

Emerging Geographies of Belief

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Edited by

Catherine Brace, Adrian Bailey, Sean Carter,
David Harvey and Nicola Thomas

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2011

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2586-7, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2586-3

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the outcome of the Emerging Geographies of Belief conference, organised by historical and cultural geographers at the University of Exeter. The editors would like to thank the academics from across the humanities and social sciences who participated in the conference and especially those who have contributed chapters to this volume. We are grateful for the help of the editorial team at Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Individual authors would like to offer the following acknowledgements:

Catherine Brace: I would like to thank Mike and Miriam for their unstinting love and support.

Elizabeth Leppman: I would like to thank the Rev. Elise Johnstone, Assistant to the Rector of the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, Lexington, Kentucky, for assistance with this paper.

Julian Holloway: I would like to sincerely thank editors of this book for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, and the organisers and audience of the Emerging Geographies of Belief conference held in Exeter at which these ideas were originally presented. I would also like to thank Louise Saunders for her unending support in my quests to write (another) 'God Paper'.

Avril Maddrell: Thanks to Paul Revell for map preparation. My thanks to the Editors for their vision, persistence and patience in producing this volume. This chapter draws on and links to related publications (Maddrell 2009b and Maddrell and Sidaway 2010).

Andrew Orton: The support of the Economic and Social Research Council in funding this research, and the contributions made by those who participated in it, are gratefully acknowledged.

Mark Wynn: This essay has made use of some passages in: Wynn, Mark. 2007. God, pilgrimage and acknowledgement of place. *Religious Studies* 42: 145-163. This material is reproduced with permission. I would also like to thank Peter Byrne and the editors of this volume for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

CHAPTER ONE

EMERGING GEOGRAPHIES OF BELIEF

CATHERINE BRACE, ADRIAN R. BAILEY,
SEAN CARTER, DAVID C. HARVEY
AND NICOLA THOMAS

The goal of this interdisciplinary book is to present new research from international scholars that explores questions of belief, faith, and religion. Focusing on theoretically informed cultural, geographical and historical analyses of faith, belief, religion, society and space, the book presents new and revised theoretical approaches and methodologies, grounded in rigorous empirical research both contemporary and historical. Our eclectic approach is deliberate, for recent research into religious faith and practice has focused on the complex interactions of the political and poetic dimensions of sacredness in contemporary societies. Taking this research agenda forward, this book explores how religious beliefs inform and construct social identities, public knowledge and modes of governance. In particular, there is an urgent need for a critical understanding of how terms such as “religion”, “faith”, “fundamentalism” and “secularism”, for example, inform public debates and foster constructive engagements both between faith groups and between people of faith and people of no faith.

Further, in this collection, we are at pains to show that religion cannot be mapped neatly onto faith or belief. We attempt to tease out the different circumstances in which—for example—belief can operate without religious adherence or faith can inspire social action in geographies of hope. The geography of the title relates to an overarching concern with space and spatiality rather than describing a single disciplinary approach. Our concern with belief, faith and religion operates at different temporal and spatial scales in different localities, from the contemporary appeal to a more global sense of responsibility to a historically situated account of faith-led educational practices. This reflects, more generally, the so-called spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities. But, despite this wide

historical and geographical sweep, the authors share some key concerns. This collection is unique in combining theoretical, conceptual and discursive approaches to the emerging geographies of belief with substantive examples of the intersection of belief, faith and religion with aspects of everyday life. Discussions of the potentially subversive and prophetic capacities of faith, belief and religion sit alongside a consideration of how these have become implicated in the spaces and performances of hope. The book provides a critique of the situationist and substantive approaches to religion along with insights into the role of faith in education, community and social work. It considers the practices of remembrance, representation and pilgrimage and the place of religion in contemporary identity politics. In sum, the book problematises the seemingly simple categories of faith, religion, and belief, calling attention to how these are mobilised and implicated differently in different circumstances.

There is a growing appetite for the sort of interdisciplinary approach to questions of faith, belief and religion taken in this book, as evidenced by the launch of the Religion and Society Research Programme in 2007, jointly funded by two UK research councils: the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council. This multi-million pound research programme sought to understand the role of religion in shaping our lives, communities and society. The programme signals a greater awareness of, and curiosity about, how faith and belief are materialised in practice and policy with potentially transformative effects. The relevance of religion to global geopolitics, international relations and the practice of everyday life is also the organising feature of Tony Blair's Faith Foundation, launched in 2008 by the former Prime Minister of the UK. Taking a broad contemporary view of linked problems, the Foundation seeks not only to encourage greater understandings between different belief systems, but to encourage inter-faith action on global problems such as poverty and conflict. These initiatives—the AHRC/ESRC research programme and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation—raise important questions for geographers and others interested in the study of religion. First, what is the role of academics in shaping a debate about the place of belief, faith and religion in contemporary thought and action, and how can an interdisciplinary approach facilitate such research? Second, how can we make our scholarly endeavours relevant to wider society? And, though recognising the significance of large, well-organised programmes, a third question arises out of a desire to examine faith in everyday life: how can we develop a more fine-grained understanding of belief, faith, and religion, accepting that these are not synonymous and that they have different geographies? These questions run throughout this book, breaking

the surface in some chapters and remaining implicit in others, but always guiding the whole scholarly endeavour.

In addressing these larger themes, the book provides a key theoretical resource but, crucially, goes on to show how multiple perspectives on belief, however defined, can be applied in practice. Whilst there has been much contemporary work on the individual areas covered by the book, they have not been brought together before to provide a dynamic insight into issues of the most pressing relevance.

Belief, Faith, Religion

The title of this book makes a deliberate attempt to signal what the book is *not* about as much as what *is* contained between its covers. This is not a book about religion but it contains many chapters which take religion as their theme. It is not a book about faith, though consideration of faith as a motivator is certainly evident throughout the book. This is a book about belief. It is important to make this distinction because it enables a more wide-ranging debate to take place, which attempts to assert the importance of belief as something that is not irreparably conjoined with either religion or faith to the point where it is meaningless to speak of it without the other two appearing in the same sentence.

This raises the question of what we mean by belief. It is instructive to take as a starting point the epistemic threads which hold religion, belief and faith together in order that we can then tease them apart. The etymology of these words—*religio*, *credo* and *fidei*—helps us to understand their entanglement. From a theological perspective, the three terms describe different aspects of the religious experience. *Religio* refers to the disciplines of a particular belief system that exists “relative to sacred things” (Durkheim, 2001 [1912], 44). These disciplines include the practices, laws, regulations and observations that condition the pursuit of the divine. *Credo* is a series of intellectual maxims that are assented to, opening up the intellectual spaces through which this pursuit takes place. While both of these might lend themselves to a broadly sociological interrogation, *fidei* or faith implies a belief-ful relationship with an object that cannot be accessed through doctrinal statement and ritual alone. Faith might be understood as a gift whereas belief can be produced from within oneself. As an epistemological category, it has an *apriori*, which is God. These connected terms—*religio*, *credo* and *fidei*—clearly find leverage in their combination. Atran and Norenzayan (2004, 713) give this uncompromising account of the entanglements of religion, belief and faith:

In every society, there are 1. Widespread counterfactual and counterintuitive beliefs in supernatural agents (gods, ghosts, goblins, etc.); 2. Hard-to-fake public expressions of costly material commitments to supernatural agents, that is, offering and sacrifice (offerings of goods, property, time, life); 3. Mastering by supernatural agents of people's existential anxieties (death, deception, disease, catastrophe, pain, loneliness, injustice, want, loss); 4. Ritualized, rhythmic sensory coordination of (1), (2), and (3), that is, communion (congregation, intimate fellowship, etc.). In all societies there is an evolutionary canalization and convergence of (1), (2), (3), and (4) that tends toward what we shall refer to as "religion"; that is, passionate communal displays of costly commitments to counterintuitive worlds governed by supernatural agents... [T]hese facets of religion emerge in all known cultures and animate the majority of individual human beings in the world.

Against the provocations of Atran and Norenzayan's account, we can set Insole's view of the potential inherent in religion, belief and faith. Speaking of an approach to religion and ethics that draws on the realist claim that "truth is independent of our beliefs about truth, and that we can in principle hope to have true beliefs about God", Christopher Insole points out that "[I]t is this gap between our practices and the way things are which is the source of hope, risk, transformation and faith" (Insole, 2002 1, 29).

Though poles apart in their analysis, what Atran, Norenzayan and Insole describe is a material-metaphysical assemblage—from the visible (though perhaps no more knowable) manifestations of religion and its beliefs, to the elusive yet compelling dimensions of faith. However, this assemblage defines only part of the object of this book's enquiries because clearly, all three terms—religion, belief and faith—start to escape their etymology when used synonymously or when applied to aspects of everyday life that have little to do with their theological epistemics (see, for example, recent writing on religion and popular culture such as Forbes and Mahan, 2005). The very fluency of notions of belief and faith is of use to us, because it demonstrates how leaky the metaphysical assemblage can be and how differently the relations between religion, belief and faith can be enacted in different places and times, and form the basis of different imperatives to act. Foregrounding belief in our analysis enables a consideration of new religious belief and folk practices (e.g roadside memorials and amulets), health consumerism as a religious practice, and the comfort of familiar fictional places alongside work on extraordinary ontologies, pilgrimage and our social responsibilities as academics whether we have a strongly held religious belief or not. This list also hints at the many and varied spaces and scales in which belief is enacted. We

undertake this critical account of belief, connected with varying degrees of strength to faith and religion, from a social science perspective informed by cultural geography. Thus, we are interested in how belief produces and is produced by diverse spatialities. For the geographer, “spatiality” refers to the way space and social relations are co-constructed. Space is not an empty vessel in which social relations simply occur, and neither do these social relations go unaffected by the spaces in which they take place (Johnston *et al.*, 2000). Each of the following chapters features, implicitly or explicitly, a concern with spatiality at a variety of scales: from the scale of the nation state, to the “geography closest in” of the body.

In this book we wish to acknowledge the many and varied ways in which people act on, dwell in, operationalise, resist, suppress, celebrate and variously live their beliefs. We wish to call attention to the mix: difference and heterogeneity are shot through our account. Thus we seek to provide an enlivened account of varied geographies of belief, and suggest that belief has emergent properties as something arising from the combination of things, unexpected and transformative. Because the scope of the book is so wide, we ask our readers to take seriously Holloway’s appeal for hospitality. It is, as we have argued above, not only about religion and religious belief. Indeed, looking at belief allows us to think beyond the constraints of the dualism of sacred and secular. The book is very much about lived relations in which belief of some kind—whether religious or otherwise—provides the condition for action. We ask how belief is organised not only and most obviously through religious institutions but through the mechanisms of governance, education, welfare, the state and the nation. Focusing on belief also allows us to consider the correlate of hope: what it is, where it comes from and what it can do.

The Chapters

The chapters in this book cluster around a series of six themes: emerging issues in geographies of belief; education; identity; sacred place/space; the body; and ethos. The book begins with three chapters which explore emerging issues in geographies of belief. Paul Cloke (9, 11) begins with a clarion call to set aside the “dreary acceptance” that the market-state has the ability to shape how we govern ourselves, and seek out optimistic geographies and the spaces and communities of hope by reconceiving “the mindset of the body politic”. Cloke makes an important point that “emergent geographies of faith and belief offer exciting new avenues for identifying hopeful otherness” (11). This theme is echoed by

Holloway's chapter in which he opens up a "more hospitable space" in which to examine the "extraordinary ontologies that are presenced and performed in religious and spiritual geographies" (31). In so doing, he charts a course through the substantial and situationist approaches that have characterised the study of religion and belief in geography. In the third of this group of chapters, Lily Kong sets out the responsibilities of academics to produce more relevant public geographies that make "geographical perspectives matter in the understanding of religion, both in the public sphere and in the academy" (53). Arguing that geographies of religion are uniquely positioned for such a task, she nevertheless offers a critique of both the scale at which geographies of religion have been studied and the relative lack of impact and relevance in much geographical work. Kong ends with a call for an "explicitly publicly relevant geography of religion" (65).

Such publicly relevant geographies are glimpsed in the next three chapters in this book. In an historical account that takes as its theme the role of religion in the governance of education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Brace, Bailey and Harvey call for more attention to be paid to youthful spiritualities as a neglected aspect of geographies of belief. The chapter examines the role of Methodists in educational politics and reform, showing how the "responsibilities and entitlements of childhood were being radically transformed through the interventions of the state" in the later nineteenth century, with the result that "the geographical siting and regulation of childhood was organised through spaces that were *beyond* as well as *within* the 'officially sacred'" including schools (77, 85). Reinhard Henkel interrogates the relationship between religion and geopolitics in his examination of identity, ethnicity and religion in the Western Balkans. In charting the fortunes of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Croatian Roman Catholic Church and the Bosnian Muslims through the 1990s to the present day, he demonstrates the causes and consequences of the complex and deep rooted entanglements of ethnicity and identity. Roger Stump contributes the last of this group of chapters by exploring further questions of identity and belief, through the lens of Christian Reconstructionism. Identifying this as a postfundamentalist movement in the US, Stump argues that the "rise of Christian Reconstructionism thus represents a significant transformation of the nature of religious identity among conservative or traditional Protestantism" (132). Echoing the theme of religious entanglements in the business of government present in the other two chapters, Stump shows how Christian Reconstructionists have attempted to bring their beliefs to bear on such

topics as gay marriage, abortion, education, public assistance and social services.

The next three chapters in this book take place as their central concern. Elizabeth Leppman demonstrates the importance of fictional places as sites of collective memory and belonging in her examination of "The News from Lake Wobegon," a monologue about a small town in central Minnesota that is a feature of the long-running radio show *Prairie Home Companion*. Leppman explores how everyday spaces become sacred through the stories of familiar characters and places. From the comforts of Lake Wobegon, achieved through an imaginative pilgrimage, the book moves on to consider the different interpretations of pilgrimage. Taking the view that "pilgrimage practices seem to be in some degree endemic to religious life" (154), Mark Wynn charts a course between interpretations of the act which emphasise either its naturalism or supernaturalism. Echoing the notion of hospitality which runs through Holloway's chapter (see above), Wynn provides "a view of pilgrimage which is true to the self-conception of at least some pilgrims, and which is religiously serious, but without tying the meaning of the practice to contentious speculations about the character of divine agency here and now" (154). Building on Wynn's notion that "physical proximity can be religiously important" (155), Veronica Della Dora explores the mobility of objects such as religious postcards which allow sacred places to "travel". Focusing on the nineteenth-century pilgrimage cards of Mount Athos, a mountain-peninsula in northern Greece, Della Dora shows how Athos travelled through the circuits of Russian society. The postcards "establish an affective link with a remote place most faithful would never see" (169).

Leppman, Wynn and Della Dora show that pilgrimage involves the act of movement (imagined or real); it is concerned with the body and the objects carried with it. It is also entwined with ritual and memory. Continuing these themes, the next two chapters share a concern with the material and ritual aspects of belief. Jude Hill considers amulets as an object around which hope, enchantment and suspicion accumulate. The amulets, worn to ward off bronchitis, find a place in overlapping systems of belief in both the science of medicine and the magical properties of certain objects. Hill encourages us to consider not only the objects themselves but their treatment in a museum setting as part of her call to "take material culture more seriously within the study of religion" (198). Picking up on the theme of memory, Avril Maddrell considers the significance of how "lives are memorialised and bereavement is mapped in the landscape, and how this relates to changing expressions of belief in the UK" (219). Using the case studies of Tarn Moor green burial site, the

River Soar's use for Hindu and Sikh ash scattering and the Witness Cairn at the Isle of Whithorn, Maddrell shows that "the choice of 'sacred' spaces and practices of remembrance are closely tied to an individual's belief systems and wider cultural context" (233).

Shot through Hill and Maddrell's accounts is a concern with the performative aspects of belief, whether through wearing an amulet or memorialising a loved-one by adding a stone to a cairn. Here we turn to a consideration of the "geography closest in" as the performative and embodied aspects of geographies of belief are given consideration in chapters from Matthias Varul and David Grumett. Varul argues that the pursuit of a healthy body through contemporary consumerism represents a new form of religiosity, albeit without the commitment and unified system of belief that characterises traditional religiosity. Meanwhile, Grumett shows that the Christian practice of eating fish shaped not only a bodily discipline of abstinence but an economic and social geography of commodities over the last thousand years.

In the final chapter in this collection, we return to a concern with geographies of hope in a contribution by Andrew Orton in which he considers the varied individual, institutional and policy-orientated geographies of Christian community work. Orton shows that local Christian faith-based work is constrained by national and local policy making which inhibits such organisations fulfilling their potential in supporting the state in the delivery of caring services in the community.

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CHAPTER TWO

GEOGRAPHY AND INVISIBLE POWERS: PHILOSOPHY, SOCIAL ACTION AND PROPHETIC POTENTIAL

PAUL CLOKE

Introduction: Geography and Invisible Powers

We live in an era of hope-deprivation. Evaluating the achievements of globalisation, Dicken (2004) reminds us that there are goods—employment opportunities, incomes, consumer products and services—and bads—unemployment, poverty, pollution, resource crises and so on—unevenly scattered through society and space. Geographers have provided complex and deep understandings of these processes, identifying overarching neo-liberal narratives of the governmentalities of the state and the market. Yet some of these neo-liberal orthodoxies can lead to cynicism and a lack of hope, not least in their profound pessimism in terms of the capacities of people to relate differently to each other and to the nature-places they inhabit. Despite entreaties to the contrary (see, for example, Harvey, 2000), there is a dreary acceptance in some popular quarters that how we live is being circumscribed by the market-state's ability to shape how we govern ourselves, giving the impression that people don't believe in anything anymore; people don't believe that they can change things or make a difference; people have lost the capacity to participate, to be inspired or enchanted.

Some may regard such overgeneralisation as highly questionable, but there has been a broad recognition of a current state of “post-political pessimism” (Eagleton, 2004, 30). The rise of Barack Obama, for example, has been founded in no small measure on the Audacity of Hope (Obama, 2006). Therefore the question of where hope can be found amongst the apparently hegemonic interconnections between individual subjectivity and the market-state is both current and pressing. Where do

we look for more optimistic geographies? Where can we encounter spaces and communities of hope? Clearly there are multiple responses to such questions, notably from a range of participatory movements involved in practical secular action and reflection aimed at developing fairer and more sustainable ways of living. Thus, in the words of the Trapeze Collective (2007, 1):

Everyday, everywhere, through spontaneous and planned actions, people are changing the world together. These everyday actions come from the growing desire to do it ourselves—plant vegetables, organise a community day out to get people involved in improving where we live, expose exploitative firms, take responsibility for our health, make cups of tea in a social centre, figure out how to install a shower powered by the sun, make a banner, support strikers, pull a prank to make someone laugh, as well as think.

However, as Stiglitz (2002) has notably argued, the prevailing model of political and economic organisation in the Western world has also come under significant pressure from myriad social and cultural movements, the religious roots and cultures of which are difficult to ignore or argue away. This observation suggests that the apparent dominance of Enlightenment secularisation has foundered somewhat, not least in an often grudging acknowledgement of “the continuing presence and force of public religion” (de Vries and Sullivan, 2006, ix). This book, then, has some potential for the exploration of new spaces of hope, given its identification of emerging geographies of belief as a key intellectual area in which geographies of hope can be encountered. I am not talking here about “insider” geographies of religion, only accessible via personal faith and adherence to particular doctrine. Rather, I am suggesting that amongst both a wide diversity of belief, faith and attitudes to formal religion, and multiple representations and performances of conversations and hybrid relations between the spiritual and the secular, there can be significant agreement that landscapes of belief are important in identifying certain geographies of hope.

Belief is a concept that requires some exploration of boundaries. For example we need to be willing, along with Vattimo (1999), to question the Enlightenment philosophy that belief should be guided by reason. Indeed, some of the growing interest in spirituality in the Western world has precisely been linked with doubts about science and other supposedly reason-based Enlightenment values. As Bunting (2007, 27) has suggested, Enlightenment values are “a much compromised property” challenged by the facts surrounding the socio-economic and environmental nostrums of

the “good life”, and by the “vacuity of purpose” and “desperate, restless discontent” that underlie that life. We also need to be willing to question the evidentialist proposal (see Adler, 2006) that the strength of belief is proportional to the strength of the evidence available. For example, Caputo (2001) responds to such a suggestion by equating religion with a love of the unforeseeable, focusing on the uncontainability, polyvalence and undecidability of the event in which the name of God is manifest (Caputo, 2006). We may, then, as Julian Holloway argues elsewhere in this book, be required to contemplate a kind of belief in which hope is given substance by both faith and event: a faith in the emergent and an emergent faith; a belief in that which is invisible as well as in the visible.

If, in order to discover spaces of hope in the contemporary world, we are looking to reconceive the mindset of the body politic, then belief may be a significant framework by which relationships among body, mind and soul, and between visibility and invisibility, can be experimented with. In other words, an exploration of alternative political theologies opens up the possibility of naming, and perhaps enlisting, invisible powers which lie beyond many current appreciations of market and state. What is important here is not a necessary agreement as to the precise nature of these powers—indeed different analytics will point to the affective and the spectral as well as to the religious Godhead. Rather, what matters here is that there can be a fruitful fascination with the spiritual landscapes (see Dewsbury and Cloke, 2009) of something other: fuelled by intuitive rather than discursive reasoning, and by a spiritual perception which potentially exceeds governing forms of individual conscience and public reason. Lily Kong’s chapter in this book argues for a publicly relevant geography of religion. My own emphasis is on aspects of faith and belief that permeate through but also flow around organised religion. It is in this sense that I contend that emergent geographies of faith and belief offer exciting new avenues for identifying hopeful otherness in the sometimes turgid landscapes of globalisation, neo-liberalism, public secularism and private religion.

Geographies of Belief

Despite the attempts of institutionalised religion to demonstrate the contrary (see, for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Commission on Urban Priority Areas, 1985), “faith” and “space” have often been awkward partners within social science narratives. Disciplines such as human geography, for example, have sought out “safe” geographies of religion, marking out both *geographies of difference* in which religion is

positioned as an aspect of ethnicity or political fascination (Guelke, 2006), and *geographies of landscape and place* involving both formal and informal spaces of the sacred (Kong, 2001). Beyond such safe havens, however, it has been my experience (and also see Keenan's (2003) parallel observations in sociology) that human geography's treatment of religious individuals and faith-based groups has often been liberally laced with embarrassment, suspicion or downright hostility. With the notable exception of this book, and of other recent interventions (for example by Holloway and Valins, 2002; and Proctor, 2006), "faith" seems to have been one form of otherness that has often been denied sympathetic engagement by human geographers who purport to speak about, and care about, social justice (see Cloke, 2002). Somehow, faith becomes easily essentialised as fundamentalist, proselytising, culturally weird, politically conformist and integrally immersed with the workings of the capitalist state; the opiate of the people here, the God-trick of neo-liberalism there. There are often, of course, strong grounds for specific critique of religion which can in turn fugue into more generalised opposition, whether in terms of Christian missionaries engaged in colonialist projects, or the bigotry of contemporary religious flag-wavers, deploying faithful fundamentalism as the driving force for prejudice, violence and war without ever seeming to notice the irony, let alone the hypocrisy, of stances which oppose abortion, but approve of "shock and awe" destruction of human life.

It is not that such sweeping essentialisms lack some critical purchase. For example, the commodification of religion (Lyon, 2000) has now reached such a level that a huge industrial complex stands ready to provide religious television, music, books, clothing, bumper-stickers and even confectionary (Testa-mints—sweets with a Bible verse attached—see Claiborne, 2006). Equally, it is clearly possible, as Hedges (2006) argues of the American religious right, for religion and patriotism to mask what amounts to neo-fascist imperialism. Moreover, the thesis of secularism does speak strongly of a declining influence in aspects of religious involvement. Thus Prochaska's (2006) review of Christianity and social action in Britain charts the swing from a seemingly hegemonic late 19th century faith-involvement in social provision, to the present day in which Christian churches have, in his view, relinquished their role as centres of community life. He paints the picture of religious denominations which have become "distracted and self-absorbed" (171); Christian charities which have watered down their religious image; and church-goers who are "volunteering less and less" (172). He argues that "to most people in Britain today, the very idea of Christian social reform has a quaint,

Victorian, air about it” (2). However, care is required before such essentialist critiques are accepted wholesale. For instance, sociologists of religion (for example, Aldridge, 2000; Davie, 1994) clearly identify complexities in these trends. Davie’s survey of the supposed shift away from faith and belief in Britain confirms an increased suspicion of religious institutions and an erosion of interest in ritual participation and regular commitment within a particular faith community, but points to a continuing interest in and fascination with spirituality more generally. It also seems obvious but important to understand that faith, belief and religion have their own moral landscapes. In this way a denouncement of “bad” religion (when, for example, it becomes associated with the indiscriminate killing of innocent people) need not necessarily involve a more sweeping rejection of religion and belief *per se*, which may also be associated with other, more ethical practices. It is surely necessary to acknowledge that competing moralities and ethics enter into and dwell within religious thought and practice, just as they do in other spheres of the social and the cultural. As Elisha (2008) asserts in the context of US religious conservatism:

The desire among suburban evangelicals to practice perfect generosity and thereby accentuate affective rather than contractual dimensions of charitable giving is as much an effect of modern liberalism and middle-class idealism as it is testimony to the resurgence of conservative Protestantism in public life. Their ambition to embody divine grace and their embattled sense that such ambitions are never fully realized are in some ways suggestive of nascent counterhegemonic impulses while in other ways consistent with ascendant neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies (183-4).

Elisha’s recognition of this complex counterhegemonic presence is illustrated further in Robinson’s (2006) narrative account of three generations of Christian leaders, in whose ministry the tendency towards counterhegemony is often in tension with more hegemonic practices. Therefore, to reject religion, belief and faith as at best an irrelevance, and at worst a regressive and conformist movement, may be to miss out on significant aspects of these nascent counterhegemonic impulses, these hopeful practices and modes of participation in contemporary society.

Perhaps, then, it is time for a careful and critical redemption of some aspects of faith-involvement in social action and political participation, even if this means exploring the flip-side of previous critique to discover: how faith-mission groups have established key education and health care services both within and contra to historical regimes of colonial collaboration

(Jennings, 2002; Sharkey, 2003) as well as in contemporary circumstances of governance (see Andrew Orton's chapter in this book); how when self-appointed world leaders were "prayerfully" going to war, there were significant Christian anti-war campaigns (see Wallis, 2005; Pagnucco, 1996) assembling around the ethical guideline and slogan of "who would Jesus bomb?"; and how faith-involvement has been catalytic in the promotion and implementation of fair trade and wider ethical consumption practices (Cloke *et al.*, 2010) which represent powerful pathways to participation in contemporary society. In the remainder of this chapter I want to discuss three trends that point to the timeliness of redeeming the interconnection of faith and participatory action in these spheres.

The Emerging Philosophical Fascination with Faith

First, I am interested in the ways in which both theology and philosophy are beginning to identify various third spaces in which an invocation of theoretical traces of belief are used to disrupt the complex orthodoxies of materialism and secularism. One obvious space for such comings-together is in the idea of the post-secular. According to Blond (1998), three critical aspects of secularism have energised ideas of the post-secular. First, secularism has allowed religion to fall back into the hands of fundamentalists, with a result that various dimensions of otherness have been condemned and ostracised in the name of faith. Secondly, the secular narrative has carried with it a belief that the kinds of advances achieved in the realm of science can be reproduced in the politics and ethics of welfare, with a result that subjectivity has in part been surrendered to dehumanising materiality. Thirdly, secularism has tended to produce a vacuum of hope in which self-serving acts of negation and denial have become tantamount to the new and rather weak mysticism of the age. Partly based on an acknowledgement of this critique, but also partly driven by a seeking out of new pluralist ground, there has been a tendency for some faith-based and some materialist political narratives to converge into new spaces of post-secular rapprochement. Thus new theological ideas of faith, spirituality and religion have started to offer a heightened sense of "hyper-real" (Caputo, 2001)—a reality beyond the visible involving a passion for not knowing rather than all-knowing fundamentalisms, and a church that defines itself in its practice of hope as much as in its dogma and traditions (Smith, 2004). Equally, the post-secular is reflecting faith-ethics in which virtue is placed in a new and positive relation to difference, rather than seeing faith-motivated service to others as a means of converting those others (Coles, 1997). At the same

time, new political ideas are seeking to bring about an “overt metaphysical/religious pluralism” in public life so as to forge a “positive engagement out of the multidimensional plurality of contemporary life”. (Connolly, 1999, 185). The idea here is that participants will neither have to offload their metaphysical baggage, nor adopt an overarching faith, but merely accept a deep plurality of religious and metaphysical perspectives in public discourses. What emerges from this, according to de Vries, (2006, 3) is not so much a transformation of the secular state, but a shift in the state’s “secularist self-understanding”. As Stout (2008) has argued, in order to counter neo-liberal hegemonies we need progressive coalitions between those with religious faith, and those with none, and indeed there may already be evidence (see Cloke, 2008) that these post-secular rapprochements are emerging. These ideas of post-secularism are strongly contested, but they offer both evidence of a renewed integration of faith into contemporary thinking, and a potential framework for the exploration of faith-related, or at least faith-tolerant practice in contemporary society and space.

The critique of how secularism has surrendered subjectivity to a dehumanising materiality is reflected in an emergent reflexive territory of the post-secular, in which a growing interest in ideas of faith and belief can be found in the ways in which some of the key thinkers of materialist socialism have been drawn towards aspects of religion and faith. As Milbank (2005) argues, material socialism has been required to invoke theology in order to achieve an adequate ontology, although it should be emphasised that this does not constitute the mass conversion to religion of Marxist-leaning atheists. However, it can be argued that key philosophers are being drawn towards an implicit horizon of belief, albeit in a rather partial and fragmentary manner. Milbank’s own analysis (2005, 398) focuses on four particular contributions:

Derrida sustains the openness of signs and the absoluteness of the ethical command by recourse to...negative theology; Deleuze sustains the possibility of a deterritorialization of matter and meaning in terms of a Spinozistic virtual absolute; Badiou sustains the possibility of a revolutionary event in terms of the one historical event of the arrival of the very logic of the event as such, which is none other than Pauline grace; Žižek sustains the possibility of a revolutionary love beyond desire by reference to the historical emergence of the ultimate sublime object, which reconciles us to the void constituted only through a rift in the void. This sublime object is Christ.

Thus, secular attempts to (re)develop materialist foundations for continuing socialist aspirations are appealing not only to idealist philosophies but also to theo-ethics of otherness, grace, love and hope. Such a move, according to Milbank (2005), is in part a search for notions of thinking and willing that incorporate an excess beyond material logic and rationale—thinking that entertains unpredictability, creativity and a desire which exceeds the self. Theology presents both an ultimate principle of thought and will, and at the same time accepts that this thought and this will are only remotely accessible, taking the form of gifts from the suprainтеллекual. This appeal to transcendence, then, can sustain a non-reductive materiality, but it also permits a vision of how to go beyond a mere liberal celebration of otherness and plurality. Žizek (2001) and Badiou (2001) in particular are concerned that contemporary anxieties with otherness do not reflect any serious wish to engage with the exotic other. Rather, the other is too often kept at a geographical and representational distance, press-ganged into the role of perpetual victim to play alongside our role as morally detached and ethical indifferent observer. Thus human solidarity only occurs in our weakness rather than in creative celebration and aspiration. Theology offers pathways for a more positive relationship with others. As Milbank (2005, 399) suggests:

As theology puts it, we are to love people because—and even only insofar as—they display the image of God. But such a love involves the mutual recognition of our positive realizations and capacities. Therefore what is valued here in every case is not the ineffably and inexpressibly different, but rather what is universally acclamable and shareable, albeit precisely because it is unique and particular.

Milbank's analysis chimes with current fascinations in human geography, in which potential is now being recognised in the capacity of religion to ground the "human". Over recent years, the turns towards ever more deconstructive cultural geographies have tended to prioritise varying forms of human extension and difference, and modes of being in space, rather than providing more overarching ontological frameworks of humanness. There has been a fear that any essential idea of humanness will inevitably result in a reduction of difference to sameness. Milbank's valorisation of what is universally acclamable and shareable embraces the unique and particular without repressing such difference. In the new reflexive territories of the post-secular, there is a renewed sense that faith-centred ontologies of the human are not necessarily repressive, and indeed might be regarded as ethically progressive.

These emerging spaces of collaboration between materialist philosophy and theology open out new potential for geographies of faith and belief, not least because of the prospects of envisaging equality with difference through the ontological lens of faith, hope and charity. Such developments, however, pose new and important questions, not least concerning how principles of equality with difference are applied to different forms and organisations of faith and belief. For Derrida (1996), the emergence of postmodern religiosity has been nomadic and lacking in specific roots of tradition or belief, and the deconstructive process requires a grasp of religiosity involving a radical departure from the specificities of particular religious movements. For Žižek and Badiou, Christianity is taken to be the religion of universalism, which alone proffers an idealist materialism without a triumphant celebration of that ideal. This is clearly not a debate that can be settled here, but in both cases the underlying aim remains to distance ourselves from the idea that meaningful action equates simply with the successful assertion of will. As Rowan Williams (2005, 3) puts it: “Theology claims that what intelligible action is “after” is divine action whose gratuitousness (or love) motivates and activates an unlimited process of representation without simple repetition (and thus posits irreducible human and other diversities)”. Belief, then, presents spiritual landscapes in which the triumph of the self, the atomisation of desire and the liberal celebration of endlessly interchangeable pluralism may be examined and challenged in new ways.

The Implications of Faith in Spaces and Performances of Hope

If my first arena of interest concerned the theological and philosophical third spaces in which the invocation of belief is used to disrupt the complex hegemonies of materialism and secularism, my second arena of interest relates to the ways in which faith, belief and religion are becoming implicated in emergent spaces, practices and performances of hope. In this section I draw on a number of examples from different parts of the Christian religion, simply because these are the ones I know most about. Although some commentators (see Prochaska, 2006) celebrate a past golden age of religious philanthropy, social action and protest, as in the 19th century heyday of Christian social reform in Britain, and compare the present situation unfavourably with that radical past, there is, I believe, substantial evidence that faith-motivation is a significant factor in contemporary landscapes of service to the poor and socially excluded. To some extent, the interpretation of this evidence is itself ideological—what

we see tends to be strongly influenced by what we believe. Take, for example, Caputo's observations (2001, 92) on faith-based social action:

Religious people, the 'people of God', the people of the impossible, impassioned by a love that leaves them restless and unhinged...are impossible people. In every sense of the word. If, on any given day, you go into the worst neighbourhoods of the inner cities of most large urban centers, the people you will find there serving the poor and needy, expending their lives and considerable talents attending to the least among us, will almost certainly be religious people—evangelicals and Pentecostals, social workers with deeply held religious convictions, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic, men and women, priests and nuns, black and white. They are the better angels of our nature. They are down in the trenches, out on the streets, serving the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, while the critics of religion are sleeping in on Sunday mornings.

In these observations, Caputo (2001, 92) not only identifies "religious people" as a significant part of the problem with religion, but also sideswipes critics of religion in the process:

That is because religious people are lovers; they love God, with whom all things are possible. They are hyper-realists, in love with the impossible, and they will not rest until the impossible happens, which is impossible, so they get very little rest. The philosophers, on the other hand, happen to be away at the weekend, staying in a nice hotel, reading unreadable papers on "the other" at each other, which they pass off as their way of serving the wretched of the earth. Then, after proclaiming the death of God, they jet back to their tenured jobs, unless they happen to be on sabbatical leave and are spending the year in Paris.

Caputo's point is clear. On the one hand, religion spawns passionate lovers of the impossible, who are likely in some places to spill their passion out into situations of social need, but in so doing they can become impossible people capable of confusing themselves with God and compromising the liberties of people who disagree with them. In this way, religion can often be at odds with itself. On the other hand, critics of religion often neglect to practice their alternative compassion by walking the talk, getting their hands dirty, seeking out practical outlets for an intellectual assertion of justice and freedom.

Against the background of these debates it is impossible to provide an unambiguous evidential account of the implication of faith in emergent spaces of hope. Instead, I will simply argue from some examples that I have found impressive that whatever our analytical prejudices it is hard to