

Summing Up and Looking Forward

Adam Dinham

Thank you for inviting me. This has been an interesting conference and the theme is very topical and important. It's not always easy to bring this topic to life: there's a welter of theoretical material on civil society and a lot of contesting and debate about what it means and how to actually do it. There is a serious danger of this being a very dry sort of topic, as a result, but I think we've managed to make this a lively and very much current couple of days.

Jonathan Chaplin's introduction was very helpful in kicking things off by setting out his helpful typology: Oppositional, Protective, Integrative, Transformative. His analysis began of course with the question of the Big Society and whether or not this is the same thing as civil society. One of the problems of Big Society is that it comes precisely at a time when there is so little funding around to support the sorts of civil society activities which are envisaged. Some would suggest that it is precisely because there's no money that civil society is needed: I think what government has in mind is associations and networks of local people doing things which have for some time otherwise been done by state. In the absence of money, civil society will provide instead. But as Jonathan so helpfully began to unpick, civil society can take a variety of forms and some of those need government and state to be involved - to support civil society actors by providing infrastructure and an economic and social context in which they can flourish. A key challenge in the coming years is how that civil society activity will take place in a context of financial stress and distress, especially in areas which are already very poor. How will people in those areas find the time, let alone the money, to run all those incredibly important services which local areas need - not just libraries and leisure centres, as in Jolanta's model of 'leisure civil society', but also more critical services such as hospital car services for elderly people, homelessness projects, drugs and alcohol addiction drop-ins and the like? It may be easier for people in wealthier areas to fill the gaps - to do their civil society duty. But those in the poorest areas will struggle, and the state is not going to be there to help. Jonathan suggested too that Christianity may have more to offer than money! And I think that is certainly true. In the 1980s the Faith in the City critique went a long way in challenging the political status quo, even if it was arm-twisted to some extent, and mightily complained against by Norman Tebbit and others. But its legacy resonates right down to the present as a moment when the Church of England acted as a civil society body to challenge the state.

Jonathan reminded us too of principles in Christian thought which chime very clearly with the current government's thinking on civil society - not least the papal reminder that it is no less than a grave injustice for a higher authority to usurp the actions of a lower body when that lower body can perform that function itself. The politics of localism supported by Eric Pickles and others ring with the principle of subsidiarity, as Jonathan suggests.

Yet we also find ourselves in a religiously plural society - and a religiously plural Europe. Things have changed, certainly since the Church of England could last claim to be the national church. Not only is there a much greater mix of religious traditions

in Britain and Europe today, but church attendance has also steeply declined, and many churches in parishes are struggling to find clergy and keep the roof on, let alone to be instrumental in civil society alongside their people. In any case is it really appropriate or even possible to revalorise the Church of England as the national church and an agent in civil society without alienating the plethora of other beliefs and traditions which now mix in every community? It would be a tough kind of civil society which was articulated, in terms of the religious contribution, only by the Church of England - or even only by Christians. And it would likely be divisive too.

Adrian Pabst picked up on these dilemmas very nicely in his discussion of civil society and religion from an Eastern European and specifically Russian perspective. He rooted civil society in monasticism which he sees as having been the first of a new kind of association. It is interesting to reflect on the extent to which governments still revolve around this notion of faiths being good at association - it is reproduced today in the emphasis on the idea of 'community' - and faiths are regarded as being good at community. Yet current policy draws these themes together in very strange and incoherent ways. It celebrates communitarianism, as Jonathan Chaplin suggested - he cited Amitai Etzioni whose ideas so influenced Bill Clinton and, later, Tony Blair. Etzioni's argument in *The Spirit of Community* was that societies have become atomised and must retrieve the idea of community from the jaws of individualism. Yet Western politics are also committed to the rolling back of the state to make way for markets and capitalism which will, in turn, deliver thriving civil society by bankrolling it. The argument of the Third Way went that you could have both thriving markets AND thriving communities because wealth production would pay for society-production.

As 2008 and after has shown us, that did not go well.

Adrian, talked, too, of the depoliticisation of Soviet society and I was struck, not by the difference, but by the similarities with Britain. We've had the emasculation of the Trades Unions, the modularisation of learning in schools so that young people struggle to make connections and narratives which can be critical of politics and society. In universities, too, degrees are geared more and more towards the employability of graduates rather than their formation as people and citizens. And we've seen the professionalisation of politics so that our political leaders don't rise up from communities and issues which affect the everyday person, but are plucked from think tanks, special advisorships and internships with favourite MPs, straight in to Parliament and the Cabinet Room. This amounts in the UK to a depoliticisation which allows for neo-liberalism - the argument that states should roll out the way, markets must be allowed to do their magic, and society will somehow follow in behind. This poses a challenge to civil society which politicians won't like. And this is beginning to emerge, as some of our discussions have suggested.

Andrew Bowden talked last night about the fox-hunting ban. I thought too of stop the war. And David Thomas referred to the anti-capitalist movement's protests at meetings of the G20 in recent years. These are civil society activities which challenge the status quo. In the case of the G20 protests, they challenge the very fabric of the neo-liberal settlement. They challenge capitalism itself. This puts issues of power and wealth at the centre of civil society, and David spoke very helpfully about this in his talk on Gramsci and Havel. While Adrian highlighted Putin's response in Russia -

bringing the oligarchs into government - David drew our attention to the importance of filling civil society spaces with challenges to power and wealth. He cited *The Spirit Level* whose argument is that equal societies are not only fairer but more efficient and suggested that government WANTS inequality because it preserves its power, privilege and hierarchy. He reminded us of the example of Greek protests against austerity at the moment. And I reflected that the Greeks have everything to protest FOR and nothing to respond WITH. That kind of civil society can only become a lament. But David's point, and his reflections on Gramsci in particular, is to remind us that civil society is an arena in which actors struggle for power. The challenge for churches is to stand alongside the poor, as Faith in the City put it, and give voice to the powerless at the grass roots AGAINST the big civil society actors and their vested interests - including businesses, lobby groups, NGOs and all the other accruals of power which can so easily drown out the little people. Ken Medhurst's reminder of the dangers of churches looking like their adversaries is salutary in this context, of course. For churches, too, are big powerful actors and it is sometimes all too easy for them to stand alongside the rich, not the poor, and they must resist the temptation to do so.

This is precisely a dilemma faced by my team at the Faiths & Civil Society Unit when trying to plan the priorities for future research, and you saw one part of that in action in Jane Winter's presentation. There we looked at how one pressure of joining the neo-liberal status quo is the requirement of submitting to the logic of measurement. We chose to press ahead with that piece of work, despite the danger of making ourselves complicit in the settlement. We did so in order to try to introduce some nuance to the process and show how even such instrumentalising processes can be 'corrected' and recast to yield some benefit to the participants themselves. But we know we have also to ask bigger questions too about how desirable it is for faith groups to become part of the voluntary sector, or embody themselves as social enterprises, or whatever else the structure. What part should faith groups play in civil society is a question constantly on our lips.

And Jolanta's account of the transition the Polish church faces - from oppositional defender of the people to itself defensive against the liberal insistences of the EU - reminds us once again of the power struggle which characterises civil society in all its forms. Her understanding of civil society as networks of people stands in contrast, as she reminded us, both to the 'leisure civil society' she identifies in Britain and to the mammoth NGOs which sucked the life out of those networks in Poland.

So we've had a really interesting and helpful tour round some of the civil society challenges and dilemmas elsewhere in Europe. I want now to try to bring that home by looking at the changing relationship between religion and state in Britain in the modern past.

I'm going to do that by focusing on religion and the welfare state because welfare has been variously a state and civil society activity in various mixes and shines a light on civil society in helpful ways as a result. Despite talk of 'privatisation' and 'secularisation' in postwar Britain, the residual resources of faith groups preserved them as public actors, even when the welfare state was at its greatest extent. As a 'market' ideology came to challenge a 'statist' one, it was possible to justify the continuing role of religion in both welfare in terms of a 'free market' which makes the most of the financial and human 'capital' which 'faith-based providers' can supply. The

effect has been to move welfare from a partly or predominantly faith-based philanthropic enterprise before 1945, through a period of statism afterwards, and then from the 1980s back out to a plurality of providers again, which explicitly includes religious groups once more, though in a greater mix of 'competition'. This is not to say that faith-based provision ceased in the period after 1945 but that it was in some sense nationalised before being set back within a much more mixed context once again after 1979.

I'll explore these trajectories of change here, but there are two important caveats. First, religious change in the context of these processes should not be understood as inevitable. This is not a story of inexorable, impersonal and irreversible forces. Politics have been deliberate rather than incidental in debates and decisions about the public and social roles of religion. Schools policy *decided* to prefer non-confessional religious education (RE) in schools, though it reflected and consolidated changes that were also 'bottom up'. Welfare policy *intended* to impose a control and command structure to address social need. And government *promoted* a multi-faith approach to social cohesion. These changes have been variously resisted and embraced. Second, the recent extension and reassertion of religious welfare provision represents a shift from an emphasis on religion as 'belief' to religion as 'resource'. 'Faith', in policy parlance, becomes something which may (or may not) be useful and, moreover, 'useable' by the state and civil society. Overall, I'm suggesting that what has happened over the postwar period has been the *deliberate* marginalisation of religious socialisation post-1945, especially from the late 1960s, resulting both from policy and from bottom-up changes, followed by the *accidental* re-emergence of religious social action in welfare after 1980. The resulting gap between thought and action accounts in large part for the poor quality of public debate about contemporary religion, which tends to ambivalence at best.

Religious groups in Britain have been undergoing great change in relation to welfare since 1945. There is a long tradition of faith-based involvement in meeting 'welfare' needs, especially in urban and disadvantaged areas. John Wesley, the eighteenth-century revivalist, proclaimed that believers should not only 'earn all you can' and 'save all you can' but also 'give all you can' (John Wesley, 1771, cited in Prochaska, 2006, p. 2). Religious or faith-based service provision is rooted in Victorian philanthropy, when society 'boasted millions of religious associations providing essential services and a moral training for citizenry...' (Prochaska, 2006, p. 2). The Victorians, in this view, 'believed that religion and the public good were inextricably linked' (Prochaska, 2006, p. 3) and that 'charity could only be effectively exercised under the influence of sacred principle' (Prochaska, 2006, p.3). Bowpitt (2007, p. 2) notes that

While Florence Nightingale walked with her lamp in the hospitals of the Crimea, Ellen Ranyard's Bible nurses tramped the streets of London, giving comfort and medical help to the sick and dying in their own homes, inspired by the longing that none should leave this world without being prepared for the next.

He also comments that 'other areas of Christian philanthropy reflected the character of Victorian society and appear anachronistic to us now' (Bowpitt, 2007, p. 2), for example the practice of 'district visiting' to all the inhabitants of a neighbourhood, the

point of which was to show that no one was beyond the love of Christ.

The Victorian period has sometimes been seen as a golden age for faith-based (or more accurately, Christian and church-based) social action and welfare, involving amongst many other things '2,349 subsidiary associations to dispense the Bible' (Prochaska, 2006, p.17) at a time when 'myriad parish societies... had membership numbers that varied from under ten to hundreds' (Prochaska, 2006, pp. 17-18). The role of the churches was widely seen as both legitimate and necessary. From a missiological point of view it was seen as the duty of people of faith to provide for need. Thus for Alexis de Toqueville, Christianity was 'not an opiate, nor a morality of slaves but a religion of self-discipline and personal service that answered social and political needs' (in Prochaska, 2006, p.26), and in his memoir on pauperism written in 1835 after a visit to England, he writes that one of the merits of Christianity is that it makes charity a divine virtue.

As has been well-rehearsed in the social policy literature, the extension of the franchise, the rise of a middle class, and a growing awareness of grinding poverty culminated in the crucible of the war years in the 1940s in the emergence of a radically different approach to welfare which shifted the emphasis from (voluntary) charity and philanthropy to (state) government. This was a period of statism which regarded welfare as far too important to leave to well-meaning amateurs - including faith groups. It crystallised in the UK in the establishment of universal welfare after the Second World War - a strategic, nationalised commitment to intervention which incorporated and consolidated all sorts of 'welfare professionals' in the state's employ. This included doctors, nurses, midwives, district nurses and health visitors, dentists, social workers, teachers, probation workers and even (for a short time) community development workers.

The idealism of universal welfare proved too strong an influence for a disparate non-governmental mix of service provision to elude. Practically every aspect of social service, from health, to employment, to family and community was incorporated in a hugely extended public policy arena - the very social contract which has been questioned since the debt crisis following 2008 which, though it emerged as a crisis of credit in private banks, was often recast as a public sector crisis caused by profligacy in spending on public services and welfare.

The nationalisation of services in the 1940s also had an instant effect on their funding, since the welfare state encouraged the expectation that needs would be met without resort to charity. Philanthropy was recast as paternalistic, disempowering and unjust. The philanthropic approach was largely rejected and the Labour Party's critique displaced philanthropy with optimism that the state would eradicate social ills.

Prochaska (2006) observes, nevertheless, that the welfare state, when it did come, inherited much of the Christian 'spirit' embodied in Victorian philanthropy, and cannot simply be read as the secularisation of services which had hitherto been provided by faiths. Statist welfare may have consolidated the decline of religious significance in welfare, but it does not mark the beginning of these processes. Neither does it mark the end of the involvement of faith in welfare.

A first wave of critique in the postwar period observed that the welfare settlement had

failed to eradicate the 'five evils' and much of the blame was placed on an over-emphasis on physical and material solutions embodied in huge new housing estates. To counter this, community-based policies were introduced which were rooted in neighbourhood and self-help - precisely the sorts of work faith-based providers had been so good at. In this period, community work came to be seen as 'a third method of social work intervention' (Younghusband, 1959, p. 24) alongside group work and case work. Much of this new community work took place in local projects, many initiated by faith groups. This was in part a result of the Church of England's parish system which ensured that there were staff, buildings and resources in every area of the country.

Concurrently, the Gulbenkian Report envisaged work in communities which is concerned with affecting the course of social change through the two processes of analysing social situations and forming relationships with different groups to bring about desirable change (Younghusband, 1968, p. 22).

It identified three key values which were to prove significant: first, people matter and policies and public administration should be judged by their effects on people; second, participation in decision-making about every aspect of life is of fundamental importance to human flourishing; third, work in communities should be concerned with the distribution of resources towards people who are socially disadvantaged.

This provided a context with which faiths could identify in terms of an insistence on human worth and value and on structural critiques of society which refused to locate the causes of poverty and disadvantage with the people who suffered from its consequences.

This was the first 'new space' for faith-based welfare after the welfare consensus. It proved short-lived. The structural socio-economic critiques endangered community-based approaches by being critical of government policy. This came to a head in the Community Development Projects (CDPs) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A report arising from one of the CDPs, called *Gilding the Ghetto*, was critical of government. Government subsequently (and quietly) closed the CDPs down, and the community approach to addressing welfare needs was over. This residue of faith-based provision was once again privatised.

But a second 'new space' has opened up since, in surprising ways. A shift in welfare to 'market led approaches in the 1980's and early 1990's' (Mayo, 2000, p. 28) marked a conscious move towards provision of all sorts of services, not by government, but by voluntary sector agencies, regarded as cheaper, more efficient, and more knowledgeable about local needs. While this was driven ideologically by monetarist economics which saw the welfare state as part of the problem, not the solution, it has been criticised for failing to achieve the hoped-for reduction in the role of the state. In practice it led to an increase in regulation of non-governmental services which placed a massive bureaucratic strain, both on providers and on the civil service which had to monitor them. In addition, the process of becoming a provider was usually based on contracts awarded on a competitive basis. This was criticized for making the winner the cheapest bidder rather than the best, and for introducing market competitive values and practices instead of collaborative ones which would better serve

communities. Nevertheless, faith-based providers have consistently occupied the space this created, either by turning existing services in its direction or by introducing new ones. The faith-based contribution in Britain could, once again, not only be made but also be acknowledged.

In recent years it has become fashionable for faith-based bodies to research and demonstrate their 'contribution' and this has often been put forward in economic terms. This has led the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) to conclude that 'faith-based organisations are a strong force in the charitable sector', which encompasses a large range of social action projects and programmes' (NCVO, 2007, p. 15). Within this, many charities are engaged in religious activities and the NCVO's 2007 report notes that at least one registered charity in seven is thus engaged. It is noted that 'the total income of faith-based registered charities is estimated at £4.6 billion', though income appears to be unevenly spread across organisations so that those with an income of less than £200,000 account for 90 per cent of organisations but generate only 11 per cent of the total income (NCVO, 2007, p. 16). This reflects the case that many faith-based organisations are very small, informal and heavily dependent on volunteers, though a few others are amongst some of the largest of all charities.

It is also noted that over half of faith-based charities aim to serve the general public, not just their own tradition, and two-fifths place a particular focus on children or young people (NCVO, 2007, p. 15). Grant-making for welfare projects is the majority area of activity (56 per cent of faith-based organisations) followed by welfare service provision (35 per cent) (NCVO, 2007, p. 15). This is supported in other research which shows that a significant amount of work across England focuses on children/young people and the elderly, although faith-based organisations are engaged in many other activities.

In each of the nine English regions there has been some sort of mapping of faith-based social welfare activity to identify what faith groups are doing. In some regions this has been extensive. Thus *Beyond Belief* (BB, March 2004) claims that there are at least two welfare projects for each faith centre in the south-east. *Faith in the East of England* (FEE, July 2005) identifies 180,000 beneficiaries of faith-based activity in the east. *Neighbourhood Renewal in London: the Role of Faith Communities* (NRL, May 2002) identifies 7000 projects and 2200 faith buildings in London. *Believing in the Region* (BR, May 2006) reports that 80 per cent of faith groups deliver some kind of service to the wider community in the West Midlands. *Faith in England's North West* (FENW, November 2003) shows that faith communities are running more than 5000 social action projects and generating income of £69m - £94m per annum in the north-west. In Yorkshire and the Humber, *Count Us In* (CUI, 2000) shows that in Hull 90 per cent of churches are involved in social action and *Angels and Advocates* (AA, November 2002) reports that there are 6500 social action projects in churches across Yorkshire and the Humber. *Faith in the North East* (Smith, September 2004) shows that there are more than 2500 faith-based projects in the north-east. *Faith in Action* (June 2006) demonstrates that 165,000 people are supported by faith groups in the south-west by 4762 activities. *Faith in Derbyshire* (May 2006) claims that, on average, churches run nine community activities in the East Midlands.

While the evidence suggests that faith-based providers may be skilled and

experienced at providing community-level, project-type interventions, the skills and capacities required to deliver larger-scale services as laid out in public sector contracts are of a different order. In many cases this means that faith-based organisations change shape in order to meet the new challenges and opportunities. They become recognisable 'brands' in their own right and are no longer understood primarily or popularly as 'faith-based'. Examples are of contracts run by organisations such as the YMCA (now 'Y'), and the Salvation Army whose 'social action' programmes are large but may have become dissociated from the faith base from which they started. Certainly their relationship with worshipping and fellowship communities is distended. Another example of much larger faith-based participation in the welfare sector is in housing (and provision for homelessness). Housing associations are frequently faith-based, as in the example of the English Churches Housing Group (ECHG) which is one of the country's largest housing associations providing homes for over 26,000 people. They manage over 11,000 homes, operate in over 176 local authorities and employ over 1200 people. Their services also include affordable high quality accommodation including flats and family houses, sheltered housing, personal care services, supported housing services supporting over 9000 individuals, outreach workers to assist rough sleepers, drug and alcohol management programmes, and a 24 hour, 365 days a year customer service centre dealing with over 80,000 calls. This is big business - and a faith group is the operator.

There can be challenges, however, which reflect continuing attempts to protect the public realm as a secular space. An important obstacle is the mistrust of faith-based providers among funding bodies and a lack of knowledge and expertise on the parts both of the public sector and faiths at the local level. For the public sector the lesson has been one of recognising that faith groups have religious starting points and positions and sometimes their work in public spaces comes from that motivation. In other cases, faiths are motivated simply by a commitment to social justice and human fulfilment. In either case, the line between the social provision and the faith-based motivation for engagement may not be clear. This is a practical outworking of the division which secularism insists on between the public and the private.

Another pressure comes from the government's desire to encourage all the actors in the extended mixed economy, including faith groups, to develop financial self-sufficiency. Not only should the activities of welfare be taken on by organisations in civil society. So too should the costs, and the risks. This critique has gained traction since the 2008 debt crisis and government has been increasingly convinced of the need to reposition public services, not in a large public sector, but in a so-called 'Big Society'. Social enterprise and mutuality are the mechanisms by which governments in the UK would like to achieve this, and faith-based welfare activity is likely to evolve further in that direction in the coming years. The proposal is that the deconstruction of state welfare infrastructures will clear space for a wave of private and community-based social entrepreneurship, which is suppressed by current policy. It is arguable that many non-government actors, including faith groups, have been doing social enterprise for decades or even longer. An example is the Oxfam shops whose income supports wider community work in the developing world. But while many organisations might be doing social enterprise, according to some of the definitions of it, many more do not think of themselves in that way.

Shifting Government Approaches to Welfare:
From Statism to Big Society

"Tradition, community, family, faith, the space between the market and the state - this is the ground where our philosophy is planted."

From a speech by Prime Minister, David Cameron, to launch the Giving White Paper, in Milton Keynes, 23 May 2011

"The first principle is that...when the war is abolishing landmarks of every kind, [this] is the opportunity for using experience in a clear field. A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching.

The second principle is that organisation of social insurance should be treated as one part only of a comprehensive policy of social progress. Social insurance fully developed may provide income security; it is an attack upon Want. But Want is one only of five giants on the road of reconstruction and in some ways the easiest to attack. The others are Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness.

The third principle is that social security must be achieved by co-operation between the State and the individual. The State should offer security for service and contribution. The State in organising security should not stifle incentive, opportunity, responsibility; in establishing a national minimum, it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than that minimum for himself and his family."

From The Beveridge Report, Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, November 1942

A number of factors have coincided to drive an interest in social enterprise. Local authorities and other public sector bodies have passed on to new or pre-existing organisations areas of work they used to run themselves like social housing, leisure or social care, and much more of this will have to take place as their central government budgets are reduced by unprecedented amounts of up to a third of their 2010 budgets. Charities, including faith-based organisations, have to keep themselves financially sustainable while many traditional sources of funding such as membership fees and almost all government grants become much harder to access. The politics of meeting local needs have increasingly perceived a business or commercial approach as a more

flexible and sustainable route to delivering multiple social benefits - members, staff and customers can all be beneficiaries in different ways.

It may be a challenging model for community-based faith groups, who make up the majority, at a number of levels. First, social enterprise requires a business ethos which may not be home territory for many faith groups whose interests often lie in questions wider than and sometimes at odds with accepted social hegemonies about capitalism, what makes people happy and how people should interrelate (for example, non-contractually). Profit generation, even where those profits are intended to be used for social 'goods', is a different kind of activity from that more usually engaged in by faith groups, even though there are examples of faith-based social enterprise stretching back over a long period.

The concern of many faith groups in relation to this is the invasion of their ethos and values with those of a business culture. Associated with this, too, is anxiety about the potential for separation from a core mission or set of activities. Another area of concern for faiths is the demands made by the need to 'professionalise' in market terms. Many faith-based activities are already working in highly professional ways and some have a long track record of doing so. But at the same time, the regulatory and monitoring regimes associated both with public sector contracting and with business in social enterprise and mutuals can be onerous.

The politics of the 'Big Society' also tends to look for big social actors. It sees in the Church of England the ability to lead the faith contribution. It has buildings, staff and volunteers in every neighbourhood, and political influence in Parliament. This may be a nostalgic view. But as I said earlier, things have changed for the national church. While reported affiliation holds up, attendance has steeply declined. Many parishes can no longer afford a full-time priest. Some have none at all. Funds are committed to clergy pensions and the maintenance of ancient buildings. At the same time, the religious make-up of the UK has altered dramatically from the days when the churches were widely responsible for philanthropy. Religious plurality has become more embedded in the national psyche after decades of non-confessional RE (see below). In the new century a 'multi-faith society' found expression in government funding for multi-faith partnerships, and the resulting infrastructures of multi-faith bodies now reach out to ethnic and religious minorities which the Church of England struggles to reach.

So what sort of religious civil society organisations will deliver as the twenty-first century unfolds? They could go in either of two directions. In the market direction, they will emphasise competition, and large, established bodies may be most competitive, and power and resources will concentrate around them.

In the community direction, they will emphasise collaboration and partnership. Local initiatives will emerge from the bottom-up and reflect the interests of local people. Which prevails, and where, is still unclear. In welfare terms, what is likely to emerge is not so much the 'big society' as lots of very differently served small ones. Private providers may be well-placed to deliver superstructures like hospitals or public transport; indeed, a small monopoly already do so in various private finance initiatives. Social services, such as meals on wheels, community transport, community centres and respite care, which are more locally based, and less visible, will depend

upon less powerful 'big society' actors, especially volunteers.

In this context, welfare, and its faith-based providers, confronts a political sphere which both valorises faith resources and yet gives practically no account of faith. Experience suggests that faith groups will continue to meet need, whatever the politics. It also suggests that faith itself may have a role for the first time since *Faith in the City* (ACUPA, 1985; see Introduction and Illustration X), in recalling people to the political dimensions of welfare and civil society. The welfare politics of the first half of the twenty-first century seem set for the first time to displace those of 1945, and religion is responding in a range of ways; from new forms of provision to critique and defence of the least powerful as huge shifts in power take place.

It should be noted that there is a good deal of European and international discussion of the place of religion in public education in recent years which is likely to have a growing influence on national debates in the UK. For example, the Council of Europe, which has 47 member states, supports the study of religions and beliefs in public education as part of a broad intercultural education. Similarly the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, with 56 participant states, advocates a form of education about religions and beliefs grounded in the human rights principle of freedom of religion or belief, but adapted to the social contexts of particular countries. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has also funded action research to develop better religious literacy in universities in pursuit of a better quality of conversation about religion in wider society. These wider debates about the place of religion are reflected too in welfare terms, where a large programme of research on 'welfare and values in Europe' (WaVE, funded by the European Commission) has also taken the debate forward, and the place of religious faith in a wide range of public spheres has been increasingly debated. The Faith-Based Initiative in the USA has also focused attention on the public role of religion. Its place in both education and welfare thus unsettles public discourse and challenges assumptions about the 'secularity' of the public realm while greater religious diversity presents policy with the challenge of how to address it.

But while there are similarities in the processes mobilising change, there are differences too. The traditional involvement in welfare by religious communities, which was historically central to the voluntaristic structure and culture of British (Christian) pluralism, may have served to hold off some of the secularising tendencies of the public sphere, despite professionalisation and market forces. Indeed, the recent (re)turn to 'faith communities' to deliver welfare under state programmes strengthened their hand once again. Their role in public delivery of welfare services grew as ideas like 'Big Society' entered the political lexicon and made new spaces for faith-based actors to take their place alongside any other actors with resources to contribute.

In these contexts, the continuing participation of religious groups and individuals unsettles questions which had been thought to be settled. What I've tried to show is that religion never disappeared as a civil society force, though it was profoundly challenged and changed by both secularising and pluralising forces in the postwar period. The sphere of welfare reveals that the public realm is not after all the post-religious space which had been imagined, and that Britain is neither simply secular nor simply religious but complexly both. Civil society can benefit from recognising this and from recognising the role of church and other faith groups in it. At their best

they will challenge power and wealth on behalf of the people they stand alongside, and refuse to look like their adversaries!

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