

Faith in Community and Communities of Faith? Government Rhetoric and Religious Identity in Urban Britain

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ABSTRACT *This paper examines the concept of community and the discourse around it in the context of the religious diversity in urban areas in England. Sociology has a long history of working with, deconstructing, and at times rejecting the usefulness of the term 'community' and many scholars have in the context of postmodernity preferred to talk about processes of identity formation and networking. Constructions of identity in which faith affiliation plays a salient role are probably becoming more common and more politically significant. However, an integrated theory of the relationship between religion, community, ethnicity, and identity remains to be developed and this paper attempts some tentative first steps.*

In their search for 'feel good' terminology, politicians in democracies such as the UK have often turned to the language of community and continue to do so. Faced with the task of managing local conflicts and delivering services which are responsive to the demands of users, contemporary governments have increasingly adopted communitarian positions and the language of social capital. In recent years in the UK, religion has moved up the political agenda and an official discourse and policy initiatives structured around the notion of 'faith communities' have emerged.

The New Labour government has indeed put its faith in community and sought to co-opt communities of faith into its 'project'. However, it is far from clear that there is a coherent understanding of the notion of faith community or of the two words that make up the phrase. One may question whether the government discourse resonates with the understandings of community and identity in the major faith traditions found in the contemporary city. An examination of some of the official discourse set alongside the changing and conflicting identities of some 'faith communities' in London and other British cities suggests that the British State's current simplistic approach to engaging with religious diversity is an inadequate basis for policy development.

Community as a Sociological Concept

Sociology has a long history of working with, deconstructing, and at times rejecting the usefulness of the term 'community'. A good starting point is Hillery's listing of 94 definitions of the notion of community (Hillery, 1955). They fall mainly into three categories, which inevitably have considerable overlap. In the first place are those which have a largely geographical or local reference, while the other two are more strictly sociological in that they focus on relationships. One recurring theme is solidarity, fellow feeling, *communitas*

which binds people together with a shared sense of identity or belonging. An alternative emphasis is on social interaction as frequent contact. Here the exchange of information, goods, and services tends to structure and transform networks into a self-conscious entity. The two approaches have some resonance with the familiar sociological dichotomy of structure and action and the traditions associated, respectively, with two giants among the discipline's founders, Durkheim and Weber.

The industrial revolution and the urbanisation and political upheavals which accompanied it were the context in which the founding fathers of sociology were working and had a significant impact when they selected their problems to study. Plant (1974) examines the account of German thought given by Nisbet and points to the contributions of Herder, Schiller, and Hegel in the 'rediscovery of community' at that time. A key notion of the German Romantics is fragmentation. The whole man (person) is found in the context of traditional community, while in modernity, the division of labour leads to fragmented forms of human interaction. Plant traces how the theme continues especially in urban sociology down to the work of Louis Wirth (1938) and Harvey Cox (1968).

The most influential statement of these ideas for subsequent discussion of the concept of community is Tönnies's duality between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (association), which appeared in 1887 (Tönnies, 1887). The popular version of the account is as follows: in the idyllic (but perhaps imaginary) village life of two centuries ago, community (*Gemeinschaft*) was a natural state of affairs. Interaction was on a human scale and people largely lived with, worked alongside, married, worshipped with, traded with, quarrelled with, and were even oppressed by, people whom they had known face to face all their lives. Inevitably status was ascribed rather than achieved and there were therefore many constraints on the ability of individuals, especially the poor, females, and outsiders, to achieve prosperity, power, and personal fulfilment or a chosen lifestyle. Relationships between people were multiplex, i.e. the same people were linked by a multi-stranded pattern of roles. The Romantic argument is that this produces intimacy, social cohesion, and sympathy between the participants. To be fair to Tönnies, it is important to point out that he saw *Gemeinschaft* not as a disappearing historical situation, but as a quality and style of human interaction, that it is the intimacy of home and hearth, of religion and neighbourliness, and that even in modern urban settings, it is not totally absent.

Nonetheless, it is here that we can find the root of the myth of 'community lost', which drives so many current political and popular debates around urban regeneration, housing policy, crime, 'feral' youth, families, and parenting. In the old days, as described for London's East End by Wilmott and Young (1957), it was—it is said—safe to leave your front door open and everyone looked out for everyone else. A whole *genre* of community studies, usually with a geographical base and working-class emphasis peaked in the 1950s and 1960s (Frankenberg, 1966; Bell & Newby, 1971), but then disappeared from sight until revived in the 1990s (Crow & Allan, 1994), as sociologists recognised that they produced inadequate accounts of class conflict, social and geographical mobility, and increasing ethnic diversity (Rex & Moore, 1967). Anthropological approaches to community in the post-war period introduced the notion of social networks (Bott, 1957) and began to highlight the importance of exclusion and social

boundary maintenance in identity and group formation (Barth, 1969) and the social construction of community (Cohen Anthony, 1985). Critical analysis of the discourse of community included Lyon (1984) and a number of feminist writers (Frazer & Lacey, 1993; Bounds, 1997). More recent and upbeat studies of social movements, communities of interest, and virtual interaction, such as those by Craven and Wellman (1973), Wellman (1979), Rheingold (1994), and Castells (1997, 1998), focus on the building of shared identities and community through personal networking, liberated from spatial constraints. Yet even these find it hard to break away from the paradigm of community lost or fragmented, just as sociology of religion remains wedded to the secularisation paradigm, with which there are numerous obvious parallels and linkages.

Sociologies of Identity and Ethnicity

In recent years, as community studies declined in popularity, there has emerged within the discipline of cultural studies in Britain a large body of research and literature on the construction and negotiation of ethnicity and identities. Drawing inspiration from seminal work by such writers as Barth (1969), Cohen Anthony (1985, 1986, 2000), and Stuart Hall (Hall, duGay *et al.*, 1998), scholars such as Phil Cohen (Cohen, 1993; 1999; Cohen & Fenton, 2002), John Eade (Eade, 1989; Eade & Jones, 1999; Eade, Gille *et al.*, 2001; Eade & Garbin, 2002; Eade & Wright, 2002), Gerd Baumann (Baumann, 1999; Baumann & Schwartz, 1999), and Claire Alexander (Alexander & AmitTalai, 1999; Alexander, 2002; Alexander & Baumann, 2002) have looked at the way in which people from ethnic minorities negotiate their identities and community affiliation in the context of Inner London as a globalising city. Language (Linguistic Minorities Project, 1985; Reid, Smith *et al.*, 1985; Hewitt, 1986; Smith, 1985), music and art, street territory and racial violence (Cohen, 1993) have all been addressed as elements in the processes of racialisation and identity formation. Much of this literature concentrates on cultural expression and informal personal relationships, perhaps to the neglect of organisational and institutional life in inner city communities. Furthermore, since this tradition tends to assume secularisation as a given, until recently, religion has rarely featured as a significant factor in studies of ethnic identity in the UK, although it is recognised as significant in, for example, Eade's more recent writings. The other main exceptions are in the discipline of religious studies, for example in the work of Kim Knott and colleagues in the Community religions project at Leeds (Knott *et al.*, 1986; 1992; Knott, 1992) and in Bob Jackson's and Eleanor Nesbitt's work at Warwick on the religious experience of Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Christian children (Nesbitt & Jackson, 1993). In Northern Ireland and Scotland, where Catholic Protestant sectarianism remains a problem, religious loyalties have been the subject of academic studies, such as those by Bradley Joseph (1995) and Connolly (2002). With the growing political significance of Islamic identity we can expect a rapidly developing academic industry in coming years. A common thread and strength of the literature outlined above is that it rejects the reification of particular categories, such as languages, religions or ethnic groups, as essential properties of individuals by which they can be labelled, stereotyped, and controlled. By avoiding

essentialism such an approach leaves room for human agency in social life and for the social construction of 'imagined communities'.

Community and Social Capital ... Networks, Trust, and Norms

In recent years, the language of community has also been eclipsed by a discourse around Coleman's concept of social capital (Coleman, 1990). This has been popularised by Robert Putnam whose work on civil society in Italy (1993), articles on the disappearance of social capital in the USA (1995), and portrayal of a society where people prefer to go 'bowling alone' (2000) rather than in clubs or leagues have been very influential among politicians and others on both sides of the Atlantic. The elements of social capital have been broken down as networks, norms, and trust by Fukuyama (1995) and discussed in the context of American religion by Greeley (1997). A more critical and less functionalist development of the concept of social (and other forms of) capital is found in the work of Bourdieu (1988). The notion of social capital is not without its critics, especially when used simplistically as though it were an easily measurable, single variable (Portes, 1998; Smith, 1998; Sharp, 1999). Nonetheless, as a sensitising concept it has much value and obvious relevance to communities of faith and to the secularisation debate expressed in terms of the slogan 'believing without belonging' drawn from Grace Davie's work (1994).

A final strand in the political articulation of the notion of community emerges with the growth of communitarianism as a political philosophy as promoted by Etzioni (1994) and the Communitarian Network in Washington, DC and adopted by politicians of the Third Way, such as Tony Blair's New Labour in Britain. Stressing the balance of individual rights and responsibilities, communitarians advocate policies which are for the good of the many, not the few, and are in favour of subsidiarity, where decision making and governance is delegated to the most local level possible. While this approach has its attractions to the electorate, it runs into problems in a context of continuing economic inequalities, which often correlate with gender and ethnic or religious divisions in society. Fundamentally, communitarianism is based on Durkheimian and functionalist understandings of society, where social cohesion takes precedence over the just resolution of conflicts based on class or group interest. Numerous writers have offered a critique of communitarian ideas (Frazer & Lacey, 1993; Smith, 1996; Bounds, 1997; Leech, 2001), the most cogent and extensive of which is probably that by Bauman (2001).

Community and Identity in the Major Faith Traditions

Some notion of community would seem to resonate well with ideas, theologies, and values found in all the major world religions. On the one hand, most religions advocate fellowship and harmony with other people, especially with co-believers. At the same time, the very particularity of beliefs and the conviction that there is a single precise way of salvation often strengthen the human tendency to define, erect, and maintain social boundaries which exclude those who believe and behave differently.

In Christianity, relationships are fundamental to an understanding of the Godhead, most central in the credal affirmations of the persons of the Trinity, and the Genesis account of humanity created in the divine image; therefore “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18 in NIV of the Bible). Communion is a term for the central act of Christian worship and the idea of fellowship at table, in the spirit, and in sharing of resources (*koinonia* in NT Greek) is highlighted in the NT documents. Throughout the history of the Church, community has been an important theme, whether in the intentional communities of the monasteries and medieval friars, sectarian alternatives, such as the Anabaptists, or in contemporary movements, such as the Base Ecclesial Communities of Latin America, or in inner-city community development undertaken by the Church of England in the wake of the *Faith in the City* report (ACUPA, 1985; BCC, 1989; Farnell *et al.*, 1994).

In parallel, sometimes uneasily, the notion of the church as the elect or as a chosen people has often been stressed, drawing its strength from readings of the OT story of exodus and covenant. Catholic and Anglican theology for example draw on this tradition in welcoming new members into the community of faith soon after birth by infant baptism. There are Zionist, Afrikaaner, and Ulster Protestant versions of the chosen people motif as well as contrasting voluntaristic or sectarian ones. Some evangelical Christian accounts emphasise the idea of a new covenant in which individual believers, by coming to saving faith in Christ, become members of a new people, indeed a new humanity, in which “there is neither male nor female, slave nor free, barbarian or Scythian” (Col 3.11, Gal 3.28 in NIV Bible). However, the reality of racially segregated evangelical congregations across the western world shows just how difficult it is to put this vision into practice.

Judaism shares with Christianity the OT understanding of a community defined as a chosen or covenant people, an understanding which has been reinforced by long experience of exile, life in ghettos, the holocaust, and the establishment of the State of Israel. However, pluralism and conflict within that state are apparent, in divisions between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews and between the secular ‘doves’ and the religious ‘hawks’ over the land-for-peace question. In European and British Jewry, there is a sharp division between the reformed/liberal and Orthodox factions, marked with separate synagogues and religious, educational, and social institutions and increasingly by geographical segregation of the strictly orthodox communities into a small number of neighbourhoods, for example in North East London and Salford in Greater Manchester (Pinto, 1996).

In some ways, the Islamic notion of the *ummah* as a universal community of those who voluntarily profess the faith does not seem far removed in principle from the second Christian notion outlined above. In the global context of modernity and postmodernity, where Muslims are generally suffering under the economic and cultural domination of Western Capitalism, it certainly provides a rallying point for identity formation. However, it must be noted that, as in Christianity, the ideal of a single church/*ummah* has in reality been fragmented over many centuries into denominations, parties, and movements, some of which deny the status of true believer to their competitors. Contemporary political conflicts both within the Islamic world and in the wake of terrorist attacks on the USA make it even more difficult to present Islam as a unified

community, other than at the rhetorical level. The growing political significance of Islamic identities has resulted in a relatively wide range of scholarly literature which includes Knott and Khoker (1993), Lewis (1996), Jacobsen (1998), Modood (2000), Metcalf (2001), and Roald (2001).

To some extent, the Sikh notion of the *Khalsa*, into which believers are 'baptised' into membership of the community of faith, has similar connotations. There is certainly a theology of communal solidarity forged out of persecution in the time of the *gurus* and of radical equality among believers of both genders and all social classes, which is symbolised by the open sharing of food in the *langar* (communal kitchen) and the religiously sanctioned custom of everyone sitting on the floor rather than on chairs at tables, which might denote hierarchy. Sikhs remember the persecution of the *gurus* at the hands of the Moghuls, the traumas of partition in 1947–1948, and the events during the Khalistan conflict of the 1980s and define their communal identity in conflict with Islam and to a lesser extent Hinduism. The Sikh community (unlike Muslims) is recognised as an ethnic group in British race relations law, with the implication that Sikhism is a category into which individuals are ascribed or born. Indeed, fieldwork interviews with Sikh community leaders reveal that this understanding of the Sikh community is normal, while those who have a specific religious commitment may be referred to as the 'spiritual ones'. The notion of a homogeneous Sikh community is further contradicted by what can only be described as caste divisions between Jaats, Ramgrahias, and Naamdharis and permeable boundaries, with groups sometimes described as Punjabi Hindus, such as the Ravidassis and Valmikis (Nesbitt, 1991; 1994). Gurdwaras tend to serve only a single caste or sect, and there are numerous stories of shunning and exclusion of visitors from the outgroup (Singh Kalsi, 1992; MultiFaithNet web site, 2002; Philtar web site 2002).

Hinduism in contrast with the major monotheistic faiths has rarely emphasised notions of social equality and classically based its social philosophy on a creation myth in which distinct social orders were placed in a firm hierarchy. Community formation has therefore long been associated with the notion of caste and strong taboos on intermarriage, sharing food, and intercommunal religious observance remain to this day. Community membership is very much ascribed at birth rather than chosen on the basis of religious conviction. The lower castes have a history asserting their communal identity in struggles against oppression, as in contemporary *dalit* social movements in India or in group conversions to Christianity, Islam or the Ambedkar Buddhism movement. In the Hindu diaspora and under the influence of some of the Western influenced reform and *bhakti* (spiritual devotion) movements, caste identities may become less salient (Burghart, 1987; Caswell, 1996). The politicisation of Hindu Nationalism under the BJP (Bharat Janata Party) in India and the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) globally in the contrast and conflict with a politicised Islam, represented in the main by Pakistan, may have helped the formation of a pan-Hindu communal identity. Meanwhile, the Hindutva movement has been shown to have a significant impact on the reorganisation of youth and religious communities in the UK (Bhatt, 2000).

A useful framework for understanding the range of relationships between religious belief and community belonging is to use the terminology currently used by Grace Davie of the transition from religion as obligation to religion as

consumption (Davie, 2002). Davie's concerns are mainly within her 'soft' (as opposed to Bruce's (2002) 'hard') version of the secularisation process in Western Christendom. However, the terms can be applied just as well synchronically to the varying significance of faith in ethnic and religious communities in diaspora. At the obligation end of the continuum, one would want to place Hindus together with those Jews and Sikhs who interpret their religious identity as mainly ethnic. At the consumption end of the continuum, one might place New Age adherents, many of the New Religious Movements, and charismatic or postmodern Christians. Somewhere in the middle, one might find Catholic Christians (especially those with a minority ethnic heritage), (Islamicist) Muslims, and religiously Orthodox Jews.

As a uni-dimensional continuum this typology is obviously inadequate to capture the immense variation of religious positions that are held by individuals in contemporary urban society. It is probably useful again, following Davie (1994), to separate two distinct variables to represent believing and belonging or faith and community affiliation.

Individuals can be located in terms of their belonging to a faith community along a ladder of participation adapted from the tool familiar to community development workers and derived from Arnstein (1969):

Leadership (external representative)
Leadership (internally)
Activism (as volunteers doing work internal or external to the organisation)
Membership (paying dues, subscriptions, voting rights)
Participation in public worship/prayer/festivals
Affiliation/Identity Affirmation/tick in Census box
Ascribed identity/born into the faith

Logically, all of the steps on the ladder are independent of content or strength of religious belief, although there may well be a positive correlation. Individuals have always had some consumer choice as to what they actually believe in the secret places of their own soul and to a lesser extent in the private and public practice of their spirituality. In postmodernity and in a context of religious diversity, beliefs and spiritualities may indeed be seen as optional choices for free individuals from a religious supermarket. Despite the research in cultural studies on emergent ethnicities and cultural hybridity referred to earlier, such consumer choice is much less the norm for religious affiliations, identities and communal observances, in ethnic minority and diaspora communities, where ascribed identities, economic and social exclusion, and traditional social and kinship obligations continue to have more force than in white mainstream society.

A final element of the relationship between religion and community needs to be considered. It is the question of how a religious organisation or community

relates to the wider society in which it is set, the relationship between church and state. The typology of church, denomination, and sect derived from Troeltsch (1931) may still contain some useful insights. Some features of the model are shown in the table below.

Church	Denomination	Sect
For all	Accept others in plural market	For elect only
Ethnic/tribal/born into	Consumer choice	Recruiting/evangelising (selling in the market)
Accepting/managing the world as it is	Engaging with or transforming the world	Denying the world

However, it is not evident that this typology can be applied adequately to faith traditions beyond Christendom or in situations of religious diversity where ethnic minorities remain socially excluded. For example, Hindu or Muslim or Black Majority Christian communities in diaspora in London may feel that they would like to be a 'church', as they were in their homeland. However, they may find they are in an increasingly competitive situation for the commitment of their second generation or for a share of the power and resources of wider plural society and need to act as a denomination, with toleration of other groups. They may also find that they are facing social exclusion and that the only viable strategy is to retreat into a sectarian relationship with the wider world. Other typologies of this relationship yet to be developed may provide greater insights. Overall, however, the conclusion of this exploration of the sociological and religious studies literature suggests that concepts and constructions of community and identity are complex, contested, and constantly changing and that the range of relationships with religion is wide and diverse.

The Development of UK Government Policy

We are now in a position to examine the current policy concerns and discourse of the British state in relation to faith communities. It is the intention of this paper to show that government statements and interventions are, as one might expect, highly pragmatic and unsophisticated in theoretical understanding and therefore probably doomed to confusion and failure.

UK government interest in the field first became evident with the creation, in 1994, of the Inner Cities Religious Council in the Department of Environment (subsequently DETR). This can be traced as a direct response to the concerns articulated in the *Faith in the City* report commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury following urban 'riots' in the early 1980s (ACUPA, 1985). Jenny Taylor's doctoral research (2000) has traced the emergence of a new policy discourse recognising and favouring faith-based involvement in the context of the Inner City Religious Council at the DETR (now DLTR) and attributes much of this change to the influence of particular individuals with strong faith commitments in the civil service and possibly of particular members of the New Labour government. The D(E/L)TR has certainly supported faith-based

initiatives in research and capacity building (Shaftesbury, 2000; Smith, 2002) and in other special projects.

In the following section, we shall look at five source documents which indicate the key elements of the UK government policy.

1. Tony Blair's Speech to the Christian Socialist Movement: March 2001

The Prime Minister is well known, and often criticised as, a politician who openly professes his faith and articulates his Christian values in public. In this, as in many other aspects of his political persona, he appears closer to the North American than to the secular European style of political leader. Yet, it is a Christianity that is deeply aware of religious plurality; not for Blair the George W. Bush *gaffe* of talking about crusades against Islamic terrorism—rather he makes it known that he has been reading the Holy Qu'ran. In a speech delivered in the run-up to the general election in 2001, Blair stated:

As a member of CSM [Christian Socialist Movement], I am proud of the long and strong tradition of Christian Socialism within the Labour party. But the Christian faith is not and should never be the monopoly of any one political party or section of the community. An abhorrence of prejudice based on race, class, gender or occupation is fundamental to the Gospels. It is what draws so many Christians into politics, across the political spectrum.

I am also delighted to see here today representatives from many other faith communities. Our major faith traditions—all of them more historic and deeply rooted than any political party or ideology—play a fundamental role in supporting and propagating values which bind us together as a nation.

Community action has always been a central mission of the churches and other faith groups. Looking outwards to the needs of others, beyond your own immediate members, is a prime expression of your beliefs and values. And in carrying out this mission you have developed some of the most effective voluntary and community organisations in the country. (Blair CSM speech, 29.3.01)

In this speech, Blair articulates three key ideas about contemporary faith and politics. Firstly, his version of Christianity is an open and inclusive one, committed to diversity and social inclusion. Secondly, he expresses an almost naïve optimism that the diversity of religion in the UK will foster social cohesion rather than conflict. Finally, he credits faith in general as a key driver of altruism and as the source of valuable voluntary community and charitable action. Throughout the speech, he employs the language of community and an undeveloped notion of 'faith community'.

2. Home Office Report on Community Self Help 1999

The Home Office Active Communities Unit report was prepared during the first term of the New Labour government, under the ministerial eyes of Jack Straw (also a CSM member) and Paul Boateng (a committed Christian and Methodist

Lay Preacher, who has become Britain's first Black Cabinet Minister). The aim of the Report is more pragmatic than Blair's speech and focuses on the desire to involve religious groups in strengthening participation in civil society. It is probably significant that the vague and warm language of 'faith community' is displaced by more managerial terms, such as 'faith groups' and 'faith organisations', as if the faith sector can be seen as a subset of the voluntary sector, with ready-made structures and organisations who can engage in partnerships with and deliver services for the state.

Funders should recognise that faith groups may well be the most suitable voluntary and community organisations to deliver general community objectives, and should be prepared to provide sustained financial support for this.

... the vital role of faith organisations as a key focus for many poor neighbourhoods: as a large and relatively well resourced part of the voluntary and community sector, they may be crucial to this audit and action plan exercise. (Home Office Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help Report, September 1999)

3. David Blunkett's Speech in his First Month as Home Secretary (July 2001)

David Blunkett's contribution was delivered immediately after the 2001 election, his appointment as Home Secretary, and in the aftermath of serious disturbances involving police, far-right politicians, and disaffected young men from poor white and Muslim neighbourhoods in Bradford, Oldham, and Burnley. The press release of the speech read as follows:

"Partnership with faith communities will be central to the renewal of civil society" (Home Office, 19/06/2001) says David Blunkett.

In a speech to a multifaith audience, celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the Churches Main Committee, Mr Blunkett affirmed his, and the Government's, commitment to "strengthening the part faith communities play in promoting the values which bind us together as a nation".

But we are now moving into a new era, in which we have the possibility of joining up the commitment of faith communities to the social agenda of a vibrant and renewed civil society.

"The question today is this: how can we mobilise the strength and commitment of faith communities as part of the renewal of civil society and engagement in active citizenship?"

This Government has made two commitments. One is to look at how Government consults and works with faith communities, including their representation at and involvement in community and state events.

The other is to enable faith communities to contribute to the 'active community'.

From the fight against racism, xenophobia, and division, through to global poverty and environmental sustainability, we see the role of faith communities working for progress and decency.

This is a two way process between government and the faith communities. It is not about 'what this Government can do for you', nor 'what can you do for us', but rather 'what can we do together'.

The Home Office will need to provide support to foster this partnership. We are therefore giving grant funding to the Inter Faith Network of £360,000 a year to help us identify the issues to be addressed."

Mr Blunkett suggested that faith leaders had a key role in tackling social exclusion. He said:

"Every faith has a 'development worker', full or part-time, paid or voluntary. In other words, the priest or pastor, the vicar or minister, the teacher, Imam, or Rabbi.

This is a resource available to all areas of our country, even the most deprived, the least active and the most likely to be disengaged from the political process. This is a resource that even Government regeneration programmes and the development of community leadership cannot match.

Today we need to heal communities. We need to provide a voice against undercurrents of hostility and violence in society. This cannot be a matter for politicians alone, but for the whole of our community [...]"

It is possible to read the speech as a synthesis and development of the first two documents, with clear resonances of Blair's naïve optimism about faith communities and the pragmatic need to find allies to manage and serve the 'dangerous places' of the inner cities. Two new elements emerge: the specific commitment to an interfaith approach marked by the award of large-scale funding to the Inter Faith Network and the assumption that 'faith communities' have a large army of 'community leaders' poised to give their time to support the government's projects. The Home Secretary here seems wedded to a traditional Anglican concept of the role of the church, where a vicar with time on his/her hands is happy to work un-controversially for the welfare of the whole community. However, the reality of religious life in the inner city is more likely to be one of over-stretched clergy, groups relying on lay (and socially excluded) leadership, faith that makes priorities of spiritual rather than social agendas, and sectarian or communal competition for scarce resources.

4. Local Government Association Guidance

The *Faith and Community LGA Good Practice Guide* of 2002 includes the following statements:

2.2 Faith groups are an important part of the voluntary and community sector, although they do have distinctive characteristics and potential of

their own. As sources of values and commitment, and with substantial constituencies, they have a valuable contribution to make, alongside other organisations and individuals, in building a sense of local community and in renewing civil society.

It is also significant that while the advancement of their faith and worship will be central activities to most faith-based groups, many will also be engaged in community development, the representation of community interests, the provision of services for the benefit of their own members and the provision of services to benefit the wider public.

3.1 The relationship with faith communities needs not only to be placed in the wider context of modernisation of local government but to be considered in terms of the contribution faith communities make to good health, as providers of pastoral care, promoters of citizenship and community development, voices for social justice, and as the locus for gatherings of people in varying economic and social positions, of differing political views, from a range of ethnic backgrounds with shared concerns.

The publication, in early 2002, of a guidance document for local authorities needing to engage in consultation and/or partnership with faith communities marks the next more practical step in presenting government policy. The document has the *imprimatur* of the Inner Cities Religious Council in the DLTR and of the Inter Faith Network whose influence is obvious in a whole chapter on inter-faith organisations. While the text admits that there are many occasions when the Local Authority's dealings will be with on "a community by community or even congregation basis on specific issues", it stresses the supposed benefits of inter-faith working and the role of existing 'Councils of Faith', especially in promoting social cohesion. There are also chapters on issues of funding and planning issues. The overall philosophy and tone of the document continue the benevolent communitarian tone of the speeches by Blair and Blunkett and the appeal for faith-based groups to appropriate the government's agenda of promoting social inclusion, social cohesion, and urban regeneration.

5. Cantle Report on Community Cohesion

The final document (published in the autumn of 2001) takes a radically different stance. The Home Office report on Community Cohesion is the work of an independent review team chaired by Ted Cantle; it is a response to a wave of urban disturbances in Bradford, Oldham, and Burnley, cities in the North of England which have large Muslim communities, mainly with origins in rural Pakistan and Kashmir, and which have been recognised for many years as having high indices of residential segregation and urban deprivation. Published in the aftermath of the September 11th events in the USA, the report has all the signs of a 'moral panic' response. Here are some excerpts from the report (Cantle Report, 2001):

A Muslim of Pakistani origin summed this up:

'When I leave this meeting with you I will go home and not see another white face until I come back here next week.'

Similarly, a young man from a white council estate said:

'I never met anyone on this estate who wasn't like us from around here.'

In Southall and Leicester in particular ... it was also notable that diversity was seen as a positive thing and this was shown in schools where for instance pupils learnt about different religions and cultures and on the streets where festivals of all faiths were celebrated. This positive approach to diversity was adopted by the political, civic and faith leaders who held regular meetings with each other to discuss issues affecting the community and this openness and honesty meant that rumours and misunderstandings were less likely to gain credence and ferment resentment or jealousy. (p. 15)

Programmes must be devised, as part of the Community Cohesion Strategy, with support at a national level, to promote contact and understanding between and within, the black and ethnic minorities, and the white community and faiths. (p. 29)

Each community should review the present arrangements for cross cultural joint working, with a view to maximising contact, awareness and inter-community activities. Funding bodies should presume against separate funding for distinct communities, and require collaborative working, save for those circumstances where the need for funding is genuinely only evident in one section of the community and can only be provided separately. Funding should allow for this change to take place over a period of time. Funding should therefore, generally be provided on a thematic basis, for example in respect of immigration advice, literacy, capacity building etc., and based on needs across communities.

[...] we do not see 'integration' and 'segregation' as necessarily opposed. The complete separation of communities based on religion, education, housing, culture, employment etc., will, however mean that the lack of contact with, and absence of knowledge about, each other's communities will lead to the growth of fear and conflict. The more levels upon which a community is divided, the more necessary and extensive will be the need to foster understanding and acceptance of diversity. (Section 5.7.3)

Similarly faith based schools were favoured as much for their better than average results, as for the faith based education. [...] In terms of community cohesion, however, a significant problem is posed by existing and future mono-cultural schools, which can add significantly to the separation of communities described above. The development of more faith based schools may, in some cases, lead to an increase in mono-cultural schools but this problem is not in any way confined to them [...]

The key issue for Cante is that communities are not as integrated and cosy as previous celebrations of diversity have believed and that conflict between faiths is one element in a volatile and potentially dangerous polarisation. The excerpts from the Cante report suggest that the government should reconsider the wisdom of a *laissez-faire* approach to celebrating religious and ethnic diversity. They should instead devote resources to programmes promoting social cohesion and mingling of communities and in particular reconsider its support for religious schools lest they become ghettos of inequality.

What is evident in this discourse is that there are tensions, if not direct contradictions, between a liberal benevolence towards religious diversity and a growing fear that religious identity could present a serious threat to community cohesion. There is some lack of clarity in the government discourse and policy and a suspicion of 'spin', as politicians try to be all things to all people. There is also a level of confusion and some justifiable resentment among urban believers regarding the use of 'faith community' as a code word for 'ethnic minorities' or perhaps more specifically for 'those Muslims and other minorities who are making things difficult for us in the inner cities'.

Current New Labour thinking in this field is based on a strong ideology, although they might well deny the notion of ideology altogether and it might be hard to distinguish it from that of the main opposition parties. At the core of the approach is a strong and genuine communitarian concern for social cohesion, a commitment to stakeholder involvement in civil society, and the discourse of social justice and social inclusion. However, there is no strong commitment to reducing economic inequality (especially at the top end of the income distribution) and there is an assumption that the existing global capitalist system is the best or only one on offer. Broadly speaking, it is based on a sociology of consensus derived from the functionalism of the Durkheimian tradition. The approach to religion is essentially a secular one: any religion is as good as any other and a little spirituality is of benefit to individuals and probably to society as a whole. Organised religion can still have a role in transmitting socially beneficial values and may provide structures through which welfare or urban regeneration policies can be delivered more effectively and economically. In this best-of-all-possible worlds, the role of faith communities is to provide social support and enhance social capital as well as co-operate with other religious groups in working for the common good.

However, this optimistic perspective may now be in danger of shipwreck against the iceberg of another radically different conception of religion and identity. As on the Titanic, British society has huge inequalities in its social stratification. Some of the steerage passengers identify with forms of religion, Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Sikh, which may challenge the *status quo* and discern quite clearly a distinction between good and evil, truth and falsehood, justice and injustice, salvation and damnation. For them, the solidarity with the faith community may be primordial or more significant than loyalty to a nation state, increasingly so with the globalisation of economics, communications, and culture. Religious identity can certainly become a resource in social struggle (Beckford, 1999). Such urban forms of religion are far removed from the establishment stereotypes of afternoon tea and croquet on the vicarage lawn.

The final question we need to address is which of the two images of religion is closer to the reality of inner-city life. Is it a mistake for policy-makers to put so much faith in the community of faith and the faith of communities?

Community and Faith in Grassroots Reality

Very little academic research is published on the levels of involvement of faith communities in social action in contemporary urban Britain. Our own research in one multi-ethnic East London borough (Smith, 2001) identified nearly 300 religious organisations from all the major world religions, although between them they were responsible for some 620 activities and groups, in addition to public worship. Over two thirds (437) were defined as religious activities and less than a third (183) as secular groups open to the wider community, social activities and services. A high proportion of the social action was the product of a relatively focused network of mainstream Christian churches (Smith, 2001). Evidence from a wider and more recent postal survey (GLE/LCG, 2002) of some 665 congregations and faith-based groups in 20 inner-London boroughs (30% response rate, with highest response rates from Christian and Buddhist groups and lowest from Muslim groups) seems to confirm the picture, with well over half the respondents reporting some work with children or young people and half with elders. Overall, the 665 organisations claimed nearly 70,000 users for their community activities and the involvement of over 8,000 volunteers.

Christian and other faith-community involvement and partnership in urban regeneration are fairly well documented in case studies (Farnell *et al.*, 1994; Shaftesbury, 2000; Sweeney, 2001; LGA, 2002). Again, the bulk of activity appears to be in the white majority mainstream churches, with Anglicans in particular playing a leading role. The huge disparity in resources—finances, buildings, political influence, and cultural normativity—between the Church of England and ethnic minority Muslims or Pentecostals allows the former to operate as a key player and broker on behalf of their ‘weaker brethren’ and gives them the imperialistic confidence to offer services (in both senses) open to the whole local populous. Forthcoming research from the Joseph Rountree Foundation is likely to set out in more detail the range of issues and views encountered within this field of social policy (Farnell *et al.*, 2003).

On the basis of involvement and research in this field, one would anticipate that any government policy based on a simplistic rhetoric of ‘faith communities’, naïve optimism about religious diversity, and the benevolent contribution of faiths towards the common good will encounter a range of obstacles.

Firstly, it is not self-evident that there is a viable amount of faith on which to build. However we interpret the secularisation process, it is still clear that membership and attendance in mainstream Christian churches (and in many other membership organisations) in Britain continue to decline and that ageing congregations make denominations fear for their survival (Brierley, 1998; Bruce, 2002). While some parts of the inner city have a thriving religious life, this is closely linked with the vitality of minority ethnic communities and, in some of them at least, the majority of the younger generations may not maintain either belief or belonging. As time goes on, it is plausible that a residual sense of belonging to a faith community may remain as a marker of ethnicity, while the vibrant faith and moral values

that could motivate believers to 'holiness', mission, and service to the community may be eroded, as families prosper and move out of the inner cities. Meanwhile, many religious groups (particularly the newer religious organisations serving ethnic and religious minorities) have limited resources, in finance and donor base, in volunteer capacity, and in time, leadership and skills to engage with the statutory world. Buildings may be non-existent or in poor repair. Even if the state or the National Lottery were to offer funding, not every faith-based group would be keen to make use of such 'dirty' money, with inevitable strings attached.

Secondly, there is an atmosphere of confusion and sometimes suspicion that clouds the relationship between state and faith sector in the UK. Implementing a policy for partnership with faith communities, even if it becomes more clearly defined than the present range of warm platitudes, will not be easy. For most of the civil servants and local government officers charged with policy implementation are likely to be thoroughly secular in their understandings and will certainly suffer from religious illiteracy about the beliefs and practices of religious minorities and their local organisations. Most of them will be hesitant about funding religious groups, suspecting that public money might be or might be seen to support the promotion of a particular religion, leading to political controversy with secularists or other religious groups. Some may indeed be thorough secularists themselves, with great distaste for any organised religion, or have particular hostile stereotypes and prejudices about particular faiths. Even if they are open to the world of faith, local government officers are going to find it difficult to identify viable organisations as partners and representative leaders with whom they can do business. While they may be able to contact an Anglican bishop or area dean reasonably easily, the command 'take me to your leader' may be far from straightforward in places where there are 100 African independent churches and 25 mosques and a dozen cultural, student, and women's organisations representing the whole gamut of streams within Islam. It could be all too easy to perpetuate the power of the established church, because it has more capacity to engage with the state. Finally, even where outreach to faith communities is successful, statutory bodies may still meet suspicion, be asked why they had taken so long to get in touch or be told that the church or mosque is not interested in contracting to provide services 'on the cheap', for which its members have already paid their taxes.

There may also be a conceptual and cultural gap between official and religious discourses and agendas about community. A simplistic official reading which reifies 'the (faith) community' as homogeneous and supportive may miss many of the internal divisions of gender, age group, caste, ethnicity, and religious belief, which may fragment and exclude. Historic antipathies between and within faith communities and congregations may make establishing and managing community projects almost impossible. Alternatively, years of self-help and self-funding of valuable community activity may make autonomy precious and the idea of partnership with the state anathema to a religious organisation. A religious group may simply have other priorities than the government, for even where the language of charity, welfare, and regeneration have religious roots and resonance (Furbey, 1999), the deep structure of the two sides of the conversation may not intermesh. For religion may be totally other-worldly in its concern for the soul's salvation or completely revolutionary in its incarnation in

this world, while even the Buddhist Middle Way does not match up with the politics of the Third Way.

Ultimately a functionalist view of religion as the glue that binds society together is not an adequately cohesive or even adhesive theory of religious identity in the postmodern global city. A Weberian approach looking at interest groups, organisational structures, and actors operating according to explicit and implicit values based on faith may provide more insights. However, a critical sociology that recognises the reality of social conflict and the importance of unequal economic relations in shaping conflict, with the use of religious identity and discourse as a cultural resource in personal and community struggle is more likely still to correspond to social reality (Beckford, 1999). Therein is the challenge for the state, if it is to move beyond a rhetoric of social inclusion and pragmatic celebration of diversity, to a praxis of social justice in which faith communities and religiously motivated individuals would be free to play a part. Meanwhile, the challenge for communities of faith themselves is to live and speak in a way which goes beyond their own individual or communal self-interest. They might then provide a critique to the moral complacency of global capitalism, which would be recognisable in terms of the original values and concerns of their prophetic founders.

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