

Cameron's courting of Christianity: divisive, inappropriate, cynical and shallow

Posted: Sun, 20 Apr 2014 by [Elizabeth O'Casey](#)

*Following David Cameron's call in recent statements for British Christians to be more evangelical, **Elizabeth O'Casey** questions the appropriateness of his comments and reiterates the need for a secular state.*

Hearing David Cameron's recent collection of 'Easter themed' messages over the past week, in which he has sought to declare his dedication to, and admiration of, the Christian faith - arguing that "we" need to be [more evangelical](#) about the Christian religion and that "we" need to [expand the role of faith and faith organisations](#) - I was left deeply discomforted. My discomfort didn't just stem from what I viewed as the inappropriateness of such exclusionary comments coming from the Prime Minister; it was also that his statements struck me as distinctly unreflective and ignorant, displaying an unfortunate combination of cynicism and thoughtlessness.

In his article for the [Church Times](#), Mr Cameron said, "People who [...] advocate some sort of secular neutrality fail to grasp the consequences of that neutrality, or the role that faith can play in helping people to have a moral code", and accordingly demonstrated himself as depressingly unfamiliar with the secular ideal.

Certainly the type of secular state sought by many secular advocates would never seek to dispute the role that people's faith can play in dictating their moral code; unlike Mr Cameron, they make no comment at all on the validity or nature of that faith. A Prime Minister who understood the contemporary relevance of the secular framework would not seek to champion implicitly one form of faith over others. Readers of this website will be familiar with the secular refrain, but the Prime Minister seems unfamiliar with its tenets; he portrays a caricature of secularism which fetishizes a hard-line French model, removing any trace of religious identity from people's personas.

Instead of championing the institutionalised equality of all citizens through human rights, regardless of religion, Mr Cameron looks to compassion and love, framing these as inherently Christian values contrasted with secular neutrality. It might be pointed out to Mr Cameron, that Christianity doesn't have a monopoly on charity and that other religions, such as Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhism for example, to which many British citizens subscribe incidentally, also have as fundamental to their doctrine the notion of compassion and charity.

Pointing this out probably panders to the game of one-upmanship of religion and faith that comments like Mr Cameron's instigate, but it does also serve to highlight his ignorance and the inappropriately one-dimensional and insular nature of his expressed knowledge when it comes to the heritage and history of other religious and non-religious narratives and theories that motivate many within his country.

Of course nowhere has Mr Cameron said explicitly that other religious and non-religious belief systems do not supply the same level of motivational compassion, but language and emphasis are important, both in terms of their descriptive and prescriptive capacities; any statement that feels the need to reassure us that, as Mr Cameron did in his nauseatingly colloquial tones, he is not "doing down other faiths" is inevitably not a naturally inclusive statement. His comments, permeated with

an unbecoming undercurrent of censoriousness, can only be taken to imply a favouritism of one type of belief system, which is so blatantly incongruent for a man of his office. In his call for more evangelism, Mr Cameron is exclusively tying himself to one faith group, inevitably to the exclusion of others.

The openly evangelizing character of his statement perhaps reflects the views of someone who is somewhat new to such religious dedication, which is all the more wearing for the audience. Previously he took Boris Johnson's line, describing his religious faith as "a bit [like the reception for Magic FM in the Chilterns](#): It sort of comes and goes" (incidentally, I would argue, this is probably a more apposite description of how the majority of Britons feel about their faith).

Or perhaps, more likely, his views express those of a man keen to reach out to some of his grass-root supporters whom he upset with the legalisation of gay marriage. They certainly cannot be said to reach out to the British populace as a whole; with some serendipitous timing, the results of a WIN/Gallup International poll just released, show that British citizens are [amongst the most sceptical](#) in the world about religion.

Another striking thing about Mr Cameron's statement, is his pernicious manoeuvre to hand over responsibility for welfare and public services to one section of society (who he deems, for some unargued reason, the best for that job) whilst at the same time imbuing that section of society with a moral righteousness.

What Mr Cameron is promoting through his ideal of the newly-aggrandised "Big Society" (along with Mr Cameron himself, it's [now got a co-author apparently](#): "Jesus Christ, our saviour!") is a divisive and unequal tendering out of services (such as those for homeless people, youth groups, women's centres, advice centres, and health initiatives), to independent faith-based bodies. One example of what it can only be assumed Mr Cameron would favour, is [the Catholic Children's Society](#) ([which requires its counsellors](#) to "uphold and promote the Catholic ethos of the agency") being awarded an £89,000 contract to provide advice to schoolchildren on matters including contraception and pregnancies by Richmond Council a few years ago.

Of course, the public good of education has been tendered out to religious bodies for a long time now, and it serves as an example of how, institutionalised sectarianism that divides children on the contextually-arbitrary grounds of their parents' religious beliefs, can harmfully impact social cohesion within our society.

Along with expanding the role of faith-based organisations in the UK, Mr Cameron observed that Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world. Whilst there is good evidence [that this may be the case](#), it seems a little vulgar to imply that a concern for Christians should come from the UK, because "we are a Christian country" (whatever that even means?). Instead, Mr Cameron should be highlighting the desperate plight of all [religious](#) and [non-religious minorities](#) around the world.

On this issue, Mr Cameron's words wouldn't be quite so unconvincing if he and his government were doing more to combat persecution against Christians and those of other beliefs abroad. For example, the UK has thus far used none of the influence it has with Pakistan (considered [one of the most hostile nations](#) for religious minorities in the world) to ask that it might reconsider some of its more [unsavoury policies against Christians](#) and its [Ahmadi community](#). Quite the contrary, amidst Cameron's naïve talk of the blanket benefits of aid spending by the UK, it has just increased its aid to Pakistan by £180 million.

Some will argue that Mr Cameron's comments are natural at Easter time, and that to take issue with them is to overreact, but his comments are far more invidious than such a presentation would

suppose. His collection of Easter addresses represents an explicit classification of Britain as Christian, inevitably to the exclusion of the many citizens who do not identify that way, and as such are divisive and improper coming from the Prime Minister. His comments also lack nuance, or an adequate understanding of the importance, for unity and justice, of people being identified as rights-bearing citizens first and foremost, with democratic autonomy and equality, regardless of which faith they happen to have, or not have.

Elizabeth O'Casey

Elizabeth O'Casey is the former policy and research officer at the National Secular Society, and Head of Delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). Follow her on Twitter [@ElizabethOCasey](#)

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Big Society](#), [Church & State](#), [Church of England](#), [David Cameron](#)

Related Campaigns

•

[Disestablishment](#)

We want to separate church and state so no religion has undue influence over our politics & society.

[Read More](#)

•

[Scrap the Bishops' Bench](#)

We campaign to scrap the archaic, unfair and undemocratic Bishops' Bench in the House of Lords.

[Read More](#)

•

[Religion & state](#)

For over 150 years we have campaigned for disestablishment, the separation of the C of E and state.

[Read More](#)

-

Public services

Outsourcing to religious organisation threatens to undermine equal access and religious neutrality

[Read More](#)