently and is on the whole more tolerant – a term to be explored in due course (pp. 177–78). But in Britain too can be found some sharply secular voices. The group that has become known as the ‘new atheists’ may not be all that numerous, but their voices are strident and at times dominate public debate. Two of their leading members – Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens – are British.⁵ For this reason alone, their claims require our attention. Equally noteworthy is the fact that their publications sell in millions. It should not be assumed that everyone who reads these books necessarily agrees with the argument, but a significant number do. It follows that the core argument of new atheism – that religion should not simply be tolerated but should be countered, criticized and exposed by rational argument – must be taken seriously. It has important implications for policy.

Is Europe an exceptional case?

The final factor in this section introduces a different perspective and is better addressed in European rather than British terms. It is however central to the argument of this book. It starts by reversing the core question: instead of asking what Europe (including Britain) is in term of its religious existence, it asks what Europe is not. It is not (yet) a vibrant religious market such as that found in the United States; it is not a part of the world where Christianity is growing exponentially, very often in Pentecostal forms, as is the case in the global south; it is not a part of the world dominated by faiths other than Christian, but is increasingly penetrated by these; and it is not for the most part subject to the violence often associated with religion and religious difference in other parts of the globe – the more so if religion becomes entangled in political conflict. Hence the inevitable, if at times unsettling conclusion: that the patterns of religion in this part of the world, notably its relative secularity, might be an exceptional case in global terms.

This inference is all the more disturbing if we remember that the paradigms of social science emerge from the European Enlightenment and are very largely premised on the notion that modern societies are likely to be secular societies. It follows that the traditional, European-based understandings of social science may be markedly less suitable for the study of religion in other parts of the world. Indeed they are not always helpful nearer home given the intricacies of religious life in the early years of the twenty-first century. It is this point that underpins the theoretical discussion found in the final chapter of this book.

Gathering the threads

Each of the above factors merits careful consideration in its own right – the purpose of the following chapters. One way of drawing them together,

however, is to recall the two rather different things that are happening at once in twenty-first century Britain, an idea already introduced in the Preface (p. xiii). On the one hand are the increasing levels of secularity – or simply indifference – in modern Britain, which lead in turn to an inevitable decline in religious knowledge as well as in religious belief. On the other is a series of increasingly urgent debates about religion in public life, prompted by the need to accommodate new populations who bring with them very different ways of being religious. As we have seen, this largely unexpected combination is difficult to manage – unsurprisingly given the clashes of interest that are embedded in such encounters. How then can we proceed? The starting point resides in the clearest possible articulation of the present situation and a better appreciation of the pressures that lie beneath this. This book has been written with this in mind.

Religion in Britain: A Revised Road Map

The 1994 edition of *Religion in Britain since 1945* looked first at the changing economic, political and social context of modern Britain and then at the religious ‘generations’ that succeeded one another in the post-war period. This edition does likewise, bearing in mind that some of the material regarding the European context has already been covered and that the number of generations is growing. The final chapter of Part I (entitled ‘Preliminaries’) sets out the facts and figures relating to religion in this country. It is conceived primarily as a basis for operations but will also make reference to the media: as sources of information in their own right; as an indicator of change; and as a cautionary tale. We should not believe everything that we read in the papers.

The chapters that followed in the first edition formed the core of the original book, and dealt first with the religious constituencies found in modern Britain before looking in detail at the ‘ordinary Gods’ of British society – the luxuriant undergrowth of belief, much of which was far from orthodox. The subsequent chapter brought these points together in an extended discussion of believing without belonging. The later chapters dealt with a variety of topics: religious transmission, emphasizing the significance of age and gender and the place of religion in the school system; the ramifications of church and state as a framework for discussion; and the role of religious professionals, both lay and ordained. The book concluded with a theoretical discussion of the changing nature of a late modern society (in this case Britain) and the place of religion in this.

The substance of this edition is differently constructed. It derives from the material set out in the early part of this chapter and is divided into three parts. The first (Part II) concentrates on the ‘old model’: that is, the legacies

of the past, recognizing that these still constitute the parameters of faith in this country. Such a statement does not mean that nothing has changed – it most certainly has; it does however recognize that our past is distinctive and continues to influence the present. For this reason, the initial chapter in this part of the book contains a fuller discussion of the cultural heritage of Christianity, and the frames of reference that have emerged from this: namely a tendency to believe without belonging and to engage vicariously both with religion and religious institutions.

The importance of territory and the links between church and state (the arrangement known as ‘establishment’ in England) are central to this discussion, in that they are part of the apparatus delivered to us by history and need to be recognized as such. Unsurprisingly, they are currently under strain given the changing nature of British – more specifically English – society. So what is to be done? A careful analysis of the pros and cons of the present situation is the obvious starting point. Only then will it be possible to think towards the future. The rather different situations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are equally important – all of them are evolving but not always in the same ways. The specificity of the Northern Irish case needs firm underlining; things are better than they used to be in this corner of the United Kingdom but sectarianism remains a salient theme. A more developed discussion of two selected localities (York and London) concludes this discussion.

Inevitably, debates about church and state spill over into other aspects of society. The role of chaplains offers an interesting starting point in this respect. To what extent is the ‘representative’ role traditionally associated with chaplaincy still viable in late modern society? Four examples will be taken to illustrate the changes taking place: health care, prisons, the military and higher education. The last of these raises the question of religious literacy and the role of the university in public debate, and in so doing it opens the discussion about the place of religion in education per se. A whole range of issues emerge at this point, including the desirability or otherwise of faith schools, the widely ignored legal requirement to hold a daily act of worship in all schools, and the role of religious education both in and beyond the classroom. The significance of religious education will be considered in the greatest detail, in light of the comments set out above. The essential point is easily summarized: is it, or is it not, possible to reverse the decline in religious knowledge that has become not only pervasive, but damaging to public discussion? What is the role of religious education in this process and can anything be done to make it more effective? It is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of these questions.

At least some reference must also be made to the continuing disputes regarding religious professionals. These will focus largely but not exclusively on the Church of England. It is abundantly clear that an exclusively

male priesthood no longer fits current aspirations. The process of change, however, is far from smooth. Interestingly the first edition of *Religion in Britain* dealt at some length with the debates surrounding the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Church of England. The inevitable corollary – the expectation that women would in due course become bishops – constitutes an important theme in this one. It has provoked considerable public discussion both inside and outside the churches. Questions of sexuality are equally apposite; they are, however, distinct from questions of gender and must be considered in their own right. Both issues not only reflect the changing nature of British society, but the very different situation that pertains in those parts of the world where Christianity (including Anglicanism) is noticeably strong. The role of the Church of England as the mother church of the Anglican Communion will be pertinent at this point.

Parts III and IV look forward rather than back. Part III is concerned with the visible mutation that is clearly taking place in the religious life of this country, summarized above as a shift from a culture of obligation or duty to a culture of consumption or choice. This can be seen in any number of ways. The chapters that develop this discussion work outwards. They deal first with the options available in the Christian ‘sector’ of this country, recognizing that the range is almost as wide within the denominations in question as it is between them. ‘Conservatives’ exist in almost every branch of Christianity as indeed do liberals; alliances (at times unholy ones) are constructed accordingly. Who gains and who loses in this complicated network of interests? An answer has already been hinted at in the early part of this chapter but it needs to be interrogated in more detail. Why is it that conservative churches in almost all denominations are doing relatively well? And why is it that the experiential is noticeably more attractive than the cerebral to late modern worshippers? Attention must also be paid to the counter-intuitive nature of these findings and to the difficulties that they present for social science.

A second question follows from this. Given the growing significance of choice, how should these various churches react? Should they play to their respective strengths or should they continue to provide what might be termed a ‘comprehensive’ service? Should they all do the same thing? It is at this point that the past begins to resonate, in that churches that are locked into territory (the parish) are necessarily restricted. Have they, however, a corresponding advantage and how might this be exploited? Territory, moreover, has indirect as well as direct implications and at every level of society. Not only is it the organizational *raison d’être* of the historic churches, it also implies a certain way of working – one which is more like a public utility than a market. The tensions between the two models – the public utility on one hand and the market on the other – need careful scrutiny. They reveal a great deal about the religious life of this country.

The following chapter extends this discussion, finding its focus in what has become known as the spiritual, rather than the religious. A good place to start in this disparate field is to recognize the very different understandings of pluralism that can be found not only in the realities of religious and/or spiritual life in this country, but in the literature (both academic and other) that surrounds this. Once this is straight it will be easier to address the range of possibilities that are open to the British 'seeker' and how he or she might determine a spiritual pathway. A comprehensive coverage of all the options available is not possible – it would require a book in its own right – but consideration will be given to at least the more prominent new religious movements and to the huge variety of ideas that are subsumed under the rubric 'new age' (the most usual nomenclature in the 1990s).

Equally important, however, are the proliferations of the spiritual as they have developed in more recent decades and the hybrid cases that emerge as boundaries are crossed and re-crossed in this continually evolving field. The interesting, but sometimes delicate, relationships between the Christian churches and newer forms of spiritual life form one focus for this discussion. A second can be found in the tensions that arise between the material (i.e. the realities of everyday life) and the spiritual – strains that are captured in the following questions. To what extent is the market in the spiritual an extension of the market per se? Once material needs have been satisfied, individuals turn to the spiritual: the buying and selling continues. Or is it more accurate to see the spiritual as the obverse of the market in so far as it is indicative of non-material rather than material values? There is more to life than shopping. It might of course be possible to combine the two approaches, in the sense that individuals make use of the distinctively spiritual techniques to become more effective economic operators.

Part IV of the book introduces a different kind of religious diversity: namely the growing number of other-faith communities now present in many parts of Britain. Drawing on the facts and figures presented in Chapter 3, an accurate presentation of the current situation is a necessary starting point. It is true that the other-faith populations are growing in this country, but two points must be kept firmly in mind: these communities – though expanding – are both modest in size and varied in nature. Neither element is recognized in a great deal of public debate, which very quickly becomes confused. Inaccuracies, some of them deliberate, abound. Once the basics are in place, however, it will be possible to look more carefully at individual communities, paying particular attention to the Muslim minority for reasons that will be carefully explained. The discussion will be set within a wider consideration of the public and the private dimensions of religiousness and how these are evolving in twenty-first century Britain.

At this point, a clarification is helpful. It is not true that religion was once firmly privatized and has suddenly become a public phenomenon (it always

has been). It is true that religion has become visible in new ways. The presence of other-faith communities in general and of Muslims in particular has acted as a catalyst in this respect. Unsurprisingly, this has provoked a wide variety of responses. One of these can be found in a re-affirmation of the secular, both in society as a whole and in the social scientific study of this, demonstrating a further slippage in the taken-for-granted. For the greater part of the post-war period, both policy-makers and analysts assumed that religion would gradually fade from public discussion but continue to exist in the private lives of significant numbers of individuals. To say that the reverse has happened is an over-simplification but there is truth in this. The crucial point is the following: fewer people are now religious, but those who are take their religious lives more seriously – a shift with important implications for public as well as private life. Hence a new configuration: one in which both the religious and the secular are more consciously articulated. Both, moreover, are varied. The preoccupations of the new atheists form one, but only one, focus for this discussion.

Chapter 10 considers the implications of diversity (both religious and secular) for a wide variety of public institutions. As ever the religious spills over into every aspect of economic and social life: it cannot be contained in a discrete or private sector however much the more extreme secularists might want this to be the case. How then should religion be managed in, say, economic life, including the everyday demands of the workplace? What is and is not 'reasonable' and (realistically) how far does this depend on the state of the economy, specifically the current rate of unemployment? The implications for politics, welfare and the health service are equally important and will be confronted in their turn. It is these issues, moreover, that lie behind the striking growth in the attention to religion by various branches of the law. Particular cases will be looked at to illustrate this point, which will also make reference to the European Court of Human Rights – raising once again the markedly ambiguous relationship between Britain and Europe.

This discussion reflects the necessarily arbitrary nature of the divisions within this book. It is clear that there is a new urgency in the debates about religion and public life, and that many of these have been triggered by a specific and relatively recent combination of events. It is equally clear that the manner in which these issues are addressed is framed by the legacies of the past – a point at which the distinctiveness of the United Kingdom, and within this, of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland must be taken into account. The law evolves in a particular context, one aspect of which concerns the links between church and state. It is for this reason that the 'pressure points' which emerge in Britain are noticeably different from those that have developed in other European countries, not to mention the United States. This means – inevitably – that the fourth section of this book builds very directly on the second and that the divisions between them are somewhat

artificial. The discussion of the law could equally well follow that on church and state; the discussion of welfare could be joined to that on education. Most importantly of all, the material in both sections must take account of the fact that religion as such is changing in nature – a situation in which paradoxes abound. At one and the same time, religion is both more diffuse and more controlled, more experimental and more constrained, more personal and more exposed.

How then can we make sense of this complex phenomenon, which persists despite the predictions of social science? The final chapter of the 1994 edition of this book contained a theoretical discussion of the (then) current situation, as I understood this. In itself, it provoked considerable debate. This edition does likewise, but the theoretical content is noticeably different – a fact that reflects both the changing situation as such and the development of debate in the field. Both, moreover, must take into account an enormous amount of new material, which will be fully referenced as the chapters develop. The step-change represented by the Religion and Society Programme and its European equivalents (introduced in the Preface – p. xiii) is central to this discussion, recognizing that these initiatives are themselves part of the story. Why they took place at the time that they did is as significant as the abundance of material that emanated from them. A second theme runs parallel: that is the noticeably Eurocentric nature of the paradigms that have emerged in this field. To what extent are these adequate in a world in which religion grows, at times exponentially – a fact with inevitable consequences for the situation in Britain, the primary focus of this book?

Notes

- 1 'Orthodox' at this point means the mainstream doctrine in the church in question.
- 2 The Christians who came from West Africa and the Caribbean are not of course other-faith communities, though they are distinct from the host population. Their place in the religious life of Britain is important and will be discussed at some length.
- 3 The Jewish story is particular (see Chapter 3 and Graham 2012). Significant sections of this community arrived in Britain to escape persecution, in the nineteenth century from Russia and in the twentieth century from Germany.
- 4 The controversies surrounding the right of entry of Romanians and Bulgarians to live and work in the United Kingdom have been noticeably sharper. These were provoked by the ending of temporary controls in place between January 2007 and December 2013.
- 5 The remaining two – Daniel Dennett and Sam Harries – are American.

