

What are the main trends in religion and values in Britain?

Wednesday, 2nd May 2012

Duration 1:35:31

A level	
AQA	Religious Studies: AS Unit H
Edexcel	Religious Studies: Units 1-4
OCR	
WJEC	Religious Studies: RS 3 CS

This is a Faith debate featuring Aaqil Ahmed, Charles Clarke, Cole Moreton, Grace Davie and Linda Woodhead. It focuses on the main trends in religion and values in Britain.

Students could be given the same issues as used in this debate and asked their opinion on them prior to watching the discussion, revisiting them later to see if any of the views expressed had caused them to change their minds. Extension work could focus on multicultural / superdiverse, responses and trends.

This programme is suitable for use with A level students studying philosophy, ethics, and religion and society. However, the debate is quite long and it would probably be sufficient for one lesson to listen to the opening presentations. The Question & Answer section could be a useful second lesson or make worthwhile extension work.

Questions for debate

How has religion in Britain changed since 1945? What are the main differences between the 1950s, the 1980s and the 2010s, and what are the continuities? How does all this relate to wider social trends? How are these changes being reflected in the media and what part might be played by social media?

Conclusions from the debate

There are significant continuities, including the fact that a half to two-thirds of the population still identify as Christian, and the churches continue to play an important role in society. However, the overall profile of religion in the UK – and of Christianity and the churches – has become far more diverse. Most importantly, the form of religion and the way in which people are religious has changed: there is much more individual choice and selection, less traditional ‘belonging’, and religion supports a much wider range of identities.

Research Findings

The myth of secular progress received a series of shocks from 1979 (Iranian revolution) through 1989 (fall of communism) to 2001 (twin towers attack) which revealed the limitations and blind spots of a perspective which held that religion would inevitably decline and that the rest of the world would follow where secular Europe had led.

The religious profile of the UK has changed significantly, and change has been most evident since the 1980s:

- the historic churches have suffered severe decline (attendance has more than halved since the 1980s)

- the overall profile of the Christian churches has changed: there are now more Baptist and independent church goers than there are Anglicans or Roman Catholics
- non-Christian faiths have grown in numbers and profile, with Islam being the largest. These are not merely 'imports', but take distinctive forms in the British context
- alternative spirituality has grown dramatically since the 1980s, and its wide influence is most evident in the world of holistic or alternative healthcare ('mind, body and spirit')
- numbers identifying as 'non-religious' have grown, though not all of these are secular (some also identify as 'spiritual'). Atheists remain small in numbers, but are increasingly vocal in the media and public debate.

Overall, the religious and secular profile of the UK has become increasingly diverse since 1945. It is not merely that there are more 'religions', but there is much greater diversity of religious identity, even in relation to the same religion.

Maybe, as always, after watching the discussion, students should also consider Islamophobia and Muslim teachings on equality.

After discussion, if there is time, it would then be worth watching the 24 minute summary to clarify and crystallize the thoughts and views expressed.

The presentations by Grace Davie and Linda Woodhead are both available as pdfs on the website.