

Title	The Christian politics of Tony Blair : faith and values in the modern world
Sub Title	
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Publisher	Global Center of Excellence Center of Governance for Civil Society, Keio University
Publication year	2013
Jtitle	Journal of political science and sociology No.18 (2013. 3) ,p.49- 69
JaLC DOI	
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Notes	
Genre	Journal article
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AA12117871-20130300-0049

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The Christian Politics of Tony Blair: Faith and Values in the Modern World

Kenjiro Harata

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the moral and religious dimension of the politics of the former British Prime Minister and a committed Christian Labour leader, Tony Blair. Blair's premiership is noted for the way he managed, or had to manage, his public display of religious faith and its associated values which he sought to apply to particular policies as a prime source for his social conscience and political conviction. The paper addresses how he, based on a particular view of Christianity, has shaped his political agenda regarding the 'modernisation' of his party and the country, 'equalities' legislation on women's and gay rights, 'ethical' wars in Kosovo and Iraq and a fight against international, and religious, terrorism.

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I. Introduction

Since his resignation as British Prime Minister in 2007, Tony Blair has already been known for his active involvement in the promotion of religious faith as 'a force for good in the world' and often frank remarks upon the interconnection between faith and politics. Having

been refrained from ‘doing God’ – by his press secretary Alistair Campbell – whilst in office, he now seems to enjoy, with a sense of release, talking about what has interested him even ‘more than politics’ and assuming an almost ‘missionary’ role for faith on the world stage under the auspices of the ‘Tony Blair Faith Foundation’ to promote religious understanding and inter-faith dialogue.¹ Himself being one of the most openly religious prime ministers in Britain (apart from William Gladstone on the left and Margaret Thatcher on the right), Blair’s premiership is noted for the way he had to manage his public display of religious faith and articulation of moral values, which nonetheless made him a memorable but highly controversial figure in the British political tradition.

This paper seeks to understand how Blair’s view of religion informed his policies and key decisions – including Iraq being the most notable one, but also domestic, social and moral issues, the vision of Britain and the world generally and his dealings with religious leaders – by examining his political narrative throughout his career so far.² The paper does not claim to be an inclusive analysis of the Blair government or (sometimes elusive) ideas of New Labour or the ‘Third Way’, but a glimpse of that moral and spiritual element of him which had inevitable political consequences. Blair’s intense religious personality was so conspicuous in a basically secular environment of British politics where, according to one observer, ‘the only circumstances in which religion would be likely to become an important national issue would be if a leading figure appeared too devout’.³ Leading the country in an era when the British society experienced various transformations in its social fabric, ethnic and cultural self-recognition, religious make-up and sense of values, or the emergence of ‘identity politics’, Blair himself has engaged in an increasingly moral drift of politics, national as well as international. It is therefore part of this paper’s aim to explore how he addressed, and even initiated, those transformations that had enduring implications with his unique personality as a Christian Labour leader.

II. Blair’s Moral and Religious Background

This section first observes how Blair emerged as a potentially reforming Labour figure with recognisable Christian political beliefs.

It was Peter Thompson, Blair’s university inmate and an Australian Anglican vicar, who personally influenced him most and indeed ‘changed his life’.⁴ Inspired by the writings of the now forgotten Scottish philosopher John Macmurray introduced by Thompson, Blair first came to accept Christianity as a ‘socially relevant’, practically engaging and worldly faith with a robust emphasis upon social justice, compassion and fellowship with others, not just personal salvation through faith in God alone. Indeed Blair’s early, latent spiritual awakening at the age of ten was when he was taught the unconditional, indifferent love of compassionate God by his schoolmaster who offered to pray for Blair’s father then suffering a serious stroke. As he recalls that ‘my Christianity and my politics came together at the same time’,⁵ the young Blair developed, through sometimes called communitarian or social

Christianity, his political awareness, certainly of a radical and left-wing kind natural for an early-'70s university student.

'Community' being his central political notion was traced back to the theological concept of the 'Holy Communion', a Christian act symbolising the Creator's fundamental message that 'the self is best realised through communion with others'.⁶ Through the concept of socially embedded persons, he idealised human flourishing in solidarity with others, compassion for the poor and an egalitarian justice incarnated in the welfare system, arguing that the collective commitment to care not just for our better self but for others and community was a Christian socialist duty.⁷ In the context of British Christianity where its political implications are rather sharply distinguished between left and right – namely collectivist, Labour Christianity emphasising community, social justice and equality versus individualist, conservative Christianity emphasising self-help, freedom and competition, Blair chose, against his father's Conservatism and (even militant) atheism, Labour and liberal progressive Christianity.

Blair's somehow self-acquired Christianity – which he learned not from textbooks or sermons but from conversation and personal encounter – gave him another important characteristic, which, in his words, is that he was an intensely 'ecumenical Christian' relishing the religious diversity of modern Britain and finding Catholic versus Protestant debates 'completely baffling'.⁸ Nominally confirmed as an Anglican, he has a Catholic wife, Cherie, his mother was from a hardline Protestant Orange Order in Ireland and his grandmother even cautioned him, on her deathbed, not to marry a Catholic!⁹ But what motivated Blair to his faith, as he confessed, was not a particular doctrine or creed but religion in a 'social context' and moral values like charity, justice and the dignity of a human being 'that is both rational and moral'.¹⁰ Hardly dogmatic on church teachings, and with an independent, inquiring mind, Blair's non-sectarian faith provided him with a better, neutral position to deal with the Northern Ireland peace processes later and led him to a deep interest in other world religions including Islam.

First elected in 1983 with the help of John Burton, a local Christian activist, the new Sedgefield MP was to lead the cause of an ethically founded democratic socialism dating back to the times of Keir Hardie and R. H. Tawney. Joining the Christian Socialist Movement in 1992 under the influence of John Smith, perhaps a more natural Christian Labour leader than Blair, it seemed, he advocated renewal of the Labour Party and left-wing politics through a return to their Christian ethical tradition which he understood was based upon not class interests but values especially of freedom to human flourishing. As Labour struggled to find an alternative, post-Thatcherite political language, Blair found the Christian-inspired concept of community to be a moral balance to the excesses of individualistic market economy and, with it, the perceived social breakdown of the 1990s British society. As Shadow Home Secretary Blair initiated what was recognised as a 'remoralising' agenda for Britain's moral crisis most symbolised by rising juvenile crime at the time, by calling for traditional values like personal responsibility, family ties and moral discipline.¹¹ Blair's

remarks, particularly in the midst of the murder of James Bulger in 1993, such as 'We need a sense of direction as a country', 'We should not be afraid to start talking about the values and principles' and 'We cannot exist in a moral vacuum', were long absent from Labour politicians, only to be owned by the Conservatives. But in part imitating the Clinton New Democrats' 'moral talk' in the US, Blair's deliberately traditionalist appeal of community obligation and 'responsibilities that come with rights' gave the party a consensual, inclusive language, a 'one-nation Labourism', which could eventually replace the Conservatives as a 'moral conscience' role for the nation.¹²

In an effort to seize the political centre ground, the now party leader Blair (from 1994) tried to boost his moral critic against the government which were showing their own 'sleaze' and the often implied 'immorality' of Thatcherite, materialist economics. That was even described as a 'moral crusade' by a 'new moralist' politician to acquire moral superiority over the opponent, and the spiritually eager Blair even asked for the ecumenical Eucharistic service to take place at the start of the 1997 Labour Conference, where Anglican, Catholic and Methodist ministers actually took part. As the new generation of Labour included several openly Christian MPs like Gordon Brown, Chris Smith, Jack Straw, David Blunkett and Hilary Armstrong, Blair, it was reported, once had an ambition to recast New Labour as a British, and centre-left, version of continental Christian democracies, in an apparent break from the growingly secularised Labour Party of the post-war era represented by Gaitskell, Bevan, Foot and Callaghan.¹³ Hugely admiring the nineteenth-century Liberal Party led by Gladstone as a party founded on 'clear values', he was also eager to reconnect the British left with the liberal tradition, even to make Labour a 'big tent' for all socially progressive and radical forces, in a characteristic fusion of socialism and liberalism, and in the tradition of Lloyd George, Hobhouse, Beveridge and Keynes.¹⁴

His move to accept an interview for the Easter edition of *The Sunday Telegraph* in 1996, later entitled 'Why I am a Christian', however, was a risky, although potentially effective, drive in his moral discursive strategy. Despite his caution that 'I can't stand politicians who wear God on their sleeves' and 'I do not believe that Christians should only vote Labour', what he attempted was a rather bold attack on the Conservatives upon almost religious grounds, as he says in a most controversial line:

My view of Christian values led me to oppose what I perceived to be the narrow view of self-interest that Conservatism – particularly its modern, more right-wing form – represents.¹⁵

His point was, as usual, a Biblical communitarian emphasis on human interdependence, social harmony, ability to self-improve, duty to others and a sin situated in social contexts, as opposed to a (supposed) Conservative emphasis on original sin, human isolation, fear and punishment upon individuals.¹⁶ Rejection of Conservatism was, for him, a clear moral imperative from the outset. But now this mixing of religion and politics by a potential national

leader effectively to 'demonise' or 'de-Christianise' the opponent as a whole alarmed his press adviser Campbell, who, concerned about press reaction, later told Blair not to do this again. Before 1997, in fact, Blair habitually used quasi-religious language such as 'One cross on the ballot paper, one nation was reborn', rehearsing 'the simple truths' taken from his reading of Genesis chapter 4: 'I am worth no more than anyone else. I am my brother's keeper. I will not walk by on the other side'.¹⁷ It was during this *Telegraph* interview with Matthew d'Ancona that his other controversial remark 'Jesus was a moderniser' emerged, whilst he also caused suspicion in the same year when, after being told by Cardinal Basil Hume to desist from taking Holy Communion at Catholic Mass, the non-Catholic Blair wrote to him compliantly but indignantly that 'I wonder what Jesus would have made of it'. Biographer John Rentoul judges that this 'revealed a theological presumption greater even than Margaret Thatcher's lecture to the Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1988' (where she 'preached' the Biblical basis of her capitalist, entrepreneurial economic policy¹⁸). Yet warnings this time about the political exposition of religion were to continually haunt Blair's premiership, since now that he did declare his Christianity, he cannot stop the media from speculating over his religious view or 'faith moment' in key political events, such as the Iraq War, which he could not completely deny either.¹⁹

That being said, however, his active moral, and sometimes religious, pronouncements actually succeeded in widening Labour support and attracting committed Christians of any persuasion who had long been tired of Conservative rule. As Blair's social Christianity generally chimed with political orientations of Britain's mainstream churches, New Labour policies effectively secured *de facto* endorsements – not just from the conservative tabloid *The Sun*, but crucially – from the Catholic Church's pre-election document *The Common Good and Catholic Social Teaching* (1996) and the (Protestant) Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland's report, *Unemployment and the Future of Work* (1997), both of which demanded increases in public spending. In fact the successive 'common good' documents by the Catholic Church including *Taxation for the Common Good* (2004) continued to support New Labour, basically understood as the reformed welfare scheme with increased roles for voluntary civil society organisations including churches, whilst the new Labour constitution to replace Clause IV had stated: 'We work for . . . a thriving private sector and high quality public services, where those undertakings essential to *the common good* are either owned by the public or accountable to them' (emphasis added).

Yet for all this, as later developments will tell, Blair's specific stance on personal moral issues such as abortion and gay rights, as well as on foreign policy, rather unscrutinised compared with largely economic domestic policy, and somehow ambiguous between traditionalist and liberal lines, was to create his difficult relationship with religious communities across Britain.²⁰ Despite New Labour's inclusivist appeal, Blair faced huge difficulty in creating consensus on sensitive moral issues of the nation as well as unifying his own party often divided itself between secularist and religious, and morally traditionalist and liberal camps. The next section discusses specific areas where Blair's personal faith and values

were, with certain risks, reflected in practical policies.

III. Faith and Values in Blairite Politics (I)

As suggested earlier, he first had to deal with the public manifestation of his religion more cautiously, not to be misrepresented as claiming moral superiority over others and bestowing on particular policies a divine authority or, more frankly, not to be labeled 'weird' or a 'nutter'.²¹ Whilst he shared with some of Cabinet colleagues a Christian 'faith culture', his closest aids and officials in Number 10 were mostly agnostics or atheists more conscious of the secular environment of frontline British politics, acting as a secular grip on Blair. Tensions with his advisers – Alistair Campbell, Peter Mandelson, Jonathan Powell and Philip Gould – trying to 'censor' Blair's public religiosity produced frequent stories about him trying to 'do God'. But his faith, it must be understood, was primarily a personal one which he openly admitted but did not demand others to share with, a motivation and conviction, not public justification, for particular policies.²² Apart from the fact that Catholics in Britain (and Scottish Presbyterians) have long been Labour's natural allies, Blair did not utilise religion to gain political support, and this will be supported by the fact that he did not always enjoy easy relationships with religious communities including his own Churches, Catholic as well as Anglican, during his premiership.

He started his government by initiating far-reaching measures to renew Britain, supported by concepts like the stakeholding society and 'the enabling state', such as NHS reform, minimum wage, the Bank's independence, the Good Friday Agreement and even 'Cool Britannia'. Along with all New Labour priorities on welfare reform, law and order, devolution and constitutional reforms, Blair's commitment to education, and especially 'faith schools' being 'a true partnership between the churches and the government', was outstanding.²³ New Labour highly valued, as part of its 'active citizenship' or 'neighbourhood renewal' agenda, a 'faith-based' approach in government where religious communities were actively engaged in public policy consultations and delivery. One of Blair's convictions in education was that religion offers children a vital sense of values, ethos, discipline and thus good academic results, making obvious reasons that one could not deny demands for state funding by schools established by faiths other than Christianity and Judaism. (Until 1998, only Christian and Jewish schools had been publicly funded). Approving a first-ever grant-maintained status for Muslim, Sikh and Hindu schools, Blair persisted, even in the midst of the 2001 racial riots in English cities, with plans to increase the number of faith schools despite concerns for a segregated education and community division which may have prompted the riots. Whilst Labour, bearing this in mind, also promoted religious education in a multiculturalist form and even admission 'quotas' for pupils from other faiths and non-faiths for faith schools, Blair's fundamental belief in the cause of religiously based education never wavered, as he believed that the true religious sense and ethos nurture, not hamper, tolerant attitudes and mutual recognition of other faiths. Yet with public scepticism

over the real divisiveness, or even the ‘menace’, of (an especially fundamentalist kind of) faith schools growing in recent years, whether Blair’s conviction is a tested one is not so self-evident now.²⁴

With virtually no experience in diplomacy, Blair developed his foreign policy through the concept of ‘the international community’, a recast of his key domestic idea of the (family, religious or local) community, and emphasised the interdependence of nations in ‘a community of nations’ by analogy with the domestic interrelatedness between persons and community. In his speech in 2000, ‘Values and the Power of the Community’, addressed in front of Hans Küng, his respected Catholic theologian, he focused on the idea of ‘global community’ created like a tapestry in different ways by different nations who nonetheless could share common values like compassion, equal worth of humanity and a commitment to opportunity for all. We are all internationalists in this interdependent world, he proclaims, and for him what unites different people and cultures was, again, not a system of political ideology but fundamental values and ideals. Britain’s national interest would thus be best served in a world that upholds human rights, open democracy and the rule of law, which all constituted Britain’s prime moral objectives in defence and diplomacy. The brief section on foreign policy of the 1997 Labour manifesto was full of fresh idealism, ranging from the worldwide promotion of human rights, engagement with Europe and free trade against protectionism and isolationism to ‘a clear moral responsibility’ to tackle global poverty for Britain to become ‘a leading force for good in the world’. Blair as opposition leader even criticised the Conservatives’ lack of decisiveness in the Balkans and made Labour committed to maintaining the UK’s current defence capabilities including Trident and ‘strong defence through NATO’, according to its manifesto.

His more practical speech in 1999, the ‘Doctrine of the International Community’, to the Economic Club of Chicago during the Kosovo crisis justified military intervention from humanitarian motives into the intra-state affairs of genocide and human rights violations, with the potential effect of changing world perspectives on war. Describing the Kosovo conflict as a ‘battle between good and evil, between civilisation and barbarity, between democracy and dictatorship’ and thus a just war, he was to intensify his ‘moral campaign’ against ‘evil’ foreign regimes almost single-handedly, in a potentially different direction – given the Iraq War – from the ‘ethical’ foreign policy initiative originally championed by his first foreign secretary, Robin Cook.²⁵ With his instinctive moralism of ‘doing the right thing’, and an almost Manichean worldview of good and evil, Blair initiated more wars than any other prime minister since the Second World War – against Iraq, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq again. Believing that ‘it was better to act than do nothing, even though the outcome was uncertain’,²⁶ Blair now had a mission to pursue ‘a new moral crusade’ – a term he used in 1999 even before President Bush²⁷ – on the side of whoever he felt the duty to protect from ‘evil’ oppressors. His statement that ‘when the international community agrees certain objectives and then fails to implement them, those that can act, must’, reflects his clear proactive principle in foreign affairs with his characteristic ‘messianic’ resolve.²⁸

It should be added here, however, that Blair's almost religious zeal for an ideal world was also shown in his championing of environmental concerns (Kyoto and climate change) and international development aid, especially the cancellation of third world debt, through such moves as the Millennium Development Goals, the Jubilee campaign and 'Make Poverty History' – which he all shared with his Christian colleague at the Treasury, Gordon Brown.

Being rather authoritarian – or 'tough' – on law and order, and starkly judgemental in international affairs, Blair understood Christianity as essentially tolerant and inclusive, if not permissive, on personal moral issues, as being a greater force to realise a society committed to equal human values regardless of particular personal behaviour or orientation. It was his long-standing belief that rather than denying equal choice and opportunity for all including homosexuals, women and the disadvantaged, it was the dignity and moral worth of every human being before God to allow them fair conditions on which to flourish their lives and account for their own actions. As any moral judgement and action essentially belong to each individual, what must be offered is not equality of outcome but of opportunity and choice, he thinks. Not that he regarded abortion or homosexual act as morally right, but his 'political' position as a legislator was that it was his duty to provide pregnant women and gay people with equal treatment in society, and was far more morally unacceptable for him to criminalise or coerce them into other choices.²⁹ The question, according to him, was not about his personal belief – he was privately always against abortion, but 'whether in cases where women face very difficult and agonising decisions the criminal law is the right instrument to make that decision for them'.³⁰ This view is in line with the position taken by the Wolfenden Committee on homosexual offences (and prostitution) in the 1950s, namely the separation of public law from private morality, and of crime from (religious) sin.

Yet his voting record to consistently support pro-choice causes and gay rights, as well as new plans to repeal married couples' allowance to support, instead, alternative, diverse forms of family including single parents, brought the suspicion of the Catholic flock of his supporters, especially leaders like Cardinal Thomas Winning of Scotland with whom Blair had a long, bitter dispute. But without hesitation he pursued the so-called 'equalities agenda', to lower the age of consent for homosexuals (Sexual Offences Amendment Act 2000), to abolish Section 28 (Local Government Act 2003), to provide equal social and economic status for homosexuals (including their right to adopt) in the 'Civil Partnership' Act 2004 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and to eliminate sexual orientation discrimination in employment (Sexual Orientation Regulations 2003). His decision not to allow exemption to the Equality Act for Catholic adoption agencies (which refused to provide services for gay couples) in 2007 upset many, not just Catholic leaders Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Vincent Nichols and Keith O'Brien but Anglican Archbishops Rowan Williams and John Sentamu, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks and the Muslim Council of Britain, being rebuked as a violation of vital religious freedom.³¹ In March 2005 ahead of the general election, as the Conservative leader called for a cut in the legal abortion limit from 24 to 20 weeks which

was welcomed by a wide range of national faith leaders, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor even 'threatened' Labour by saying:

There has been a notion in the past that Catholics would be more in support of the Labour Party because they were working-class people. . . . I'm not so sure that would be quite as true today.³²

The equalities legislative agenda pursued under Labour and, with it, the perceived 'marginalisation' of (mainly conservative) Christians were denounced by Pope Benedict XVI during his 2010 state visit to Britain, but his hardline views on moral issues were, in turn, 'questioned' and demanded to 'rethink' by Blair in his article for *Attitude*, a gay lifestyle magazine.³³ Even willing to defy church hierarchies, Blair's Christian conscience was clearly in the liberal, progressive direction from the outset, the fact which locates him in quite an 'odd' place as a Catholic believer. Peter Osborne, a conservative journalist, criticises him for taking from Christianity 'only those parts that suit him', saying that 'on practically every key moral issue of our day – family, abortion, cloning – the Prime Minister falls on the side of the secular, liberal consensus rather than that of robust Christian teaching'.³⁴

Yet Blair's preoccupation was rather that intensified public debates on abortion and gay issues, matters of personal choice, might cause cultural conflict and division in British society as in America where 'culture wars' were easily translated into party political domains.³⁵ His fear was also that by becoming the monopoly of cultural traditionalists and moral conservatives, religion itself might be viewed and thus trivialised as old-fashioned and reactionary. His long fight since his early, double reception of social Christianity and Labour politics has been to reclaim Christianity's contemporary relevance and thus reject personal moralism in social legislation. For Blair, as 'morality' primarily concerns with care for others, compassion and solidarity, a society 'tolerant of people's sexuality and opposed to all forms of discrimination', as he boasts, perhaps indicates his new, modern social conscience.³⁶

But for all this, the liberal equality strand forged as 'inevitable' and 'unstoppable' during the Blair years in sensitive areas of family and sexuality – some of which forced some 'modern', now Cameronian, Conservatives to support in free votes – is almost creating division and resentment among religious circles, with conservative evangelicals reasserting themselves to gain political influence, perhaps the situation Blair greatly feared. The general elections in 2001 and 2005 he fought with William Hague and Michael Howard are understood by some as partially introducing a kind of American-style religious campaign where party leaders address various faith groups vying for religious votes.³⁷ Whilst the Conservatives focused upon homosexuality and abortion to secure their core vote, Blair, trying not to make them an issue, sought to present religion not as about particularity but as tolerant and compassionate and about social justice, altruism and relieving suffering.³⁸ But there's no denying that religious lobbies in Britain these days are becoming growingly militant – with

the perceived secularist 'threat' also being felt militant – in their fierce opposition, for instance, to stem cell research, euthanasia, gay marriage, Sunday trading and gambling law, all forcing agonising decisions on British main parties.

Blair's moral reformism also troubled Church of England circles, usually tolerant on societal change and cultural 'diversity' but divided in fact on abortion, civil partnerships and same-sex marriage and united in opposing assisted dying and human embryo research. Temporarily aspiring to portray the monarchy in a 'modernising' fashion (especially with regard to the way he behaved during the death of Princess Diana), Blair also 'challenged' – if not contemplated disestablishing – his other official institution of the spiritual realm, the Anglican Church, over political matters as well as internal affairs. Initially New Labour policies were enthusiastically welcomed by the Church, ranging from increased public spending on health and education, support for church schools, decentralisation and international development to the Northern Ireland peace agreement. The Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, now reflects that, compared with the Conservatives' 'uncaring and arrogant' attitude, he could 'develop very close relationships with a number of New Labour leaders', including Robin Cook, Gordon Brown and Clare Short.³⁹ Over the summer of 2002 Blair was quite enthusiastic about electing, as his first self-chosen Archbishop of Canterbury, the progressive Anglo-Catholic Dr Rowan Williams from devolved Wales, who, as a self-described 'hairy lefty', was known for his liberal stance on women's ordination and gay issues and radicalism on social justice and war.⁴⁰ The Blair-Williams pair seemed an innovative, reformist look matched with Britain's New Millennium, sharing the basic tenets of Anglican social thought espoused by William Temple and R. H. Tawney, although Williams, who was rather of a pre-Blair, traditionalist Labour, did not share Blair's idealism on morally based military intervention.⁴¹

Blair in fact took a high interest in the appointment of bishops of the Church he cared so much, with an enthusiasm that could rival that of Thatcher or Churchill who both disliked woolly establishment bishops. When in 1997 he rejected two candidates for the bishopric of Liverpool, a key area for Labour, because he wanted a 'more innovative, fresh' figure who could tackle complex community issues (i.e. sectarian conflict and inner-city problems), there was a cry of political interference and the 'Church in danger' among church circles.⁴² Since the creation of the present system to choose diocesan bishops in Callaghan's time, no prime minister including Thatcher had rejected two names put forward by the Church's nominations commission – the Prime Minister is normally supposed to choose the first name – to request another name(s). Blair always wanted for bishops, it was said, 'men of vision to take the Church forward' rather than 'Establishment candidates',⁴³ and he eventually chose James Jones for Liverpool, a radical and outspoken evangelical, but who later, against Blair's wishes, opposed the abolition of Section 28 and the ordination of a homosexual bishop.⁴⁴ Normally on friendly terms with church figures and institutions, but occasionally disaffected with their outdated practices, Blair was sometimes seen as anathema to the Church, with minor clashes erupting over the exhibition contents of the Millen-

nium Dome, unfavoured ‘super casino’ plans and the now ‘politically correct’, Labour use of the term ‘faith communities’, rather than ‘churches’, to describe Anglican and other traditional Christian denominations.

IV. Faith and Values in Blairite Politics (II)

Disagreements between church and state during Blair’s premiership became most visible in the run-up to the Iraq War to which Williams led a high-profile opposition with other faith leaders. In fact Blair’s lasting legacy, and turning point, in terms of not just his popularity but crucial relationship with faith communities, Christian as well as non-Christian, which truly tested his faith, was Iraq. His vision for, as well as the means to achieve, the world free of oppression and dictatorship has continued since, and was even strengthened by the success of, Kosovo. (And it should be noted that it was as early as 1998 that he first authorised joint air strikes with the US, ‘Operation Desert Fox’, against Saddam Hussein). Often labeled a liberal or cosmopolitan interventionist, Blair’s international moralism this time, in 2002-03, seemed to many the most risky attempt of his typical mixing of values with practical policies, not least in that it bestowed on him an excessive self-righteousness to intervene prematurely even when evidence of clear and imminent threat was not established. But becoming even more judgemental when under pressure, he pursued his moral aims despite the potential cost of unpopularity, which he only saw as ‘the price of leadership and the cost of conviction’.⁴⁵ His typical postwar remarks such as ‘the world without Saddam is better’ and that he ‘would still have thought it right to remove him’ even without evidence of WMDs are indeed serious and unashamedly ‘unrepentant’, since he saw in Iraq’s dictator, as in Slobodan Milošević and Osama bin Laden, the manifest incarnation of evil which he could not but challenge at any cost. The man who believes that he ‘did the right thing’ cannot be repentant, as any apology for the (especially moral) case for war would be thought to compromise his unflinching conviction.

Iraq was the moment where the role of his faith was keenly speculated in the media, with prominent journalists including Sir David Frost and Jeremy Paxman asking whether he consulted God, prayed with President Bush, etc. It was during an interview with *Vanity Fair* about these things that Campbell interrupted it with a now famous phrase, ‘I’m sorry. We don’t do God’, after asking ‘Is he [Blair] on God?’⁴⁶ There were various intimate stories about Blair’s desire to end his pre-war televised address to the nation (in March 2003) by saying ‘God bless the British people’ – with which he, persuaded by his aids, replaced ‘thank you’.⁴⁷ Later in 2006 during a TV interview with Michael Parkinson, by which time Blair might have been considering retirement, he was forced to admit:

In the end, there is a judgement that, I think if you have faith about these things, you realise that judgement is made by other people . . . and if you believe in God, it’s made by God as well.⁴⁸

The personal and direct encounter with God, normally an exclusive language for evangelical Christians, was now so significant that he could not even keep it hidden from the public. Confronted with such a key decision to continue his mission of a moral war, he clearly craved standards or values beyond secular political terms and even this world, with a sheer readiness to 'meet his Maker' to account for whatever actions he would take.⁴⁹ Eager to find moral reassurance and personal solace before the war, he even sought a papal audience, an extraordinary move, which in February 2003 was realised on the condition that it be a private meeting accompanied by his practicing Catholic wife, Cherie, who was nominally the main guest. The two leaders finally disagreed on the morality of war, but the now frail Pope John Paul II, essentially acting as a spiritual mentor, was reported as saying that Blair's motivations were good and offering him a personal encouragement with a word 'God bless England!', something which might have strengthened the resolve of the prime minister.⁵⁰ Because in the end the decision to start a war belonged not to religious leaders but to politicians alone. (The Pope, whilst knowing this well, certainly hoped the other choice). For all his tension with organised Christianity including its most influential figure, the Pontiff, Blair's fundamental tenet as an 'independent' Christian politician has been that:

Christianity is a very tough religion. . . . It is judgemental. There is right and wrong. There is good and bad. . . . But when we look at our world today and how much needs to be done, we should not hesitate to make such judgements. And then follow them with determined action.⁵¹

The often made association between Blair and President Bush upon religious grounds was, for Blair, a quite difficult and 'painful' one, according to his observer James Naughtie.⁵² Whilst sharing, quite accidentally, common views with Bush on military action founded on values not least of freedom and justice, Blair's international idealism preceded the arrival of the 'born-again' President, and Blair's Christianity was rather alien to Bush's or the religious right's conservative one. Equally being committed to building a close, 'special relationship' with the Clinton Democrat administration, Blair often led and persuaded the US Presidents of the moral case for a military intervention. (Thus the 'Bush's poodle' claim was, for him, simply a misplaced one). Even if it could be true that Blair had already determined on military action against Iraq anyway, his strategic aim of consistently siding with the US was rather to soften the US policy by exercising personal influence, not to leave the counterpart in a dangerous, unilateralist position – although that eventually seems to have failed.

Whilst Blair rightly contended that the Iraq War was certainly not a war between religions, or founded on religions, it might be his 'practical' failure that he took religions or ideas rather too seriously, without paying enough attention to how they might be viewed and treated by others. He for instance could have viewed the worldwide struggle against

terrorism not as a costly, endless war between rather abstract ‘democracy and dictatorship’, ‘civilisation and barbarity’ or ‘good and evil’, but as a policing and judicial measure against violence and pure criminality. Despite his careful, deliberate appeal to ‘moderate and authentic’ Muslims against ‘distorted and extremist’ Muslims, and contention that the people he rescued in Kosovo and Sierra Leone were mostly Muslims, that he decided on wars regardless of religion but on the basis of universal human values, he failed to persuade the majority of Muslims and Arab countries of the virtue of a war. The last years of the Blair government were preoccupied with issues to do with post-conflict Iraq, homegrown terrorism and especially Muslim community relations. Yet after the 7/7 London bombings which Blair saw as an attack against ‘our’ – British – ‘way of life’, his enthusiasm for values and (true) religion has only grown, as he intensified calls for social integration founded on shared values or ‘Britishness’, such as democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law, important though they all may be.⁵³ And in characterising anti-terror policies as essentially value-centred, he insisted on internalist or ‘inherent’ approaches to terrorism, remarking that:

To say his [the terrorist attacker’s] religion is irrelevant is both completely to misunderstand his motive and to refuse to face up to the strain of extremism within his religion that has given rise to it.⁵⁴

With this fight against religious extremism and to find religion’s reconciliatory role as his newly-found top agenda, Blair resigned his office perhaps too early, leaving all the issues including national talk of ‘Britishness’, to another Christian Labour leader, Gordon Brown. But by relinquishing his initial promise of a full third term, Blair’s long-standing personal hope finally came to realise, which is conversion to Catholicism announced in December 2007. After informing Pope Benedict XVI of his intention to convert, during his final foreign visit as prime minister to the Vatican in June that year, he was received by Cardinal Murphy-O’Connor at his private chapel, despite the two men’s disagreements over moral issues and war. There was certainly criticism for this red-carpet welcome, from conservatives like Ann Widdecombe, the Tory MP, and John Smeaton, Director of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, not least over his record on abortion. It was also questioned whether Blair, having sometimes been called a ‘High Anglican’, really came to believe ‘all that the holy Catholic Church teaches’, including transubstantiation, papal infallibility and perhaps anti-contraception. But again what led him to that faith was not a set of (particularly Catholic) doctrines but, according to his close observer, ‘formalities’ and certainties of faith which he probably craved most in his retired, new life with his family.⁵⁵

Although regularly attending the Catholic parish church near Chequers whilst in office, he chose to remain Anglican because, it was said, he did not wish to cause constitutional complications – regarding his role in the establishment – and be viewed as a ‘disrespect of the established Church’ by becoming a first-ever Catholic prime minister within the

Protestant Kingdom.⁵⁶ A Catholic Blair might have complicated his right to choose Anglican bishops,⁵⁷ and he, for all his zeal for constitutional reform, never considered revising the Act of Settlement to allow those in line to the throne to marry a Catholic. (This long-awaited reform in terms of ‘equality’ was finally proposed in 2011 by Anglican, not Catholic, Prime Minister David Cameron). Whilst allowing photographers to take pictures of himself in the Catholic Mass, and making no secret of his fondness for the Catholic faith, he continued to dismiss speculation that he might convert. One of the reasons for this ‘mystery’ in Blair’s faith was, of course, the tension between his faith and family and public office. But another, from a rather uncharitable view, could be that given his commitment to the progressive cause in social morality, potentially divisive reforms such as homosexual rights, promotion of embryonic research and his voting on abortion would have been much more difficult if Blair had been known to be a Catholic. Although there is no practical impediment in Britain to Catholics becoming prime minister, a Catholic Blair could not have so easily, and consistently, ignored condemnations and warnings, if not ‘orders’, from church hierarchies and even the Pope particularly over the war in Iraq.

V. Faith and Globalisation: Blair’s Post-Prime Ministerial Career

It may be odd to some that this seemingly un-Catholic Blair,⁵⁸ released from political pressure, now represents one of the most prominent (and celebrity?) voices for the public role of faith, addressing the most demanding question in contemporary affairs, that is, the interrelationship between religion and politics, or the politics of religion. Sometimes enjoying a direct, unmediated interaction with God whilst neglecting papal teaching, his religion really sounds more evangelical and ‘faith-alone’ Protestant than Catholic when, for instance, he says: ‘Faith is not discovered in acting according to ritual but in acting according to God’s will, and God’s will is love’; and, by referring to John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace* being an Protestant hymn, that ‘it is through faith, by the grace of God, that we have the courage to live as we should and die as we must’.⁵⁹

He now asserts that, as faith is important in his politics just as ‘health is important to everyone’, we, political, business and religious leaders of all faiths, must all ‘do God’, i.e. talk about religion robustly in the public sphere.⁶⁰ With a new, lifelong mission to promote inter-faith dialogue and religious reconciliation, even to become himself a bridge between different faiths or the West and the non-West, he seriously debates for, on an individual basis, the ‘faith’ camp against the secular humanist and atheist camp, frequently appearing in notable lectures, conferences and the media around the world. His constant theme is that in today’s interdependent world where religious dimensions in politics, particularly of the Middle East, become even more important, faith and spiritual values which can unite different nations and cultures vitally help us ‘humanise’ the impersonal effects of globalisation. Central to his understanding of the present age is again a global ‘community’ of values, or indeed a ‘globalisation of our best ethical values’ which we need, understood as an attempt

to reconcile traditional values with the modern world, and individual freedom with the wider common good.⁶¹ By sharing common values like charity, compassion, equal worth and humility before higher being which Blair finds in all major world faiths,⁶² religion can genuinely be a positive force for good, a greater good for human progress and justice in the world. (He invited religious leaders from six major faiths – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism – to sit on his Faith Foundation’s ‘International Religious Advisory Council’). One of Blair’s core beliefs has been that in a world where boundaries of race, culture, ideology and even national border become fluid, ‘the spread of our values makes us safer’.⁶³ Pluralist – against exclusivist – in accepting other religions’ truth claims, Blair’s religion is basically characterised as liberal, modern and rationalist Christianity which, as he confirms, presupposes the reconcilability of religion with reason, science, toleration and celebration of diversity. He says that ‘it would be very arrogant towards God’s purpose for us, not to recognise that others have their own ideas [truth claims]’.⁶⁴

What concerns him most in the post-9/11 world is the global rise of both religious fundamentalism (of whatever faith) and aggressive secularism, which somehow formed an ‘unholy alliance’ where both view and ‘need’ each other as an essential enemy. In restoring religion to its rightful place against these two opposite claims which make it the cause of clash, religion could genuinely be a transforming as well as a relieving power in an uncertain twenty-first century world. Our future world will be ‘poorer in spirit and ambition, less sensitive to conscience and less focused on the common good, if it is not under the guardianship of faith in God’, he claims.⁶⁵

Although his desire to eradicate two extremisms and find a common ground among (genuine, major) religions is sincere, his assumption of religion as a progressive, modern and rational force, not reactionary and exclusivist, is not without controversy. Some criticise that Blair’s or the Foundation’s approach amounts to reducing different faiths to the ‘same, predetermined common denominator’ and ‘stripping them of their identity’,⁶⁶ even though Blair would contend that finding a commonality rather than differences is what we need most in the first place. Keen to claim religion’s contemporary relevance, he introduces a rather simplistic, and excessively divisive, interpretation of our moral values: that our major dividing line is now between ‘open vs. closed’, ‘tolerant vs. intolerant’, ‘civilisation vs. barbarity’, receptive vs. resistant to modern change, even engaging in free trade vs. isolationist in protectionism, supporting vs. opposing immigration, etc.⁶⁷ It is presented as if ‘what is new and modern is good, and old is bad’, an usual obsession with newness, youth and reform which had led Blair to reject the ‘old’ Labour left and commend ‘New’ Labour for a ‘young’, ‘new’ Britain.⁶⁸ Behind this worldview or value system lies his fundamental recognition that we have no other way but to ‘accommodate’ and adapt, rather than react, to the ‘inevitable’ forces of globalisation and modern change in economic, political and cultural spheres. He recently stated that ‘complaining about globalization is as pointless as trying to turn back the tide’ and that ‘competition can’t be shut out; in the end, it can only be beaten’.⁶⁹ We cannot, he thinks, overcome our inter-cultural sensitivity created by the glob-

alisation itself until we agree on fundamental human values of progress, openness and reform, as opposed to the closed mind and fanaticism, religious as well as atheist. Although Blair would not necessarily discriminate against non-believers, he still seems to believe that without some sense of religion, one cannot fully acquire the (true) sense of toleration and respect for other faiths, a position which was evidenced by his support for the cause of faith schools and a multi-faith, not secular, approach to religious education.

His – now intellectual, not military – crusade against extremism goes increasingly idealistic, if not optimistic, as the ambitiously crafted activities of his Faith Foundation – which though claims its motto ‘Idealism becomes the new realism’ – actually show: an inter-religious ‘Faiths Act’ campaign to end deaths from malaria, ‘Face to Faith’ programmes for children to overcome religious intolerance, an ‘Abraham House’ project to encourage engagement between the three Abrahamic faiths and even ‘Faith Shorts’ award for young filmmakers to express their faith. Whilst all these projects are indeed commendable though long-term in vision, whether this is the task that the former prime minister who is responsible for many practical consequences including overseas wars – especially in Iraq – should do is questionable. (Blair would certainly regard this task as his essential, long-standing concern, not some ‘compensation’ for past policies). Given his other role as peace envoy to the Middle East, one might also wonder what positive steps could have been taken if, whilst in office, he had taken that religious element in Israeli/Palestinian affairs more seriously.

Being a firm believer in a faith-based approach in politics, he once attracted some criticism when, in an effort towards social cohesion and inter-faith dialogue after the London bombings, he intensified calls to ally with ‘moderate’ voices of Islamic communities, as if to suggest that it was the government’s job, not religious groups’, to define moderate, ‘genuine’ and ‘mainstream’ Islam as opposed to the radical, ‘minority’ and ‘unorthodox’ faith of the terrorists.⁷⁰ The government funding plans for those moderates to train and research at universities and strategy to prevent radicalisation in local communities and especially on campuses, seen as too intrusive and arbitrary, were viewed with suspicion. But with the boundary between faith and its social outreach, and between religion and politics, becoming increasingly vague for him, he might dismiss the idea that governments or (former) politicians should not engage in such activities, i.e., the deliberate promotion of, or otherwise government intervention in, particular faiths. And as an inclusivist or pluralist believer of religion, he will also reject the suggestion that his Christianity compromises the credibility of such multi-faith initiatives and engagement with Muslims.

VI. Conclusion

Blair’s claim to the pluralist view of religion and to finding overlapping values among world religions is indeed the essential point that even academic theologians have not yet fully articulated.⁷¹ He has to do even more to prove this point, a task which nonetheless was made difficult by his deteriorated relation especially with Muslim countries, as well as

by the latent perception gap that seems to exist between the West and the Arab world on the very meaning of such notions as toleration, pluralism, religious freedom and a proper respect for religion. The latter was certainly one of the causes that brought about the almost ‘civilisational’ clash between Western and Muslim peoples over the publication of satirical images of the Prophet Muhammad which certain Western media thought was the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression.

This brief sketch of the religious face of Blair’s half career must be quickly concluded. To focus on the domestic political scene, as Blair has already become a controversial exception in terms of politicians’ religiosity, his immediate successor, son of a Presbyterian minister, who really had a firm conviction in social Christianity and a ‘moral compass’, had to somehow downplay his public religiosity throughout office – in part to pursue a different style of leadership and personality from Blair.⁷² David Cameron, a fairly moderate Church of England goer, apparently conscious of Blair’s precedent, confesses that his faith is ‘a bit like the reception for Magic FM in the Chilterns: it sort of comes and goes’, adding: ‘If you are asking, do I drop to my knees and pray for guidance, no’.⁷³

Whilst the Conservative Chairman Baroness Warsi promised that the new coalition government was committed to ‘doing God’,⁷⁴ the general consensus found in current British politics may be for main party politicians to ‘mildly’ do God, i.e., to pursue a middle course between an aggressive, American-style religious politics and the openly secularist agenda promoted by lobbies like the National Secular Society and the British Humanist Association, with the shared but difficult aim of striking a right balance between equal rights and religious freedom. On the left, Ed Miliband, who is Jewish, and Nick Clegg, who has a Catholic wife and sends their children to a Catholic school, are both avowed atheists, but they and their parties are also committed to faith-based initiatives in public policy as passionately as the Conservatives which hail the ‘Big Society’ agenda. The media may eagerly pursue politicians’ religious faith, but people would respect leaders of any faith or none as being a personal matter, and would support public involvement of faith communities such as education and welfare provision, as long as they follow certain standards on equality and diversity – although they themselves are sometimes controversial. And it would be that as atheist politicians respect people of faith, politicians of faith respect people of other faiths and none. Britain does not lack atheist, Jewish and many Protestant prime ministers in the past, but when, in particular, Catholics and non-Judeo-Christians like Muslims would rise to the highest elected office and what that would indicate for Britain’s constitutional and cultural change are yet another big question.

Notes

¹ Tony Blair, *A Journey: My Political Life* (London: Random House, 2010), pp. 680–681.

² For religious accounts of Blair, see Mark D. Chapman, *Blair’s Britain: A Christian Critique*

(London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005); John Burton and Eileen McCabe, *Don't Do God: Blair's Religious Beliefs and Its Consequences* (London: Continuum, 2009).

³ James Naughtie, *The Accidental American: Tony Blair and the Presidency* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p. 111.

⁴ Blair, *A Journey*, p. 79.

⁵ John Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister* (London: Little, Brown, 2001), p. 35.

⁶ Tony Blair, 'Foreword', in Christopher Bryant (ed.), *Reclaiming the Ground: Christianity and Socialism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), pp. 10-11.

⁷ Blair, 'Foreword', p. 12.

⁸ Tony Blair, 'Why I am a Christian', in *New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), p. 61.

⁹ BBC Radio 3, 'Belief', 10 April 2009.

¹⁰ Tony Blair, Maiden Speech to the House of Commons, 6 July 1983.

¹¹ Peter Manley Scott, Christopher R. Baker and Elaine L. Graham (eds.), *Remoralizing Britain?: Social, Ethical and Theological Perspectives on New Labour* (London: Continuum, 2009); David Walker, 'The moral agenda', Brian Brivati and Tim Bale (eds.), *New Labour in Power: Precedents and Prospects* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 66-74.

¹² Studies on New Labour rhetoric and discourse include Norman Fairclough, *New Labour, New Language?* (London: Routledge, 2000); Mark Bevir, *New Labour: A Critique* (London: Routledge, 2005); Michael Freeden, 'The Ideology of New Labour', *The Political Quarterly*, 70:1 (1999), pp. 42-51.

¹³ For the relationship between New Labour and Christian democracy, see Nicholas Huntington and Tim Bale, 'New Labour: New Christian Democracy?', *The Political Quarterly*, 73:1 (2002), pp. 44-50.

¹⁴ John Rentoul, 'Tony Blair 1994-', in Kevin Jefferys (ed.), *Leading Labour: From Keir Hardie to Tony Blair* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), p. 210. Blair said that 'the aim of socialism is to give greater freedom to the individual' (quoted in Freeden, 'The Ideology of New Labour', p. 43). Yet it is also pointed out that 'it is only when it is annexed to the adjective 'Christian' that the world 'socialism' is acceptable to Tony Blair' (Chapman, *Blair's Britain*, p. 102).

¹⁵ Blair, 'Why I am a Christian', p. 58. He also remarked that 'Christianity helped to inspire my rejection of Marxism', in that it denied human free will.

¹⁶ His Commons maiden speech attacked the Thatcher government by saying that his socialism stood 'for co-operation, not confrontation; for fellowship, not fear'.

¹⁷ Tony Blair, Speeches to the Labour conferences in 1997 and 1995 respectively. Conservative journalist Charles Moore criticises the former comment as 'a tasteless suggestion that Britain had been crucified under the Conservatives and resurrected under Labour' (Kay Carter ed., *From Thatcher to Cameron*, London: Biteback, 2010, p. 45).

¹⁸ Rentoul, *Tony Blair*, p. 352.

¹⁹ Blair was continuously derided by the satirical magazine *Private Eye* as the young, sanctimonious 'Vicar of St Albion'.

²⁰ Blair would not entirely agree with Anthony Giddens's radical view of 'democratic family'.

²¹ Tony Blair, 'Faith and Globalisation', The Cardinal's Lectures, Westminster Cathedral, London, 3 April 2008; BBC One, 'The Blair Years', 2 December 2007.

²² On the Iraq War, he always stressed that his religion as well as the particular faith of either country were irrelevant to his decision.

²³ Tony Blair, 'Faith in Politics', Speech to the Christian Socialist Movement, Westminster Central Hall, 29 March 2001.

²⁴ Channel 4's documentary 'Faith School Menace?' (18 August 2010), presented by atheist biologist Richard Dawkins, became highly influential.

²⁵ For 'ethical' aspects of New Labour or Blair's foreign policy, see Richard Little and Mark Wickham-Jones (eds.), *New Labour's Foreign Policy: A New Moral Crusade?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Karen E. Smith and Margot Light (eds.), *Ethics and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Stuart Croft, 'Ethics, Labour and foreign Policy', in Colin Hay (ed.), *British Politics Today* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), pp. 216-236; Christopher Hill, 'Putting the world to rights: Tony Blair's foreign policy mission', in Anthony Seldon (ed.), *The Blair Effect, 2001-5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 384-409; David Coates and Joel Krieger, *Blair's War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

²⁶ Burton and McCabe, *Don't Do God*, p. 139.

²⁷ Tony Blair, 'A New Moral Crusade', *Newsweek*, 13 June 1999.

²⁸ Tony Blair, Speech to the South African Parliament, Cape Town, 8 January 1999.

²⁹ Rentoul, *Tony Blair*, p. 199; Naughtie, *The Accidental American*, p. 111.

³⁰ Peter Osborne, 'The special relationship between Blair and God', *The Spectator*, 5 April 2003, p. 14. How he was able to resolve this conflict between personal and public beliefs is not known.

³¹ The noncompliant Catholic adoptions agencies eventually faced closure or had to sever their links with the church.

³² 'Cardinal tells Catholics to reject Labour over abortion', *The Times*, 15 March 2005. However, perhaps because of the gap between clerical hierarchies and lay members, the actual election results showed the overwhelmingly support of ordinary Catholic voters for Labour's third term which was even greater than the 1997 landslide victory.

³³ 'Blair questions Papal gay policy', BBC News, 8 April 2009. This 'marginalisation' of Christianity was highlighted in a BBC documentary 'Are Christians Being Persecuted?' broadcast on 4 April 2010.

³⁴ Osborne, 'The special relationship between Blair and God', pp. 14-15.

³⁵ 'Blair shuns US religion politics', BBC News, 22 March 2005.

³⁶ Tony Blair, 'Values and the Power of the Community', Speech to the Global Ethics Foundation, Tübingen University, Germany, 30 June 2000.

³⁷ Joseph M. Knippenberg, 'Religion and (Abortion) Politics in Great Britain: Tony Blair's Faithworks Speech', *Editorials*, Ashbrook Center, March 2005.

<http://ashbrook.org/publications/oped-knippenberg-05-blair> (Accessed 15 September 2012). For a slightly different account, see Hugo Young, 'While Blair seeks the truth, Hague searches for votes', *The Guardian*, 29 June 2000.

³⁸ Tony Blair, Speech to Faithworks, London, 22 March 2005.

³⁹ George Carey, *Know the Truth: A Memoir* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 210.

⁴⁰ We do not know whether Blair, as of 2012, would favour, as an symbol of 'ethnically diverse' and 'multicultural' Britain, John Sentamu, a black Ugandan-born but morally hardline Archbishop of York, to be Williams's successor.

⁴¹ Rupert Shortt, *Rowan Williams: An Introduction* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), pp. 107-108.

⁴² 'Blair blocks church choice for bishop', *The Sunday Times*, 14 September 1997.

⁴³ Anthony Seldon, *Blair* (London: The Free Press, 2004), p. 524.

⁴⁴ Another tension between Blair and the Church, when in 1998 the Crown Appointments Commission put two names for the post of the Bishop of Southwark without order of preference, in order to give the Prime Minister enough leeway, is reported in 'Church bends knee to Blair', *The Independent*, 1 February 1998.

⁴⁵ Tony Blair, Speech to Labour's Local Government, Women's and Youth conferences, Glasgow, 15 February 2003.

⁴⁶ Yet Campbell – who professes himself to be a 'pro-faith atheist' – now clarifies that this was not 'a major strategic statement' but just a rough attempt to end the relentless questions. <http://www.alastaircampbell.org/blog/2010/09/16/baroness-warsi-misses-point-of-we-dont-do-god-writes-a-pro-faith-atheist> (Accessed 15 September 2012).

⁴⁷ Blair now confirms this story. The reason why the British people see as problematic, and even feel offended by, the Prime Minister saying 'God bless ...' is suggested that in Britain it is the monarch, not his/her minister, who plays the first role of public religion, and that God is primarily required to 'Save the King/Queen' (Nelson Jones, 'God, the Queen and Tony Blair', *New Statesman*, 15 May 2012).

⁴⁸ Without electoral pressure, Blair now volunteers secret, inside stories of his faith and premiership to the media: such as that whilst leader of the opposition he urged his reluctant staff to kneel in prayer with representatives of the Salvation Army who came to see him.

⁴⁹ *The Times Magazine*, 3 May 2003. Michael Portillo aptly criticises this point, saying that 'those who look for judgment not from the electorate or Parliament or a free press but from God release themselves from the constraints of democracy' (*The Sunday Times*, 25 February 2007).

⁵⁰ Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of the Party* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 448.

⁵¹ Tony Blair, 'Foreword', p. 12.

⁵² Naughtie, *The Accidental American*, pp. 111-112.

⁵³ See for instance Tony Blair's Speech, 'The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values', 10 Downing Street, London, 8 December 2006.

⁵⁴ Tony Blair, Speech to the Foreign Policy Centre, London, 21 March 2006.

⁵⁵ Rawnsley, *The End of the Party*, p. 449.

⁵⁶ Rawnsley, *The End of the Party*, p. 449; BBC Radio 3, 'Belief'.

⁵⁷ In fact, until 1974 Catholics had been barred from becoming Lord Chancellor whose job includes ecclesiastical patronage.

⁵⁸ He is neither a typically working-class Catholic who normally values traditional morality nor a conservative Catholic convert from Anglicanism who opposes women's and gay ordination.

⁵⁹ Tony Blair, Speech to the National Prayer Breakfast, Washington D.C., 5 February 2009.

⁶⁰ Tony Blair, 'Why we must all do God', *New Statesman*, 19 March 2009.

⁶¹ Blair, 'Values and the Power of the Community'.

⁶² On this point he is reported as being inspired by Hans Küng's concept of a 'global ethic'.

⁶³ Tony Blair, Speech to the Economic Club of Chicago, 22 April 1999.

⁶⁴ Tony Blair, 'Religion in Public Life', The Westminster Faith Debates, London, 24 July 2012.

⁶⁵ Blair, Speech to the National Prayer Breakfast.

⁶⁶ Michael Schooyans, quoted in Hugh O'Shaughnessy, 'Tony Blair's Faith Foundation inspires ridicule', *The Guardian*, 13 May 2009.

⁶⁷ Blair, 'Faith and Globalisation' speech.

⁶⁸ If he continues to go on like this, his observers cannot but ask the question: how can he be confident of his Catholic Christianity, one of the most traditionalist, ritualist and oldest faiths in

the modern world, at all?

⁶⁹ Tony Blair, 'Europe is Falling Behind', *Newsweek International*, 28 November 2005.

⁷⁰ For instance, see Tony Blair, Speech to the 'Islam and Muslims in the World Today' conference, London, 4 June 2007.

⁷¹ The similar project is also being undertaken by the UN's 'Alliance of Civilizations', as a response to Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis.

⁷² For Brown's religion, see Gerry Hassan, 'Don't Mess with the Missionary Man: Brown, Moral Compasses and the Road to Britishness', *The Political Quarterly*, Special Issue, 78/S1 (2007), pp. 86-100.

⁷³ *The Guardian*, 16 July 2008; *The Evening Standard*, 6 November 2009.

⁷⁴ Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, Speech to Church of England Bishops, Oxford, 15 September 2009.