

Institution: Lancaster University
Unit of Assessment: 33: Theology and Religious Studies
Title of case study: Recasting the Public Debate on Religion
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>In research on religion and society, Professor Woodhead has argued for an updated, expanded understanding of 'religion' and 'belief' in the UK today. In part by leading to Woodhead's direction of the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme, the research has led to major impacts throughout 2008-13. In particular it has influenced the Equality and Human Rights Commission's handling of new equalities legislation, and it has significantly enhanced public discussion about religion through the high-profile Westminster Faith Debates, co-organised by Woodhead and the Rt Hon Charles Clarke. The Debates have reached millions, increasing recognition of religion's ongoing presence in public life and generating further policy impacts. The many beneficiaries include policy-makers in equalities issues, politicians, journalists and the general public.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Woodhead's research analyses how religion in the UK has changed since World War Two, providing new frameworks for understanding it and explaining practical and policy implications.</p> <p><u>Core insights:</u> broadening how religion in post-war Britain is understood, to take account of growing Christian variety, a new multi-faith landscape, new spiritualities, more reflexive belief, and women's changing role.</p> <p>Although the historic churches remain important in the UK, their influence and membership declined dramatically after the 1970s. Yet many people still think of religion in the UK in terms of church membership, even assimilating other world religions to this model. Woodhead has challenged this 'ecclesiastical captivity' of thought, illuminating the more varied religious landscape of the post-war period. Key elements of this contribution are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a taxonomy (Woodhead and Heelas 2000), now widely adopted, distinguishing between 'religions of difference', 'religions of humanity' and 'spiritualities of life' • applying this taxonomy to original empirical research on churches in the UK, showing wide variety within the 'congregational domain' (Heelas and Woodhead 2005) • empirical research in Kendal, UK, showing how significant post-Christian forms of holistic or mind-body-spirit forms of spirituality have become since the 1980s, and offering an explanation: the 'spiritual revolution' thesis (Heelas and Woodhead 2005) • attending to the previously neglected importance of women in religion, their key role in church decline and holistic growth, and developing a new theory to explain this (Woodhead 2008) • advancing analysis of the 'unchurched majority' in the UK: the ethnic majority who identify as Christian in the census (72%), but are not members of religious bodies and combine religious and secular commitments in ways which have 'practical and emotional logics' rather than creedal ones (Riis and Woodhead 2010, Woodhead and Catto 2012) • offering a new integrated analysis of religion and society in post-war Britain, replacing previous studies which took secularization as their paradigm and the churches as their focus (Woodhead and Catto 2012) • challenging theories of the privatisation of religion and showing how, post-war, religion has remained integral to public life – in, e.g., education, law, the workplace, consumption, health and healing (Woodhead and Catto 2012).
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>1. Woodhead and Heelas (2000), <i>Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology</i>. Oxford: Blackwell. ISBN-10: 0631210741; ISBN-13: 978-0631210740. 2* evidence: prestigious academic</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

publisher; widely cited (162 citations on Google Scholar); endorsements: 'an extremely valuable collection ... [that will be] very widely used' (Robert Bellah); 'highly illuminating ... well structured, and well argued, ... an important, innovative work that is very timely' (Watling, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*).

2. Heelas and Woodhead (2005) *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Oxford: Blackwell. ISBN-10: 1405119594; ISBN-13: 978-1405119597. 2* evidence: Leverhulme funding as above; peer-reviewed monograph, prestigious academic publisher; 694 citations on Google Scholar; endorsements: 'an important book that should be read by anyone concerned with ... religion in this country' (Davie, *Church Times*); '... we need both careful empirical research and constant reflection on our categories. Heelas and Woodhead supply both in generous measure' (Charles Taylor).

3. Woodhead (2008) Gendering Secularisation Theory. *Social Compass* 55 (2), pp. 187-193. DOI: 10.1177/0037768607089738. 2* evidence: article in fully peer-reviewed international article.

4. Riis and Woodhead (2010), *A Sociology of Religious Emotions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN-10: 0199655774; ISBN-13: 978-0199655779. 2* evidence: leading academic publisher; peer-reviewed monograph; endorsements include: 'a welcome and highly distinctive contribution to this emerging field of study ... deserves to be discussed widely' (Beckford, *Acta Sociologica*).

5. Woodhead and Catto eds. (2012), *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*. London: Routledge. ISBN-10: 978-0-415-57581-2; ISBN-13: 978-0-415-57580-5. 2* evidence: major new anthology; peer-reviewed; reputable academic publisher; endorsements: 'authoritative ... essential reading for anyone who wants to know how and why religion in the UK has changed since 1945' (Hugh McLeod, Emeritus Professor, University of Birmingham); 'the most complete picture to date of the ... British religious landscape of the postwar decades ... a must-read' (Peter Beyer, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Ottawa).

Peer-reviewed grant: *The Kendal Project: Patterns of the Sacred in Contemporary Society, 2000-2002*, £97k, Leverhulme Trust Research Project. PI Heelas, Co-I Woodhead, Co-I Szerszynski.

Woodhead's research and leadership was publicly recognised in 2013 when she was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for Services to Higher Education.

4. Details of the impact

The impact of Woodhead's research has escalated in successive stages, first improving religious education in schools. Central findings of Heelas and Woodhead (2005) and Woodhead (2008) have been incorporated into the A-level Sociology syllabus. They are a major part of Unit 3 of the AQA Sociology GCE and are the basis of a Sociology of Religion unit in the OCR Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Sociology (Unit G672). Woodhead (2005), (2008) and others are discussed in major Sociology textbooks such as Langley et al. *Sociology AS for OCR* (2nd edn. 2010: pp. 203-4, 215) and Haralambos and Holborn eds. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives: AS and A2 Student Handbook* (7th edn., 2008: p. 440, pp. 422-5, inc. section 'Linda Woodhead – female religiosity and gendering secularization'). The latter is the market leading A-Level Sociology textbook, bought and used by most centres teaching A-Level Sociology according to publisher HarperCollins. Thus Woodhead's research has enhanced the education of the c. 30,000 students taking A-level Sociology in the UK annually.

In 2007, Woodhead was appointed Director of the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme. In light of her research and programme role, she was commissioned to write policy reports advising the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) on how to approach their new mandate for religious equality. Her first report '*Religion or Belief: Identifying Issues and Priorities* (2009; Ref. 1), which draws on her research (pp. iii-iv, 5-7, 10-12), has:

(a) helped the EHRC to set its research priorities, including commissioning the report *Religious Discrimination in Britain* and setting up its Religion or Belief Network, now with 500+ members;

(b) led to Woodhead advising on the EHRC briefing paper 'Religion or Belief' and guide 'Religion or belief in the workplace: a guide for employers following recent European Court of Human Rights judgments' (Feb 2013).

(c) informed the EHRC's legal interventions. In '*Religion or Belief*' (p. 30) Woodhead recommends that in dealing with clashes between equality strands the principle of 'proportionality' should be supplemented by that of 'reasonable accommodation', whereby employers should make reasonable adjustments to accommodate people's needs to manifest their religion. The EHRC took forward this recommendation in its submission to the European Court of Human Rights concerning four widely reported UK legal cases (Eweida and others); see EHRC press release, 07/2011 (Ref. 2). Following the European Court's subsequent ruling, the UK government is considering changing the law on religious discrimination and the EHRC is working with employers and employees on interpreting and applying the ruling.

Drawing on her research on public religion in Britain, Woodhead has since 2008 been widely consulted on religion and security, e.g. by the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism and (until 2009) by Paul Wiles, former Chief Scientist at the Home Office. She advised against conducting intrusive research on Muslim communities when a Home Office survey of all Muslim mosques and communities was planned, thus contributing to improved, more sensitive security policy.

The impact of Woodhead's research has increased greatly since 2012 as an outcome of her direction of the Religion and Society Programme, which required her to disseminate Programme findings. The vehicle that she and the former Home Secretary Charles Clarke designed was the Westminster Faith Debates of 2012 and 2013. (Elizabeth Hunter from Theos assisted with media relations in the 2012 series.)

The Debates were described by the *Guardian's* religion writer Andrew Brown as 'the most interesting and successful attempt ... to talk about what all people believe and why this really matters' (Ref. 3). Each Debate pairs Programme award-holding academics with public figures to address contemporary issues in Religion and Public Life (2012) and Religion and Personal Life (2013) before audiences including MPs, civil servants, journalists, think-tank researchers, teachers, and faith communities, representing over 400 organisations. Woodhead's research has fed into the Debates' far-reaching impact on public discussion not only indirectly, in that the Debates result from her role as Programme Director, but also directly, in that her research has informed the design of the Debates.

The Debates, whose participants have included Tony Blair, Rowan Williams and Richard Dawkins, have: been attended by over 2000 people; been viewed around 19,000 times on YouTube; received 1.8 million hits online, with thousands of views each week (e.g. 4258 and 2403 in the first two weeks of 2013). Media coverage has been exceptional: the 2013 Debates were reported over 69 times in mainstream media (Ref. 4); for example, the 2012 debate on religious education in schools made headlines in the *Daily Mail* and *Guardian* (22/2/2012) and the closing 2012 debate made the *Telegraph* front page (24/07/2012). The Debates have been reported internationally in Austria, Denmark, Germany, India, Switzerland, and the USA (*Time*, *Washington Post*). Viewers from over 58 countries have accessed the online Debates, which are used in teaching in India, the Netherlands, and Palestine. As a result Woodhead has become a regular media commentator, on, e.g., BBC1 *The Big Questions* (11/03/2012, 15/01/2012), BBC Radio 4 (e.g. *Thought for the Day* 26/12/2012, *Sunday* 5/5/2013); in the *Guardian* (e.g. 07/05/2012, 07/11/2012, 12/2/2013), *The Tablet*, and other venues including the 2013 Davos World Economic Forum.

As this level of media coverage shows, the Debates have greatly increased public recognition of religion's continuing public presence. This is confirmed by Dominic Grieve QC MP, Attorney General: 'This series has been extremely successful in raising the level of public debate about religion, on topics of great importance for our national life' (Ref. 5). Again the BBC's Commissioning Editor for Religion confirms that the Debates have 'made it more acceptable to "do religion" in public. This can be seen in the media, from more newspaper opinion pieces to religion-related programmes' (Ref. 6). Further evidence of enhanced public discourse is the extensive discussion that continues online, in, *inter alia*, the *Guardian* Comment is Free and many blogs (New Statesman, National Secular Society – see, e.g., 5/7/2013).

Through the 2013 Debates, Woodhead's research has had further impacts on ongoing political

debates on assisted dying and same-sex marriage. Woodhead commissioned YouGov polls on these topics, publicised in press releases, to inform the relevant debates. The results confirmed her view of the gap between the 'unchurched majority' of religious people and the 'strictly religious' minority. The results were widely discussed in the Anglican church (e.g. in *Church Times*, *Thinking Anglicans*, *Modern Church*), in UK newspapers and on BBC news online. The finding that 70% of Britons and 72% of Anglicans support assisted dying (discussed in *New Statesman* 14/5/2013) was cited in three court cases (Lamb *et al.*) requesting relaxation of right-to-die guidelines. The Home Office's Chief Scientific Advisor confirms that 'the finding [on euthanasia] had world-wide press coverage [and] it is hard to imagine that this will not feed into the forthcoming debates in Parliament and elsewhere' (Ref. 7). Woodhead's finding that most religious people support same-sex marriage was repeated in the *Evening Standard* editorial of 8/5/2013 to persuade the Cameron government to continue with the bill to legalise it. As the Chief Scientist noted, Woodhead's finding here 'has been influential in discussion and debate which will have informed government as the legislation has progressed' (Ref. 7).

Through its effect on the Debates, Woodhead's research has contributed to enhanced public understanding of changing forms of religion amongst policy-makers, politicians, journalists, the general public, and religious communities. As a whole, Woodhead's research has led to improved and updated school teaching on religion; has influenced policy, especially on equalities issues and on religion and security; and has significantly helped to reshape media, public and political debate on religion.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. The EHRC's 2009 '*Religion or Belief*' report is at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/your-rights/religion-and-belief/>
2. EHRC press release on reasonable accommodation: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/news/2011/july/commission-proposes-reasonable-accommodation-for-religion-or-belief-is-needed/>
3. Andrew Brown's statement in the *Guardian* (26/07/2012) is reproduced at <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/News/Pages/Final-Westminster-faith-debate.aspx>
4. A full list of media coverage of the 2012 and 2013 Faith Debates is at: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/faith_debates-2013/media_coverage; http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/faith_debates-2012/media_coverage
5. Grieve's statement is at: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/News/Pages/Final-Westminster-faith-debate.aspx>
6. Commissioning Editor, Religion, and Head of Religion and Ethics, BBC TV (who may be contacted for corroboration).
7. A statement from the Chief Scientific Advisor to the Home Office is available which corroborates the impacts on political debates on assisted dying and same-sex marriage.

Selected additional users who could be contacted to corroborate claims:

8. Research Manager, Equality and Human Rights Commission.