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'Doing God' in Number 10: British Prime Ministers, Religion and Political Rhetoric

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Abstract

This article analyses British prime ministers' use of religious language and their own religious beliefs in their political rhetoric. This is used to justify policy, support their ideological positions, present a public persona, and cultivate their personal ethical appeal and credibility as values-driven political leaders. The focus is on the use and the nature of the religious arguments of Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron. As political leaders, British prime ministers are aware of the need to modify and tailor their language in response to changing audiences and contexts. "Doing God" is a difficult and risky rhetorical strategy for British prime ministers but it increasingly has the potential to yield political benefits.

Author Bios

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In a lecture entitled "Faith in Politics?" in 2011, hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace, former British Labour prime minister Gordon Brown told a story about the interwar Conservative prime minister Stanley Baldwin "who, when redrafting his speeches by hand, used to regularly inscribe on the margins of the page the phrase "refer to AG". And so conscientious civil servants duly sought the advice of the Attorney General about the legal propriety of the relevant language – until, after months of the Attorney General replying that he had nothing to add, the same civil servants realised this was Baldwin leaving a note for himself that, as he gave the speech, he should, with great regularity, invoke as inspiration and support for his argument A.G. . . . Almighty God" (Brown 2011).

Baldwin was a devout Christian, who began each day at Number 10 Downing Street kneeling with his wife in prayer, and whose politics, motivation and thinking had a strong religious dimension. He welcomed opportunities to talk openly about his faith, and religious language, images, and allusions peppered many of his speeches (Williamson 1999, 277-293). For much of the twentieth century, however, it has been argued "most PMs and senior politicians were either sceptic of faith or kept their personal faith separate from their politics" (Cooper 2013). "British Prime Ministers of the twentieth century paid due lip service to their Anglican or occasionally nonconformist beliefs," it has been said, "but few openly admitted allowing their religious beliefs to fuel their politics" (Spencer 2006, 21). Although the three immediate post-Second World War prime ministers (Clement Attlee, Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden) were unbelievers, the occupants of Number 10 since the late-1950s have, with a few exceptions, been a group of politicians with personal Christian faith-commitments (Hennessy 2008). But however important their faith may have personally been, prime ministers like Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, Edward Heath, Harold Wilson and John Major did not speak out openly about it while in office or

frontline politics. It was treated as a private matter and not something they paraded before the public or overtly and explicitly linked to their political programmes. Most British prime ministers and political leaders, notes Mark Chapman (2008, 3) have adopted a secular political discourse and been "very reticent about speaking of their faith" or "how faith has influenced their approach to public policy."

This prime-ministerial reticence was matched by a scholarly neglect of the subject of faith and its impact in Downing Street. With a few notable exceptions – Gladstone in the nineteenth, Baldwin in the twentieth century (Shannon 2007; Williamson 1999) – relatively little academic attention has been paid to prime ministers' religious beliefs and their possible influence on or relationship to their policies or ideological goals and the manner in which they present and seek to justify them. The subject of religion and the US presidency has, in contrast, received much more attention (Smith 2006). Presidents and presidential candidates are expected to do what Roosevelt used to call "the God stuff" (O'Connell 2012, 54): that is to speak about faith and frequently use the Bible in their political rhetoric. Domke and Coe (2010) argue the political and rhetorical use of religion – what they term "the God strategy" – has become even more central and important in the United States from the 1980s onwards as Republican and Democrat political leaders and presidents speak the language of faith, invoke God and link the United States with divine will, and send out signals to connect to the faithful. The context for this religious politics is, of course, a country that in comparison with other modern Western societies, including Britain, scores very high on general measures of religiosity and has large and well-organised evangelical, fundamentalist and conservative Christian groups and communities.

One study found that, in contrast to US presidential speeches, when it did happen, the use of religious rhetoric by British political leaders was "notably more subtle and

indirect" – with references, for instance, to "faith" rather than directly to "God". All the same, the use of religious references or allusions in British party leaders' speeches have increased after 2001, particularly after the 9/11 attacks, and with Tony Blair clearly leading the way (Theos 2008). But "doing God" or "doing faith" is, in many ways, a difficult and risky rhetorical strategy for prime ministers. "Politicians feel uncomfortable debating religion", Tony Blair (2012, 5) has said. "It is off our beaten track of financial crises, security challenges, healthcare, education, welfare. It pitches us into an unfamiliar realm where we suspect, rightly, many nasty swamps of controversy are located." When Blair talked about how his religious faith shaped his political thinking he opened himself up to charges of "playing politics with God" (Campbell 2007, 112) and of being a "sanctimonious, calculating hypocrite" (Seldon 2004, 518). "God was a disaster area", his media adviser Alastair Campbell insisted, after an interview Blair gave on the subject triggered a media storm. "British people are not like Americans, who seem to want their politicians banging the Bible the whole time. They hated it . . . The ones who didn't believe didn't want to hear it; and the ones who did felt the politicians who went on about it were doing it for the wrong reasons" (Campbell 2007, 111-112). Similarly, there was a backlash when David Cameron in 2014 described Britain as "a Christian country" and went further than he had done before in talking about his personal religious beliefs. "Jesus invented the Big Society 2,000 years ago", Cameron said in reference to his "Big Society" initiative of volunteering and civic responsibility. "I just want to see more of it" (Withnal 2014). Critics questioned his motives and timing: was he trying to distract attention from the damaging resignation of Cabinet minister Maria Miller, or "dog-whistle" to reassure disgruntled church-going Conservative activists antagonized over gay-marriage, or hoping to win back religiously-inclined UKIP voters ahead of the European elections (Theakston 2014)?

These reactions show how controversial and problematic invoking religion to explain or justify policy decisions can be in modern secular democracies, with claims it is potentially divisive, illegitimate and not accessible to public reason (Crabb 2009; Graham 2009). As Blair once said, when asked why he didn't speak about God more in public: "Look what happens when I do" (Spencer 2006, 14). Although quite open about how his faith played into his politics when he was in Opposition, he became progressively "more diffident" as prime minister in the face of a more sceptical public as his association with George W. Bush, the fallout from the Iraq war, and public anxieties about religious fundamentalism and extremism made his public statements about religion more controversial (Graham 2009, 149-151). Conscious that he was walking a tightrope, Blair's public line on religious belief and politics had become by 2006 the defensive "it's probably best not to take it too far" (Brown 2006).

It is significant that only out of office has Gordon Brown spoken out eloquently about the relationship between faith and politics in modern societies, regretting he did not as prime minister go further in drawing on and speaking about his own Christian faith. Brown argued prime ministers should not be asked to leave their religious beliefs at the door of Number 10 and in so doing bring a "diminished version" of themselves into the public square. But they should not thereby claim a moral superiority or immunity from the need for rational deliberation about politics and policy and the demands of robust democratic contestation (Brown 2011).

The Study of Rhetoric in British Party Politics

We argue that since the premiership of Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Ministers have increasingly started using religious language in their political rhetoric. This is used to justify policy, support their ideological positions, present a public persona, and underline their

personal ethical appeal to highlight their individual moral suitability to be a national leader. As Alexander (2006) observed, political leaders present themselves as "exemplifications of sacred religious and secular texts" (Alexander 2006, 52) to enhance their public image.

Despite this relationship between religion and political rhetoric there is little or no scholarly analysis of how the role of religious arguments has affected the image of British Prime Ministers. As Richard Toye notes there are few "explicitly conceived rhetorical analyses" as a method of evaluating British politics (Toye 2011, 177). Much of the existing scholarship tends to be "rather narrowly focused work from within the discipline of linguistics" (Toye 2011, 177). Charteris-Black (2005) examines political metaphor, while Gaffney analyses political personas and reputations (Gaffney 1991; Gaffney and Lahel 2013). More generally, the British study of political rhetoric examines such issues as party renewal or non-religious aspects of leadership style (Lawrence 2008; 2009; Lanham 1991; Leith 2012). None examine religious aspects of political rhetoric and Prime Ministerial leadership.

There is no single methodological approach in the study of rhetorical discourses within British politics. This field is in its infancy, compared to the United States (Crines and Hayton 2014, 6). James Martin (N.d.) highlights the general importance of analyzing political rhetoric by arguing "rhetorical analysis underscores the situated nature of ideas, that is, their presence in speech and argument" (Martin N.d, 1). Given the impact of religious ideas, these are worthy of significant scholarly attention. Indeed, rhetorical analyses enable the deconstruction of religious ideas, and the "content of arguments by… identifying premises and conclusions" of evident political controversies (Martin N.d, 1). However existing scholarship focuses on the political theory of ideologies, which prevents this subfield of British political science from embracing religious discourses.

Within this subfield of political science the emergent scholarship analyses how rhetoric works in terms of three core characteristics of effective communication: individual character/credibility, use of emotions, and evidence/logic (Finlayson 2008, 2012, 2013; Finlayson and Martin 2008; Toye 2011, 2013; Atkins et al. 2014; Atkins 2011). These characteristics have been used to deconstruct British conservative neoliberalism (Crines N.d), the national interest of the Coalition government (Crines 2013a), and the anti-establishment rhetorician, George Galloway (Crines 2013b). The nature and impact of different oratorical and rhetorical appeals is also the focus of two substantive studies of British Labour (Crines and Hayton 2015) and Conservative (Hayton and Crines 2015) party oratory. Finlayson notes "appeals to the character of the addresser may be based on implicit claims to authority, or perhaps sympathy, and may be attempts to encourage an audience to identify with the speaker or to see them as 'just like us'" (Finlayson 2007, 558). In terms of religious arguments, this expects the speaker to demonstrate a similar moral character to the audience to gain credibility. A speaker may also make use of emotions. Indeed, "he or she attempts to move them by putting them in the right frame of minds, or, put differently, to create the right disposition" (Greiner 2005). For example the speakers under review ask their audience to imagine essentially normative forms of society. Meanwhile statistical or empirical arguments appeal to logic and evidence. Importantly emotional, logical, and character-based arguments are used asymmetrically by the rhetorician (Crines N.d), yet can be evaluated in isolation.

This paper analyses the religious discourses of Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, and David Cameron. Thatcher's premiership represented a sea-change moment in British political discourses that prompted her successors to follow a similar style of ethical conviction. The move towards the politics and rhetoric of conviction and individual moral belief has been accompanied by an expectation amongst the electorate for

moral credibility in British Prime Ministers and party leaders, particularly concerning social welfare (Crines N.d; Hayton and Crines 2015; Atkins N.d). This expectation had not been as prevalent before moral rhetoric came to "inform suspicion of any politics unregulated by a higher-order discourse (be it religious, moral or scientific)" (Finlayson 2012, 751).

We are concerned with the extent to which these political leaders are using religious arguments to build up their broader political character as moral actors; the means and arguments by which their construction of truth reflects their ideological agenda; and whether their intended audience is the recipient or if it is expected to enhance their character and credibility as the speech travels. Our analysis concludes by drawing out similarities and differences in how each leader used religion rhetorically. We draw out common themes and techniques to discern the extent that political discourse and religious rhetoric are intertwined.

Margaret Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher's deep and life-long religious faith was a massively important aspect of her personality, thinking and politics (Weiss 2011). Her Christian faith undoubtedly "shaped and guided her political policies and choices" (Smith 2007). Although not apparently interested in theological questions about spirituality or sacraments, she was extremely interested in the idea of duty to God, in ethics, and what she saw as "putting into practice the teaching of Scripture" (Moore 2013, 6; 349). She had no qualms about speaking publicly and strongly about her religious upbringing and beliefs (Campbell 2003, 388), drawing on the Bible in her speeches, and not shying away from talking about good and evil (Thatcher 1963, 1978a, 1978b, 1981, 1988). "Although I have always resisted the

argument that a Christian has to be a Conservative", she wrote in her memoirs, "I have never lost my conviction that there is a deep and providential harmony between the kind of political economy I favour and the insights of Christianity" (Thatcher 1995, 554-555). She clashed loudly with the bishops in the 1980s, thinking they were soggy collectivists and that the churches should stay out of politics, while in turn they were critical of her tone and the social consequences of her policies (Filby 2010).

As Conservative Party leader and then prime minster, Thatcher set out her views on Christianity and politics in speeches at St Lawrence Jewry in London (Thatcher 1978a, 1981) and to the Church of Scotland General Assembly (Thatcher 1988). Establishing an identity and saying that she was speaking as both a Christian and a politician whose religious convictions affected the way she approached politics and government was a credibility-enhancing claim made in these speeches, one directed both at her immediate audiences and at the wider public as she strove to define her character as a values-driven and strong leader. She declared herself "thankful" she was "brought up in a Christian family and learned the message of the Christian faith" (Thatcher 1981), recollecting "many discussions" in her early life about the Bible and religion (Thatcher 1988). Crucially, Christianity had equipped her with "standards to which political actions must, in the end, be referred" (Thatcher 1978a). "We were taught always to make up our own minds and never to take the easy way of following the crowd" (Thatcher 1978a).

Emotional arguments and appeals to collective values, that strove to embed ideas about Britain as a Christian nation in need of "national spiritual renewal" (Smith 2007, 248-251), run through Thatcher's political-religious rhetoric. The moral dimension of national life was critical: a nation and a people "need a purpose and an ethic. The State cannot provide these – they can only come from the teachings of a Faith . . ." (Thatcher 1978a).

"Most people", she said (Thatcher 1981), "would accept that we have a national way of life…founded on Biblical principles." Historically, "we acknowledged as a nation that God was the source of our strength and that the teachings of Christ applied to our national as well as our personal life" (Thatcher 1981). "The Christian religion – which, of course, embodies many of the great spiritual and moral truths of Judaism – is a fundamental part of our national heritage. And I believe it is the wish of the overwhelming majority of people that this heritage should be preserved and fostered." Furthermore, schools should teach the crucial part the "Judaic-Christian tradition" had played in "moulding our laws, manners and institutions" (Thatcher 1988). Thatcher was always a strong admirer of the Jewish faith, tradition and community values, it should be noted (Thatcher 1988c; Weiss 2011, 37-8). But crucially, she believed Britain's cultural identity and values as a Christian nation were under threat, being challenged and in danger of being undermined:

> These characteristics of our nation, the acknowledgement of the Almighty, a sense of tolerance, an acknowledgement of moral absolutes and a positive view of work, have sustained us in the past. Today they are being challenged… Each generation must renew its spiritual assets if the integrity of the nation is to survive (Thatcher 1981).

Another key theme in Thatcher's political-religious rhetoric related to the relationship between the individual, society and the moral importance of work and wealth creation (Smith 2008, 241-248). Here we see euphoric emotional rhetoric in concert with appeals to empiricism. It is a myth that she believed there was "no such thing as society".

Rather she was concerned to challenge the idea that social needs were best met through the collectivist welfare state rather than through family, community activity and charitable giving: "intervention by the State must never become so great that it effectively removes personal responsibility" (Thatcher 1988). "To mutter 'the government ought to be doing something about it' is not the way to rekindle the spirit of the nation," she argued (Thatcher 1981). "There are grave moral dangers and serious practical ones in letting people get away with the idea that the can delegate all their responsibilities to public officials and institutions", she maintained (Thatcher 1978a). Giving a specific example of care for elderly relatives, the disabled or children, she went on: "Once you give people the idea that all this can be done by the State, and that it is somehow second-best or even degrading to leave it to private people . . . then you will begin to deprive human beings of one of the essential ingredients of humanity – personal moral responsibility." We should not, she insisted, "allow people to handover to the State all their personal responsibility." "I wonder", she asked, "whether the State services would have done as much for the man who fell among thieves as the Good Samaritan did for him" (Thatcher 1978a)?

"No one would remember the Good Samaritan if he'd only had good intentions", Thatcher once famously told a television interviewer. The important point was that "he had money as well" (Campbell 2003, 391). Hard work, thrift, prudence, and enterprise were thus key virtues. "We have always had a sense that work is not only a necessity, it is a duty, and indeed a virtue", she argued. "Creating wealth must be seen as a Christian obligation if we are to fulfil our role as stewards of the resources and talents the Creator has provided for us" (Thatcher 1981). "We are told [in the Bible] we must work and use our talents to create wealth" (Thatcher 1988). She put her own spin on the parable of the talents: "the steward who simply did not use the resources entrusted to him was roundly condemned. The two who used them to produce more wealth were congratulated and given more"

(Thatcher 1981). In another version, she told a party gathering: "Those who traded with their talents, and multiplied them, were those who won approval. And the essence of their performance was the willingness to take risks to make a gain" (Thatcher 1985). Addressing the Church of Scotland she drew on the audience's emotions in referring to how the Tenth Commandment ("Thou shalt not covet") "recognises that making money and owning things could become selfish activities. But it is not the creation of wealth that is wrong but love of money for its own sake . . . How could we respond to the many calls for help, or invest for the future, or support the wonderful artists and craftsmen whose work also glorifies God, unless we had first worked hard and used our talents to create the necessary wealth?" (Thatcher 1988).

Underpinning all this was the view that individual choice and personal responsibility was the basis of Christianity and morality. The "defence of the individual against the state" was in her eyes "founded on a Christian concept of man": an individual choosing between good and evil (Thatcher 1978b). This implied the Conservatives' individualist approach was morally superior and "closer to the Christian ideal" (Filby 2010, 190) than collectivist socialism. The "idea of personal moral responsibility" was at the heart of the Biblical message. Here she combines her character and credibility with emotions to argue "It is to individuals that the Ten Commandments are addressed . . . the "thou" to whom these resounding imperatives are addressed is you and me" (Thatcher 1981). The admonition to "love thy neighbour as thyself, and do as you would be done by", she explained "does not denigrate self, or elevate love of others above it. On the contrary, it sees concern for self and responsibility for self as something to be expected" This led, she said, to "the great truth" that "self-regard is the root of regard for one's fellows" (Thatcher 1977). And in turn this individualist view of morality led to the view the state should not

provide more than a safety net. "Generosity is born in the hearts of men and women; it cannot be manufactured by politicians . . . [or] left to officials" (Thatcher 1981).

Tony Blair

As a student at Oxford University Tony Blair "was initially quite articulate and open in discussing how his faith informed his politics" (Graham 2009, 149). This was a luxury he could less afford as he "trod a fine line between the UK electorate's admiration of him as a creature of principle and a religious fanatic" (Graham 2009, 149). Indeed, as Blair noted religious beliefs risked "people think[ing] you're a nutter" (BBC 2007). Yet in his formative years he strove to promote the relationship between Christianity and democratic socialism through such groups as the "Christian Socialist Movement" (Graham 2009, 150) and through contributing to such publications as *Reclaiming the Ground: Christianity and Socialism* (Bryant 1993). Blair was not afraid of publically showing his Christian faith before 1997, however as Prime Minister he was less able to "do God". The Northern Ireland peace process, the relationship with George W. Bush, and the subsequent War on Terror were each arenas that required a delicate rhetorical balancing act to avoid the perception of religious favouritism. This balancing act did not prevent him from acting in a value-driven manner, however.

Throughout his time as Prime Minister, Blair strove to communicate a flavour of his religious values by emphasising common strands of social obligation he claimed held universality. Blair used his credibility as a social democratic Christian, however his "missionary zeal" often made him "appear judgemental and uncompromising" (Burton and McCabe 2009, 102) to those who held different values. Yet for Blair, the universality of

moral values straddled different denominations, secularists, and agnostics, making faith a positive social force (Griffiths 2011, 14). Indeed, during the 2010 Munk Debate with Christopher Hitchens, Blair argued "you do not need to be a person of faith in order to do good work" (Griffiths 2011, 18). The rationale for this strategy was to present a unifying purpose that drew attention to common goods amongst those of different beliefs and none. This strategy demonstrated his moral character that, he hoped, would appeal to a broader audience as the message travelled beyond the immediate arena.

Blair provides a useful summation of the relationship between religion and politics: "If you are a person of faith it's part of your character, it defines you in many ways as a human being. It doesn't provide the policy answers" (Griffiths 2011, 35). Religious values, for Blair, are perspectives of how social solidarity is advanced. He used emotions by arguing "We now know, through several quite different disciplines, that they are universal values. Economists call them 'social capital'. Evolutionary biologists call them 'reciprocal altruism'. Political theorists call them communitarianism or civil society. Each of these phrases stands for what is really a quite simple idea that what gives us the power to survive in a rapidly changing environment are the habits of co-operation" (Blair 2000). Thus, values may be articulated differently by different groups despite similar moral aspirations of individual and collective goods.

He later went on to argue politics and religion are interconnected because of mutual dependency. "Politics without values is sheer pragmatism", Blair insisted. "Values without politics can be ineffective. The two must go together" (Blair 2001). This interconnected relationship was a central element of Blair's religious credibility because in isolation neither could prove effective in improving society. Indeed "faith in politics isn't only about the relationship between faith and politics. It is also about having faith in the

political process itself and its capacity to achieve a better society" (Blair 2001). Blair argued the values of both can engineer social improvements domestically and internationally, demonstrating the benefits of a close relationship between politics and religion.

He also argued religion was not in decline. To articulate its social relevance, he argued "I know that people talk a great deal about the decline of religion and the churches in our national life. But…it is your revival and adaptation which are striking" (Blair 2005). Here his character is used to highlight the value of community faith groups by affirming their endurance. "I would like to see you play a bigger not a lesser role in the future", he declared (Blair 2005). To justify this proposition he argued social justice and religious values work in unison. "People often ask what is the essential idea that binds together our policy on the NHS, schools, welfare and the economy. I say it is to recast the 1945 settlement on public services and welfare state for the modern age. To remain absolutely true to the principles of social justice and opportunity for all. The voluntary sector, including the churches and faith communities, have a critical role to play in meeting community and individual needs in this new settlement" (Blair 2005). Blair's recasting of the pillars of social justice with faith groups aims to demonstrate how their interconnected nature benefits society. To do so he highlights how religion has historically embraced changing ideas in society and the campaigning role of churches: "I think of the campaign to abolish the slave trade, led by William Wilberforce with so many Christian organizations in support" (Blair 2005). By drawing attention to the role of religions in the successful abolition of slavery Blair underlines their progressive character as a force for contemporary social good. To ensure this argument resonates, Blair continues by emphasising their enduring values and relevance. He paid "tribute to the wide array of Christian and faith-based charities which work across the developing world" (Blair 2005). This rhetorical

strategy enables Blair to show how faith has driven social change domestically and is continuing to do so internationally, enhancing the credibility of his argument.

Blair also highlighted the importance of religious faith as a social motivator for those directly involved. "You do this because of your faith, not in isolation from it, a point that government - central and local - must always appreciate" (Blair 2005). For Blair, the power of religious values as a social motivator is highly effective in constructing his argument that politics and religion are natural bedfellows. He also sought to highlight the interconnected values of those who held distinct theological differences. This was particularly an issue when arguing against religious extremism. He drew out the importance of moderation and how those of different faiths must unite to combat radicals from within their own theological tradition(s). "Around the world today, along with the images of violence, are the patient good works of people of different faiths coming together" (Blair 2007). For Blair, this sense of unity in opposition to radicalism enables their shared values to intermix in the promotion of peaceful cooperation. He continues by arguing faith "is a crucial motivator of millions of citizens around the world, and is an essential non-governmental way of helping to make society work. To lose that contribution would not just be a pity; it would be a huge backward step" (Blair 2007).

Gordon Brown

Gordon Brown's political persona was textured by his background and upbringing. Brown's father, a Minister in the Church of Scotland, was a major influence on his childhood moral values. For a speech to the 2006 Labour conference, Brown argued that his upbringing instilled compassion, honesty, and hard work as his moral compass, and that "we should use whatever talent we had to help people least able to help themselves"

(Brown 2006). Add to this the "death of two beloved parents, marriage, fatherhood and the tragic loss of a child" within a short timeframe, and Brown found a new "willingness to advertise his religious background" (Gay 2009, 72). This went well "with the established grain of New Labour's strategy for renewal" (Gay 2009, 72), affording him the opportunity to advance his morality-driven interpretation of social democracy. In 2006 Brown – then widely seen as prime-minister-in-waiting - publicly endorsed a book by the prominent American pastor Jim Wallis (*God's Politics*) which criticised the religious right and called for a progressive faith-based politics of the centre-left, stressing personal responsibility and the need to work for economic justice at home and in the developing world – causes close to Brown's heart (Bartley 2006). Wallis became a close friend of Brown's and described the politician as having the church "hardwired" into him: "I think it's in his DNA, Christian thinking . . . It really is very powerful in him." Brown told Wallis that he needed and used the moral pressure of church groups to help push forward on his favourite causes such as poverty and aid for Africa (Hinsliff 2006). However, while in office as prime minister (2007-2010), Brown shied away from speaking directly about his personal Christian faith and convictions: fearful of a media backlash he instead talked more generally about moral values, the inspiration he got from his father's work as a minister, and the importance of faith communities in building social capital (Gay 2007; Chapman 2008; Brown 2011).

When addressing a faith group conference in 2008 Brown emotionally commended their work: "whenever you see suffering you want to heal it, whenever you see injustice you want to rectify" (Brown 2008a). From this he argued that faith represented an interlinking force of similar moral values that bind together those who held different theological beliefs. Like Blair, he noted the credibility of faith groups derived from their historical importance to social change. "From the timeless wisdom of all the great religions - from which billions

across the world derive daily inspiration - there is a consistent ethical core that propels us to act:" (Brown 2008b). A sense of shared moral purpose underscored the value of faith for social justice. Indeed, "has that not been the message of the churches and faith groups throughout the ages? I would say to you to have confidence today, have confidence today that just as Mandela went free and apartheid came to an end, that while the arc of the moral universe is long, it does bend towards justice" (Brown 2008b). Rhetorically speaking, Brown is emphasising their importance in promoting personal morality and social progress, demonstrating their value to society. Noting that "more than two-thirds of our fellow citizens are followers of the major faiths" (Brown 2008c), he drew attention to the numerical strength of global religion and, by implication, its significance. He emotionally argued "we can be in no doubt about the power of faith to shape our world" (Brown 2008c). This allusion to the role of religion in forging cultural and social traditions confirms, for Brown, the sociological value of faith.

He also argued a fusion of religion and society produces a stronger sense of nationhood. "While it is not for politicians to lead that bringing together of faith - that can ultimately only be done by the leaders of faith communities themselves - we cannot successfully lead nations without it" (Brown 2008c). For Brown, the individual moral values of the citizenry constructs a sense of national identity that promotes togetherness (Brown 2008c). For Brown, individuals are linked together collectively through faith and social values. "Through each of our heritages, our traditions and faiths, runs a single powerful moral sense. A sense that we all share the pain of others. A sense that we believe in something bigger than ourselves" (Brown 2008c). Brown defines faith as an interconnecting sense of purpose that sees the value of religion as a moral obligation to improve the social position of others. "Most of us accept that what you do not wish done

to yourself you do not do to others. It is the same sacred ideal at the ethical heart of all true religions: our duty to others" (Brown 2008c). Indeed, even though denominations derive from different theological traditions, Brown rhetorically combines them to construct a single moral social objective. This sense of togetherness is, he argues vital for the community. "I believe that through our continuing dialogue, we can come to recognise our common ground. The common ground on which we stand, whatever our faith positions. A common commitment to peace, to freedom, to prosperity, to tolerance and respect" (Brown 2008c).

Brown's justifications for the role of faith and religion in society were partly predicated upon "why it seems so uncontroversial, so incontestable, even natural, for members of churches and faith groups as individuals, and indeed for churches and faith groups as institutions, to involve themselves in a great moral movement for political change" (Brown 2011). However, his defence of religion in active society is challenged by what he defined as liberal secularism. This issue proved problematic for Brown's argument because liberal secularism acts as an intellectually exclusive entity that precluded religion from political discourses. He argued "the conventional orthodoxy today is of a public square, an arena for making political decisions, where religious belief is, at best, at arms-length and which, with some notable exceptions, has become the embodiment of what some people call liberal secularism" (Brown 2011). For Brown the dominance of secularism in the political process has prevented religious values from penetrating into the social agenda and political discourse. This, in turn, has held back domestic and international politics from addressing economic and social problems that Brown argues can be successfully combatted by using faith groups. He continues, however by defending the rejection of religious and secular theology in politics. "It is right to reject a theocratic

approach to politics" however "we should also reject the standard version of liberal secularism - and for exactly the same reason. Because, just as theocracy undermines freedom of conscience, so too does liberal secularism, because it unfairly expects people of faith to leave their conscience at the entrance to the public square" (Brown 2011). Brown's argument is that both theocracy and liberal secularism reduce the ability of political actors to govern from a sense of moral purpose. To remedy the problem, Brown argues "this country is ready for . . . a deliberative and democratic politics" (Brown 2011) in which both secularists and religious groups engage in closer value-driven discourses. Indeed, "we will not achieve it - and it will not be widely understood - unless we answer the charges laid by both the theocrats and the secularists. I believe we can do that best by advancing a framework for faith politics that gives priority to values but contains the duty to seek common ground" (Brown 2011). It must be remembered, however, that Brown's advocacy for a fusion of faith and politics strives to rhetorically justify their real-world value. He concludes by arguing "we can elevate religious values to the heart of the debate about global development and our global society" (Brown 2011). Those values, Brown argues, revolve around solidarity, togetherness and cooperation, which are essential elements of social justice. However, he cautions that political discourses cannot "continue to consign religious values to only the fringes of the debate about the future of our national economies and societies" (Brown 2011). The rationale for this conclusion is predicated around his belief that "my religion and reason tell me that we cannot for long be truly happy in any place when we see opportunities denied in every place" (Brown 2011).

David Cameron

David Cameron describes himself as a classic "racked with doubt" Anglican (Elliott and Hanning 2012, 239). At face value this suggests a private role for the established Church in his life with little active involvement in his political ideology. However, when asked what he believed the role of the Church was, Cameron replied "we need to make sure that the balance between Church and state, faith and politics, religious identity and political identity that has developed over centuries is maintained" (Jones 2008, 171). Cameron's subsequent prime-ministerial rhetoric promotes this fusion by arguing for a sense of moral patriotism that is premised on romanticism, national symbols and traditions. Cameron's religious values texture his political rhetoric in a far deeper form than might initially be assumed. This differs from how Blair and Brown saw religion because Cameron uses the values of faith to promote individual responsibility.

For Cameron the value of religion is as a key component for constructing moral citizenship. Rhetorically he defines this as an individual undertaking that distinguishes society from the state. This is particularly noteworthy when advancing justifications for faith groups and philanthropy as key components of the "Big Society". While Blair and Brown sought to institutionalise moral collectivism, unsurprisingly Cameron joins with Thatcher by arguing the value of faith as moral individualism.

For him the moral individual is one who takes care of those in need and has traditional values rooted in a romanticised view of British history and identity. To advance this proposition he argues "when you think of our country, think of it as one that not only cherishes faith, but one that is deeply, but quietly, compassionate" (Cameron 2010). Cameron uses emotional arguments to highlight the importance of faith in texturing a fusion of moral identity with compassion. Rhetorically, he also uses his own experiences to demonstrate the interconnected aspirations of religion and politics by arguing "in my own

life I have seen it in the many, many kind messages that I have had as I have cradled a new daughter and said goodbye to a wonderful father" (Cameron 2010).

For Cameron Christianity also plays a great role in defining cultural and national identity. This extends not only to the institutions of state but also to British culture, social welfare and the English language. Cameron highlights their significance by arguing "just as our language and culture is steeped in the Bible, so too is our politics. From human rights and equality to our constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy; from the role of the church in the first forms of welfare provision, to the many modern day faith-led social action projects – the Bible has been a spur to action for people of faith throughout history, and it remains so today" (Cameron 2011a). The importance of Cameron's style of religious defence fuses the various strands of British nationhood with the historical impact of Christianity on the evolution of national and political traditions. This also aims to create a greater sense of interconnectedness that equates the political and cultural significance of faith with civil and social reforms across Britain.

Moreover, as with Brown and Blair, he avoids the theological fundamentals of religious belief. Indeed, he argues that his Christianity is "constantly grappling with the difficult questions when it comes to some of the big theological issues" (Cameron 2011a). He has, however, said "I believe we should be more confident about our status as a Christian country, more ambitious about expanding the role of faith-based organisations, and, frankly, more evangelical about a faith that compels us to get out there and make a difference to people's lives" (Cameron 2014). Like Brown, Cameron's argument strives to use religion to promote its value in improving society. However his reaffirmation of Britain's Christian heritage is an attempt to confirm the historic fusion of protestant values in contemporary society. He qualifies this by arguing "Let me be clear: I am not in any way saying that to have another faith – or no faith – is somehow wrong." (Cameron 2011a). By

striving to embrace those of other faiths and none he is following in Brown and Blair's rhetorical footsteps. "I am also incredibly proud that Britain is home to many different faith communities, who do so much to make our country stronger" (Cameron 2011a). Rhetorically this is an attempt to enhance the credibility of his argument *vis-à-vis* the impact of Christianity upon British identity. Thus to ensure this message resonates he reaffirms the key point emotionally, saying "the Bible has helped to give Britain a set of values and morals which make Britain what it is today. Values and morals we should actively stand up and defend" (Cameron 2011a). Thus for Cameron the importance of religion is in creating a sense of moral identity through faith, regardless of its theological heritage. Moreover, his defence also revolves around the strengthening effect of religion upon societies. "Societies do not necessarily become more secular with modernity but rather more plural" (Cameron 2011a). Also the moral values that Cameron defends are manifest through individual perspectives on how the moral citizen engages with society. Those are "responsibility, hard work, charity, compassion, humility, self-sacrifice, love pride in working for the common good and honouring the social obligations we have to one another, to our families and our communities" (Cameron 2011a). These Christian values are used by Cameron to discern how faith should manifest itself in society. Indeed, by interconnecting religious values with a sense of moral, patriotic citizenship he is also implicitly presenting the inverse as a rhetorical "other". For example "for people who do have a faith, their faith can be a helpful prod in the right direction. And whether inspired by faith or not – that direction, that moral code, matters" (Cameron 2011a). Thus Cameron uses emotional arguments, in concert with his character as a faithful individual, to demonstrate the value of fusing moral individualism with society. He concludes by arguing "I have never really understood the argument some people make about the church not getting involved in politics. To me, Christianity, faith, religion, the Church and the Bible are all inherently involved in politics

because so many political questions are moral questions. So I don't think we should be shy or frightened of this" (Cameron 2011a).

Conclusion

For all the long-term decline in religious faith, identification, practice and culture in Britain (Brown 2001), it is still the case that a majority - 59.3 per cent - of the population described themselves as Christian in the 2011 census (down from 71.7 per cent in 2001), while 25.1 per cent described themselves has having no religion (up from 14.8 per cent in 2001) (Kettell N.d, 8). Regular church attendance has declined significantly over time but the 2012 figures of 1.05 million taking part in a Church of England service each week and 0.9 million attending mass each week in a Catholic church are still five times the combined current membership (368,000) of the three main political parties (Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat). "Little wonder, then, that party leaders pay lip service – perhaps cynically – to this sleeping giant", comments Andrew Hawkins (2012): "Britain's churchgoers are a constituency that cannot be ignored". Moreover although the influence of religion on electoral behaviour is less than other factors (such as current issues, the state of the economy, perceptions of leadership and the socio-economic background of voters), there is still a discernible influence, including a link between being Anglican and voting Conservative for instance (Clements and Spence 2014), and survey research shows that more than half (56 per cent) of Conservative voters in 2010 considered themselves to be religious, compared to 43 per cent of those who voted Labour (Kettell N.d.). In this context prime-ministerial religious rhetoric still has the potential to yield political benefits.

As political leaders, prime ministers are aware of the need to tailor their language in response to changing contexts. Blair found himself up against a more sceptical public as his career went on while Brown's "moral compass" rhetoric was partly about positioning himself as "not Blair". Cameron's appeal to religious voters could in part be interpreted as an attempt to reassure traditional Conservatives and compensate for their negative views of his progressive policies (such as same-sex-marriage). Thatcher's strongly-articulated "singling out of Judeo-Christian virtues" in the 1980s would not have been possible in "the more inclusively multi-faith Britain" of the early twenty-first century (Grimley 2012, 92-93) in which Cameron appeals more in terms of a "warm and fuzzy Anglicanism" (*The Economist* 2014).

The idea that recent British Prime Ministers "don't do God" is wrong. Prime Ministers Thatcher, Blair, Brown and Cameron have indeed directly and indirectly "done God" in their political rhetoric to construct their persona, pursue specific political objectives, and promote a role for religion in British politics. Each used religious-based arguments to justify political objectives. For Thatcher and Cameron their justifications are used to reinforce economic individualism alongside a constructed and romanticised view of British history and identity. Indeed, both drew upon the Bible for such justifications. In contrast, Blair and Brown used religion to argue for greater economic and social cooperation alongside highlighting the value of faith groups. Neither Blair nor Brown directly used the Bible in the same manner as their Conservative opponents; however they strived to draw attention to the comparable values of different faiths by creating a sense of unity and social democratic purpose.

However, what unites each of the leaders under discussion are their rhetorical strategies. Each relies upon their character and credibility to justify a closer relationship

between politics and religion. Such claims enable the speaker to demonstrate they reflect the values of their immediate audience, thereby ensuring a positive reception. Moreover, each use emotions to texture their arguments with a sense of moral injustice on the part of those who seemingly exclude faith groups, appeals again calculated to influence the reactions of their respective audiences to embrace their argument. But as the speech travels beyond the immediate audience the speaker expects it to implicitly highlight with the electorate their moral persona as a politician with values and one who "values values" (Graham 2009, 163), thereby garnering enhanced credibility for their broader objectives. As Prime Minister it demonstrates their trustworthy character, even with those who do not hold similar (or perhaps any) religious convictions. Maddox's (2004) argument about Australian prime minister John Howard, can thus be placed into the British context, pointing to "the appeal to a highly secular electorate of an apparently sincerely – but not too in-your-face - religiously committed Prime Minister . . . Religious values, even if we don't ourselves share them, promise sincerity, right-mindedness and safety in an uncertain world."

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