

Theme: Religion, third sector, policy and public management

Editorial

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Leading at the government–third sector interface presents challenges of principle, law, governance, finance and innovation. By its own admission, the UK government has been behind the curve in developing evidence regarding the charitable and wider third sector to help public leaders in this task*. Along with many civic actors, policy-makers then may legitimately have assumed that the ‘modernization’ of society would ensure that never again could religious factors complicate public management. After all, the idea of advancing ‘secularization’ underwrote most of the social sciences as taught in Europe until recently (Davie, 2007; Spalek and Imtoul, 2008).

Contemporary events, political rhetoric and social reality, however, have shattered such preconceptions. Aside from the ‘radicalization’ of some communities by a mixture of local poverty, enthusiastic religious discourses and extraordinary international events, there have been political efforts by segments of New Labour and many Conservative front-benchers to affirm faith communities as social contributions and as a basis for public sector reform and civic renewal (Hague, 2000; Ahmed, 2003; Cameron, 2007; Centre for Social Justice, 2007). Meanwhile, the world has never been more religious nor more varied in the forms which that religiosity—and equally diverse numbers of secularisms—now take (Berger, 1999; Levey and Modood, 2009; Modood, 2008).

Even in seemingly ‘modern’ Britain, mainstream Christian denominations are experiencing significant internationalization of their congregations due to global immigration. In some regions they encounter

both increased membership and immiseration among their co-religionists (Davis *et al.*, 2007; IPPR, 2009). Moreover, religious ‘belief’ data by electoral ward, even before EU accession country arrivals, suggests around 80% of UK citizens believe in a God—with an astonishing number of wards reporting *Christian* conviction at above 85% (Davis *et al.*, 2008).

Nevertheless, the sociological evidence reveals that especially in Britain religious organizations and institutions, their members, allies and long-distance supporters (not to mention their critics) comprise a curious mixture of not only ‘believing’ but also ‘belonging’ individuals and communities. In 2006, the government’s citizenship survey reported religious observance as a stronger indicator of increased likelihood to practice civic habits, such as volunteering and giving, than religious—or secular—‘beliefs’ alone (Home Office, 2006). Meanwhile, some religious communities are convinced that they exist ‘for the nation’ or ‘for the poorest’. This compels them to welfare service and advocacy for all citizens, not just their ‘members’. The appropriate analytical balance then between religious ‘belonging’, ‘believing’, ‘membership’ and who speaks for the civic common good across the UK’s highly religiously divergent regions is complex territory (Davie *et al.*, 2003). Add to this the internationalization of social policy, migration flows and religious networks, and the national picture becomes more contentious still (Crouch, 2005; Wuthnow, 2009).

These challenges have not made for easy public leadership: the Charity Commission and the National Health Service, for example, have been in the difficult position of having to try to define religious ‘belief’, while the Lord Chancellor’s Department, and others, have a human rights agenda to negotiate (Parliament, 2007). Other departments of state relate to ‘faith-based voluntary organizations’, ‘religious NGOs’, ‘church’ and ‘faith leaderships’. Unlike the USA (for example at Harvard’s Hauser Center), they have been unable to pursue dialogue in an environment where a major school of government (or equivalent) has been consistently working on an evidence base for the religious third sector, nor funded to devise a top management executive programme for those in government (Bane *et al.*, 2007). No

*See both the Cabinet Office’s call for a consultant to advise on, and the subsequent tender documents, for the OTS/ESRC Third Sector Research Centre:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/third_sector/assets/research_centre_annex_a.pdf

wonder, then, that parts of Whitehall have chased the dream of a single 'faith umbrella body' to simplify matters (interview with Faithworks in 2008).

For the leaders of faith communities, the journey from mass-produced government towards a more challenging, but potentially increasingly responsive, idea of governance has been no less demanding. What government may see as seemingly simple public advances by a leader of faith may be achieved at huge personal cost, with policy 'success' for government occurring at the very moment at which faith community support and credibility is shredded for that person, precisely because of that advance. New government initiatives, meanwhile, may cause the raising up of a generation of activists whose extra commitment to civic engagement with government risks undermining the capacity of their own religious community (Farnell, 2007). Simultaneously, fresh government funding streams give birth to 'representatives', who by-pass traditional community hierarchies, challenge those who had claimed a monopoly on the task or represent nothing more than a phase of institutional entrepreneurship. Lastly, new legislation changing the civil law accountability of religious charities in the field of employment, public benefit and equalities—to name but three—may come as a profound shock to some religious trustees formed in traditions which see their institutions as embodiments of unique, and even superior, ethical attributes*. Some religious leaders would like it simpler too.

The scope of this edition

For some, 'religion' and 'faith' bring to mind particular public management concerns, especially the disputed questions of faith-based schooling, and healthcare—its ethics and allocation. Such debates could indeed benefit from a deeper and more discursive exploration, not least by putting the UK policy options in their international context (Finn, 2010). Nevertheless, they are the subject of much

*See requests made by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and the Catholic Scottish Bishops' Conference for 'exemption' to the civil law on employment and equalities legislation. A source of conflict here is the tension between new 'civil' law and longstanding 'canon' law (which, although binding on the bishops, has the civil status of the 'rules of a club'):

www.catholicchurch.org.uk/ccb/catholic_church/media_centre2/press_releases/press_releases_2009/bishops_respond_to_proposed_eu_equal_treatment_directive

public debate at a time when the bulk of state–religion–third sector conversations are so scattered across departments of state as to make them almost unnoticed (Davis *et al.*, 2008).

More importantly, there are limits to what a single edition of a journal can achieve, not least when the reach for evidence is itself contested. At the heart of any meeting between religious communities and the modern state is an encounter of epistemologies—theories of knowledge, the nature of truth and the sources and ultimate purpose of human flourishing. While Le Grand has noted how conceptions of justice might influence the management design of public services, even his exhortation to go beyond 'what works' does not provide an adequate ground to converse with many disputed interpretations of what constitutes 'history' or 'reality' (Le Grand, 2003). For example, it is hard to discuss 'evaluation' when 'value comes from God'; or agree to findings of research involving members of some faith communities that reject parts of its teaching that relates to the position of, say, women or gay people, if this marks them out as apostates (or a sample of 'dissenting' community members prejudicially chosen by 'secular' sociologists) (Reese, 1992; Greeley, 2001). Likewise with the vital debate as to what 'helpful' religious leadership might look like in a modern society (Dinham, 2009; O'Neill, 2009).

This themed edition of *Public Money & Management* takes religious ideas seriously but is primarily focused on the practical and public leadership challenges that arise from the civic role of religious organizations, charities, institutions and their encounter with the state at the local and wider levels. While noting efforts in some quarters to increase 'religious literacy', this publication aims primarily to locate debates about religion, third sector policy and public management within a wider task: namely the search for a robust evidence base for the UK third sector in its European context. Helped by grants from two religious charities, it is a product of activities emerging from an interdisciplinary institute at Oxford and from a dialogue with practitioners and colleagues in and around the new Third Sector Research Centre at Southampton. It is not a work of religious, theological or secularist advocacy.

Gareth Morgan, in his new development article (see p. 343), draws out the recent changes in charity law across the three British

jurisdictions noting how they have enabled researchers and policy-makers to develop more extensive data on the size, scope and impact of the voluntary sector. In England, however, very significant religious revenues will still fall under the radar of statutory scrutiny. On the one hand, this is because of the decentralized division of religious charitable entities into thousands of 'exempted' congregations with turnovers of under £100,000; and, on the other, because of inadequate regulatory resources at the Charity Commission. By contrast, in his main article, Morgan argues that larger religious charities, some with turnovers of nearly £200 million, need not fear the new public benefit reporting criteria integral to the new laws. Resolving the balances of accountability for these small and large religious bodies, for Morgan, is both an issue of ethics and prudential management.

In shifting managerial circumstances new education and leadership is key, not least to ensure that those charged with new duties are fit for purpose. The article by Rob Paton, Haider Ali and Lee Taylor on p. 363 critically assesses the origins, methods and content of a government initiated training programme for faith leaders. Its observations on the timing, mismatches in perceptions and market needs provide lasting insights both for those dealing with religious organizations and with the wider third sector.

Approaching governance from a different direction, Rachael Chapman and Vivien Lowndes (p. 371) focus on the knotty problem of local religious participation in diverse communities. They draw out the consequences—and challenges—of new fora in the attempt to harness civic voices. What is at stake is the very meaning of the word 'representative' and the nature of future research. Combined with Austen Ivereigh's description (see p. 351) of controversial models of faith-based community organizing to secure liberalization of immigration laws, their nuanced assessment of the form and potential for religious involvement in pioneering forms of local participation is remarkable.

Davis (p. 379) looks at the Europeanization of faith-based advocacy relocating the 'local' in the governance debate to the 'national' level. He draws on new case studies of some of the world's largest voluntary organizations putting the UK focus on the role of 'congregations' in wider context. Assessing the interplay between state

structure and the form of religious anti-poverty advocacy, he suggests that the design of government institutions, together with the leadership actions of civil servants, are more likely a key to success of religious civic action than either they—or religious NGOs—would care to admit.

Particularly striking are the arguments made, in varying ways, by Dr Muhammad Bari (p. 340) and Ambassador Francis Campbell (p. 347), that in the policy and leadership process that which is genuinely 'religious' or 'faith-based' needs to be carefully teased out from factors which are driven by misplaced political fears, national culture, class and/or race. Campbell points to the institutional capacity of religion to help international governments deliver the Millennium Development Goals. In some global regions, churches and mosques, he says, are the only organizations that have survived state failure and market collapse: in Africa alone they deliver up to one third of all healthcare. And yet while naming faith communities as part of 'the solution', he is also strong on suggesting some of the problems they can present to policy-makers. Consequently, he decries the tendency to see religions as 'always good' or 'always bad'. Dr Bari makes a similar observation in his controversial lament that the government's Prevent/Contest strategy has confused faith, race and social cohesion with national security and safety. Combining them, he says, creates policy distortions and enhances social incohesion.

This edition of PMM may not help resolve the feelings of discomfort that the discussion of religious principles and organizations in the policy-making realm engenders for many, nor affirm the joy felt by others. It is, though, one small step in addressing the unavoidable task of rooting future policy actions in contemporary evidence rather than unempirical confusion. ■

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