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RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM[2]

Abstract

This paper offers a review of religion and politics in the United Kingdom shortly after the Scottish Referendum in September 2014 and the UK General Election in May 2015. It first provides a brief historical outline of the emergence of the four separate parts of the current United Kingdom, their different experiences of Anglo-Saxon and Viking invasions and responses to the Reformation in the fifteenth century after a millennium of Roman Catholicism. It then briefly reviews data from recent censuses and social attitude surveys about religious identities, beliefs and commitment and political party preferences which generally indicate a preference for Conservative Party support by Anglicans and Labour by Roman Catholics. Recent Church of England leaders have suggested that religion is now a major player on the public stage. This is strongly rejected. Firstly, census and survey data point unambiguously to the declining salience of religion and the public's strong belief that religion is a private and personal matter and that religious leaders should not meddle in politics. Secondly, three examples are given where it is argued that critical interventions by religious leaders in recent years have not led to any serious changes in government policies.

Key Words: religion, politics, four UK nations, power, influence

I   Introduction

In a recent speech in the House Of Lords, Lord Harries of Pentregarth, the former Church of England Bishop of Oxford, asserted that 'religion is now a major player on the public stage in a way that could not have been envisaged perhaps even thirty years ago.'[3] In a similar vein Nick Spencer quotes Peter Berger who reversed his views of thirty years earlier when he wrote in *The Desecularisation of the World* in 1999 that 'the assumption that we live in a secularised world is false:

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3   Harries, Rt. Revd. Richard, House of Lords debate, 27 Nov. 2014.

the world today, with some exceptions…is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.' In his review of the contribution of voluntary faith groups to the provision of public services in contemporary Britain, Spencer notes the increasing government support for charities and claims that 'twenty-first century Britain will see a lot more of God in the public square'.[4] In their pre-election pastoral letter in 2015 the Church of England bishops claimed 'that religion, far from withering on the vine as urbanisation, industrialisation, wealth and education increase (the theory of secularisation), has a growing public profile and cannot be ignored as a political force'.[5] It is one purpose of this paper to challenge these claims and suggest rather that in spite of frequent interjections in British politics by Church leaders, religion does not have any significant weight or power in British politics at the present time.

More particularly I will explore the relationships between religion and politics in the United Kingdom (UK) drawing, where possible, on a variety of census and social attitude surveys in recent years. At one level religion in these surveys is concerned with self-identification – as Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jew, Buddist, and so on – or within Christianity by denomination - such as Church of England, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and so on. At another level attempts are made to measure variations in the strength of religious commitment, for example in terms of membership, frequency of attendance at religious services, and the salience of religious beliefs and values.

In the national surveys, political views are largely measured in terms of voting or political party preference, for example Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat. More recently other parties have become more strongly supported such as the Scottish National Party (SNP), United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the Green Party, and so on. In addition some surveys attempt to measure the nature and extent of political commitment in terms of party membership, activism and values.

This paper will review some of the evidence of the relationships between religion and politics in the component parts of the United Kingdom in recent years. More importantly it will explore the extent to which religion has been a determining factor in significant political decision-making and whether this influence has been increasing or decreasing. It will conclude that the salience of religion has declined in recent years.

In order to understand some of the differences between the four constituent parts of the UK it is first necessary in Section II to review briefly their historical evolution. This will include the impact of various invading forces, different patterns of migration and settlement, the relationships between the dominant monarchies and their religious identifications, and the influence of different re-

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4   Spencer Nick, *"Doing God": A future for Faith in the Public Square*, Theos, London, 2006, pp. 17, 47-48.
5   *Who is my Neighbour?* A Letter from the House of Bishops to the People and Parishes of the Church of England for the General Election 2015, 2015.

ligious traditions, and in particular, of the reformation. Section III will summarise the present situation and current context including the immediate after effects of the Scottish Referendum in September 2014 and the General Election in May 2015. Section IV will outline some of the survey evidence of relationships between religion and politics in each of the four nations. In particular it will review the relationships between party voting and activism and religious identification and commitment. Section V will consider a number of case studies which will throw light on the extent to which religious forces shape the outcomes of British politics. In the final section I will attempt to identify some general themes which emerge from these various studies and comment briefly on the implications of the 2015 General Election.

II   Historical Roots

To understand more clearly the complex relationship between religion and politics in the United Kingdom, we will briefly review: firstly, the millennium of Catholic Christianity up to the Reformation in the sixteenth century; secondly, the three centuries until emancipation; thirdly, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up to the 1960s; and finally more recent developments.

In his demythologizing history of *The Isles*[6] Norman Davies shows how the present countries of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland emerged historically since the 'fiercely competing' Celtic tribes of pre-historic times. Roman invaders occupied most of England and Wales but little of Scotland, and Ireland was never occupied. The fifth century saw the withdrawal of Roman armies and a succession of invasions along unprotected coastlines by Angles and Saxons. A state of continuing tribal warfare remained for centuries. Irish Christianity flourished after making numerous compromises with the former practices of Celtic paganism. The spread of Christianity was slow until the mission of St. Augustine in 597. In the centuries following the Roman withdrawal the gulf between the Germanic and Celtic peoples grew wider over time.

In the ninth and tenth centuries large numbers of Scandinavian or 'Viking' forces landed around the East and West coasts of both islands with a view to settling permanently. Successive waves of Danish invaders took control of the whole of the country between Scotland and the Thames. King Alfred persuaded the Danish Lord to accept baptism and sign a treaty in 878 and the resulting fusion led to a unified kingdom of England.

Following the Norman conquest in 1066 the Normans were unable to sub-

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6   Davies Norman, *The Isles: A History*, Macmillan, London, 2000. This provides a comprehensive overview of the origins and emergence of the four separate nations which make up the United Kingdom today, and of their religious and political histories. See also, Bruce Steve, *Politics and Religion in the United Kingdom,* Routledge, London, 2014, pp.1-15, and Hastings Adrian, *A History of English Christianity 1920-2000,* SCM Press, London, 2001.

due Wales but effectively partitioned it. In Scotland by the twelfth century the influx of numerous powerful Norman families led to their entente with England. But the Normans made no attempt to cross the Irish Sea and in Ireland Brian Boru pronounced himself 'emperor of the Irish'. When King John submitted to the pope in 1213 the Kingdom of England and Lordship of Ireland were turned into papal fiefs as part of the great commonwealth of Latin Christendom. The following year John lost Normandy and all the major provinces in northern France. In 1215 the Welsh barons were able to insist on separate laws for Wales in the *Magna Carta.*

The 'hundred years' war between French and Plantagenêt dynasties was fought in France and resulted in the eventual withdrawal of English claims to French territory. Following the Black Death plague in the mid-fourteenth century there was slow realisation of England's growing political and cultural power but also its growing isolation from the continent. There were periodic inter-state marriage alliances between the two native dynasties, the Tudors and the Stewarts.

At the end of the fifteenth century 'it had been true for a thousand years that almost everyone in the Isles was a Catholic Christian...acknowledging the supreme spiritual authority of the Pope.'[7] Before the Reformation 'the Christian Church formed the backbone of both the national and local state.' It was a major cause of the 'gradual separation of religion and politics' since then.[8] When the Pope refused to grant Henry VIII an annulment, 'the Act of Supremacy (in 1534) created an independent and formally separate Church of England with the monarch as its head.'[9] Protests were ruthlessly crushed. In Scotland Calvinists persuaded Church leaders to break with Rome and rule the Church through a General Assembly. 'Religious differences would form the main basis for future political alignments... (and) the Reformation cut off the Isles from much of the Continent and from that main body of Christendom which had been its spiritual home for the previous millennium'.[10] In 1541 the Irish Parliament raised Ireland to the status of a sovereign kingdom with Henry VIII as its hereditary monarch. Systematic plantation of English colonists in Ireland caused much resentment but Irish Catholic clergy continued to say Mass in Latin. Scotland's Reformation produced a national Church though in the Scottish Highlands the majority of the clans stuck to the Gaelic tongue and to Catholicism. In Wales the churches promoted Welsh culture.

The discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 led to two centuries of discrimination against Catholics and suspicions of their being unpatriotic. In Northern Ireland there was the ruthless plantation of Presbyterians from Scotland, the consequences of which remain today. In the rest of Ireland there was a reinvigorated

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7   Davies, op.cit., p. 385.
8   Bruce, op. cit., p. 2.
9   Davies, op.cit., p. 387.
10   Ibid., pp. 396-7. See also the analysis of diversity in the different nations of the two islands in Bruce, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

Catholicism. Puritans also found life difficult in seventeenth century Britain and opposition to the absolutism of the king, with its appeal to the 'divine right of kings' grew. This led to the execution of Charles I and the triumph of the Parliament forces led by Oliver Cromwell. He proceeded to fight the Catholic rebels in Ireland where most of the land was now in Protestant ownership.

Following Cromwell's death and the Restoration of an Anglican Church of England, the Protestant Establishment was dominated by Anglican Tories but challenged by a powerful Nonconformist Whig opposition.[11] Parliament offered the crown to William of Orange and Mary jointly in 1689. In a Bill of Rights Parliament was strengthened and the crown prerogative diminished. The Act of Settlement of 1701 confirmed that the monarchy was subservient to Parliament, thus ending the Divine Right of Kings. In 1707 Queen Anne accepted the Act of Union and reigned as Queen of Great Britain and Queen of Ireland. Rising demands for Catholic emancipation in Ireland persuaded the British Government to end Irish autonomy and in 1801 the name of the state was changed to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Religious discrimination was rife. In Scotland a solid core of Catholics was reluctantly tolerated but in England 'anti-Papism' prevailed. Disillusionment with the Church of England led to the growth of Nonconformism. It was not until 1829 that the Catholic Emancipation (Relief) Act was passed rendering Catholics eligible for most offices of state but not monarch.

In the 1840s around a million Irish were dying of starvation because of the Famine and a further million emigrated to Britain or America. 'Memories of the Famine steadily sapped the hopes that Ireland would benefit from the United Kingdom.'[12] The large numbers of Irish immigrants who moved into the new industrial cities of England and Scotland created a significant Catholic segment in the working class. Meanwhile, Nonconformity also flourished and by the turn of the century was outstripping attendance at the Church of England. The Church of Scotland experienced a schism and further fragmentation. The formal links between the established Church and the unpopular state led to the setting up of a disestablished Church of Ireland in 1871 and a disestablished Anglican Church in Wales in 1920.

During the eighteenth century British parliamentarianism was a system of unreformed parliamentary patronage. It took nearly two hundred years to achieve full adult suffrage for all over eighteen in 1969. The unreformed House of Lords was still prepared to block both the 'People's Budget' and the Second Home Rule Bill in 1909/10. The aristocracy continued to hold enormous social power until

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11   The terms 'Tory' and 'Whig' both originated as terms of abuse in the seventeenth century. The Tories were supporters of the monarchy and the established Church of England while the Whigs favoured a constitutional monarchy and non-conformism. Subsequently the Tories were succeeded by the Conservative Party and the Whigs by the Liberal Party. See *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tories_(British_political_party)* and *http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Whigs_(British_political_party)*, accessed 13 October 2015.

12   Davies, op. cit.. p. 638.

the Liberal government, with support of King George V, in the Parliament Act in 1911 threatened to remove the hereditary basis of the House of Lords.

Although in the nineteenth century Britain became recognized as the 'Workshop of the World' there was a growing awareness of major class differences. But attempts to form trade unions were seen as revolutionary. The exclusion of 'the expanding working class from political life generated strains and lasting bitterness... The working class and labour movements, like the economy itself, were all-British affairs.'[13] In post-Union Scotland the most intransigent conflict was the cultural one between Gaelic Highlanders and the Lowlanders. The tensions between the British government and Ireland which had led to the Easter Rising in 1916 gave rise to the Partition between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland in 1922, with the British monarch continuing to be head of state. The Irish Free State left the British Commonwealth in 1948 when it declared itself the Republic of Ireland.

The systematic discrimination against Catholics in Northern Ireland led to continuing bitterness and sectarian conflict ('the Troubles') which lasted for thirty years from the 1960s until the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This included the abandonment by the Republic of its claim to Northern Ireland. The Agreement was supported by large majorities in referendums in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and came into force in 1999. In 2007 the leaders of the Catholic Sinn Fein and the Protestant Democratic Unionist Party agreed to share power in the Northern Ireland government and the British government ended its military presence in Northern Ireland. Common membership of the European Community by the U.K. and the Irish Republic since 1973 has brought the two nations closer together. In 2011 Queen Elizabeth II made a state visit to Dublin at the invitation of the President of Ireland. The visit was seen as a symbolic normalisation of British-Irish relations.

By the first decade of the twenty-first century the religious scene in the United Kingdom had changed significantly since the end of the Second World War. The Protestant Ascendancy which had existed since Henry VIII was substantially over. The Roman Catholic Church had won 'parity of esteem' and two popes had visited Great Britain in 1982 and 2010. Irish immigrants had experienced significant upward social mobility and outward geographical mobility from inner cities to suburbs. Catholics were to a considerable extent assimilating to the norms and beliefs of increasingly secular societies[14] and anti-Catholicism had all but disappeared.[15] The proportion describing themselves as non-religious was increasing rapidly. Different waves of immigration brought in large numbers of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and a variety of Christians from former colonial territories from

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13   Ibid., p. 641.

14   See, e.g., Hornsby-Smith, Michael Peter, *Roman Catholics in England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987 and *Roman Catholic Beliefs in England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

15   Field Clive, 'No Popery's Ghost: Does Popular Anti-Catholicism Survive in Contemporary Britain?', *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 2014 (7), pp. 116-149.

Asia, Africa and the West Indies, and more recently from Eastern Europe.

The concept of devolution was shelved in 1979 when it failed to find sufficient support both in Scotland and Wales. However, by 1998 there were majorities for a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly which were inaugurated in 1999. 'For the first time in its history, the British Parliament had willingly agreed to share power with a comprehensive system of subordinate legislatures.'[16] By 2014 the pressure for independence had become so strong in Scotland that the three main political parties in the Westminster Parliament pledged 'A Vow' to devolve more powers to the Scottish Parliament. Such powers are currently under discussion and it remains to be seen whether devolution will lead to the disintegration of the United Kingdom. Post-referendum polls suggested that a majority of Catholics, non-Christians and those favouring no religion were most in favour of independence and that it 'was only the votes of Protestants which saved the United Kingdom'.[17] Interestingly, while at international rugby matches the Scots, Irish and Welsh sing their own national anthems the English have no anthem.

In sum, since Roman times two millennia ago, the islands of Great Britain and Ireland have been intimately related. They both experienced waves of Viking raids and invading armies of settlers from Denmark and the Nordic lands. Monarchical dynasties were forever warring. and interstate marriages created frequently changing alliances. For over a millennium the dominant religion was Roman Catholicism but this changed dramatically in the sixteenth century. In England the Church of England became the established Church with the monarch as its head. In Scotland the Reformation followed a Calvinist path. In Ireland Celtic Christianity survived in spite of aggressive English Protestant settlements. Protestants in Northern Ireland ensured Partition in 1922 and religious differences in the Province continued to provide major conflicts. Wales was particularly influenced by Non-Conformist Protestantism. The two world wars in the twentieth century shattered the United Kingdom's imperialist pretensions and recent steps to devolve power from the Westminster Parliament have hinted at the possibility that the U.K. might break up. Major changes in the past half century include a significant dilution of the centuries-long hatred of Catholicism; the arrival of significant numbers of non-Christian immigrants; and evidence of major cultural shifts between the generations. We will attempt to explore these further on the basis of recent surveys in the United Kingdom.

III   The Present Context

There seems to be plenty of evidence that there is a general decline in the salience of religion in the UK and also a deep disillusionment with the prevailing

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16   Davies, op. cit, p. 778.

17   Field Clive, 'Scottish Independence', in *www.brin.ac.uk/news/2014/scottish-independence-and-other-news*, 21 September, 2014.

political system. Let us consider some of the 'signs of the times' concerning the present state of both religion and politics in the UK.

An indication of the lack of centrality of religion in British politics was indicated when the former prime minister Tony Blair's press secretary, Alastair Campbell, was reported as preventing the prime minister from answering an interviewer's questions about his Christian beliefs saying 'we don't do God'![18] Grace Davie explores the paradox between Britain's increasing secularity alongside the growing presence of religion in public debate on politics, the law, education and welfare.[19] Steve Bruce argues that especially since the Great Reform Act of 1832 which greatly increased the number of nonconformist electors, 'the largely secular nature of British public life...was largely the accidental by-product of religious diversity in a multi-national state. It was a pragmatic resolution of the difficulty of reconciling the rights of competing minorities.'[20] Interestingly, Tony Blair delayed his reception into the Catholic Church until after he had left office.[21] Religion has become regarded as a private preference rather than a matter of public power and influence.

Another indication of the decline in the close relationship between the governing establishment and the Church of England nearly five centuries after the Reformation was given by the heir to the throne, Prince Charles. In 2008 it was reported that he was planning a symbol ic change when he becomes king in order to reflect the multicultural nature of UK society. He proposes to take the title 'Defender of Faith' in place of 'Defender of *the* Faith', the title bestowed on Henry VIII by the Pope in 1521 in recognition of his early defence of Roman Catholicism. The change would require Parliament to agree significant changes in legislation and would clearly have implications for the Church of England's claim to be the Established Church.[22]

Steve Bruce makes a strong case for the declining social significance of religion in the public sphere.[23] Firstly, there is the loss of its social functions, such as education, social welfare and nursing care. Secondly, there is the loss of its political power. Religion has become privatised and, as the Alastair Campbell quote illustrates, there are sharp distinctions between private belief and the public and secular sphere. Bruce also reviews data from British Social Attitudes (BSA) surveys from 1998 and 2008 and concludes that they show 'that most Britons were

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18   Brown Colin, *The Telegraph*, 4 May 2003. See also Nick Spencer, op. cit. Alternative views have recently been proposed by Filby Eliza, *God and Mrs. Thatcher: Conviction Politics in Britain's Secular Age*, Biteback, 2015 who argues that Margaret Thatcher's conviction politics reflected her Methodist upbringing; and Smith Greg (ed.) *21ˢᵗ Century Evangelicals*, Evangelical Alliance, 2015, which claims high levels of political activism among Evangelical Christians.

19   Davie Grace, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2015.

20   Bruce Steve "We Don't do God": The Long Divorce of Religion and National Identity in Britain 1832-2008', *J. For the Study of British Cultures*, 2009: 16 (2), pp. 117-130.

21   BBC News Channel, 22 December 2007.

22   Pierce Andrew, *The Telegraph*, 13 November 2008.

23   Bruce, op. cit., pp. 159-160.

opposed to religion enjoying greater public prominence or influence.'[24] Clive Field reviews evidence for the declining authority of Church and clergy since the 1960s.[25]

Hastings assesses the loss of the 'interlocking relationship at every level between civil and religious authority (which) was what Establishment meant' and sees Anglican clergy becoming more clerical and the 'State and the social establishment which dominates it are a great deal more brazenly secular.'[26] Yet he points out that 'the power of the past was a power within bondage'. He suggests that there is a continuing struggle between 'the secularisation of society and the desecularisation of religion'[27]. With a historian's perspective he is hopeful of a new wave of religious fervour.

There are also significant 'signs of the times' and indications of uncertainty and turmoil in UK politics. Unlike continental countries which traditionally have electoral systems with variations of proportional representation, the UK has traditionally had a 'first past the post' electoral system. This has substantially generated a two party system with stable governments and with only small numbers of Members of Parliament in small parties and few cross-party alliances. Attempts to introduce some form of 'proportional representation' to reflect better the views of the electorate, however, were heavily defeated in the UK Alternative Vote Referendum in May 2011.[28] The recent 2010-5 Parliament was the first Coalition Government since World War II. The situation seemed to be changing with the traditional third party, the Liberal Democrats, a party of Government in Coalition with the Conservative Party. However the election in May 2015 unexpectedly yielded a majority Conservative Government.

For some years the electorate has reacted angrily to the seeming lack of justification for the Iraq War and the evidence of a widespread expenses scandal amongst its Members of Parliament. This led to a deep scepticism about politics and Westminster politicians, particularly in Scotland. Indications of dissatisfaction with the two main parties, the Conservative and Labour Parties, was reflected in the steady rise in the proportion of the electorate voting for what is now the Liberal Democrat Party whose share of the vote rose from under 3% in the 1950s to 23% in 2010 when, however, they achieved only 8.8% of parliamentary seats.[29] Resentment of their role in the Coalition Government led to a dramatic collapse to only 7.9% of the vote and only eight seats in the May 2015 Westminster Parliament.

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24   Ibid., p.169.
25   Field Clive D., 'Another Window on British Secularization: Public Attitudes to Church and Clergy Since the 1960s', *Contemporary British History*, 2014, 28 (2), pp. 190-218.
26   Hastings, op.cit., p. 664.
27   Ibid., p. 670.
28   'United Kingdom Alternative Vote Referendum, 2011', *Wikipedia*, Accessed 11 March 2015.
29   Many of the following statistics can be found in Table 2.

Clear signs of dissatisfaction were also shown by the share of votes for 'Other Parties' which rose steadily from 5-6% in the 1970s to 24.7% (but only but only 12.2% of parliamentary seats) in the May 2015 General Election. In Scotland the Labour Party was wiped out and the Scottish National Party (SNP) won 56 seats. The election demonstrated some huge inequalities in the voting system. For example, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) with 3.9 million votes and the Green Party with 1.2 million votes each won only one seat whereas the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Northern Ireland won eight seats with 184,260 votes. It remains to be seen whether such inequalities will result in some constitutional changes in the voting system.

The general disillusionment with politics has also been reflected in sharply declining memberships of political parties. Indeed, membership of the three main political parties in the UK is at a historic low[30] at under 1% compared to 3.8% in 1983. Conservative Party membership has declined from 2.8 million in 1953 to just under 150,000 in 2013. Membership of the Labour Party declined from over one million in 1953 to 190,000 in 2013. Membership of the old Liberal Party was over 243,000 in 1960 but the new Liberal Democrat Party had only 44,000 members in 2014. At the same time membership of some of the 'other' parties has been increasing. There are currently 44,000 members of the UK Green Parties, just under 8,000 members of Plaid Cymru, 93,000 members of the SNP, and 39,000 members of UKIP. The rise of the 'Other Parties' began in 1987 when they won 4% of the vote. This rose to 24.7% in the May 2015 General Election.

There has been a long-term decline in the proportion voting in parliamentary elections from a peak turnout of 83.6% in 1950 to 65.1% in 2010. By contrast, the turnout in the Scottish Referendum in September 2014 was 84.6%, the highest since 1950, and was widely considered to reflect the strong disillusionment with and antagonism towards the centralism of the Westminster Parliament and the scandal over widespread misuse of the system of parliamentary expenses. 45% of the electorate voted that they wanted Scottish independence from the United Kingdom while 55% voted that it was better to stay together as part of a United Kingdom. The 'yes' vote was particularly high in the old de-industrialised areas such as Glasgow and Clydeside. It seems that a considerable proportion of Labour voters had rejected official Labour policies and had voted 'yes'. This had major implications for the Labour Party in the United Kingdom as a whole in the run-up to the General Election in May 2015. It was also interpreted as demonstrating a considerable opposition to what was seen as a Westminster consensus and its advocacy of neo-liberal capitalism.

In the fortnight before the Scottish referendum the polls had suggested that the gap between 'yes' and 'no' voters was narrowing rapidly so that a 'yes' vote seemed a distinct possibility. In panic all three main party leaders in the West-

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30   Keen Richard, 'Membership of UK Political Parties', Commons Library Standard Note SN 05125, 30 January 2015.

minster parliament 'vowed' to give Scotland a considerable degree of devolution and control in the event of a 'no' vote. In the aftermath of the referendum there was general agreement that the movement for independence run by the Scottish National Party had galvanised politics and generated a new generation of activists.

The vote had an immediate knock-on effect. On the morning after the vote the prime minister, David Cameron, fearful of the strength of Euroscepticism in his Conservative Party and the evidence of strong support for UKIP, pledged to ensure that the law would be changed to ensure that there would be 'English votes for English laws', that is corresponding forms of devolution for England, and no doubt further devolution for Wales and Northern Ireland. In other words, politics in the United Kingdom early in 2015 was in a state of flux as the constituent nations to a greater or lesser extent sought greater devolution and an affirmation of their separate national identities.

IV Survey Evidence

Three major surveys in the United Kingdom record information about religious affiliations: the UK Census, the Labour Force Survey, and the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA).[31] The different questions asked produced rather different results though general trends can be discerned.[32] For example, the Census for England and Wales asked 'What is your religion?' and the proportion of the population saying that they had none increased from 14.6% in 2001 to 24.7% in 2011 in England and from 18.5% to 32.1% in Wales. The Census in Scotland asked 'What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?' and the proportion selecting 'none' increased from 27.6% in 2001 to 36.7% in 2011. There were no comparable data for Northern Ireland in 2001 but in 2011 10.1% recorded they had no religion. Similar trends were reported by Labour Force surveys. When asked the question 'What is your religion even if you are not currently practising?', the number selecting 'no religion' increased from 15.7% in 2004 to 22.4% in 2010. The trend was even more striking in the British Social Attitudes surveys. When asked 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?', the number selecting 'no religion' increased from 41.2% in 2001 to 50.6 in 2009.

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31 Clive Field reflects on the need to distinguish affiliation, beliefs and practices in 'Measuring Religious Affiliation in Great Britain: the 2011 Census in Historical and Methodological Context', *Religion*, 44 (3) 2014, pp. 357-382. A useful summary can also be found in Wikipedia for 'Religion in the United Kingdom' which outlines data from a range of contrasting surveys. There are also separate articles on Religion in the constituent countries of Great Britain: England, Scotland and Wales. There is a separate article on 'Christianity in Ireland'.

32 Steve Bruce and David Voas compare census and sample surveys, and those for England and Wales with those for Scotland in 'The 2001 Census and Christian Identification in Britain', *J. Contemporary Religion*, 19 (1) 2004, pp. 23-28.

Table 1: Stated Religion by Nation, 2001 and 2011 Censuses (%)[33]

Religion	England		Scotland		Wales		N.Ireland		U.K.	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Christianity	71.7	59.4	71.9	57.6	65.1	53.8	85.8	82.3	71.6	59.5
Islam	3.1	5.0	0.7	1.5	0.8	1.4	0.1	0.2	2.7	4.4
Hinduism	1.1	1.5	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.1	1.0	1.3
Sikhism		0.7	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.6
Judaism	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.4
Buddism	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.4
Other	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.4
No religion	14.6	24.7	18.5	32.1	27.6	36.7	---	10.1	---	25.7
Not stated	7.7	7.2	8.1	7.6	5.5	7.0	---	6.8	---	7.2
Population, m(= 100%)	49.1	53.0	2.9	3.1	5.1	5.3	1.7	1.8	58.8	63.2

Table 1 gives the stated religion for each of the four nations for the censuses in 2001 and 2011. These data indicate that very substantial and significant changes occurred during the first decade of the twenty-first century in the three nations comprising Great Britain. First of all, while in this decade the population of the United Kingdom increased by 4.4 million the number selecting Christianity as their religion declined by 4.5 million. The number selecting the 'no religion' option increased by nearly six million in England over the decade with a further half million in each of Wales and Scotland. In England one quarter of the population in 2011 claimed they had no religion while the proportion in Wales had increased to nearly one-third and in Scotland to well over one third. The exceptional nature of religion in Northern Ireland with its history of sectarian conflict is also clear with a slight increase in the number selecting 'Christianity' as their religion, though the proportion declined from 85.8% in 2001 to 82.3% in 2011.

Between 2001 and 2011 the numbers in the United Kingdom selecting Islam as their religion increased by 1.2 million to 2.8 million and other non-Christian religious adherents increased by a further 0.5 million. The jihadist '7/7' bombing in 2005, the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013 and concerns about around 500 travelling to Syria to join jihadist fighters in the war in Syria have raised concerns about Muslims in the United Kingdom. But Muslim religious leaders have been at pains to distance themselves from the jihadists and there have been several cases where Muslim families have reported their concerns about their children.

The results from the Religion and Society Research Programme funded by

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33   *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_the_United_Kingdom.* See, in general, the published records by British Religion in Numbers (BRIN), accessed 13 October 2015 for 2010 data; accessed 2014 for 2001 data.

the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) from 2007 to 2012 suggest that 'a multi-faith and multi-commitment nation...is here to stay'[34] while the Director of the programme concluded that in the UK 'everyday, lived religion...is thriving and evolving, whilst hierarchical, dogmatic forms of religion are marginalised.'[35]

Table 2 shows the number of Members of Parliament by political party and their share of the votes, as well as the turnout for selected elections to the Westminster Parliament over the seventy years since the end of the Second World War. Three things, in particular, can be noted from these results. In the first place, the implications of the 'first past the post' voting system, which appeared to ensure a stable and dominant government, meant that third parties such as the Liberal/Liberal Democrats were grossly under-represented in terms of parliamentary seats. For example, in 1945, Labour had 48% of the vote but 62% of the seats while the Liberals and Others with nearly 12% of the vote had only 5% of the seats. Again, in the 2010 election, the Conservatives had only 36% of the vote but achieved 47% of seats while the Liberal Democrats and other parties with 35% of the votes had only 13% of the seats.

Table 2: Members of Parliament in Westminster by Party, Share of Vote, Turnout and Election Year[36]

Year	Labour		Conservative		Lib/LibDem		Others		Turnout%
	Seats	%vote	Seats	%vote	Seats	%vote	Seats	%vote	
1945	395	48.1	215	40.1	12	9.0	18	2.8	72.6
1950	315	46.2	298	43.5	9	9.1	3	1.2	83.6
1959	258	43.8	365	49.3	6	5.9	1	1.0	78.7
1970	287	42.7	330	46.0	6	7.5	6	3.8	72.0
1979	268	36.9	339	43.9	11	13.8	16	5.4	76.0
1983	209	27.6	397	42.4	23	25.4	21	4.6	72.7
1997	418	43.2	165	30.7	46	16.8	29	9.3	71.3
2010	258	29.0	306	36.1	57	23.0	28	11.9	65.1
2015	232	30.5	331	36.9	8	7.9	79[37]	24.7	66.1

Secondly, the decline of two-class politics seems apparent from the 1970s with the Liberals/Liberal Democrats achieving well over one-fifth of the votes, and with other parties over one-third of the votes, in the 2005 and 2010 elections. One factor would appear to be the decline of employment in the manufacturing and heavy industry sectors from the 1970s, the growth of employment in the

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34   Knott Kim, 'Faith and Unity Through Diversity', *The Tablet*, 4 February, 2012.

35   Woodhead Linda, 'Religion à la Mode', *The Tablet*, 28 April 2012.

36   *http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/uktable.htm,* accessed 13 October 2015.

37   Note that this figure includes 56 MPs elected for the Scottish National Party, up from 6 in the 2010 election

service sector, and a big decline in membership of trade unions from 13 million in 1979 to under 6 million in 2012. The strong vote in the Scottish Referendum in September 2014 together with the large post-referendum recruitment by the Scottish National Party (SNP) was also indicative of a growing disillusionment with the two-party system. Another indication is the decline in the memberships of the three main parties.

Table 3: Party Voting by Religion, % (2010)[38]

Party	Anglicans	Catholics	Other Christian	Other Religions	Not Religious	Election Result
Conservative	45	30	33	31	29	36
Labour	25	40	30	28	28	29
Liberal Democrat	20	23	26	31	33	23
Other	10	7	11	10	10	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Thirdly, the steady decline in voter-turnout for general elections from 83.6% in 1950 to 66.1% in 2015 is also a sign of a growing disillusionment with the current political system. There is a perception, particularly in Scotland, that the centrist politics of both the two main parties do not make a significant difference in terms of policy outcomes which, since Thatcher in the 1980s and Blair's 'New Labour' from 1997 to 2010, have largely been determined by an increasingly dominant globalising neo-liberal capitalism.

Table 3 indicates that Anglicans are more likely than the population generally to vote Conservative, even if they may no longer represent 'the Conservative Party at prayer'. As Bruce indicates: 'despite the decline of the Catholic fortress mentality, considerable inter-marriage and upward social mobility...Catholics still show a strong preference for voting Labour.'[39] He continues to argue that as 'there is very little about the Labour party's programme that would make it more attractive to Catholic values than those of the Conservatives, we have to suppose that much of this is a residue of the patterns formed on class grounds in the 1930s.' I think this is only partially true and would suggest that Catholic values such as the common good, solidarity and the preferential option for the poor are more likely to be found in the Labour party than the Conservative party, especially in the post-Thatcher period of neo-liberal capitalism. The non-conformist Christians as well as those of other religions and no religion are all more likely than Anglicans and Catholics to vote for the Liberal Democrat Party.

The British Election Surveys (BES) and British Social Attitudes Surveys (BSA) provide more detailed analyses of the relationship between political party vot-

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38   Adapted from Bruce, op. cit., p. 26. See also Field Clive, 'Religious Voting Intentions', *http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2015/religious-voting-intentions-and-other-news*, 8 March 2015.

39   Bruce, ibid., p. 26.

ing and intentions and religious affiliation and frequency of attendance (as a measure of commitment).[40] In 2010 self-identifying Anglicans were nearly twice as likely to vote Conservative as Catholics. Self-identifying Catholics were more likely to vote Labour and show lower support for Liberal Democrats. Self-identifying Nonconformists were more likely to vote for Liberal Democrats than the other denominations. Muslims were more likely to vote Labour while Jews and Buddhists were disproportionately Liberal Democrats. Among Anglican and Catholics women were more likely than men to vote Conservative though the opposite was the case among other religious groups.

Among Anglicans, regular attenders were more likely than nominal members to vote Conservative. Broadly speaking these patterns hold for current voting intentions though there are noticeable differences within some denominations when adherence to traditional belief in God is taken into account. For example, among Catholics and Nonconformists, support for the Conservatives is noticeably higher among those with a traditional belief in God while among the Church of Scotland/Presbyterians the opposite is the case.

The BES and BSA surveys also enabled the analysis of values in terms of three major political measures: left-right, libertarian-authoritarian, and welfarist-individualist preferences. On the left-right scale, Catholics and Muslims were more consistently left while Anglicans were more consistently right. When asked the more specific question about 'tax and spend' policies, Catholics were slightly more in favour with the 'other religion' group more hostile. On the left-right scale religious attendance was a better indicator that religious affiliation. Non-attenders were more likely to be on the left of the political spectrum. The libertarian-authoritarian scale was based on six statements and Anglicans tended to be the most authoritarian. In 2011 the infrequent attenders tended to be authoritarian while frequent attenders were the most libertarian group. The welfarist-individualist scale based on eight statements suggested a consistent trend towards individualism over the past decade. Generally, Anglicans were more anti-welfarist and Catholics more welfarist than other groups. Frequent attenders were more sympathetic towards government spending on welfare benefits for the poor even if this led to higher taxes.

As was noted in the previous section, the countries of the United Kingdom have always included successive waves of immigrants, mainly in search of employment but also as asylum seekers and refugees. In the post-war period there have been at least three significant waves of immigration. The first wave from the 1940s to the 1960s were Irish working class who mainly lived in Roman Catholic inner-city parishes. But following the introduction of 'secondary education for all', increasing numbers of the Irish immigrants were upwardly socially mobile into middle class jobs but were also well-enough off to be geographically mobile

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40   See, e.g., Clements Ben and Spencer Nick, 'Voting and Values in Britain: Does Religion Count?' Executive Summary, Theos, nd.

to suburban areas around our major cities. The size of this wave of immigrants was indicated by the returns from the 1971 Census. These suggested that around one quarter of Catholics were first generation immigrants and a further fifth were second generation immigrants, that is the children of immigrants.[41] Around one half of the immigrants were Irish, the bulk of them Catholics. Their working class and anti-Unionist origins were reflected in their tendency to vote Labour.

The second large wave of immigration came from the 1950s to the 1970s and included not only migrant workers from the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent but also refugees and asylum seekers such as Ugandans. Many congregated in parts of the major cities such as London, Leicester and Bradford. The 2011 Census data showed that over 300 first languages were spoken in London schools[42] and there were more than 50 non-indigenous communities in London with a population of more than 10,000.[43] Some schools in London, for example, have been reported to have students who have come from over seventy different countries. The 2011 census showed that only 44.9% of London's population were of 'White British' origin. 37% were born outside the UK including 24.5% born outside of Europe. The Black Population in London, mainly from Africa and the Caribbean, was 1.1 million and the Asian Population, mainly Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, was over 1.5 million.[44] There are, however, very substantial differences between the different ethnic groups, for example between the entrepreneurial Chinese and East Asians, highly educated Ugandan refugees, lower class Bangladeshis, and West Indians with low educational achievements. Table 3 suggests they have a higher than average propensity to vote Liberal Democrat.

The third major wave of immigration occurred over the past decade and especially since several countries from central and eastern Europe joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. It is estimated that over 200,000 Poles settled in the UK after World War II but by 2001 there were only 61,000. Following the enlargement of the EU large numbers of economic migrants have come to the UK. For example, the 2011 Census estimated there were 521,000 Poles and 97,000 Lithuanians in the UK. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimates in 2012 are considerably higher.[45] Polish migrant workers, for example, have a great reputation as skilled workers and there are numerous agricultural workers from Eastern Europe who are seasonal farm workers.

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41   Hornsby-Smith Michael, *Roman Catholics in England*, op. cit., pp. 24-26.

42   *www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/londonfacts/default.htm?category=2,* accessed 2014; see ref.41.

43   *En.wikipedia.org/wiki/demographics_of_London,* accessed 13 October 2015

44   *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_groups_in_London,* accessed 13 October 2015

45   *En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poles_in_the_United_Kingdom,* and *Lithuanians_in_the_United_Kingdom,* accessed 13 October 2015

V   Case Studies

In order to investigate the claim that 'religion is now a major player on the public stage' it is necessary to consider not only religious attitudes but also evidence of the power of Church authorities to influence public policies. In this section we will consider three issues where Church leaders in recent years have expressed concern without any noticeable policy response from the Government: housing policy, poverty and inequality, and the common good.

First, let us consider housing policy. During the Thatcher years the Church of England protested strongly about some of the social implications of the government policies of that time. In a recent biography Eliza Filby argues that Mrs. Thatcher's worldview was shaped by the Methodist values of piety, thrift and the Protestant work ethic learned in her local Methodist church in Grantham. But she concludes that during her time as prime minister (1979-1992) she created a more secular Britain driven by deregulated capitalism.[46] In 1985 the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas published a highly critical report *Faith in the City*.[47] One of its conclusions was that much of the growing spiritual and economic poverty in Britain's inner cities was due to Thatcherite policies. Before it was published a Conservative cabinet minister reportedly dismissed the report as 'pure Marxist theology'. According to Wikipedia 'the report triggered extensive public and media debate regarding Thatcherite ethics, urban decay, the modern role and relevance of the Church, and the perceived growing divide between rich and poor in 1980s Britain.' One outcome was the creation by the Church of England of a Church Urban Fund in 1988 which distributed £55 million to faith related issues across the country such as promoting the use of Church land for the construction of affordable housing.[48]

But there is no evidence that such informed and committed pleading had any significant impact on the government's housing policies. Permanent dwellings completed in the UK fell from over 300,000 a year from 1953 to 1977 to an average of 175,000 from 1991 to 2013. The main cause of the fall was the drop in average annual local authority completions from around 157,000 to under 2,000.[49] There is a particular problem in London where the property market has become 'a magnet for the super-rich'.[50] One consequence of the shortage of housing is

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46   Eliza Filby, *God and Mrs.Thatcher: The Battle for Britain's Soul*, Biteback Publishing, London, 2015.

47   *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation*. Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas. Church House Publishing, London, 1985.

48   Bessant Chris (ed.), *Faith in Affordable Housing: Using Church Land and Property for Affordable Housing*. Housing Justice, London, 2009. See also *www.culf.org.uk*.

49   *https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building,* Table 241, accessed 13 October 2015.

50   See, e.g. *wire.novaramedia.com/2014/10/London-housing-crisis-6-problems-we-face,* accessed 13 October 2015.

increasing rents and a lack of affordable housing.[51]

A recent study by the Social Market Foundation has pointed out that 'for two decades and more, the supply of housing – both private and public – has fallen well short of the level needed to match predicted increases in demand. The situation is set to worsen with household numbers rising rapidly in the decades ahead.'[52] The 'Right to Buy' social housing at a considerable discount introduced in 1980 and deregulation of financial services resulted in substantial reduction in the social housing sector and an almost total collapse in the number of local authority houses being built. The shortage of housing resulted in increased house values and an interest on the part of the owner-occupying majority in limiting new house building. Nimbyism, that is 'no building in my back yard', or in the protected 'green belts' around major cities, became a cultural norm which contributed to the suppression of house building to much lower rates than the estimated '230,000 net additions ...required on average over the next twenty years.'[53] In sum, in this major area of social policy the concerns of the Churches have had no noticeable effect on government housing policies.

Secondly, the Churches have expressed concerns about poverty and inequality. Recent analysts have drawn attention to the consequences of growing inequality both domestically and globally. Wilkinson and Pickett summarised international evidence which showed that high levels of inequality were related to a wide range of social disadvantages including lower life expectancies and higher levels of morbidity.[54] Again, in his comprehensive analysis of international capitalism, Thomas Piketty has raised serious questions about the long-term growth of inequality which is likely to give rise to serious social uncertainty and conflict.[55]

Such concerns have again been raised recently by the Church of England. Thirty years after the *Faith in the City* report the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have raised serious questions about the maintenance of social cohesion and the moral principles underpinning Britain's social, political and economic policies.[56] *On Rock or Sand?* offers a scathing attack on inequality arguing that Britain has been dominated by 'rampant consumerism and individualism' since the Thatcher era. The Archbishop of Canterbury argued that entire towns and regions have been 'trapped in an apparently inescapable economic downward spiral.' The Archbishop of York defiantly asserts that 'like the Old Testament prophets...it is essential for religion to speak the truth to power.' Other contributors

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51   See, e.g. Bessant (ed.), op. cit.
52   Keohane Nigel and Broughton Nida, *The Politics of Housing*, Social Market Foundation, London, 2013, p. 3.
53   Ibid.
54   Wilkinson Richard and Pickett Kate, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, Allen Lane, London, 2009.
55   Piketty Thomas, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2014.
56   Sentanu John (ed.), *On Rock or Sand? Firm Foundations for Britain's Future*, SPCK, London, 2015.

see the welfare state as the embodiment of the Christian command to 'love thy neighbour as thyself' and have criticised spending cuts which have widened the gap between the rich and the poor.

Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has also vowed to put payday lenders out of business by using the Church of England to build up a network of credit unions and financial cooperatives. Particularly targeted was Wonga, reported to have charged up to 6000% interest on loans. There was considerable embarrassment when the Church of England was found to have shares in Wonga but efforts have since been made to divest of these. The Archbishop also criticised Government ministers for damaging contrasts between 'scroungers' on state benefits and 'strivers' in work, pointing out that some multi-millionaires are scroungers or tax dodgers. In February 2015 it was also revealed by an international consortium including the *Guardian*, BBC Panorama and *Le Monde*, that through a Swiss subsidiary the HSBC Bank was helping customers to avoid paying taxes. The bank has since apologised but to date only one person has been prosecuted. The Government was embarrassed when it became clear that a former chief executive and chairman of HSBC had been appointed a Government minister by David Cameron.

The standard measure of relative income poverty used throughout the European Union is less than 60% of median income. In 2014 a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) said that 23.2% of the UK population were now in relative poverty. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) estimate that 3.5 million children (27%) were living in poverty but in some local neighbourhoods this proportion was between 50% and 70%. As many as 66% of children growing up in poverty lived in a home where at least one member worked. Between 1998/9 and 2011/12 1.1 million children were lifted out of poverty, partly as a result of increased levels of lone parents working but also as a result of increased levels of benefits. Under current government policies child poverty is expected to rise to 4.7 million by 2020.[57]

The New Economics Foundation noted that whereas 'in 1979 the UK was one of the most equal of industrialised countries, today it is one of the most unequal'.[58] Among the explanations were the processes of 'deindustrialisation and financialisation' in the UK. In spite of their sometimes penetrating criticisms of existing Government policies or outcomes, there is little or no evidence that the Churches have had the power to influence or change decision-making in the areas of political and economic policies which have any influence on poverty and inequality outcomes.

Thirdly, over the past two decades the Churches have promoted the idea of the 'common good'. In a document critical of the social consequences of Thatch-

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57   *http://www.cpag.org.uk/child-poverty-facts-and-figure,* accessed 13 October 2015

58   Lawlor Eilis, Spratt Stephen, Shaheen Faizen and Beitler Daiana, *Why the Rich are Getting Richer,* New Economics Foundation, London, October 2011.

erite policies the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in 1996 published *The Common Good*.[59] The document defines the common good as 'the whole network of social conditions which enable human individuals and groups to flourish and live a fully, genuinely human life... All are responsible for all, collectively, at the level of society or nation, not only as individuals.'[60] The document rejected 'unbridled capitalism', 'trickle down' economics and the exclusion of the poor from full participation in society. It urged an 'option for the poor' and warned that if the gap between the rich and poor became too great it would undermine the common good. 'The first duty of the citizen towards the common good is to ensure nobody is marginalised.'[61] The statement rejected the doctrine of laissez-faire capitalism as a form of idolatry or economic superstition. It argued that 'it is not morally acceptable to seek to reduce unemployment by letting wages fall below the level at which employees can sustain a decent standard of living.'[62] It concluded 'the political arena has to be reclaimed in the name of the common good. Public life needs rescuing from utilitarian expediency and the pursuit of self-interest. Society must not turn its back on poor people nor on the stranger at the gate.'[63]

The Common Good came out shortly before the 1997 election which initiated thirteen years of 'New Labour' policies. However, these remained substantially uncritical of neo-liberal capitalism even though they did introduce a number of ameliorating social policies. Shortly before the 2015 General Election, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales circulated a much less challenging letter for Catholics to consider before voting in order to 'best serve the common good.'[64]

Interestingly, the Conservative prime minister, David Cameron, following the 2010 election favoured the notion of the 'Big Society' which he said was 'about a huge culture change where people in their everyday lives...don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their communities.[65] The idea proposed 'integrating the free market with a theory of social solidarity based on hierarchy and voluntarism'.[66] The Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, initially approved of this but the grow-

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59   Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*, Gabriel Communications, Manchester, 1996.

60   ibid, §48.

61   Ibid. §75.

62   Ibid. §97.

63   Ibid. §119.

64   CBCEW, *The General Election 2015: A Letter to Catholics in England and Wales from their Bishops*, 2015. Clifford Longley pointedly described this as 'meek' when compared with *The Common Good* and the Church of England's *Who is my Neighbour?*

65   *http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2012/10/big-society-...*; Knight Barry, 'From Big Society to Good Society', *New Statesman*, 23 October 2012.

66   *http:en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_ Society*, accessed 13 October 2015.

ing need for food banks and the plight of the homeless and anti-immigrant propaganda led to subsequent criticisms and it failed to prioritise the poor, weak or strangers.

In February 2015 the Church of England Bishops launched a pastoral letter in advance of the General Election.[67] It called for a new direction in British political life which rejected the 'growing appetite to exploit grievances, find scapegoats and create barriers between people and nations' and focused more on the common good. It pointed to the contradiction between the celebration of equality in principle while treating 'the poor and vulnerable as unwanted, unvalued, and unnoticed.'[68] A recurring theme was the need to combat the accumulation of power which leaves too many people powerless. It contrasted the ugly undercurrent of racism and the crude stereotyping of migrants with Christian neighbourliness and in its concern for 'our grandchildren's future' it appealed for long-term perspectives. In Scotland Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) released a set of resources for the 2015 UK General Election based on its '2020 Vision of the Good Society'[69] and a Church of Scotland representative urged the UK to take a moral lead and stop the renewal of the Trident weapons system and promote disarmament.[70]

In spite of all these efforts, there is no evidence that any of them from the largest Churches in the UK have led to significant changes in government social, economic or defence policies.

VI   Concluding Reflections

This article has noted that after a millennium of Roman Catholicism in the two Isles, the Reformation radically altered the religious characteristics differently in each of the four nations. Following the Reformation for four centuries in Britain there was much antagonism between Catholics and Protestants while Roman Catholicism continued to be the religion of the majority in Ireland. Anti-Catholic feelings steadily weakened in the years after the Second World War.

Both England and Scotland had established Protestant Churches but significant dissenting minorities. This pervasive religious pluralism, increased by successive waves of immigration, rather than overtly aggressive secularism, was responsible for the increasing 'privatisation of religion'.[71] Religion became a private and personal issue. British Social Attitudes surveys over the past decade have shown that 'most Britons were opposed to religion enjoying greater public prominence or influence... The British public is happy with the privatisation of

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67   *Who is my Neighbour?*, op. cit.
68   Ibid., p. 28.
69   *http://ctbielections.org.uk,* accessed 13 October 2015.
70   *http://rt.com/op-edge/234435-church-scotland-nuclear-race/,* accessed 13 October 2015.
71   Bruce, op. cit., pp. 159-60.

religion.'[72] In any case, there is a distinct absence of consensus among Christians on such matters as abortion and nuclear weapons. 'Christian leaders might still, nevertheless, deliver an effective witness without consensus'[73] as the recent pre-Election addresses of the Church of England bishops and the Roman Catholic hierarchy have indicated.

The Church of England, in particular, has been effected by the steady migration out of rural communities as a result of changes in the job market, increased educational opportunities, and subsequent social and geographical mobility. This has had a number of related consequences. The close ties with the local parish church have been replaced by the relative isolation of urban living from immediate familial and community support and the breakdown of close ties with the Church. Hastings argued that these social changes have resulted in a general decline of clerical authority and the twin processes of laicisation and feminisation.[74] There is strong evidence also of significant generational shifts in religious beliefs in the 1970s.[75] Linda Woodhead has also reported significant changes in the patterns of Catholic belonging in recent years. There are significant reductions of religious beliefs, church attendance, reliance on religious authorities, and opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage and euthanasia.[76] The empirical data we have reviewed has also shown very considerable declines in religious beliefs, commitments and identities especially since the 1960s. Catholics, for example, who mobilised in defence of Catholic schools in the late 1940s, are unlikely to be mobilised for any political goal today[77] though large numbers did participate in the global 'Make Poverty History' campaign in 2005. However, they failed to contest effectively the legalisation of abortion in 1967 and subsequent attempts to amend it. More recently, in spite of a petition advocated by the Catholic bishops opposing the legalisation of same-sex marriages, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill was passed by large majorities by both the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments in 2013.[78]

Particularly noticeable at the present time is the rapid increase in the number of Muslims in the UK and its anticipated increase to 4.2 million (6.5% of the popu-

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72   Ibid., p. 169.

73   Hastings, op.cit., pp. 657-658.

74   Ibid., pp. xviii-xix.

75   In the case of Roman Catholics see, Hornsby-Smith Michael Peter and Lee Raymond, *Roman Catholic Opinion: A Study of Roman Catholics in England and Wales in the 1970s,* University of Surrey, Guildford, 1979.

76   Woodhead Linda, 'Endangered Species', *The Tablet,* 16 November 2013. See Also *http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/18748929-00704005* and *http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13537903.2014.945733#,* accessed 13 October 2015

77   Hornsby-Smith Michael P., *Roman Catholics in England,* op.cit., p.216; Hornsby-Smith Michael Peter (ed.), *Catholics in England 1950-2000: Historical and Sociological Perspectives,* Cassell, London, 1999, pp. 298-300.

78   *http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2013/marriage-same-sex-couples-bill/,* Field Clive, 4 February 2013, accessed 13 October 2015.

lation) by 2020.[79] While there are undoubtedly undercurrents of opposition to the levels of immigration experienced in recent years, the challenges of pluralist cultures, and the occasional terrorist atrocity, there has not so far been a serious and widespread level of hostility towards Muslims.[80]

The three case studies reviewed of active interventions in British politics in recent years by the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Churches have revealed considerable disquiet on the part of the Church leaderships with the direction and values of British politics. But their protests seem very largely to have fallen on deaf political ears. There have been no serious changes of political direction as a result of these religious interventions. The conclusion seems clear: religion does not have significant power to influence seriously the direction of British politics. As Hastings put it, 'English Christianity remained committed, serious, open-minded, constructive, ecumenical, diverse, an integral contributor to national life but certainly no longer a dominant intellectual, social or political force.'[81]

This paper has been completed shortly after the Scottish Referendum on independence from the United Kingdom and a keenly contested UK General Election. This provided a striking demonstration of the impact of the upward social mobility of the educationally successful working class, together with the impact of massive deindustrialisation on traditional allegiances to the Labour Party. Significant numbers have assimilated to middle class mores while the poor and marginalised have been stripped of intelligent and committed working class activists and trade union leaders. These generational shifts and the substantial rejection of traditional labour affiliation which were reflected in Scottish referendum, together with the high levels of immigrants with diverse cultural backgrounds, suggest that a major upheaval is currently underway in British politics, the results of which are not yet clear.

The UK General Election in 2015 confounded all the pollsters and after five years of coalition government provided the Conservative Party with a majority of MPs in the Westminster Parliament. Prime Minister David Cameron has promised a referendum on membership of the EU in 2017 and further devolution and possible forms of federalism, in spite of a promise to promote the interests of 'One Nation'. The future looks very uncertain and has been well reflected in the observations of a political commentator about the 'formidable obstacles' facing the prime minister: 'First, and most obviously, we are clearly not One Nation. Never has this kingdom looked more disunited, a polarisation amplified by the electoral system. Southern England outside London looks like a one-party blue (i.e.

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79   *www.brin.ac.uk/news/2011/future-of-the-global-muslim-population/,* accessed 13 October 2015.
80   See, e.g., Clements Ben, 'Explaining Public Attitudes towards the Integration of Muslims in British Society: the 'Solidarity of the Religions', *J. Contemporary Religion*, 2013: 28 (1).
81   Hastings, op.cit., p. xxiii.

Conservative) state. Scotland looks like a one-party nationalist state.'[82] There is no evidence that religion played a significant role in the election or that it is likely to do so in the challenging years ahead.

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82   Rawnsley Andrew, 'Cameron should enjoy his "sweet victory" – before it turns sour', *The Observer*, 10 May 2015, p.39.

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Мајкл П. Хорнсби-Смит

РЕЛИГИЈА И ПОЛИТИКА
У УЈЕДИЊЕНОМ КРАЉЕВСТВУ

Сажетак

Овај чланак нуди преглед односа религије и политике у Уједињеном Краљевству убрзо након референдума у Шкотској у септембру 2014. и општих избора у земљи у мају 2015. године. На почетку је кратак историјски приказ настанка четири одвојена дела Уједињеног Краљевства, њихових различитих искустава са англо-саксонским и викиншким инвазијама и одговорима на Реформацију из XV-тог века након миленијума римокатолицизма. Након тога, кратко приказује податке са скорашњих пописа и истраживања друштвених ставова у вези верских идентитета, веровања и обавеза и преференција према политичкој партији који, генерално гледано, указују на преференцију англиканаца да подржавају Конзервативну партију, док са друге стране римокатолици преферирају Лабуристичку партију. Лидери Енглеске цркве су недавно истакли да је религија сада главни играч на јавној сцени. Овај став је снажно одбијен. Прво, попис и истраживачки подаци недвосмислено указују на опадање религијског заноса и на јак став јавности да је вера приватна и лична ствар, а да верски лидери не треба да се мешају у политику. Друго, три примера у овом раду указују да и поред јаких интервенција верских лидера њихове акције нису довеле до озбиљних промена у владиној политици.

Кључне речи: религија, политика, четири нације Уједињеног краљевства, моћ, утицај