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**Critical Faith: An Exploration of Christian
Elites and UK Government Engagement**

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A Journey Ended.

I started this a long time ago –

sometimes I remember why –

but now it is finished.

I can do other things now.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you, all of you.

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

Jn 21:25, NIV

Declaration:

This thesis and any mistakes contained herein are my work. This thesis has not been submitted for a qualification elsewhere.

Abstract:

This thesis provides an exploration of how Christian faith actors in the United Kingdom contributed to four high-profile public debates between 2010 and 2019. The case studies explored were Christian engagement in the debate around: High-Cost Short-Term Credit; Hunger and Welfare Reform; The Syrian Refugee Crisis; and Brexit. The exploration of these case studies represents an original contribution because of their novelty in the literature, as well as representing an area of a high level of Christian elite consensus where the elites involved behave and conceive of their position differently relative to other issues more deeply explored in the literature such as abortion. Through a series of elite interviews and discourse analysis of speeches, newspaper articles and other media, the analysis examines how Christian actors used religious values as part of political deliberation, as well as how these individuals saw the place of their faith within British political life. This reflection on values and strategy amongst these elite actors also represents a valuable original contribution to the literature.

The research project finds that Christian elites have a distinctive contribution to British politics. The experience of providing practical charitable responses to social need informs a Christian elite response which brings in information, expertise and a lived experience to political debate. Christian elite political engagement is shown to be strategic and closely tied to the needs highlighted through social action. Christian elites are motivated to engage in politics by their faith, but for the most part frame their contributions in politics in secular terms, understanding that overt mentions of Christian theological terms often fail to communicate. However, many Christian elites also felt that the values of British politics are underpinned by a Christian history, and that there is not necessarily a clear contrast between Christian and secular values.

Chapter One:

Introduction

Project Aims

This project addresses the question of how Christian elites engage in British politics and its importance for the scholar of the politics of religion in the United Kingdom. Whilst the number of churchgoers continues to decline in the UK, this has not been accompanied with a reduction in the political activity of Christian groups. Instead, in recent years Christian elites have shown themselves to be particularly active in political issues – especially those which seem to affect the poorest in society. In this, Christian action at the highest level of British politics appears to correspond closely with Gospel imperatives. The leaders of Christian denominations and charities have been at the forefront of political campaigns and a part of broad, plural coalitions for change. Far from becoming an irrelevance in the face of a rising tide of secularisation, understanding the Christian faith and the actions of Christians remains essential to those wishing to understand the fullness of British politics.

The project explores the way in which Christian elites (understood as national level Christian organisations and Christian leadership) have engaged in political affairs through an analysis of four case studies from 2010-2018:

- High-Cost Short-Term Credit;
- Hunger and Welfare Reform;
- The Syrian Refugee Crisis;
- Brexit.

The project investigates these four primary case-studies because, although they cut across some of the biggest issues that the United Kingdom has faced in the last decade, they have been largely ignored by scholars of the politics of religion who have, for the most part, focussed on issues such as religious decline, faith schools, the influence of religious groups on high profile ‘moral’ issues, such as same-sex marriage and abortion, or the links between religion and national security.

In each of these cases, the project examines the choices Christian elites make surrounding the strategic decisions around engagement. The project aims to answer the following questions:

- How do Christian elites engage in politics?
- Do Christian elites bring a distinctive perspective and knowledge set to politics?
- Do UK Christian elites engage in politics strategically?
- Does the practice and engagement of Christian elites in British politics challenge claims that the United Kingdom is a secular nation?

In answering these questions, the project aims to characterise the sorts of language that Christians use to argue for change: whether they use religious forms of language, or whether they use other means to advance their objectives. The project also aims to gain insights into the thought processes behind choice of language and strategy through elite interviews with Christian elite actors. The project investigates whether Christian groups have a distinctive contribution to British politics, as well as seeking to understand how Christian elites conceive of the place of the Christian faith in politics.

Project Findings

The project shows that Christian elites are politically engaged in a variety of ways. They have fed people, supported them on a pathway out of debt, housed those fleeing from war, and acted as a bridge in a divided nation. The project also follows how Christian groups have argued against government welfare reforms, cast out moneylenders, brought the cries of the refugee to the policymaker's ear, and argued for European unity. The project shows how Christian groups navigate the British political sphere, informing debate with original research, arguing in backrooms, corridors and in open chambers. It also shows how Christian groups have engaged with these issues by using a discourse which is largely based on public reason, drawing on statistics, economics, the language of rights and freedoms, whilst drawing on insights informed by an ancient tradition of thought brought to bear on burning issues today. It shows Christians as providers, campaigners, and critical friends.

The project shows how Christian groups have been successful, it shows sometimes when they have not. It shows at times when their interventions are welcomed, and when they

are divisive. When, at times, Christians are distinctive, and when at other times their words could easily have issued from other mouths. The project illustrates a reflective Christianity contemplating its place and value within a changed nation, engaging with and remaining critical of the prevailing ideas of the time. It also reveals that the reflections of Christian groups, and the practical outworking of their faith in dialogue, challenge and service, contain within them thoughtful critiques of ideas of secularism. The thesis investigates the relationships between the faith of the individuals interviewed, and their actions and the language they choose to employ within public debate. For the most part, the investigation finds that Christians frame their contributions within the world of politics in ways which resonates within the bounds of secular neutrality.

The project therefore presents the following key findings:

- Christian elites engage in British politics through practical service, providing help through things like credit unions, foodbanks and refugee accommodation.
- Christian elites provide information for politicians and government ministers in the form of research as well as reporting from their unique perspective as service providers and as a presence 'on the ground' and within communities.
- Christian elites strategically choose whether to use overtly Christian forms of language as part of their political engagement. Christian language is used sparingly, depending on the audience as well as the position of Christian elite actors relative to government, who may be insiders or outsiders.

This project provides unique perspectives from Christian elites, showing that, while they do not claim a Christian ownership of the British nation and the political realm, they do not see the political sphere as being entirely secular. Christian elites claim that there is an overlap between Christian values and the values of British politics. Some Christians understand that framing the language of faith values into secular terms is an exercise in translation. For these actors, this translation and reframing is done strategically in order to best communicate with government and in an environment of plurality. For these people, whilst recognising that liberal ideas of neutrality have value, their primary reason for using that language is pragmatic rather than principled.

However, the majority of Christians interviewed for this project did not feel that there was such a division between Christian arguments and the secular language of public discourse. These individuals claimed a Christian ownership of the language of British political debate

which stems from a long history of Christian faith values and British society. This is a particularly interesting contribution to the literature because it differentiates many Christian elites interviewed from those of other faiths within the literature, as well as some of the Christian advocacy bodies which other works in the field have surveyed (for instance, in debates to do with same-sex marriage and abortion). By contrast, many of the Christian elites interviewed here did not utilise the language or strategy of minority rights discourse, and instead took advantage of a more privileged, and oftentimes institutional, access to politics.

The following pages will therefore be of use to scholars who are interested in the state of religion and politics in the United Kingdom. This project provides an original contribution to the literature in this area showing how Christian elites engage politically in an increasingly secular UK context, and by gaining insights into their motivations and thought processes by encouraging them to reflect upon their actions in elite interviews. Of greatest value are the varied voices of Christians of different denominations, ages, and backgrounds, speaking from their experience of struggle for change and struggle in service, which this thesis brings to the literature.

Project Structure

This thesis is structured as follows. The next chapter is a theoretical review which summarises the literature, looking at the manner in which scholars have understood the way in which politics religion relate in the United Kingdom, paying particular attention to the secularisation thesis and how recent changes in demographics and an increasing religious plurality have altered the terrain which Christian elites navigate. The following chapter details the research design and methodology, explaining why particular methods were chosen to investigate the research questions.

The thesis then proceeds in the fourth chapter with the first of four case studies. This first case study focusses on how Christian groups lobbied for controls over the High-Cost Short-Term Credit sector. Prominently in this area, Archbishop Justin Welby took exception to the high levels of interest and exploitative lending practices of Wonga.com. This case study shows how Christian groups had a distinctive contribution in relation to the practical support they offered to those who suffered from problem debt as a result of payday loans. The experiences and data from this practical support was fed into public debate in the form

of reports. The chapter also follows how Justin Welby used a narrative of usury which he supported with scriptural allusions to help form a plural coalition for reform.

The fifth chapter engages with the manner in which Christian groups have engaged with the issue of poverty and hunger in the United Kingdom and the welfare reforms which have contributed towards the rise in foodbank usage. In particular, the chapter looks at the work of the Trussell Trust and the work they have done with responding to the practical needs of the hungry in the United Kingdom, as well as contributing to debates around welfare reform through campaigns, select committee submissions, and data reports. The chapter finds that Christian elites articulated their arguments towards welfare reform in values which resonate in public bounds of universality, but that these values were perceived to be cognate with Christian values. In particular, many Christian elites focussed on the dignity of the human person, building on data provided by the Trussell Trust, as well as a focus on individual stories, to argue for change.

The sixth chapter looks at how Christian groups engaged with the Syrian refugee crisis. The chapter examines the way in which they responded to the practical needs of those who arrived in the United Kingdom, as well as arguing for further refugees to be allowed into safety in Great Britain. Another key area that Christians were active in here was in providing a link between communities in Syria and policymakers in the UK. Whilst Christian actors used secular language to make their case, the chapter finds that many of the values which sustained a plural coalition around refugees were felt by Christian elites to have a religious heritage in Christianity. Some Christian actors were pleased that values such as human dignity were well understood here, but were frustrated that a Christian conception of human dignity was not applied more consistently on other issues such as abortion.

The seventh chapter is the final case study. This chapter explores how Christian groups in the United Kingdom interacted with the debate to do with the UK's departure from the European Union. The chapter follows how, unusually, Christian leaders almost universally showed their support for the Remain campaign and how this caused a pastoral/political dilemma where they struggled to reconcile political statements for remain with the need to minister to a more euroskeptic laity. A particular focus was how the identification of the European Union with a Christian history proved a divisive narrative which did not motivate a majority of Christians to support remain. This identification of Christianity with Europe was not something which resonated broadly. Subsequently, the campaigning position of Bishops has left ill-feeling amongst Christian euroskeptics.

The eighth chapter is not a case study, but instead draws together a number of reflections Christian elites provided in interview to do with how they conceive of the place of Christianity and Christian values within British politics. The chapter finds that Christian elites variously operate as both insiders and outsiders within the British political system, which is something which varies between issues, but also between denominations and type of organisation. It investigates the manner in which Christian elites choose the language which they use strategically, whilst perceiving the idea of the United Kingdom as a secular nation as being an artificial and contestible notion. Instead, the chapter finds that many Christian elites feel that there is a substantial Christian history of the United Kingdom which has left a permanent mark upon its values and politics.

The ninth chapter concludes the thesis combining the findings of the four case studies and the insights into the place of Christian faith and values in politics gleaned from the previous chapter. Ultimately, the thesis concludes that Christian elites remain active participants within British politics, and that this engagement provides a nuanced critique of British secularism. This critique claims a Christian ancestry for the values of the British political sphere, leading to a permeable divide between public and private spheres. Christian elites are shown to be strategic actors who operate within this contested environment.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The following pages review the existing literature on the relationship between religion and politics in the UK and set out the theoretical framework underpinning this investigation. The review proceeds first with a summary of literature relating to the current state of religion in Britain, exploring the role of religious groups in shaping public policy, the links between government and faith organisations and the extent to which the UK is now a secular nation. Having identified a critical gap in the literature around the strategic actions of Christian elites, the review then continues by focusing on the overarching context within which these elites operate. This begins by examining the demographics of religion (particularly Christianity) in the United Kingdom, and by looking at issues around belief and belonging. These questions are then connected to literature surrounding faith as a politically salient identity category, and the rise of faith actors as the authentic articulators of political rights demands. Here the analysis examines the differential history of Christianity in the United Kingdom with respect to other religious groups, as well as interdenominationally. This examination raises the question of whether Christians might have a privileged relationship towards the British state and whether this might affect the kind of political strategies that Christian elites adopt.

Reviewing Religion in Britain

The religio-political landscape of Britain is in a state of flux – increasingly pluralist and increasingly less Christian. Christianity in the United Kingdom is distributed amongst a number of denominations, the largest being the Church of England and Roman Catholic Church, who in 2010 according to the British Social Attitudes Survey made up 20% and 9% of the population, respectively, with 15% of respondents from other Christian denominations (NatCen, 2012, p. 180). Non-Christian religious adherents made up 6%, whereas those who professed no religion made up 50% of respondents (NatCen, 2012, p. 180). The largest amount of decline is amongst Anglicans who declined by half since 1983, though the low level of Roman Catholic decline masks demographic shifts where figures have been helped by Catholic migration.

The 2011 census revealed a slightly different picture where religiously, in England and Wales (as opposed to NatCen's British focus), Christianity was reported to remain the majority religion at 59.3%. Nonetheless, this was a fall from 71.7% ten years earlier¹. At the same time, the number of people corresponding to each of the other main faiths and those of no faith has risen, with the number of Muslims having increased 1.8% since the previous census (Office for National Statistics, 2012). This time of religious change has corresponded to a time of ethnic change; the census reveals that those considering themselves White British decreased in the same time period from 87.5% to 80.5% (Office for National Statistics, 2012), with migration impacting both ethnic and religious change.

Surveys since the last census have also illustrated a continuation of this trend of Christian decline, with a YouGov poll in 2015 describing that only 42% of respondents described themselves as Christian (YouGov, 2015). Since the cardinal figure of 50% is discursively important (in that it either allows or disallows Christian actors from plausibly maintaining that the UK is a Christian nation) this range of results is interpreted differently by different groups. Nonetheless, the overall picture is unmistakable; whether or not Christians make up slightly above or slightly below 50% of the UK population, the picture is one of decline.

Scholarship of the politics of religion has attempted to make sense of a United Kingdom which is increasingly characterised by both a rising tide of secularism and a picture of religious pluralism, where religion remains an important phenomenon to understand. Scholars looking at the growth of secularism in the country have investigated a range of connected themes, including the beliefs and political views of religious nones (Clements & Gries, 2017; Lim, MacGregor, & Putnam, 2010), as well as the emergence of a new category of people, unaffiliated with a major faith, who consider themselves 'spiritual' (Huss, 2014). Scholars such as Davie (2015) have also investigated how ideas of belief and belonging relate to one another in an increasingly secular nation.

Despite the declining rate of religious observance across the population, scholarship has nonetheless found that faith continues to have political impacts. Studies have shown differential attitudes towards major political parties between different faith groups (Raymond, 2011; Tilley, 2015) drawing on wider studies into the impact of religious belief on attitudes to democracy (e.g. Diamond, 2010; Ben-Nun Bloom & Arikan, 2012; Ewans, 2014). Scholars have also worked to understand the effect of religious pluralism and ethnic

¹ Though there is a methodological question concerning the specific questions asked in the previous census and whether it may have led to a larger amount of nominals identifying as Christians.

diversity on community cohesion. In the wake of riots in northern England, the Cattle Report investigated how different religious and ethnic communities existed alongside one another in parallel lives, attending different places of worship, workplaces and faith schools (Community Cohesion Review Team, 2001). Connected to this has been research surrounding identity formation amongst different religious and ethnic groups, including Muslims (see: Ansari, 2004; Modood, 2010; Meer, 2010; Gilliat-Ray, 2010), Hindus (see: Knott, 2009; Zavos, 2010), and Sikhs (Zavos, 2015) and how this process relates to relationships with a broader national community, as well as the articulation of rights demands. Scholars working in this area have explored the links between religious extremism and national security, as well as government strategies to minimise harmful religion (see: Brighton, 2007; Coppock & McGovern, 2014; Hurd, 2015; Thomas, 2016; Gill, 2019). These discussions have followed high profile national and international events, such as 9/11 and 7/7.

Alongside this, scholarship has also investigated how changing patterns of identity relate to government engagement with religious communities for service provision and the promotion of cohesion, including policies such as the Big Society (Knott, 2009; North, 2011; Ransome, 2011; Zavos, 2015), or the impact of faith on high-profile policy issues such as abortion (Clements, 2014, Hayes & McKinnon, 2018), same-sex marriage (Kettell, 2013; Clements & Field, 2014), and euthanasia (Danyliv & O'Neill, 2015).

Another prominent area of research has been the role of faith schools. Both the Cattle report and the Oldham Independent Review looked into the manner in which faith schools may reinforce an environment of parallel lives, also feeding into debates around social cohesion (Community Cohesion Review Team, 2001; Richie, 2001). Here, scholars have focused on the extent to which faith schools exacerbate or create division (see Berkeley, 2008; Ward, 2008) or merely reflect pre-existing divisions in society (Halstead & McLaughlin, 2005). Other authors have investigated the issue of faith schools from a normative angle surrounding the rights of the parent and the rights of children (see: Marples, 2006; Brighouse, 2005, 2009; Brighouse & Swift, 2009).

Another area of discussion in the literature around the role of religion in public life is the idea of *public reason* presented by authors such as Rawls and Habermas which aims to outline normative foundations for a level playing field of political engagement for people from different philosophical, religious and moral perspectives. The central claim is that values expressed in political argumentation ought to be 'generally acceptable reasons'

(Habermas, 2006) or those that citizens might 'reasonably be expected to endorse' (Rawls, 1997), meaning that in discussions around rights and freedoms, religious arguments ought to not be introduced unless in due course translations or neutral reasons are supplied. Public Reason is not without its critics, some (e.g. Taylor, 2011) hold that its exclusivist nature imposes an unfair burden on religious citizens and that secular language must be reformulated in order that no basic position is favoured relative to another. Others have worried that the concept of a distinction between public and private reasons presupposes a particular conception of religion as metaphysical and not material (Quadrio, 2014), and from others who worry that the conception assumes that religious knowledge is contrary to rational argument (Bahram, 2013), and others who are sceptical that it represents a complete set of reasons which can be applied to any issue (e.g. Reidy, 2000), though others such as Quong (2004) are more optimistic. This normative debate therefore cuts to the heart of the place of faith values within British politics and has consequences for different ideas of secularism.

Despite the focus of scholarship in each of these areas, there remains a significant gap in the literature to do with the strategies employed by Christian elites to advocate for political change. In particular, there has been little research investigating the political strategies of mainline Christian groups. This is a problem because any study of religion in the UK which overlooks the perspectives of, and the way in which Christian elites strategically engage in politics may only present a partial understanding of the politics of religion in Britain. Much scholarship has tacitly accepted an idea that rising secularism means that religion is no longer important for British politics or has focused on the value which religious groups present to government in relation to service provision and governance. What investigation there has been in relation to the strategies of religious groups has often focused on minority religious groups, who occupy a different position in relation to access to government than mainline Christian elites. At the same time, studies of Christian groups in relation to issues such as abortion has often focussed on smaller Christian groups who employ similar strategies as minority religious groups. In debates around issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage, the voices of Christian elites have not always been in harmony, whereas the case study chapters show a large degree of consensus and commitment to campaigning across Christian elites from different groups. These case studies therefore present an opportunity to explore a significant gap in relation to understanding the political strategies of Christian elites from the largest of Christian groups in relation to these issues which are new to the literature. In order to understand the

strategic behaviour of these elites, it is necessary to understand the social and religious context in which they operate. The rest of this chapter explores these issues in more detail.

Christian Elites in Britain: the atypical, but orthodox.

Whilst around 50% of the UK claim to be Christian, this figure does not necessarily correspond to common measures of religiosity such as church attendance and theological orthodoxy. The 2010 BSA survey revealed that 56% of Christians claimed to never attend church² (NatCen, 2012, p. 180).

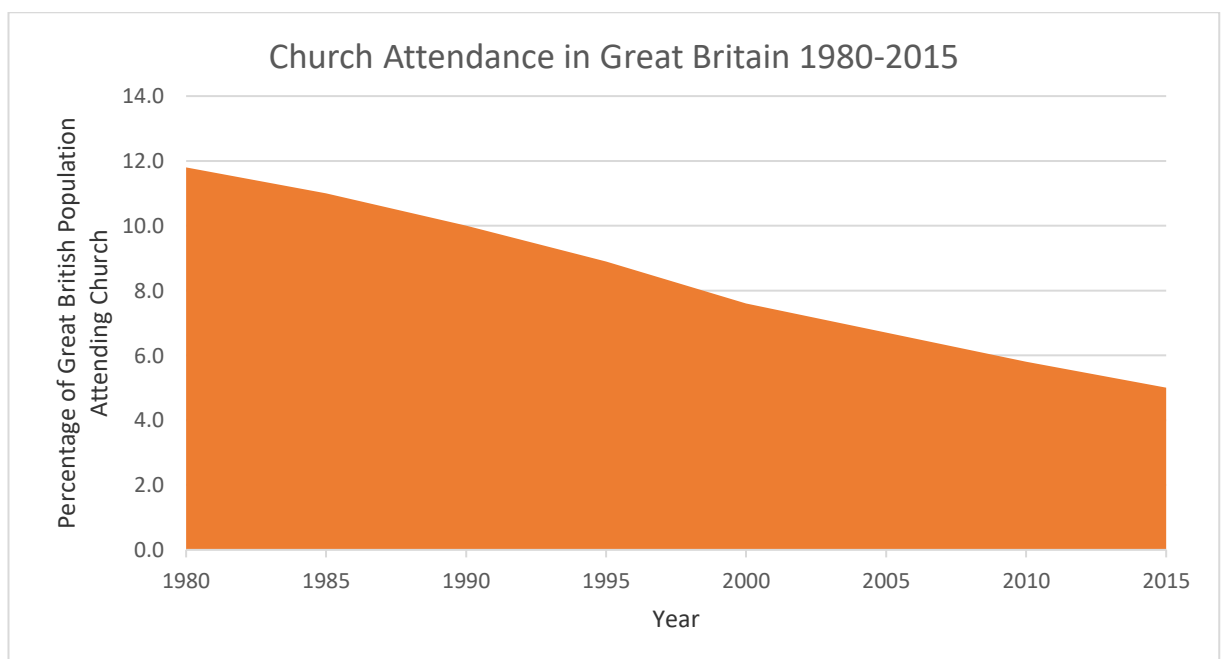


Fig 1: Church Attendance in Great Britain 1980-2015, sourced from Peter Brierley, from his British Religion in Numbers website (Brierley, 2015)

There is consequently a difference between belief in religious teachings and belonging in some sense to a religious community, since many individuals choose to identify themselves with a religious identity when they do not attend worship. It is this phenomenon which is taken up by Grace Davie's *believing without belonging* thesis, which adds nuance to literature around secularisation. In essence, believing without belonging refers to the state of affairs where, though religious attendance in Britain is broadly a picture of decline (especially in the case of the Church of England and Roman Catholic Church),

² This level of people not attending church, whilst having increased in the previous 30 years, has largely remained around 55% during this time. This is in a stark contrast to the decrease in adherence as a whole.

Between half and two-thirds of British people assent to 'belief in God' in more general terms, and roughly similar proportions touch base with the institutional churches at some point in their lives, often at times of crisis. (Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, 2015, p. 5)

In this sense, though individuals do not habitually attend worship at any religious establishment and therefore to Davie do not *belong* to them, individuals nonetheless possess residual religious beliefs which occasionally lead to them turning towards religious organisations for ceremonial roles, such as funerals. In this way, though traditional religion is declining, it nonetheless retains residual importance for many.

Voas and Crockett, however, argue that Davie's thesis distorts the truth, arguing that - however measured - 'the crucial fact about religion in modern Europe is decline; the rest is commentary' (Voas & Crockett, 2005, p. 25). The problem with Davie's view is that in order to assert that the experience of many in British society is that of believing but not belonging, it is first necessary to show that they meaningfully believe the same thing. Whilst it is the case that religious communities may sustain theological diversity, some aspects of faith traditions are not negotiable. YouGov surveys again prove instructive. In 2013, YouGov reported that 4% of respondents who self-declared as Christian answered 'I do not believe in any sort of God or higher spiritual power', with 15% declaring 'I do not believe in a God, but do believe there is some sort of spiritual higher power' (YouGov, 2013, p. 12). By 2015 this had risen to 9% and 23%, respectively. (YouGov, 2015, p. 2) and only 55% of those individuals who identified themselves as Christian positively affirmed a belief in God (YouGov, 2015). This picture of patchy Christian belief exists against a backdrop where in 2017, only 29% of the population as a whole believed in God (YouGov, 2017). This is a finding mirrored in Bissett's analysis where he concludes that,

In short, among those in the UK who are not of other religions, and not connected with church, there is an interest in spirituality, but it is not necessarily Christian spirituality, nor one translating into church attendance.

(Bissett, 2016, p. 27)

What is shown instead of believing without belonging is a rising number of religious nominals who exhibit less of what can be termed orthodox faith³. These individuals are often unsure of the existence of God, and in any case, seldom refer to God or religion to direct them morally or in terms of the purpose of life (Voas & Day, 2010, p. 12). Other authors have pointed to a rise in the number of people who consider themselves to be spiritual, though not religious (Huss, 2014). Consequently, though Voas and Crockett are undoubtedly correct in arguing that religious decline is indisputable, it is not uncomplicated. Whilst there is a decline in both religiosity and identification, it must be understood that though there is an association between the two, there is no direct correlation. Instead, the relationship between the two is perhaps best understood through a kind of reversal of Davie's thesis – belonging without believing.

Whilst there are shifts in beliefs amongst those who attend Church, those who do are much more likely to exhibit an orthodox faith. Consider the case of a broad survey of Church Times subscribers. Whilst Church Times subscribers are unlikely to be a representative sample of the Church of England, they are nonetheless a significant group within it. A survey of 9000 subscribers revealed that 98% believed in God in 2001 (Village, 2018, p. 48), a stark contrast to the 55% of Christians as a whole, discussed earlier. With the data available it is not possible to precisely describe the variance of belief amongst Christians in the nation and to relate that directly to the numbers given for weekly church attendance, but it seems reasonable to say that those who attend church are more likely to hold orthodox beliefs than those who are outside church, and although Bissett does demonstrate that this picture is not uncomplicated, he shows a strong correlation between those who classify themselves as very religious and those who attend church (Bissett, 2016, p. 23). A simplistic, but convenient, way of talking about Christianity in the United Kingdom therefore might be to speak of two groups – one group which is less orthodox and largely does not attend church, and another group which is more orthodox and attends regularly. This latter group⁴ are in decline, as evidenced by the uniform picture of church attendance decline across all Christian denominations in the United Kingdom where it is estimated that Sunday worship has declined by more than 50% between 1980 and 2015, with only around 2.5 million

³ Davie notably has called for her theory to not be operationalised and assessed empirically, stating that it leads inevitably to a distorted picture of belief in society (Davie, 2000, p. 116). The author is confused by this call – how else is Davie's theory to be tested, if not through empirical research?

⁴ And indeed, so is the former group.

Christians attending church on a typical Sunday (Brierley, 2015). Whilst in decline, however, it is this group that forms the focus of the thesis.

The Christian elites who are interviewed are part of this thesis are church leaders, politicians and charity advocates who are not drawn from the population of religious nominals. These Christian elites have worldviews which are strongly shaped by their religious beliefs and whose actions are guided by religious teachings. The thesis does not therefore attempt to provide an analysis of how the *typical* Christian interacts with public debate. The 45% of those who call themselves Christians but who do not believe in God do not experience the same sorts of problems associated with engagement in public debate as those who actually profess a belief. Those whose lives are not shaped by scripture do not need to make a strategic choice whether to frame their political engagement in religious or secular terms: the secular is the natural register. Instead, the thesis focusses on Christian elites, who confess an orthodox faith in a public way, and who are therefore decidedly *atypical* of the population surveyed who claim the identity.

Belonging without believing

Whilst the project for the most part concerns itself with Christian elites, who are atypical with regards to having more orthodox beliefs and having higher levels of religiosity, the broader populace who claim a Christian identity but do not attend worship or exhibit an orthodox faith remain a conundrum; why is it that they claim Christian identities? This question is important because it shows the degree of cultural resonance that Christianity still has within the United Kingdom, and helps to shape the wider political context within which Christian elites operate. One reason for this is that this cultural resonance affects the profile of these Christian elites. For instance, the Archbishop of Canterbury's statements have a higher profile than might be expected given that only a small proportion of the nation's population attend church on a typical Sunday. Indeed, despite low church attendance it is possible that many people view the Church of England as being significant or respectable in some particular way, or as being associated with a traditional English identity. Understanding nominal Christianity is important, then, because the manner in which people claim a nominal Christian identity influences the backdrop to the political strategies of Christian elites.

In order to understand the reasons why people might claim nominal Christian identities, it is first necessary to understand that nominal believers are not a uniform category. Abby Lee presents a set of reasons why nominals associate themselves with faith, Davie summarises Lee's view well here, stating that:

Nominalism, it follows, is not simply a residual category, but contains within itself considerable variety: it can be 'natal', 'ethnic' or 'aspirational', the nuances of which need careful unpacking. The first is given by birth or baptism; the second is claimed, sometimes as a proxy for Englishness; and the third is aspirational in the sense that it confers respectability.

(Davie, 2015, p. 81)

Whilst the proportions of those deploying faith in these ways are not supplied by empirical study⁵, it is clear that in these ways, the claim to belong to a faith tradition forms part of the articulation of individual identity even when an individual does not belong to a worshipping community, or believe strongly in an orthodox version of that faith. Consequently, in contrast to belief and unbelief, there has arisen a third religious category that authors like Demerath refer to as *cultural religion*. This is characterised not by belief or participation, but provides a sense of 'continuity with generations past and contrast with rival groups and identities' (Demerath, 2000, p. 136).

Associating oneself with a religious tradition in this way is a choice which has consequences for the statistical assessment of religion. In attempting to understand the complex nature of religious nominals and nones, Lim, MacGregor and Putnam discovered that, speaking in a US context, there exists a group (roughly half of religious nones) who are volatile in terms of whether they choose to describe themselves as religious, and who may describe themselves as religious depending on the circumstances of the question (Lim, MacGregor, & Putnam, 2010, p. 615). Day suggests that liminal nones have had a significant impact on the study of religion in the United Kingdom, particularly in the 2001 census where questions of ethnicity were in close proximity to questions of religion (Day, 2011, p. 184).

It is this association of belief and ethnic, national or group identity which prompts the phrase *belonging without believing*. Whilst traditional analyses of religion tend to focus on

⁵ Indeed, there are also difficulties with assessing exactly how many individuals are religious nominals. Measures associating lack of church attendance with nominalism perhaps unjustly prioritises social practice as evidence of belief, though on this measure approaching 90% of individuals professing a faith do not attend church weekly (Day, 2011, p. 178).

dynamics of belief and belonging (Wald & Smidt, 1993, p. 32), it is clear that in the case of cultural religion, one can be exercised without the strong presence of the other. In this sense, Demerath's cultural religion corresponds with what Day refers to as 'performative, nominalistic, Christianity' (Day, 2011, p. 175). Whilst the focus of this project is on Christianity, it is important to note that a performative nominalistic faith is not exclusive to that religion. For instance, Meer reflects upon the Muslim experience, understanding that many Muslims in the UK who are not particularly devout nonetheless associate with a Muslim identity which builds into a sense of a worldwide consciousness (Meer, 2010, p. 82), and that this has built into an increasing sense of individuals of other faiths borrowing into religious over ethnic identities (Zavos, 2015, p. 243). In this manner, religious identity, despite decline, remains a category which has resonance in the manner in which individuals choose to see themselves, but of particular interest to the thesis is the manner in which this sense of cultural religion has arisen as a politicised identity category⁶. One area which has been under-researched is whether there is an interaction between a claimed, but not lived, faith of the majority and the strategies of the faithful minority. Questions arise such as whether the respectability around a claimed Christian faith amongst those who do not believe is something which provides Christian elites with a greater respectability and access amongst government circles, whether this respectability extends to when Christian elites 'do God' and utilise religious arguments, and whether the connection between Englishness and Christianity (particularly Anglicanism) has an effect on whether atypical but orthodox Christians consider themselves minorities, and whether they feel that their values are cognate with the values of the land.

In order to start exploring these themes, this review now turns to an examination of the manner in which the political actions of religious, and in particular Christian, groups relate to existing literature on pressure groups in the United Kingdom. In particular, it considers the degree to which ideas of identity, language and the cultural dimension of religion relate to questions of access and engagement with government.

Pressure Groups in British Politics

Wyn Grant has established an influential account of the operation of pressure groups in the United Kingdom. Grant's conception and typology, as well as how he describes the power

⁶ Which will be further considered later.

dynamics between pressure groups and government, provide an opportunity to explore how faith pressure groups lobby government. Grant defines a pressure group as

an organization which seeks as one of its functions to influence the formulation and implementation of public policy, public policy representing a set of authoritative decisions taken by the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary, and by local government and the European Union (Grant, 2000, p. 14)

Pressure groups are differentiated from political parties in that, in the ordinary case, they seek to influence public policy, rather than wishing to exercise power directly in the creation of policy (Coxall, 2013, p. 3). In this sense, though some pressure groups have, on occasion, stood for election, the main goal of this is to gain publicity and to influence government (*ibid.*). Examples of this lie in the Pro-Life Alliance which in 2004 contested EU parliamentary elections, achieving 0.1% of the national vote (Electoral Commission, 2004, p. 146), and in niche parties who attempt to engage with a limited number of issues. For these groups, the exercise of direct power through achieving a victory in a general election is either not an aim, or a low probability, and instead they attempt to influence those who do have direct power to favour their proposed actions.

Not all pressure groups, however, are the same. As mentioned, some contest elections for publicity, and others do not. Another broad distinction can be drawn between those pressure groups who lobby government as their primary function, and those who do so in a secondary manner (Coxall, 2013, p. 8). Those who pressure government in a secondary fashion include entities like large companies whose primary purpose is delivering dividends for their shareholders, but who may lobby government to campaign for favourable treatment or permissive regulation. Those who pressure government as their primary function might include advocacy bodies, or dedicated lobbying bodies whose services are for hire by other interests (Cave & Rowell, 2014, p. 47). Pressure groups can also be further subdivided into sectional and cause groups, as Coxall reflects:

A sectional pressure group represents the self-interest of a particular economic or social group in society: examples are the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and the British Medical Association (BMA).

A cause group is formed to promote a particular cause based on a set of shared attitudes, values or beliefs: examples are Greenpeace, the Child Poverty Action Group and Amnesty International. (Coxall, 2013, p. 5)

One of the key aspects of pressure group activity is the question of access. If pressure groups function, not by exercising decision-making power themselves, but by influencing agents who do, then access to agents of government is crucial. As Cave and Rowell reflect, access is key, '[h]aving access to government does not equate to having influence in government ... It is just that without access, influence is, if not impossible, then limited' (Cave & Rowell, 2014, p. 47).

The question of the manner in which pressure groups gain access to decision-makers is, to a large extent, shaped by the manner in which the state is conceived. The most common way of approaching this is through the use of a pluralist perspective. One of the key critiques of the pluralist approach is that pluralist thinkers often overstate the ease with which groups can attain access to policy consultation with government. Whilst it might be simple to claim that newer pluralist viewpoints, such as reformed pluralist views present more qualified approaches to pluralism, the truth is more nuanced. Instead, it is the case that much original material by authors such as Dahl avoided many of the pitfalls which later critical authors claimed were features of pluralist thought (Jordan, 1990, p. 294).

One key area for debate within pluralism is the extent to which the state, and ministers, constitute interested political actors in their own right. This cuts to the core of interest group access and the policy process. If the state and ministers are interested actors, then the policy process and outcomes will, to some extent, reflect their desires and interests. If the state and ministers are merely neutral arbiters, the outcomes of political deliberation merely and fully reflect the power of interested groups. This latter, stronger, claim is held by Bentley, who wrote in his famous statement that 'when the groups are adequately stated, everything is stated' (Bentley, [1908] 1948). This claim, however, is a stronger claim than is held by many pluralist thinkers. For instance Lindblom writes that many pluralist thinkers 'recognize that public agencies or groups of public officials can themselves constitute interest groups', though primacy is still accorded to other pressures (Lindblom, 1965, p. 13).

This weaker assertion also admits that access to the policy process might, to a certain extent, depend upon the interests of the state, leading to an uneven playing field, Smith (who carries out a charitable critique of the pluralist viewpoint) writes: '[d]espite the

accusations of many critics, pluralists do not see all pressure groups as having equal access to the policy process' (Smith M. J., 1990, p. 303), and that this can lead to a reduction in pluralism in certain policy areas. Nonetheless, pluralist thinkers would claim that, to a large extent, most interested groups are in some way *heard*, even if that does not lead to formal access to the policy process, or equal outcomes. A nuanced view of this is put forward by Dahl, who writes:

To be 'heard' covers a wide range of activities ... Clearly, it does not mean that every group has an equal control over the outcome ... control over decisions is unevenly distributed; neither individuals nor groups are political equals. When I say that a group is heard 'effectively' I mean that one or more officials are not only ready to listen to the noise, but expect to suffer in some significant way if they do not placate the group, its leaders, or its most vociferous members.

(Dahl, 1956, p. 145)

In this sense, as Smith writes, pluralists claim that there is always an external constraint upon government action which balances interests, whether that is from actually represented pressure groups and counter-pressure groups, or from an awareness in the mind of the policymaker of the potential for such a group to arise if an interest group's desires are not sufficiently catered for (Smith M. J., 1990, p. 305). This is echoed by Dudley and Richardson who understand government ministers to be interested actors who are acutely aware of actors who are beyond their policy networks, writing that 'ministers are often acutely aware of those who are not directly participating... especially, voters' (Dudley & Richardson, 1996, p. 567).

Faith Groups and Access

In this sense, pluralism does not truly represent an untroubled view of state impartiality. Instead, it presents a viewpoint where power is distributed (unevenly) throughout society, and where politicians are interested and calculating actors who always 'hear' the demands of consulted and unconsulted groups and who make decisions according to the likely political consequences of action and inaction. Since pluralism is compatible with the idea of politicians as interested actors, the idea that power is dispersed throughout society presents a strong reason for government departments to consult with pressure groups in their area of interest. Indeed, government relies to a large extent on lobbying bodies to

govern effectively; pressure groups provide information, expertise, advice and support for government policy (Cave & Rowell, 2014, p. 8). This, however, does not imply that all pressure groups are of equal worth or use to government, or that all groups obtain equal access.

Government, in the sphere of pressure group consultation, is not toothless. One of the biggest things which government has within their power to confer or deny is a sense of legitimacy. Group legitimacy comes in different varieties: a group may be seen as legitimate by its members in that it adequately represents their viewpoints; a group may be seen as legitimate by society for being an association or lobbying body which should be allowed to exist; finally, a group may be seen as being legitimate by the government in that they are happy to engage with them in the policymaking process. Pluralism, as ever, is divided upon the source of group legitimacy, with many theorists placing a high degree of emphasis upon the latter of those sources of legitimacy (Christiansen & Dowding, 1994, p. 16).

To a large extent, government conferred legitimacy corresponds with access. One of the key features of British policy-making are policy communities and networks (Dudley & Richardson, 1996, p. 567). The core idea behind the policy community is that policymaking is divided into particular issue areas which are characterised by a set of relationships between government officials and interest groups (Coxall, 2013, pp. 20-21). Admission to these groups confers the opportunity to influence government policy. Grant's insider/outsider typology fits into this idea of access. He defines insider groups as those groups which are considered to be legitimate by government and who have routinized access to government through policy communities, and outsider groups as those who do not have regular access of this sort (Grant, 2000, p. 19).

Grant's conception of insider and outsider groups places a great deal of power in the hands of government. For Grant, insider group status is something which is granted by government actors and is dependent to a large extent upon the ability of a pressure group to engage with the rules of the game as set out by government. Thus, a group 'has to show civil servants that it can and is prepared, to talk their language; that it knows how to present a case, and how to bargain and accept the outcome of the bargaining process', and that this power to set rules comes from the fact that '[a]ccess and consultation flow from the adoption of a pattern of behaviour which is acceptable to government, particularly to civil servants' (Grant, 2000, p. 20). Coxall adds some further qualifications which increase the likelihood of a group gaining access to government, including 'representativeness,

willingness to compromise, the reliability and quality of [a group's] advice, and its economic leverage and veto power' (Coxall, 2013, p. 81).

Whilst Grant's analysis does not make explicit allusion to a particular faith dynamic in the development of his typology (though he does mention that the Church of England is a pressure group as a secondary function (Grant, 2000, p. 16)) many of the core elements of his view directly relate to faith pressure group activity: faith groups must speak the language of civil servants, or in other words engage in a form of public reason, in order to have their viewpoints represented; they must make convincing claims to represent an actual sectional interest; they might make a specific claim of providing cultural expertise. In this vein, much of the recent rise of faith as a politicised identity category has to do with the existence of policy networks invested in faith and ethnic affairs in central government, such as those to do with counter-extremism, education and emergency food provision – in each of these areas faith actors provide access, expertise or a service which is needed by government actors. In this sense, as Konrad Pędziwiatr notes, the existence of discursive arenas negotiable by advocacy groups is essential to their existence. Pędziwiatr takes the example of the Union of Muslim Organisations (UMO), formed in 1970 and in many ways a precursor organisation to the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), which was unsuccessful because at the time most of the policies affecting Muslims 'had been taken until recently at local rather than national political level' (Pędziwiatr, 2007, p. 272).

Consequently, a component of the rise in faith group advocacy is as a result of encouragement by government actors who have encouraged faith groups to engage with government in ways that are convenient and have shaped an enabling organisational landscape. This encouragement in many places has been explicit, epitomised by then Home Secretary Michael Howard's advice in 1994 to British Muslims that they ought to speak from a united platform in order to exert more influence, rather than be represented by a number of different and conflicting organisations (McLoughlin, 2005, p. 60). Government interest in faith group engagement is not an uninvolved affair – the government has specific aims and objectives to be accomplished through faith group engagement. A key sense in which government is interested in faith group engagement is in response to pressures of governance, with Clive Field in his historical introduction to the British Religion in Numbers (BRIN) project writing that government interest in religious statistics 'reflects the demands of diversity and equality agendas... and the need to combat socio-political alienation and terrorism' (Field, 2010, p. 53).

One impact of this government interest in faith groups comes from two principle biases which government has in engagement: a homogenising bias, and a moderating bias. This pressure towards the creation of unified advocacy bodies to represent groups whose lived experience is less unified shapes their identities and their relationships with government. In simple terms: groups who cannot present a unified voice due to reasons of heterogeneity tend to be heard less by government. This phenomenon introduces a religious dynamic to pressure group engagement, leading to the reflection that the interests of non-religious individuals 'are often drowned out by virtue of their heterogeneity' (Kettell, et al., 2016, p. 22). Amongst religious groups, the development of unified voices has therefore been a response to this homogenising bias, with different faiths, such as Hindus, taking inspiration from the organisation of Muslim advocacy bodies in the wake of the Rushdie affair (Zavos, 2015, p. 889). Nonetheless, developing united voices in this way remains a struggle, and smaller Christian denominations are also affected by this difficulty – often banding together under umbrella organisations such as the Evangelical Alliance if they do choose to engage with government at all. This has an impact on which groups are regularly consulted and engaged with.⁷

This moderating bias is related to governance challenges around cohesion and extremism. These pressures have given rise to a government discourse of faith which shapes the manner in which government engages with faith actors. This discourse, and its shift from previous approaches by government, corresponds with a similar shift in academic discourse on faith. Hurd notes in the introduction to her analysis of what she terms a *new global politics of religion* that there has been a shift in academic discourse in North America and Europe away from understanding that faith is a private affair and irrelevant to governance concerns towards one where faith poses problems and generates opportunities for government. She writes,

the world is said to be witnessing a battle between “two faces of faith”:
dangerous religion and peaceful religion. With some help from the domestic
and international authorities, the story goes, the latter is destined to triumph
over the former... In this narrative “religion” appears as an aspect of social
difference that is both a potential problem ... and its own solution

⁷ As will be spoken about in the methodology chapter, this leads to an overrepresentation of particular Christian denominations in British politics, simply because they are the ones who are able to present a sufficiently united voice and are able to pay the high costs of keeping bases in London in order to be close to Parliament.

(Hurd, 2015, p. 10)

Jennifer Taylor in her work on faith in the inner city areas of Britain understands that demographic change, and the resulting cultural interaction would lead to a new religious discourse as a result of secular ideas of public/private separation becoming challenged by minority religious understandings (Taylor J. , 2002, p. 121). Taylor recognises that government engagement with faith networks and actors as a form of ‘administrative pragmatism’ in recognition that faith actors are situated in areas where the government faces governance challenges (Taylor J. , 2002, pp. 100-1). This administrative pragmatism has found expression in government rhetoric and practice. The New Labour Government introduced a strong stance of consulting with faith groups in partnership, something which continued under Cameron’s Big Society⁸ where faith group voluntary service provision formed a core part of policies of state retrenchment (Kettell, 2012).

As part of this Big Society agenda, a new discursive framing was required to harness the capacity of faith groups to save the government money. A core part of this approach was the *two faces of faith* discourse, as captured in Baroness Warsi’s speech in 2010 where, proclaiming that the secularisation thesis had failed, she reflected that there were three principle things necessary for good relations between faiths and government: firstly, a strong understanding of the state of faith in Britain; secondly, a recognition by government of the contribution of faith to society; finally, right policies relating to voluntary action and social cohesion (Warsi, 2010).

Religion as a politicised identity category

This rise of government engagement with faith groups as partners in the delivery of public services, and as essential lynchpins of strategies to enhance community cohesion has resulted in a consciousness shift amongst policymakers towards religion as an identity marker in the UK. Different religious groups are now regularly consulted or involved in the creation and application of government policy on specific issues and areas, with authors like Knott remarking that ‘Religion and belief have gained broad equality of status with other aspects of social identity – gender, race/ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and age’ (Knott, 2009, p. 88). This is often with respect to local and central government obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Gunning Principles to have due regard for the impact of

⁸ A concept laden with Christian language

policies upon different communities, but also a reflection of government reaching towards the voluntary and community sector increasingly in service delivery⁹. This change in the way in which the state relates to faith groups represents a change not only in terms of who gains access to government consultation, but also a shift in the language used to refer to minorities – as authors like Zavos reflect, there has been a ‘general turn to religion in the articulation of ethnic identity... superseding a previous focus on national or quasi-racial (as in ‘Asian’) identity’ (Zavos, 2015, p. 243).

Whilst some element of this change in government engagement and consultation has a great deal to do with migration (with the attendant tensions in community cohesion terms), simple demographic shifts are not sufficient to account for this change in attitude. Explaining this change in attitude, however, is not simple, and authors like Tariq Modood have expressed their frustration in the sometimes one-sided approaches to understanding it: either focussing on how religious political group identities are as a result of state policies towards faith groups, or arise fully-formed from the groups themselves. Instead, Modood suggests a degree of interdependence between the two (Modood, 2010, p. x). In this way, faith has arisen as a politicised identity category both as a result of senses of faith belonging and the institutional topography created by government interest in faith group engagement. Whilst this review has hitherto focussed on the way in which government networks and demands have created a top down pressure for faith to be seen in this way, it is important now to consider the manner in which identity formation within religious groups has led to faith increasingly becoming an identity marker in politics.

In the literature, moments such as the Rushdie Affair and the success of Britain’s Sikh community in obtaining concessions from the government regarding the wearing of religious headgear on motorcycles are often regarded as key, but too much focus on the events obscures the dynamics behind them. A large component of the shift to faith as a politicised identity category lies in the relationships that migrant communities have to their countries of origin; it is these relationships to family and culture abroad relative to a feeling of belonging in Britain, and alongside dynamics of class and wealth, which form the manner in which individuals conceive of themselves and the communities to which they belong. Amongst first and, to some extent, second generation migrant communities, religious and cultural/national identities are intrinsically linked forms of belonging, as Levitt writes:

⁹ Indeed, this change is something which secularist groups have found to be a worrying shift, (Humanists UK, 2019).

Many new immigrants come from places where religion and culture go hand in hand. They cannot sort out Irishness from Catholicism, Indianness from being Hindu, or what it means to be Pakistani from what it means to be a Muslim (Levitt, 2007, pp. 108-9).

This cultural and national dynamic leads to a differentiation amongst migrants of the same faith, but of different cultural origins. Indeed, this dynamic, alongside that of class, has led to a greater formation of relational networks amongst migrants of the same national and class origins, as opposed to social relations with migrant groups of different origins. Indeed, Ansari has shown that this phenomenon persists amongst migrant communities 'even when they pray in the same mosque' (Ansari, 2004, p. 3).

Amongst third generation migrants in the United Kingdom this phenomenon is not replicated. Especially in the case of young Muslims, there is a disconnect between third generation migrants and their parents and their countries of origin. This disconnect manifests in a rejection amongst this group of the authority and importance of the norms and culture of their parents and grandparents, and even the rejection of the religious authority of foreign-born clerics who Gilliat-Ray notes are often perceived to be out of touch with the context of living in British society (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, pp. 163-6). This process of the renegotiation of cultural and religious identity is not particular to the United Kingdom, and similar processes are seen in other Western European countries, for instance mirrored in Sireloudi's study of Turkish migrant groups in Germany (Sireloudi, 2012). This renegotiation of cultural and religious identity, however, cannot be understood entirely without context. A key part of the formation of a primarily religious identity amongst these groups is the hostile reception many migrant groups have historically received, which led to a generation of individuals who were distanced geographically and culturally from the birthplaces of their parents, and who were alienated from feeling truly a part of British society. As Ansari writes, this identity vacuum led to the formation of religious identity,

Made to feel different and excluded, many British Muslims, especially the youth, found a valuable resource and alternative forms of identification in 'religion'. There was a conscious effort to move away from ethnic and national identifications towards being defined first and foremost as Muslims.

(Ansari, 2004, p. 9)

Indeed, this impact of alienation upon identity formation was acknowledged in the recent report by the Council of Religion and Belief in British Public Life (CORAB), reflecting that

Members of minority groups and communities, including religious groups and communities, frequently have to develop and define their identity in a context of being discriminated against and excluded, and of being the targets of hate crimes and demeaning stereotypes. This can, in consequence, prevent them from seeing themselves as belonging fully to the ongoing national story.

(Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 2015, p. 75)

In this respect, religion amongst the Muslim, Sikh and Hindu communities in the United Kingdom has provided a sense of belonging in a way that nationality has failed to provide, and this has led to an increase in faith actors as authentic articulators of rights demands, with an attendant rise in faith advocacy bodies such as the Muslim Council of Britain, as well as greater regard given to religious identity and practice in equalities and employment law. In these cases, this shift in identity has led to a shift in the language used to articulate rights demands, and the actors who are trusted to make those demands on the behalf of religious communities.

Christian identity and minority rights discourse

A brief note here is required to plug Christianity back into the story of faith engagement painted by the literature. In contrast to other faith groups mentioned, the majority of Christians in the United Kingdom are not of immediate migrant descent, however the actions of other faith groups and government flavour the terrain which Christian actors may navigate, as well as highlighting potential strategies for engagement. The strategies employed by other religious groups are often open to Christian elites, but this longer historical relationship between Christian groups and the British state affords them alternatives.

By way of example, in contrast to the more recent MCB, the Evangelical Alliance (EA) traces its origins to the 19th century, and has long campaigned on issues of religious freedoms, especially overseas. Whilst it is true that the EA claims to represent a diverse and diversifying community which it engages with through its One People Commission and commissions its own reports to analyse ethnic differences in faith understandings

(Evangelical Alliance, 2011), the group's history and large indigenous membership afford it a different institutional access to the British state compared to other faith groups. Christian groups in general have a long history in the United Kingdom with the provision of various different services to the nation, with faith charitable provision long pre-dating the welfare state, and church schools and colleges pre-dating (and forming the foundation for) the modern education system (Revell, 2008, p.219). Many household charitable names such as Bernados and the Children's Society have Christian origins. The British state is consequently well used to the view of the church as a charitable service provider, which provides Christian groups with credibility and respectability with respect to government engagement in these areas. The different location of Christianity with respect to the state is epitomised by the Church of England whose established nature and history provide it with formal and legal insider status through Bishops in the House of Lords. The Church of England has had a history of engagement with government (and indeed of governing) in the United Kingdom in a way which stretches back centuries. This experience of a centralised and hierarchical church with clearly designated spokespeople frames the homogenising bias government actors have whilst engaging with other faiths.

The discourse of the two faces of religion has affected Christianity differently, where many Christians (in particular Anglicans) possess an aura of respectability in government circles. In this respect, a long history¹⁰ and the commonality of a claimed (though perhaps not lived) identity has led to a different perception of the faith. This has resulted in a double standard between the treatment of Christian groups with respect to other groups. The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby notes that were government ideas on extremism applied evenly, then he himself would qualify as an extremist because he perceives his faith to be more important than the rule of law (Bingham, 2016). It is important to recognise, however, here that not all Christian groups enjoy this same access to government, or perceived respectability. Notably, this respectability is not always conferred to conservative evangelicals who Welby remarks are often misunderstood as being one and the same as extremist Muslim groups (ibid.).

This long-standing history of Christianity within British society, and also the changes which have occurred more recently, place Christian groups in an interesting position with respect to their political engagement. One advantage of this position is that it creates an

¹⁰ It is important also to note that non-Anglican Christians in particular have a long history of, at various points, surveillance and persecution within the English and then British state.

opportunity for Christian elites to use newer forms of minority rights discourse which have been used by other faith communities, as well as to capitalise on their existing institutional access. The decision to use one or another, and the balance between them, is an interesting aspect which will be considered throughout the project.

The rise of minority rights discourse and the subsequent adoption of that discourse by religious minorities (for instance, in the case of Sikhs and motorcycle helmets) has led to a response from church bodies which find themselves in a changing nation. As Bruce and Glendenning reflect in their study of public perceptions of the public presence of religion '[l]eading church figures claimed the government was accommodating Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh sensitivities while refusing to create the same public space for Christians' (Glendenning & Bruce, 2011, p. 515).

In a century where it is becoming increasingly implausible to claim that Christianity represents the summation of religious views of society, this creates a strategic problem for Christian elites seeking to promote a certain view on political matters. One issue here is that, when it comes to making their case in public debate, theological arguments do not have universal appeal. Steven Hunt in his study of Christian advocates for and against the rights of sexual minorities instead finds that Christian groups in the United Kingdom sometimes 'vacillate between theological language and rights and antidiscriminatory discourse' (Hunt, 2014, p. 127). Bruce finds similarly, showing that, though churches remain effective political actors, they are now constrained by 'secular rules of engagement' (Bruce, 2013, p. 380). Faith discourse, as Reynolds discovers, is reframed in terms of 'love, forgiveness, compassion, and belonging, rather than... God and belief directly [in order that it resonates within] public boundaries of universality' (Reynolds, 2015, p. 40). The use of this discourse does not necessarily reflect a moral endorsement of these boundaries, but perhaps only instead a prudential reflection on the art of the possible. Consequently, in response to a change in institutional circumstances, some Christian groups have proven to be fast learners, adopting the same rights discourse and occupying the same forums as minorities. In a different sense, Christianity, in the manner of other faith identities, remains an expression of difference. In response to a perceived sense of an aggressive form of secularism, disparate Christian groups have utilised discourses of marginalisation as parts of a collective response on critical issues of moral concern, as highlighted by Kettell (2016), as well as a critique of the bounds of public deliberation, with variable success.

It is consequently interesting to understand the extent to which minority rights discourse is used as a political strategy by Christian groups and how this interacts with cultural Christianity. Whilst it is certainly the case that some Christian groups feel alienated from recent government policies that pursue projects and values which increasingly differ from longstanding orthodox Christian positions (such as same-sex marriage and liberalised abortion laws), especially in the case of the Church of England there is a nation-centred element of belonging to the Christian faith. In this way, cultural religion and orthodox faith are not necessarily mutually exclusive – whilst, as demonstrated, there are many who call themselves Christian by way of a cultural identity marker without having theological orthodoxy, cultural Christianity and its relationship to ideas of nationhood may nonetheless be important for those who confess the early creeds. Individuals who feel an identification with the national project might not understand themselves to belong to a minority faith, or subscribe to minority opinions, and might seek to advance their interests in other ways.

Different Christian groups in the United Kingdom have different relationships with the British state, with Roman Catholics and non-conformists having a relationship of surveillance and suppression until relatively recently. Nonetheless, in recent years it has been common for political leaders to describe Britain as a Christian nation, for instance in 2015 when then Prime Minister David Cameron at Christmas described Britain as a ‘Christian country’ stressing the importance of Britain’s ‘religious roots and Christian values’ (Barnett, 2015). This sense of a Christian nation means that Christian groups may feel their faith and values are more greatly worked out through the national life of Britain than other faith groups, and that they have a greater ownership over its institutions. However, Christian groups who feel less secure may choose to use the language of minority rights to articulate their claims instead.

Critical Faith – Christian pressure groups as government critics

The preceding review has focused on two core objectives: i) to examine some of the key ways in which scholars of politics and religion have explored these themes within the UK context, and ii) to provide a theoretical backdrop for studying the political strategies of Christian elites. The review explored how, although the picture of faith in the United Kingdom is one of decline and of rising pluralism, this is not an uncomplicated affair. Whilst it might have been expected that religion would become less politically salient over time, this new environment, shaped by increased pluralism and equalities discourse and state

retrenchment, remains highly influenced by religious groups. Instead of a simple divide, the bounds of the secular are contested by faith groups who negotiate and contest a terrain of government policy networks and a discursive world of religious and minority rights. Faith engagement with government was found to be a push and pull, with a discourse of faith belonging and authenticity pushing faith groups and elites to advocate on the behalf of their communities, and a pull from government who, choosing their partners carefully and setting the forums of discussion, look to faith groups to satisfy governance challenges.

The literature was found to have a significant gap with respect to the actions of Christian elites. Scholars have focussed much more on the experiences of different religious groups and on key policy areas such as same-sex marriage, faith schools, community cohesion and extremism. Whilst, against this backdrop of decline, minority rights discourse has become a tool of faith groups, with faith belonging persisting as a politically salient category, this was often from the standpoint of groups who see themselves as minorities within the British state. Consequently, there is a gap in scholarship surrounding the way that Christian groups, who may not view themselves as minorities and who in certain cases retain privileged institutional access, engage in British politics. The thesis engages in an investigation to fill this gap in the literature. The next chapter outlines the project's research design and methodology.

Chapter Three:

Project Design

The primary research exercise of the project takes the form of four case studies, which are each high-profile issues in British political debate within which Christian groups have taken a prominent role since 2010. The case studies are the following:

- The debate on High-Cost Short-Term Credit firms (such as Wonga.com).
- The debate on Government welfare reform and how this relates to the rise in foodbank usage.
- The debate on the military intervention in Syria against ISIS, as well as the Syrian refugee crisis.
- The debate on the UK's referendum to leave the European Union and its aftermath.

As touched on in the theoretical review, these case studies were chosen for a few reasons. Firstly, they were selected because of their novelty in the literature – British Christian elite involvement has not been widely discussed in the literature with respect to any of these four case-studies. Secondly, they are chosen because of the Christian elites who were active within these areas and the tactics which they employed. The Christian elites in these case studies tend to conceive of their role and position differently to that of groups arguing against things like abortion legislation, and may adopt different tactics since many are representatives of mainline denominations who often have a greater insider access to government. Consequently, there is a gap in the literature corresponding to Christian elite involvement in these four areas. These case studies were also chosen because within them, Christian elites have exhibited a high level of consensus. Finally, these case studies were chosen because of the difficulty which exists with studying historical cases in sufficient detail. A key part of the research exercise here, as will be explained shortly, is to understand the reflections of Christian elites: it is not possible to do this where elites have forgotten much of their involvement or have died.

In each of these areas, the analysis is concerned with the political strategies that these high-profile Christian elites used. These strategies included submissions to select committees, case studies of lived experience of service provision, discussion within

Parliament, newspaper columns to the general public, and private meetings with key actors. In drawing on these sources, the project investigates the public justifications Christian elites make with respect to their actions and suggested policy solutions, as well as their reflections in interview on the thought processes behind and surrounding their actions. The chapters also draw on interview material exploring the underlying motivations for these interventions in order to more fully account for the strategic choices involved. The analysis is also concerned with how these actions were pursued and the strategic choices which were made, and how this was related by Christian elites to their worldviews and self-understanding. The project, therefore, provides an overview of actions undertaken by Christian groups within these debates, as well as the discourse used to justify those actions.

The specific questions the research means to address, then, are:

- How do UK Christian elites engage in politics?
- Do Christian elites bring a distinctive perspective and knowledge set to politics?
- Do UK Christian elites engage in politics strategically?
- Does the practice and engagement of Christian elites in British politics challenge claims that the United Kingdom is a secular nation?

These questions are related to the theoretical questions which were explored in the preceding overview. In particular, they help to understand how Christian elites navigate politics in an increasingly secular and pluralist environment, where the state is reducing the level of public services it provides.

The specific groups and actors the study will pay particular attention to are those who have taken part prominently within the discussions on these public issues. Prominence will not be assessed in a precise quantitative fashion, but is an indicative category referring to those Christian actors and groups who have taken part in formal political proceedings (such as debates in Parliament and submissions to Select Committees) as well as those groups and actors who have featured in national newspapers, including Christian newspapers such as the *Church Times*, and *Catholic Herald*.

As such, the project focusses on the following Christian actors and groups:

- Christian Members of Parliament.

- Christian Members of the House of Lords, including Anglican Bishops.
- Leaders of Christian Charities and Advocacy Bodies.

The term *Christian elite* will be used to describe the actors interviewed from each of these groups. Elite here does not necessarily imply that these individuals are substantially wealthy: some of individuals like Bishops earn fairly large salaries (though relatively small in comparison to those in similar positions within secular organisations) and live in palaces, whereas others simply earn the living wage. Instead, elite here refers to the positions these individuals have with respect to the national level organisations they represent, and also in some cases to the level of access they have to government.

In investigating Christian elites who have been prominent within these case studies, the study will not reflect the experience and practice of all Christian groups in the United Kingdom. A variety of smaller Christian denominations, whilst collectively making up an appreciable fraction of Christians in the United Kingdom, do not have the resources to contribute on a large-scale to national debates. Similarly, the specific institutional relationship which establishment confers upon the Church of England means that they are more prominent within national debates than other Christian denominations. As explored in the Literature Review, government policies such as the Big Society where faith groups have been looked to as service providers and tools to access communities have also put some Christian elites in the spotlight, depending on the services they provide and government need. Any true reflection of the nature of Christian groups in public debate in the United Kingdom will therefore present this kind of picture where some Christian groups have a greater representation than others. The research process will consult with actors from a variety of Christian denominations in order to examine differential perspectives offered from different traditions, but it is nonetheless not the case that all groups have equal representation within the analysis.

In addition, as was discussed within the theoretical review, there is a question concerning who qualifies as a Christian. Whilst the research does not undertake to question people on their worshipping habits, nor to ask interview participants to sign up to the early creeds, the project is interested only in the contributions of churchgoing Christians who express an orthodox faith. This is not meant to diminish or disparage the faith experiences of individuals which do not always feed into neat boxes of orthodoxy, but merely to reflect that churchgoing Christians who believe in God are the group which the literature suggests may well find the constraints of the secular sphere most stifling.

In many cases, it is evident that somebody possesses such a faith because they will say so, sometimes to a social cost. Many Christian actors with whom the analysis is concerned occupy particular roles by virtue of their faith (for instance, they may be clergy), and this is something which also makes them easy to find. Nonetheless, the research is certain to miss many Christian believers in Parliament whose faith is lived out in a quiet way which escapes the notice of researchers. Whilst interesting questions could certainly be made regarding those Christians who keep their faiths private within Parliament, and that these questions would be material to the research aims, it is a research problem which is impossible to mitigate. Consequently, the thesis will not speculate as to why some Christians do not make their faiths known in public life, and will solely focus upon those who are able to be accessed.

The research assesses the political strategies of Christian elites by focusing on three primary sorts of contributions to political debate. These are:

- Reports presented to Parliament.
- Public speeches in Parliament and other places.
- Articles or commentary submitted by Christian authors to newspapers.

These different contributions will be sourced from:

- Government websites, with a particular focus on pages which detail submissions to Select Committees.
- Hansard, which has recently updated its search functionality, making Parliamentary debate more accessible to the researcher.
- Prominent columns within secular newspapers.
- Interviews with high profile Christian actors within secular newspapers, as well as one-off columns.
- Christian newspapers, especially the Church Times and Catholic Herald.

The research will also look at how Christian elites relate political strategies to Christian faith groups, contrasting the language employed within them with other contributions. To this end, the project will consider:

- Reports aimed at Christian religious audiences.
- Prayer materials aimed at Christian religious audiences.
- Addresses and sermons.

These contributions will be subjected to a content analysis, with an emphasis on the values that are contained within them. The NVivo textual analysis software was used to help identify themes within these contributions, as well as identifying connections and patterns across different Christian actors. This analysis of patterns is not something which will be explicitly shown within the analysis chapters, though it forms the backdrop of thinking behind them.

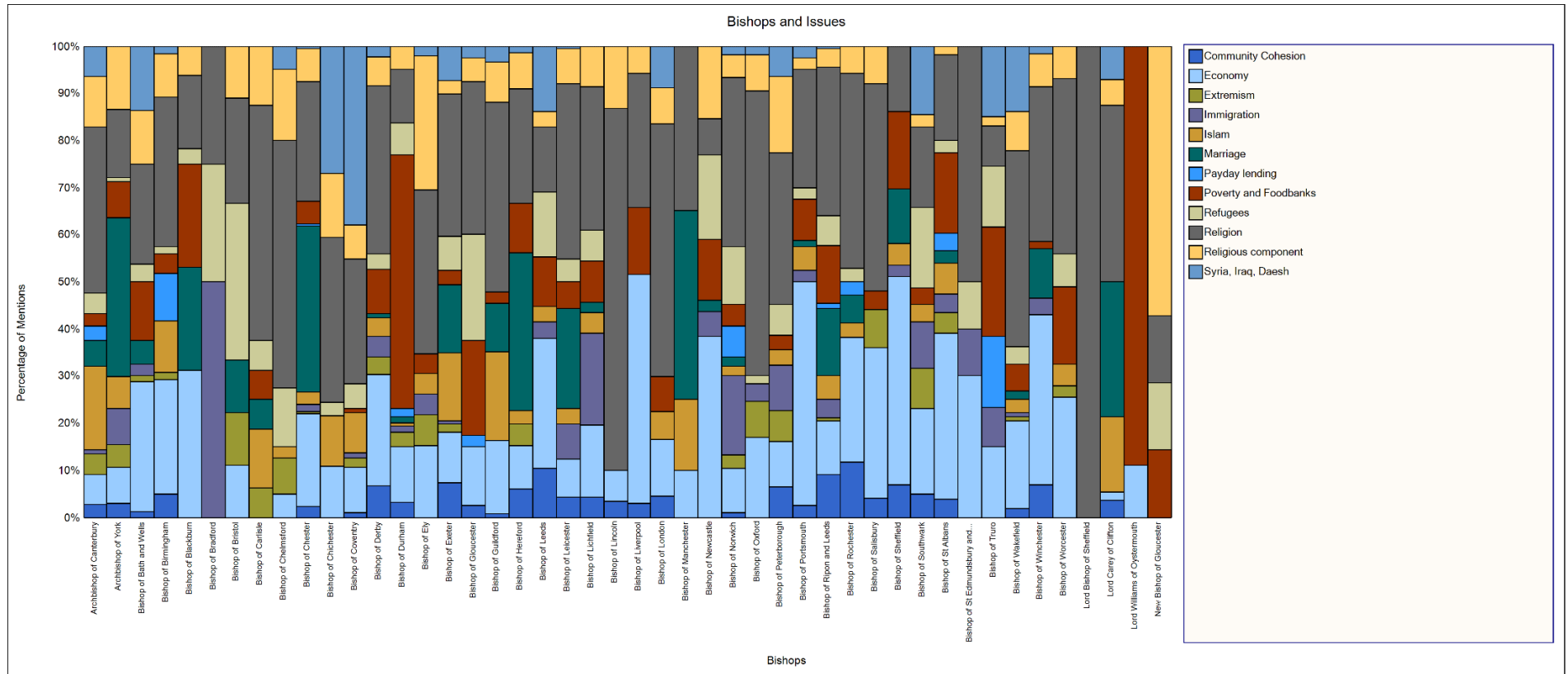
The following pages show some examples of NVivo 11 analysis which helped to form the backdrop to the thinking. In each case, the data has been a guide to thinking, but not a replacement for thought and manual work, and there is a great deal of interpretation involved. This level of interpretation is essential because NVivo does not have an intelligent understanding of the material fed into it, and context is often essential to understand contributions. For example, on one of the graphs, the new Bishop of Gloucester is shown to have a very high level of religious language in her speech, but this was because it reflects only a small number of speeches since her introduction, including her maiden speech where it is the fashion for a Bishop to mention religion more. These maiden speeches are introductions, rather than examples of practical argumentation and often simply frame a Bishop's particular area of interest, as well as expressing gratitude at the opportunity to serve.

In order to use NVivo to analyse a body of text, it is first necessary to allocate certain words to themes. One such theme was religious language, since a key theme is the resonance of Christianity within an increasingly secular country. A high level of religious language used in the public sphere would be of concern to many secularists, but would also suggest a continued resonance of that language amongst those listening – i.e. we would expect religious language to be used when the speaker expects it to be understood. Whilst religious language could be defined as a number of different things, NVivo requires a list of certain words in its analysis. In this case, religious language was taken to mean mentions of the following: Jesus, God, Christ, Bible, theology, theological, and biblical. This paper does not make the claim that these words exhaust everything which could be termed religious; it is, for instance, possible to recount a story of the Good Samaritan as part of a speech without any mention of the aforementioned words. Instead, these words are used as a kind of rough indicator where their presence is evidence of an explicit allusion to religious concepts, and is a suggestion that a passage references religious concepts to a greater degree. Some other religious words were not chosen because of their common use in

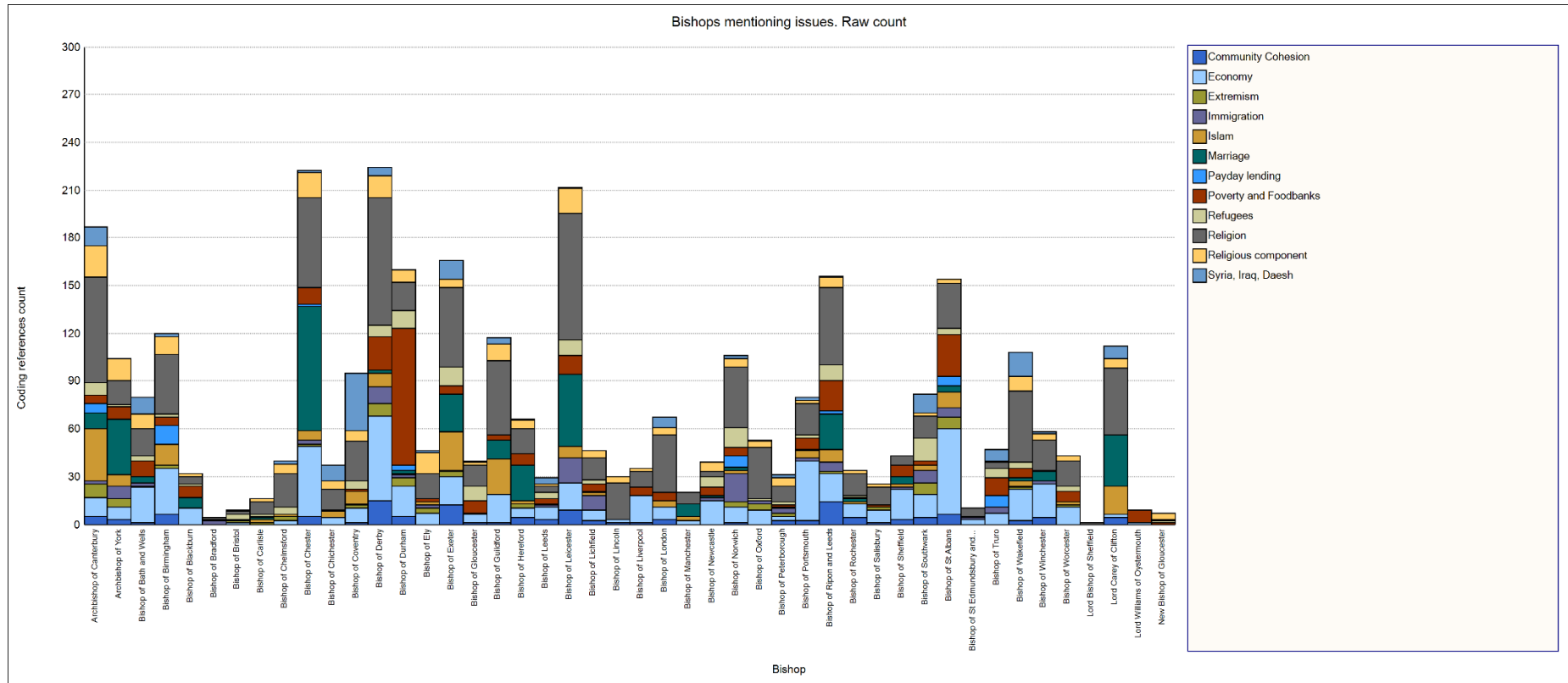
speech with alternative meanings: for instance, it is not useful at all to measure the uses of the word Lord in the House of Lords.

Additionally, it is worth clarifying what is meant by the term mention. By mention it is not meant that the number of times those words have been uttered is simply counted. For instance, in a single sentence, a speaker might say the word Jesus twice, but it does not seem that that sentence is thereby made more religious than one which only says Jesus once. Instead, a mention will instead be taken to mean an utterance of a word and its immediate context. In this sense, both a sentence with one utterance of Jesus and a sentence with two comprise only one mention. The immediate context of the word is determined using the NVivo software package - what is kept constant therefore is the algorithm it uses to measure what this is. It is worth noting here that NVivo is not in any way as skilled at determining the immediate context of a mention as a human being is. It is for instance possible in a long speech to mention Jesus' name once, and thereafter refer to Him as 'He', in this case, the mention might be substantially longer than that which NVivo might attribute. Nonetheless, cases like these tend to be rare in speech (and in the speeches in question), and NVivo provides a consistent rough yardstick. If there is any bias to the results it is likely to be small, but it would be in favour of deflating the mentions of religious language in the House of Lords by a small margin. A percentage measure was used to describe the size of the mentions relative to the overall corpuses – in a rough way, these percentages show the proportion of that corpus which is in some way related to the use of the aforementioned words.

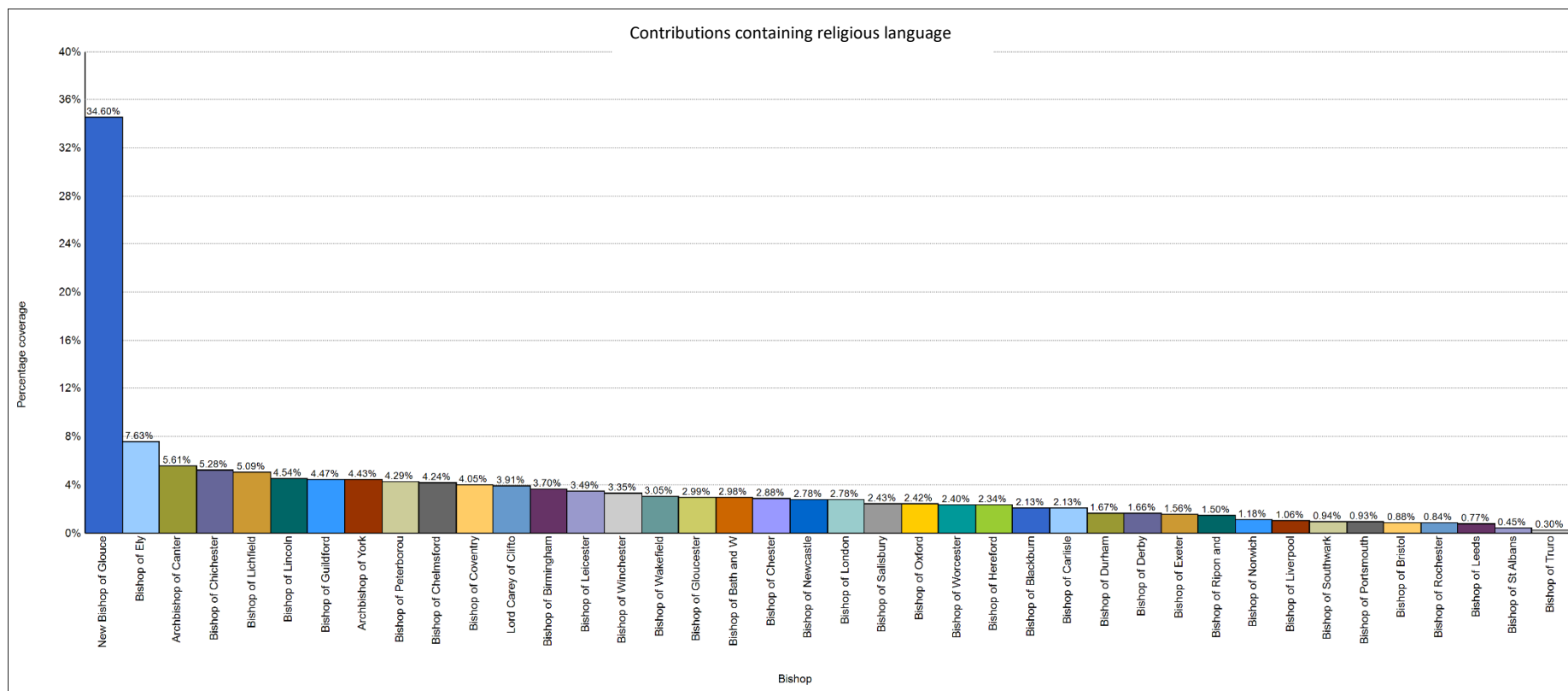
In this way, NVivo can provide a useful method to direct later manual analysis, but the extent to which the software does not understand what it reads, as well as the abstraction inherent in assigning certain words to themes means that it was not relied upon alone to analyse the way in which Christian actors engaged in public debate. The next few pages show some resulting graphs of NVivo analysis to provide an indication of how this work was carried out.



A graph showing the proportion of a Bishop's contributions which are associated with a particular topic. Caution is warranted here: not all Bishops have contributed the same amount.



This graph is similar to the previous one, but instead gives a greater indication of scale. It shows proportion, but the Bishops who contribute more are shown as larger bars.



This is once again a proportionate graph. The New Bishop of Gloucester had only made her maiden speech at this moment, and so the proportion is much higher since it refers to religious language within a single address.

A large theme in the theoretical debate around faith engagement with politics is found within the public reason literature, and is to do with the idea of translation (Habermas, 2006), as well as the extent to which religious values are puppeteers behind the values used in political discourse (Rawls, 1997). In order to comment upon these themes, it is not simply necessary to note whether contributions seem to reflect the bounds of secular neutrality, but it is necessary to:

- Examine whether Christian elites feel as though they are engaging in a process of translation and whether they feel as though this process is difficult.
- Understand how Christian elites feel as though the values they use in public debate are influenced by the values of their religious beliefs.
- Examine the strategic choices around why Christian elites frame their contributions in the ways that they do.

In order to comment upon these two areas, the research involved a series of 22 elite interviews. The actors who were interviewed belong to the three groups of people who were outlined previously, with a particular focus on actors who had made direct contributions to public debate in the four case study areas. These actors were interviewed in a semi-structured way, and were asked to reflect particularly on the following:

- How their faith has motivated their behaviour.
- What they feel the place of the Christian faith is in public debate.
- How they feel that Christian values resonate within public debate.
- Whether Christian values are admissible within public debate.

One of the particular benefits of the NVivo analysis is that it aided with the selection of Christian actors who were selected for interview in connection with particular issues. Through a mixture of NVivo analysis and manual reading of the sources outlined previously, particular Christian actors were selected to comment on their faith in public debate, as well as how it was related to their actions.

Discourse Analysis

In order to examine the reflections of Christian elites, as well as their public statements, the project utilised discourse analysis. Discourse here is taken as the totality of the written or spoken contributions of Christian elites to public debates. Discourse analysis is a varied and diverse field, with many different approaches proceeding from different ontological and moral viewpoints. This

theoretical diversity, however, ought not to be mistaken for a weakness in the method as a tool of enquiry. As Hamilton writes,

Far from its being a liability to be lamented because of the lack of a single coherent theory, we find the theoretical and methodological diversity of discourse analysis to be an asset.

(Hamilton, 2015, p. 5)

Within discourse analysis, there are many different approaches to analysing political discourse. However, given the specific interest of the thesis to do with practical arguments and campaigns, as well as reflections upon them, the focus of the discourse analysis will therefore be on political discourse as persuasion, or as argument. Wilson writes that, towards the study of persuasion or argument, many approaches to studying discourse focus on a rhetorical element (Wilson, 2015, p. 775). It is important to understand that rhetoric is not something which is necessarily opposed to substance. Frequently, rhetoric is often understood to be bluster, void of content, or an attempt to distract from true substance. Instead, this project holds that the ways in which things are articulated have a relationship with the ideas and values being shared by the speaker; consequently, rhetoric has substance. In this way, though the thesis shares the view of Norman and Isabela Fairclough, who write that political discourse is 'primarily a form of argumentation... more specifically practical argumentation... for or against particular ways of acting' (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p.1) and finds its scheme of analysis valuable, the analysis dispenses with the remainder of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) view.

Fairclough and Fairclough subdivide practical argumentation into a number of different elements. These elements are as follows: a claim, circumstances, goals, means-goal, values, alternative options, and addressing alternative options. In this, the claim represents the specific proposal for action – in short, what is to be done. The goal represents the state of affairs which the actor wishes to obtain, and the means-goal is a set of statements which intend to convince the listener that the strategy outlined in the claim is necessary and sufficient to obtain the goal. The circumstances are a description of the current state of things, as the actor sees it, and the alternative options are considerations of other claims which may be, or have been made to obtain the same goal. The values are a set of ideas mobilised in support of a goal. Particularly, for the purposes of this analysis, religious language might primarily be found amongst values used to justify action – though they may be found elsewhere, for instance a religious worldview might be used to inform an actor's description of circumstances, though this will often not be apparent. The analysis throughout the thesis focusses upon when religious values, again understood as a set of ideas, are used as practical

reasons. The first case study chapter on High-Cost Short-Term Credit includes a table which illustrates through the practical example of one of Justin Welby's speeches how these different terms relate to actual speech and to show what parts of his contribution represent values. Including such tables for every contribution would disrupt the flow of the thesis, and so elsewhere only quotations focusing around values are included. This information presented in the chapters, in the forms of interview data, speeches and other contributions, is presented by way of illustration and example. The attempt is to give the reader an example of where something has been the case, rather than to present a fulsome overview of everything said.

Whilst, consequently, Fairclough and Fairclough present a strong method of analysis, the broader ideological project is not subscribed to. Instead, the thesis agrees with Finlayson that CDA relies upon a broader theory of 'ideological distortion' where there is less of a focus on the content of arguments, and instead an assumption that rhetoric is a 'cover for dubious interests and is fixated on exposing evasions and omissions' (Finlayson, 2007, p. 552). This idea of ideological distortion draws upon a Marxist framework where ideas of false consciousness play a key role.

Instead, this project proceeds from a different assumption. Whilst it is certainly the case that rhetoric can be used to mislead, it seems that very often political actors have a tendency towards authenticity, in the respect that much political rhetoric speaks of a worldview to which the speaker subscribes and to which they wish others to subscribe. The project therefore takes political actors by their words, if not necessarily taking them at their word. Paradoxically, in a world where fake news has become a watchword, a breakdown in party loyalty, particularly since the EU referendum has led to a widespread rejection (though perhaps not refutation) of Downs' spatial model of voting where ideology is purely instrumental (Downs, 1957, p. 97). In the absence of strong leadership, politicians often say exactly what they mean, though to little effect. Political rhetoric often contains the substance of the speaker's worldview and values.

Ideas of ideological distortion stem from an assumption that political actors do not believe what they say, and only say what they do in order to obtain their ends. This is especially problematic when applied to religious actors; it seems offensive and inaccurate to hold that religious elites simply advance their will over a credulous majority. Instead, this project, focussing on religious actors, will take them at their word, examining how their contributions in public interact with their religious beliefs. Consequently, the project will understand that the substance of an argument is the set of active reasons and values, rhetorically packaged, which are used to persuade others of the need for a certain action.

In the attempt to characterise the sorts of values which are used by Christian elites and examining their argumentative approaches, the analysis will take Finlayson's Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA) as its approach to discourse analysis, and in particular his concept of 'commonplaces' (Finlayson, 2007, p. 557). Finlayson writes that commonplaces,

are broadly applicable argumentative approaches that can be used across instances, standard kinds of proof that, for Cicero, included things such as definition, similarity, difference, contraries, cause, effect and comparison. They rely on everyday common-sense values of what is just or unjust, honourable or dishonourable, common maxims, generally approved of principles... and commonly accepted ways of arguing.

(Finlayson, 2007, p. 557)

RPA represents a particularly useful tool because Finlayson's approach highlights the different narrative and argumentative worlds which may be occupied by different actors within the same space, as Finlayson writes 'It may be the case that analysis will reveal that different groups of political actors work within particular frameworks of argument shaped by different sets of commonplace' (Finlayson, 2007, p. 557). These different frameworks of argument are understood by Finlayson to not merely reflect different values, identities, and worldviews, but instead as being constitutive of them (Finlayson, 2007, p. 553). In this way, different actors within the political sphere may have different argumentative approaches which relate to their respective worldviews. On this view, the use of secular language by a religious citizen may have greater significance than simply a language of communication, since arguments are tied to identities and worldviews. A use of secular language might therefore be tied to a subscription to a worldview with a secular sphere, or an acceptance certain position of religious value with respect to politics.

Since language as part of a commonplace interacts with identity and worldviews, there may be a burden associated with those whose identities do not easily fit. Understanding whether religious individuals understand this translation as being burdensome in this manner relates to the core questions of the thesis, as well as theoretical debates on public reason. Consequently, RPA becomes a useful research method with which to approach discourse with a view to addressing the focus of the thesis. A hybrid method is therefore presented, where some elements of Fairclough and Fairclough's methodology is used to highlight values arising in discourse, framed within an RPA view of commonplaces.

Interviews

Interview subjects were approached to participate in the project in a variety of different ways: some were emailed or telephoned, some through other contacts, whereas others were approached face-to-face. There are, however, difficulties inherent in approaching elite actors, and not everybody approached consented to be interviewed. Some Christian elites stated that they could not participate because of a lack of time, whereas others simply did not respond. In particular, Roman Catholic elites were difficult to encourage to participate. One Roman Catholic elite who took part in the study stated that this difficulty was regrettably unsurprising, saying that there was an institutional wariness amongst Roman Catholic elites in consenting to be interviewed. Whilst special efforts were taken to reach Roman Catholic elites with respect to other groups, they are nonetheless underrepresented in the thesis.

In order to encourage participation and free conversation, anonymity was offered to interview subjects. The interview subjects, however, were made aware of the limits of such anonymity; when dealing with a small pool of elite actors who are being interviewed about certain topics, the manner of speaking can often allow the informed observer to see through anonymity. The inherent nature of the project, however, aims at connecting the reflections elite actors had in interviews to their actions and comments in public. Consequently, there is also considerable value to be had from non-anonymous participants.

Ultimately, none of the interview participants asked for anonymity, though several did ask to see the way in which they were quoted prior to any publication to ensure that they were being quoted faithfully. Interviewees were given an opportunity to amend their contributions and were reminded that they may exercise their right to withdraw from the research at any time. During the research, none of the participants asked to withdraw, and none wished to amend their contributions. Most participants, however, did not ask to see the way in which they were represented either because they felt that the matters they discussed were not of a sensitive nature, or that their positions were sufficiently secure. Throughout the research, participants are sometimes presented in an anonymous way, and at other times by name. Participants are only named when it was to link a specific contribution of theirs to their reflection of it.

The interview process consisted of 22 semi-structured interviews with elite Christian actors. All of the interviews were carried out by the author alone. These interviews were carried out in a number of different locations, from the researcher's living room and cafés, to government offices and the Palace of Westminster. Face-to-face communication was chosen because it represents the best way of not misinterpreting one another, even when that meant a day of travel to have a short

conversation. In each of these cases the interview process was similar, and effort was taken that they were as relaxed as possible; most interviews took place over a cup of tea. The interviews ranged in length from around 45 minutes to 2 hours.

In general, the researcher was happy to let the interviewee simply talk, provided they were on topic. For the most part, the interviewer found that interviewees would either anticipate questions and answer them or answer them naturally. In this way, the interviewer attempted to remove as much of his own voice from the equation. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer talked the participants through their rights concerning the research, and asked them whether they would like to ask any more questions about either the research or himself. Some interview participants were curious about the researcher, and were very pleased to hear that the researcher is a practicing Christian. These conversations about the researcher were, however, very brief and polite and fairly superficial. The general feel of the conversations ranged from jovial to deeply thoughtful, usually within the same interview. Interview participants seemed very relaxed, which is often to be expected with elite actors.

All of the interviews were recorded in order to aid with transcription and analysis, though these recordings will not be made public. All participants were given the option of not being recorded, though only one initially chose this option and then swiftly changed their mind and invited the researcher to record after seeing him frantically scribbling notes. After the recording devices (Amazon Kindle Fire tablets) were turned off, often the conversation continued in a less formal way for a short time. It is certain that some of this non-recorded material has flavoured the author's view of many of the issues, but it is not directly quoted anywhere in the thesis. Most of the interview data was transcribed, though in some cases only particular sections were transcribed. This is because the researcher developed a repetitive strain injury over the course of writing his thesis and at times typing has become very painful.

In each of the case studies, the reflections of interview participants are related to their actions and contributions within public debate. The interview recordings are used to provide an insight into the motivations behind particular actions which were taken, reflections on the language which was used, as well as context which was not present from simply reading the text. Through chapters 4-9, key segments of transcribed data are laid alongside quotes from participation within the public sphere. In this way, a picture of Christian participation within British political debate, as well as a reflection on that participation is built up. In the final chapter, this picture is once again related to the theoretical debates which were explored in the literature review.

Chapter Four:

High-Cost Short-Term Credit

Introduction

This chapter is an exploration of the manner in which Christian elites participated in the public debate on payday lending firms like Wonga.com which took place most chiefly between 2011 and 2015. During these years, payday lending firms, both on the high street but also particularly online, rose very quickly to occupy a considerable market share of the consumer credit market in the United Kingdom. This provoked a public discussion in the media, but also within parliament, about measures to regulate this newly emerged industry. Ultimately, restrictions were imposed by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) in 2015, and the continuing debate after this point has largely been to do with the efficacy of the FCA's measures. Christian organisations and churches took an unusually high-profile role in the public debate, with the Archbishop of Canterbury's involvement being extensively publicised in the media. Christian organisations assembled research papers, deliberated within parliament, and helped set up the Credit Unions which were to be a safer alternative to payday lending firms.

The chapter begins with some background on the payday lending debate, describing the nature of high cost short term credit and its growth in the United Kingdom. After this, a brief outline is given to the debate which existed in parliament. This is followed by a reflection on the relationship of credit to Christianity, and how that has manifested itself in this particular debate. A more specific analysis of the manner in which different Christian elites got involved in the debate is then entered into. The particular question here is whether or not Christian elites framed their interventions in the language of faith, or whether they chose to reframe their interventions into secular terms, and if so, for what reasons and to what effect?

The chapter finds that during the course of the debate Christian elites engaged in discussion within Parliament and also produced reports drawn from their perspectives as service providers. In addition

to this, Christian elites served as a link between Parliament and faith communities. The investigation found that when speaking within Parliament and to government, Christian elites made little reference to religious language, which was contrasted to the language used when speaking their faith communities – demonstrating how Christian elites strategically frame their contributions. However, Christian elites found a surprising willingness of trade unions and business communities to engage with theological concepts.

High Cost Credit and Harm

Payday lending is not the flavour of the day. Characterised as manipulative and predatory, there is a broad consensus amongst society and mainstream media in the United Kingdom that payday lenders exploit the most vulnerable in society (Packman, 2012, p. 68). This reputation is, to a large extent, due to their availability to those with poor credit ratings who are liable to experience significant hardship as a result of the high interest rates charged and the frequent absence of effective affordability checks. This sentiment is echoed by Brown and Woodruffe-Burton, who write that payday lenders are considered to be predatory

because of the product's availability to people with poor credit ratings, and/or those who have been refused credit from other sources, but is also attributed to the characteristics of the loans that typically have a four-figure plus annual percentage rate (APR), are risky to the borrower, have the ability to be 'rolled over' multiple times, and tend to use over-simplified marketing campaigns that gloss over the dangers of not being able to repay. (Brown & Woodruffe-Burton, 2015, p.109)

Broadly speaking, a payday loan is a form of high-cost short-term credit (HCSTC) where money is borrowed for a short time (ordinarily less than a month), in order to provide the borrower with money until their next payday. In general, the amount of money borrowed is small – around £270 repaid over 30 days (Office of Fair Trading, 2013, p. 9) - but despite their small size in absolute terms, they may cause significant harm. It is this form of harmful debt which is often referred to as *problem debt*. The Centre for Social Justice provides a definition of problem debt where debt becomes an issue because of its size relative to the disposable income of the holder, and because of the impact it may have on health, relationships and wellbeing (Centre for Social Justice, 2013, p. 15). They describe how problem debt has a significant impact upon the mental health of individuals, with those struggling with debt being 33% more likely to develop mental health difficulties, seven out of ten debt-advice seekers being prescribed medication by their GP to assist with mental health difficulties

associated with their debt, and with a third of debt-advice clients contemplating or attempting suicide as a result of their debt (ibid., pp. 19-20).

Problem debt has two primary components: the financial, social and economic situation of the borrower; and the credit product sold to the borrower. Bridges and Disney reflect that a core element of whether debt becomes a persistent problem for borrowers is whether they are affected by persistent 'adverse economic characteristics, such as single parenthood, economic inactivity and low wages' (Bridges & Disney, 2004, p. 23). A 2014 Demos report showed that 'nearly all debt consists of people borrowing from sources that are not typically viewed as problematic in and of themselves... the debt becomes problematic only when payments are missed' (Salter, 2014, p. 19).

In this sense, consumer credit cannot be seen in isolation; simply legislating against particular forms of consumer credit will not alleviate all hardship in this area, with the whole consumer credit market (which includes, but is not limited to, payday lending)¹¹ causing £450 million of consumer harm according to the National Audit Office in 2011-12 alone (Lawrence & Cooke, 2014, p. 1). Nonetheless, unregulated payday lending represents a specific and particular harm which affects a demographic who do not have access to savings, other forms of credit, or a social network to otherwise finance necessities (ibid., p.2). Amongst this demographic, the risk of debt becoming problematic is significantly increased (Salter, 2014, p.24), with almost three quarters of those who use payday lending and unauthorised overdrafts saying they run out of money on a monthly basis (Which?, 2014, p.7). For these people payday lending can become especially harmful since credit products which might be more appropriate for emergency or short-term use become medium or long-term through a series of rollovers or short-term loans repeated on a monthly basis (Caskey, 2005, p. 21).

The Growth of the UK Payday Lending Industry

Payday lending, or things like it, are not a new phenomenon, but its recent manifestation is. The UK case of payday lending is particularly understudied relative to the situation in the United States (Brown & Woodruffe-Burton, 2015, p. 109), though authors like Packman have made valiant efforts to bridge this gap. The UK and US cases are not, however, wholly divorced from one another; five of the seven largest payday loan companies in the UK are either controlled or owned by US companies who cast their gaze across the Atlantic as a result of a looser regulatory framework relative to the US (Packman, 2012, pp. 51-3). The payday lending market in the UK grew rapidly over the course of a

¹¹ Indeed, according to a Demos survey, only 6% of respondents had used payday loans, and 1% from illegal loan sharks (Salter, 2014, p. 19).

decade; from 2004 to 2014, payday lenders grew from being worth £100 million to £2.2 billion (Packman, 2014, p. 45). A significant contributing factor towards this growth was the fallout from the 2008 economic crisis. In the aftermath of the crash, there was a growing reluctance on the part of banks to provide the same sorts of credit offers which were previously common – especially in the area of unsecured credit. As the Financial Times noted, it was this environment where regulation was loose and banks absent which provided ‘a fertile breeding ground’ for groups like Wonga who, after being set up in 2007, turned a loss of £1.9 million into a profit of £14 million in 2010 (Goff, 2011).



Fig 1: Google searches for Wonga.com over time. Source: Google Trends. The Y axis ‘represent[s] search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means that there was not enough data for this term.’ (Google, 2019).

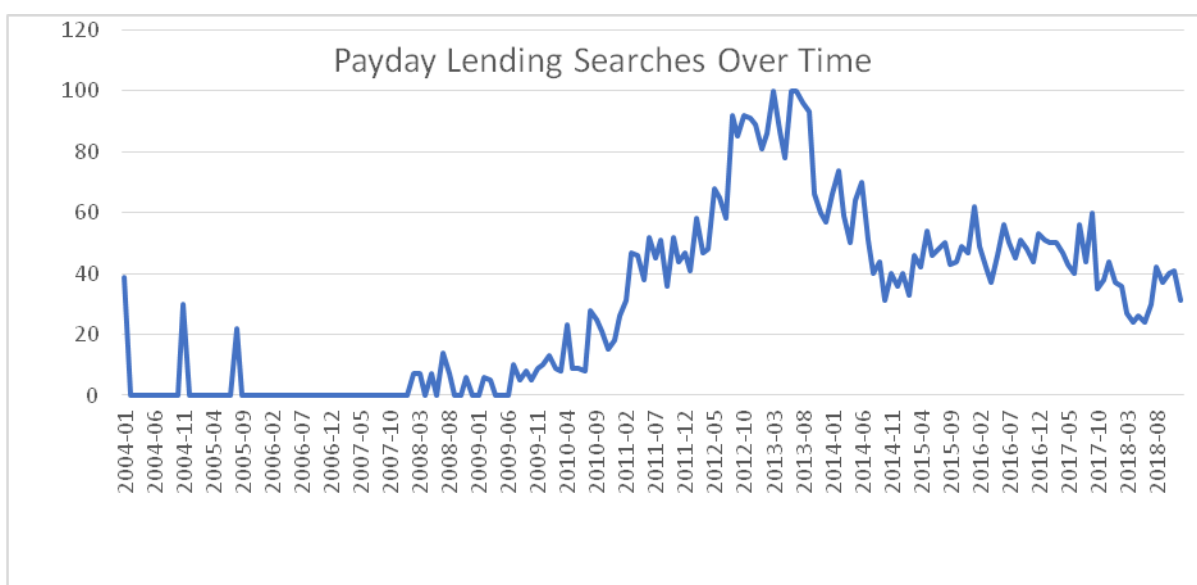


Fig 2: Google searches for 'Payday Lending' over time. Source: Google Trends. The Y axis 'represent[s] search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means that there was not enough data for this term.' (Google, 2019). Note, the values on the last two graphs are not interchangeable and do not indicate relative popularity. In actuality, Wonga.com was a far more popular search term than Payday Lending.

A particular change in these new forms of HCSTC was their use of technology relative to what was possible in the past. As the above diagram shows, these new payday lending firms made extensive use of the internet in order to market their product. Google searches for the phrase 'Wonga.com' peak in 2012, as do searches for other related phrases, such as 'payday lending', so too do searches for news articles relating to the same (Google, 2019). The accessibility of these firms on the internet made it possible to quickly obtain credit at home or on mobile devices without the need to meet face-to-face. In the case of Wonga.com, suitability requirements are assessed through an automated online service which is available at all hours, and can disburse funds within the hour (Palmer, 2009). This automated service relies less on the traditional indicators to which banks ordinarily refer, but instead on a database of information on former Wonga customers and on alternative sorts of information, such as social media (Shaw, 2011). Though this technology has resulted in low default rates on Wonga loans despite industry scepticism (ibid.), it is also not clear that Wonga is always reaching the audience its creator Errol Damelin says is its focus:

'It's not for people who constantly need money. If you are £1000 behind every month, you have a problem and we wouldn't lend to you. This is for people who, two or three times a year, might be surprised by something and need cash for a short time.'

(Palmer, 2009)

Indeed, as explored previously, though default might be rare, rollovers, and the attendant continued costs and harms that go with them, are not.

The growing public awareness and market value of payday firms did not go unnoticed by UK media and parliament for very long. Unfavourable news articles surrounding the topic became common by 2011 and 2012, and with headlines like the Mirror's '*Legal loan sharks target soldiers battling to survive on low military wages*' (Mirror, 2011), and the Mail's '*Loan shark' firm targets students: 4,000% interest offered as alternative to student loans*' (Harris, 2012), it seemed as though an attitude shift was taking place. Parliament, too, was not blind to the rising issue of HCSTC firms. In late 2010, Stella Creasy, Labour and Cooperative MP for Walthamstow, with the support of others submitted the Consumer Credit (Regulation and Advice) bill. In this, Creasy lamented the situation at

the time where the consumer credit industry had become dominated by poor practice, high interest, and little competition:

We have seen first hand how this is a market without competition. Just six companies control 90% of the loans made, which means that they can set the terms of trade. Such companies make money by locking people into cycles of debt, with interest rates starting at around 272%, and rising up to 2,500% or more. If people miss a payment by a day, they incur a charge, on which interest is added, and then there are the administration fees and fines, on which more interest is added. If they get into problems, they can always borrow more, thus starting the cycle of debt again.

(HC Deb 3rd November 2010 vol 517 c949)

Though Creasy's Private Members' Bill made no further progress through Parliament, it signalled the beginning of a period of scrutiny across both houses which, after a change of government opinion, led to an introduction of an interest rate cap by the FCA. This cap was introduced with the express aim of 'protect[ing] customers from excessive charges', and amongst other things included a maximum charge of £15 on default fees, and a total cost cap for fees and interest of 100% of the initially borrowed amount (Financial Times, 2015).

HCSTC firms felt the impact of the increased FCA regulation hard. Immediately after the introduction of the cap, Wonga saw its interest revenue fall from £157 million to £47 million, leading to a pre-tax loss of £80.2 million (Osbourne, 2016), and subsequently engaged with futile attempts to rebrand its business in accordance with the FCA regulations and to promote itself as a 'newly responsible and transparent lender' (Brookes & Harvey, pp. 169-70)¹². Overall, the FCA cap combined with generally improved economic circumstances have led to some improvement of in the finances of the least well-off in society, with a modest rise of the ability of people to find money for unplanned one-off expenses without recourse to formal or informal loans (Rowlingson & McKay, 2016, p. 5). Despite this, the debt relief charity Stepchange reports that, though slightly fewer individuals approach the charity with payday loan debts, the 'average amount owed was still £1,380, just £17 lower than before the regulations came into force' (Stepchange, 2016), reflecting a broad consensus that more still remains to be done in the area of the regulation of high-cost credit products (Gregory, 2016, p. 3).

¹² Ultimately, these attempts were unsuccessful, and in 2018 the company collapsed into administration (Collinson & Jones, 2018).

Christianity and High Cost Credit

Christianity's relationship with usury is long and uneasy, if varied. At times usury has been outright banned¹³, though following the reformation usury became more acceptable, with authors subsequently commenting that '*neither revelation, nor natural religion, prohibits, as morally wrong, the giving or receiving of interest*' (Bolles, 1837, p. 27, *emphasis in original*). Whilst, post-reformation, usury became more acceptable, it has rarely been fully trusted with figures like Calvin permitting reasonable interest rates, but having 'nothing but contempt for those who made excessively priced loans to the impoverished' (Graves & Peterson, 2008, p. 53). Indeed, it is this concern for the impoverished which is at the heart of the consistent Biblical demand for compassionate treatment of the poor and vulnerable (ibid., p.650). Exodus reveals this passion clearly:

If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. If you take your neighbour's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because that cloak is the only covering your neighbour has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

(Exodus 22:25-27, NIVUK)

Despite this call, there had been little high-profile involvement from Christian elites¹⁴ in the regulation of the lending industry in the United Kingdom. As Lord Glasman noted wryly in the payday lending debate during which Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby spoke, it had been a long time since an archbishop had become involved in the lending industry:

It is also a tremendous honour to follow the most reverend Primate. I believe that the last archbishop to take a very strong stance against usury was Archbishop Laud and I say to the noble Baroness, Lady Wilcox, that we know what happened to him.¹⁵

(HL Deb 20th June 2013 vol 746 c487)

Treading in the trail blazed by Stella Creasy, Archbishop Welby made a number of high-profile interventions against the high-cost short-term credit (HCSTC) sector stretching back to his time as Bishop of Durham. Whilst he declared his intention to 'compete' rather than 'legislate' lenders like Wonga out of existence through strengthening alternative forms of finance (Welby, 2013), ultimately, the attempt at competition was not as successful as his legislative efforts against HCSTC

¹³ And left to be practiced by the Jewish populations of Europe and contributing in no small part to anti-Semitic feelings towards those people.

¹⁴ Though Christians have been involved in looking at the issue of poverty more generally. Especially notable is the work which Christians Against Poverty (CAP) and the Trussell Trust have done for many years in this area.

¹⁵ Archbishop Laud met his end on Tower Hill.

firms. In terms of legislation, Welby engaged substantially with attempts to introduce an interest rate cap on HCSTC from within the House of Lords (Packman, 2014, p. 49), eventually getting his wish after three years as the FCA introduced a cap (Collinson & Jones, 2016). In this endeavour Welby was not alone. Amongst Church of England bishops, the momentum was carried forwards in the Lords by Bishops Gloucester, Bristol, Truro and St. Albans, and more broadly members of both houses contributed substantially to the cause.

The Archbishop's intention to compete lenders out of existence was due to a recognition that simply removing access to credit for the least well off in society was likely only to lead them towards other harmful or illegal forms of lending, with Step Change reflecting that there is significant room and need for 'accessible, affordable credit' (Rodrigues, 2016, p. 3). Consequently, there was a drive towards the promotion of credit unions in the United Kingdom, which were perceived by many to be a community-based alternative to HCSTC firms. The use of credit unions in the United Kingdom has, however, been uneven, with England in particular making little use of them, with the Bank of England reporting in 2013 that only 1.5% of the adult population of England belong to one, in comparison with 2.1% and 6.8% in Wales and Scotland, respectively (Jones, 2013). In the same year, the Centre for Social Justice commented of the Archbishop's drive that,

there is a long way to go before the Archbishop's ambition is fulfilled: UK credit unions have just over a million members and made loans of £662 million in 2012, of which more than a third was in Northern Ireland despite it having just six per cent of the total population. In comparison an estimated seven million people use high-cost credit and borrowed an estimated £4.68 billion in 2012, more than seven times the amount lent by credit unions. (Centre for Social Justice, 2013, p. 134)

Indeed, whilst government announced the credit union expansion project in 2012, which led to the investment of £38 million into the credit union sector, it was reported at the time that this level of funding was likely insufficient to meet with demand (Rowlingson & McKay, 2014). It is especially clear that this is the case since, at the time, the HCSTC sector invested almost as much as the aforementioned investment purely in advertising (Centre for Social Justice, 2013, p. 134). Despite this, there is evidence that limited success has been achieved, with the number of members of credit unions having doubled to almost 1.3 million (Rowlingson & McKay, 2016, p. 34).¹⁶ The Archbishop's intention was not only to advocate for the expansion of alternatives to HCSTC, but also to play a modest role in the creation of credit unions with the creation of the Churches Mutual Credit Union

¹⁶ Though this still remains short of the more than fourfold increase the 2014 report said was necessary (Rowlingson & McKay, 2014).

(CMCU). The CMCU is an ecumenical project involving a wide variety of UK church leaders with the initial aim of providing financial products for clergy, their families, and churches, with an ultimate aim of being open to congregations and further denominations (Just Finance Foundation, 2015)¹⁷.

Whilst the Church of England's (and Parliament's) engagement with legislating on payday lending ended with the FCA cap, other Christian organisations such as Christians Against Poverty (CAP) - of whom Archbishop Welby is the patron - have played a continuing role in advising government on this issue, engaging in particular with a recent call for input and review on the impact of the cap (Gregory, 2016). In particular, CAP has argued for a holistic approach to the problems surrounding HCSTC. Whilst CAP has welcomed the FCA intervention, it advises that HTSTC only represents a small part of the challenges those in financial difficulty suffer and that therefore 'a more consistent approach' is needed (ibid., p.3). Indeed, Stepchange – a non-religiously affiliated charity deeply active in the area of debt counselling – emphasises that the FCA's intervention was not a 'silver bullet' and that further work needs to be done in the areas of multiple borrowing and in the creation of a database that would prevent HCSTC users from borrowing from multiple payday firms (Tutton, 2014). This form of increasing financial literacy and debt counselling is tackling the problem from the other end, from the grassroots, rather than in a legislative way. These forms of aid form a part of a combined and holistic strategy which different Christian elites are working towards. A spokesman for the Church of England's Church Urban Fund explained this holistic strategy in interview, which involved education and financial inclusion in schools and local communities, research around worldwide best practice regarding community finance programmes which is used to inform and support initiatives in the UK, as well as pushing for legislative change:

we have pushed on a lot of legislation, so we've got changes to the rules ... so if we can get children to understand money, if we can get the banks to step into the space, and if we can do some work around what would get the community finance sector working better in 20 or 30 years, we will have a better system or at least we will have a bit of guilt around about the fact it didn't work, and that will probably be enough to move to make things work.

(Research Interview J)

¹⁷ The Just Finance Foundation is itself a body set up by the C of E Church Urban fund whose mission is to 'develop and implement the Archbishop of Canterbury's continuing vision of creating a fairer and more just financial system' (Just Finance Foundation).

Religious Language in the Parliamentary Debate on Payday Lending:

Religious belief is a motivator for action and civic engagement, with an involvement with religious social networks having a positive relationship with civic skills and active engagement with politics (Ben-Nun Bloom & Arikian, 2012, p. 250). Religious organisations and individuals engaged with politics are often very forthcoming about the religious roots of their social action and engagement. John Kirkby, founder of CAP speaks of his belief of God's call to him and Christians to a ministry to people groaning under the weight of debt, proclaiming:

God has given us a 21st Century answer to one of the most pressing social needs within society today. Jesus met people's needs with love, compassion and practical help. Our desire is to simply do the same and watch the miracles unfold.

(Christians Against Poverty, 2017)

The Trussell Trust (who will be spoken about more in subsequent chapters) are equally clear about their religious roots.

The Trussell Trust is a poverty charity founded on Christian principles. We work with people of all faiths and none, but are inspired to do what we do by Jesus' words.¹⁸

(Trussell Trust, 2017)

Whilst the religious beliefs and motivations of some political actors are well known – it is no secret the Archbishop of Canterbury is a Christian – the language used when engaging in public debate is often different. This section will investigate the use of religious arguments by high-profile Christian elites involved in the payday lending debate. In particular, this section will investigate when specific elements of the Bible are alluded to, and assess the manner in which biblical arguments are employed – are they used as standalone arguments,

In investigating the language used in the payday lending debate by Christian actors, as mentioned in this paper's earlier discussion on methodology, Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) understanding of political discourse will be used as a resource. Whilst not sharing the fulness of Fairclough and Fairclough's view, the thesis shares the view that political discourse is 'primarily a form of argumentation ... more specifically *practical* argumentation ... for or against particular ways of acting' (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 1). Any form of argumentation endeavours to set out that the actions proposed in the argument are necessary and sufficient to attain stated goals. By way of example of how this method works, the following table details the manner in which Fairclough and

¹⁸ They refer specifically here to Mt 25:35-36

Fairclough's typology applies to a particular speech of Justin Welby's. In particular, with the focus of this project on values, goals and claims, the project looks at how religious reasons and values form part of political debate.

Claim (what needs to be done)	<p>a) To introduce caps ‘at a sensible level that does not choke off supply and send people into the hands of loan sharks’</p> <p>b) To ‘provide alternatives’, though ‘it is going to take a long time’</p> <p>c) A ‘regulatory environment that makes it possible to have flexibility of provision’</p>
Circumstances	<p>‘The payday lending industry has grown at a vast speed’, and ‘alternative sources of credit are few and far between... for those who have had their applications for credit turned down by a high street bank’; payday lenders assure people ‘that the process of taking out a loan is quick, simple and safe,’ but ‘once the loan has been taken out, it is difficult to get out of the cycle... simply paying off the interest becomes a struggle’</p>
Goals	<p>A functional finance industry: ‘A finance system that in an area of poverty cannot provide £200 is dysfunctional’</p> <p>People being free from financial hardship</p> <p>An end to ‘usurious lending’</p>
Means-goal (the strategy is necessary and sufficient to achieve the goals)	<p>a) ‘With the rates offered, simply paying off the interest becomes a struggle’; This is one part of the strategy – ‘simply dealing with that does not deal with the long-term question’, there must be alternatives</p> <p>b) ‘A mixed economy of geographically based credit unions and professional ones, and other forms of finance such as CDFIs... will give the best chance of developing good, alternative sources of finance that will take away the need for caps because essentially they will compete the high-rate lenders out of existence’; ‘For the credit union movement to be successful and sustainable, and other forms of local finance to develop, we need a bottom-up movement of local organisations working to change the sources of supply. It will take many years... but it must start now’</p> <p>c) ‘We can use local institutions that have places of work and skills that can be brought in through volunteers’ e.g. churches.</p>
Values	<p>Opposition to a religiously understood concept of usury: ‘Caps are there to prevent usurious lending’; ‘ We need to look at reasonable limits that cut out legal usury from our high streets’</p>
Alternative options	<p>i) ‘The noble Baroness said that caps should not be introduced at any price’</p>
Addressing alternative options	<p>ia) ‘A cap does not mean 25% or 30%. It is not any figure... [after study] the cap to be brought in at an appropriate level’; ib) ‘The trouble is that the interest rates are at any price, typically more than 2,500% on an annual basis. We need to look at reasonable limits’</p>

Table 1: A table outlining the structure of Archbishop Justin Welby’s argument in the HoL on 20th June 2013, (HL Deb 20th June 2013 vol 746 cols 485-7).

In the above address by the Archbishop, the full structure of the argument is framed within secular and non-religious terms. It proceeds as follows:

- i) The payday lending industry has grown very quickly and its practices are usurious, which, combined with a lack of options for consumers is causing hardship.
- ii) Consequently, there is a need to introduce an interest rate cap, to promote alternatives, and to create a regulatory environment which allows those alternatives to flourish.
- iii) Though others have claimed a rate cap is not desirable, it is clear some interest rates are egregious and harmful and should be disallowed.
- iv) However, it is the case that this strategy will not be sufficient alone and thus alternatives, especially Credit Unions should be pursued together.
- v) In the creation of these Credit Unions, community bodies are an important asset, and thus the regulatory environment should enable their contributions.

One of the key premises of this argument is the concept of usury, which Welby introduces to the debate. The concept encompasses the claim that there is a form of lending which is immoral and exploitative, and that ought to be disallowed as a matter of principle. The concept of usury has a history within Christian thought, and its introduction represents a reframing of a debate around lending to encompass a moral dimension. The term was used by various members within the house and became a popular way to describe the operations of companies such as Wonga.

Broadly speaking, though, the contributions of the Archbishop seem to resonate in neutral terms within public bounds of universality. The following section outlines the three most prominent points raised by Bishops in the House of Lords during the payday lending debates (namely that: (1) HCSTC firms have exploitative practices and interest rates are too high, (2) that an interest rate cap might be part of the solution but not the whole solution and (3) that credit unions might be a part of a fairer financial market):

(1) A large number of contributions made substantial reference to the negative effects of HCSTC firms, that they are exploitative and that particular harms are associated with excessive interest rates. This idea of exploitation and harm is couched, as mentioned before, in the language of usury:

The Lord Bishop of Gloucester:

My Lords, the Church of England's national investing bodies recently decided to avoid investment in payday lending firms because of the risk of exploitative lending. Bearing in

mind that credit has to be provided responsibly and affordably, will the Government also consider instituting a requirement that payday lenders must, before advancing a loan, assess a borrower's financial circumstances and ability to repay?

(HL Deb 10th January 2012 vol 734 c 3, 2012)

Justin Welby as the Lord Bishop of Durham:

As was said, interference and capping of interest rates normally drive people towards loan sharks with unintended consequences of a very serious order, as we see in many parts of the country at the moment. However, if you look at the profits being earned in this market, it is clear that the barriers to entry are so high that there is absolutely no way in which people can come in and start shaving off the abnormal rates being achieved through participation in this market. If it was working, the interest rates would drop—it is as simple as that. The rates are clearly usurious—to use an old-fashioned expression. It used to be said in the old days that you could not take away people's beds and cloaks because they were essential for life—that is the Hebrew Scriptures; today, equivalent things are being taken away as a result of those very high rates of interest. It is a moral case, and it is bad for the clients and bad for all of us in this country when it is permitted to happen.

(HL Deb 28th November 2012 vol 741 c 223)

Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury:

Payday lenders lead to people being assured, through impressively slick marketing campaigns and targeted advertisements, that the process of taking out a loan is quick, simple and safe. However, once the loan has been taken out, it is difficult to get out of the cycle. With the rates offered, simply paying off the interest becomes a struggle ... The trouble is that the interest rates are at any price, typically more than 2,500% on an annual basis. We need to look at reasonable limits that cut out legal usury from our high streets.

(HL Deb 20th June 2013 vol 746 c 485-7)

(2) In response to excessive interest rates, many Bishops advocate for an interest rate cap, though not as a strategy in isolation:

Justin Welby as the Lord Bishop of Durham:

As was said, interference and capping of interest rates normally drive people towards loan sharks with unintended consequences of a very serious order, as we see in many parts of the country at the moment. However, if you look at the profits being earned in this market, it is clear that the barriers to entry are so high that there is absolutely no way in which people can come in and start shaving off the abnormal rates being achieved through participation in this market. If it was working, the interest rates would drop—it is as simple as that.

(HL Deb 28th November 2012 vol 741 c 223)

Justin Welby as the Archbishop of Canterbury:

I very rarely dare to disagree with the noble Baroness, Lady Wilcox, but on this occasion I will take my life in my hands. A cap does not mean 25% or 30%. It is not any figure. The Financial Services Act provides for a study of the consequences of a cap to be looked at and then for the cap to be brought in at an appropriate level. Caps are needed at a sensible level that does not choke off supply and send people into the hands of loan sharks. I have seen the effect of that when working in Toxteth. Caps are there to prevent usurious lending.

(HL Deb 20th June 2013 vol 746 c 485-7)

(3) A large number of contributions made reference to the power of credit unions to be an alternative form of finance available to those without access to mainstream banking, and who would otherwise use payday lending firms:

Justin Welby as the Lord Bishop of Durham:

The answer to this is not in limiting interest rates but in providing effective competition from local savings at a mutual level and recreating the system that worked so well from the early 19th century until the 1980s. I fail to see this in the Bill and that gives me great concern. I hope the Minister will explain how the competition obligation will not only reduce the problems of access for banks and for other large organisations—as we have already seen with the co-operatives’ problems in taking on the branches of Lloyds Bank—but increase the opportunity for much smaller and more locally based organisations to contribute to their local communities. This will affect a large number of people on the most marginal points of society.

(HL Deb 11 June 2012 vol 737 c 1160-1163)

The Lord Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:

One thing that I have not heard very much about in these debates, although we talked about it often in the past, is the role of credit unions. Those unions seek to tackle debt but their growth has been sadly limited in this country and they appear to be unable to provide the necessary cover to give security to those struggling in our society, although the work that they do is excellent. I hope that as we go forward in discussing the issue of debt, we shall encourage credit unions to play a much greater part in providing a way forward and one answer to the major issues that we face.

(HL Deb 28th November 2012 vol 741 c 223)

Justin Welby as the Lord Bishop of Durham:

In looking at credit unions, we need to remember that one of the most significant aspects of modern life is that accessible finance and affordable credit have become as much a basic utility as many other areas that we considered to be utilities. It is because of that, along with the move towards universal credit and particularly the changes to housing benefit, which have just been referred to, that the time for credit unions has come in a way that we have not seen since the 19th century. Many of the suggestions that have been made today speak to how credit unions can come into their own.

(HL Deb 13th December 2012 vol 741 c 1172-1175)

Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury:

A mixed economy of geographically based credit unions and professional ones, and other forms of finance such as CDFIs, as the noble Baroness, Lady Kramer, said, will give the best chance of developing good, alternative sources of finance that will take away the need for caps because essentially they will compete the high-rate lenders out of existence.

(HL Deb 20th June 2013 vol 746 c 485-7)

The Lord Bishop of St. Albans

My Lords, I imagine many of us are concerned about the culture of debt that seems to be normative in many parts of our society. In the light of this, can the Minister tell us whether the Government have any plans, first, to encourage all schools to consider working closely with credit unions, as in the case of the credit union in St Albans, where I come from and, secondly, to further roll out and encourage payroll savings schemes as part of a wider initiative to encourage saving and financial responsibility across society.

(HL Deb 3rd February 2015 vol 759 c 539)

Paul Butler as the Lord Bishop of Durham:

My Lords, will the Minister comment on the place and role of credit unions in this whole purpose? The churches and many others see them as a vital part of bringing people into financial services. For me, in the north-east, I see that many people will still not go near a bank, but they will go to local community credit unions. Will the Government commit to further supporting that work?

(HL Deb 1st December 2016, Vol 777, Col 329)

Aside from the term usury, which may in some ways be viewed to have a particular religious understanding, the only inclusion of any religious material at all in these interventions was from Justin Welby's contribution to the Financial Services Bill debate on 28th November 2012, where he paraphrased Exodus 22 (as shown earlier), by saying:

It used to be said in the old days that you could not take away people's beds and cloaks because they were essential for life—that is the Hebrew Scriptures; today, equivalent things are being taken away as a result of those very high rates of interest. It is a moral case, and it is bad for the clients and bad for all of us in this country when it is permitted to happen.

(HL Deb 28th November 2012 vol 741 col 218)

Whilst this does constitute a specific scriptural allusion, scripture here does not seem to be doing the main work in this statement. Exodus here is mentioned as a kind of augmentation to the *values* being mentioned, but also as historical fact. The central idea, however, is that, as a result of high interest rates, things which are essential for life are being taken away from those who need them. This claim survives without any further need for religious justification, and absenting the mention of scripture, the fundamental *value* human life stands for itself. In the same way, though there is a particular Christian understanding of usury, it is also a word which speaks to others who may not be aware of, or endorse that historical conception.

A clear picture seems to therefore be emerging – in the payday lending debate in the House of Lords, Bishops chose to frame interventions in a way that involves religious allusions and values when those arguments might also speak in a broader secular way. For the most part, Christian elites chose to formulate responses based upon the concept of harm, as well as the language of economics and competition, proposing a solution of an interest rate cap combined with a promotion of credit unions and mutuals.

This solution of a legislative response combined with a response to increase competition may be viewed through the same lens as other Church interventions. The language of usury, as well as Justin Welby's interventions, were well-received in the case of this debate. In later chapters, and in the next section, it will be shown how discourse is chosen strategically by Christian actors in order to maximise a positive reception to achieve change. The practical solutions campaigned for by the church were explored in the previous section, where they were viewed simply as ways in which the

church attempted to resolve problems; they may also be viewed in another way. The language of legislation and competition is a vocal register, as well as a practical solution, where the Church of England, whilst being in favour of its proposed solution, had a deeper interest in preventing harm caused by this form of legal usury. A senior figure within the Church of England's Parliamentary unit said:

definitely language of competition meant that it was it was taken seriously by those on the right as well as those on the left. Traditionally the language of the left being regulation, legislation. Language of the right: free market competition. So... in order to address a question of injustice and social harm through the language of competition, it's really quite interesting and is not often heard. I think it's fair to admit that it's not often heard coming out the mouth of Bishops... but you know, he was absolutely serious. He wanted there to be, he wanted people to go to credit unions instead, you know, so the answer to that is to get government... to deliver. There is, is not just simply to say 'well off you go Credit Unions', but it's also to try and create a climate and you need government support for that in which credit unions can thrive. So, so there was a need for government action and investment and to create a legislative environment where credit unions could prosper.

(Research Interview M)

A spokesman for the Church Urban Fund further elaborated upon the Church's core focus here:

[After our efforts in Parliament] Wonga, as it was, could no longer exist, and so we may not have competed it out of out of sight but we have legislated it out of sight. But whatever we did, we had to get rid of it because it was usury on a grand scale and not acceptable. Absolutely unacceptable. And the stories of misery and agony that it caused.

(Research Interview J)

The Payday Lending Debate Outside Parliament

Outside of the House of Lords, the debate on payday lending showed a strong degree of collaboration between Christian churches. North of the border, the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, Baptists and others were making similar efforts with regards to the payday lending debate. Very early on, the Church of Scotland (or Kirk) joined forces with the Church of England

against payday lending (McKie, 2013). Whilst its Moderator and leadership do not have access to the Scottish Parliament in the same manner as the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England, the Church of Scotland nonetheless engaged substantially with lobbying government and devolved government in Westminster and Holyrood. This engagement took the form of both individual representations to government, but also in ecumenical efforts¹⁹. During the payday lending debate, the Kirk's individual contributions took the form of letters written to the Scottish Parliament, calls on peers in the House of Lords to vote in specific ways on amendments (Church of Scotland, 2012), as well as reports sent to every MP and SNP, and a call upon its 450,000 members to boycott payday lending firms (Glasgow Churches Together, 2013). The Church of Scotland also responded to several government calls for information, including from the Treasury, and the Commission on Banking Standards (Church of Scotland, 2014; 2012).

The Kirk's approach here was very much research led, with two reports being of particular note, the first being an internal report to the 2012 General Assembly, entitled the *Special Commission on the Purposes of Economic Activity*, and the second an ecumenical and more public-orientated document entitled *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty* (Church of Scotland, 2012; Baptist Union of Great Britain, Methodist Church, Church of Scotland, & United Reform Church, 2013). Whilst the latter will be looked at more deeply later, it was the former report which set the agenda for the Kirk's approach; comprised of members from a wide range of backgrounds including politicians and economists, not all of which with Church of Scotland connections, the report set out a commitment to both an interest rate cap of 40%, but also a range of measures including credit unions (Church of Scotland, 2012, pp. 4; 43-44).

Like the Church of England, the Church of Scotland has been involved in the promotion of Credit Unions, with a particular focus on Scotland. Awareness of credit unions was raised through leaflets (see: Church of Scotland 2014) and also through work with the Carnegie Trust whose Affordable Credit Working Group noted the opportunities which the premises and expertise of the Kirk offered the endeavour to develop community lending services (Affordable Credit Working Group, 2016, p. 50). This work continues, with the former moderator of the Kirk, the Very Rev. John Chalmers chairing the Affordable Credit Working Group as it continues forward (ibid.). The Church of Scotland is also a partner in the Churches Mutual Credit Union.

¹⁹ As with other Christian lobbying, the Kirk's campaign was very much joined up, with payday lending a particular feature of a broader discussion on poverty and economics. More on Christian groups and poverty more generally will be explored in the next chapter.

For the most part, the language used by the Church of Scotland is of the same sort as that used by the Bishops of the Church of England in parliament – there is little recourse to theological notions. The responses to government calls for information, which are focussed on the opportunities that Credit Unions offer to the world of community finance, as well as the practical difficulties they face, make no mention of any religious language in any respect (Church of Scotland, 2014), nor did the Kirk’s work with the Carnegie Trust. In this respect, these Christian elites chose to speak in the language of economics, case study, and data in order to communicate to politicians.

It is important however to understand that Christian contributions to this debate have not solely been directed at politicians in Holyrood and Westminster: they have also been directed towards fellow Christians. The materials used to promote credit unions to congregations, however, do make significant use of a Christian case for Credit Unions, consisting of scriptural references and descriptions of how the early church very often shared and held property in common:

In the early church, there was a lot of sharing of resources (e.g. Acts 4: 32- 35; II Corinthians 8: 13- 15). How can the church today learn from these principles?

A number of the parables Jesus told involved people investing or being entrusted with money. Jesus also spoke about “the deceitfulness of wealth”, and how that sometimes gets in the way of our walk with God see Matt 13: 22. Is it important that we have a right relationship with money, and how do we ensure that we do?

(Church of Scotland, 2014)

These sorts of exhortations go beyond simple attempts to persuade congregations of the merits of Credit Unions, but instead they represent an appeal which establishes that Credit Unions as being a modern representation of an ancient Christian tradition and therefore a mission which is not only commensurate with Christian goals, but one which is at the heart of what churches do.

However, the theological case also emerges with a practical one, which resonates with points (1) and (3) raised in the debate in Parliament. As the Church of Scotland said:

[Credit Unions provide] low cost affordable credit which might otherwise be unobtainable to some people.

This is contrasted with the dangers of payday loans who:

offer loans, some with interest rates of over 4,000%. This is another example of how the lowest earners in society can only access the highest rates of credit. Credit union’s [sic.]

have tried to combat these organisations by offering smaller loans, usually between £250 and £1,000, at significantly lower rates.

...

Churches across Scotland can help by telling parishioners about this ethical, low cost, accessible alternative to high street banks.

(Church of Scotland, 2014)

Contributions which are orientated towards Church congregations tend to include more overt theological language than those which are used in the public sphere, and these contributions include more religious themes than submissions in response to calls for information from select committees which are entirely technical and secular in nature. Materials orientated towards congregations, however, echo the practical arguments offered elsewhere. This indicates a strategic choice of Christian elites to do with the sorts of language they speak to different audiences.

In the payday lending debate therefore a picture has emerged. Throughout the debate, both in parliament, and in reports and contributions where government ministers and officials are the intended recipients, there was little or no mention of religious language by the prominent Christian actors who were involved – what mentions which did exist were, with one exception, simply flavour in that they did not constitute core parts of arguments. The core exception to this picture, however, lies within the use of the term usury which is a concept which resonates within both religious and secular contexts. During the debate, usury is endorsed and used by various political actors.

More broadly, and outside this particular exception, Christian groups, such as CAP and the other organisations mentioned here mirror the phenomenon which Reynolds noted: faith organisations tend to reframe faith discourse in universal terms when speaking to broader audiences (Reynolds, 2015, p. 40). The payday lending debate also involved the use of churches as forums for debt advice and credit unions. This required communication of the values and resolutions of the debate to church congregations. This communication was approached in different ways to the debate in parliament and Christian elites adopted a different vocal register when speaking to their coreligionists. For instance, the Church of Scotland in particular framed its communications in an altogether more religious approach when appealing to members of its congregations.

For Christian elites, providing practical support for individuals and engaging with parliament are part of a cohesive strategy, though one with audiences and stakeholders who need to be approached differently. As one interviewee reflected:

we want to be systemic in our approach to social change and, the old Desmond Tutu thing, if you keep fishing people out of the river you have, in the end, to go upstream to go and find out who's throwing them in. And so we try to be analytical about approaching these things so what we are after is about changing systems as well as supporting individuals ... we try to hold together the personal with the social and so inputting into the political sphere - we spend a lot of our time talking to politicians – it's quite important for us if we are to get the sort of systematic change that we want. And we've been quite successful in that, so with the financial inclusion stuff we've been part of getting changes to legislation which ... have limited interest rates on loans.

(Research Interview J)

There is a recognition within the Church of England that often it is other people and organisations that actually have power to effect change. This means that Christian elites do not only approach politicians, but also business leaders, as a spokesman from the Church Urban Fund said:

we're really trying to influence people in positions of power, and so we do some work with politicians, but I don't think politicians are the best of the most powerful people at the moment. And so we do quite a lot of work with bankers banking in the city and so we're trying to influence the city in terms of its decision making... we are having a dinner with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the governor of the Bank of England in November and we will have all of the leading players in the city at that and we're going to talk about how we create a better financial system and so they're quite receptive.

(Research Interview J)

He said further,

the second we started to expose those [the effects of Wonga's business practices] it has mobilised bankers against it as a model.

(Research Interview J)

An Anglican Bishop who had taken part in one such meeting between the Church of England and business leaders, at which the Archbishop of Canterbury was in attendance, spoke about the

surprising receptiveness of business leaders to forms of philosophical and theological discussion concerning the moral dimensions of business:

We were with Business Leaders, very senior Business Leaders in the region and nationally as well ... I knew the Archbishop would operate brilliantly in that environment and he did.

...

I had to chair the discussion. And it turned into a deeply philosophical discussion about: What is the nature of humanity? And how do we enable human beings to be well educated? And Business Leaders also talked about a deep sense of responsibility they had for the welfare of thousands of people. It was as if I was talking to a group of priests and pastors. So they were very keen to talk about philosophical, religious, spiritual issues. To talk about – they didn't want to talk about the mechanics of business; they wanted to talk about the much deeper questions. I do not know how many of them would identify themselves as Christians, but they were very interested in a theological discussion which I did not force.

(Research Interview F)

Conversations and dinners such as this have not been well publicised by the press; whilst Justin Welby was criticised in some quarters for meeting with the TUC, (for instance, he was criticised by Conservatives for 'parroting Labour policy' (Burgess, 2018)), his meetings with big business leaders and the governor of the Bank of England simply escaped wider notice. During his meeting with the TUC, Welby provided a content warning for the large theological content of his speech: 'By the way, I'd better warn you there's quite a bit of God in this. It's sort of my job.' (Welby, 2018) Alluding to Amos 5:24, Justin Welby said:

Five years ago, I said to the Chief Executive of Wonga that I wanted credit unions to compete him out of business. Well he's gone! Today I dream that governments, now and in the future, put church-run food banks out of business. I dream of empty night shelters. I dream of debt advice charities without clients. When justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, the food banks close, the night shelters are empty, families and households are hopeful of better lives for themselves and their children, money is not a tyrant, and justice is seen. (ibid.)

In this sense, whilst speaking to Parliament on this issue, the Church of England spoke using the language of usury, but otherwise were restrained with their use of theological resources. In

meetings with business leaders and unions, it seems that the Church of England found that *doing God* was surprisingly welcome and well understood. The choice of whether Christian elites use religious or secular language seems to be therefore flavoured by the receptiveness of the audience to such arguments. The surprise of Christian elites as to the high level of receptiveness of business leaders to religious (though also other moral) forms of language seems to have been quickly followed by attempts to continue to speak in that register to business leaders.

In the debate around high-cost-short-term credit, Christian elites therefore demonstrated an ability to use a variety of languages and reasons, from economic language, secular values, to theological concepts. Christian elites seemed to be at home speaking each of these languages, and chose which to use strategically, based upon the perceived receptiveness of the audience to such language. Even when speaking to local communities within churches, Christian groups of a variety of denominations used theological reasons as part of communication alongside the language of economics and data. This picture points to a position where, even when speaking with one another, Christian groups are at home with secular language as well as biblical values. This is significant because it relates to theoretical questions of unequal burdens; if Christians are at home using secular language within churches, then they may also be comfortable using them in public discourse.

Conclusion:

The payday lending debate in the United Kingdom ended with a substantial victory for opponents of HCSTC firms. Whilst payday lending firms rapidly rose to prominence in the market for financial products, the legislative response to the human cost paid for their business practices was similarly swift. The efforts spearheaded by Stella Creasy MP were soon joined by Christian elites. The intervention by Christian elites, and especially the widely publicised interventions by the Archbishop of Canterbury, served to raise the profile of the debate in the UK press. In addition to other campaigners, Christian elites played a key role in advocating for a legislative response to HCSTC firms. Primarily, Christian faith actors argued for an interest rate cap on consumer credit, as well as a development of alternative forms of credit to alleviate problems in a market which was not functioning correctly. To the end of promoting alternative forms of credit, Christian elites also worked towards the promotion and provision of Credit Unions. The status of Christian churches as having a presence in many different communities and being involved in practical efforts of debt relief ensured that Christian elites were taken seriously as a distinctive contribution to the debate.

During the debate, Christian faith actors debated within Parliament, in the media, developed scholarly reports, as well as communicating the demands of policy to coreligionists. In reports whose primary audience was government or Parliament, Christian faith actors including (but not limited to) the Churches of England and Scotland, the Trussell Trust, and Christians Against Poverty made very little explicit reference to religious language, and did not justify any of their viewpoints through reference to theological premises. Finally, when Christian actors spoke to business leaders and trade unions, they engaged in theological discussions concerning the nature and ends of the economy.

Chapter Five:

Hunger and Welfare Reform

Introduction

Much about the social and economic life of the United Kingdom in the past decade can be summarised as being to do with two sorts of banks: those that deal with money, and those that deal with food. Foodbanks are a form of food redistribution, usually run on a charitable basis by volunteers. From being relatively uncommon before the economic crash of 2008, foodbanks have become a feature in many towns and cities throughout the United Kingdom. Whilst it is difficult to properly measure how many foodbanks there are in Britain²⁰, a sensible estimate is that around half of the country's foodbanks are operated by the Trussell Trust, a Christian charity, with the remainder being operated by other independent charitable bodies, many of whom are affiliated to different churches of various denominations (Caplan, 2016, p. 6). At the time of writing, the Trussell Trust, through a franchise system with local churches, operates 423 foodbanks (Trussell Trust, 2017).

This chapter examines the growth of foodbanks in the United Kingdom since 2008, looking at who supports them as well as the people who use them. The analysis then proceeds to pay particular attention to the role that Christian elites have played both in debate surrounding this issue and practical engagement on the ground. Ultimately, it is concluded that Christian elites have been central to both the public debate on food banks, as well as in practical action. The investigation shows how this experience of practical engagement in areas such as food banks and debt relief have provided Christian elites with a distinct perspective which they bring in a quantitative and qualitative way in reports and submissions to Parliament, as well as in spoken contributions. Whilst faith discourses prove to be motivational for individual and group behaviour, the reports and spoken submissions brought by Christian elites to public debate are strategically framed within secular terms.

Economic crisis and hunger crisis

²⁰ This is due to the fact that many food banks are independently organised, and that many organisations such as churches give out food aid to the needy in a way which is not formally measured.

Since the 2008 economic crisis, there has been a growing problem of hunger and poverty within advanced Western economies. In response to recession, many nations such as the UK employed policies of austerity where public expenditure was reduced in order to reduce a national budget deficit. According to the OECD, the scale of reductions in public expenditure by the UK was only exceeded by three other EU member states – Greece, Spain and Ireland (Financial Times, 2015). Welfare reforms have formed a key part of this program of cuts. Between 2010-11 and 2015-16, whilst welfare spending increased by £24.4 billion (an increase of 1.7% in real terms), this represented a fall of 0.6% of GDP (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2016, p. 4). Whilst this might seem to be a modest reduction, this decline takes place against a climate of demographic change which, if levels of expenditure relative to the number of service users were maintained, would have resulted in an increase of welfare expenditure of an additional £14.4 billion. Against this backdrop, the coalition government made welfare spending cuts of £19.6 billion, which primarily fell on working age benefits and tax credits, as well as disability benefits. In addition to spending cuts which have already been achieved, the 2017 government led by Prime Minister Theresa May planned to make further savings of a 2.3% real terms reduction (equivalent to 1.4% of GDP). Across the three governments since 2010, this would consequently represent a 2.1% welfare reduction as a share of GDP and an ‘unprecedented’ eight consecutive years of welfare reduction (ibid., p.5).

As the Feeding Britain report of the All Party Parliamentary Group into Hunger in the UK reveals, poverty and hunger is linked to the rising costs of fuel, food and housing where wages have failed to keep pace with the highest rates of inflation amongst advanced Western economies (APPG into Hunger in the United Kingdom, 2014, p. 11). In the face of these economic trends, British families are struggling to put food on the table. In response to this problem of hunger and poverty, there has been an increase in the number of foodbanks distributing food and a corresponding increase in the number of people receiving food parcels. Foodbanks, in their essence as charitable enterprises distributing food to the needy are not new and nor are they particular to the UK. The APPG report charts the growth of foodbank creation and usage amongst advanced Western economies over the last 35 years, writing that,

The first food bank was established in Canada 32 years ago. It had 3,800 food assistance programmes in 2013 – of which 800 were food banks. The French network of emergency food assistance has likewise mushroomed since its first food bank opened in 1984; there are now 2,000 Restos de Couer helping people at risk of going hungry in the winter

months. The birth of the food bank network in Britain began in Salisbury, of all places²¹, in 1999. (APPG into Hunger in the United Kingdom, 2014, p. 11)

Indeed, the UK (like most nations) has a long history of ad hoc responses to food poverty; foodbanks in their current iteration, however, represent a new found professionalisation of this ancient initiative (Lambie, 2011, p. 6)²². As mentioned in the introduction, the large number of different independent foodbank providers makes it difficult to properly measure the growth and use of foodbanks in the UK²³, though the Trussell Trust represents the largest provider. Whilst it is therefore widely agreed that more quantification of foodbank usage is necessary, the Trussell Trust produce statistics on their own services. These figures provide a useful attempt to understand the situation of British hunger. Trussell Trust figures report individual uses of their services but do not provide information as to whether these uses are unique – in other words, whether the same person has used the service more than once. Nonetheless, because their data is always collected and presented in the same way, they provide a useful illustrative tool in understanding the growth in food hunger. The picture which emerges is worrying – in 2011-12, 128,697 three-day supplies were given to people and families in need, in 2016-17 this had risen almost tenfold to 1,128,954 (Trussell Trust, 2017). This rise in users corresponds with a growth in the number of foodbanks themselves, in 2011 there were 148 Trussell Trust foodbanks (Lambie, 2011, p. 2), and in 2017 that number stood at 423 (Trussell Trust, 2017).

A rise in the number of foodbank users is not, however, sufficient to prove that there has been a decreased ability of people to access food. As frustrating as it seems, it is therefore necessary to respond to complaints like Lord Freud's, who in a Lords debate said:

My Lords, there is actually no evidence as to whether the use of food banks is supply led or demand led. The provision of food-bank support has grown from provision to 70,000 individuals two years ago to 347,000. All that predates the reforms. As I say, there is no evidence of a causal link.

(HL Deb 2nd July 2013 vol 746 c 1072)

And further clarified that:

I meant that food from a food bank—the supply—is a free good, and by definition there is an almost infinite demand for a free good.

²¹ Food poverty is affecting communities in the UK which are not ordinarily thought of as centres for poverty.

²² Later in this chapter, the Trussell Trust's method of operation will be discussed.

²³ In addition to the Trussell Trust, Fareshare represents another large foodbank provider (Dowler, 2014, p. 6).

(ibid.)

Lord Freud's complaints correspond to a narrative within the press and regrettably within local government and parliament where foodbank use is understood as a lifestyle choice (Garthwaite, 2016, p. 4). For instance, as part of a broader statement to do with how addiction leads towards foodbank usage, Julia Lepoidevin, a Conservative Councillor for a Local Authority said:

But do colleagues in this chamber never have cases where families make a conscious decision not to pay their rent, their utilities or to provide food for their children because they choose alcohol, drugs and their own selfish needs? ... There are families that have enough income and make a choice.

(Gilbert, 2014)

Fortunately, responses to this worry are now readily available. Over the last decade, there have been a large number of research projects into food insecurity across advanced western economies. Davis and Baumberg Geiger present an analysis which found that food insecurity as measured by deprivation²⁴ has increased across all European nations, with the United Kingdom especially affected. The authors speculated that this particular weakness of the UK could be to do with failings of the UK's benefits system, or perhaps also a reflection of stronger familial support networks in southern European nations which fared better (Davis & Baumberg Geiger, 2017, p. 355). Given the referral system operated by foodbanks like the Trussell Trust, it is possible to examine the reasons why organisations such as the Job Centre, GPs and the Citizens' Advice Bureau refer people to foodbanks. The top three reasons for foodbank referral are to do with low income, benefit delays, and benefit changes, at 26.45%, 26.01% and 16.65%, respectively (Trussell Trust, 2017).

Contrary to Lord Freud's contention, the stigma surrounding foodbank usage, combined with the referral system, seems to prevent 'infinite demand' for their services. A typical picture of foodbank usage is therefore one of last resort. As Garthwaite writes reflecting on her ethnographic study of foodbank use in the UK,

People waited until they had exhausted all other avenues of support available to them, such as relying on family and friends to lend them money, have meals with, or pay off their debts before they asked for a foodbank voucher. Yet the powerful political, media and public discourse continues to question the lifestyles and personal attitudes of

²⁴ Deprivation was measured by respondents who said that they could not afford food and basic essentials.

people using the foodbank, branding them 'undeserving' of support and responsible for their situation.

(Garthwaite [2], 2016, p. 285)

This evidence is further supported by research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation into destitution in the UK²⁵ who describe how foodbank users are acutely aware of a stigma around accessing foodbank services,

Virtually all who had used food banks reported similar feelings of acute shame or embarrassment, routinely using terms like 'demeaning', 'degrading', 'disgusting' about having to seek help in this way, but at the same time were universally grateful for the support they provided.

(Fitzpatrick, et al., 2016, p. 58)

Far from happily seeking out services, individuals in need consequently can be seen to use a variety of coping strategies before seeking foodbank referral. This is a pattern which is mirrored internationally amongst advanced Western economies, such as in Australia where mothers often go without food themselves before seeking help from food charities (McKenzie & McKay, 2017, p. 45). Ultimately, it is also the case that foodbanks are never a long-term solution to food poverty since they do not address the structural causes of poverty – a fact which studies internationally have indicated (Lambie-Mumford & Green, 2017, p. 277; Riches, 2002, p. 661; McKenzie & McKay, 2017, p. 45). Short-term referrals cannot be long-term lifestyle choices. The answer to Lord Freud's question is that the growth in foodbank usage is led by a clear crisis of hunger where people are not otherwise able to feed themselves – and indeed, even with the assistance of foodbanks people are still going hungry or having less nutritious diets (Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999, p. 112).

Bearing in mind the aforementioned welfare cuts, it is clear to see, therefore, that this growth in hunger and foodbank usage is occurring at a time when government is withdrawing support for the needy. As Lambie-Mumford reflects, there 'seems to be a very real danger of the simultaneous entrenchment of emergency food provision and retrenchment of welfare' (Lambie-Mumford H. , 2013, p. 86). This has led to a fear that in the absence of government action, foodbanks could become 'a new version of a residual or 'Poor Law' kind of welfare state' (APPG into Hunger in the United Kingdom, 2014, p. 15). Indeed, strong evidence is emerging that there is a particular

²⁵ Destitution is measured by the JRF as an individual or their children has lacked two or more of the following essentials in a month because they could not afford them: shelter, food, heating their home, lighting their home, appropriate clothing or basic toiletries. An individual is also considered by the JRF to be destitute if they cannot by themselves afford those items (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2016, p. 8).

correlation between foodbank usage and government welfare reductions with studies showing that, controlling for the capacity of individual foodbanks to provide services, there are more food parcels given in areas where welfare cuts have occurred (Reeves, et al., 2015, p. 2).

Many in the literature therefore have mixed feelings about foodbanks, whilst the work of volunteers in setting up food relief charities is universally praised, some worry that the existence of foodbanks allows ‘governments to look the other way’ and to neglect their real responsibilities towards feeding the general public (Riches, 2002, p. 661), and that the erosion of welfare services and their replacement with inadequate charitable provision might lead the two to become synonymous, where service provision becomes discursively framed as a ‘handout’ between people who are not social equals (Garthwaite, 2017, p. 290). Others, however, whilst sensitive to those worries are more optimistic. Whilst recognising that there is a risk that foodbanks might be used to deny that there is governmental responsibility to address the hunger problem in society, charity and the inherent contact between people that it leads to might be part of the solution –

the performance of charity, in the form of provision of food aid, arises from one of our most important attributes: our humanity, and a recognition, however imperfect, that this is shared by the ‘Other’. Far from denying that the situation of food poverty exists, the giving of food aid by volunteers attempts to grapple with it, and therefore cannot be summarily dismissed as just part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

(Caplan, 2016, p. 8)

It is certainly the case that none of those who are closest to providing foodbank services are content to allow the government to avoid their responsibilities. It is to the efforts of foodbank campaigners that this analysis now turns.

Presenting evidence and pointing the finger

The public debate on foodbanks and welfare reform in the United Kingdom may be characterised by a consistent denial on the part of the government that there is any link between an increase in foodbank usage and their welfare reform programme, and a campaign on the part of charities, religious bodies and opposition politicians to show that such a link exists. The previous section demonstrates that the link between welfare cuts and hunger does indeed exist – if the reader remains unconvinced, the referenced publications take a great deal of time to carefully lay out that case. It is not the purpose of this section to demonstrate in that this is the case, but rather to describe how that case was made in public debate in and around Westminster. The following is

therefore a brief and abridged history of the debate on foodbanks in the UK, which at the time of writing has still not reached any conclusion.

Garthwaite rightly points out that the 18th December 2013 Foodbanks debate in the House of Commons was an important occasion in the broader foodbanks debate (Garthwaite, 2016, p. 60). The debate was held after an online petition garnering over 130,000 signatures was presented to parliament (HC Petition 9th December 2013 vol 572). Opposition members²⁶ referred to Trussell Trust statistics in support of their arguments, in terms of the number of parcels delivered, number of foodbanks open, but also in terms of reasons for referral. The primary arguments were twofold – the first was that foodbank numbers were being driven by government welfare cuts and benefit sanctions, for instance Jonathan Ashworth (Labour and Co-operative member for Leicester South) who said:

Increasingly, people in work, and people on benefits, are turning up at food banks because of a series of social security cuts implemented by the Department for Work and Pensions. The food banks in my constituency report increased usage because of the bedroom tax, and not just for food parcels—people who have had to move into private rented accommodation but do not have the appropriate furniture are going to food banks that provide furniture. Food banks report increased usage because of sanctions, delays in appeals and delays in benefit decisions.

(HC Deb 18th December 2013 vol 572 c 838)

The second set of arguments employed by opposition members was focussed upon refuting previous claims relating to the reasons for foodbank usage which had previously been made by government ministers. Here it is important to note that the 18th December 2013 debate was not, as Garthwaite claims, the first Commons debate on this subject (Garthwaite, 2016, p. 60). Prior to this, there were a number of debates in the Commons Chamber as well as Westminster Hall, as well as a small number of oral questions²⁷, and there were debates in the Lords²⁸. Whilst many of the debates

²⁶ An honourable mention goes to Sir Tony Baldry who was then Church Estates Commissioner and Conservative MP for Banbury. Baldry was unafraid to speak the truth regarding foodbanks and referred to a great deal of research undertaken by the Church of England to understand the poverty problem. Whilst he added his name to the noes at the final vote, his voice was 'amongst those standing up for the poor'. (HC Deb 18 December 2013 vol 572 c 832-834).

²⁷ See: HC Deb 14th November 2011 vol 536 cols 448-9; HC Deb 19th December 2012 vol 555 cols 239-262WH; HC Deb 9th January 2013 vol 556 cols 301-302; HC Deb 12th February 2013 vol 558 cols 229-253WH; HC Deb 12th March 2013 vol 560 cols 274-276; HC Deb 3rd July 2013 vol 565 cols 1028-1036; HC Deb 10th October 2013 vol 568 cols 295-296

²⁸ Which Garthwaite does make reference to. See: HL Deb 2nd July 2013 vol 746 cols 1071-1073; HL Deb 26 November 2013 vol 749 cols 1291-1293.

preceding it in the Commons were ostensibly of limited focus, some focussing, for instance on the situation in Wales or Scotland, these debates often brought in evidence, themes and arguments which later began to characterise the debate more broadly. In the 18th December 2013 debate, therefore, Opposition members were referring as much to comments made in those previous debates as they were the comments of the ministers there in the room present. For instance, in opening the debate Maria Eagle (Labour member for Garston and Halewood) makes particular reference to statements in both the Commons and the Lords, referring to Lord Freud who was welfare minister, and then Education Secretary Michael Gove (Conservative member for Surrey Heath):

The Government have tried to claim that the growth in food banks is a case of supply and demand. Lord Freud, the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, suggested that the rise was down to people seeking out food because it was free. He said:

“by definition there is an almost infinite demand for a free good.”—[Official Report, House of Lords, 2 July 2013; Vol. 746, c. 1072.]

Yet everyone who receives food from a food bank is referred there by a front-line organisation and, therefore, verified as being in a crisis situation

...

To suggest that people can just arrive at a food bank asking for free food shows just how out of touch Ministers are with the way food banks work. The Trussell Trust is very clear: over 50% of referral agents are statutory agencies, and referrers include doctors, social workers, school liaison officers and citizens advice bureaux advisers. These professionals make sure that people turning to food banks are in genuine crisis.

People are using food banks not out of choice, but out of necessity, yet Ministers still refuse to listen. The Education Secretary has claimed that people are turning to food banks because

“they are not best able to manage their finances.”—[Official Report, 9 September 2013; Vol. 567, c. 681.]

How insulting, patronising and out of touch is that comment.

(HC Deb 18th December 2013 vol 572 c 809 references in square brackets are those directly copied from Hansard)

The primary response of government ministers was to lay the blame for many of the contributing factors to the hunger crisis at the doorstep of the previous Labour government²⁹. In particular, Esther McVey, the Minister of State for Employment said that Labour was responsible for the crisis in two different ways. Firstly, McVey claims that Labour was responsible for increasing the cost of living by presiding over a time where ‘Gas bills doubled, council tax doubled and fuel duty went up 12 times’ (HC Deb 18th December 2013, vol 572 c 812). Secondly, McVey claims that Labour is responsible because they led the economy into an economic crisis which has resulted in unemployment, underemployment, and necessitated welfare reform (ibid., c. 813). Consequently, the government’s line is that increased foodbank usage has nothing to do with government welfare reforms, and everything to do with the previous government’s performance. Curiously, McVey makes a final argumentative turn which is very interesting –

In the UK, it is right to say that more people are visiting food banks, as we would expect. ... Times are tough and we all have to pay back the £1.5 trillion of personal debt, which spiralled under Labour. We are all trying to live within our means, change the gear, and ensure we are paying back all the debt that we saw under Labour. (ibid., c. 814)

It would seem that this is an admission that foodbank usage is in some way necessary, inevitable, or perhaps desirable. The contention is therefore that government welfare reforms are not responsible for the rise in foodbank usage, but even if those reforms are responsible for such a rise, those reforms are themselves necessary because of Labour’s performance and consequently the rise in foodbank usage is wholly the fault of the previous government. At no point does the minister allow that the government is responsible for the hunger crisis. When it comes to describing the reasons for foodbank usage, members of government are likely to describe the rise as a result of a variety of factors and not any single reason (HC Deb 18th December 2013 vol 572 c 847).

Whilst the Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)³⁰ was not present in the debate actual, his comments formed the official response of the government

²⁹ This argument, however, has had rather less traction in recent years.

³⁰ It is DEFRA who has been most involved with issues of food and hunger in the UK. With DEFRA’s remit being separate from that of the DWP, this has meant that the issue is primarily considered by a department whose focus is not on welfare which in some way separates the government response to this issue (Lambie-Mumford H. , 2013, p. 86). This seems to be a conscious choice – with the government line consistently being that foodbanks are not part of the welfare system (HL Deb 2nd July 2013 vol 746 c 1071) (and perhaps therefore their discussion ought therefore not properly be considered by welfare ministers). Having said that, in the 18th December 2013 Foodbanks Debate, DEFRA did not send a minister, and instead the government was represented by Esther McVey, the Minister of State for Employment in the DWP (HC Deb 18th December 2013 vol 572 c 806).

to the public petition. This signposted the support available through hardship payments and benefits for those who are in need, as well as claiming that the proportion of income spent on food has remained static for low income families (HC Observation 1st July 2014 vol 583); the reply in essence denies the existence of a problem. This is a different response to that employed by McVey in the debate. In this reply, the Secretary of State makes reference to DEFRA's published data in its 2012 Family Food report. The Family Food reports do indeed show that for the time period investigated that there had been no significant change in the proportion of income spent on food, but this is to do with the way in which its findings are presented. In its summary, the 2012 Family Food report present the percentage of spend on food and non-alcoholic drinks by the lowest 20% of equivalised income (DEFRA, 2012, p. v), the later APPG report, Feeding Britain, shows that the largest problem is in fact in the lowest income decile, where food expenditure did rise, and combined spending of food, bills and fuel rose dramatically from 31% to 40% of income from 2003 to 2011 (APPG into Hunger in the United Kingdom, 2014, p. 12). Furthermore, the Family Food report, in its detailed breakdown does in fact present that there had been a 12% food price rise in real terms from 2007 to 2012 (DEFRA, 2012, p. 47). DEFRA also comments that its figures of percentage household expenditure hide another truth – that the lowest 10% of families purchased 5.7% less food by weight over the same period, and that the energy content of meals of the lowest two income decile families in 2012 was below that of its 2007 level (ibid., p. 51). In not mentioning these facts, the Secretary of State seems to be stretching the idea of what can be considered a truthful response.

Subsequently, the debate continued along similar lines. Government ministers continued to insist that their welfare reforms have no effect on foodbank attendance, and that the actual reasons behind foodbank usage are complex³¹ –

For instance, Priti Patel said in June 2015:

We have looked at the issue extensively, and we agree with the conclusion reached by the all-party parliamentary inquiry into hunger that the reasons for food bank use are complex and overlapping. There is no robust evidence that directly links sanctions and food bank use. (HC Deb 22nd June 2015 vol 597 c 608)³²

³¹ As an argumentative strategy, the insistence that the reasons for foodbank usage are very complex has the benefit of making the causes seem mysterious and beyond government control.

³² At this debate, fellow Conservative MP Andrew Percy (Brig and Goole) said that an independent foodbank in his constituency had told him that sanctions were causing foodbank referrals, leading the MP to wonder at the rightness of the way in which sanctions are employed (HC Deb 22nd June 2015 vol 597 c 609)

Or as Damian Hinds said in October 2017, responding to Frank Field's contention that the rollout of the newest welfare reform, Universal Credit, was causing increases in foodbank usage:

The right hon. Gentleman is of course right that he has raised that point a number of times. I think last time he raised it, he put it in the context specifically of Christmas. I am aware that organisations like food banks do have an increase in their activity at Christmas-time. I think we have to be careful in ascribing the reasons for the usage of food banks to individual or simple causes.

(HC Deb 24th October 2017 vol 630 c 190)

And opposition members (and increasingly now Conservative members) continue to assert there is such a link. Increasingly, opposition members are also armed with an array of information and reports. These reports, and the people who produce them will be considered most properly in the next section.

Christians and British Hunger

Before looking into the actions of Christian groups and their roles in the hunger and foodbanks debate in the United Kingdom, a small disclaimer is first necessary. As with the other chapters in this paper, this chapter's focus on the actions of Christians is not intended to take away or discredit the actions of those of different faiths or none. Whilst the Trussell Trust is a Christian charity and it runs the largest numbers of foodbanks in the United Kingdom, the second largest group, FareShare, is a non-religiously affiliated charity which does wonderful foodbank and food work in the UK (FareShare, 2018). Their work is to be encouraged, and the author encourages the reader to learn more about what they do. Christian groups, however, are the focus of this thesis, and so it is to their role in this debate that the chapter now turns.

Interestingly, the first debate entitled Food Banks in the House of Commons was in 2011 when an Oral Question was asked of the Church Estates Commissioner which read 'What steps the Church of England has taken to support food banks' (HC Deb 24th November 2011 vol 536 c 448). The brief exchanges between members and the Church Estates Commissioner were non-adversarial, and non-partisan: the same cannot be said for the other exchanges in Parliament. In other debates, the work of foodbank charities, whilst universally lauded, became a political football of sorts to be passed

from party to party. Each party – Labour, Conservative, SNP, and after 2015 Liberal Democrats³³ passed blame onto one another.

Prior to the beginning of the debate in Parliament, and whilst it continued to rage on, Christian elites and groups were responding to the immediate need. Conservative MPs are correct when pointing out that foodbanks first began to grow in the UK in the Labour governments preceding their rule – what they are perhaps less keen on talking about is how the rise in foodbank usage has been more than tenfold during the time they have been in office (Perry, Williams, Sefton, & Haddad, 2014, p. 15). Consequently, one of the key ways in which Christians have been responding to the crisis of hunger in the United Kingdom has been through the alleviation of the immediate need. The second area in which Christian elites have become involved in dealing with the UK hunger crisis has been in campaigning and providing information and research to contribute to public debate. This section will investigate how Christian elites have become involved in these two different ways, as well as talking about how Christian values have been talked about in these different contexts.

Christians in Action

As mentioned, the largest provider of foodbank services in the UK is the Trussell Trust, and many of the remaining providers are affiliated with different churches (Caplan, 2016, p. 6). These foodbanks are places which provide emergency food relief for families who cannot make ends meet. Whilst independent foodbanks are free to operate as they wish, the Trussell Trust operates a franchise system. This franchise system is run in conjunction with local churches, who are asked to make a contribution of £1500 in the first year of the foodbank's operation, and a further £360 each consecutive year. In return, the church receives a great deal of support from the Trussell Trust, including training, an operating manual, a website, ongoing support and audits as well as a name which is recognised by local supermarkets and firms (The Trussell Trust, 2018).

These foodbanks are in turn supported by individuals, but also organisations. Individuals may volunteer in different ways to help out at foodbanks and contribute as much as they feel able, Volunteers at the foodbanks do not make decisions on the eligibility of individuals to access foodbank services, instead individuals are referred to foodbanks and only those with referrals (and the attendant red vouchers) are able to access foodbank services. Individuals may also donate food or money to the operation of the foodbanks, with gift aid available to UK taxpayers (The Trussell Trust [2], 2018). Tesco is also a strong supporter of the Trussell Trust (as well as FareShare), and it

³³ During the coalition years, Liberal Democrat members were quite silent on the matter.

has run food collections at its supermarkets since 2012. These food collections take the form of annual events, but also permanent collection points in many of its stores. Shoppers are encouraged to donate food and the company 'tops up' this food by 20%, which ensures that they do not profit from the food bought for charity. Tesco also donates its surplus food to Fareshare where food not used at the end of the day is picked up free of charge. Since this 2012 and in these ways, Tesco has collected over 46 million meals. (TESCO, 2018).

Individuals with referrals who visit the foodbank are given a three-day parcel of food, which contains a nutritionally balanced diet for those three days. The Trust are also keen to stress that foodbanks provide a lot more than simply food, and a variety of initiatives, as well as a simple listening ear are often available at these centres. (The Trussell Trust, 2018). Not available in foodbanks, however, are the job advisors which were planned to be placed in foodbanks by the former Work and Pensions Secretary (Cowburn, 2016). In a reply to an online petition, the Trust rejected that they had been involved in such plans and spoke of a wish to not 'jeopardise the non-judgemental environment' within their foodbanks, as well as being very clear that many foodbank visitors are in work, and rearticulating their opposition to government practice (The Trussell Trust, 2015).

The majority of foodbank volunteers are Christian (Garthwaite, 2016, p. 29)³⁴, and as mentioned, the foodbanks are run in conjunction with local churches. On its website, the Trust is very clear about its Christian roots and on its website lists its 'mission verse' as Matthew 25:35-36, which reads

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

(Mt 25:35-36 NIV)

It is this Christian imperative which is at the heart of what motivates Christian people at all levels of the Trussell Trust. Lambie in her report on the Trust writes that it is this faith which is key to the growth of the organisation's foodbank operations in two key ways:

The findings suggest that the faith basis of the Foodbank initiative is an important factor in explaining the rapid growth and success of the franchise for two key reasons. Firstly, the Foodbank provides Christians with a tool for undertaking the social action work that their faith calls them to do. Secondly, by prescribing that Foodbanks are church-led

³⁴ Though volunteers of all faiths and none are welcome.

there is an inherent capacity for nation-wide growth given the geographical reach of churches across the country.

(Lambie, 2011, p. 14)

Lambie's research involved interviews with people at different levels of the trust, from strategic level actors, to managers, and Garthwaite's work involved ethnography with volunteers³⁵. People at all of these levels referred to different Bible passages and religious motivations for their involvement with the Trust. Their involvement and work with the trust was a part of 'living out' their faith (Garthwaite, 2016, p. 27; Lambie, 2011, p. 14). Similarly, a representative of the trust in interviewed as part of this thesis explained how faith as well as deep personal experiences had been a core part of how he came to work there,

I have been working for the last sort of 16-17 years in explicitly faith-based Charities. I worked for the Catholic church for 8 or 9 years ... I'd had a kind of particular personal circumstance which was a friend of mine sadly committed suicide who was suffering badly with mental health issues. I kind of felt pretty moved by ... just recognizing that there was a real kind of gap in the social fabric that should have been there to kind of protect him, and I really wanted to kind of do something that was much more practically minded to try and help, not necessarily directly into that very particular space, but just the general kind of increasing absence of support for people who were vulnerable. And so Trussell in that sense was a brilliant kind of fit for me. And then I guess lastly there was also a kind of faith motivation too... I became increasingly aware of the work the trust where I haven't been very directly involved in the past ... you know, that seemed to be a bit more of a spiritual attraction there as well as the kind of very practical stuff.

(Research Interview T)

In the same way as many individuals are motivated to join the trust's work, Christian churches and communities seek to become hosts for foodbanks for faith reasons. These faith reasons, however, vary from church to church and over time. As one interview subject said:

there are examples and people themselves would self-report that there were Church communities, particularly of a more evangelical tradition, that also saw foodbanks as a way of exhibiting or displaying God's love in a very visible way that might open up conversation about kind of more, other forms of hunger ... I think actually the food bank

³⁵ The work of this project therefore joins a growing body of literature.

network over the last eight or nine years ... it's possibly one of the areas that has I think enriched, challenged, provoked and created very fascinating conversation about that the kind of evangelism/ social justice tension and has helped a lot of churches who would have viewed social justice simply as a tool previously to understand a little bit more about what announcing the Kingdom looks like more in its fullness. And you know, we have some Churches who are in our network who have absolutely gone on a journey... starting at a point where it was definitely about direct proclamation and evangelism, and are now in a very different space of how they act as a church and how they kind of think about that process of serving their local community

(Research Interview T) .

It is clear therefore that Christian values are at the heart of what motivates and guides the Trussell Trust, and that these values motivate many Christian people to get involved. However, the majority (85% according to an interview subject) of Trussell Trust foodbanks also benefit from the help of non-Christians. However, in these instances, the trust does not conceive of Christian values as being an obstacle for involvement. Instead, Christian values are instead understood to be universal values throughout society:

[the Christian values of compassion and human dignity] have traction in the sense of I think that they are universal values which have motivated people ... they're the values that I think express something about what it means to be, or what people hope it means to be a citizen of this country.

(Research Interview T)

In this sense, Christian values are understood to be shared values. Here, values of compassion and human dignity represent a framing of Christian values in a manner which resonates in the secular sphere with people who are not Christian. For the Trussell Trust, this framing of Christian values in a way which is accessible to non-Christians, as well as having theological depth is a conscious strategic choice:

for some of us there is a kind of another lens or another layer to those values that needs to be informed by theology ... informed by, shaped by, and kind of challenged by, and spoken to by Christian tradition and scripture ... and that allows people who come from

Christian background or any kind of faith background or indeed through outside faith ... to read a rich narrative onto those values that can help them kind of dwell in them even more. So the vision needs to be wholly a vision of the Kingdom ... but you don't need the theological part in order to kind of engage with them.

(Research Interview T)

The Trust therefore chooses a language which is authentically Christian, but framed in ways which sustain the levels of engagement from non-Christian volunteers and political actors.

Christian Groups and Research

The second way that Christian groups have been involved in the debate of foodbanks in the United Kingdom has been through contributing to a need for research into foodbank usage. Christian groups (with the Trussell Trust perhaps chief among them), have contributed a great deal of research and expertise to the debate around hunger and foodbanks. Whilst data has been contributed by other bodies (such as the DWP, and local authorities), the data and research provided, or funded by, Christian groups has formed the majority of research which has informed the debate. This research is presented in a neutral tone and refers to facts and figures, and not theological premises. The primary focusses of this research have been to do with: answering questions about who the users of foodbanks are and what are the circumstances that have led them to seek out foodbanks; answering questions about the effects that government welfare reforms have had on foodbank usage; and proposing solutions and policy proposals to do with the alleviation of the crisis. Some of this research was commissioned by Christian groups at their own impetus, and some of the research was presented in response to government calls for information. A great deal of the research was done in conjunction with universities across the UK with scholars from Warwick, Coventry and Oxford universities playing a particularly prominent role. The following section is a summary of that research and its findings, as well as how it fits in with the broader strategies of the organisations who commissioned them.

It seems logical to continue with a focus on the Trussell Trust before moving onto the research efforts of other Christian bodies. In interview with an Anglican Bishop, it was revealed that the research of the Trussell Trust stems from the experience of ministering the practical needs of people in deep hardship who come to the foodbanks:

the sort of chair of the [local] foodbank, which is a Trussell Trust foodbank, spoke for five minutes, and he was extraordinary. He spoke about the fact that he was a retired GP and had volunteered to help with the food bank, but didn't really understand what it was about, and had become - this is not quite his words - but he had become radicalised through his involvement at the food bank. So his engagement as a volunteer led him to get really angry about the fact that there were food banks at all. He spoke in a very quiet English way, but it was very passionate and compassionate and everybody in the room kind of, you know it was one of those moments, where we can conquer the evening.

(Research Interview A)

It is this kind of passion born out of compassion which is the central driving emotion behind a drive within the Trust towards research. The Trust has a clear section on its website where it signposts the visitor to all of its research output and involvement. The Trust has made eight key research papers, reports and submissions from 2014, when it released its report *Below the Breadline*, in conjunction with Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam, whose main contention is that 'changes to the social security system are a driver of food poverty' (Cooper, Purcell, & Jackson, 2014, p. 4). Church Action on Poverty is an ecumenical Christian charity which is a national campaigning body on poverty, but which also has some grassroots projects in communities (Church Action on Poverty, 2011). The report contains a set of eleven recommendations to government to do with strengthening the welfare safety net for people in the UK, to make changes to the sanctions system, and more general recommendations to reduce food poverty (Cooper, Purcell, & Jackson, 2014, p. 5).

The Trussell Trust also twice contributed with evidence to Work and Pensions Select Committees. The first was a submission to the committee enquiry into benefit sanctions where the Trust showed strong evidence of hardship manufactured by the DWP's policies, concluding that 'Trussell Trust foodbanks across the UK have reported an increase in numbers needing emergency food from foodbanks as a direct consequence of sanctions, many of which have appeared to be unfair' (The Trussell Trust, 2015, p. 9). This enquiry ultimately concluded with a number of criticisms of the DWP – they were as follows: that 'Benefit sanctions affect a large number of people, sometimes leading to hardship and undermining efforts to find work'; that sanctions are 'imposed inconsistently' from place to place; that the DWP has no data to assess whether benefit sanctions have any beneficial effects on the employment prospects of claimants; the DWP 'does not understand the wider effects of sanctions'; and that sanctioning housing benefits can cause particular hardship. Each of these

criticisms was accepted by Government (HM Treasury, 2017, pp. 1-2). The department's report summary wrote that:

There is an unacceptable amount of unexplained variation in the Department's use of sanctions, so claimants are being treated differently depending on where they live. The Department has poor data and therefore cannot be confident about what approaches work best, and why, and what is not working. It does not know whether vulnerable people are protected as they are meant to be. Nor can it estimate the wider effects of sanctions on people and their overall cost, or benefit, to government.

(Committee of Public Accounts, 2017, p. 3)

On the face of it at least, this seems to be a strong policy success for the Trussell Trust and fellow campaigners. The second submission, submitted to the Select Committee for Benefit Delivery, did also enjoy some success, with much of what the Trussell Trust (and 67 other contributing groups) said being taken on. In particular, the Trussell Trust raised awareness to do with how welfare delays and underpayments cause hardship (The Trussell Trust, 2015, p. 7), something which was reflected in the Select Committee's final report³⁶ (Work and Pensions Committee, 2015, p. 31).

The majority of the Trussell Trust's full-length reports are co-published with a variety of other groups, some of which are Christian. For instance, the 2014 Emergency Use Only report, whose core thesis was centred around establishing that foodbank usage occurs as something of last resort when government emergency support fails (Perry, Williams, Sefton, & Haddad, 2014, p. 7), was published with the Child Poverty Action Group, Oxfam, and the Church of England³⁷.

The first full-length solo published report produced by the Trussell Trust is the recent Early Warnings report which focusses on the effects of Universal Credit on foodbank usage. The report paints a picture of increased positive engagement between the DWP and the Trust, pointing towards a possibility of substantive change in government policy in the future, but it also paints a very clear picture that Universal Credit rollout to areas has resulted in a more than doubling of the rate of foodbank referral (The Trussell Trust, 2017, p. 2). The Trust also published A Local Jigsaw

³⁶ Though not specifically mentioning the TT.

³⁷ The report's description of the Church of England in its 'about the authors' section introduces the Church in some ways which resonate more with a Christian audience, describing its role as 'proclaiming the Christian gospel', but also in ways which resonate in a broader audience, describing it as 'strengthening community life in numerous urban, suburban and rural settings' (ibid., p. 6), thereby in a short form introducing itself to two audiences.

which pointed to the dangers posed by reductions in funding to local welfare assistance schemes which were undertaken for reasons independent of need for such provision³⁸ (Hadfield-Spoor, Lemon, Jitendra, & Thorogood, 2017, p. 8). This research was undertaken with data from local authorities, as well as the Trust and was undertaken by the Trust itself (ibid., p. 11). The Trust has also done a great deal of research in conjunction with the University of Oxford, publishing research on the profiles of people who receive food parcels from the Trust foodbank network (Loopstra & Lalor, 2017).³⁹.

A particular feature of Trussell Trust reports is that, in combination with well-presented data and statistics, there is a distinct qualitative dimension to their research. This qualitative core often consists of case studies, such as in their submission to the Work and Pensions Select Committee (The Trussell Trust, 2015). These case studies include the voices of real individuals who have suffered hardship, which are amplified by the Trust and passed to government. In this sense, whilst the Trust does a great deal of work towards providing a vital evidence-based approach for legislation in this area, it also centralises the human person within their work to ensure that numbers do not obscure humanity within debate.

Christians Against Poverty (not to be confused with Church Action on Poverty), has also been active in providing research, informing debate. CAP's research is, similarly neutral. There is a similar theme with CAP's research of centralising the experiences of real people, for instance with their 2016 client report including a double page spread of 'Mark's story', including a photograph of Mark (Christians Against Poverty, 2017, pp. 8-9).

Church Action on Poverty is also involved in producing research to contribute to the debate on hunger and poverty, and has particularly called upon devolved and national government to help reduce the proportion that families spend on their food, fuel, and other essentials (McBride & Purcell, 2014, p. 4)⁴⁰. Church Action on Poverty has a wide spread of reports, some of which are more clearly focussed with a Christian audience in mind. This means that the group at times is perhaps an exception to the neutral tone other groups adopt, since some of their reports do include recourse to religious beliefs, but this seems to be largely the case in recent reports which appear to be aimed at a church, rather than government, audience (for example: Bickerton, 2017).

³⁸ Need seems to have increased whilst funding has decreased.

³⁹ This research was funded by the ESRC and The Trussell Trust.

⁴⁰ This report drew evidence from a project delivered jointly with the Iona Community, Christian Aid Scotland, Faith in Community Scotland, and with funding from the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church (McBride & Purcell, 2014, p. 2)..

It is important to understand that these interventions take place against the backdrop of the aforementioned negative portrayals of those who access foodbanks and welfare both from those in government and in the media, where providing data and explanation of poverty is not a value-neutral exercise. A particularly notable contribution here is the Joint Public Issues team (JPIT), who represent the Methodist Church, the United Reform Church, the Baptist Union and the Church of Scotland. In interview with a senior member of their team, JPIT's opposition to Universal Credit is shown to be clearly more than one of implementation:

But since 2008 it has become obvious that poverty and the experience of poverty is going to get worse and ... from 2010 it was clear that the driving force behind that was welfare reforms and the way in which welfare was being changed ... So we did a number of campaigns: one called Truth and Lies about poverty which was around attitudes to those who experienced poverty; Rethink Sanctions – the outcome of thinking that those who experienced poverty are essentially unpleasant and that poverty and immorality are essentially synonyms is that you then take a punitive and unpleasant attitude towards them and sanctions is the way forward with that.

the reason why ... we thought that [Universal Credit: Poverty by Design] was a happy play on words is that the prevailing narrative in Universal Credit is 'oh... I agree with the principle of Universal Credit, however ... ' Now, what has become clear is that the principal is somewhat flaky and, as it is baked into the design of Universal Credit, it is awful ... the fundamental is that Universal Credit distrusts claimants – it checks up on them again and again and again, and again ... this is a welfare system saying 53 billion pounds, 57 billion pounds a year to change attitudes and behaviours [Interviewer: Not to look after people?] No. Out of all of its outputs on all of these measures of whether it's successful don't include whether or not the children go to bed hungry ... in places there is a deliberate choice to use hardship as a way of ... starving people is a good way to change behaviour. It definitely will do that. And yeah and there are places in that design which are open to the fact that you can use hardship to change the behaviours and parents. So you are essentially denying children what they need to survive to shape behaviours to be more suitable to the workplace. I mean one it's bloody stupid. It's not going to work but two ... that you would contemplate using that as a ... it's just immoral, just immoral. That's that's why it says by design, we definitely want poverty to increase because it will help achieve what we think are our aims.

(Research Interview E)

JPIT has an array of different reports and materials, some of which are church-facing (and which adopt a more overtly theological tone), and others are aimed more closely at policymakers.

The purpose of the Joint Public Issues Team is to essentially face two ways. It is to look towards the churches and try to ascertain what it is that they are concerned about and what ... the public issues and social issues that are affecting them and they wish to be they think should be prominent in the public sphere and it's also to look towards and say these are the things that from our experience you should be concerned about and you should be engaged with. And then the other direction is we face towards government so we do campaigns work lobbying work and things like that.

(Research Interview E)

The member of JPIT interviewed was explicit in the rationale behind the use of religious language in reports:

We thought that [speaking about Jesus] will convince people in the church. People in the church... who think this is all political nonsense

...

Frankly, if you can if you can tighten or loosen the noose of the sanction system by not mentioning Jesus ... I think Jesus would like me for doing it, but my, my default would be to do so because it's where I'm coming from and it would be dishonest not to. But if it- if it doesn't help people, then you get rid of it.

(Research Interview E)

In this way, there is an emerging picture where Christian research bodies are contributing towards the debate using facts and figures, and that they do so because that in this debate they understand that it will be the most likely to communicate. Christian groups use overtly

theological language to speak to their own groups to communicate between national and local levels but use secular language in the public sphere. One interview participant, unprompted, quoted Habermas:

There are a number of issues around about speaking Christianese into the public sphere. One is that, in attending to particulars in the church, we have lost the universal. And so things like gender and sexuality, which for me are second order issues, they're not primary issues, primary issues are around freedom, and equality, and justice, and so we have got ourselves caught up in in this story which is not the primary story of the Church. So that means that when we try to speak into the public sphere about justice, and equality, and freedom, we are not really taken all that seriously because we have slightly dodgy views ... things that are now normally considered to be issues of equality. So our voice doesn't ring true in the public sphere when we speak in Christian language. So what we have to do is we have to go to Jürgen Habermas and engage in the process of translation, so where St. Paul talks about there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male or female, we are all included, we talk about equality, and where Jesus talks about freedom and being free in Christ to be who we are, we have to turn that into freedom and agency, and when we look at the prophets, we have to turn that into issues of social justice rather than issues of the rightness of structures ... So I think it is very difficult for Christians to speak into the public sphere using Christian language, but I don't think it's all that difficult to do a translation and end up with exactly the same principles and then when people are firmly on the journey you can talk to them about where those principles are coming from but if you start off in Christianese generally you are misunderstood.

(Research Interview J)

In this way, in this particular debate, Christian contributions, linguistically, are often purposefully not distinct. What is distinct about Christian contributions in this debate is that they have attempted to centralise the experience of the human person, and to give voice to the voiceless. However, despite widespread use of statistics by politicians involved in the debate around foodbanks and welfare reform which are generated by Christian groups, this does not mean that conversations surrounding those statistics were always helpful:

I think at times some of the statistics that we have gathered have been used to shame or to force a kind of almost party-political kind of agenda ... Therefore there's been a relationship break down sometimes with some people who are ... working in the public sphere. Yeah, that's led to accusations of inaccuracy around data gathering and various unhelpful conversations between those who are working in the political sphere and those who are doing this kind of voluntary work. And so that kind of mode of adversarial using data as a kind of weapon would have characterized some of the public discourse around foodbanks particularly in the early years of the 2010s

(Research Interview T)

Consequently, in recent years another characteristic approach of Christian groups in this area has been to adopt a non-adversarial and relationship-driven approach:

more recently we have found a much better way of working with those in public office and I think that that way is based much more on relationship. So I would say relationship actually is ... what fundamentally drives positive change, because the minute you kind of lose relationship with one another it does then become a kind of adversarial weaponizing of information, whereas relationship allows for context.

(Research Interview T)

The analysis will now turn to Christian contributions to the discussion within Parliament.

Christians in Parliament

Having outlined the ways in which Christian groups engaged with the problem of hunger in the UK through taking practical action to alleviate immediate suffering, and through providing research to provide an empirical grounding to deliberation, this analysis will now turn to the manner in which Christian groups specifically engaged in debate in Parliament. In particular, the Church of England has had a high profile form of engagement in both houses of Parliament.

As mentioned before, the Church of England has also been involved in supplying research for the foodbanks debate⁴¹. The All-Party Parliamentary inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom was

⁴¹ Of course, many of the churches who hosted Trussell Trust foodbanks are from the Church of England.

funded by the Archbishop of Canterbury's charitable trust⁴², and chaired by the former Bishop of Truro Tim Thornton⁴³ (APPG into Hunger in the United Kingdom, 2014, p. 1;4). The Feeding Britain report which the group subsequently produced was a wide-ranging report which explored various different ways in which people become vulnerable to food poverty and therefore having need of foodbanks. In correspondence with the researcher, Frank Field⁴⁴ said that the report was funded by the Archbishop after he had asked for the Archbishop to fund it:

From the moment I mentioned to the Archbishop that a cross-party group of us wanted to run an inquiry into the need for food banks – almost all of which are run by Church groups and people of good will who work or volunteer with Christian bodies – he was really keen to offer any support we needed. He immediately suggested that I talk further about the idea with the then Bishop of Truro, Tim Thornton, who went on to co-chair the inquiry with me.

In interview, Bishop Tim Thornton, said that his involvement came out of a mixture of his own experience with working with foodbanks in his then diocese, and being asked by the Archbishop to get in contact:

I happened to be somewhere where I bumped into the Archbishop who said that he'd been talking to Frank Field who wanted to kind of think about some sort of inquiry into why food banks are growing and Justin said to me, you know, I was really taken with what was going on your part of the world. Would you be interested in talking to Frank about whether you might be involved and so I met Frank Field and we talked about it and, after various shenanigans and negotiations, it ended up that I co-chaired the inquiry into why food banks were on the rise in the way that they are

(Research Interview A)

⁴² The charity commission lists the aims of the ABC's charitable trust as being to 'Make grants, provide goods/services/facilities for the following charitable purposes; advance & promote Christian Religion & Education in the faith & practices of the Church of England; promote religious & charitable work of the Church worldwide including through relief of poverty & sickness, training for Ministry, support of ministers/their families & provision of facilities [sic.] for public worship' (Charity Commission, 2017). Support for the APPG seems to be commensurate with its aim to relieve poverty.

⁴³ Thornton is now Bishop of Lambeth, Bishop to the Forces, and Bishop of the Falkland Islands.

⁴⁴ Field is now independent member for Birkenhead and member of General Synod.

In this way, it is clear that the Church of England's involvement in Feeding Britain came about as a result of direction from the highest level, with Archbishop Justin funding the report and seeking out specific people to chair it.

Feeding Britain was a cross-party effort, but one which was united by shared worries and concerns. Field explained that the 'members of Feeding Britain were just fed up with how the government had fallen in to a trap with slagging off food banks'. In this sense, the report was therefore produced in direct response to a frustration with how the discussion was faring in Parliament, and also out of a fear expressed by Mr Field 'that food banks, and then social supermarkets, which just give away food, or seek donations back, will institutionalise this aspect of poverty'. The report outlines key areas such as benefit sanctions and delays where government policy has contributed towards hardship, but broadly speaking (as is to be expected from a cross-party effort) the report remains fairly neutral as regarding the culpability of different parties. Nonetheless, the report makes a number of recommendations for how government can reduce food poverty, and its central arguments which outline the manner in which material factors have contributed towards foodbank need refute central government arguments that demand for foodbank is independent of hardship, for instance being to do with increased public awareness of their activity (Wintour, 2014). A particular aim of the report was, as was with the case of the Trussell Trust's research, to centralise the experience and the hardship of real people. As Bishop Tim Thornton said:

I think we were very clear at the time... that we wanted to get the voices of those who were in real need out into the open.

(Research Interview A)

The report met with a good degree of success, though in other areas recommendations fell on deaf ears, as Bishop Thornton said in interview:

We had 77 recommendations in the report and I'm pleased to say that some of those very quickly were acted upon. Some of them that are very sadly not gone anywhere near being acted upon.

(Research Interview A)

Frank Field, in correspondence, similarly struck a mixed tone where the report had met with great success in some areas, but in others work still needed to be done.

Feeding Britain was, in many respects, a breakthrough moment in the way politicians and the public understood and responded to the hunger that has been afflicting too many of our fellow citizens. Here was a serious cross-party effort to explain what we had found out about the injustice of hunger in modern Britain and, with unbelievably impressive backing from the Archbishop of Canterbury, we had published a blueprint for dealing with it. The Government's mind was focused in those first few days following the report, on a series of immediate changes that could be made to the benefits system. Now it is beginning to implement one of our major recommendations for providing free meals and activities for poorer children during school holidays, while the number of school breakfast clubs continues to grow. It has also given much greater attention and accompanying resources to the redistribution of surplus food to those frontline bodies helping to tackle hunger and its root causes. Arguably the most effective action from the authorities was taken by HMRC and Ofgem, both of whom implemented our recommendations around tax credits and energy costs for large numbers of poorer people. The greatest source of frustration lies within the benefits system – Universal Credit, in particular – where the process of trying to gain urgent and necessary reforms continues to present stern challenges.

In this context, it may be seen that, as with other Christian research, the APPG used the language of research – facts, figures and data. What is distinctive about this approach, here, and with other groups, lies with the link between lived experience and research. The experience of practical care, and the encounter with hurting people seems motivational for the research process, and it contributes a particular flavour. In particular, the research of the APPG and other Christian groups has had a particular feature of giving a voice to the voiceless – centralising the human person as the living being, rather than as a statistic. This strategy of Christian elites to combine lived experience and real stories with data has proven an effective medium with which to speak to government actors.

As well as being involved in the APPG in the ways described above, the Church of England was active more directly through its Bishops. What follows are the main arguments advanced by the Lords Spiritual in this debate, as well as short excerpts of what was said to illustrate. Here, Christian elites choose to frame their contributions in secular terms, often focusing on practicalities, statistics, as well as terminology such as 'bridging social capital' – demonstrating a clear drive to speak the same sorts of language as government. Christian faith values concerning a Gospel

concern for the poor are clearly motivational for intervention, but discourse is framed in secular language:

Given the rise in foodbank use, how might their work and the work of churches be better supported?

Food: Prices, 14th November 2011, Vol 732, Col 447 – Bishop of Norwich

My Lords, is the Minister aware of the rapid growth of food banks around the country—a Christian initiative which is gaining ever wider support? I declare an interest as the patron of Norwich Foodbank, which has assisted 860 families and individuals in just the past three months. What might be done to better integrate this generous voluntary provision with the work of statutory agencies?

Civil Society, 11th June 2015, Vol 762, Col 894-7 – Bishop of St Albans

The question I am asking today is: what can we do to encourage the development of more intermediate institutions [amongst other things, they have facilitated foodbanks], which are the places where we are most likely to build bridging social capital?

Civil Society, 11th June 2015, Vol 762, Col 907-9 – Bishop of Rochester

[churches and voluntary agencies] are actually rather well placed to offer those spaces and platforms for people to come together in common concern and action for the well-being of society and the flourishing of the communities in which we are set ... if there is one plea to government it is to try to make sure that there are not too many barriers that get in our way.

Many of those who use foodbanks are in work/ foodbank usage is due to cost of living and low wages

Food: Banks, 5th February 2013, Vol 743, Col 135 – Bishop of Bath and Wells

My Lords, food banks are usually used in an emergency to stave off hunger. However, there is a risk that people with no other source of food will become reliant on them,

including the 60% of those who use them who are already in work. Will Her Majesty's Government ensure that welfare reform does not leave families more at risk from hunger?

Families: Cost of Living, 31st October 2013, Vol 748, Col 1755-7 – Bishop of Derby

My point is that work for many people is very insecure. It does not plough on and on and it is not just about getting a living wage. The experience of trying to be in work is insecure for many people. It is not untypical to tip out of work, get into debt because of having been living at a certain pace, and to run out of food. Churches and other groups try to pick these people up again. The problem, however, is that churches and the volunteer sector are struggling with the increased number of people in this situation and finding it harder to make that kind of generous response.

Child Poverty, 17th November 2016, Vol 776, Col 1584-5 – Bishop of St Albans

Across Britain, churches continue to organise with workers for a living wage. Organisations such as Christians Against Poverty are working to help those in the grip of debt take control of their finances

....

There is, of course, occasionally the need to give immediate relief where it is appropriate—for example, food banks—but that is not a long-term solution.

...

the fact remains that as familial poverty inhibits educational attainment, it creates a vicious cycle. If we are to break that cycle, we must focus not on handouts but on economic empowerment—on income, in other words.

Poverty, 13th July 2017, Vol 783, Col 1297 – Bishop of Leeds

My Lords, does the Minister agree that there is a problem here, in that we want to applaud the employment figures released today but, at the same time, we need to recognise that it is people in employment who are using our food banks, where the

numbers have rocketed in the last few years? Therefore, the simple statement that we applaud the rise in employment disguises a deeper problem.

Government cuts are leading/will lead to hardship and foodbank usage

Welfare Benefits Up-rating Bill, 19th March 2013, Vol 744, Col 502-3 – Bishop of Leicester

This Bill is both unnecessary and ill conceived. It will harm the most vulnerable in our society and do nothing to promote work incentives. I have heard nothing at Second Reading, in Committee or today to make me change my view that this Bill ideologically shrinks the welfare state regardless of desperate need. Nor does it change my view that we are heading for a US-style welfare system that is dependent on food banks and hostels. We know that we can do better than this, we must do better than this, and we should amend the Bill.

Welfare Benefit Up-rating Bill, 19th March 2013, Vol 744, Col 514-16; 524-5 – Bishop of Ripon and Leeds

60% of the Bill's savings come from those in the poorest third of our population, and 3% from those in the richest third. This will mean that, on the Government's estimates, 200,000 more children will be in poverty, half of them in working families.

Government Spending Review 2013 (Grand Committee), 3rd July 2013, Vol 746, Col 427-30 – Bishop of Truro

According to the Government's own figures, the combined effect of public expenditure cuts and tax and benefit changes is to make the poorest households nearly £1,000 worse off. The Chancellor pointed out that the richest 10% have paid the most, but he forgot to say that across the rest of the distribution it is poorer households that lose a higher proportion of their income. Low-income families with children in particular are bearing a disproportionate share of the burden of tackling the deficit.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Though here he also illustrates his point with a biblical quotation.

Benefits sanctions and delays and problems with welfare are leading to hardship and foodbank usage

Food Banks, 20th March 2014, Vol 753, Col 270 – Bishop of Gloucester (former)

My Lords, research by Citizens Advice shows that the main reason people are referred to food banks is delay in the payment of benefits and benefit sanctions; anecdotally, this is also the church's own experience from its involvement in the many food banks it helps to run across the country.

Low income and Vulnerable Consumers, 6th November 2014, Vol 756, Col 1810-12 – Bishop of Norwich

Around 30% of all visits to food banks are caused by benefit delays. The inefficiencies in our system contribute to the problem on a very large scale. For a family which lives day to day in its budgeting, a gap of several weeks' income, which is reported so often as to be commonplace, can lead to a rapid deterioration in the quality and amount of food that that family eats.

Queen's Speech, 19th May 2016, Vol 773, Col 41-3 – Bishop of Durham

The routes into destitution are complex, but problems with the benefits system feature prominently in this [Joseph Rowntree Foundation] and other studies ... There is an urgent need to fill the gaps in the welfare system caused by delays and errors in administering benefits and the uneven access to crisis payments.

NHS: Food Banks Vol 767, 26th November 2016, Col 808– Archbishop of Canterbury

Does the Minister recognise that the comments at the time of the previous Government about there being no link between benefit changes and food banks was significantly challenged at the time and that our experience in Church of England, which is involved in the vast majority of food banks across the country, is that between 35% and 45% of people coming to get support from food banks report that the reason for running out of food is to do with changes to the benefit system and sanctions?

Universal Credit, 9th March 2017, Vol 779, Col 1468 – Bishop of Oxford

in the last three months I have visited a large number of food banks across the diocese of Oxford in seemingly affluent communities, building on my experience of food banks in the diocese of Sheffield. All have underlined to me that the most common reason why people access food banks is delay in accessing welfare payments.

Comprehensive social provision should not be replaced by charitable provision/ food banks not the solution

Queen's Speech, 9th May 2013, Col 745, Col 55-8 – Bishop of Exeter

I want to offer a warning. All the various components of civil society undoubtedly have a contribution to make to the fostering of the common good. Nevertheless, none should be expected to bear, or be asked to accept, a weight for which it is not equipped.

Church of England: Holistic Missions, 21st November 2013, Vol 749, Col 1124-6 – Bishop of Carlisle

As the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Leicester indicated, we do not envisage the church taking over all the provision of health and social care in this country or delivering major welfare programmes on behalf of the state. That is not how it works best, nor would that be appropriate.

Social Justice Strategy, 16th October 2014, Vol 356, Col 361-3 – Bishop of Truro

I stand second to none in congratulating those many thousands of people who volunteer to work in food banks but I worry that those food banks reinforce the commodification idea or process—that is, a problem comes through the door in a person who is in need of food and they are given a box of food. Clearly, that of itself is not the answer to a much deeper problem.

Present throughout were narratives talking about how the church is doing much good work in this area.⁴⁶

The four main arguments illustrated, as well as the narratives which talk about the work the church is doing in the area of foodbanks seem to suggest within this debate broadly three aims of Church of England Bishops: i) to support the work of foodbank charitable provision; ii) to publicise the church's role and relevance as a provider and facilitator of this charitable provision; iii) to demonstrate the negative impacts of government policy upon society and to draw attention to the concurrent rise in foodbank usage. In this way, the Lords Spiritual may be seen to be meaningfully part of a combined effort alongside Christian research bodies and charities who are attempting to address the practical need as well as achieve policy change to alleviate that need.

As mentioned before, in the furtherance of these aims, religious language or theological reflection was seldom employed, and never as a core premise of an argument. The largest allusion to scripture in this debate was by the (now former) Bishop of Truro, who alluded to St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians⁴⁷ as an illustration to highlight how government rhetoric which separated taxpayers from benefit claimants was harmful to society:

Bishop Tim said:

Forgive me, as I conclude, for using a biblical reference to make my point. Paul, in one of his letters, used the metaphor of the human body to describe a Christian vision of mutual support and interdependency. He said:

“those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour ... so that there should be no division in the body ... if one part suffers, every part suffers with it”.

Though only after having made a similar point in neutral terms:

⁴⁶ Other contributions along these themes may be found in the following debates: Food Poverty, 11th December 2014, Vol 757, Col 1921 – Bishop of St Albans; Agriculture and Horticulture, 7th July 2016, Vol 773, Col 2186-88 – Bishop of St Albans; Benefit Cap (Housing Benefit and Universal Credit) (Amendment) Regulations 2016, 8th November 2016, Vol 776, Col 1128 – Bishop of Leeds; Food: Food Banks, 2nd July 2013, Vol 746, Col 1072 – Bishop of Truro; Church of England: Holistic Missions, 21st November 2013, Vol 749, Col 1118-21 – Bishop of Leicester

⁴⁷ Bishop Tim presents a condensed 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

Making such a clear distinction between taxpayers and claimants creates the misleading impression that the welfare system involves a large one-way transfer of money from one group to the other. Far from stimulating compassion, it encourages resentment towards those who are seen to be living off the good will of others. It also ignores the reality that the vast majority of us both contribute to and benefit from the support provided by the benefits system at different points in our lives.

(HL Deb 3rd July 2013 (Grand Committee), vol 746, cols 427-30)

Anglican Bishops, however, are not the only Christians active in Parliament. Whilst there is no comprehensive register of the religious beliefs of members⁴⁸ there are a number of associations in Parliament which cater for the spiritual encouragement of members there. Many of these associations are affiliated with particular political parties, such as the Conservative Christian Fellowship, and Christians on the Left, there is also a cross-party body called Christians in Parliament. These groups exist primarily to cater for the spiritual support of members, and therefore their role is foremost pastoral. Christians who are involved in those groups who contributed to the project expressed frustration that Christian politicians did not always seem to have a consistent and joined-up approach to their faiths and their activities in Parliament.

Whilst not being campaigning bodies, these groups do encourage Christians to relate their faiths to the issues of the day. As one member described:

It's pastoral it's ... a Christian presence ... to maintain the Christian Ethos in parliament and the Christian presence there and to help people who are Christians in Parliament to grow in their faith and to be thinking about the issues of the day and how their faith relates to the issues they legislate on

....

But that's my big disappointment there isn't [a difference of approach with Christians to some political issues] not that I have seen I'm not sure that many of them relate it to their faith.

....

Q: Do some people leave their faith at the door?

⁴⁸ Indeed, perhaps there shouldn't be.

It is happening. There are quite a few exceptions to that. There are quite a number of exceptions to that. There are people who are deeply, deeply committed to their faith and you know, to lose their position in their party they would stand down rather than go against, but that level were few and far between. They find a way of getting around it. And that's why ... they're not ... they're legislators for the whole country they're not there to represent the Catholic or the Anglican faith but that faith should be informing who they are and what their principles are.

...

It's always hard to get people to be consistent in their views and it can be very contradictory but there are, I know, I know quite a number of people who are very principled very consistent in their thinking.

(Research Interview G)

Another member of one of these associational bodies said in interview of the impossibility of a kind of unified Christian line in Parliament:

I had the kind of classic conservative Evangelical view that this is right that is black and white, and I have changed my mind on a number of issues. But even if I haven't changed my mind, I recognize genuinely and sincerely other Christians are legitimately holding a diametrically opposed view. So if you take that and extrapolate that ... it means that if we have a corporate policy ... we're going to upset some people. We don't want to do that. So we don't really have a corporate policy. What we're trying to do is to inspire people to come to their own decisions [and helping] people understand one another

(Research Interview C)

Christian Parliamentarians are therefore routinely divided when it comes to the right solutions, but they may agree upon the basic principles which are valuable from a Christian perspective. Christians in Parliament, bound by the whip, are likely to vote in accordance with that whip, and some will find this easier or more difficult than others. Within Parliament therefore, the Bishops, whilst not taking any kind of formal whip, are considerably more unified than Christians might be more generally the case within the house, though without a comprehensive register, this is impossible to fully verify. However, whilst Christian members may not publicly be known for their faith, even to researchers,

the Lords Spiritual are very visible. Whilst individual members represent themselves, as Bishop Thornton says

[Lords Spiritual are] a very visible presence that there is a God in the world and God has something to say ... I also think that we are, to some extent, being there as a voice of a different a different register or different mode of speaking ... it's interesting that when you quite often, we'll talk to representatives of other faiths or other Christian denominations. They will say it's really important that the Lords Spiritual are there. I'm very keenly aware...when I was there that we were carrying a representation mode which of course other peers don't... if a Bishop gets up, then it can't be Tim Thornton's saying, you know, 'you're dreadful' or 'I think this' because you are there as the Bishop of Truro ... you carry a representative role in and of yourself ... you are there an obvious sign and symbol of standing on behalf of your faith - of the church.

(Research interview A)

In this sense, and for this issue, the Lord's Spiritual presented the image of a unified Christian opposition to the rise in Foodbank usage, stemming from government welfare reforms. The extent to which this image corresponds to the attitudes of Christian laity in Westminster is not possible to know.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Christian groups have contributed to the issue of the growing hunger crisis in the United Kingdom. Christian groups have responded in a two-fold way: by addressing the immediate need of people who are badly off, and by supplying information and lobbying the government. Whilst it is clear that faith discourses are motivational for Christians to act in this manner, and that taking part in and organising these charitable activities are integral to the faith, Christian elites nonetheless use secular language, data, and the language of social science when speaking with government in order to obtain policy goals. Where values were in evidence, Christian elites strategically framed theological values in ways which are accessible to both Christian and non-Christian actors. What was most distinctive, however, about Christian approaches here was the real attempt to bring in the experiences of real people in hardship, and to demonstrate that these people are not simply suffering in isolation, but who are part of a greater whole, harmed by welfare reforms. The combination of the practical experience of Christian charitable provision with data and

the contributions of Christian elites in debates and select committees led to a great deal of success. In this way, Christian elites provided a distinctive contribution towards the debate – marrying practical, moral, and data-driven approaches.

Chapter Six:

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

Introduction

This chapter is an exploration of the ways in which Christian elites have contributed to the public debate in the United Kingdom on the crisis in Syria, since the beginning of armed conflict in 2011. The chapter will examine three primary facets of Christian elite engagement with conflict in Syria: the concern for the welfare of those living in the area; a question of forms of military intervention in the region; and an engagement with the resulting refugee crisis.

More so than any of the subjects explored in other chapters, the issue of conflict in Syria and surrounding areas, as well as the impacts that conflict is having on a regional and international scale, is a deeply complicated issue which is developing on a day-by-day basis. The essence of conflict, displacement, and the multiple armed groups involved in the region makes accurate assessments of the situation on the ground difficult; the majority of sources consulted in research for this chapter included provisos saying that the figures they presented were scholarly estimates and ought to be treated with caution. Consequently, the background section of this paper makes no claim of being a comprehensive guide to the situation in Syria and surrounding areas, or the history of the conflict – readers ought to feel free to consider the Bibliography to look at works which do more justice than which space permits here. Similarly, owing to the continually developing situation in the region, the analysis is time-limited; the analysis does not consider events past August 2018. Due to the fluid nature of the conflict, considerable reference is made to the situation in Iraq where this has had a knock-on effect on the situation in Syria.

Christian elites have been involved in various ways surrounding the three primary areas of investigation, mirroring the way Christian elites have engaged with the issues investigated in the previous case studies of this thesis. Here too are Christian groups involved in direct support of those affected, here too are Christian elites involved in public discussion with the government in parliament and elsewhere,⁴⁹ and here too are Christians involved in the production and dissemination of scholarly research to inform debate. Unlike other case studies, some of the

⁴⁹ Though, as will be explored later, whilst on certain issues there is consensus, especially on issues of the rightness of military intervention, many Christian groups in the UK are divided.

Christian elite actors which are mentioned are international bodies which are not based in the United Kingdom.⁵⁰ The elites who feature in the analysis are those whose contributions have in some way figured in UK public debate: one of the big ways this happens is that the work of a group (either in terms of their relief efforts, or reports they have produced) are cited in parliamentary briefing papers. As before, this chapter begins with some description of the background to the debate, and later moves on to look at specific ways in which Christian elites have become involved. The key conclusion drawn in this chapter is that Christian elites in this field engage in a strategic framing of Christian theological principles into a discourse of which highlights the dignity and worth of the human person. This is combined with a discourse which aims to capture the threat of IS as being moral/theological as well as material, where the non-secular values of Christian elites and other religious leaders is an asset. This discourse makes room for religious leaders to speak faith-to-faith in order to combat the ideological threat of IS.

Background

'Syria has become the great tragedy of this century - a disgraceful humanitarian calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history' – António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2005-2015 (UNHCR, 2013)

In March 2011, demonstrations driven by public dissatisfaction with corruption, lack of freedom and high unemployment were put down with deadly force by the Syrian government (BBC, 2018). As unrest intensified, and government crackdowns continued, opposition groups began to arm themselves – unrest had escalated into a civil war. Involving a large number of armed groups like IS and the armed forces of many nations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Iran and Russia, the conflict has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Over time, the civil war took on an ethnic and religious character (Zisser, 2017, p. 555). Early on in the war, Salafist jihadist groups began to form, with Jabhat al-Nusra forming ten months after the uprising began (Walter, 2017, p. 30). Walter writes that extremist groups can enjoy support not just from those who subscribe to their ideologies, but also from moderate citizens who make strategic choices in difficult times regarding which groups will best safeguard the security of their families (Walter, 2017, p. 8). Peace talks have repeatedly broken down and there have been several failed attempts since the first

⁵⁰ Of course, many of the churches mentioned in previous chapters are themselves international, for instance the Roman Catholic Church is worldwide, as is the Anglican Communion, of which the Church of England is a part. Nonetheless, the author differentiates these from some Christian bodies considered in this chapter which operate primarily in an international charity context.

round of talks in June 2012. Most recently talks collapsed in December 2017. A key factor surrounding the failure of peace talks has been the role of the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, in the country's future (Al Jazeera, 2018), and the intervention of regional and world powers has further made settlement difficult (Devi, 2018, p. 15).

The conflict has caused widespread destruction and loss of life. Whilst estimates on the death toll vary based upon the reporting body, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights⁵¹ estimates the death toll at the time of writing⁵² to be around 511,000 people, which includes 106,390 civilians of whom 19,811 were children under the age of eighteen (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2018).

Refugees and Asylum

Since the beginning of the conflict, over 6.5 million people have been internally displaced and a further 4.4 million are registered refugees, which amounts to around half of the country's pre-crisis population (Verme, et al., 2016, p. xv). Most of the people who have fled Syria in fear of their lives have sought refuge in countries in the region, as Caroline Lucas remarked in the House:

It is often said that, with almost 20 million refugees worldwide, the world is currently facing the worst global refugee crisis since the second world war. The impact of that crisis, however, is distinctly un-global. Figures from the UNHCR show that 86% of the world's refugees are hosted by developing countries. That the responsibility for supporting refugees currently rests on a minority is evident when looking at where Syrian refugees are being supported. The vast majority are being hosted by countries in the region. (HC Deb 16th March 2016, Vol 607, Cols 327-6WH)

The largest number of Syrian refugees are in Turkey, where in 2016 it was reported that almost two million refugees had fled (Home Affairs Committee, 2016, p. 4). Jordan is another large destination for refugees fleeing the strife in Syria, where the influx has increased the Jordanian population by more than eight percent (Carrion, 2015, p. 3), and many Syrians have also fled to Lebanon and Iraq (Achilli, 2015, p. 2).

⁵¹ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is a Coventry based organisation run by Rami Abdul Rahman. The organisation's figures are widely used by military analysts, international organisations and news outlets, (MacFarquhar, 2013).

⁵² April 2018.

The number of refugees which have fled to neighbouring countries has put strain on the infrastructures of those nations, and has also led to increasing amounts of hostility between host populations and refugees, as Achilli remarks of the Jordanian experience:

The protracted nature of the Syrian crisis and its negative, real or perceived, impact on the living conditions of Jordanians has meant that Jordanians, who, at first, welcomed refugees, have become hostile: those who were originally *dyuf* (guests) are now *laji'in* (refugees). (Achilli, 2015, p. 2)

Much of the rise in tensions between refugees and host populations has had to do with access to the labour market. Because the majority of refugees have found living space in urban areas and not camps, and because landlords have gained from the influx of refugees by raising prices, the most vulnerable in Jordan have been affected by Syrian labour working in the country's large informal sector (Carrion, 2015, pp. 5-9). Due to droughts prior to the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, many Syrians were on the move before the conflict began⁵³. Many of these people fled to cities which later became badly embroiled in conflict, and they therefore became refugees. Many of these refugees do not have the qualifications which are required in the economies of Jordan and Lebanon, and this combined with government restrictions to the labour market has forced refugees to work in low-paid and low-skilled employment in the informal sectors of these nations (Verme, et al., 2016, pp. 35-8).

In addition to fleeing to nearby countries, many refugees have sought safety further afield in Europe. One of the main routes that Syrian refugees and other people took was a route over the Eastern Mediterranean, with 68,000 people travelling across those treacherous waters in the first six months of 2015 alone⁵⁴ (Home Affairs Committee, 2016, p. 15). According to the European Council, the number of monthly irregular arrivals by sea peaked in October 2015, when there were 216,260 arrivals (Council of the European Union, 2018). This level of movement gradually subsided by May 2016, and in February 2018 there were 1589 arrivals, of whom 1223 were from Syria (ibid.).

The European Union's response to this flow of refugees has been widely criticised. Karageorgiou writes that despite laws and protocols emphasising cooperation and solidarity, the European response was 'echoed in 28 individual policies', which blunted its contribution to resolving the crisis

⁵³ There is debate around whether this displacement of people due to drought was a contributing factor to the Civil War. Many analysts believe it is a contributory factor, such as Zisser (2017), though Selby, Dahi, Fröhlich and Hulme are sceptical of this claim (Selby, Dahi, Fröhlich, & Hulme, 2017, p. 41). Despite perhaps not being a causal factor – it nonetheless remains a key factor in the aid and refugee dynamics of the conflict.

⁵⁴ As the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee notes, 57% of these people were Syrian, 22% were Afghan and 5% were Iraqi (Home Affairs Committee, 2016, p. 15).

(Karageorinou, 2016, p. 210). Broadly, EU states have adopted different strategies of containment involving providing aid to the region and deterring refugee flows to Europe (Achilli, 2015, p. 9). Part of this strategy involved an accommodation with Turkey where all refugees arriving in Greece would be returned to Turkey, and that for each refugee returned in this way a refugee in Turkey would be resettled in Europe (Rankin, 2016).⁵⁵

For those remaining in Syria, there are large challenges relating to access to humanitarian assistance with 5.6 million people estimated to be in acute need, 419,000 of whom live in besieged areas (Devi, 2018, p. 15). There have been a number of attempts to obtain ceasefires to allow humanitarian assistance to reach those who need it most, including in February 2018 when the UN security council unanimously agreed to a 30-day truce (Morello & Gearan, 2018). The reality on the ground, however, has been that ceasefires have not always been respected and past ceasefires have failed, with the United States accusing Syrian Government forces of attacking civilians and opposition groups (Weaver, 2016).

As mentioned, the EU response has often been to provide aid to refugees in the immediate area of Syria, and the UK has been no exception to this approach. The United States and the United Kingdom have been the top bilateral donors in humanitarian aid to the Syrian Crisis (Ostrand, 2015, p. 265). A stated aim of this approach has been to reduce the number of refugees who undertake the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean, with accepting refugee flows through Europe being described as creating a 'perverse incentive' to cross the sea (Swinford, 2016). Therefore initially, the UK's primary strategy was one of providing aid to the nations surrounding Syria. This approach was criticised by a number of advocacy bodies, who described it as being a 'dangerous containment strategy' (Refugee Council, 2016), with a considerable burden left on neighbouring states with scarce resources.

This strategy of supplying aid to the countries bordering Syria whilst discouraging movement of peoples over the Mediterranean was accompanied by a variable, though oftentimes negative, portrayal of Syrian refugees in the British media and political discourse. Present within this discourse is a large gender dynamic shown in the portrayal of refugees in print media, and on social media, as well as security discourses. A particular aspect of a negative portrayal of refugees is the claim that Syrian refugees are primarily male, who have been variously described as terrorists, rapists, or

⁵⁵ Furthermore, Turkey received an agreement that there would be 're-energised' talks on EU membership, and that there will be a greater flow of aid money into Turkey to assist with refugees there (Rankin, 2016).

cowards (Walters, 2016, p. 179)⁵⁶. There has also been a deeply dehumanising element to the description of refugees. One such dehumanising description of refugees came from David Cameron who referred to ‘swarms’ of migrants, and that he wished to prevent people from ‘breaking in’ to the country (Dearden, 2015), and Phillip Hammond described migrants as ‘marauding’ around Calais⁵⁷ (Slack, 2015). In this sense, the humanity of refugees has been reduced in favour of imagery which reflects insects, armies, or weather events.

A key turning point in the discourse surrounding refugees from Government sources in the UK was the death of Alan Kurdi, a young boy who was one of at least twelve Syrian people who drowned trying to reach the Greek island of Kos (Smith H., 2015). The tragic image of Alan Kurdi laying face down in the sand and the waves was an electric shock to the international discourse surrounding refugees. Though this shift in discourse and policy was perhaps short lived (Kingsley, 2016), with Alan Kurdi’s father later saying that the photograph of his son had ‘changed nothing’ (Ensor, 2016), it nonetheless caused a shift in stance on the part of a number of Western governments. The UK government under David Cameron, in contrast to his earlier comments, promised to accept 20,000 refugees who had travelled through Europe (Kingsley, 2016). Whilst adult male refugees had been portrayed in a negative light by the media, the death of a child had attracted near universal outcry and sympathy. Indeed, whilst male refugees have fallen victim to a securitised narrative, the later Dubs amendment⁵⁸ with its focus on unaccompanied children in Calais attracted wide national support because of its focus on helping children, a vast contrast with Phillip Hammond’s language.

Whilst there was a concrete policy response to the issues, this response did not have the same practical force as the moral pronouncements made by those in power. The aforementioned Dubs amendment resulted in many fewer than the initially suggested 3000 children ultimately being given an opportunity to escape a perilous future – only 480 (Bulman, 2017). Lord Dubs later referred to the government as having a ‘shabby approach’ to the whole affair (McGuinness, 2017, p. 41), and many MPs felt that there was a substantial gap between the explanation for the shortfall which was given by government and the evidence which local authorities were supplying (Jackson, 2017). This small figure is made especially distressing because of the large number of unaccompanied minors (some 85,000) who are amongst displaced peoples throughout the EU, many of whom disappear shortly after arrival and fall victim to crimes of a sexual nature (Home Affairs Committee, 2016, p.

⁵⁶ This is perhaps due to the fact that Syrian refugees with young families and children have often sought refuge in nearby countries, with Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan having more children than their host populations (Verme, et al., 2016, pp. xv-xvi).

⁵⁷ This description was of African migrants, and not Syrian refugees, but nonetheless feeds into a broader discourse about the movement of people and threat.

⁵⁸ Explored more later.

41). Indeed, a broader climbdown with respect to provision for refugees seems to be indicated by the scrapping of a dedicated minister for Syrian refugees in 2016 whose position was established only a year earlier (Cowburn, 2016).

Refugees and Religion

As mentioned before, there is a strong religious dimension to the civil war in Syria. Various armed groups in the conflict appeal to a form of extremist religious ideology. The so-called Islamic State, variously known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh, or in this paper as IS, is perhaps the most well-known of these groups. IS, which had its genesis as the Al-Qaida affiliated⁵⁹ *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* grew in the chaos after the US-led invasion of Iraq where Sunni Muslims became increasingly discontented with the post-war regime, and further established itself in areas where there was government breakdown and civil war, such as in Libya and Syria (Özdemir & Gürler, 2018, pp. 122-130). Alongside IS, other extremist groups, including the Al-Qaida affiliated Jabhat al Nusra⁶⁰, have been active in the conflict.

In areas under its control, IS has engaged in the persecution and slaughter of religious and ethnic minorities⁶¹ including Christians and Yazidis (Smith B. , 2016, pp. 3-5), as well as Shi'a Muslims such as against Turkmen villages around Kirkuk (Lang & Smith, 2016, p. 12). This has led to a great displacement of religious minorities from IS areas, such as in Iraq where from 2003 to 2015, 75% of Iraqi Christians were driven from their homes (World Council of Churches, 2016, p. 11). The arrival of extremist groups to areas leads to a sharp decline in the security and safety of religious minorities: this is as true for Syria as in Iraq. For instance, many Christians, despite being *people of the book* have been forced by IS to pay a special kind of tax called *Jizya* or worse are forced to convert under pain of death; further reports have emerged in Syria of Christians who have been killed, and Christian girls who have been enslaved (Lang & Smith, 2016).

Prior to the civil war, the overall picture in Syria was one where different religious groups lived alongside one another more harmoniously, but subsequently religious minorities have been forced to 'choose sides' at the risk of 'allegations of collusion and violent attacks' (World Council of Churches, 2016, pp. 19-20). Prior to the Civil War, Syria had a substantial degree of religious diversity, where

⁵⁹ Later, IS and Al-Qaida would split, and the relationship between IS and Al-Qaida affiliated groups is complex and varied – sometimes one of cooperation, and other times of violence (Dearden, 2017)

⁶⁰ Who have a similarly bloody track record with regards to their treatment of religious minorities.

⁶¹ It is important to note that the term 'minority' is often disputed and resisted by groups in the region. It is certain that many different groups could have a legitimate claim to be a minority in different geographical areas, including those who in aggregate might seem a majority. The term, however, is resisted because it is often seen as a source of vulnerability, or a denial of the deep history of different groups in the region for centuries or millennia (World Council of Churches, 2016, p. 10).

Christians perhaps made up 10-12%⁶² of the population, though Christians themselves are spread between a variety of denominations (Rabo, 2012, p. 80). Further to this, there was significant diversity with regards to Islam, with the largest Muslim minority being Alawites who are a Shi'a group who represent around 12% of the population, with a variety of other ethnic and religious groups such as Isma'ili, Druze, Yazidis and Kurds living within the country (ibid.). The groups are not uniformly distributed around the country, with various groups making particular areas their homes. In part, this mix and distribution of religious and cultural groups and the way they correspond (or not) to national borders is owed to the colonial history of the region where borders were drawn by the British and French Empires. This imperial involvement (and subsequent Western intervention in the region) has had an impact on religious harmony in the region. Whilst being only one of many factors, this interaction of the region with a predominantly Christian (or, at least Christian-presenting) west has risked the creation of a Muslim versus Christian narrative which has consequences not only for foreign relations, but also the safety of Christians in this area of the world. As will be explored later, prominent Christian actors in the UK have largely displayed a reluctance to feed into such a narrative (Sherwood, 2016).

Whilst there is therefore a strong religious aspect to the conflict, it is also important to note that the majority of those who have fled the conflict in Syria are Muslim. However, upon fleeing areas of conflict, there are differences in terms of registration with aid agencies amongst different religious groups, where Muslims are much more likely to do so than other minority religious communities – it is not however possible to draw clear conclusions about why this is the case, though it may be to do with a continued fear of discrimination (World Council of Churches, 2016, p. 27). However, further afield in Europe, there has also been a religious element to the responses of many European nations, some of whom have offered a preferential (or indeed exclusionary) treatment for Christian refugees: for instance, Slovakia declared that it would only accept Christian refugees with the justification that since there are no Mosques in Slovakia, the refugees would not enjoy their stay (BBC, 2015).

Christian Elite Response

As mentioned before, this chapter's focus is primarily on Christian elites in the UK. As such, this section considers UK based Christian groups and their interaction with the Syrian crisis. Christian elites in the UK were primarily engaged with the Syrian crisis in the following ways: firstly, through lobbying the government to accept more refugees in the UK; secondly, through assisting with

⁶² Though as Rabo writes, since official statistics are not collected on religion, this is difficult to estimate and there is a degree of scholarly disagreement on this issue.

community sponsorship schemes to house and support refugees; and thirdly through providing an opportunity for policymakers to understand the region through hearing the voices of Christian communities with whom British Christians are in contact.

Christian faith actors and understanding the Middle Eastern context

One thing that often deeply intensifies the sense of being ignored and misunderstood is an attitude here towards Christian migrants or refugees from the region which assumes that they must be Muslim because they are Arab. I am sorry to say this, but in the past I have heard such sentiments even from some in government. It is an attitude that can sometimes also assume that they are converts whose faith depends on western missions and therefore in some way they are responsible, by their own choice, for their situation. A Palestinian Christian friend of mine was wont to say when asked by westerners, "When did your family become Christians?" "About 2,000 years ago".

Justin Welby

(HL Deb 9th December 2011, Vol 733, Col 926)

One of the roles which Christian elites in the UK have had in contributing to public debate on the issue of the Syrian crisis has been in terms of providing a real form of knowledge and appreciation of the religious and cultural dynamics in the area. As in the quote by the Archbishop of Canterbury above, a great deal of this contribution has been to do with countering a form of narrative which places the Middle East as being a homogenous and homogeneously Muslim bloc. In many cases, this has taken the form of, in a loose way, but sometimes directly, relaying the voices of those who are affected by the crisis – in particular Christians. These voices, however, do not simply speak of a self-concern, but rather for a concern for the situations and religious freedoms in the region. This was perhaps exemplified in a discussion in the House of Lords⁶³ where the Anglican Bishop of Exeter spoke about a theme which emerged amongst the contributions of Middle Eastern bishops at a synod on the subject:

⁶³ Entitled Christians in the Middle East – this was a wide ranging discussion talking about Christians in the broader area, not just in Syria. The Lord Bishop of Exeter's contribution stemmed from memories of a synod of Bishops in 2010 called by the Pope of Rome amongst which 140 (out of 185 total) came from the Middle East. (HL Deb 9th December 2011, Vol 733, Col 933-6).

I was particularly struck by one of the great themes of the synod becoming immediately apparent on day one, as speaker after speaker, in their introductory remarks, spoke about the importance of religious freedom seen, not as the special pleading for the region's embattled Christians, but as the cornerstone of a healthy democratic society, and as a universal cause to be pursued for the good of all, Muslim, Christian and Jew alike.

...

While radical Islam is sometimes styled as a special threat to the Christians of the Middle East, it is worth remembering that in terms of raw numbers, the primary victims of religious extremism in the Muslim world are other Muslims. In that context, the case for religious freedom as an essential component of human rights is a project that Christians and many Muslims and Jews can share.

(HL Deb 9th December 2011, Vol 733, Col 933-6)

Very often, the contributions of Anglican and Catholic Bishops in UK public debate have been to do with the plight of people in the region and have been focussed broadly upon a concern for religious and social freedoms being good for all. The Lord Bishop of Wakefield placed his concerns for social freedoms as being related in some way to identity, first by virtue of being a human being, and secondly as being a member of the episcopate:

As just one more human being, I am concerned about the fate of all minorities in the Middle East, religious or otherwise. As a bishop, I am understandably concerned by what is happening to the Arab Christians

...

In Syria, churches are politically targeted, just as they were in Iraq at the time of the fall of Saddam Hussein, having been seen in the past as supporting a brutally repressive regime. Either way, the result is the same. In Israel, Arab Christians are fleeing their ancestral land and homes. Many of your Lordships will know the statistics, and the numbers seem to increase as the weeks, months and years go by. Alongside the events in Syria, Iraq and Egypt, it is a human tragedy of historic proportions.

In many ways, I fear that this vulnerability is a reflection of a wider societal insecurity, as I have already hinted. How can we assist? States need to feel comfortable and confident

enough in their own skins, as one might put it, to uphold their core values for all citizens regardless of religious or non-religious background.

(HL Deb 2nd July 2013 vol 746 c 1071)

Whilst Christian groups showed themselves to be concerned for religious freedoms and security for the good of all, this is not to say that there was not also a specific concern for the plight of Christians in the region. For instance, Aid to the Church in Need (an international Roman Catholic organisation whose roots lie in the aftermath of the Second World War, but with 23 national offices including one in the UK) is a charity whose primary concern lies with the persecuted Church, and which has a secondary concern for suffering more generally. The UK website sets out its objectives as being:

- to advance the Christian religion by supporting and promoting the Church, especially in countries where Christians are suffering persecution or discrimination;
- to further the other charitable work of the Church by providing practical assistance and pastoral care for persons in need, especially those who are living in, or are refugees from, such countries.

(Aid to the Church in Need, 2018)

Whilst its focus is therefore primarily upon ‘supporting the Catholic faithful and other Christians where they are persecuted, oppressed or in pastoral need’ (ibid.), the organisation also presents reports on religious freedoms throughout the world which have information on freedoms for various different faiths. For instance, its report on Syria makes reference to the suffering of Muslims, and its report on the United Kingdom makes reference to attacks on Muslims and Jews (Aid to the Church in Need, 2018).

Often, with regards to the Syrian conflict and the associated crisis of displaced people, part of the particular concern for the welfare of Christians in the region is to do with the aforementioned religious aspects to the uptake of aid in the region. Indeed, as Kettle writes, in the UK there was such a concern that Christian refugees ought to have been prioritised in the refugee resettlement scheme because there was what seemed to be an underrepresentation of Christian refugees benefitting from the UNHCR scheme (Kettle, 2018, p. 151). High profile responses from leading figures in large Christian churches in the UK have echoed this concern, but the language used in these statements

has often been careful to avoid narratives which might lead to an increase in religious tension.

As Cardinal Vincent Nichols (then Archbishop) expressed of the UNHCR scheme in an interview on Radio 4's Today program:

I think its unintended consequence will be that there will be few, if any, Christians coming to this country.

...

That is because for the most part Christian refugees do not go into the UNHCR camps. They go to fellow Christian organisations.

...

If we are going to deal purely with UNHCR according to their rules, then there can be no preference given to anybody on behalf of their faith and we will simply bypass the Christian refugees, not intentionally but in fact.

(BBC, 2015)

And further, as Cardinal through his spokesperson:

People in this country are generous to those in need and we now have a scheme that enables that generosity to be channelled effectively with the community sponsorship scheme. The Catholic Bishops' Conference has had an extremely productive dialogue on this issue and received firm reassurances from the government that Christians are accessing the UK's Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme in numbers broadly proportionate to the overall displaced population.

(Diocese of Westminster, 2017)

This intervention, whilst being specifically concerned with Christians does not seem to represent a form of special pleading, but rather aims towards equality of access. Whilst there has been speculation (as mentioned earlier in the report from the World Council of Churches) to do with a possible fear of persecution being one of the reasons to do with the lack of Christian engagement with aid camps (a report of which the Cardinal will have been aware), the Cardinal's intervention is focussed in more neutral terms.

In July 2017, there was a Westminster hall debate entitled 'Persecution of Christians: Role of UK Embassies'. During this debate, individual Christians in the Commons (including the Church Estates Commissioner) contributed to the discussion. The theme of equality of access to aid appeared in this debate also. Dr Lisa Cameron⁶⁴ who, prior to her contribution to the discussion, felt the need to declare that she had an interest as a practicing Christian, said:

I was a member of the Select Committee on International Development in the previous Parliament and we were fortunate enough to visit Lebanon and Jordan to see the good work being done there. Our aid money is helping some of the most vulnerable refugees in the camps, and I very much appreciated that work. However, when preparing our report, we heard evidence to the Committee that Christians are often fearful of going to refugee camps—they fear persecution and being singled out. They hide their religious beliefs in the refugee camps, and some are so much in fear for their lives and of the potential danger that they will simply not go to the camps.

(HC Deb 24th October 2017 vol 630 c 190)

However, this was also a claim not for a special form of treatment, but rather for an equality of treatment. Asking forgiveness for his use of biblical language, Chris Bryant⁶⁵ argued that human rights must be taken together, and that one cannot have other forms of civil liberties whilst denying religious freedoms, but that also that any campaign for religious freedoms must be joined up with a campaign for those other rights:

I hope Members will not mind if I refer a bit to the Bible, as I think I am the only former priest in the room. Chapter 19 of John's Gospel states that when Jesus was on the cross, the soldiers decided that since the robe that he wore was seamless, they would cast lots for it rather than tear it apart.

The fundamental point that I want to make to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is that human rights are a seamless garment: we cannot split the different elements that we try to stand up for—religious freedom, personal freedom, sexual freedom and, for that matter, the rights of women.

...

⁶⁴ SNP member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow.

⁶⁵ Labour member for Rhondda and former Church of England minister.

If we simply focus on one element—freedom of religion—we undermine the historical truth of the Christian faith. In the Epistle of James, the answer to the question, “What is true religion?” is

“to visit widows and orphans in their affliction”.

That is fundamentally what our international aid budget is all about. If we try to say, “We won’t give you money if you don’t honour religious freedoms,” we fundamentally undermine what all the churches campaigned for in the run-up to the millennium: a set of goals to tackle poverty around the world.

(HC Deb 4th July 2017, Vol 626, Cols 12-13WH)

In this therefore, religious freedoms (which are understood as a good for all, and not just Christians) are shown to be a part of a broader set of freedoms which the Church (and government) ought to champion. Bryant’s choice of language here is interesting in introducing a Biblical narrative. In one respect, it seems to be the exception that proves the rule; in choosing to speak in religious terms, he begins by saying ‘I hope that Members will not mind if I refer a bit to the Bible’, suggesting that his use of religious language here is not the norm. Ordinarily therefore, Christian elites choose to frame their arguments in other, secular, ways. Nonetheless, whilst he does use religious language to support his argument that human rights are indivisible, nobody seems to object in this instance.

In none of the contributions in Parliament did any member feed into a Christian versus Muslim narrative on persecution – the issue was framed more broadly. In this way, Christian actors in Parliament seem to have been careful to avoid a sectarian framing on persecution, such as that which is present perhaps in other European countries⁶⁶ where Christianity has been deployed as an identity marker opposed to an Islamic other, for instance in Poland and Hungary (Gera, 2017; Tharoor, 2018)⁶⁷. Indeed, high profile Christian actors have been explicit about their fears of religious interventions exacerbating sectarian conflict. For instance, further in the Lord Bishop of Exeter’s speech in the house⁶⁸, he said the following:

In Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria and Lebanon a push, generally with strong support from the grass roots, including women, for a multiparty parliamentary democracy, was firmly

⁶⁶ There has been some attempt by far-right groups such as the English Defence League in the UK to adopt this strategy, but their rallies do not attract the same level of support as those on the continent.

⁶⁷ Something which has, however, been resisted by the Pope of Rome.

⁶⁸ Mentioned earlier.

crushed, particularly by Britain, France and Italy, while sectarian identity was cynically fostered as a means of sustaining colonial rule. All of this has left a bitter taste but also an aspiration for a more authentically Arab or Middle Eastern style of democracy and, with each new western intervention, there is an exacerbation of the problem facing many Middle Eastern Christians, which is a tendency in the Muslim street to identify them with the West and the policy choices of western Governments, even when such policies are not supported by the churches here or there.

(HL Deb 9th December 2011, Vol 733, Col 933-6, 2011)

Further in the same debate, by the Lord Bishop of Guildford:

But today there are fears. As we have heard, Christian groups are subject to surveillance and harassment, churches are torched or bombed and the faithful are killed. Perhaps the relatively new, and more assertive if not aggressive, Muslim tradition of Wahabism may be in part responsible, but so also must the political identification of Christianity with the West and western political and economic influence in the Middle East. Many Muslims now see in Christians a political instrument of the West.

(HL Deb 9th December 2011, Vol 733, Col 954-6)

Or for instance in a contribution from the Archbishop of Canterbury in considering an armed response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The worry expressed has to do with the manner in which ideas of the West have been regrettably and wrongly conflated with ideas of Christianity. Note here how, as mentioned before, the voice of Christians from the region is being conveyed and amplified to form a part of the Lords debate:

Some consequences we can predict. We have heard already about Lebanon and about Iran, particularly the effect that an intervention would cause on the new Government in Iran as they are humiliated by such an intervention. However, there is a further point. I talked to a very senior Christian leader in the region yesterday and he said that intervention from abroad will declare open season on the Christian communities. They have already been devastated. There were 2 million Christians in Iraq 12 years ago; there are fewer than 500,000 today. These are churches that do not just go back to St Paul but, in the case of Damascus and Antioch, predate him. They will surely suffer terribly, as they

already do, if action goes ahead. That consequence has to be weighed against the consequences of inaction.

(HL Deb 2nd July 2013 vol 746 cols 1071-1073)

Indeed, even when persecution is mentioned specifically, it tends to be contextualised in a frame where, as mentioned before, religious persecution is of great detriment and danger to all communities in the area. Thus whilst Lord Alton of Liverpool⁶⁹ in his many contributions is very clear about the persecution of Christians (and indeed is trustee to Aid to the Church in Need), the thrust of his arguments is for a protection of freedom of conscience for all:

There are growing restrictions on freedom of conscience ... But I stress that it is not only people of religion who suffer from violations of Article 18. In Indonesia a young man, Alexander Aan, has been jailed because he declared himself an atheist.... Whatever our beliefs, the defence of Article 18 is therefore something which all of us should champion.

(HL Deb 26 November 2013 vol 749 cols 1291-1293)

The consequences for Syria have been lethal for millions of people, not least in the slaughter of the region's minorities. Nearly 10,000 Yazidis are believed to have been killed or captured by ISIS, with more than 3,000 Yazidi girls and women believed to be currently enslaved in Syria. Christians have also experienced a genocide that began with the Armenians at the beginning of the 20th century and continues to this day.

(HL Deb 5th December 2018, Vol 794, Col 989)

Consequently, it is clear to see that the voice of British Christian elites in the United Kingdom on the subject of the persecution of Christians in Syria has been one which has been careful and measured. Whilst Christian leaders have expressed a worry for their co-religionists in Syria (and in the surrounding areas of Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq), this has not been an exclusive call where all that is of concern is the plight of Christians. Instead, Christian elites have displayed a broader concern for the welfare of other cultural and religious minorities within the region. Where concern has been

⁶⁹ Whilst not being an official church representative, Lord Alton of Liverpool is a widely known prominent Roman Catholic peer who has campaigned on issues such as religious freedom and sanctity of life issues.

particularly focussed on Christians, it has been to do with a demand for equality of treatment, rather than special treatment. Christian elites have (sometimes, as shown earlier, in a way which is explicitly expressed) displayed a worry that their contributions might exacerbate a sectarian dynamic to the Syrian conflict. British Christian elites, therefore, have not engaged in an exercise where Christian persecution is understood relative to a Muslim other, but instead in a way where the swift downturn in religious freedoms and other civil liberties are of detriment to all. Keen to highlight the concerns of Christians in the region, British Christian elites have relayed the concerns of those living in the area, so that British policy might understand more truly the truth on the ground.

UK Christians and Military Intervention in Syria and against IS

What has really pushed me into the position where I feel, on balance, that we have to back military action against Daesh is my personal experiences in the refugee camps this summer. ... I cannot stand in this House and castigate the Prime Minister for not taking enough refugees ... if we do not also do everything in our power to eradicate that which is the source of the terror from which people are feeling. Tim Farron MP⁷⁰

(HC Deb 22nd June 2015 vol 597 c 608)

On the 2nd December 2015, Parliament voted to take UK Military Action in the form of airstrikes against IS in Syria. Within both Houses of Parliament there was impassioned debate to do with the merits of such an action. In this debate, Christian members as well as senior clerics both within Parliament and outside expressed opinions to do with the proposed action. Prominently, both the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Cardinal Vincent Nichols backed military intervention, though both qualified this support as only being acceptable if combined with other forms of diplomatic and aid efforts:

Cardinal Vincent Nichols:

Effective action is necessary to stop the grave harm being inflicted by ISIS on civilians... While indiscriminate violence is never justifiable, specific use of force to protect the vulnerable is defensible, if it is combined with sustained diplomatic and humanitarian

⁷⁰ Tim Farron was leader of the Liberal Democrat party from July 2015 to July 2017. After repeated questioning on his religious beliefs surrounding the sinfulness of gay sex, he resigned saying that 'To be a leader, particularly of a progressive liberal party in 2017 and to live as a committed Christian and to hold faithful to the Bible's teaching has felt impossible for me' (BBC, 2017).

efforts. As Pope Francis has said: 'where there is unjust aggression, it is licit to stop the aggressor.

(Cardinal Vincent Nichols in Smith S. , 2015)

Archbishop Justin Welby:

To my mind, the "just war" criteria have been met. However, while they are necessary, they are not by themselves sufficient in action of this kind, where we can end up doing the right thing in such a wrong way that it becomes the wrong thing ... our bombing action plays into the expectation of ISIL and other jihadist groups in the region, springing from their apocalyptic theology. The totality of our actions must subvert that false narrative, because by itself one action will not work.

(HL Deb 2nd December 2015, Vol 767, Col 1119-20).

It is important to understand that the Roman Catholic Church's political strategy is an international movement which is founded upon shared principles, which are then adapted to fit the political circumstances of the particular nation within which the Church is acting. These principles find their origins within Catholic Social Teaching and often in response to, or in witness to, a specific need. This specific need, given the Catholic Church's international nature, is not something which is experienced in a detached way. It is this involved nature which guides Catholic contributions, as well as granting those contributions considerable strength. As one Roman Catholic interviewed stated:

I think in a very practical level the fact that it's a universal church and that we have a presence and engagement across the world actually gives a lot of strength to our engagement with policy makers in the UK. So, for example, engaging with the FCO in Parliament about its interaction in Iraq or the Middle East or the Lebanon: we're speaking with the lived experience of the local church there ... in Iraq we've recently had Bishops out in northern Iraq visiting people who have been affected by the conflict ... the government actually recognises it so there may be times that we are asked for information, advice, understanding of the situation on the ground because the church is in places that the government won't be.

(Research Interview P)

Cardinal Vincent Nichols' statement should therefore be understood in this international framework. Indeed, the Cardinal alludes to a broader statement by Pope Francis on the subject of the prevention of violence in the region which was very explicit about the moral limits of such an intervention, as well as the possible risks. The Holy Father made reference to how this form of intervention may be exploited in a covetous way by expansionist nations:

How many times under this excuse of stopping the unjust aggressor the powers have taken control of nations. And, they have made a true war of conquest.

(Holdren & Jones, 2014)

He also made reference to the ways in which such war leads to the deaths of innocents:

today the bomb goes and kills the innocent with the culpable with the child and the women and mother. They kill everyone. But, we need to stop and think a bit about what level of cruelty we have reached. This should scare us.

(ibid.)

In this sense, Cardinal Vincent Nichols' intervention is one endorsing a limited intervention in the interest of protecting different groups who are being attacked by IS, accompanied by a negotiated end to the conflict. Indeed, research interviews with senior Roman Catholic actors revealed an expansive and holistic understanding of the *Just War* tradition, which is enriched by the experience of being present throughout the world.

I think firstly, the Cardinal was there in northern Iraq and saw the real devastation that had been made. People being made refugees. The Yazidi people who have suffered unimaginable crimes. So that wasn't something that came out of a vacuum. It was out of an experience, and a reflection on that experience, and a dialogue with those people who have suffered, and those who minister to them, particularly in the church but more broadly. So it wasn't unmoored. And I think the second thing is the *Just War* tradition ... it's not a theory, it's a practical exercise in moral statecraft. How do you deal with the reality of violence? How do you deal with the reality that violence, in a way, is a recognised institution of the international system, which is why we have a law of humanitarian conventions in war? So we don't start from an ideal position, we start from an engagement with an evil and how to combat that evil. And in very

limited circumstances, for very limited durations, the church has always said that it is permissible to resist that.

(Research Interview P)

Another Roman Catholic actor said in interview:

There's something that has always stood out for me ... with Just War theory is that ... all these humanitarian conventions stem from ... how you conduct yourself regardless of how the enemy is conducting themselves. And probably that's never been more needed when there is something like Daesh which is using, which is contravening all the humanitarian rules ... we've seen what they've done to the people there, and to have a tradition of responding to that that is based upon fundamental humanitarian concerns is essential ... I think the importance is that doesn't just stop with with conflict it's not just about before the decisions for military action but actually everything that is done afterwards ... you know some of the houses that we saw in Christian areas that were still destroyed have been destroyed by coalition airplanes and it's the church there that's helping to rebuild that ... the Just War tradition continues beyond the decision to intervene itself but actually a very important aspect of it is afterwards ... now we have a responsibility to continue to support and rebuild

(Research interview P)

Whilst Cardinal Vincent Nichols' contribution seems therefore to be grounded within *Just War* tradition, Archbishop Justin Welby's intervention makes explicit mention of it as an exercise of practical reasoning in the House of Lords. In doing so, Welby at once utilises a concept which has strong roots in a Christian theological tradition, but which also would resonate within public bounds of universality. *Just War* is therefore strategically deployed by Christian elites as a framing of Christian ideas around morality and armed conflict in a way which resonates in a secular sphere amongst non-Christians. In the same way as with the Roman Catholic church, this attitude to military intervention is enriched by an engagement with Christian communities in the region. An Anglican Bishop interviewed for the project said that:

on the back of that that ... the Christian Community in those places ... as a bishop you have a way therefore into Iraq or Syria that is actually not available to government

ministers. When the Foreign Secretary visits Iraq, or any other Foreign Office minister, they will not see much, and they will only hear what is briefed to them by their brilliant officials. They won't. It's too dangerous to get out and about. But as a bishop you can do that, you can get closer to the ground, and you can work with other churches ... so I think we really have something for them, to offer our government in terms of perspective. What's it like? What's it sort of like on the ground?

...

we must accept a historical responsibility that we have been in some way a cause of some of the problems and been a participant in the violence particularly with Iraq and more long-term with Syria and therefore have a responsibility to remain committed to long-term reconciliation, reconstruction process long-term. ...I think behind that is my loss of confidence in violence to solve problems. You know, I do think that war just seems to cause more problems. I used to believe that there is a place for war: I probably still do. But I do think its capacity to cause further problems is extraordinary.

(Research Interview F)

In this sense the *Just War* justification by Justin Welby and other Church of England bishops is one which understands community impact, and one which holds up the centrality of the human person and community, regardless of where they may be.

Justin Welby also speaks beyond the *Just War* tradition, understanding that the conflict has an ideological framing, where Western military intervention may strengthen the ideology of IS – so that in order for conflict to truly be resolved ‘The totality of our actions must subvert that false narrative, because by itself one action will not work...’ (HL Deb 2nd December 2015, Vol 767, Col 1119-20). In this sense, Welby introduces the notion that the struggle against IS is a theological and ideological struggle, where the wrong action has the risk of confirming to IS ‘their dreadful belief that what they are doing is the will of God’ (ibid.). This theological and ideological struggle is framed carefully. As shown before, Christian elites are concerned to avoid a discourse of a struggle between true and false religion where Christianity is the truth and Islam is a false and dangerous other. Instead, Welby aims for a situation where Christians and others may be in coalition with ‘global mainstream Muslim and other religious leaders’ (ibid.)⁷¹.

⁷¹ In this Welby echoes Mk 9:40 ‘Whoever is not against us is for us’ (NRSVA).

The full response was not always reflected in media coverage at the time, with perhaps one facet of Welby's speech resonating more loudly than others. With headlines such as that of Christian Today focussing on solely the element of *Just War*:

Christian Today: 'Justin Welby: Criteria for just war in Syria have been met'

(Lodge, 2015).

Whereas RT built into a narrative which had surfaced earlier in comments Welby had previously made about military intervention in Iraq that the Church's endorsement of action was akin to a form of crusade, speaking into an inherent risk when Christian elites endorse military action in this way:

Russia Today: 'Crusades 2.0? Church backs use of armed force in Syria'

(Russia Today, 2015).

The nuance present within the Just War tradition as presented earlier was therefore not always well understood within public debate.

Other denominations had a varied reaction to the prospect of military action in Syria against IS. The Church of Scotland, The Baptist Union of the United Kingdom, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church set out a joint statement which, though being deeply opposed to IS, was sceptical of the value of military intervention.

[The churches are] convinced that Daesh can only be defeated through a comprehensive economic, diplomatic and security strategy that has the involvement of all partners in the region and the full support of the UN Security Council

[The churches] Assert that aerial bombing is unlikely to have a decisive role in defeating Daesh and that even the use of precision weaponry is likely to cause civilian casualties and trauma within communities.

(The Trussell Trust, 2015)

The statement spelled out the thought process behind this viewpoint, explaining how it was reached through an understanding of a practical military reality that IS-held areas often were in urban areas where airstrikes would be of limited effectiveness and likely to cause heavy civilian casualties, and a practical diplomatic reality that there is no international consensus around the resolution of the conflict, without which 'the UK could be drawn into an extended military campaign that only adds to the cycle of violence and struggles to maintain regional and international support' (ibid.). Aside from

practical realities, the statement was anchored in a theological reality where ‘The Christian gospel has at its heart the assurance of a loving God who acts justly and directs all people in the way of peace’ leading to the churches ‘eschew[ing] all forms of intolerance and hatred and urg[ing] that measures taken to overcome the intolerance demonstrated by Daesh must also seek to promote values that we hold dear’ (ibid.). In this sense, the statement represents an intervention in the form of public reason, but one which authentically flows from basic theological principles.

The objection articulated by the Baptist Union, the Kirk, the Methodist Church and the URC, however, is not a categorical opposition to the use of military force: the objection, to a large extent, hinges upon the practical realities mentioned above. In this, therefore, these Churches differ a great deal from Quakers⁷², who have a long history of opposition to warfare of all kinds, as their corporate testimony says:

All bloody principles and practices we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world. That spirit of Christ by which we are guided is not changeable.

24.04

The Religious Society of Friends was very clear in its opposition to any kind of military intervention in Syria, ‘This week Parliament prepares to vote on military action in Syria. Quakers in Britain oppose this, consistent with our belief that killing is wrong’ (Quakers in Britain, 2015a). Quaker members were encouraged in an advisory document to write to their MPs to dissuade them from violent action, to hold vigils and demonstrations, to persuade those in their local meetings, and to engage with social and print media (Quakers in Britain, 2015b, p. 1). This guide also contained a number of suggested arguments which Friends could use which largely surrounded the sense, shared by other Christian actors, that military intervention could reinforce the justificatory narrative of IS, and a number of demands on lawmakers to resist the demonisation of Muslims, to welcome the refugee, and to consider terrorism properly as the proper object for the rule of law, and not warfare (Quakers in Britain, 2015b, p. 2). Indeed, this document displays a clear difference in arguments used between audiences, as the statements which are more likely to face their own members were far more

⁷² The author sometimes finds some difficulty in labelling Quakers as Christian because of a lack of articulation of a Christian faith in accordance with the early creeds. Nevertheless, *Quaker faith and practice* says that ‘The Religious Society of Friends is rooted in Christianity and has always found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus’ 1.02 and that membership is understood ‘within a broadly Christian perspective’ 11.01. Whilst many Quakers would not identify with the term Christian, nor confess an orthodox faith, this chapter will nonetheless consider them as a Christian group. (The Religious Society of Friends, 1.02; 11.01)

focused on a belief that all killing is wrong, whilst the arguments which their members were encouraged to use whilst engaging with members of Parliament were couched in terms of a practical argument that bombing would only serve to strengthen IS. This shows a strategic choice of arguments used between different audiences, with a focus on the moral amongst other Quakers and a focus more on practical consequences for letters to MPs. For Quakers, the fundamental response to the needs of those who are persecuted by IS is not to respond with military action (there is no *Just War*), but instead through welcoming refugees to meet their acute needs, which itself will 'undercut the narrative of those who seek to create fear and mistrust' and that through love, communities 'can challenge and rise above the ideologies of hate' which will 'defeat the terrorists more assuredly than military action' (Quakers in Britain, 2015c). Whilst focusing on practical consequences, the Quaker approach is also combined with an attempt to reframe the debate in moral terms – recognising the true enemy as being a hateful ideology.

Whilst there is a difference between the actions proposed by the Roman Catholic and Reformed and Catholic churches, and those held by the Methodist Church, Baptist Union, URC, and the Kirk, there is a commonality between all of them in that each is concerned with the safety of those who IS is persecuting, including Christians. Each also acknowledges a broader and ideological or theological dynamic to the conflict, which military action alone is insufficient to solve. Instead, each advocates humanitarian efforts to rebuild communities and trust within communities in order that peace might be achieved. The Quaker argument is broader as it is connected to a more fulsome opposition to war in all kinds, but this argument, too, understands that IS represents a foe whose threat is not merely material, but ideological, and recognises that the actions taken by Parliament have an ideological and material impact. Thus, whilst the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches advocated for military intervention, the Methodist Church, the URC, the Baptist Union and the Church of Scotland counselled against it on practical and legal grounds, and the Quakers argued against it purely on the grounds that war is, in all cases, wrong, commonalities are present amongst all three positions. All three positions were also rooted in theological understandings of the nature of a God of peace⁷³. For the most part, these theological understandings are stated in a way which might be understood from a secular perspectives.

⁷³ Indeed, even the *Just War* tradition is rooted in this sense that the Christian God is one of peace – Aquinas' argument, for instance, grapples with passages such as Matt 26:52: 'Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword' (NRSVA) (Aquinas, 1977 (c. 1225-1274), Q XL, Art. I).

Christian Groups and Refugees

We believe that Christians of all backgrounds and denominations share a common vision for God's love, and therefore have a responsibility to aid refugees in any way we can. God has commanded Christians over and over again to love thy neighbour, to empower the powerless, to feed the hungry. Deuteronomy 10:19 says, "and you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt," Matthew 25:35 says "for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in," and just recently Pope Francis said "hearts must not be closed to refugees." By committing to provide financial, social, and emotional support, community sponsorship gives Christians the opportunity to be Good Samaritans to our neighbours in need.

(Church Response for Refugees, 2017)

Having now considered the ways in which Christian groups have looked at religious persecution in Syria, and how they have considered the question of military intervention, this section will now investigate the ways in which Christian groups have responded to the refugee crisis which has resulted from that situation. As in other situations explored in this thesis, Christian groups have responded to the practical need, but have also lobbied the government for political change. In this case, Christian groups have provided practical assistance for refugees who have arrived in this country through initiatives like community sponsorship, and have also joined in the campaign alongside other actors (for instance Lord Alf Dubs, who is a notable secularist) to encourage the government to allow more refugees into the country. First, this section will consider the practical support given to refugees within the country.

There are a number of separate schemes for refugees in the United Kingdom, they are: the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme; the Gateway Protection Programme; the Mandate Scheme; Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme from the Middle East and North Africa region; and the Community Sponsorship Scheme (APPG on Refugees, 2017, p. 11). Each of these schemes varies in focus. The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) was established after September 2015, when the (then) Prime Minister made a commitment to safeguard 20,000 Syrian refugees (National Audit Office, 2016, p. 4), since this time, it has been deemed to be 'essentially effective' and by the end of 2017, over half of the target number of refugees had been resettled through a referral system from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) where

the *most vulnerable* are resettled from host countries in the region and given over to UK local authorities and their partners (Bolt, 2018, p. 2). The Gateway Protection Programme is another, older⁷⁴, programme which has a broader focus on origin, and also operates in conjunction with a referral system from the UNHCR. It admits 750 refugees to the UK each year (HM Government, 2010). The Mandate scheme has no numerical target, and aims to resettle refugees who have a close family member living in the UK (HM Government, 2018a, p. 3). The Vulnerable Children Resettlement scheme (VCRS), which was announced in April 2016, was formed to cater for the needs of unaccompanied children in the Middle East and North Africa⁷⁵, and also vulnerable children who are otherwise at risk (HM Government, 2016). As of February 2018, 539 people were resettled under the VCRS (HM Government, 2018b). In addition to this scheme, which has its focus on children, provision was made through section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016, known commonly as the ‘Dubs Amendment’, which required that ‘The Secretary of State must ... make arrangements to relocate to the United Kingdom and support a specified number of unaccompanied refugee children from other countries in Europe’ (Immigration Act 2016), some of whom will have had their origin in Syria. The final specified number of refugees relocated under this scheme would be 480 (Home Office, 2018, p. 1). Finally, the Community Sponsorship Scheme is a specific way in which communities can welcome refugees who have arrived through the VPRS and the VCRS which, as the Home Office says ‘encourages innovation in resettlement that has the potential to promote positive resettlement outcomes, both for the resettled families and local communities’ (HM Government, 2017, p. 5). Christian elites have been in various ways involved in these different schemes, not just in the community sponsorship scheme. Involvement with these schemes has taken the form of practical engagement, as well as political engagement.

Political Engagement

One of the primary ways in which Christian actors in the UK have been engaging with the crisis of refugees is through lobbying for an increased number of refugees to be allowed into the country, and through a sustained criticism of the policies which affect their lives within the country. A large part of this has been a concern for the language used to discuss the policies around asylum.

As previously mentioned in the background section of this chapter, there has been a significant shift in rhetoric to do with the acceptance of refugees in this country. This is connected with a

⁷⁴ Launched in 2004 (HM Government, 2018a, p. 3).

⁷⁵ It is also the case that other schemes also lead to the resettlement of children, for instance many have been resettled under the VPRS (HM Government, 2016).

particular understanding of the British nation, its people, and its way of life. As Kettle, an ordained minister and researcher who works for the *Mission and Public Affairs* division of the Church of England in Westminster observes,

for many in these islands, mainland Europe is a buffer zone for refugees. This is never stated but is fundamental to British attitudes. An extraordinary level of attention was given to securing the English Channel against the attempts of refugees to gain access from France. Calais and Dover became the epicentres of a drama where the stakes were life and death—the actual deaths of adult and child refugees. An immense amount of effort went into pushing for, and resisting, the bringing of unaccompanied children from France to Britain, and the reuniting of families divided by that channel.

(Kettle, 2018, pp. 155-6)

As shown earlier with the language of Phillip Hammond, David Cameron and others, this narrative where refugee flows across Europe are perceived as a security threat has manifested in a preferred response to halt the movement of refugees at the English Channel. Christian groups in the UK have been keen to disrupt this narrative where the refugee is seen as a threat and where Britain is seen as a fortress: as Paterson reflects of the example of the Church of England, ‘the CoE’s central migration messages are swimming against an increasingly hostile discursive and attitudinal tide’ (Paterson, 2018, p. 595). This disruption has been pursued in different ways. Many Christian groups have been keen to highlight the dignity of the refugee as a person as being of paramount importance throughout the asylum process from beginning to end. One example of this was found in the campaign by JPIT⁷⁶ *A Very British Nativity* which, through the Nativity story sought to show the importance of showing hospitality in a time where refugees are treated with hostility (JPIT, 2016, p. 1). The Pope has also become involved in this conversation, encouraging nations to look to the safety and dignity of refugees over concerns of national security (Jolliffe & Burke, 2018, p. 149).

Other Christian groups have been keen to disrupt the nation-centred nature of this argument, where the suffering of refugees is seen as a problem for the United Kingdom and its borders. One of the key organisations in this field is Churches Together in Britain and Ireland’s Churches Refugee Network (CRN), which arose in 2004 as a formalised structure for work which had been conducted previously on an informal basis (CTBI, 2014). The programme *Focus on Refugees* has arisen out of this work, and has been engaging in the debate around the issue of refugees. A large part of their contribution to

⁷⁶ Who represent the Methodist Church, United Reformed Church, Church of Scotland, and Baptist Union.

the discussion around refugees has been a focus on a form of Christian solidarity, where members of the group have crossed national borders in order to express a form of solidarity, which has biblical origins in passages such as St. Paul's letter to the Romans:

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another

Romans 12:5 (NRSVA)

As part of this, the group organised two trips to places affected acutely by the refugee crisis – one trip to Greece, and another to Italy. The first trip, to Greece, was a visit comprised entirely of female Christian leaders from the UK, envisaged as a visit of 'women to women; northern Europeans to southern Europeans; and Christians to Christians' (Galloway, 2016). The intent behind this was to 'hear the voices and stories of women, who are often silenced in the dominant narratives'; to counter the image of "Fortress Europe", securing its own interests and then pulling the drawbridge up behind it'; and to affirm that

Among the most important values that people of faith can offer in the context of war and displacement is the belief that care, justice and compassion are not confined by the boundaries of our own states. From a faith perspective, our country is the whole world. If it is not, then we are not true to our faith.

(Galloway, 2016)

The second visit was couched in similar understandings of Christian solidarity, though it was comprised of young male Christians to Italy who, through meeting men of a similar age who had made perilous journeys seeking refuge, would be 'living letters' highlighting their plight 'seeking to make visible what is currently invisible and to amplify the testimony of those who do not have our privileges of voice and access' (Meban, 2017). In this sense, both visits were a challenge to narrower principles of national identity, and ideas of othering, and an articulation of a different sort of identity which Christians claim 'in the love of God... reconciling not just the Church but the world' (Galloway, 2016). This challenge would be communicated to member churches and communities in order that they might 'be moved and challenged by the stories' and that as a challenge to prevailing narratives churches would then 'want to ensure that this message will be laid alongside the new media

headlines and stories' (Elliot, 2017). One interview subject, who had been on one of the visits, remarked:

There were several things from that visit ... and one that kept striking me was that we were at a camp - because they had closed the borders. And we were at a camp at one of the islands and we were between wire. And these people were saying to us: "write my name write my name so that you don't forget I am – I am". And so we would write their names down. And the point was: don't forget my name don't forget me... I thought I am not a number I am not just a part of the amorphous mass. I am. This is who I am; this is how I am. And I kept thinking your name is written on the palm of my hand, I can count the hairs on your head... the idea that these are statistics is just beyond anything that I can cope with. I have to do something I have to be part of something.

(Research Interview L)

In this, the participant alludes to Isaiah 49:16, and Luke 12:7/Matthew 10:30⁷⁷, which form a core part of their understanding of the central humanity of refugee people. These scriptural resources in which each individual person is known fully by God form the essence of a commitment to never reduce people to numbers.

Whilst Christian elites have been challenging the nation-centred narrative around refugees for some time, the change in governmental will came less from a sustained campaign of concern, but rather as Tim Farron makes clear as a result of a wind change in British public opinion in response to the image of Alan Kurdi:

to print the absolutely heartbreaking picture of the body of Alan Kurdi was one of the most powerful things any journalist could choose to do... it changed the tone of the debate in this country. A week ago, there was no plan whatsoever from those on the Government Benches to make the kind of proposals that were made yesterday.

⁷⁷ Isaiah 49 speaks a great deal of the knowledge God has of His people: in v. 1 – 'Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name'; and in vv. 15-16 'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands'. Luke 12:4-7 says 'I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.'

(HC Deb 9th September 2015, Vol 599, Col 456).

Indeed, the debate in which Farron was speaking came out in response to an online government petition which attracted 450,287 signatures (UK Government and Parliament, 2016). It seems that the influence of Christian elites at this particular juncture was quite limited as, though David Cameron⁷⁸ did promise to welcome 20,000 refugees into the country, a letter signed by 84 Anglican Bishops which was (at first) written privately to the Prime Minister and which encouraged the admission of a further 30,000 refugees was not met with a reply from the Prime Minister's office within a month of the letter being sent (Handley, 2015). In particular, the letter was to do with the theme of playing one's part and contributing one's fair share, where the Bishops were keen for the church to play its part in 'offering support to all refugees who come' and to 'make rental properties and spare housing available' and to 'promote and support foster-caring among churches... to care for the increasing number of accompanied minors' (The Observer, 2015). In the same theme therefore, the increased number of refugees which the Bishops encouraged the Prime Minister to allow was to do with 'bring[ing] us into line with comparable commitments made by other countries' (ibid.). After a lack of reply, the letter was made public, which resulted in David Cameron expressing his respectful frustration towards the Bishops, that their suggestion might lead to further refugees wishing to undertake perilous journeys and that he wished that the Bishops might state that 'Britain has fulfilled our moral obligations' (Watt, 2015).

Political engagement has also taken the form of a focus on the plight of asylum seekers once they arrive in the United Kingdom. One such organisation is the Jesuit Refugee Service⁷⁹ (JRS) who recently published their *Out in the Cold* report, which focussed on the many ways in which the asylum system as currently delivered creates situations where many are forced into street homelessness and destitution (Jesuit Refugee Service UK, 2018, p. 6). The director of the JRS in her foreword echoed a similar need to reaffirm the human person against hostility, writing that 'In this climate of hostility towards migrants, we seem to have forgotten that at the centre of the public storm are human beings' and quoting Pope Francis who understands that these stories of suffering

⁷⁸ Whilst David Cameron himself is an Anglican he has been the subject of lobbying by Bishops of that church. Cameron has described his own faith as being something which comes and goes 'like the reception for Magic FM in the Chilterns', echoing Boris Johnson's statement (Wintour & Watt, 2008), in this regard there might be considered to be a liminal nature to his religious identification where sometimes he might identify as Christian and other times not. As discussed in the methodology section, there are a number of people who may be considered to be in this category.

⁷⁹ The Jesuit Refugee Service are an international body who have regional offices, including one in the UK. They provide practical support as well as engaging in advocacy.

are '*a sign of the times*'⁸⁰ and therefore that the Church ought to respond with acts of charity, prayer and sacrifice (Teather, 2018, p. 5). In this sense, the JRS emphasises that the moral nature of asylum cannot be divorced from economic or security narratives, as Anna Rowlands writes:

In a public context where most conversation about migration is reduced to the economic or political, to understand the role of JRS is to grasp that the debate about migration is always also both cultural and implicitly or explicitly theological.

(Rowlands, 2018, p. 72)

In this way, another element of the debate which Christian actors have been keen to subvert is the distinction between economic and other kinds of migrants. A great deal of political discourse has distinguished between those fleeing for asylum, and those migrating for economic reasons, in a way which has not captured the suffering and desperation experienced by those who travel between states, often perilously, in search of a way to earn a living. Even in situations where the humanity and the rights of the asylum seeker are affirmed, it is often the case that the humanity of the economic migrant is not. One interview subject said:

On that visit it was clear to me that, predominantly, it was young men. I'm a mother, and I've got two sons, and I thought to myself what would I do if I was in Syria and my boys were 19 and 20? I would say: go, go, go. Just go. Find a way. You're strong, you're young. Keep in touch with me and go. And there was a lot of criticism that these young men were economic migrants. Forgive me, but tell me what's the difference between an economic migrant and any other kind of migrant? You are a migrant. You're fleeing for your life for some reason. If you are fleeing for money reasons, for financial reasons, you're desperate. Nobody actually leaves their homes in such circumstances for fun. Nobody. It is not a lifestyle choice.

(Research Interview L)

Another interviewee said that:

⁸⁰ Referring to the phrase from the Gospel of Matthew which in the world of Catholic Social Teaching since Vatican II has taken on the significance of the Church, 'in the midst of such darkness' nonetheless providing hope for humanity displaying 'herself ... deploy[ing] all her power of charity, prayer, sacrifice and suffering' (Second Vatican Council, 1961, p. 1).

it's about the possibility for relationships between human beings. So it's the possibility of the life of the common good the possibility of the dignity of individual human beings the possibility of a just distribution within the social order... [One of the reasons] why Catholic Social teaching is so interesting on migration, and why it has a kind of unique value within a wider set of social theories on migration... is it refuses to treat the political and economic as separate and separable categories in the modern world. So it insists that if you're asking political questions about, you know, who should give whom access to a territory... that analysis is framed in terms of an economic analysis of justice. Not only a political analysis of justice.

(Research Interview R)

In this way, whilst Christian attitudes towards the dignity of persons are centralising the human against negative rhetoric towards refugees, they are also affirming it in the context of migration more broadly, which is something which is often absent from political debate.

Consequently, as has been shown, the main thrust of Christian political engagement to do with refugees has been an attempt to affirm a God-given human dignity against a backdrop of a dehumanising narrative which promotes the nation over individual, and a parallel and related campaign to encourage the nation to accept more refugees and to take better care of them when they arrive. This affirmation of a theologically rooted conception of human dignity is nonetheless something which ordinarily resonates within public bounds of universality, and has enabled Christian actors to work alongside those of other faiths and none (such as Lord Dubs) to campaign for more humane and merciful government policies towards refugees. Campaigning on human dignity, regardless of its origins, is often seen uncontroversial matter, though at times a Christian conception of human dignity is broader than that which is understood more widely, as one prominent Roman Catholic legislator who also campaigns on abortion noted, starkly:

What saddens me is that sometimes we are remarkably silent when it comes to issues like the right life of an unborn child. I don't understand that discrepancy. I think that from the womb to the tomb we should always speak out for human dignity. No one's ever picketed my home, no one's ever burnt out my constituency offices when I've spoken out about bad housing and unemployment, but they did when I speak out on the right to life of an unborn child.

(Research Interview O)

In this sense, the reframing of Christian values in ways which resonate in the secular sphere does not necessarily ensure that non-Christians understand those values in the same ways Christians might. The reframing of Christian values is not therefore always an effective strategy to attain policy aims. In this example there are a number of different perspectives on human dignity which are often practically sufficiently similar in order to sustain cooperation on specific projects, but this does not extend to the area of abortion legislation.

Practical Engagement

Christian groups have been active in welcoming refugees to the country and providing for their needs practically. One of the highest profile ways in which Christian groups have become involved with this has been the community sponsorship scheme, which had its inauguration by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the then Home Secretary at Lambeth Palace (Kettle, 2018, p. 157). Indeed, it was the Archbishop of Canterbury who became the first community sponsor under this scheme, welcoming a refugee family into Lambeth Palace in July 2016⁸¹ (Davies, 2016). Despite this scheme attracting such a high profile, uptake amongst communities, most of whom ‘with churches at their core’ has been limited, which is perhaps to do with the large amount of work many churches are already doing with refugees through the VPRS (Kettle, 2018, pp. 157-8). Examples of the work done by Christian groups in welcoming refugees into the communities may be found in the work by the Methodist Church in Birmingham who, alongside Citizens UK, have lobbied city leadership to welcome more refugees to the city, (Birmingham Methodist Circuit, 2016). and have upon their arrival helped put together systems of support and care. In Birmingham, as in other places in the country, Christians worked collaboratively with those of all faiths and none to help achieve policy change,

actually we are challenging you and encouraging you to receive 500 refugees. And this body of people support this. And that's where representation is so crucial in stuff with church with faith. Sometimes we just think we're tied into the church with 12 people or whatever ... well I can say I represent 150 Methodist churches, and I represent countless people from Jewish synagogues, and Eritreans and Somalians, immigrants into Birmingham. I represent all of those people; let's speak on equal terms ...
Birmingham City Council said yes to the 500

...

⁸¹ The family was later rehoused in 2018 in a move which angered many but which, according to a church official, was ultimately in the family’s best interests (Hastings & Taher, 2018).

I just love doing what I'm doing. I'm giving a voice ... And so I've continued speaking about it and if I had given it up, I would have given up the trust of that the Eritreans, the Somalians and others had put in this bloke that happened to wear a clerical collar. And on the days through all of our training, especially my training in the industry, was always to liberate the other. And certainly in my church theological study liberation, and womanism, and feminism, and dalit theology, I would get to a point where I'd like to shut up to get the other to speak. And they knew that I was doing that, and they didn't know anything about dalit theology. But they noticed that I was becoming quieter, and they would come up to me and, this is no exaggeration, and they would pull my shirt and they would say... don't stop speaking because people are listening to you.

(Research Interview D)

Despite the success of this practical provision, as well as local government engagement, it is important to note that Christian bodies are not always unified in the welcome of refugees into their communities, as the same interviewee said:

I do realise that 500 extra people into Birmingham is a massive number. The hospitalization, the schools, the welfare, you know the housing. I do know that not all church people agreed with me. I got letters from Methodist people, who were leading Sunday worship regularly, saying 'you do not do this in my name'. It actually makes me shiver and it could it could move me to tears that how can they, how can they be in a pulpit ... on the Sunday proclaiming the love of Christ and then saying we don't want refugees. But of course, when we reflect on that a little deeper they've probably got shit lives ... no job, no accommodation, life was crap for them, so they can see the refugee coming in looking like they're coming in on a package from Harrods: everything was tied up beautifully for them. So for one particular person I sent a three page letter back so they knew that I seriously considered all of their points, and gave them signposts to get help from all of the areas that they were concerned, and offered to go and have a coffee with them.

(Research Interview D)

It is exercise of practical provision and its impact upon local communities which necessitates that many church agencies be dual facing in nature. In this sense, Christian advocacy bodies can find themselves campaigning for something at local or central government level, whilst simultaneously explaining the need for that provision and preparing practical responses at a faith community level.

As a member of JPIT said in interview:

so it's really important to tell the world, and tell actually people within our church that our faith is - faith can do great, can do great things. It teaches us things that can change society for the better, of which simply treating, treating people with ... respect is the bare minimum. Yeah, so that's why we, I mean, that's why I want to talk about God ... my faith is what drives me to say these things and I want to say that the things that God teaches us about the nature of what it is to be a human are really important in treating humans with decency.... We thought that [talking about God] will convince people in the church. People in the church, who don't, who think this is all political nonsense. We think when they read that, we might have a chance of shifting their mind just one little iota.

(Research Interview E)

In this way, in the face of a need to convince both politicians as well as other Christians, there is a strategic framing in religious language of interventions directed at Christians. The choice of which language to use is dependent upon the likely receptiveness of each group to the form of language being considered.

In another area of practical engagement with migration and asylum, the JRS has also been and working within asylum detention centres throughout the UK. Asylum detention centres in the UK operate in a way which causes great psychological harms to those detained which is caused especially through the way in which space and time are experienced by those within it as they are moved around frequently and detained indefinitely (Gill, 2009, p. 186). JRS support within detention centres provides help for detainees to acquire healthcare support, emotional support and help keeping in touch with friends, family and solicitors, (Jesuit Refugee Service, 2018). which the nature of the British detention estate makes difficult.

In each of these cases, the practical engagement is linked to political engagement, with the both the JRS and Methodist Church producing reports to do with the conditions of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. Whilst operating with communities and volunteers can be difficult, the outcomes,

both in terms of practical help provided and information and expertise gathered can be of immense value. Indeed, these reports, like the aforementioned *Out in the Cold* report which have their foundations in the practical experiences of these religious organisations present truths which are not easily discounted by policymakers and which are presented in language with which they will engage. This contrasts with the religious language orientated towards other Christians.

Conclusion:

Christian groups and actors have responded to the Syrian crisis in a number of different ways, both practical and political. The primary areas of engagement for Christians in the UK for the Syrian crisis have been to do with lobbying the government to accept more refugees in the UK, assisting with housing and supporting refugees, and providing a connection to policymakers to religious communities in the region. Christian elites have attempted to:

- highlight that conflict in Syria and the surrounding region is not simply a military struggle, but also a moral, philosophical, and theological struggle which Christian and other faith leaders ought to be a part of refuting;
- highlight that there is a common and shared humanity between people in the United Kingdom and refugees who live beyond its borders which must not be reduced to economic, political, and security arguments;
- highlight that there is a duty of care of the nation towards asylum seekers and refugees within the UK so that the dignity of the human person is preserved.

In each of these areas, Christian elites have faced two ways: towards other Christians and towards the secular sphere. Whilst biblical language has not primarily been used as a language of argumentation in arenas such as Parliament, biblical narratives were used when speaking to co-religionists. Whilst ideas such as *Human Dignity*, *Just War*, and *Solidarity* were spoken about to Christians and secular audiences, interventions orientated towards secular audiences were strategically framed almost exclusively in these terms. Whilst Christian elites did not, for the most part, use biblical language to express their ideas in a public way, many actors who were interviewed felt no sense of dissonance between their faith and the language they used publicly. The contributions which Christian elites made politically were also grounded in a practical experience of a worldwide church involved in visiting and speaking with people and religious leaders in Syria, visiting refugees and asylum seekers elsewhere in Europe, and caring for Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. In this way, Christian elites brought a unique perspective to the discussion.

Chapter Seven:

The United Kingdom and the European Union

Introduction

On the 23rd June 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in a referendum which had a turnout of 72.2 percent of eligible voters, the largest turnout for a vote since 1992. The referendum was part of a fundamental shift in the relationship between the United Kingdom and its European neighbours, as well as its relationship with the rest of the world. Though, at the time of writing, Britain has yet to leave the EU, it is likely that the political, economic and social impact of this vote will be felt for decades to come. In particular, Brexit (as it has come to be known), the campaign towards it and the discussions after the vote, have been deeply connected to ideas of what it means to be part of the British nation.

This chapter explores the manner in which Christian groups have engaged with this great national conversation. Specifically, the chapter finds that Christian groups have engaged with Brexit in three primary ways: firstly, in terms of an engagement with the initial political campaign, encouraging voters to consider certain values when casting their ballots and often campaigning for the remain vote; secondly, in terms of engaging in a conscious attempt to reconcile a voting public which, over this issue⁸², has become deeply divided; thirdly, in engaging with and in parts instigating a national conversation around what the shape of the British nation ought to be in a post-Brexit world. As before, this will be explored through reference to written statements and speeches by Christian elites, as well as through reference to interviews.

The chapter finds that Christian elites were hampered in their attempts to campaign on this issue by divisions within Christian churches. Specifically, it is shown that amongst the laity there was a majority for *Leave*, which is a contrast to senior clergy who, often prominently, stated their

⁸² Though in reality, it has been divided deeply for some time around issues of identity, culture and class.

intentions to *Remain*. Christian elites, as in other chapters, orientated their campaigning in two different directions: towards Christians and towards Westminster. The chapter finds that Christian interventions met with mixed success. More successful interventions occurred when elites framed their interventions in terms of a framing of Christian values using concepts such as *the common good*. Less successful were contributions which reached for a Christian history and heritage of the European Project, which was resisted by Christian Eurosceptics and ignored by others. Christian elites used more overtly theological language in this debate in comparison to the other issues explored and it is not clear that this strategy was always effective. Nonetheless, Christian elites provided a distinctive contribution to the debate, drawing upon a particular faith-tradition based set of reasons. Less in evidence here was a relation of the voices of their congregations.

As with each of the other chapters (though particularly in common with the chapter on Syria), this analysis is time limited because of its continually developing nature. This chapter therefore comments on events up to early 2019. The author at the time of writing is therefore unaware of what the situation will be on the day when Britain leaves the EU, or indeed whether it will ultimately leave.

Background: Historical Origins

The roots of Brexit lie substantially before the referendum. Whilst the scope of this chapter examines the time immediately surrounding the EU referendum, by way of context it is important to consider the history of Britain's involvement with the European Union.

The United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community (EEC – which later became the EU) in 1973. This accession to the EEC came after two previous failed attempts at joining, where UK membership was resisted by French President Charles de Gaulle who, amongst other worries, felt that the UK had a 'deep-seated hostility' and 'lack of interest' in the construction of the European project (Drake, 2010). Whilst de Gaulle's refusal was met with dismay from other members of the EEC and with 'gloom' from across parties⁸³ in Westminster (BBC, 2008a), it was welcomed by those within Britain who resisted the notion of joining. Ultimately, the decision in Parliament to join the EEC was not an uncontroversial matter, with many of the narratives which would later come dominate the national conversation in the late 2010s being present in a fully-formed way in October 1971.

⁸³ Notably, however, the Labour party at the time was fairly split in terms of its enthusiasm for the European project.

The arguments which featured most heavily were those surrounding the economic consequences – whatever they might be – as Prime Minister Edward Heath reflected:

‘In the debates of the last six days, the economic arguments have figured very prominently’

(HC Deb 28th October 1971, Vol 823, Cols 2087-8)

But the other primary theme he reflected was that of sovereignty:

‘It is right that there should have been so much discussion of sovereignty.’

(ibid. Col 2210)

Ultimately, the final decision was in favour of joining the EC, though the final healthy majority of 356 to 244 obscures the extent to which parties, and in particular the Labour party, was divided on this issue. Division will be a large theme throughout this chapter; it would be a mistake to understand division as a uniquely modern phenomenon. Though the decision on behalf of the United Kingdom to join was made in 1971, it was only after the end of de Gaulle’s presidency that the UK was allowed to join the EEC. In the hours immediately after accession, Prime Minister Edward Heath spoke of a hope that the ‘every day lives’ of Britons would be transformed, and that there would be ‘a great cross-fertilisation of knowledge and information, not only in business but in every other sphere’ and indeed in the months following the membership announcement, the real and deeply human process of movement, entanglement and association began with over a thousand British civil servants who moved to Brussels to take up their place at the heart of that community (BBC, 2008).

The discussion in Parliament to join the European Community in many ways failed to give full resolution to all of the questions and concerns which were raised within it. As was noted by members within the discussion (and as shown in some dialogue quoted earlier) the negotiation and decision lacked legitimacy in the eyes of many within the general public. In response to this, the UK held its first referendum on membership of the community two years later in 1975. Once again, many of the arguments which are familiar today were then present (consider, for reference, materials produced by the two campaigns (National Referendum Campaign, 1975; Britain in Europe, 1975)).

Ultimately, the result of this referendum delivered a decisive vote for remaining within the EC where, with a 64% turnout, 67% of the vote went to the Yes campaign, and the United Kingdom continued to be a member of the EC and the later EU. Nonetheless, the themes present within the conversation continued to be features of the UK's relationship with the EU. These themes, and, in particular a focus on British national sovereignty, have contributed to Britain being understood as an *awkward partner* in Europe⁸⁴. Much of what Wallace noted in 1986 has truth thirty years later, as he noted that 'Historical myths shape practical policy', and that a 'preoccupation with sovereignty in particular' led to a difficulty of the UK to engage with new relationships of interdependence and new economic realities (Wallace, 1986, p. 380). These *historical myths* borrow into narratives of 'cultural separateness, difference and even superiority' and lead towards a basic fact that 'British people in the main, do not feel European' or 'trust EU institutions' (Murray, Warleigh-Lack, & He, 2014, p. 286). In practice, British membership of the EU was in one sense characterised by a sort of 'permissive consensus', where the EU's role in political affairs was largely not noticed by much of the public and whose roots were not deeply grounded (Geddes, 2016, p. 269). With hindsight, it is easy to see that many of the issues which existed within the first referendum were not sufficiently resolved, and perhaps only merely forgotten, and that they would later become a 'source of significant political conflict' (Hay, 2016, p. 295); it is to this later conflict this chapter now turns.

Background: The 2016 Referendum

I know that the United Kingdom is sometimes seen as an argumentative and rather strong-minded member of the family of European nations. And it's true that our geography has shaped our psychology. We have the character of an island nation - independent, forthright, passionate in defence of our sovereignty. We can no more change this British sensibility than we can drain the English Channel. And because of this sensibility, we come to the European Union with a frame of mind that is more practical than emotional. For us, the European Union is a means to an end - prosperity, stability, the anchor of freedom and democracy both within Europe and beyond her shores - not an end in itself. We insistently ask: How? Why? To what end?

⁸⁴ It is certain that these identity-focussed aspects of the relationship between the UK and EU are also accompanied by differences in terms of a focus in economic policy, where the UK tends to advocate for more economically liberal policies. Nonetheless, this chapter's focus is on questions of identity and feeling which it contends are more fundamental with regards to the decision to leave.

From David Cameron's (2013) Bloomberg speech

In his Bloomberg speech, David Cameron outlined his commitment to promising an in-out referendum on EU membership for the British people. This came as part of a period where a variety of British political leaders had promised to hold some kind of EU referendum if certain conditions were met. Ed Milliband, the Labour leader, promised a referendum in the event that there was a transfer of powers from Westminster to Brussels⁸⁵ (Parker, 2014). The Liberal Democrats, far earlier in 2010, promised an in-out referendum in the event of a substantial change in the relationship between the EU and the UK, recognising that the EU had 'evolved significantly since the last public vote on membership over thirty years ago' (Liberal Democrats, 2010, p. 67). David Cameron's speech was different in the respect that it promised, after a period of renegotiation where Cameron would argue for a British vision for the future of Europe, a 'proper, reasoned debate', after which the British people would decide (Cameron, 2013). In this sense, it was the first offer since 1975 for the British public to have a say in a referendum on the current state of affairs, and not on a future EU⁸⁶.

Whilst some things remain the same, some things change. Whilst there are similarities between the context of the European referendum debate in the 1975 and that of 2016, the Britain to which David Cameron was talking to in 2013 was a changed nation from the 1970s. It is different in terms of its social and economic makeup, and its ethnic makeup. Socially and economically, as Ford and Goodwin note, since the 1960s there has been a large social shift in terms of the makeup of the workforce in the UK and its unionisation – in short, there has been a decline in *blue collar* work as a result of widespread industrial decline in the 1980s. This has led to a fundamentally different electoral environment for political parties in the last 25 years than was the case previously. (Ford & Goodwin, 2014, pp. 114-7) This had, led in the preceding two decades, led political parties towards strategies which appealed to a larger middle class, in what the BBC called an 'Alliterative assault' appealing to the likes of 'Mondeo Man', 'Worcester Woman' and 'Pebbledash People' (Stone-Lee, 2005). This strategy mirrored that which was outlined by Downs in his spatial model of party alignment, where parties 'will converge rapidly upon the center [sic.]' (Downs, 1957, p. 118). This

⁸⁵ Indeed, Ed Miliband was not convinced that substantial shifts in powers which would prompt such a referendum would occur in the near future (Parker, 2014; Wintour, 2014)– his promise for his in-out referendum was therefore perhaps not one he ever expected to have to honour.

⁸⁶ Whilst this would therefore be the first time that the general public would have had an opportunity to have their say in a referendum since 1975, it is important to note that the Labour 1983 Manifesto included a pledge to leave the EU, saying that 'On taking office we will open preliminary negotiations with the other EEC member states' (Labour Party, 1983).. Labour, however, lost decisively in 1983, but this electoral verdict was a decision on a broader range of issues than EU membership.

focus on the median voter was often considered to be to the detriment of those without qualifications or who continued to be employed in traditional working class professions (Ford & Goodwin, 2014, pp. 114-7). Time had also progressed, and many people who voted in the 2016 referendum were those who had no experience other than living within the European Union. The formational experiences of these people are different to those who voted in the 1975 referendum, who were people who grew up outside the union, but also some of whom lived through the latter days of the Empire. These generational and socio-political aspects served to introduce generational, class and identity elements between, and within these referendums.

This socio-political and strategy change has been accompanied by a widespread voting disengagement, where traditional class affiliations to traditional parties have become less strong – as Denver notes, ‘declining voter turnout has been paralleled by a decline in the intensity of party identification’ (Denver, 2007, p. 47). This has led to a greater level of voter disengagement, but also in recent years a large rise in electoral volatility and support for alternative political parties, such as UKIP (Renwick, 2016, p. 56). This political change accompanied a large period of ethnic and cultural shifts due to migration to the UK, where many migrants arrived from the EU. Fig 1. displays levels of migration to the UK around the Brexit vote. These levels are to be contrasted with historical levels of migration. The graph displays net-migration figures at the end of September 2015 of 323,000 (Immigration: 617,000; Emigration: 294,000) (Office for National Statistics, 2016), which contrasts with levels shown in Fig. 2, which are much lower. This change in migration has led to a changed UK, where in 2013, 12.4% of the population was born abroad, and where the largest increase for any single national group was amongst Polish-born residents who had increased from 95,000 in 2004 to 679,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2015).

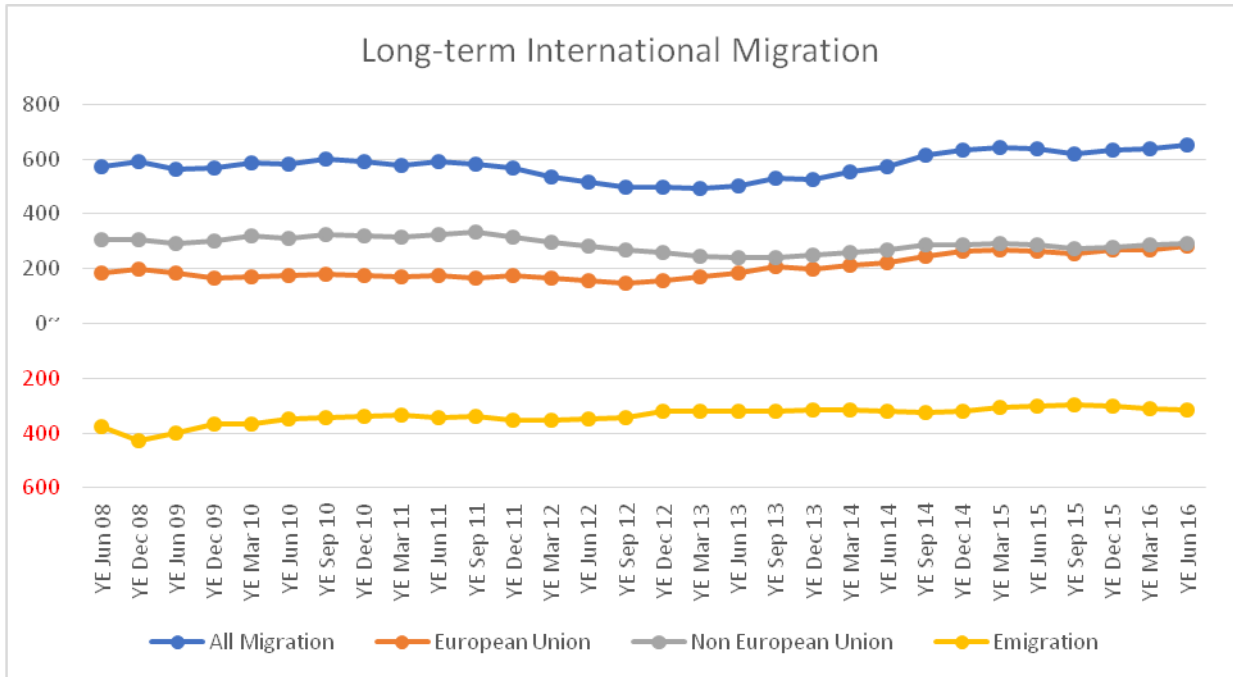


Fig 1: Long-term international migration to the United Kingdom in the years leading up to Brexit. The graph displays, throughout, though especially in 2015 historically high levels of immigration. Immigration is displayed on the Y axis in thousands. Emigration in this dataset is shown as a negative figure. Data sourced from the ONS.

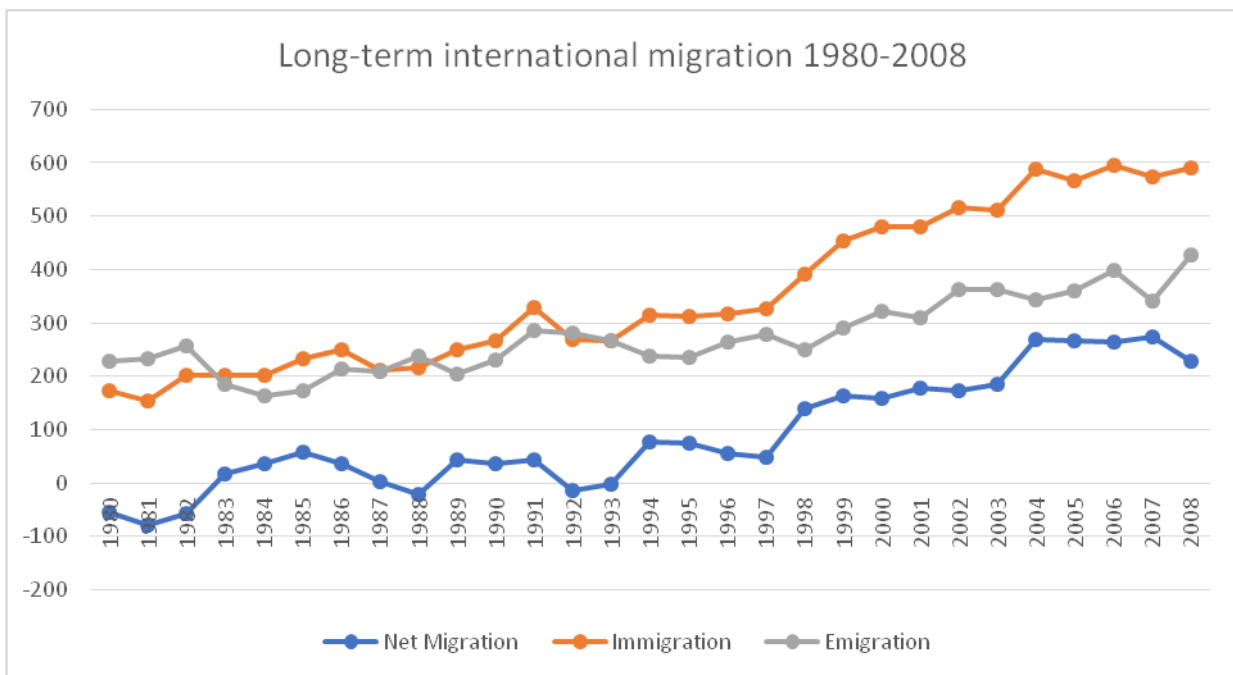


Fig 2: Long-term international migration 1980-2008. Migration is displayed on the Y axis in thousands. Data source ONS.

It is perhaps therefore not surprising⁸⁷ that such shifts in migration and demographics have been accompanied by increased anxiety concerning immigration. As Goodwin and Dennison reflect, there is a rising majority who wish to see immigration reduced either a little or a lot, a number which has risen from 39% in 1995, to 70% in March 2015 (Dennison & Goodwin, 2015, p. 175). Whilst Dennison and Goodwin claim that the 'British Public is not divided on immigration' (ibid.), their later analysis of BES statistics reveals that this simple majority figure masks serious variation within public attitudes to migration, with the Labour party in 2015 being particularly divided, with 40% believing immigration is bad for the economy, and 36% believing that it is good, but that also those who are older, those who are not managers or professionals, and those without degree qualifications are far more likely to say that immigration is bad for the economy (Dennison & Goodwin, 2015, pp. 176-7). It is important to note that this concern is related to themes such as the economy and the provision of public services and living space, but also, as mentioned in the chapter on Syria, it is related to questions of security and terrorism where a number of terrorist attacks throughout Europe, some of whom involving migrants, served to reinforce a link between immigration and terror in the minds of the electorate (Clarke, Goodwin, & Whitely, 2017, p. 12). This was emphasised by media coverage which presented immigration in a shocking and threatening way, involving words like 'stampeding', 'swamping', 'invasions' and 'crisis' (Gavin, 2018, p. 836). Ultimately, this concern with immigration manifested at the polling booths, with analyses such as that conducted by Goodwin and Milazzo demonstrating that support for Brexit had a great deal to do with immigration and the perception of immigration, where support for leaving the EU was higher in communities which had experienced high levels of ethnic change and many who voted for Brexit 'felt negatively about how historically unprecedented levels of immigration were impacting on the national economy, culture and the welfare state' (Goodhart, 2017, p. 462).

Alongside this increase in a concern related to immigration, in recent years attitudes towards the European Union have also changed. Since the turn of the millennium, Euroscepticism has found a resurgence in British politics. This newer form of Euroscepticism, whilst possessing similar themes to do with sovereignty and on economic considerations as 1975, is far more focussed on the issue of immigration than was the previously the case. In 1975 the issue of Euroscepticism split political parties, although in 2016 it was the Conservative party which was divided instead of the Labour party⁸⁸ (Geddes, 2016, p. 265). Euroscepticism began to make a strong return around the ratification of the Maastricht treaty (ibid., p. 269), but in particular gathered apace since the Great

⁸⁷ Though perhaps not inevitable.

⁸⁸ Although there were divides in the Labour party, these were not of the same scale as those within the Conservative party.

Recession of 2008, where public attitudes to the ability of the major political parties – valence considerations – to deal with the issues of the economy and immigration fed into an increased popularity for the Eurosceptic third party⁸⁹ (Clarke, Goodwin, & Whitely, 2017, p. 144).

This lack of trust in the ability of the governing parties to achieve their goals in Europe was reinforced by David Cameron’s renegotiation with the EU. Whilst during the coalition government the majority of Conservative voters spoke of reform instead of withdrawal from the European Union, this was something which later changed closer to the referendum when it became clear that the desired reforms would not be obtained (Lynch & Whitaker, 2018, p. 37). Whilst David Cameron did secure some concessions and safeguards for Britain in his renegotiation with the EU, the reforms which were offered were not considered by many to be substantial (Atican, 2018, p. 111), which reinforced domestic conceptions that the EU was impossible to reform⁹⁰. Whilst the renegotiation was intended to lead to Britain remaining within a reformed and improved Europe, instead it had ‘the contrary effect of demonstrating the EU’s attachment to free movement as a condition of membership’ (Glencross, 2016, p. 3).

These valence dynamics did not only apply to an assessment of domestic politicians with regards to their ability to satisfy UK interests in Europe, but also with regards to the EU itself. With the issue of migration still paramount in the minds of the electorate, the refugee and migrant crisis⁹¹, where there was a failure of the EU to manifest a strong collective response, raised issues to do with ‘intra-EU solidarity’ (Karageorinou, 2016, p. 210). Caporaso draws a direct link between the refugee and migrant crisis and Brexit polling, writing:

In the UK, there was a small bias for ‘remain’ in the first half of 2015 but this margin dissipated quickly in the summer of 2015 with dramatic increases in the flows of refugees across the Mediterranean. Anti-refugee sentiment continued throughout the year.

(Caporaso, 2018, p. 1349)

⁸⁹ UKIP was the third party in the 2015 election in terms of the number of votes gained, though not in terms of seats claimed; due to first past the post, in terms of seats the SNP were the third party.

⁹⁰ Glencross notes that much of the reason behind the failure of Cameron to achieve substantial reforms in his renegotiation is to do with the existing UK demands which had been accommodated in the past, and that any further demands would begin to compromise fundamental principles of the EU (Glencross, 2016, p. 24).

⁹¹ As spoken about more substantially in the Syria chapter.

In the light of the heightened public concern to do with migration, the principle of freedom of movement became especially problematic for the British voting public. Increasingly, a rhetoric to do with *taking back control* of borders and of the nation was presented both by UKIP before the referendum and by the Leave campaign during the referendum. As Goodman reflects, Leave campaigners presented migration as a risk to the UK which could only be handled by leaving the EU (Goodman, 2017, p. 40). The response to this argument by Remain campaigners was limited by the widespread anxiety around migration, and also the failure of David Cameron to achieve any substantial concessions on freedom of movement. Consequently, Remain campaigners concentrated largely upon claiming that voting to leave the EU would not be an effective way of managing migration, and did not make a substantial and sustained attempt to campaign for the positive impact of migration upon the UK (Goodman, 2017, p. 49). Ultimately, this meant that during the EU referendum campaign, there was very little attempt from either side to highlight the benefits of migration upon the UK. It is perhaps regrettably therefore not surprising that in the months following the Brexit vote, hate crime in the UK rose⁹² (Home Office, 2018, p. 7).

The EU had also, in the perceptions of many, not acquitted itself well in the handling of the Great Recession, as the troubles of many of its members in the single currency became popularly known as the Eurozone crisis. The crisis, whose effects continue to be felt, involved emergency assistance to Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus. Greece was especially badly hit, with its economy shrinking in size by a quarter and youth unemployment rising to fifty percent (Brunsden & Khan, 2018). Responses to the Greek crisis involved emergency bailout loans which were accompanied by various stipulations on a reorganisation of the Greek economy, which were in turn accompanied by widespread strikes, protests, and rioting (the following news articles provide some idea: (Taylor, 2012; BBC, 2012; Kitsantonis, 2017)). These images of fiery running street battles, and the notion of an overbearing EU and Germany in particular became part of a narrative which was capitalised upon by politicians like Nigel Farage, who in criticising beleaguered Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras said in the European Parliament:

You come here, Mr Samaras, and tell us that you represent the 'sovereign will of the Greek people'. Well, I am sorry but you are not in charge of Greece, and I suggest you rename and rebrand your party... It is called New Democracy; I suggest you call it No Democracy because Greece is now under foreign control. You can't make any

⁹² Hate crime in the UK had been continuing to rise, having more than doubled since 2012/13. The rise after Brexit, however, represented a particular spike. Of these hate crimes, 76% were racially motivated (Home Office, 2018, p. 7)..

decisions, you have been bailed out and you have surrendered democracy, the thing your country invented in the first place.

(Smith H. , 2014)

These two crises, from which the EU was in the process of emerging, had led to it attracting a great deal of criticism from politicians and intellectuals across Europe, which had the dual effect of eroding public confidence in the institution's ability to cope with contemporary challenges, but also had the effect of disallowing various argumentative avenues for the Remain campaign campaign (Glencross, 2016, p. 39). In short, the very same public intellectuals who were critical of the EU could not easily, and with a great degree of plausibility enthusiastically argue for its value. In combination, the distrust of political and intellectual elites, as well as a distrust in the EU as an institution had disastrous consequences for the efficacy of the Remain campaign:

Distrust in the political elite was clearly evident in the campaign. The Remain side misjudged this mood among citizens. Their campaign revolved around senior politicians and other 'experts' presenting 'evidence' about why Brexit would be damaging, with the focus being on its damage to the future of the British economy. However, the people making this case were exactly the type of people who were increasingly distrusted.

(Marsh, 2018, p. 83)

Ultimately, when Britain went to the polls in July 2016, the final vote, which surprised commentators, was for *Leave*. This leave vote was immediately followed by a number of different things, the first of which was the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron who promised to remain for a time, and then to hand over to new leadership. Crucially, on the steps of Number 10, he said that the 'will of the British people is an instruction that must be delivered' (BBC, 2016), which has remained a theme in the aftermath of the referendum. Another thing which immediately followed was one of the largest one-day losses to the value of sterling in history, as it reached a 31 year low on currency markets (Allen, Treanor, & Goodley, 2016).

Crucially, what followed the decision to leave the EU was a vast outpouring of emotion – from jubilation amongst those who voted Leave to anger and despair from those who voted Remain. This is because the decision of whether to remain a part of the EU has, as Browning writes, not only

political elements, but also it has ‘exhibited deep emotional, psychological and even existential elements’ (Browning, 2018, p. 336). In short – the decision of whether to remain or leave the European Union has a lot to do with how people understand themselves and the world they live in, as well as real material consequences for a wide variety of people living in the UK: from those who conduct business connected to the EU, to EU nationals whose right to remain within the nation which had become their home was now in question. As Browning later reflects, ‘one of the most notable things about the referendum is how a single vote became the focus of such significant levels of anguish and aspiration on all sides’ (Browning, 2018, p. 350).

The nation was therefore highlighted to be a disunited kingdom, where different groups of people had very different visions about the direction the country ought to take. Research in the aftermath of the referendum has been rapidly assembled by social scientists who, for the most part, were largely blindsided by the decision. This scramble to understand what happened has coalesced around two, related, questions: who voted to leave, and why? This scholarly discussion perhaps provides a contrast to the public debate in the aftermath of the referendum, which provided a picture of the typical Brexiteer as being afflicted by a particularly nasty form of English nationalism. Whilst there may be some truth to this view, it is also important to be aware of its limitations – and in particular the extent to which it serves to demonise all those who voted leave. As Colin Copus⁹³ reflects:

The tone of the debate post-referendum, however, has been to lay the ‘blame’ as if blame is appropriate, for the result on a nasty English nationalism conveniently forgetting that the majority of Welsh voters also voted leave. But, the argument also seems to rest on the lazy and offensive assumption that every English person voted leave for racist, xenophobic and bigoted reasons.

(Copus, 2018, p. 92)

Instead, scholarly discussion has focussed much more on the socioeconomic positioning of those who voted leave. Whilst some commentators characterised the decision to leave as not being related to economic concerns, describing it instead as being connected to emotional issues which resulted in a ‘decoupling’ of elites from ordinary citizens (Marsh, 2018, p. 83), this viewpoint fails to reflect the extent to which economic concerns are bound up with emotions and ideas of identity. This interaction between feelings and economics is better reflected by Matthew Watson’s analysis, which concludes that economic considerations did play a role ‘but decidedly not in the manner that

⁹³ Who is clearly affronted by the notion – something which he shares with many leave voters.

psophologists have come to expect' (Watson, 2018, p. 18). Instead, those who voted *Leave* were those who have not benefitted from economic changes which have affected the nation in the last years, and who therefore did not respond well to exhortations to *Remain* to safeguard the economy, 'because the economy is not something they feel does right by them' (Watson, 2018, p. 18). Much of this is therefore bound up in shifts in the structure of the UK economy, as well as shifts in the electoral strategies of political parties which were mentioned earlier in this chapter. It is important, however, to also understand that these problems of economic disenfranchisement and the sense of being *left behind* is not something which is unique to the UK. As Hagemann writes, 'large groups of voters express profound dissatisfaction with mainstream politics in Europe, which they feel have left them behind'⁹⁴ (Hagemann, 2018, p. 160). These divides in society are not reducible purely to nationalist lines, though they are related to concerns about immigration and the shape of the economy. They are divides which were therefore highlighted by Brexit, but which existed long before the decision to hold the referendum. Norris and Inglehart advance a *culturally backlash* theory, where it is ultimately a deeper cultural division, to do with the values held-dear by those who voted *Leave* or *Remain*, where those who voted *Leave* were those who felt 'most threatened by the rapid pace of cultural change and the loss of respect for traditional ways of life' (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 396).

Whilst therefore, there were deep divides between *Leave* and *Remain*, rooted in long term changes in the shape of British society, there were also divides amongst those who voted the same way in the referendum. Those who voted to leave because they had felt *left behind* have different concerns to those who wished to leave on free market grounds. Following the departure of David Cameron, the incoming Prime Minister, Theresa May,⁹⁵ therefore had the unenviable task of reconciling the wishes of these disparate groups, a task which was made more difficult after May's dreary election campaign in the 2017 general election where, against expectations, the Conservative party lost seats in the Commons, leading to them forced to enter into a *confidence and supply* arrangement with the DUP (Cabinet Office, 2018). Theresa May was consequently managing a 'government between a rock and a hard place: managing difficult domestic challenges— including a hung parliament—while negotiating an all-defining deal with a united and strong European Union' (Hagemann, 2018, p. 155). This process of negotiation has, to date⁹⁶,

⁹⁴ Similarly, a similar problem may have manifested in the election of President Donald Trump in the United States.

⁹⁵ Who voted remain.

⁹⁶ 27th November 2018.

resulted in the resignation of 19 people from government roles (Jarvis, 2018) – showing clearly the divisions in government which to some extent reflect continuing divisions in broader British society.

Christian Elites and Brexit

fear is a pastoral issue. You deal with it by recognising it, and by standing alongside and providing answers to it ... accentuating fear for political gain ... is absolutely inexcusable

Justin Welby (2016) at a migration and asylum evidence giving session at the Home Affairs Select Committee before the EU referendum.

Whilst Locke might express in his letter that the proper interest of church groups is the ‘concernment for the interests of men’s souls’, and the business of government as ‘a care for the commonwealth’, and that his task was the proper delineation of those concerns to avoid ‘controversies’ (Locke, 1788 (1689), p. 12), even a cursory review of the previous chapters would reveal quite plainly that Christian groups in the United Kingdom are also deeply concerned for the common weal. The various theological and scriptural explorations in previous chapters – and there will be more to come - have also revealed that this task is often conceived as being an integral part of, and not being in addition or in opposition to, the Christian mission. Whilst this concern for the common good is therefore understood to be a key part of the Christian message, especially when this concern manifests in an endorsement of, or opposition to, particular policies, it can cause a difficulty relating to other dynamics of ministry. Indeed, this is where the discussion which was had earlier in the thesis relating to the nature of the Church as a pressure group is relevant. Returning to Grant’s definition, a pressure group is understood as ‘an organization which seeks *as one of its functions* to influence the formulation and implementation of public policy’ (Grant, 2000, p. 14, *emphasis added*). For the part of Christian churches, pressure group activity is therefore to be understood as one of their functions, and a function which is seen by many as being integral to Christian living, but is nonetheless a function which does not exhaust all of what a church is, or is for. Democracy, which is intrinsically concerned with decisions for or against particular policies or outcomes therefore always poses a particular challenge to churches whose mission to minister to

the whole population means that they are concerned with the moral, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing of people with diverse political views, but whose physical wellbeing is also bound up in the common weal. This problem, which characterises this chapter more than any other, will be roughly termed the pastoral/political problem.

It is this pastoral/political problem which is at the heart of the consideration of church involvement in advance of democratic elections and referenda. Christian elites who are church leaders often seek to balance pastoral and political concerns and try to avoid caring either solely for one or the other. A typical strategy employed in the squaring of this circle involves a focus on principles and values, rather than on particular parties and policies. The first part of this section will therefore explore the manner in which church groups have attempted to balance this pastoral/political dynamic both in the run-up to and in the aftermath of Brexit, which being a referendum is a question which is perhaps even more tied to a specific single issue than any given election. The second part of this section will engage with the emerging trend of attempts to form Christian imaginaries of the shape of a post-Brexit state. These two sections are linked by shared principles of what makes a fair, just and kind society.

Christian Elites in the Run-Up to the Referendum

‘In no sense do I have some divine hotline to the right answer. But for my part, I shall vote to remain.’

Justin Welby, in *The Mail on Sunday*

(Walters, 2016)

In the run-up to the EU referendum, Christian elites were active in the campaign in two primary ways: the first was a focus on facilitating constructive debate; the second was through campaigning either for, or against withdrawal. This section will focus primarily on the actions of churches, who figured most prominently within the debate. It will be shown that church groups presented a case for *Remain* to their congregations in primarily religious language, and that they adopted a more mixed-register when speaking more broadly. This mixed register referred in places to a shared Christian history and experience amongst European member states. Almost without exception, Christian actors campaigned for *Remain*, though it is worth noting that many far-right groups claimed for themselves a Christian heritage, which is theologically vacuous and consists only of an opposition to a Muslim other. The notable exception to this picture was the case made by Canon Giles Fraser, and Adrian Hilton who formed Christians for Britain as a ‘Non-denominational cross-

party broad-church (literally) body of Christians advocating #Brexit to restore UK democracy’ (Fraser & Hilton, 2015). However, whilst most Christian elites advocated for *Remain*, this faith in the European Union was not something shared by the majority of Christian laity.

Before examining the contributions of Christian elites, it worth revisiting how Christianity associates with Britain’s socioeconomic makeup. This examination will allow some theorisation of events. Christian groups as a whole (including all denominations) were, in the 2011 census, recorded as the largest religious group with 33.2 million professing a faith, representing 59% of the population of England and Wales (ONS, 2013, p. 2). In England and Wales in 2011, 93% of Christians were White, and 89% were born in the United Kingdom, though on both of these counts this percentage is falling (ibid.). Christians are also older than average, with 22% over the age of 65, as opposed to 16% of the population as a whole (ibid. p.3). According to data from ComRes, in 2017 49% of Christians considered themselves to be members of the working class⁹⁷, as opposed to 46.2% of the population as a whole, and as opposed to 43.1% of those who professed no religion at all (Committee of Public Accounts, 2017, p. 40). Lord Ashcroft’s polls also indicate that the majority of Christians in the UK voted to Leave the European Union, with 58% declaring they voted to leave⁹⁸ (Ashcroft, 2016, p. 10). This is something which is corroborated by research by Woodhead and Smith, who examine the voting of Anglican, Roman Catholic, and other Christian voters, showing that all three voted to leave, though with Anglicans most likely to do so⁹⁹ (Smith & Woodhead, 2018, p. 207). This demographic picture feeds to some extent into a variety of possible narratives for Brexit, such the *economic grievance thesis*, as well as Norris and Inglehart’s *cultural backlash* thesis, which highlights that there is a difference in values amongst generations, with older voters more likely to vote to *Leave*, (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, pp. 396-7). It is important to note, however, as Woodhead and Smith do, that the Anglican vote for Brexit is not populist, since it is not associated with a strong leader, or opposed to democratic institutions, in the way that Evangelical support for Donald Trump is:

the most popular Anglican reason given for voting Leave was to protect British freedoms and institutions against ‘meddling’ bureaucrats. Thus, in terms of its second and third [of three] main characteristics, the claim that Anglican Brexit is populist fails.

⁹⁷ NRS grades C2,D, and E

⁹⁸ Whilst Woodhead and Smith claim that Christians are the only religious group who had a majority for voting leave (Smith & Woodhead, 2018, p. 207), Ashcroft’s polls (from which they derive their data) do not indicate this. For instance, 54% of Jewish respondents declared that they would vote leave. Ashcroft’s polls, after weighting, also indicate that Sikh voters voted to leave, though with such a small sample (20) and such a small margin (52%), an element of circumspection is warranted.

⁹⁹ 66%, 55%, and 55%, respectively (Smith & Woodhead, 2018, p. 207).

(Smith & Woodhead, 2018, p. 219)

Indeed, perhaps a greater focus on community and place, through the parish system, which is not exclusive to Anglicans, as well as a focus on traditional value may be a contributing factor to an understanding of many Christians as resembling Goodhart's 'somewheres' rather than 'anywheres' (Goodhart, 2017, p. vii).

Whilst Christian laity voted to leave in the EU referendum¹⁰⁰, in the run-up to the referendum, the vast majority of high-level Christian leaders in the UK were of a different persuasion, as evidenced by their own statements of intent immediately before the referendum. In this respect, therefore, as mentioned before clergy had a pastoral/political dilemma with respect to their ministry in the lead up to the referendum. With respect to Anglican bishops, and as Woodhead and Smith reflect, only one Bishop has publicly endorsed *Leave*, Mark Rylands, Bishop of Shrewsbury (Smith & Woodhead, 2018, p. 220). In an article in the *Church Times*, he provided a summary of why he voted to *Leave*:

Yes, I voted to leave the European Union. I did so for all the usual reasons that were cited over the past months: democratic deficit, huge central staff salaries, waste of resources in Brussels and Strasbourg, loss of both sovereignty and oversight of UK law.

(Rylands, 2016)

Roman Catholic authorities were also vocal with respect to remaining in the European Union, with Cardinal Vincent Nicholas, and Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor both proclaiming their personal, and not official, support of remaining within the EU. Speaking about the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, one interview subject said that:

¹⁰⁰ Whilst laity, on the whole, voted to leave, in many ways they were as divided as the rest of society. For instance, whilst many might expect Roman Catholics to be on the whole in favour of *Remain*, they instead represent a divided camp with a small majority for *Leave*. Many prominent Eurosceptics, such as Iain Duncan Smith, and Jacob Rees-Mogg are Roman Catholic, but there are others who claimed that it is not possible to be a faithful Catholic and support Brexit (Hitchens, 2016). It is also important to note that, with respect to the Church of England, different groups within the church voted in different ways, with Charismatic Evangelicals far more likely to support Remain than other Anglicans, a phenomenon which seems to be related to the wealthy and metropolitan nature of many Charismatic Evangelical Anglicans (Gardini & Woodhead, 2019).

they were massively in favour of Remain with one or two exceptions – Archbishop Peter Smith¹⁰¹ being one of them. Possibly another ... I think there is a traditional left liberal leaning amongst Catholic Bishops that believe international activity is good, national activity is bad. The laity has certainly not gone that way.

(A prominent Roman Catholic political actor interviewed by the author)

Many also felt that the Pope was also in favour of *Remain*. Receiving the Charlemagne prize for European integration shortly before the EU Referendum, the Holy Father struck a mixed tone, speaking of the difficulties of a Europe which has become tired and entrenched, but which still has potential to be much more (Harris, 2016). Illustrating clearly this pastoral/political dilemma, Thomson writes:

Catholic Eurosceptics are not pleased by this collective nudging. And the fact that it is unofficial does nothing to placate them.

(Thompson, 2016)

Nonetheless, ‘despite impressions to the contrary, there is no Catholic party line on the issue’ (Condon, 2016), but this lack of an official stance does not prevent those impressions from being pervasive. In general, therefore, Christian denominations as a whole remained formally neutral with regards to the referendum, though as shown here and as the Church in Wales reflects ‘some individual clerics, including Bishops, have made their feelings clear’ (The Church in Wales, 2016), which blemished that image of neutrality. What churches, universally, were focussed upon however was the negative and hostile tone which the debate often exhibited, as well as the troubles involved in determining fact from fiction during the referendum campaign. Broadly speaking, and as will be further illustrated, this commitment to neutrality as regards the referendum result was something which was present early on in the debate, and which began to break down later. The commitment to good dialogue and an opposition to divisive and racist language was something which was sustained throughout, and maintained subsequently after the referendum.

Christian elites used their platforms to promote good dialogue through the use of resources and through prayers. It is important to understand that, though many of these resources were aimed at

¹⁰¹ Metropolitan Archbishop of Southwark and Vice-President of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales.

Christians, it is a thing long-established that churches in the run-up to public votes become places of conversations and hustings. Many of these resources and prayers therefore encourage the behaviour of Christians, but also they encourage Christians to help encourage others. The Church in Wales, establishing public meetings to explore issues and values in a sober fashion, reflected that:

The debate about EU membership so far has too often been characterised by myths, misleading assertions, and accusations on both sides. For Christians, it's as important to separate fact from mud-slinging as it is to prayerfully consider which values, concerns and ambitions guide our choices, as we seek to reflect God's will – and not only for our own lives, but for the lives of our neighbours and for the generations to come.

(The Church in Wales, 2016)

In a similar vein, shortly before the referendum, after a public clash with Nigel Farage who he viewed to be deliberately attempting to stir up racism, Justin Welby told *The Telegraph* that 'There is no official Christian or Church line on which way to vote. Voting is a matter for each person's conscience', and that 'after the referendum we must come together as one people to make the solution we choose work well', with the plea that 'hard words ... must not create enduring bitterness.' (The Telegraph, 2016).

In order to avoid hostility, and to promote constructive deliberation and dialogue, a number of different Christian elites produced materials and resources for the use of churches. The Joint Public Issues Team,¹⁰² in the run up to the referendum produced a booklet called *Think, Pray, Vote*, which was a resource for churches. The booklet encouraged readers to reflect upon how concepts which have arisen in the debate relate to Christian concepts – for instance, how does national sovereignty relate to the supreme and universal sovereignty of The Lord God:

All Christian theological thinking about sovereignty begins with the sovereignty of God. If we accept that God's power is universal then our starting concept of sovereignty is one that transcends national borders. All other sovereignties exist under, and are subject to, divine sovereignty. But when should nations or individuals surrender a degree of self-determination in order to cooperate? And when should they preserve

¹⁰² Who work on behalf of the Methodist Church, United Reformed Church, Baptist Union, and Church of Scotland. Their work has appeared elsewhere within this thesis.

their individuality in order to meet their own needs more acutely? Certain passages within the Bible suggest that God wants us to live together in unity but our individual diversity is also valued, as we read in 1 Corinthians 12:19, 'If all were a single member, where would the body be?

(JPIT, 2016, p. 9)

The aim of this resource was explicitly 'not [to] presume to say which way people should vote', but rather to promote thoughtful and prayerful reflection upon the issues. The resource placed at its heart a call to love thy neighbour and to explore what that might look like in the context of the EU referendum (JPIT, 2016, pp. 2-3). This sense of thoughtful reflection contrasts with the often hostile rhetoric in public debate.

It is perhaps in prayers published in the run up to the referendum that the strongest vision of the kind of national conversation mainstream denominations wished for is expressed. Consider the three below:

'Loving God,
In the referendum that lies before us,
in the challenge of seeking an answer,
in our differences of opinion,
in our need to understand,
may you guide us in our decisions,
make us gracious in our disagreement,
and may we join you to work for the
building of your kingdom
rather than our own.
Amen.

(JPIT, 2016)

God of truth,
give us grace to debate the issues in this referendum
with honesty and openness.
Give generosity to those who seek to form opinion

and discernment to those who vote,
that our nation may prosper
and that with all the peoples of Europe
we may work for peace and the common good;
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Church of England, 2016)

In our view, three things are essential:

- that we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- that we all inform ourselves of the arguments on both sides of the debate;
- that we each exercise our vote with a view to the common good of all.'

'Lord, grant us wisdom that we may walk with integrity, guarding the path of justice,
and knowing the protection of your loving care for all.

(Catholic Herald, 2016, pp. 1,2)

In each of these prayers, there is shown a desire for honesty and integrity, understanding of others, and an understanding that there are more important values than self-interest (whether that is expressed in a will to 'work for the building of [God's] kingdom rather than our own' (JPIT, 2016), or in terms of commitments to the common good. Each of these prayers is careful to not aim for either a *Leave* or *Remain* position, though a cursory review of social media reactions to the Anglican prayer reveals that people have taken it to mean both. The language here is very different to that which often characterised the wider debate. Prayer is a particular form of discourse, where God is one of the audiences, or perhaps the chief audience. It is nonetheless the case that collective prayer communicates to those who hear and participate. Prayer, in this case, is therefore an exercise in practical argumentation, though it is not exclusively so. In this way, the aforementioned prayer which calls for God to bestow His grace in order to enable His people to work towards the common good is also a practical instigation for those Christian people hearing to participate in, and actively contribute towards, that work. Prayer, therefore represents an exclusively religious language by which believers communicate, though those who pray do not understand it exclusively or primarily in those terms. In this way, these prayers demonstrate a Christian argument for the need for

honesty, openness, generosity, prosperity, peace, justice, and a conception of the common good which is not limited to the British nation.

The above contributions, however, were primarily aimed at the Christian public. Other Christian contributions were broader in their intended audience. The concern relating to the nature of rhetoric in the run up to the referendum, which was expressed to co-religionists through prayer and resources, was expressed more broadly by Justin Welby speaking to the Home Affairs Select Committee in the run up to the EU referendum. Whilst having refused to comment on his views on which way the UK should vote (though his colleague Bishop Paul Butler had no such reservations, and at a later date Welby made his position known)¹⁰³, the Archbishop made clear his opposition to divisive and hate-filled rhetoric, whilst outlining his view of the appropriate approach to national conversation:

Keith Vaz:

Do you think there is a line between those who have genuine concerns about it and those who use the immigration issue for party political purposes as part of a campaign of fear? I am referring in particular to the comments of the leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, who said over the weekend that our staying in the European Union could lead to sexual attacks like those we saw in Cologne. That is exactly what he said. I would regard those comments as racist, as would a lot of people. What is your take on what he has said?

Justin Welby:

I would agree with you. That is an inexcusable pandering to people's worries and prejudices. That is giving legitimisation to racism, which I have seen in parishes in which I have served and which has led to attacks on people in those parishes. We cannot legitimise that. As I said, fear is a pastoral issue. You deal with it by recognising

¹⁰³ The Archbishop of York also made his *Remain* position known, both in the House, but also in the Telegraph, where he connected remaining within the European Union with a Christian ethic of standing by one's oath. He also stressed that there is a 'common Christian heritage' amongst European states which means that they ought to look beyond self-interest. Nonetheless, whilst he did make Christian appeals, he was clear that his support for *Remain* was a conscience decision of his, which has the implication that it was not an instruction or a theological pronouncement that Brexit is incompatible with Christian faith (Sentamu, Our commitments to our European partners cannot be lightly cast aside - that's why I'll be voting to remain, 2016).

it, and by standing alongside and providing answers to it. What that is is accentuating fear for political gain, and that is absolutely inexcusable.

Keith Vaz:

So you would utterly condemn the comments made by Nigel Farage?

Justin Welby:

Without hesitation.

(Home Affairs Committee, 2016)

The Archbishop's contribution here contrasts clearly in tone from the religious language used to communicate amongst the faithful, as, sitting in Westminster, he condemns racism in secular terms.

Interview participants revealed that this cautious approach to the referendum campaign, where Bishops would facilitate good debate, and keep their personal opinions to themselves, was as a result of an informal consensus which had formed amongst Anglican Bishops. One Church of England Bishop commented that:

I think that the Church of England – the referendum presents challenges to the Church of England – I had some role, at least, in agreeing to a policy, it wasn't a hard and fast sort of a policy, but it was a sort of approach that as Bishops – as the Bishops of the Church of England – officially we wouldn't join the campaign on either side, but would try to facilitate and provide space for good debate so that views could be presented courteously and in an informed sort of way and there could be genuine debate. We didn't think it was our role because this was rather close to – you know just as in an election you don't tell people how to vote or apply an indirect pressure – so we generally felt that we needed to allow people to make up their own minds. We were also conscious that there were – there was going to be a divided Britain in some form, some people wanted to leave, some people didn't, and the Church of England has a responsibility to the whole of the nation. So to alienate, you know, forty percent, or whatever it was going to be, who I think most people assumed would be voting to say

to come out – I think it was clear that most Bishops wanted to stay in, but not necessarily most of those who affiliated in some ways with the Church of England ... I think we thought that the proportion of Bishops voting remain was not necessarily reflective of those affiliated with the Church of England and certainly in the nation – it wasn't going to be 95% voting remain – so we had to be sort of responsible.

(Research interview F)

Another Anglican Bishop reflected that this form of approach is typical for a General election, where, in order to avoid claims that a Bishop might be 'abusing [their] position',

And that's why, you know, I think one's very very careful before elections. You know, normally what we've tended to do is to issue a list of questions that we suggest people ask any candidates standing for election in their constituencies and they will do things which we would argue are based on the sort of thing about things like Who is your neighbour? How do we care for one another? How do we create a society? How do we look after the vulnerable and the poor and the ill? And, of course, to some people that sounds political and there is an element – you can't get away from it – where it's political. It's the polis, it's the city, how do you run a city, we can't – we can't distract from that. I mean, what I never do is to – is to – I would never let anybody know what I voted for in a general election because well, we're not supposed to, well actually Bishops can vote in a general election – the Lords temporal can't, but the Lords spiritual can and of course Robert Runcie did and of course it was quite an issue.

(Research Interview I)

The Rt Revd Nick Baines, however had a different reflection on why the House of Bishops worked in the way that it did. His claim was that the Bishops had largely already articulated their view on the issue, and to no good effect.

The House of Bishops did not drive a particular line in the referendum campaign. Rightly or wrongly, the reason for this was simple: we had put out a document before the 2015 general election in which the EU/Europe featured strongly, and nothing had changed. Second, the debate around what the bishops had written had not been

exactly intelligent. We decided not to say anything new on the grounds that we had already set out our stall.

(Baines, 2018)

Nonetheless, however it arose, this strategy did not last throughout the whole of the referendum campaign, as closer to the vote various Bishops (such as Bishop Paul Butler) expressed their positions. As an interview participant expressed:

That began to sort of fall apart as it became clear that this was going to be much closer than most people had thought and some Bishops did come out much clearer about how they were going to vote, including the Archbishops of Canterbury and York – but that came a little bit late and I think it will remain on the consciences of the Church of England – should we have nailed our colours to the mast?

(Research Interview F)

A Bishop who did make clear their own position in the run up to the referendum said:

I start with a broad assumption that in today's world – it's probably true of all worlds – we have to talk, we have to find win-win solutions to the world's problems, and we need to have coalitions, and I do that against the backdrop of being in a nation which has a memory of a past where we were the Empire making the waves and ruling the waves and that's what worries me about some of the lead Brexiteers I think they just are living in fantasy land...at the end of the day, they're the people amongst whom we have a common broadly Judeo-Christian heritage and so on and I think it is very very easy to destroy coalitions and it has done huge damage ... You know my French and German friends are just hurt, puzzled, can't work out what's going on I didn't tell people what to vote- but I did make it clear my own position.

...

because I feel that I actually do have a platform and I am using it: unashamedly, I am going for it.

(Research interview I)

One of the resources deployed by Christian groups to argue for a *Remain* position was an emphasis on a shared Christian history or heritage amongst Christian groups – such as the ‘Judeo-Christian heritage’ the bishop mentioned above. One of the primary manifestations of this shared heritage is shared Christian values amongst European nations. This focus in the run-up to the referendum resulted in things like Archbishop John Sentamu’s letter to *The Telegraph*, where he spoke about his decision to vote Remain:

We need to remind ourselves of the contribution which the existence of the EU has made to peace in Europe since the Second World War; ways in which the existence and support of the EU has helped the development of smaller, weaker members, particularly over the past 20 years; our common Christian heritage and what this means and has created in practice.

(Meer, 2010)

In the Lords, it manifested in, contributions, such as that of the Lord Bishop of Coventry, who said:

the debate about Europe, if it is to reinspire the generations, will need to appeal to something higher than money... “Without a vision, the people perish”, said the ancient Jewish prophet...it is worth reconnecting with the original vision for a reconciled Europe, which was of “a community of communities”.

Behind that proposal lay a rich seam of Christian theology known technically as the doctrine of *koinonia*, or communion, in which people and churches place themselves in an ecology of interdependence, which, in promoting the common good of the whole, also serves the particular good of the parts...this theology of... the “covenanted mutuality of the autonomous” that is shared by Anglican, Protestant and Orthodox churches may ... complement the more distinctively Roman Catholic notion of subsidiarity, with its implication of organic unity that has been so influential on the development of Europe up to this point.

(HL Deb 25th November 2014, Vol 757, Col 817)

This idea of a shared history, and a shared Christian history with its attendant values, therefore formed public argumentation for remaining within the European Union. The Lord Bishop of

Coventry's contribution attempts to bring in that history, but also brings in principles of communion and subsidiarity as being root principles of the EU, which it ought to rediscover. Terms such as subsidiarity and the common good represent a package of Christian values which resonate in secular discussion in a way in which a direct relation of Biblical values do not. Framing Christian values in this manner enables Christian elites to contribute insights from their traditions in secular dialogue.

It can therefore clearly be seen that the focus of Christian groups in the run-up to the European Union referendum was, to some extent, similar to that which is common in the run up to a General Election: namely, a focus on promoting an approach to voting which rests on certain reasons which stem from Christian principles. What was different with the EU referendum campaign was that Christian groups who would ordinarily not disclose their voting intentions in the run up to a General Election, at various stages of the referendum campaign disclosed their voting intentions. Whilst these were always presented by members of different denominations as being the opinions of the various figures in a personal capacity, and therefore not directives or articles of faith, it is not clear how effective this has been as a strategy to square the political/pastoral circle. A particular feature of this endorsement of the EU by a number of Christian leaders was an appeal to a shared Christian heritage amongst European states, which did not prove to be an effective language of persuasion amongst secular audiences, or amongst Christians who held a *Leave* view. Another thing which was particular to the EU referendum campaign was a particular focus on Christian leaders speaking up against rhetoric employed throughout the national conversation – in particular against rhetoric which were viewed as hate-filled.

Christian Groups Post-Brexit and Imaginaries of a Post-Brexit Britain

The EU referendum had revealed a very divided United Kingdom. Churches stood in the midst of those divides. Whilst congregations contained members who voted both *Leave* and *Remain*, Church leadership predominantly voted *Remain*, and in the latter days of the referendum campaign, as discussed previously, many Christian elites had come out with specific expressions of their voting intentions – something which is not normal practice in the run up to other votes, like General Elections. These statements of intention in the run up to the referendum placed church groups in an interesting position when it came to the aftermath of the referendum. Whilst in Westminster Theresa May, who had supported Remain before the referendum, proclaimed that 'Brexit means Brexit' in an appeal for certainty in uncharted waters (Allen N. , 2018, p. 112) Christian elites were reacting to the referendum result.

Immediately after the referendum, a variety of denominations sent out statements reacting to the result. A strong theme which emerged out of these statements was firstly, an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the vote as the democratic will of the people, secondly a continued opposition to some of the harsher forms of rhetoric which emerged during the debate, and finally a commitment to moving forwards as one nation. For instance, the Methodist Church, recognising that the 'people have spoken through the democratic process', and that the referendum had 'shown both the best and worst of our democracy', noted that the debate had 'at times promoted feelings of fear and even hatred and racism' (The Methodist Church, 2016). JPIT released a detailed message entitled '*After the Referendum – a recommitment to the Common Good*' which proceeded much along the same lines, and which included the following prayer:

God of every nation and people,
At this historic moment we pray for all who are affected by the decision that has been made.
Whatever differences this has revealed within our own society,
may they not eclipse what we have in common.
Where the narratives of political debate have caused harm and division
help us to reclaim the true values of our shared humanity.
Where exaggeration and distortion have generated suspicion and fear
may truth and honesty restore hope and goodness.
We pray for all the nations of Europe
that you will help us to find ways of living and working together
to pursue the mercy and justice that you require.
We recommit ourselves – together – to the values of your eternal Kingdom
and pray that along with all people
we might help your world become more as you intended.
(JPIT, 2016)

The prayer, as with those previously discussed, represents a religious form of language speaking to Christian groups. In particular, the prayer represents an attempt to condemn the negative and divisive values of the debate, and to reclaim Christian values which are opposed to harm, suspicion, and fear. The central theme – a recommitment to the Common Good, a value which resonates both within Christian and secular contexts - is something which, as will be explored shortly, a variety of Christian elites would take on, alongside a number of other values.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols released a statement which also emphasised the need to respect the will of the people expressed through the ballot box, and talked about the ‘new course’ the nation was embarking on which would require all to work together ‘with respect and civility, despite deep differences of opinion’ and that the nation could build on ‘traditions of generosity, of welcome’ (Nichols , 2016). Cardinal Reinhard Marx, President of the Commission of Bishops Conferences of the EU, also called for respect for the result, though he struck a more critical tone, writing that ‘This decision of the British voters should of course be respected, even if we... find it extremely regrettable’. He nonetheless appealed to ‘existing cultural and spiritual ties’ (continuing in the same narrative vein of a shared Christian history amongst European states), which ought to be ‘preserved, used and reinforced in the future... Europe goes beyond the European Union’ and he called for a reimagining of the Europe, a task which the Church wished to contribute towards (Marx , 2016). There was a similar call for reimagining from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, who, in a statement which shared the same sorts of concerns relating to the need to deal with the hurt of the referendum campaign, and to create a nation which remains hospitable and compassionate, wrote

The vote to withdraw from the European Union means that now we must all reimagine both what it means to be the United Kingdom in an interdependent world and what values and virtues should shape and guide our relationships with others.

(Sentamu & Welby, 2016)

Therefore, there emerge a number of themes which are common amongst different Church responses to the referendum result. The first is a reaction to the negative tone of the debate and a call towards reconciliation and a moving together as a nation as one. The second is a call towards a reimagination of the nation along the principles of welcome, hospitality, and the common good. These themes represent a strategic framing of Christian values to better resonate amongst secular groups, but one which has a long history amongst Christian social teaching. Amongst them both is the continuing theme of a shared Christian heritage amongst European states.

Helpful and Unhelpful Narratives in Post-Brexit Britain

The referendum result for many Christian actors was a surprise which highlighted that a divide had grown between laity and clergy, who now had to find a voice and a path forwards. As one senior Anglican clergyman commented:

I think that people in the church have, largely speaking, been very reticent to let their thoughts be known because it's clearly such an emotive issue. And I think you'll have heard other people say this: I think one of the biggest, one of the biggest, wake-up calls for many of us in relationship to the referendum was just recognising how out of touch many of us had become with large sections of the society which we're supposed to serve. So, I mean, I think it's self-evident that the vast majority of people in leadership positions in the Church are Remainers and then, goodness me, it suddenly turns out that there are a large number of people certainly who voted in the referendum by a small majority, but nevertheless a majority, who were pro-Leave. And so it just underlined the fact that there is this fairly large gulf.

(Research Interview S)

Amongst some church leaders, there was a reflection that a Christian response in the midst of Brexit had to heal, rather than exacerbate, the divides which had become so recently apparent. There was once again a focus on the Church becoming a forum for the expression of views, though this interview participant expressed doubt that the Church had truly fulfilled this function:

it felt as if to then make a big song and dance about how awful it is to be leaving would be almost to drive further wedges into that particular gap. So what we really needed to be doing was helping people to talk to each other. We've not been very effective at that, I don't think, and that's a source of a very great sadness to me that we've not, we've not really provided a forum, I think, for people from the different sides to really engage in good debate.

(Research Interview S)

This theme of coming together in the wake of the referendum has proven to be an enduring feature of Christian contributions to public debate since the vote to leave. This coming together has had a two-fold focus – firstly, a condemnation of negative rhetoric which divides, and secondly, a focus on values which might unite. In both of these circumstances, Christian actors have often suggested that faith-inspired values are the way forwards. As the Archbishop of Canterbury said, on 'the adversarial nature of the process':

The most serious and visible aspect is the personalised nature of the threats outside the House against Members of the other place especially, whether personally, online or by other means ... Our Christian heritage and the heritage of other faiths and non-faith traditions call for us to treat others as we would wish to be treated—the golden rule. Christ himself went on to call for love for enemies. That does not mean the absence of passionate difference but calls for respect for human dignity. That requires active leadership— politically and in security against such threats.

(HL Deb 9th January 2019, Vol 794, Col 2235)

As the Bishop of Newcastle said:

I shall not focus on the choices before us, but I note that, whether by intention or default, we will make a choice—a choice will be made—and, beyond that choice, we have to live together. We are experiencing a time of extraordinary turbulence and toxicity in our political life.

(HL Deb 25th March 2019, Vol 796, Col 1635)

Many Christian elites began to think about the forms of values which might be able to unite a divided country, in many cases looking to values which have a strong history within Christian thought, as well as in national consciousness. One example of this comes from the Bishop of St Albans, who said:

Much has been said in this Chamber about the deep feeling of division in this country in the light of the Brexit referendum. Nevertheless, the NHS, and the importance we place on caring for one another, is at the core of the “British values” ... these values are a part of many faiths, including Christianity. Part of what it means to be British is to care for one another, even when it comes at significant cost.

(HL Deb 12 July 2017, Vol 723, Col 1283)

There was also a focus upon which forms of principles could form a part of a new settlement with the European Union, for instance, as the Archbishop of York said with regards to guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens after Brexit:

I never want to see any human person used as a bargaining chip. They are made in God's likeness and as far as I am concerned, they are people and must be treated according to the rule of law in this country.

(HL Deb 1st March 2017, Vol 779, Col 823)

The Archbishop of York's statement here is interesting because it combines a form of religious language, 'They are made in God's likeness', alongside secular values such as the rule of law – which have featured heavily in debates around Brexit. In emphasising the humanity of EU citizens in the United Kingdom (and British citizens abroad), the Archbishop chooses a narrative which counters a negative aspect in discussion (people being used as bargaining chips), whilst harnessing a value which people on both sides of the *Leave/Remain* divide have endorsed. In the statement – the religious term is combined with the simple and uncontroversial 'they are people', bringing the statement into a territory which resonates with all.

As mentioned, there has also been a continued emphasis on a shared Christian heritage amongst European nations which is thicker than the institutional incarnation of the EU – as the President of the Conference of European Churches¹⁰⁴ reflected at a service at St Paul's Cathedral to celebrate the first Europe Day since the referendum:

Christians concerned for Europe and our place therein do not have the vocation or the luxury of simply wringing our hands. We have now to make the best Brexit we are able.

I suggest that the way to do this is to witness to the profoundly Christian origins of the European project; to remind our fellow Europeans in the EU that Europe is wider than the EU; and to invite our Churches to witness to the profoundly human and Christian virtues of both hospitality and justice: "For if you love those who (only) love you, what reward have you?"

(Hill, 2017)

¹⁰⁴ And former Bishop of Guildford

This theme was something which was also present in discussions in the House of Lords. The Lord Bishop of Chester said, speaking about the values which ought to form a part of the discussions on the future relationship with Europe:

The original concept of “Europe” was never primarily economic or, for that matter, geographical ... We speak of Europe because a great civilisation developed there, shaped by Christianity and other forces ancient and modern ... While the original founders of the EU in the immediate post-war years had a certain economic view, they were also ... influenced by Catholic social teaching ... More recently, a more secular spirit has been to the fore that has left Europe rather ill equipped to deal with the new religious presence in its midst, and the growing presence of Islam in particular.

My plea is simply that... we should especially promote the continuation and deepening of the educational, artistic, scientific and—yes—religious ties that over the decades and centuries have made European civilisation what it is today.

(HL Deb 1st December 2016, Vol 777, Col 329)

The curious element of this stratagem is that Christian elites are using faith values as a language of public argumentation to both Christian and secular audiences: namely, the EU has a shared Christian religious heritage and history which ought to be preserved. The choice of Christian elites to engage in this way is at variance to what has been seen elsewhere in the project, where Christian elites have, for the most part, chosen the language of faith when speaking to other Christians, and have focused on a far more secular discourse when speaking in a secular context. These values, since they rely upon a particular view of history and a Christian faith tradition appeal to a vision of a European past which may not be recognisable to those of other faiths.

The narrative of the preservation of a Europe shaped by the Christian faith was not widely taken up by parliamentarians, but nor did it communicate widely within a Church context. The appeal to Christian heritage also posed a difficulty for Christian *Leave voters*, for two primary reasons. Firstly, it had a recent history of being used to justify arguments relating to remaining within the European Union. Secondly, whilst senior clergy in a variety of denominations took pains to stress the personal nature of their exhortations to *Remain*, the identification of the EU with Christianity and Christian values alienated *Leave* voting Christians because of the carefully unstated companion to that statement: that voting to *Leave* is to walk away from that Christian heritage, and therefore somehow

in some way to do something un-Christian. That frustration was summed up by prominent Christian blogger and co-chair of Christians for Britain Adrian Hilton, writing that:

I have been exasperated by bishops and other clergy who have suggested that my personal motives and political objectives are xenophobic, racist, self-regarding and, in the final analysis, un-Christian ... there are undoubtedly some churches I wouldn't want to visit again, and doubtless others which would never want to see me again. My, how these Christians love one another.

Adrian Hilton, quoted in Hooper (2016)

In this way, the worry outlined by Colin Copus, that there is a *Remainer* rhetoric which contains a discourse which alienates *Leave* voters because it claims that they all voted for 'racist, xenophobic and bigoted reasons', (Copus, 2018, p. 92) finds its theological echoes within British Christianity post-referendum. Continued claims¹⁰⁵ of the value of the European Union did not aid this situation, and particularly to many at the time, the claims by the Archbishop of Canterbury that the European Union was 'the greatest dream realised for human beings' in over 1500 years (Hope, 2018) seemed particularly poorly timed, two years after the public vote to leave. Nor are theological parallels with Israel in the desert necessarily helpful, as the Lord Bishop of Leeds suggested that those who voted to *Leave* might need to die before there could be a positive vision for the future:

To be biblical for a moment, when Moses led the people of Israel out of captivity after 400 years in Egypt, they did not go straight to the promised land; they spent 40 years in the desert. There, a whole generation of romanticisers about the past died out. That is the point. You have to let a generation go in order to have a new generation that can envision and build a new society ... I have no doubt that the United Kingdom, if it remains intact, will grow a younger generation who will create a prosperous and creative future for our islands ... But the generation that has led us into this mess—my generation—might have to make way.

(HL Deb 5th December 2018, Vol 794, Col 1059)

The attempts at reconciliation are therefore as much needed within the Church as they are in British society at large. The beginning of that reconciliation has involved attempts within Christian

¹⁰⁵ Which will be spoken about in the next section

groups to understand why the referendum had been such a shock. Since the referendum, the Church Times, which is an independent Anglican newspaper, has run special issues on Brexit. In one such, an article wrote:

Why, in fact, was the referendum result such a shock?

Answer: because we had not understood how divided the country was. Old against young; provincial against metropolitan; and Scotland, Northern Ireland, and London against much of the rest of England and Wales. The overall result was close; but few of the results by area were close — most were strongly one way or the other.’

‘The failures that produced such divisions include all the sins of omission and commission which have resulted in a society so unequal in life chances, and in which many feel so resentful of what they see as so alien.

(Green, 2018)

Two Roman Catholic elites, who have engaged in the ensuing national conversation, spoke about how, despite claims that it was underpinned by Christian identity, the failure of the European Union was due to its failure to embody Christian principles – in particular the principle of subsidiarity.

I think it is entirely possible to make a Christian, particularly a protestant case for [Brexit] being a legitimate Christian vision. I think you could have done it within the EU as well with a better understanding of subsidiarity. A better understanding of the Catholic tradition would have, could have redeemed that, but this is not a Catholic country ... I don't think that Brexit is inherently anti-Christian, no.

(Research Interview K)

what could have saved the European Union, insofar as Britain's membership is concerned, is the proper exercise of the principle of subsidiarity, which was a Catholic Church invention and has guided the Church's teachings on its own organisation for centuries. The actual phrase subsidiarity is a Catholic Church concept nicked to try and give a veneer of respectability to these monolithic European institutions that don't believe in subsidiarity at all. So you have that intellectual dishonesty on policies that underpin them.

(Research Interview H)

This emphasis on subsidiarity, both in terms of how the EU did not perfectly embody it, and in terms of how governance ought to be conducted in the future represents a reconciling narrative because, though *Remain* narratives during the referendum always possessed some reflection that the EU is not a perfect entity, this focus on the extent to which the EU failed to realise a Christian principle sets the narrative grounds for there to be a welcome for those Christians who voted *Leave*. It is also a reconciling narrative because the failure to govern through subsidiarity is part of the set of troubles leading to an unequal British society.

Since the referendum, a great many Christian thinkers and actors have been speaking into the question of 'what next?'. This question occupies a space where, post-Brexit, there has been a lack of a coherent or realistic vision offered by politicians in Westminster towards what the United Kingdom will be like after it leaves the European Union. This lack of vision, whilst especially present within the Brexit debate, however, is not something which is new. It is important to understand that the problems and the discourses surrounding Brexit are long-standing, something which was demonstrated in the first section of this chapter. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that Churches have been active in this attempt to reimagine politics for some time, for instance the Church of England Bishops' pastoral letter for the 2015 general election highlighted that:

different parties have failed to offer attractive visions of the kind of society and culture they wish to see, or distinctive goals they might wish to pursue. Instead, we are subjected to sterile arguments about who might manage the existing system best.

(House of Bishops , 2015, p. 13).

So too did the Archbishop of York, in his book *On Rock or Sand*, begin to outline how he thought Christian groups could work towards a richer shared common life in the nation, building upon Christian principles and values which he viewed to be the, perhaps forgotten, bedrock of British society. Sentamu wrote that:

The Judeo-Christian wisdom is in Britain's veins, whether recognised or not. Her laws, her language and many of her values were formed by that Religion and virtue.

(Sentamu, 2015, p. 16)

Sentamu called for the formation of a Well-being state, digging into the words of Jesus in the parable of the Wise and Foolish builders¹⁰⁶

This Well-being State – justified by our recognition of one another’s common humanity, expressed in neighbourly love and guided by the principles of Freedom, Fellowship, Service, and the Rule of Law – are the firm foundation, the rock, we need for Britain’s future. Only when we help one another perceive and imagine this vision together will we be like the wise builder of Jesus’ parable

...

Individualism and consumerism are sand. Freedom, Fellowship, Service for God and neighbour, and the Rule of Law are rock. These are the firm foundations for Britain’s future.

(Sentamu, 2015, pp. 257-258)

This lack of imagination within politics has been taken up by Christian groups and thinkers who are attempting to reimagine a shared life in Britain which is founded on Christian principles. Sentamu’s ‘Wellbeing State’, focussed on the principles of Freedom, Fellowship, Service for God and Neighbour and the Rule of Law, represent a reframing of Christian values into language which resonates as principles all can understand¹⁰⁷. Contained within this push towards Christian principles is also the fear that the nation, post-Brexit, might go down an alternative direction (Sentamu’s sand). In his book *Dethroning Mammon*, Welby strikes a similar tone, writing that ‘it is essential that the new United Kingdom outside Europe is not built to a design drawn by Mammon; to put it more clearly, materialism is not the answer to the challenges we face’ (Welby, 2016b, p. 6)¹⁰⁸. This warning about

¹⁰⁶ ‘Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!’ (Matthew 7: 24-27 NRSVA).

¹⁰⁷ Whilst service to God here is a principle only religious might understand, more broadly the principle of service may be understood by all. The inclusion of God here shows in some respect a statement which speaks to two audiences.

¹⁰⁸ The title of the book, and the quote allude to Matthew 6:24, and Luke 16:13 ‘No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon’ (KJV). In Matthew, the passage could be interpreted as placing anything above God, though in Luke, the preceding verses seem to imply a more restricted meaning where mammon is wealth, or money.

the idolisation of the market as *mammon* is built upon in his book *Reimagining Britain*, where he writes

Unless the economy is built on foundations of justice, the common good and solidarity, words like aspiration are utterly meaningless and stability is a dream

...

The market is not efficient: it does not indiscriminately produce the best outcomes for everyone; and that needs to be recognized so that the market is not treated as a deity whose whims cannot be challenged.

(Welby, 2018, pp. 149-150)

Accompanying the warning of the narrative and sort of Britain that he did not wish to see emerge, Welby spoke about the form of narrative he did wish to see emerge, which ‘speaks to the world of hope and not mere optimism’ and which would ‘promote community, be courageous and be lived out consistently’ (Welby, 2018, p. 32). This focus on community, and the sense of a state which must remain welcoming and must not turn its back on its role in the international sphere continues to build on the *Who is my neighbour?* narrative which was coined from the 2015 pastoral letter, which was meant to inform the 2015 general election. In this way, Welby’s interventions represent a strategic framing of Christian values for the moral ends of the economy and the proper treatment of those within it in secular terms – moving to principles of ‘justice, the common good and solidarity’ (Welby, 2018, p. 149).

In the case of Christians, and in this case the Church of England in particular, the deployment of scriptural principles in the forms of phrases from parables which continue to have resonance in the public imagination, such as *Who is my neighbour?* represents, as John Hughes (who contributed to the important book *Anglican Social Teaching*, which represents a return to confidence with regards to social teaching in the Church of England post-Temple) reflects,

a ‘post-liberal’ turn to tradition-based modes of reasoning, leading to a renewed confidence in the Church’s capacity to use the theological resources of its own tradition to think about social problems.

(Hughes, 2014, p. 94)

It is this form of Christian tradition-based reasoning which is forming the basis of Christian imaginaries of a future British state. It is also, as seen before, being used as values as part of a language of practical argumentation where even direct quotations from scripture do not always seem off-limits, such as when the Archbishop of Canterbury, taking advantage of the tradition of daily prayers in Parliament, explicitly used scripture in the Lords to encourage people to look towards higher principles and values:

My Lords, of the choice of psalms that form part of our daily prayers in the Lords, we have Psalm 46, which we heard today,

“The nations rage, the kingdoms totter”,

and Psalm 121, which we will doubtless hear tomorrow,

“I lift up my eyes to the hills ...

My help comes from the Lord,

who made heaven and earth”.

Eyes need to be lifted now more than ever

Archbishop of Canterbury within the debate *Brexit: Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration*

(HL Deb 5th December 2018, Vol 794, Col 989)

This focus on tradition-based reasoning represents a strong opportunity for Christian elites to mobilise a system of thought in a way which resonates and communicates within secular spaces. Within the discussion around the future of Britain after Brexit, short allusions to scripture, such as the previously mentioned *On Rock or Sand* and *Dethroning Mammon*, combined with the framing of the greater part of discussions around values such as *subsidiarity*, and *the common good* have allowed Christian elites to bring an alternative faith-tradition-based vision of post-Brexit Britain to debate. Whilst Hughes speaks specifically to do with the Anglican church’s turn towards this form of discursive grounding, it is clear that other churches, and in particular the Roman Catholic church, in the form of Catholic Social Teaching, possess such a resource to draw from.

An example of this form of reimagining of what the nation means is found in Adrian Pabst's short essay on how, post-Brexit, a common good¹⁰⁹ approach to borders and immigration. Pabst argues that 'Christian social teaching provides conceptual and practical resources to reframe the debate about immigration' (Pabst, 2018, p. 20). Pabst's view is supported by others like Ryan, who claims that Christianity 'provides a language' which enables conversation amongst British people, and with migrant communities (Ryan, 2018, p. 9). Ryan's claim is more extensive in that he argues that Christian forms of language are able to communicate in a strong way in discussions where identity features heavily (Ryan, 2018, p. 10), echoing the comments of the Bishop of Chester. In this way, principles such as *subsidiarity*, *the common good* and questions like *Who is my neighbour?* represent a strategic framing of Christian principles in ways which borrow on areas of shared experience and tradition and which resonate within more secular environments.

Conclusion

'Bishops are called to tell the truth, regardless of what people think they want to hear. We might be wrong, we might be prejudiced, we might be simply misguided; but we must not be silent. We should be unafraid of arguing among ourselves about matters that concern the common good and the future of our world.

(Baines, 2018)

This chapter has explored the historical origins of Brexit, examined the events of the recent referendum campaign and has looked at the role that Christian groups have had in the run-up to the vote, and in its aftermath. The different phases of the discussion highlighted that there are often divides between Christian elites and other Christians. Principally, it was demonstrated that Christian leaders from a variety of denominations found themselves in a difficult situation relating to Brexit given the differences in opinion between clergy and laity. Whilst clergy were shown in the run-up to the referendum to initially remain circumspect but then to come down firmly and *en-masse* in favour of *Remain*, it was also shown that this put Christian groups in a difficult situation in the aftermath of the referendum, where they encountered a political/pastoral dilemma. Ultimately, it was shown that Christian campaigns for *Remain* dug deeply into an understanding that the EU was a Christian project, and that this caused particular damage amongst divided

¹⁰⁹ A value coming from Catholic (though he prefers Christian) Social Teaching

congregations. However, a focus on a tradition-based Christian form of reason which was present before the referendum, and which has expanded subsequently, has become a resource which is being used to reimagine what the United Kingdom might look like in the future.

Whilst therefore a framing of Christian values in terms like *the common good* resonated widely, focus on Christian heritage for the European project was not successful in both secular and Christian contexts. Whilst, for the most part, Christian elites favoured a similar strategy to that as in other case studies by framing Christian values in ways that resonated with secular audiences, Christian elites employed a greater deal of overtly religious language. It is not clear that this always resonated well with a plural audience or at all times with other Christians. Nonetheless, as the dust settled from the referendum, Christian elites provided a distinctive contribution to questions around the future of the United Kingdom outside the European Union.

Chapter Eight:

The Place of Christian Elites in Politics

The last four chapters have been case studies investigating the way in which Christian elite actors have engaged with particular areas of debate between 2010 and 2018. Returning to the research questions laid out in Chapter Three, the case studies have primarily provided evidence to help answer the first three questions:

- How do Christian elites engage in politics?
- Do Christian elites bring a distinctive perspective and knowledge set to politics?
- Do UK Christian elites engage in politics strategically?

In a brief summary, the chapters have found that:

- Christian elites engage in politics in two primary ways. The first is engaging by doing. Christian elites provide services for the needy and vulnerable. The second is by contributing to public discussion around the issues which affect those they support.
- Christian elites bring a unique perspective to British politics which is informed by their practical experiences of providing care and support, as well a moral perspective informed by their faith tradition.
- Christian elites engage in a process of strategically framing their contributions depending on the audience they wish to influence. For the most part, Christian elites frame Christian values in ways which resonate within a secular sphere when speaking with secular audiences, and in terms of faith values when speaking to other Christians. At times, when an opportunity presents (such as with the unexpected receptiveness of business leaders to a religious/moral discussion) some Christian elites may frame their contributions in more overtly religious terms.

The purpose of this chapter is to dig more deeply into the fourth of the research questions:

- Does the practice and engagement of Christian elites in British politics challenge claims that the United Kingdom is a secular nation?

Throughout the four case studies, a theme has emerged to do with the ability of Christian elites to draw upon their faith traditions with values from social theology. Whilst the values such as *the common good* and *human dignity* resonate broadly and communicate well within the secular sphere, they are nonetheless values which Christian elites consider to be part of a religious thought tradition. This chapter explores this more fully, and combines it with additional insights gathered in interviews. In addition to specific questions related to the areas in which they engaged, the semi-structured interviews also asked questions concerning how Christians envisaged the place of Christianity in politics, as well as how they understood the status of Christian values in debate.

The chapter finds that the practice of Christian elites has implications for how we view the British secular settlement. In particular, it is shown that Christian elites do not believe that there is a separation between secular values communicated within British politics and the language of a Christian faith tradition. Instead, Christian elites view the values of British politics as being informed by a Christian history to the British state. The position of British Christian elites is also shown to have consequences for viewing the United Kingdom as a secular nation; whilst Christian elites are shown to operate as both insiders and outsiders, certain Christian groups are given more privileged forms of access to government, exemplified in the position of the Lords Spiritual.

The Place of Christian Elites

Questions to do with the state of secularism in the United Kingdom relate to place which Christian elites have and feel that they have in British politics. British politics is not a level playing field amongst different religious groups. The Church of England has formal institutional access to Parliament through the 26 Lords Spiritual and the Second Church Estates Commissioner. Furthermore, it is a longstanding custom for former Archbishops to be made life peers after retirement from their sees. Other Christian denominations (and other religious groups) do not have the same kind of institutional access, though from time to time Chief Rabbis, former Presidents of the Methodist Conference and others have sat in the Lords as Lords Temporal. Whilst Roman Catholic clergy do not sit in the Lords (though some have been invited), the high profile of figures such as Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor and Cardinal Vincent Nichols afford their interventions with a certain weight.

Lay members of Christian denominations serve in both the Commons and Lords. This analysis considers these people Christian elites by virtue of their secular influence, though they are of varying seniority within their Churches. Some members of the laity like Frank Field who served on both

General Synod and within the Commons are influential within both secular and non-secular spheres. Organisations such as Christians in Parliament exist primarily to provide support and encouragement to the laity (of varying denominations) in and around Parliament.

Who Engages in Politics?

Amongst the Christian elites interviewed, there was universal support for Christian involvement in politics. This is no great surprise, given that the Christian elites interviewed were chosen for their involvement within particular political issues. It stands to reason that those that felt it was important for themselves to get involved in politics might also feel that it is also important for others to do so.

Whilst the Christian elites interviewed represent a number of the largest Christian denominations in the UK, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, many smaller denominations may find it difficult to engage in political issues. Whilst Christian elites from the Church of England can claim to be 'comfortable both in the backstreets and the corridors of power ... we really do feel that we belong in both of those places' (Research Interview S), other Christians from different denominations may not have the resources of time money, and expertise available to comfortably or effectively participate in an organised way in national politics. As one interviewee reflected, there is a clearer Biblical mandate to engage in work for justice, rather than politics specifically, and that some Christian elites may choose to engage in other ways to work for justice which are less costly, or with which they are more comfortable,

there is an unclear kind of Biblical mandate to engage in politics per se. Insofar as there is a Biblical mandate to engage in justice, there are easier, much less uncomfortable ways of doing that ... doing mercy projects or food banks which don't piss anybody off... and you understand what that looks like because your churches are very good at marshalling volunteers and running a project ... whereas in politics, you are entering into a febrile and chaotic space as an inexperienced actor.

(Research Interview Q)

Therefore, it must be understood that for many Christian elites, the decision to enter into politics itself is a strategic question where there are benefits and disadvantages. For many Christian bodies, the best way to advance Christian values in society will be to dedicate their efforts to local relief efforts, rather than to engage in a national dialogue for which they are ill-equipped.

There are also some Christian denominations where the choice to not get involved in politics is one of conviction, rather than one of practicality. There are a number of Christian denominations for whom political involvement is not always actively encouraged. Christian leaders from these denominations did not appear in the analysis because they did not engage with the case study issues explored. One prominent example lies with the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, who ordinarily remain apolitical as a matter of principle. Members of the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church do not vote or join political parties, though from time to time they may engage in politics if particular laws are at variance with Church teaching:

Thus, while we do not vote, we still pay attention to the politics of the countries we reside in, and as with all Christian Churches, the Plymouth Brethren do on occasion take a moral stand concerning the compatibility of legislation and policy with the teachings of the Holy Bible. On these occasions we actively lobby our representatives, exercising our individual democratic rights as citizens living in a free society.

(Plymouth Brethren, 2020)

Whilst there is therefore variation between denominations around whether it is possible or desirable for Christian leaders to become involved in politics, the analysis also found a variation between how Christian elites from different denominations viewed the division of labour around engagement with politics. Whilst the analysis in the four case studies has shown how Roman Catholic clergy have become involved in some political issues, there seems to be a difference in thinking between how the Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic spoke about the place of the Church within politics. Most strikingly, Roman Catholic Christian elites spoke strongly about politics as a lay vocation.

What it [Catholic Social Teaching] doesn't do is offer particular policy pronouncements, which it would say is the realm of the freedom and responsibility of those who work within the structure of politics ... So when we're talking about a freedom and a responsibility of the individual to be involved in those decisions that the church doesn't offer direct comment on, that is about pursuing the political vocation which has a theological horizon to it. And that is not the appropriate space of the church proper.

(Research Interview R)

So Cormac Murphy O'Connor ... wanted to take it [a peerage] but he couldn't, he wasn't allowed to by the Church. The Church says that's the layperson's job. You know you say at the end of mass 'mass is ended, go in peace, go out and glorify the Lord' ... Get out into the world, which is your world, and shape it. That's a layperson's job ... this is one good example, one of the few good examples, of the Catholic church where it is acknowledging the vocation of the Catholic layperson: shape society, become a politician'.

(Research Interview G)

The difference here is that, whilst Christian elites from all denominations spoke about the contribution of the laity to public service and politics, Roman Catholic elites felt that some aspects of political engagement are the place of the lay Christian, and not the Church. In this way, the Roman Catholic elites interviewed did not see the privileged position of the Church of England in politics that it has through establishment as something to be coveted.

The pastoral/political dilemma which was spoken about in the previous chapter on Brexit is however related to this discussion of the position Christian elites who are church leaders ought to take within political discussion. Many Christian elites from a variety of denominations spoke about how the position of Church leader sometimes presents difficulties for the Christian elite to engage in political issues. This relates in particular to the relationship between the Church leader and their congregation. This difficulty has led to the strategy which has been seen throughout the thesis where Christian elites focus on a discussion of principles in their engagement in both Church and secular audiences. In other words, party politics is largely off-limits to Christian elites who are Church leaders. As one Methodist peer reflected,

until I came to this part of London, every single appointment I had in Britain was in a Conservative constituency... I could not use the pulpit for party political purposes. It wouldn't lend itself to that.

(Research Interview B)

Nonetheless, as was explored particularly in the chapters on Brexit and on the Syrian Refugee crisis, even when engaging with issues in terms of principles, there nonetheless remains a pastoral/political

dilemma where there can be backlash from congregations when Christian elites attempt to effect policy change.

Why Engage in Politics?

As previously mentioned, all of the Christian elites interviewed supported the involvement of Christians in politics. The Christian elites felt that Christians have a great deal in terms of skills as well as perspective to add to politics. However, the Christian elites were in a mixed mind (sometimes even within themselves) about the distinctive impact of Christians in politics.

One theme which arrived in a number of conversations was the sense that Christian politicians offer the opportunity to be prophetic – or to be the voice of God in a political situation.

the prophetic role, that is where the Christian parliamentarian will be ... Being a prophet is not just about telling the future, it's about reading the signs of the times and representing the voice of God in society.

(Research Interview G)

Another interviewee spoke about how Christian politicians ought to be 'signs of contradiction' in politics, using the example of William Wilberforce. In particular, the interviewee spoke about how the Christian faith of Wilberforce and his connection to John Wesley was essential for the abolition of slavery:

The evangelization came first and the political change came next. [The abolition of the slave trade] couldn't have happened if John Wesley and his friends hadn't been re-evangelising the nation. The very last letter that John Wesley wrote was to William Wilberforce and said continue in this work against the inhumanity of slavery. And he said 'be an Athanasius Contra mundum' an Athanasius against the world. So I think being signs of contradiction in our own little ways is not a bad model to emulate and we should all perhaps be more Athanasius Contra mundum.

(Research Interview O)

In the vein of being a sign of contradiction, a number of Christian elites connected with churches viewed that the Church represented a moral force in society, albeit one with messages that are not

always popular. In particular, discussion with Roman Catholic elites spoke about the need to interpret the messages of a global church for a local audience, which left some room for Christian statecraft.

I think that sometimes [standing up for the Church's moral teaching on refugees is] not going to be the most politically or publicly popular position to take but I think that's where the church's moral teaching comes into force and that's where it is rooted. And I think part of our job is looking at how we can practically advance that teaching and the... position of the church to be a moral force in society.

(Research Interview P)

Practical advancement of the ability of the Church to be a moral force in society requires Christian elites to make a sober assessment of the possibilities open to them in political engagement. For instance, Church representatives did not feel that churches were necessarily able to engage in power politics in order to advance their policy objectives. Even the institutional access of the Church of England in the Lords Spiritual was thought to be a drop in the ocean of the votes required to effect change in Parliament. Instead, the ability of the churches to be a moral force is almost exclusively one of timing and persuasion:

it's about influencing the climate of the debate... we're not into the power politics, but you can try and change the climate, and if you time your interventions well and if you make them striking and if you appeal, I think, across political divides then... you're probably going to be the most successful.

(Research Interview M)

Whilst Christian elites who are church leaders spoke about a wish to be a moral force, other Christian elites were less united. A number of the Christian elites who were interviewed spoke about being disappointed by the lack of consensus amongst Christian politicians on particular issues. Some were sceptical, believing that consensus amongst Christians on all political issues was perhaps impossible. Amongst this discussion was an awareness that, at least on some issues, there is not always a straightforward translation of church social teaching and Biblical values to particular policy suggestions, as mentioned earlier. Accepting this, bodies such as Christians in Parliament who are an interdenominational, primarily pastoral organisation which supports Christians who have a vocation

to political life does not attempt to create a kind of corporate Christian position on policy issues, but instead to help Christians to discuss how Biblical principles might apply to different issues such that they can make their own decisions:

if we try and have a corporate position of Christians in Parliament on some of the controversial issues of the day, we are almost automatically excluding some of our members because they can take a different view ... I recognise genuinely and sincerely other Christians are legitimately holding a diametrically opposed view ... So we don't really have a corporate policy. What we're trying to do is to inspire to people to come to their own decisions ... and help people understand one another.

(Research Interview C)

Whilst Christian elites from the laity often therefore engage with Biblical principles in their thinking around particular issues, this does not always lead to a form of consensus. Although there is no whip for the Lords Spiritual¹¹⁰, Bishops in the Church of England, as explored throughout the different case study chapters, have exhibited a much higher level of consensus. Biblical principles and Christian belief are therefore motivational of action, but these values do not always lead to simple and clear policy applications.

The other key element of Christian engagement in politics is the ability of Christian elites to provide a bridging function, channelling the voices and experiences of those they serve as part of their various areas of charitable provision. This work involves a pastoral element where Christian elites engage in listening, and a bridging element where they convey the concerns they hear. In the case studies the analysis has seen, for instance, Christian elites engaged in listening to the stories of those who have taken advantage of debt relief and emergency food provision and shown how those stories found their way into reports and parliamentary debate.

I became the voice of the living wage in Birmingham ... I became involved in trying to push doors open for refugees. And all of this is based upon pretty much what a Chaplain does, but of course I wasn't operating as a Chaplain: I was using some of the gifts of a Chaplain. And predominantly that's listening ... to far and wide, the what people are saying and where are they saying, and why are they saying it, and why haven't it said it before, why hasn't the wider community listened to them before.

¹¹⁰ Though there is a convenor, at present David Urquhart Bishop of Birmingham.

(Research Interview D)

being a Methodist Minister does not mean shutting yourself off from the world. I must cultivate the art of offering 50% of myself to the congregations I was serving and the other 50 percent of my time representing those same people to the wider world beyond the church. And I have sought rigorously to apply all of that; I always try my best to be a pastor but also to be a prophet.

(Research Interview B)

For these Christian elites interviewed, listening is pastoral, but it is also connected to an attempt to contextualise stories in the light of a wider picture and to present that picture to the wider community so that others will take notice. This work is taken up by Christian elites who are church leaders, but also those who are MPs. One elite interviewed likened the work of Christian elites who are MPs to be occupying a vacuum left by priests in communities where there has been religious decline:

Pastorally they're doing the work the local priest used to do in the past out in the country ... Most non-Church goers don't have contact with priests so very often a lot of the work MPs pick up in their surgeries is very pastoral. They need a caring ear. And listening. And the good ones really do that very very well.

(Research Interview G)

Whilst the Anglican clergyman mentioned being comfortable in both the backstreets and corridors of power (Research Interview S), it is this sense of *being* in both of those places which allows Christian elites to provide a distinctive contribution to British politics. Whilst different denominations and organisations may experience varying levels of comfort and ability to engage in politics at a national level, their engagement in politics adds tremendous value. The reach of Christian elites across the breadth of the nation and deep into different sorts of communities and within different forms of service provision has led Christian elites to become trusted conversation partners for government ministers. By virtue of their position in society, government ministers seek to take advantage of the expertise of Christian elites. As one interviewee from the Trussell Trust remarked:

And what that looks like is much more open conversation, but within quite sort of closed forums. So working groups, consultation groups as government departments seek to try and better their services. We are one of their consultation partners ... We're critical friends. We're not afraid to be assertive about what we feel is right and what is wrong. But we feel that it is far more valuable to be in the room having a conversation about something, than being outside throwing stones in.

(Research Interview T)

Consequently, two of the largest contributions of Christian elites to British politics are in terms of the perspective they bring. Firstly, Christian elites provide a perspective which is informed by a Christian faith tradition, which they tend to frame in language which is accessible to others in a secular environment. This perspective, however, does not necessarily manifest into a unified position amongst all Christians. Secondly, Christian elites provide a distinctive contribution in forming a bridge between communities and Parliament. This is especially valuable in the House of Lords where, as one interview subject remarked (Research Interview A), the Lords Spiritual are the only peers with a constituency.

The Place of Christian Values in British Political Debate

The analysis now turns to a more direct look at the way in which the Christian elites interviewed thought about the reception and place of Christian values within British politics. As part of the semi-structured interview questions, each interviewee was invited to reflect upon whether they felt that Christian values were 'in or out of season', echoing 2 Timothy 4:2.

A number of Christian elites interviewed felt that Christian language was either not understood, misunderstood, or communicated in the wrong ways within the secular sphere. In particular a number of Christian elites reflected on the sense that Christianity had become a form of 'toxic brand', with non-Christians feeling that a Christian worldview was harmful or backwards. This struggle for Christians to communicate their values is something which was encapsulated in 2013 when Justin Welby spoke to the Evangelical Alliance about how people under 35 'not only think that what we're saying [about same-sex marriage] is incomprehensible but also think that we're plain wrong and wicked and equate it to racism and other forms of gross and atrocious injustice' (Gledhill, 2013). This was something which emerged in research interviews, with a number of Christian elites

talking about the need to strategically reframe Christian discourse into language which is more accessible and which carries fewer negative connotations within the public psyche:

sometimes the public perception of Christians in the public squares is that we're rather unpleasant people ... sometimes our language is very ugly and old-fashioned and I regret that ... we must address [issues of gender and sexuality] sensitively and gently because there are people that ... it's their life experience and to put on hobnail boots and trample all over their innermost feelings is absolutely not what Jesus would do. So ... it's finding the right way to speak publicly on these sensitive issues.

(Research Interview C)

when we try to speak into the public sphere about justice, and equality, and freedom, we are not really taken all that seriously because we have slightly dodgy views ... things that are now normally considered to be issues of equality. So our voice doesn't ring true in the public sphere when we speak in Christian language. So what we have to do is we have to go to Jürgen Habermas and engage in the process of translation, so where St. Paul talks about there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male or female ... we talk about equality, and where Jesus talks about freedom and being free in Christ to be who we are, we have to turn that into freedom and agency ... So I think it is very difficult for Christians to speak into the public sphere using Christian language, but I don't think it's all that difficult to do a translation and end up with exactly the same principles'.

(Research Interview J)

Christian elites can sometimes find this process of reframing to be difficult, but with others, or at other times, this process can be simple. The level of difficulty in translation may be related to the particular issue being discussed. As was discussed in the chapter on the Syrian Refugee crisis, it is easier to translate Christian understandings of human dignity in relation to refugees than it is in relation to abortion. This difficulty may also be related to the level of experience of political engagement which the Christian elite has, which returns to the previous discussion surrounding the strategic choice of Christian elites to engage in national politics, or to restrict themselves to other forums with which they are more comfortable.

It is not the case, however, that all Christian elites felt that Christian values failed to communicate in the secular sphere, and that communicated in the right way with sensitivity, Christian values still have traction in British politics.

I think they [Christian values] still get a hearing, they still command respect. They need to be articulated, maybe rearticulated and with a certain deftness, or persuasion.

(Research Interview F)

Part of this level of traction is that a number of Christian elites interviewed felt that a large number of values employed in the secular sphere are underpinned by Christian values. In general, amongst the Christian elites who were interviewed as part of the project, as well as many who helped the author and acted as gatekeepers for access to other elites, there was a strong reluctance to speak about British society as though it were secular. Instead, many Christian elites held to an idea where British society continues to be infused with Christian values.

whether through Christian people or Christian belief and ethics ... we aren't as much as some people would like us to think of us being a secular ... We aren't a secular society. And so people say well "maybe we think we're a secular society; we behave in the way that were secular society." And, actually, I'm not sure we do. I think I remember Rowan Williams once saying that the England feels like it's haunted by religion ... what he meant was that it is kind of present, it's there around us and we don't often necessarily quite appreciate its influence.

(Research Interview N)

we need to sort of resist the urge to talk about our current moment ... as if we're living in a particularly dangerous or secular moment ... I'm not sure I would want to say that there's that much which is ... definitively qualitatively worse.

(Research Interview Q)

Often interview subjects presented a collapse between Christian values and secular values in the respect that there is often not a difference between the two. One interview subject saw it as a question of perspective, where others may not understand Christian values as being Christian:

I think Christian values are always in season - other people might not see it like that ... I mean, I think many people would say, whether they have a faith or not ... it's wrong to harass other people. So there's a value there about caring for other people. I would interpret that as Christian value.

(Research Interview A)

This perspective on the continuing influence of the Christian faith on the values which are common currency within British politics alters the perspective a number of Christian elites have on ideas of reframing and translation. Namely, if the values of the political sphere are authentically those which belong to, or are descended from, a Christian worldview, then political communication is not an exercise in translation, though it may nonetheless be an exercise in tact and diplomacy. Despite this, not all secular values were necessarily felt by Christian elites to necessarily fit naturally within a Christian worldview. In particular, one Anglican Bishop remarked that the primacy of personal autonomy is a key area where secular systems of value may diverge from the Christian view:

One can be sitting in a debate and feel... these are not necessarily Christian principles which are underlying what people are saying... but one feels that at other times things are deeply Christian perspectives... But I do notice that where there does appear to be a disjunction is an acceptance of personal human autonomy as an absolute given - that what is necessary for humanity is to provide as much space as possible for each person to determine his or her future, and that is not a naturally religious perspective.

(Research Interview F)

Whilst autonomy does have cognate values within Christian tradition – its emphasis is one which is not necessarily common to a Christian perspective. In other words – a Christian perspective is one which is formed in relationship to the belief in a divine other who invites the believer to live life in a certain way, which at its heart tempers ideas of autonomy.

The analysis has therefore revealed that Christian values can be seen in two different ways, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first is that Christian values have a poor image stemming from a negative perception of Christian social teaching especially in relation to issues such as human sexuality and the rights of the unborn. When speaking in a Christian register, under this view Christian elites are unlikely to meet with success and therefore must engage in an exercise of

reframing into language which is more accessible and carries fewer negative connotations. For the most part through our analysis, this is what we have seen occur. The second is that Christian values are infused into the values of British society, and although it may be the case that many do not believe that these values are Christian, or that they may hold these values with a different weight than might be the case within a Christian worldview, the values of the secular sphere remain Christian values. Under this view, whilst Christian elites may have to frame their discourse in ways which resonate more strongly with others, this is not truly an exercise in translation. Naturally, this second view offers an alternative perspective on secularism in the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored a number of different themes related to the involvement of Christian elites in British politics and the implications that this might have for the scholarly understanding of secularism in the UK. The analysis found that for Christian elites, the choice to engage in politics is strategic and theological and is related to the resources of a Christian organisation and beliefs to do with the nature of politics and the proper place of Christians within it. Christians were found to bring a perspective which is informed by their theological beliefs into British politics, but engaged in a strategic reframing in order that these beliefs would resonate with a secular audience. Christian elites in the United Kingdom were not found to always be united, and Christian elites were sceptical that unity across policy issues is possible – reflecting that Christian values may be applied faithfully to different policy applications. This perspective from British Christian elites seems to suggest that the emergence of a moderately united ‘Christian right’ in the United Kingdom is unlikely.

Nonetheless, a variety of Christian elites believed that Christians in politics represent a moral force.

The analysis also found that Christian elites provide a key bridging function around a series of issues where Christian groups are large charitable providers. In this, Christian elites bring pastoral insights to the ears of decisionmakers. Christian elites felt that their influence was not one of power politics, but instead one of persuasion and moral influence. Critically, the Christian elites interviewed were those who had high levels of access to Westminster and other forums of power. Working as a minority within these places lends itself well to the strategic deployment of careful persuasion in a way which would not be open to other Christian leaders who did not have the same degree of access.

Finally, the analysis explored the manner in which Christian elites felt that, although Christian values are often perceived negatively, there remains an extent to which British politics is flavoured by a

Christian history. For these Christian elites, many of the values which are common currency within secular dialogue rest upon Christian roots. This has consequences for ideas of the secular sphere as a neutral space. Christian elites under this view do not necessarily have to translate their views into a foreign language, though there nonetheless remain considerations around how to communicate most effectively. However, there were areas where Christian worldviews and values were at variance to others commonly used – in these areas, the task of communicating for the Christian speaker can be more difficult.

Chapter Nine:

Conclusion

The Journey So Far

The analysis revolved around four primary case studies, which will be summarised here. Each of these case studies represented a key issue in political debate in the United Kingdom between 2010-2018. In each of these areas, Christian actors – whether these were churches, charitable or advocacy bodies – were active in arguing for political change. Whilst discussions in the politics of religion literature have focussed on the discussion of so-called ‘moral issues’ such as abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage, each of the case studies in this thesis represent original contributions to the literature, showing Christian elites arguing for change in new contexts. Whilst other areas of the literature have investigated the role of Christian groups with regards to service provision, and in particular the area of faith schools, this has been tied much more closely to discussions around whether or not such provision is good for society, rather than investigating the ways in which the experience of service provision flavours the perspective and contributions of religious elites and the place in which they feel they occupy within politics. Whilst normative work around public reason has looked at how different faith perspectives ought to relate together in dialogue within a neutral public sphere, the case studies each provide an empirical snapshot into the perspectives Christian elites have as they strategically pick the language and ways in which they engage with British politics.

The first chapter was concerned with the involvement of Christian groups in the debate around High-Cost Short-Term Credit (HCSTC). HCSTC firms, such as Wonga.com, provided a form of high-interest credit marketed as a ‘payday’ loan – namely a loan intended to be taken for only a short number of days to deal with short-term shocks before the borrower’s next payday. HCSTC firms existed on the High Street, but their growth online was particularly sudden, the market growing from £100 million in 2004 to £2.2 billion in 2014 (Packman, 2014, p. 45), and the regulatory response to this new form of lending lagged behind the changes in the market and in the lives of borrowers. The particular worry with HCSTC lending was that those who borrowed were those who were unable to access more favourable and lower interest forms of lending, and whose life situations left them especially vulnerable to being unable to repay. Though borrowed amounts were relatively small, averaging around £270 (Office of Fair Trading, 2013, p. 9), the high interest rates, and the high ratio of the borrowed amounts to the disposable incomes of borrowers meant that this is what is

considered problem debt; many people were trapped in cycles of debt, where interest repayments rapidly outstripped their ability to pay. Those in these situations experienced deep hardship, with 70% of those who sought debt advice being prescribed mental health medication, and a third contemplating or attempting suicide (Centre for Social Justice, 2013, pp. 19-20).

The chapter explored how Christian elites responded to the practical need of debt relief for those who were trapped in this way: the chapter highlighted particularly the work of Christians Against Poverty (CAP). The chapter also investigated the way in which Christian groups agitated for change, both inside and outside Parliament. Evidence provided by groups like CAP helped inform the conversation, but particularly striking was how the debate was flavoured by moral elements stemming from Christian conceptions of rightful lending. In particular, the concept of usury, introduced by Justin Welby represented a strategic reframing of Christian faith discourses in ways that had traction and resonance throughout the debate. These efforts eventually led to the Financial Conduct Authority introducing an interest rate cap in 2015 (Financial Times, 2015). This interest rate cap was a large contributing factor to Wonga.com collapsing into administration in 2018 (Farrell, 2018).

The second chapter examined how Christian elites have been involved in the discussion around welfare reform and foodbanks in the United Kingdom. This chapter engaged with the British context in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis where the Liberal Democrat/Conservative Coalition Government and the later Conservative Government committed the nation to a policy of austerity where, in the midst of a recession, £19.6 billion was cut from the welfare budget, falling primarily on working age benefits, tax credits, and disability benefits (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2016, pp. 4-5). In comparison with other EU nations, this was the largest set of cuts save for those undertaken in Ireland, Greece, and Spain (Meer, 2010). These cuts were accompanied by large scale welfare reform and the beginnings of the Universal Credit policy.

The cuts and reforms led to a large increase in the number of foodbanks and foodbank users. From 2010 to 2017, the number of foodbank users increased from almost 129,000 to almost 1,129,000 users (Trussell Trust, 2017). Around half of the foodbanks in the United Kingdom are run with local communities by the Trussell Trust, a Christian charity. The chapter explored how Christian elites have been involved in providing foodbanks as well as engaging in the public debate aiming to reduce the numbers of people coming to rely upon foodbanks. For the most part, a great deal of this work was done by Christian groups quantifying their practical experience on the ground in the form of data in order to inform the conversation. Christian elites also took pains to change the debate not only through data and argument, but also through relationship, where the Trussell Trust adopted the

role of the 'critical friend' of government departments and ministers. Whilst their actions were informed by faith values, secular language was chosen by Christian elites for public engagement. This campaign, however, took pains to centralise the human person and to humanise the statistics presented.

The third chapter examined how Christian elites responded to the Syrian refugee crisis. The humanitarian situation in Syria caused by the civil war was described by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees as 'a disgraceful humanitarian calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history' (UNHCR, 2013). A conflict involving many different armed groups resulted in the deaths of 511,000 people, including 19,811 children from the beginning of the violence until 2018 (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2018). Furthermore, the conflict resulted in the displacement of millions internally, as well as millions more who fled the country altogether (Verme, et al., 2016, p. xv). The majority of these refugees were housed in neighbouring nations, though many thousands made the perilous journey to Europe. There was also a religious dimension to the conflict where violence shattered harmonious plural communities. The chapter explored how the primary focus of Christian elites in the UK was to take part in lobbying the government to accept more refugees in the UK, practically supporting those refugees who arrived in the UK, as well as amplifying the voices of those in the region such that they were heard by policymakers in the UK.

Christian elites focussed on how the conflict was not simply a military struggle, but also a moral, philosophical and theological struggle. Christian elites designed their interventions with two audiences in mind. At times, Christian elites spoke mostly towards other Christians, and at others towards the secular sphere. Biblical narratives were used when speaking to co-religionists, but these ideas were reframed into concepts such as *Human Dignity*, *Just War*, and *Solidarity* when communicating with secular audiences. These concepts were also used when speaking to Christian audiences. Particularly distinctive was the way that Christian elites provided a bridge between displaced people and affected communities and government.

The fourth case-study chapter explored the manner in which Christian elites in the UK interacted with Brexit. The case study followed how Christian elites, and in particular church leaders, behaved before and after the EU referendum. It was shown how, whilst Christian laity were slightly more likely to vote to leave the EU than the population as a whole, church leadership in mainline denominations were almost universally united around a remain vote. Unlike in previous electoral campaigns, Christian elites who were church leaders made their preferred outcome known, with some leaders claiming a shared Christian heritage amongst EU member states. This identification of the European Union with Christianity was shown to be a divisive narrative, which posed a

pastoral/political dilemma for Church leaders. This pastoral/political dilemma is, to a certain extent present within church contexts where proposed change is at variance with the views of those of congregation members. Some narratives such as *subsidiarity*, *the common good* and questions like *Who is my neighbour?* represent a strategic framing of Christian principles in ways which borrow on areas of shared experience and tradition seemed to communicate well within secular audiences, whilst others such as the Christian heritage of the European Union did not.

After the case study chapters, the analysis continued to a more general examination of the place of Christian elites within British politics. The analysis found that although the actions of Christian elites were informed by faith values, and that many of those interviewed felt that they hoped the Church and Christians in and around Parliament would present a kind of moral force, nonetheless a shared faith does not necessarily always translate to policy consensus. Whilst therefore Christian elites do reframe Christian discourses in ways which inform secular debate, this does not necessarily always lead to a kind of united front. Therefore, whilst the case studies explored did demonstrate a high level of consensus amongst Christian elites, but this may not always be the case for all issues. The analysis also explored the various choices around whether and how to get involved in political issues and how this is influenced by theological and practical concerns. Christian elites reflected on the reception of Christian values within public debate, with many conscious of a need to reframe discourses in ways which will resonate with a broader secular audience. Nonetheless, a number of Christian elites felt that the values which inform the British commonplace of discussion are informed by a Christian tradition, and therefore this is not necessarily a difficult translation. Ultimately, one of the largest impacts of Christian elites within British politics was to act as a kind of a bridging function between practical experience of charitable provision and discussion around connected policy issues.

Summary of Findings

The analysis has attempted to answer the following four research questions:

- How do Christian elites engage in politics?
- Do Christian elites bring a distinctive perspective and knowledge set to politics?
- Do UK Christian elites engage in politics strategically?
- Does the practice and engagement of Christian elites in British politics challenge claims that the United Kingdom is a secular nation?

In a brief summary, the chapters have found that:

- Christian elites engage in politics in two primary ways. The first is engaging by doing. Christian elites provide services for the needy and vulnerable. The second is by contributing to public discussion around the issues which affect those they support, often arguing for or against policy. These contributions take the form of speeches in Parliament, articles and appearances in the media, as well as the creation of reports. In addition, Christian elites provide a link between national political discussions and local Christian faith communities.
- Christian elites bring a unique perspective to British politics which is informed by their practical experiences of providing care and support. Christian elites bring qualitative and quantitative insights borne out of this practical experience in the forms of reports, select committee submissions, and other contributions. Christian elites also bring a particular moral perspective to British politics which is informed by their faith tradition.
- Christian elites engage in a process of strategically framing their contributions depending on the audience they wish to influence. For the most part, Christian elites frame Christian values in ways which resonate within a secular sphere when speaking with secular audiences, and in terms of faith values when speaking to other Christians. At times, when an opportunity presents (such as with the unexpected receptiveness of business leaders to a religious/moral discussion) some Christian elites may frame their contributions in more overtly religious terms.
- The practice and engagement of British Christian elites challenges claims that Britain is a secular nation because:
 - Church of England Bishops sit in the House of Lords
 - Christian elites claim that British secular values are informed by a Christian tradition which calls into question the neutrality of the secular sphere.

Discussion of Findings

Whilst Christian elites interviewed were found to be motivated by their faith to engage in politics, for the most part the values they employed in public discussion were those which resonated in the secular commonplace of British politics. This contrast may be seen in one of two ways. The first way of understanding this contrast is in a strategic sense. In this way, Christian actors have subscribed, sometimes explicitly, to a form of discursive translation akin to that which exists within the work of Habermas. Christian actors engage in this translation because they have come to expect, and often have experienced, that Christian theological terms and language are not often well-understood by other actors within the public sphere. This translation is sometimes accompanied by an

understanding that there is a need to beg the indulgence of other actors in the political sphere for the use of religious language. This seems to suggest that there is an understanding amongst Christian actors that explicit religious arguments are often unwelcome in public debate. This lack of welcome was sometimes reflected upon by interview subjects, who reflected upon the position of Christianity within society – with one starkly referring to Christians as a group as having a form of ‘toxic brand’ (Research Interview J) where the position of Christian groups on issues such as gay marriage has led to a negative reception of Christian values elsewhere.

This form of refrain from using religious language may be seen in this sense to be pragmatic. Christian actors often do not use religious reasons because they believe that they will not be well understood and are therefore unlikely to lead to an achievement of their aims in policy change; they do not necessarily believe there is a moral imperative to not use religious language. This echoes Rawls’ reflection that religious actors will often wish to obey public reason requirements since they ‘will normally have practical reasons for wanting to make their views acceptable to a broader audience’ (Rawls, 1997, p. 784). In this way, Christian faith actors navigate a broadly liberal and secular framework, but do not necessarily endorse ideas of the secular.

This ought not, however, to be considered to represent a fulsome attempt to disestablish all of what the secular state has to offer. Whilst all actors interviewed said that there was considerable value to be had in the involvement of Christian elites in public debate and within politics, they did not necessarily always believe they could (or should) present a united front. Particularly Roman Catholic interviewees were conscious of a value to be had for a separation of church and state, and many interviewees reflected that there is a mixed history of Christian engagement in politics. There was never a wish expressed that there ought to be a return to a form of Christendom where the Church held a preponderance of power over politics.

Whilst separation of church and state and a particular vocation for the lay-Christian in politics was spoken about by the elites who were interviewed, interviewees did not feel that the values in the secular sphere were truly neutral. This feeds into the second way of understanding the contrast between the values employed and the faith values which are motivational of action, which is that the Christian actors interviewed do not always conceive of a separation between faith reasons and the language of public debate. This is the second way of understanding the contrast: namely, that no contrast actually exists. In this way, the values of the commonplace of British political debate is understood to have Christian origins, and therefore the British secular settlement is not truly neutral. In this sense, many Christian elites felt no trouble framing their contributions in ways which

were understood by non-Christians, since they were able to frame their speech using concepts which has authentic resonance within Christian social thought.

An example of this was found in the concept of human dignity which has been present throughout the thesis, but especially in the chapter on Syria. In this chapter, there was a great deal of a focus amongst Christian groups on ensuring that, in the midst of discussions surrounding national security, border control, and provision of services, the humanity and personhood of the individual was not forgotten. This focus on human dignity was something which was present both within parliament, and within the motivations of Christian groups. Human dignity was a concept which was understood by Christian actors as being within a Christian theological framework where the value of a person is imbued by the creative power of God. This concept had a great deal of traction and allowed Christian groups to form effective coalitions with actors who did not share their worldview. One interview participant (Research Interview O), however, pointed out the limits of this coalition building, where some Christian conceptions of human dignity also include the right to life of the unborn, whereas other conceptions of human dignity do not. These contestable origins of the values of political concepts mean that Christian values might communicate in some circumstances but not others. Examples which have arisen throughout the analysis of Christian values which have formed parts of political debate include: usury, subsidiarity, solidarity, human dignity, just war, reconciliation.

The final sort of discourse employed by Christians in political debate has been the overtly biblical. These sorts of contributions were very rare. Ordinarily, this biblical language was used in an illustrative way. In these examples, the illustrative biblical language was not required to understand the argument used by the Christian actor, but it provided an explanation of where the perspective of the actor was rooted. More rarely was biblical language the operative form of reason within public contributions. Often, when biblical language was employed in either sense, as mentioned before, Christian actors begged the indulgence of other members of the discussion. The vast majority of biblical contributions came from Anglican Bishops and this reflects their privileged degree of access they have within British politics; seemingly, there is either a right or expectation for Bishops to talk about God. In certain circumstances, both inside and outside Parliament, Biblical language and stories were found to communicate, with some Christian elites interviewed surprised at the receptiveness of some audiences to this form of language.

Conclusion:

It has been shown that Christian elites have a distinctive contribution to British politics. Throughout the analysis, Christian elites were discovered to be at the forefront of the response to practical need,

whether that was in relation to the provision of food, debt relief or refuge. Christian faith values were shown to be a key part of the reasons why Christian elites chose to respond in this way. This experience of being service providers allowed Christian elites to bring in information, expertise, data and a lived perspective to British politics, which enriched discussion of these issues. Engagement in political discussion was shown to be strategic and moral: for those Christian elites who had the wherewithal to enter into British politics, that engagement was closely tied to resolving the issues behind the practical needs with which Christian charities were engaging. Whilst in some of the discussions explored, a number of Christian elites seemed to exhibit a high level of consensus, this was not found to always be the case within British politics. Many of those interviewed were sceptical of the possibility of a unified Christian political line in Britain. Nonetheless, though not always united, another distinctive contribution of British Christians stemmed from their moral perspective, which ordinarily was reframed in ways which are at home in the commonplace of British political values. Christian values at times were shown to be off-putting and associated with a 'toxic brand', though at other times were considered by Christian elites to be foundational of the values which constitute British politics.

Having investigated the contributions of Christian elites to British political discussion, there is room for further study. Further work is required to understand the extent to which Christian communities feel represented by their faith leaders. The chapter on Brexit highlighted divisions between the perceptions of clergy and laity with respect to whether Britain ought to remain a member of the European Union. Since faith leaders are often used by government as a means to access faith communities, further research into whether Christian non-elites feel represented is a key area for investigation. The research was also primarily focussed on the present – in other words, investigating how Christian elites feel about the position of faith in society now. A key future area of research would be to investigate the thoughts that Christian elites have regarding the future contribution of Christianity and Christian leaders to British politics: what will be the position of Christian elites and Christian faith values in 20 and 50 years' time?

Research Interviews

Research Interview A: Anglican Bishop, 2nd March 2018

Research Interview B: Methodist Peer, 16th March 2018

Research Interview C: Christian MP, 24th April 2018

Research Interview D: Methodist Clergyman and Campaigner, 18th May 2018

Research Interview E: Representative of JPIT, 22nd May 2018

Research Interview F: Anglican Bishop, 29th May 2018

Research Interview G: Roman Catholic Cleric, 10th July 2018

Research Interview H: Roman Catholic Political Actor, 24th July 2018

Research Interview I: Anglican Bishop, 2nd August 2018

Research Interview J: Ordained representative of the Church Urban Fund, 9th August 2018

Research Interview K: Representative of Theos, 23rd August 2018

Research Interview L: Representative of Churches Together, 23rd August 2018

Research Interview M: Representative of Church of England Parliamentary Unit, 11th September 2018

Research Interview N: Ordained Representative of Church of England Parliamentary Unit, 11th September 2018

Research Interview O: Roman Catholic Peer, 6th November 2018

Research Interview P: Representatives of the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of England, 8th November 2018

Research Interview Q: Representative of the RAMP project and Good Faith Partnership, 18th November 2018

Research Interview R: Roman Catholic Political Theologian, 5th December 2018

Research Interview S: Anglican Cleric, 6th December 2018

Research Interview T: Representative of the Trussell Trust, 7th August 2019

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