



Challenges from Secularisation

WJEC A level R.S. Unit 3A Christianity Theme 2A

Key Concepts:

- Ways to argue that the UK is/is not a Christian country include:
 - (i) Appealing to Church attendance figures. Christianity is the most attended religion in the UK, **Cathedral worship** is growing and many use churches at times of transition (i.e. funerals). Yet only 5% attend church regularly, empty churches are for sale, more than half of the UK say they have 'no religion' and **secular marriages and funerals** are on the rise.
 - (ii) Personal belief: a YouGov poll (2016) says 48% believe in God or a 'spiritual power'; more than half identified as Christian in the **2011 census**. Yet, these figures do not indicate a commitment to Christian theology.
 - (iii) Public life: this is a 'Christian nation' in the sense that the head of the state is also the head of the Church and bishops play a role in the House of Lords; literature & media is permeated with Christian themes. Conversely **Humanists UK** and the National Secular Society (**NSS**) fight against Christian privilege and **New Atheism** has received literary and media attention.
- Approximately one third of schools in the UK have a faith affiliation, meaning some funding and/or governance is from a religious body. This results in some power to a **faith criterion for subscription** and to teach R.E. in their own way.
- Many praise these schools as they are the best

performing state schools, add to diversity of educational choice, relate to the faith of Christian families and promote healthy values.

- Many object to these schools as a faith - criterion is discriminatory, **R.E. should be inspected**, some ethical issues (**abortion**, homosexuality) may be taught in an unfair way or anti-evolutionary views (**creationism**) may be promoted.
- Christians sometimes feel restricted in the UK. An example is the banning of the '**Lord's Prayer advert**' at the beginning of Star Wars VII in 2015.
- **Nadia Eweida** was suspended by British Airways for not covering her crucifix, though the company allowed hijabs and turbans to be worn; she won her case.
- **Ashers Bakery**, Belfast was guilty of sexual orientation discrimination for refusing to place a pro-gay message on a cake in 2014 on Christian grounds. Later, The Supreme Court supported the bakery's freedom of expression.
- These cases show that some Christians find themselves **marginalised** because of their beliefs.
- However, the relevance of Christianity can be seen in the **Street Pastor** movement, the large numbers of Christians involved in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and many active and growing churches with contemporary worship (**Holy Trinity Brompton - HTB**).

Key arguments/debates:

Some Christians believe Christianity is robust in the face of secularism (growth of some churches, Street Pastor movement, Christian royal weddings) – and secularism has been unable to solve the most pressing issues of our day (environment, poverty, inequality and emotional health). Others believe that the growth of 'no religion', secular life transition rituals and decline of supernatural beliefs are negatively impacting Christianity. Interestingly, some Christians welcome the end of state support as this could revitalise the faith.

In addition to the number of issues already raised in relation to the question of the UK as Christian, is the fact that the 2011 Census did not ask a fair question. ('What is your religion?') This forces one to say one has a religion. When asked fairly in other surveys ('Do you have a religion? If so, what...?'), those claiming no religion rose to over half of the respondents.

Key questions:

- Do attendance numbers give an accurate impression of the strength of Christianity in the UK?
- Does Christianity have a positive or negative role as a 'public utility'?
- What is the difference between secularism as a fact and secularism as an ideology?
- To what degree is Christianity in the 'DNA' of UK culture?

Key quotes:

"The centre of British society is gradually shifting away from Christianity, but remains deeply coloured by it." (G. Davie)

"Britain ... exists somewhere in between Christian, multi-faith and 'none'." (L. Woodhead)

Key words:

Cathedral | worship | secular marriages and funerals | 2011 Census | Humanists UK | NSS | New Atheism | faith criterion for subscription | R.E. inspection | abortion | creationism | Lord's prayer advert | Nadia Eweida | Ashers Bakery | marginalised | Street Pastors | Holy Trinity Brompton