INTRODUCTION

As a result of what sociologists call "globalization," with modern travel and communications, growing economic links, and mass movements of populations from one continent to another, peoples of many different cultures and religions find themselves in daily contact with each other. There have always been many religions, but people have not always been constantly challenged by alternatives. They were able to live in their own small sphere and not have to face real differences from day to day. Settled communities could become very complacent and inward-looking. That has not always been so. The ancient Roman Empire was, for example, awash with different cultures and religions rubbing up against each other. Differing religions have always had to take account of religious diversity, and to be aware of competition.

Even so, in the modern world, no one can escape the fact of diversity in religion and elsewhere, and it is bound to provoke problems in a more pressing way than in previous generations. Two aspects of this are particularly important. Many, both believers and non-believers, can see such diversity and wonder whether the plethora of religions may not cancel the significance of any. They are so different that it appears impossible for them all to be true. The rational conclusion might be that none of them are. Another reaction could be that it is not the function of religion to proclaim "truth." Either way, the self-understanding of different religions is challenged. Major questions in the philosophy of religion have to be confronted. Some, indeed, put the fact of religious diversity in the same category as the vexed problem of evil, seeing it as a rational challenge to religious faith. It may seem difficult to explain why God allows suffering and evil, but to many it may seem just as difficult to understand what any God, who wishes a worshipful response

from humans, should make it so difficult to believe by providing so many competing faiths.

Philosophical issues about the nature of religion are intractable enough, and the relationship between faith and reason is an exceedingly venerable topic. The fact, though, of different religions also raises many political issues. How can people of different religious beliefs, and none, live together, without the conflict that seems only too evident in many parts of the contemporary world? The tensions produced by religious differences, even in democratic societies, produce challenges at every level of society. Courts in Western countries often find cases about the treatment of different religions, and various believers, among the most problematic and controversial that they have to deal with.

This book will deal with the underlying philosophical issues of how religion, and religious difference, is to be understood. I am also very aware that there is a more practical side to the issues, with major concerns about how to deal with religious differences in divided societies. Should religion be given any special treatment in society? How far should different kinds of religious conscience be accommodated? Is religious freedom of particular importance as a human right? What should children be taught about religion in state schools? All modern societies have to face these questions, and this book will not shirk them.

One constant temptation in facing major cultural differences is to take refuge in one form or another of relativism. Each group must live by their own truth, but there is no overarching "truth" that all should recognise. I have argued consistently for the incoherence of such a position since I first wrote about it, with reference both to religion and science, in my *Reason and Commitment* (1973). During the succeeding generation, relativism, as an explicit doctrine, became ever more widespread, not least through so-called "post-modernism." Such philosophical ideas can gradually have an effect on society as a whole, but they are at their most dangerous, when they merely take the form of conventional wisdom, and are not explicitly articulated, let alone rationally challenged. The same goes for an unthinking faith in science as the ultimate arbiter of everything. I continued to write in favour of a broad-based reason in, among other books, *Rationality and Science: Can Science Explain Everything?* (1993) and *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?* (1998).

Since then, religion has become an even more crucial issue both on the world stage, and within Western countries. Growing religious diversity, coupled with further moves to a more active secularism in the West, has been coupled with a marked growth in commitment to various religions, not least Christianity and Islam, in other countries across the globe. All this, it seems, can no longer be ignored either by law or politics. I have tried to deal with some of the issues arising in *Religion in Public Life: Must Faith be Privatized?* (2007) and *Equality, Freedom and Religion* (2012). Many of these problems are impossible to ignore in societies which have become religiously diverse. It is inevitable that the mere fact of religious diversity should come under philosophical scrutiny, and this is what I do in this book, whilst not forgetting the wider social, political and legal contexts. I also try to place contemporary disputes against their wider historical background.

The book was greatly aided by my work in Oxford with colleagues there. I have also been an Associate Scholar of the Religious Freedom Project, directed by Dr. Thomas F. Farr, at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs in Georgetown University, Washington, DC, and funded by the John Templeton Foundation. I was stimulated by the many ideas I encountered at the various seminars and conferences organized in association with the Project. Not least, they gave an international context, which demonstrated how problems of religious diversity, and of religious freedom, have a global salience. I am particularly grateful to Tom Farr himself, to Dr. Timothy Shah, and to Kyle Van der Meulen for all the help and friendship they have given me.

As always, I owe more than I can say to my family, to my wife, Julia, to my daughter, Dr. Alison Teply, and my son-in law, Robert Teply, all of whom have helped me in significant ways to write this book.

Roger Trigg, St Cross College, Oxford

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THE CHALLENGE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

THE PROBLEM OF DIVERSITY

The contemporary world echoes with such phrases as "celebrating diversity." As contact between even previously remote parts of the world increases, we cannot fail to be aware of the great diversity of belief and practice that exists around the world in all areas of human life. Modern technology can ensure that even tribes in New Guinea can see what is happening at that moment in New York. The increase of air travel between continents enables all of us to become tourists in every part of the globe, and many to move their homes and jobs to countries of which a few years ago they may not even have heard. There is migration from one European country to another, even though in living memory those countries may have been at war with each other, or at least totally isolated from each other's way of life. Barriers between Eastern and Western Europe set up after the Second World War have disappeared.

All this is commonplace, although it gives sociologists plenty of material on which to build theories about "globalization." None of us can live in hermetically sealed societies, assuming that our way of life is not only the best way but the only way. Differing ways of life compete for our attention even in the same place. In such a ferment of change, most people on the top of a London bus may be speaking any language but English. There used to be a saying about "the man on the Clapham omnibus" meaning, a hundred years or so ago, the average person in the street. One could use such a mythical London figure to illustrate "ordinary," "normal" reactions to whatever was under discussion. A short trip on any London bus today will quickly dispel any hope of distilling

any common reaction to anything. Languages, cultures, and religions clash in merry profusion. All the people on the bus have in common is that they are in the same place at the same time. They are, of course, all human, and their share in a common human nature may not be a trivial issue. It may provide them all with a commonality on which all else is built. We will return to that. Nevertheless the immediate impact is the fact of difference and diversity.

At a trivial level, this makes life more interesting. We have a myriad of different ethnic foods and restaurants from which to choose. At a deeper level, however, it can appear very destabilizing for any society, which becomes afraid of a loss of identity. Beliefs can no longer be assumed to be shared. Social cohesion is put in jeopardy if we all disagree, perhaps violently, about what we think most important for our own lives and for society. Indeed, do we all even belong to the same society any longer? If neither religion nor language is shared, there may be few shared beliefs, assumptions, or customs to bind people together.

The need for a common identity may be one side of the coin, but another is the need to avoid conflict with those who disagree with us, either on an individual or group basis. In all this, religion has played a central role, both as an aggravating feature and as a source of reconciliation. Religion typically is concerned with what humans think is ultimately most important in life. It defines their ultimate commitments. Indeed, some, such as the twentieth-century Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, have linked religious faith explicitly with ideas of "ultimate concern" and the "the really ultimate."[1] He says, for instance: "The question of faith is not Moses or Jesus or Mohammed: the question is: Who expresses most adequately one's ultimate concern."[2] In this it looks as if religious faith is being defined in terms of whatever is thought of ultimate importance. Whatever governs my life is of ultimate concern to me, and hence is my religion. That probably would mean that everyone has a religion, even if it is focused on what in most people's eyes may be rather trivial.

There is a story of an English football manager, to whom it was said that football was clearly his religion. His quick retort was: "Oh no – it is much more important than that!" The joke depends on the fact

1 See Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1957, p. 96.
2 Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 66.

that religion is not just a matter of passionate commitment and personal concern, but of a belief in some form of ultimate reality. Football can be a life's passion, but it is not concerned with the ultimate reality behind the universe, or with a life beyond this physical one. Religions typically are.

It is notoriously hard to define what "religion" means, not least because the temptation is to define it in terms familiar to us. Other religions, to be recognized as such, would have to be described in terms belonging to our own religion. Some definitions of religion could refer to "God" and make monotheism the defining feature of religion, but that must be too limiting. "Religion" is not just Christianity writ large, so that something only counts as religious if it coheres with what may be recognizable to Christian belief. That is too ethnocentric. Some views of religion see monotheism as itself a development, even a progression, from polytheistic forms of belief. Just as science needed the idea of one reality as an object of rational investigation, so true religion, the argument might go, needed to see that there could only be one Creator ultimately responsible for the whole Universe, and be the Creator of it. Even that view, however, tacitly assumes that monotheism (and probably Judeo-Christian monotheism at that) is the proper destination, and that religious development is a "value-laden" progress to something better.

Once we empty the idea of religion of what is most familiar, the concept itself may seem to gain little purchase. Yet the opposite danger – of defining religion too narrowly – can itself be pernicious. If a claim for religious freedom is laid before a court of law, it may, in some jurisdictions, matter whether a practice is "religious" or not. It is very easy for, say, an English court to assume that freedom of religion assumes a freely chosen commitment by an individual. It can then find it hard[3] to understand traditional definitions of being Jewish through matrilineal descent, and count this as a mere ethnic matter, without any issue of it being a theological matter for Jews. The idea of being born into a religion, rather than choosing it, may be strange to English Protestants, but it is a familiar notion in many religions, including Islam. Religion and ethnicity can merge, and indeed have done so in many societies in which religious diversity has not been fully acknowledged.

3 As in the case *R v. JFS*, (2009) UKSC 15, concerning criteria for admission to a Jewish school.

THE GROWTH OF FREEDOM

Despite the fact of an Established Church in England, there has never been any settled agreement about religion there since the Reformation. Roman Catholicism was always a latent force, practiced in some prominent families, lingering on in Elizabethan times, and implicated in the Gunpowder Plot to blow up the House of Parliament in 1605. On the other wing of the Church of England, Puritanism was soon causing separatist tendencies, with the first Baptist congregations taking root at the beginning of the seventeenth century and, as we shall see, producing demands for greater religious freedom. These tendencies, themselves producing splits between different brands of Protestantism, eventually exploded in the English Civil War of the seventeenth century. After that, and the Restoration both of King and Established Church, James II still tried to reintroduce Roman Catholicism into England, and had to flee on suspicion of attempting to establish an absolute monarchy.

Thus the accession of William and Mary in the Glorious Revolution,[4] and the Act of Toleration of 1689, provided a landmark in English history and the development of democracy. It recognized the pluralism that was endemic in English society, and no longer tied the idea of citizenship to adherence to one form of religion. The rights of "nonconformists" who stood apart from the Church of England were at last recognized, though it took many years for all distinctions between Anglicans and non-Anglicans to be eradicated. It was not until the nineteenth century, for instance, before entry to Oxford and Cambridge was broadened. Roman Catholics, too, remained under suspicion, and even John Locke, the great apostle of religious toleration and the Glorious Revolution's "official" philosopher, found it difficult not to remain suspicious of their allegiance to a foreign ruler (the Pope). Added to this, continuing Jacobite agitation in support of James II and his descendants remained a threat to the Protestant throne of England and Scotland until well on in the eighteenth century.

This pluralism, in the sociological sense of there being different forms of religious belief and expression within one society, was exported to the American Colonies. The strains this caused were particularly noticeable

4 See S. Pincus, *1688, The First Modern Revolution*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009.

in Virginia, where the Church of England was established, but as the eighteenth century progressed, other denominations such as Presbyterians and Baptists become both more numerous and more vociferous.[5] They resented Anglican privilege. Indeed, without a resident bishop, the Bishop of London provided Episcopal authority from far away. The result was that local gentry were not only prominent in the politics of the Colony but, through their "vestries" or church councils, were in charge of the maintenance of the Church and its ministry. Indeed the vestries were also a functioning local government, looking after the needs of the poor. As a result, non-Anglicans felt marginalized and resented paying taxes to support the Anglican clergy.

A society with a dominant church that was not supported by a considerable number of its citizens was clearly heading for trouble, particularly when coercive taxes were still being enforced. Virginia proved to be the cradle of demands for equal rights, and in particular for the right to freedom of religion. Even in the years leading up to 1776, there were regular prosecutions of dissenters, particularly Baptists, for such offenses as taking unauthorized services or unauthorized preaching, or even for failing to attend the Anglican parish church.[6] In protest against such a limitation on personal liberty, Virginians such as Thomas Jefferson, George Mason, and James Madison all played key roles in the establishment of freedom of religion as a basic American norm, as expressed in what became the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, saying that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The irony was that this was certainly a reaction to Anglican Establishment as practiced in Virginia, but Virginia had failed to keep pace with the expectation of "tolerance" for dissenters or nonconformists that had been required by the English Act of Toleration of 1689. The applicability of actions by the Westminster Parliament to the various colonies was a continuing bone of contention, but it is striking that, at least before the War of Independence, the British authorities were inclined

5 See John A. Ragosta *Wellspring of Liberty: How Virginia's Dissenters Helped Win the American Revolution and Secured Religious Liberty*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010.

6 See Appendix A in Ragosta, *Wellspings of Liberty*, pp. 171–183.

to champion a religious freedom that was becoming more familiar in England at the time.

The British Lords of Trade indeed responded to an inquiry by the acting Governor of Virginia by saying that "a free Exercise of Religion is so valuable a branch of true liberty, and so essential to the enriching and improving of a Trading Nation, it should ever be held sacred in His Majesty's Colonies."[7] In 1769, the new Governor said to Presbyterian clergy that "it is the King's express command that liberty of conscience be allowed to all his subjects, so they be contented with a quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the same." Presbyterians would very likely be resentful of Anglican privilege, as many would be immigrants from Scotland who would feel that their own established church, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, deserved as much recognition as the established Church of England. The feeling that privileges for one group inevitably make those who are not members of that group feel devalued and less than full citizens is an issue that echoes through all debates about the role of religion in a society in which there are differing beliefs. It offends against demands for equality.[8]

What is remarkable is that the British authorities were using phrases such as the "free exercise of religion" and "liberty of conscience" in contrast to the efforts of the Virginian gentry to impose an ecclesiastical uniformity. Yet it would only be few years before those same phrases would be used against the British. The argument that it was "good for trade" was partly that it would encourage settlers of different backgrounds. Of deeper interest, however, is the argument from principle, particularly the implication that as "a branch of true liberty," religious liberty is deeply linked with all other democratic freedoms. That was certainly a view held by the American Founders. They were confronted, as in England, with differing religious denominations, with different ways of organizing themselves. Freedom of religion typically meant freedom for different varieties of Christianity to flourish, even if there was an initial reluctance to extend that to Roman Catholicism.

Once the principle of religious liberty is accepted, however, it has to be extended to all varieties of religious conscience, protecting even

7 Ragosta, *Wellsprings of Liberty*, p. 41.
8 See Roger Trigg, *Equality, Freedom and Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012.

those who wish to repudiate all religion. The difficulty of giving a tight definition of religion then becomes salient. It is tempting to say that beliefs in the supernatural and in a life beyond the physical one are the most typical signs of a religious belief, although this might rule out pantheism, the idea that God or gods are identical with the natural world. Links with a way of life, incorporating typical moral behavior, may also seem central to a religion, but some religions, such as ancient Greek and Roman polytheism, concentrated on public ritual. Their gods were hardly exemplars of morality. The communal aspect of religion may seem important, so that religion might be defined as a particular form of social practice, but again, religions may differ radically on how much stress is to be placed on individual belief and commitment rather than public practice.

The twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has tried to define games by looking for a common feature, but in the end said they had a "family resemblance." There is no single feature that all games have in common. They are not all played with balls, for instance, although many are. Nor do all of them have game pieces, like chess and cards, for example. As Wittgenstein says of games, "if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that."[9] Wittgenstein wanted us to get away from the assumption that if we have a word, there must be one thing that it names. He wanted us to look at how words are used. Indeed he said that we must "bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." The later Wittgenstein had changed his mind about how language functioned, and reacted against his early work. He argued against the propensity of philosophers to use a word such as "object" or "being" or even "name" and to try to grasp the "essence" of the thing. He asked, "Is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?"[10]

This is the edge of a major philosophical argument about how language functions and whether its prime purpose is to pick out and identify an objective reality. It is, as we shall see, a crucial issue for religious belief. Wittgenstein, in his later work, was concerned to see how language was actually used, and its connection with our wider practices. He

9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* #66, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1958.
10 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #116.