

Religious and secular people differ over what it means to be a citizen

For religious people being an inclusive citizen of a multi-faith society like Britain means bringing your faith commitment to the table, and engaging in debate with those who have other commitments. For secularists, it means bracketing out those commitments and meeting on the common ground of shared citizenship. The incompatibility of two strategies – bracketing and including – is a significant feature of contemporary public life. There are also tensions between a secular emphasis on individual freedom and choice and religious attention to the group and tradition.

This was one of the conclusions which arose from the series of interdisciplinary seminars organized in 2009 by Jonathan Seglow from Royal Holloway, University of London, and colleagues from across the UK as well as Montreal, funded by the [Religion and Society Programme](#). They brought together key stakeholders for dialogues on religion and the family, community cohesion, healthcare, conflict and reconciliation and education. Theologians, political scientists, lawyers, members of religious groups, social scientists, NHS staff and policy-makers took part.

Another interesting finding was that an individual's political outlook on the family and how it should/should not be promoted by the state appears to be relatively independent from their religious or philosophical outlook. In this, as in other areas, the simplistic divide between 'religious traditionalists' and 'liberal atheists' is misleading. On the issue on healthcare, there is a clearer divide between religious people who hold a view of the physical body as not belonging to themselves, which leads to a very different attitude towards health and dying from someone who maintains a secular notion of bodily self-ownership. In relation to education, it is also difficult to square the right of parents to have their children educated in conformity with their religious convictions and the value of non-discrimination. In the workshop on conflict and reconciliation, some religious people complained of feeling co-opted in public political discourse and thus their ability to 'bear witness' diluted. There was a lot of scepticism about the concept of 'community cohesion', which some noted has replaced multiculturalism.

Despite disagreements, both religious and secular participants encountered perspectives they would not have done over the normal course of their professional lives and found this fruitful. The network has pioneered dialogue as a method in the fields of philosophy, law and politics. It has led to greater collaboration between the University of Central Lancashire and Lancashire County Council, as well across disciplines among scholars who attended the workshops, and the organizing of a very successful workshop on the 2010 Equality Act.



Find out more...

- Contact the network's principal investigator Dr Jonathan Seglow: j.segnow@rhul.ac.uk
- Look out for Jonathan's chapter 'Theories of Religious Exemptions' in a book co-edited by one of the co-investigators on the project, Dr Gideon Calder (together with Dr Emanuela Ceva), entitled *Diversity in Europe: Dilemmas of Differential Treatment in Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2010) <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415580823/> and one called 'Recognition and Religious Diversity' in Shane O'Neill and Nicholas H. Smith (eds), *Recognition Theory as Social Research: Investigating the Dynamics of Social Conflict* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, forthcoming).
- Look up the chapter two participants at the community cohesion workshop collaborated to write: V. Uberoi and D. McGhee, 'British Social Integration' in *Social Integration in Global Perspective* ed. by J. Frideres and P. Spoonley, McGill University Press, forthcoming.

You might also be interested in...

- Reading the findings from another Religion and Society funded network on secularism: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/secularism_means_very_different_things_in_different_times_and_places
- Looking at the report and listening to podcasts from an event the Programme co-organized in July 2010 on faith and policy: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/faith_and_policy
- The project on Muslim participation in contemporary governance also funded by Religion and Society: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/ethnicity/projects/muslimparticipation/>

Project Details

Award Title

Religion, Justice, and Well-Being: the normative foundations of public policy in a multi-faith society

Team

Principal Investigator: Dr Jonathan Seglow (Royal Holloway)

The project was managed by a **Steering Committee**, led by Jonathan Seglow. Its other members were:

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In addition, two other individuals are organising/have organised research workshops:

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All of these individuals are actively involved in the project until its completion. None of them was directly funded by the AHRC/ESRC.

University

Royal Holloway, University of London

Research Partners

Award Type

Phase 1 Research Network

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values, liberalism, democracy, political theory, normative, justice, wellbeing