

Greater Manchester Humanists

Humanist Discussion Group

18 January 2021

(Zoom meeting 7.30-9.00pm)

Are Values the New Religion?

By the early 1990s, those identifying as non-religious in Britain had become the largest single group as compared to Anglicans, Catholics, Muslims, Jews and other religions. Today, in British Social Attitudes' surveys, 53% identify with 'no religion' and around 12% with C of E (38% for all the Christian denominations).

Religious decline is generational: there is a striking correlation between age and C of E identification, with 33% of the over 75s and only 1% of the 18-24s affiliating. At the same time there has been a steady increase in non-Christian religions, especially Islam. Of the non-religious, there has been a substantial increase in those identifying as 'very' or 'extremely' non-religious, or atheist. In the US, Pew Research recently found that 29% of adults said they had no religious affiliation, up six percentage points since 2016. Covid has tested many people's view of religion. Again it is Millennials who are leading the shift away from organised religion.

63% of adults the UK believe religions bring more conflict than peace. Most people have a positive, or at least tolerant view, of members of other religious groups, but have more reservations about extremism. Likely future trends identified by Jeremy Rodell include a rise in religiosity of those identifying with a religion and a rise in the proportion of ethnic minorities amongst the religious (decline is mainly in white C of E).

According to Professor Linda Whitehead '**Values are the new Religion**' (see 2021 Cadbury Lectures - link below). Her thesis is that the Christian ethic 'Give your Life', has been replaced by the values of 'LIVE YOUR LIFE' - LYL. Decline of Christianity - replaced with individual moral responsibility - we can be good without god. The 'Agape' ethic (unconditional love) has been challenged by greater moral diversity: there is a new set of shared liberal values.

With the LYL ethic we discover our own values and who we are - race, sexuality, gender, etc. We also show respect and kindness to others even if they are different, support each other and try to leave the world a better place than when we arrived. In a 2019 survey of 18-25 year olds, 49% said we should care for ourselves and others equally (28% for myself first, 19% others first).

'Anti-Values' include 'abuse' (cardinal sin), marital rape, grooming, smacking, coercive control, groping, disrespect, unkindness, and violating duty of care.

There is a reaction to excessive 'rationalism': we are really selfish genes/DNA, animals driven by instinct, clusters of instincts. The 'new values' have greater visibility owing to: the decoupling of values and religion, the growth of 'no religion' and cultural pluralism, the move from hierarchy and roles to personal choice, and responsibility and identity. We are more values-aware when things are up for grabs.

However, increased values visibility heightens potential for conflict: increasing diversity and power of values; deep personal identification with chosen values; open public forums (especially online); entitlement to be heard and respected for who one really is (LYL). Hence 'culture wars'.

Potential questions:

Is Woodhead right? What it might mean for us?

1. Belief only important in society insofar as it drives values and hence action?
2. Liberal vs non-liberal values more significant than atheist vs religious beliefs?
3. Majority (shared liberal) values essentially humanist values, hence humanist/liberal-religious have more in common than liberal/fundamentalist-religious?
4. To what extent should we move away from humanism being identified by contrast to religion* and towards a liberal worldview (shared by non-religious/religious) identified by contrast to non-liberal worldviews? *Tricky when it comes to RE
5. Should we do more to engage with those who have different values?
6. Should we talk more overtly about values (schools, dialogue, media...)?

(Summary of Linda Whitehead thesis and questions taken from Jeremy Rodell presentation for HumanistsUK - JRodell-for-Humanists-in-Action-2021, Nov.2021).

References

Values are the New Religion - Cadbury Lectures 2021. Professor Linda Whitehead.

If you have time please watch Lecture 1 'Personal Values' for our discussion. Although the video is 90 minutes long, the actual lecture only lasts 45mins, the rest is introductions and questions. Unfortunately I cannot find a synopsis or text to save time. See:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/events/cadburylectures/2021/index.aspx>

British Social Attitudes Survey

<https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-36/religion.aspx>

https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39293/1_bsa36_religion.pdf

USA/Pew Research

<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/12/29/millennials-lead-shift-away-from-organized-religion-as-pandemic-tests-faith.html>

RS January, 2022.