

When words fail: religious literacy and post-multicultural possibilities

By Dr Jenny Taylor, Director Lapido Media.

I take my cue for this lecture from the great man himself, Sir Fred Catherwood.

Fred wrote this: ‘The last great commandment of Christ was that it is a Christian’s duty to preach the gospel of salvation, the offer of God’s forgiveness for our rebellion. Eternal salvation matters more than anything in this life. But the society in which we live does not believe in sin, so it sees no need for salvation. It sees the church as, at best, a cosy club of like-minded people and, at worst, as a dangerous sect. Words alone are not enough.’¹

Sir Fred embodied the unusual, unembarrassed integration of words and deeds: a politician and an economist who taught the Bible to a group in Westminster every single Sunday afternoon when he could, and who fought for a Christian vision of Europe not just with words but with his life, variously as Director of the National Economic Development Council and later as vice-President at the European Parliament and much else besides.

Today we stand on the threshold of what I’m calling the New Religious Era, when the separation of sacred from secular has left us with hollow words, and deeds that have no sacred rationale. Secularism has been rumbled. We were gulled into thinking that, like evolution, it was inevitable. But secularization is no longer a useful prism by which to understand or govern our times.² Multi-culturalism which is the subject of this lecture, relied on secularism – on not taking religions and religious difference seriously. It is widely

¹ <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/sir-henry-frederick-ross-catherwood-1925-2014-a-tribute/>

² Taylor, *After Secularism*. There is a wealth of material on this, but see esp. Juergensmeyer et al *Rethinking Secularism*.

believed now to have failed.³ New possibilities for integration of thought worlds unusually embodied by Sir Fred himself are opening up, despite dangers. I want to show in this lecture two things: one, that the acknowledged problems of multiculturalism have been bound up with a loss of Christian action and that two, a recovery of ‘a proper confidence’, as Lesslie Newbiggin called one of his books, can help society recover from what is undoubtedly the beginning of its disintegration. Secular multiculturalism was based on a false premise – that religion which I contend is the seed and energy of all culture, is dying out. I shall argue that we can only achieve a common home for all by replenishing and actively nurturing the vision it grew from.

First, a bit about myself since it would clearly be a wasted opportunity for someone whose charity name means TO SPEAK UP not to do so! To share with you a little bit about my journey as a journalist who stumbled first into race relations with Westminster Press, then later into Christianity. My career has therefore spanned three decades as a cultural analyst. I have travelled widely thinking and writing about multiculturalism and the mission of the church; its effectiveness overseas, its confusion at home.⁴ My charity has pioneered the religious literacy movement in the UK: a movement which seeks to recover a discourse that encompasses all that it means to be human: social, political *and* spiritual.

What became Laidlow – now the Institute for Religious Literacy in World Affairs – began with three epiphanies – moments of clarity about the social costs of secularization - the so-called separation of the secular from the sacred. This separation is at its worst the severing of our deepest motivations from our public life, as Rowan Williams puts it.⁵ It depletes the sources of sacrificial social effort and life-enhancing achievement.

The first of my epiphanies was in 1991 at the dawn of the movement to end Christian persecution. Bernard Levin, the great *Times* columnist had chided Christians for complaining of persecution. Everyone knew, he said, that the only people persecuted since Roman times

3 Trevor Phillips, former Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, is the most outspoken pundit on this; Kenan Malik one of the more nuanced. See <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143048/kenan-malik/the-failure-of-multiculturalism>

4 The following stories are told in Taylor, ‘Confessions’, pp. 203 – 218.

5 Various, but e.g. <http://www.religionlaw.co.uk/TheosDoingGod.pdf>

were the Jews. Jewish himself, his blinkered statement betrayed a cultural introversion and ignorance of religious facts that shocked me. It was made in one of his columns in 1991. It betrayed ignorance of fierce pogroms against Christians including crucifixions in Sudan and unremitting attacks in Pakistan and Iran in which I had been marginally involved as a journalist. Those persecutions were the culmination of a century of Christian massacres numbering more than the whole preceding nineteen centuries put together. Levin had a serious religion blind spot that needed addressing – and I did address it, sending him a mass of evidence from Pakistan and Iran that convinced him enough to begin a series of columns putting the record straight. He began with one called ‘Islam’s fearful blood-letting’ in 1992, and another which reprinted verbatim the testimony of an Iranian priest at his trial for apostasy.

The second epiphany was that same year when an aeroplane crashed in Kathmandu, killing everyone on board including a water engineer and his young family serving the mission I then worked for, Interserve. Not only did my seniors not see this as the perfect opportunity to tell the world of the glorious calling of God in Christ; one of them appeared in my office expressly to tell me to ‘say nothing’. And the Personnel Director – who had all the facts – actually fled the building without briefing me. We nonetheless managed to hold a press conference to which all the media came. As a result, the story of our missionary family was the focus of every front page of every British newspaper the next day, and some abroad. The Daily Mirror even used the family’s prayer card with Bible text on page two. For the best of reasons, the church was locking up its good news, preventing a wider appreciation of its mission. We had given journalists the thin gruel of bishops’ conferences, and walks of witness rather than the meat and potatoes of social transformation – and expected them to ‘get religion’.

The third epiphany – and this was the clincher – was visiting Northern Uganda in 2002 as the Church Mission Society’s Head of Media at the height of the rampage by Joseph Kony and the Lord’s Resistance Army. 25,000 children had been abducted to serve as wives and soldiers. Only half ever returned, many minus limbs, lips, noses. This horror had gone on for 17 years. The secular media did not report it properly if at all because they did not bother to understand the strange religious underpinnings of a pagan revenge culture. They did not ‘get’ spiritual fear in a lawless country. There was no political activity at all, as a result to try and

end it, and no NGOs in the area. I returned, traumatised and set up the Break the Silence Campaign. In so doing I discovered that by getting enough churches praying and going, the media would respond. This was the world's worst scenario, according to the Jan Egeland, UN Under-Secretary General for humanitarian affairs. It was 'worse than Iraq' he said at a press conference in Kampala. A concerted combination of prayer and media work delivered to the politicians an electoral mandate that moved the levers of power. Bob Geldof did one of his six Africa films up there. The ICC made arresting Kony its test case. The campaign 'greatly increased political activity' according to the Foreign Office and the war ended. The church made a difference where others had not because we had more in common with the poor in Uganda than the secular elites did. We had the common language of the spirit world, a shared understanding of religious motivation. We could hear what they were actually saying, instead of dismissing it or reinterpreting it through materialist or political filters. And we had immense spiritual resources between us to stay the distance. This was religious literacy in action.

These three episodes demonstrated for me just how wide the separation of church and state had become: a mutually reinforced separation that had become an ideological quarantine. A journalist's job is to *mediate* or bridge thought worlds, but the gap had become a chasm. Secularization means many things, but by the 1990s it meant not so much loss of faith, as totally separate worlds with dissonant and unheeding discourses that allowed ignorance and evil to flourish unchecked. The church was there, and it was active and effective but it had given up the effort to explain, to tell its story. WORDS FAILED.

1. The secularization fallacy and the loss of confidence

I want to turn now to immigration in a context of secularism, and the loss of Christian confidence. The social historian Callum Brown asserted that Christian Britain had died by 1963.⁶ That's the year by which the British people stopped 'absorbing Christianity into their lives'. He characterises this as 'the loss of old certainties, that fixed moral core which Britons as a whole used to recognise even when they deviated from it.' 1961 had seen the introduction of The Pill, which decoupled sexuality from responsibility for its outcomes.

⁶ Brown, *Death*, p. 1.

Morality was no longer a practical matter. It was also the year when suicide was decriminalised. This was ‘the first act of Parliament for at least a century to remove altogether the penalties of the criminal law from a practice both clearly condemned by conventional morality and punishable by law.’ Jonathan Sacks puts it bluntly: ‘It was the beginning of the end of England as a Christian country; that is, one in which Christian ethics was reflected in law.’⁷

Just as significantly, the sixties was also the decade when Europe ‘woke up to the Holocaust’ in Sacks’ words.⁸ That’s when the serious business of legislating to dismantle nationalism began in earnest and the European economic project was accelerated. Abolish nationalism and you will abolish war, anti-Semitism, hatred, went the thinking. But it was a strong sense of national identity rooted in Christian faith that ended the War too. It is hard to imagine today’s Britain being able to muster the resolve to repulse Hitler. This was a one-sided view that depleted the sources of the self, the strong sense of a common home with a common language – confirmed by borders now impossible to control, and by a sense of history no longer taught in schools - that loosened the bonds of society.

Into this fracturing world the migrants had begun arriving in huge numbers, giving up their own identities just as Europe was losing its own. Across Britain there are now 7.5million people who were all born overseas. Within London proper, inside the A406 Ring Road, 53.4 per cent of primary school pupils speak English as a second language. The descendants of Commonwealth immigrants now comprise almost thirty per cent of British births. And all that since 1948 when the first boat of Jamaicans landed in Tilbury. By 2066, the latest projection has it, white Britons will become the minority in a population of 80million, even if immigration were to end tomorrow, which it cannot do while we remain in Europe.⁹ Within a little over a century, Britain will have gone from an almost entirely homogenous society to one where the native ethnic group is a minority. No people in history have become a minority of the citizenry in their own country except through conquest.¹⁰ It is deeply

7 Sacks, *Home*, p. 40.

8 Sacks, *Home*, p. 34.

9 West, *Diversity*, Kindle Loc 109

10 West, *Diversity*, Kindle Loc. 109.

troublesome that those who even mention their own potential annihilation as a people should be deemed ‘racist’, and yet mentioning it requires strength.

Immigration similarly was met with a lack of authentic curiosity or cultural realism, says Philip Lewis, the Bishop of Bradford’s interfaith adviser who had served as a CMS researcher in Pakistan before returning to write *Islamic Britain* – the first book on Islam in the country. This also is unfathomable. He notes the ‘continuing failure of progressive thought to anticipate the importance and tenacity of religion as a component in ethnic identity . . .’¹¹ Ethnicity – defined in terms of territorial and religious preponderance – became the legal basis for planning and resourcing the cities. While policy-makers assumed newcomers would secularize and assimilate, multiculturalists bafflingly pandered to the ‘needs of difference’.¹² Local authorities provided libraries of South Asian imported books in Urdu and Punjabi as well as Urdu or Punjabi language classes or courses; multi-cultural education units produced specialised ‘ethnic’ materials for schools, and grants for English language teaching were cut.

Tariq Modood’s work on Asian identity in 1997 – the so-called Fourth Survey – proved that Asians largely thought of themselves in religious rather than racial terms.¹³ As if to consolidate this, ethnicity in 1983 was defined in law for the first time and then privileged in such a way as to drive a wedge between the minorities and the surrounding majority. The ruling in the Appeal of *Mandla v Dowell Lee*, the Sikh schoolboy who won the right to wear his turban to school, for the first time defined ethnicity in religious terms: ‘a community by virtue of certain characteristics, of which two are deemed essential: ‘a long shared history; and ‘a cultural tradition of its own . . . often . . . associated with religious observance’. Five other criteria were not essential but could be relevant, one of these being a common religion ‘different from neighbouring groups or the general community surrounding’ [the group in question]. For the first time since the Treaty of Westphalia, the law cleared the way for religious territoriality to become the basis for settlement. And social policy built upon it secured concessions from the majority population. Dis-integration became the law. A

11 Lewis ‘Cooperation’, p. 128.

12 The sociologist John Rex even wrote: ‘Since the long-term process of assimilation is inevitable, the commitment of planning resources in the inner city *on an ethnic basis* is not ill-considered’ (Rex 1981:39). And yet we now know this does not happen. Settlement happens along ethno-religious lines, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s it was state-sponsored.

13 Modood, *Ethnic*, 1997.

religious ghetto like Manningham in Bradford became with all its woe, an entity in law, with extra rights.

Yet even as the law defined ethnicity in this way, Race Relations legislation made it impossible to discuss. Discrimination on the grounds of ‘colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins’ was outlawed. While it is certainly true that not all Mirpuri Pakistani males abuse children, it is the case that nearly all the sex grooming gangs exposed by the *Times* journalist Andrew Norfolk were Mirpuri Pakistanis living in ethnically distinct parts of our towns and cities – and impossible therefore to pinpoint.

Discrimination is the inherent natural ability or instinct by which to distinguish one thing from another. Yet artificial laws have rendered it needlessly synonymous with hatred. An incredible battery of laws now over-ride your safety valve. There are now 35 Acts of Parliament, 52 Statutory Instruments, 13 Codes of Practice, 3 Codes of Guidance and 16 European Commission Directives that deal with discrimination, animosities and hatred. Together, various Public Order Acts and related laws make it illegal to ‘hate’ [discriminate between] anyone because of their race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, religion, lack of religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age or most recently, political affinity. Jon Gower Davies writes in *A New Inquisition: Religious Persecution in Britain Today*: ‘The law has been invited to insert its punitive, plodding and primitive self into areas of life from which we have long been accustomed to assume not simply its absence, but the positive existence of a freely-negotiated civic culture.’¹⁴ We simply dare not any longer even notice difference, let alone understand or truly encounter it. We have been taught to fear our own minds.

We have laws now that actively dissolve the integrity of the country, while at the same time we demand ever faster economic growth which can only be achieved by the in-migration from undeveloped countries of an ever-cheaper labour force. Such incoherence is a recipe for a disaster that is already upon us. Twenty years on, Britain’s more hostile, disorientated Muslim enclaves have produced some of the nastiest jihadis in the world. At least five ISIS members come from one troubled enclave in High Wycombe, one of whom, a former security guard at Morrisons supermarket, filmed the beheading of American journalist James Foley – and boasted about it on twitter.

¹⁴ West, *Diversity*, Kindle Loc. 3073.

‘Prevent’ is the name of one prong of the government’s four-pronged anti-terror strategy: the others being Pursue, Prepare, Protect. My Prevent contact in High Wycombe, a humble, decent old-school policeman, tells me he puts his life at risk – simply by going into schools in the little towns of the Chiltern Hills, to talk about radicalization.

As to that other egregious product of the ghetto, sex grooming gangs, whose behaviour is justified, according to Oxford imam Taj Hargey, by Qur’anic verses on subject women,¹⁵ these are not isolated gangs in Rotherham or Oxford alone, but, according to police, 17 towns and cities around Britain that harbour 54 such gangs right across the country.¹⁶

At the same time as we talk of integration, we are indulging the most ambitious and successful of all movements against it: the Tablighi Jamaat or ‘preaching party’ – a proselytising Deobandi offshoot, hailing from north India in the 1920s, with 80 million followers worldwide, which has refined the most successful model of Islamic reinforcement training the world has ever seen. We are awaiting the decision of the Secretary of State on their plan to build the biggest Islamist training centre in Europe – in Newham. Despite being regarded by white middle-aged journalists as an ‘exotic fringe group’ who ‘don’t stand a chance’¹⁷ all of London’s mosques have already adopted their methodology with its anti-western, separatist ethos that spurns engagement with wider society. When I visited their headquarters in Old Delhi in 2008, I was required to do my interview with two elders – one of whom was from Britain – sitting on the floor and – for decorum’s sake – required to have my back to them. The only other interview I’ve ever done without making eye contact was with my heartthrob Cat Stevens. Just my luck to have hit the jackpot just after he became Yusuf Islam. He refused to look at me.

We will pay a heavy price in terms of extra security, and massive unwonted legislation, for our unprecedented experiment in diversity, says the writer Ed West. ‘The greatest damage has been done to those aspects of England and Englishness that the Left cherish most; the gentleness and humility, the egalitarianism and social welfare institutions, the secularism of

¹⁵ <http://www.lapidomedia.com/analysis-non-muslim-women-unpalatable-truth>. Further corroboration is given by the Australian Islamic scholar and Anglican priest, Dr Mark Durie <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TS0AHERNaI>

¹⁶ *The Times*, 6 June 2013, cited Taylor, ‘Chastity’, p. 219.

¹⁷ To quote a senior contact in the Ethical Journalism Network.

public life, the presence of unarmed police and, most of all, the everyday freedom and easy-going, unobtrusive national identity that did not need to be defined by ‘values’. That ‘modest, reticent and peaceful England’ may be a thing of the past.¹⁸

John Lennon wrote the anthem for the Land of Nowhere free of the commitments of belief: ‘Imagine there’s no heaven ... No hell below us, Above us only sky, Imagine all the people living for today ...

Imagine there are no countries

It isn’t hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people

Living life in peace ...

And we did imagine it. And we discovered it does not result in peace. The vacuum is being filled by distorted utopias – dystopias that steal our children from their own bedrooms, and like the Pied Piper, lead them to their destruction in a faraway cyber-reality called Syria and Iraq.

John Lennon’s nursery rhyme did not encompass Britain’s migrants who needed to find a place and a new identity in their new country and largely failed to do so. They found themselves ‘between no cultures’ as Kenan Malik acutely observes. At precisely the same time that we were reinventing the Land of Nowhere, immigrants were consolidating around their own religious rituals, buildings, languages from the cultures they had *left* – cultures that had often failed them. There has been better integration in Britain than in France or the US, but inner-migration has nonetheless been a distinct feature. The Church of England, in its famous report Faith in the City in 1985 recommended leaving migrants alone. ‘There are

¹⁸ West, *Diversity*, Kindle Loc 3684.

places where Christian service to the community may take the form of helping others to maintain their religious and cultural heritage in freedom and dignity'.¹⁹ Small wonder that what Trevor Phillips described as 'ghettoes' – communities characterised by some degree of 'enclavement' – formed.

Western 'values' stoke fear of *fitnah* – disorder – among Muslims. Nazih Ayubi, then Director of the Middle East Politics Programme at Exeter, wrote:

'With the move from village to city, the individual is abruptly confronted with ... the alienating impact of a modernisation drive that is in many of its aspects little more than an enforced process of Westernisation. Such agonies become most alarming to the individual when their impact encroaches upon him within his own family ... for the family is, after all, the last vestige of security and identity for him. This is the very last arena to be invaded by secularist European-inspired laws and it is also the first line of attack for any demand for the establishment of a so-called 'Islamic order'.²⁰

Not only is the Western secular worldview threatening to many Muslims, it is also deemed by Islamic scholars to be illegitimate. Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr of Georgetown University in Washington, gave the Inauguration of the King Fahd Chair in Islamic Studies Lecture at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies on 11 March 1996 at which I was present. He told the audience which included the Bishop of London: 'I don't believe in the Global Village. It was foisted on the Islamic world. That paradigm which replaced the Christian paradigm cannot be global. There is another reality out there that wants to claim for itself the pre-eminence of religion because it challenges the predominance of secularism.' As Christianity loses its grip on the world's imagination, such scholars believe Islam's time has come, and we've seen only the birth pangs of its last great effort to vindicate Mohammed's revelation. Prayers are being said albeit covertly at the former mosque in Cordoba. Quranic recitation is once heard in Haggia Sophia, Christendom's greatest cathedral-turned mosque turned secular museum. The 'caliphate' is a reviving dream for many Muslims, not just ISIS.

19 Para.3.28.

20 Ayubi, *Political Islam*, p. 41

Immigration is a tool of jihad to some; to others who call Britain ‘Dar ul Dawa’, it is an opportunity for proselytism and subversion.

Mass immigration coincided with a loss of cultural confidence in a country where the fruits of Christendom which were available and highly prized, were now free-floating. They were no longer anchored to any explanatory schema. Words had failed. Consequently, writes Lamin Sanneh, the greatest challenge for the churches is not living with Muslims as such but overcoming the obstacles that the modern disaffection with Christianity has thrown up. ‘The secular programme for religious pluralism has focused primarily on rescinding the claims of Christian uniqueness, a strategy that lowers the threshold for the religious uniqueness represented by *other* religions, and opens the way for Muslim radicalism.’²¹ I agree with him, that migrants have not lost their religious sensibility and come here anticipating a ‘Christian society’ from lands where the missionaries founded their schools and their hospitals. That they don’t find it Christian any more is often a profound source of dismay and disillusionment.²²

And so to the second of my themes ...

2) Religious literacy and interfaith possibilities

Without religious literacy we cannot understand what makes people tick. Without religious knowledge, we cannot respond realistically to each other.

Lamin Sanneh goes on to say that ‘society cannot be content with drawing on the reserves of Christian moral capital without attention to replenishing the source.’²³ This is not as impossible as secularization theorists made us believe. Secularization was always a partial view, based only on studies within the once Christian polities of Europe and the Americas. With its built-in evolutionism which created a wholly fictional sense of inevitability about the demise of faith, it did not, before the 1990s, take account of immigration by religious peoples

21 Sanneh, *Faith and Power*, p. 65.

22 Two people commented on this statement after this lecture. The first, an Irish atheist, questioned it with a degree of pained dislike that was palpable. A Sri Lankan woman came up afterwards and said she entirely agreed. Why did Britain not defend its culture and beliefs, she wondered?

23 Sanneh, *Faith and Power*, p. 71

into these polities, and there were almost no studies at all of non-Christian states. It was a partial, even a bogus ‘theory’ dressed up to look like science.²⁴

‘Where religion is part of the problem it has to become part of the solution’ says Philip Lewis. Muslims in my experience may not be so averse to this as multiculturalists have led us to believe. The strain of negotiating the wilderness that the postmodern world has become is one which I think many migrants to a greater or lesser extent share. It was well expressed by a Turkish minicab driver in Haringey who told me there were now so many different people in London that he was going home. ‘We don’t know how to behave. We no longer know the code’, he said.

I sense from this a cue. It is a cue reinforced elsewhere too. A Muslim youth worker on the interfaith committee on which I serve in High Wycombe wrote this, during a round-table brain-storming last year: ‘We are Wycombe residents and that’s how we’d like to be identified. We want to be distanced from religious and ethnic identity.’

My own Muslim trustee is critical of what he calls his co-religionists’ ‘obsession with religion’. A former Islamist recruiter himself, he has lived in Britain long enough to appreciate its ‘consensus’. He despairs also of the inability of Islamists to create plural societies.

The government is now attempting belatedly to recover a common language with its work on British values to address our failed social experiments. These include ‘tolerance of other faiths and cultures’. But as Christians we cannot rest there. If we are to offer a hope of social transformation in this wilderness, we must see that **‘tolerance’ is not enough**. Sanneh argues that ‘religious toleration as understood in the secular scheme cannot in itself take care of the matter, since toleration is a weapon in the arsenal of secular attacks on the gospel.’²⁵ Lesslie Newbigin regarded the word ‘tolerance’ as inhumane, and isolating. It was not appropriate for the kind of mutual recognition that is what is actually being sought.

‘Tolerance suggests leaving one another alone, and this is precisely what Christians cannot do. Christ’s atoning work lays upon us the obligation to wrestle with these

²⁴ Taylor, *After Secularism*.

²⁵ Sanneh, *Faith and Power*, p. 64.

differences in frankness and humility, until they yield deeper insight into God's nature and will.²⁶

From that I take it that we must do all in our power therefore to protect the secular space as the arena of this honest wrestling. But we must at the same time assert that what guarantees the survival of a hospitable secular space is the Christian truth on which it was originally built: the Truth, founded upon the Cross that encompasses its own limitedness in all human apprehension of it. This limitedness is what the jihadists, as indeed Cromwell's iconoclasts and Catholic heretic burners before them, could not and cannot abide. **The grace of God's hospitality meets the truth of God's judgement in the Cross when the powers of religion and the state are both equally unmasked and shamed.** An insistence on territorial absoluteness begets tyranny, says Lamin Sanneh, and it was renounced at the Reformation.²⁷ The only alternative, he believes, is an **insistence on reciprocal plurality** in the Muslim world as a whole. So long as it is not possible to live or worship as anything but a Muslim in Islam's core of Medina and Mecca, there will always be a hidden drive towards territorial absoluteness among Muslims everywhere else.

Augustine is the first exponent of the idea of the secular as an arena in which a social boundary is imposed on theological judgement.²⁸ In the present age, human knowledge is incomplete. Theological judgement therefore cannot ever be absolute, but it cannot be ruled out either. Atheists who would ban all public manifestations of religion would also quench the spirit of reform.

I was reminded of this on the website of the National Secular Society recently.²⁹ Cases of child sacrifice had been found in Peru, which were reported in lurid detail. Only by digging deeply enough into the back story did I discover the source of the story: a group of Peruvian

26 Newbigin, 'Quest', p. 73.

27 Sanneh, *Faith and Power*, p. 69.

28 Markus, *Saeculum*. For a discussion of this, see Kate Cooper's essay 'Religion, Conflict, and "The Secular": the View from Early Christianity' in Wolffe and Moorhead, *Religion, Security and Global Uncertainties*, pp. 12-17.

29 A recent search of the NSS website failed to find the original piece, but the author has personally heard eye-witness accounts of similar incidences in Nepal and Uganda.

nuns, working sacrificially to rid the people of the extreme fear that gives rise to traditions of propitiation as dreadful as this. The NSS failed to mention the nuns – or their motivation. Scrap religion, and you scrap the motive for addressing the deepest, most hidden ills. Good and evil are contingent.

Religious literacy in the media means understanding all this and working harder to incorporate it. It also means better coverage of world affairs. Stockholm recently scrapped an arms deal with Saudi Arabia following a boycott by the Arab League of a speech to be given by their feminist Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom.³⁰ Yet this received scant coverage in the European press. Her speech drew attention to a theocratic system that prevents women from travelling, conducting official business or marrying without the permission of male guardians; by permitting girls to be forced into child marriages where they are effectively raped by old men. She was telling no more than the truth. Wallström went on to condemn the Saudi courts for ordering that Raif Badawi receive ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes for setting up a website that championed secularism and free speech. These were ‘mediaeval methods’, she said, and a ‘cruel attempt to silence modern forms of expression’. The reaction from within Sweden has been shameful. Thirty top business leaders signed an open letter last week imploring the government to honour the agreement and maintain the country’s reputation as a trading partner. It is likely Sweden’s place on the UN Security Council could now be compromised. ‘No one will listen to Sweden now for many years to come,’ opined Per Jönsson, a Middle East expert at the Institute of Foreign Affairs in Stockholm. Carl Bildt, the former foreign minister, wrote on his blog that [Sweden](#) had been damaged and the termination of the arms agreement would be met with joy in competitor nations.

Europe, for all its talk of human rights and universal values, puts money first when the going gets tough, and the media follow on.

Action to engage the media with religious literacy is however beginning to be taken at the highest levels. And here I come to my final section: what are the steps we can take *now*?

30 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/09/swedish-foreign-minister-margot-wallstrom-saudi-arabia-blocked-speech-human-rights>

Both to get back on track and perhaps more relevantly here in Northern Ireland, as migrant move here, to prevent problems from getting a hold?

First: Religious literacy in the media ...

Of ten recommendations to government in a report called *Religion, Security and Global Uncertainties* published by the Open University with the Partnership for Conflict, Crime & Security Research, which Lapido had the privilege of launching in Portcullis House in January,³¹ two of them concern religious literacy and the media:

- Religious literacy and a wider vocabulary are needed by all.
- The religious literacy of journalists should be promoted and improved through training, through access to better religion sources, and the establishment of an Institute for Religious Literacy and the Media.

Something along the lines of this latter has just been established at Goldsmiths College in London. Other bodies with a religious literacy orientation are beginning to make their mark: The Sandford St Martin Trust, which used to fund programmes for the god slot, recently put on an unlikely event with The Media Society at the Groucho Club in London's Soho called 'Damned if you Do' encouraging the media as a whole to 'get religion'.

My own organization works directly with journalists and has done for ten years, exposing the religion 'Blind Spot', providing handbooks,³² reports and analysis that render religious understanding topical and useful. We are part of a new network of 700 religiously-switched-on journalists around the world called The Media Project, working in some of the toughest locations.

Second: Religious Literacy in the culture – getting engaged.

I am a journalist observer on the Council for Christian and Muslim Relations in High Wycombe – invited by one of the Muslims on it. Three of its members came to our event Getting Religion at Portcullis House in Westminster in January.

31 Footage of the day's event, chaired by the BBC Religious Affairs Correspondent Caroline Wyatt can be found here. <http://www.lapidomedia.com/getting-religion-event-video-highlights>

32 http://www.academia.edu/1949548/Tablighi_Jamaat_-_Handy_Books_on_Religion_in_World_Affairs

Critical Muslim is a riveting publication now co-published by the Muslim Institute and Hurst run by Muslims that is hospitable to writers and journalists of other religious backgrounds in its bid to ‘give voice to the diversity and plurality of Muslim reporting, creative writing, poetry and scholarship’. I was myself asked to write the End Piece on chastity for the issue on ‘Islam and Men’ two years ago. The Halal Food Foundation is another example of the possibilities within Islam for mutual benefit. It ‘seeks to advance a more holistic understanding of what is *halal* – a word that is best translated as “praiseworthy”, and has a direct relationship to public interest, environment, business ethics and moral behaviour’ say the founders. Its chairman is a Trustee of Lapido.

Our institutions are robust enough to accommodate plurality – but *only* in the service of the common good. In Lapido’s case that means an overt and clearly stated bias towards freedom, justice and the alleviation of poverty. I have a Sikh Editor, an agnostic Operations Manager, and Muslim and Christian writers from around the world working for me.

All my staff and writers either sign a contract or observe pitching guidelines that recognize our Christian ethos. Our Charitable Object is the promotion of racial and religious harmony. Our journalism is rooted in the fact that there are four Gospels: individual reports of the facts as corroborated by four separate witnesses. Those witnesses were not Christians! They were Jews and Greeks. Milton’s *Areopagitica* is the founding treatise of journalism: a rousing plea for freedom of expression emanating from powerful resistance to state coercion of conscience.

I suggest the vast majority of immigrants want to be part of a Britain that knows values and speaks up about its Christian inheritance. – if they were taught it. We have worried about minorities at the expense of the majority. Yet Muslims in their tens of thousands fought loyally for the Empire in the Second World War. John Nicholson, who led the bloodthirsty recovery of Delhi from the jihad warriors who led the Indian Mutiny/First War of Indian Independence in 1857 did so protected by a fierce Pathan bodyguard who slept at the threshold of his bedroom every night.

Values are not the source of identity says Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.³³ Values are universal; identities are particular. They are about this place, this language, this landscape, this history, this relationship. They are about somewhere, not everywhere. In his book *The Home we Build Together: Recreating Society* Jonathan Sacks describes **what's needed as 'a covenant'**:

'Those bound by a covenant voluntarily undertake to share a fate. They choose to link their destinies together. They accept responsibilities to and for one another. Covenants redeem the solitude of the "lonely crowd".'³⁴

In Dewsbury, where two lads recently absconded from school to go and fight with ISIS, Anglican Bishop Tony Robinson has started a 'Faiths Forum' – worthy enough but dull you might think. But this is far more now than the tea and samosas with which it began. Twelve imams, police, social workers and teachers from Gojra, where 18 Christians were burned to death, recently visited UK, funded by the Foreign Office. They came to 'shadow' their counterparts. The visit was a success. When a young Christian girl in the village was recently accused of sending an abusive text message to a Muslim, instead of marching her straight to gaol as infamously was the case with Asia Bibi and countless others, locals, influenced by the group who had visited UK, took her to the local Bishop instead. She was subsequently found to have been wrongly accused. The partnership, spear-headed by Christian Pakistani entrepreneurs in Dewsbury has generated funds from Yorkshire's Muslim business community for a water treatment plant for Gojra and psychiatric care for children who survived another recent massacre at an army school in Peshawar. This is covenant at work.

We must endeavour to talk up our own sense of covenant with our neighbourhoods, and with the country as a whole, for others will take our lead. When Sir Fred talked of Europe, he meant a common home, re-built out of the rubble of two wars, on a vision of peace grounded in the Gospel. Without that vision, Europe becomes little more than an airport lounge, a holding pen between other destinations.

³³ Sacks, *Home*, p. 95.

³⁴ Sacks, *Home* p. 142.

Ed West, a 35-year old Catholic writer who lives in the heartland of the secular liberal consensus in London says somewhat unexpectedly at the end of his *The Diversity Illusion*: ‘You do not need to share some artificial government-approved British vision; you only need to love Britain.’ Philip Lewis writes that: ‘[Some Muslims] are retrieving moments in European history where Muslim, Christian and Jew co-existed, whether in Spain or the Ottoman Empire’.³⁵

Let us recall the original vision of post-war Europe: the vision of Robert Schuman, French Foreign Minister whose hope it was to rebuild out of the rubble of war ‘a community of peoples deeply rooted in Christian values’³⁶ – any purported alternative to which even Richard Dawkins dismisses as merely ‘post-modern chatter’.

Let me quote the opening sentences of a lecture given in Athens last year by Jeff Fountain, Director of the Schuman Centre for European Studies, about the revolution started by St Paul when he stepped ashore at Neapolis on the northern Greek coast and made his way to Philippi. He started a revolution that was to transform the peninsula we call Europe, by introducing a totally new worldview: of God and man, of the spiritual realm and the physical realm, of the dignity and value of human life, of linear history and time as past, present and future. This understanding, says Fountain, transformed the lifestyles of people groups ‘from Armenia to Ireland, and from Cyprus to Iceland. Jesus became worshipped in many different languages by Greeks, Romans, Gauls, Celts, Scots, Angles, Saxons, Franks, Friesians, Allemani, Suevi, Slavs, Rus, Balts and, eventually, Vikings.’³⁷

This is plurality, but it surely is not pluralism. Europe can work, can exist as a construct, only with its binding vision: a vision centred on the Cross. We must recover our faith in it.

To sum up, we must I believe:

- Abandon divisive identity politics
- Test and repeal all laws and plans that tend to cause ghettos by default

³⁵ Lewis, *Young*, p. 151.

³⁶ Fountain, ‘Five Steps’, p. 8.

³⁷ Fountain, ‘Five Steps’, p. 8.

- Insist on reciprocal plurality with foreign countries we do business with
- Refuse to tolerate mere tolerance. Politics is after all about conversion
- Apply a sense of covenant in civic and social policies including immigration

For without these measures, words fail, and violence is waiting in the wings.³⁸

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³⁸ Sacks, *Home*, p. 41.

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