

# “No Religion”; The Army’s Inclusivity Blind-spot

A report by Lt Col L T Quinn MBE, May 2016





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## CONTENTS

|                   |     |
|-------------------|-----|
| Foreword          | ii  |
| Executive Summary | iii |
| Report Structure  | iv  |

### **Inclusivity and the non-religious**

|   |  |    |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | The British Christian Army                   | 2  |
| 2 | The changing demographic of the Armed Forces | 4  |
| 3 | Who are the non-religious?                   | 8  |
| 4 | No-religion, Humanism and the Army           | 10 |
| 5 | Religious faith no longer unites us          | 14 |
| 6 | Inclusivity through secularism               | 18 |

### **Including the non-religious through secularism**

|    |  |    |
|----|--|----|
| 7  | Remembrance and sacred collective acts     | 20 |
| 8  | Chaplaincy                                 | 24 |
| 9  | Language and culture                       | 26 |
| 10 | Countering objections to secular inclusion | 32 |

### **Annexes**

|   |  |    |
|---|--|----|
| A | Definition of atheism, agnosticism and secularism      | 36 |
| B | Using JPA data to examine religion in the Armed Forces | 38 |

# “No Religion”; The Army’s Inclusivity Blind-spot

## FOREWORD

***The views expressed in this report are my own and not official policy.*** Indeed, this report has been written in the hope of changing the Army’s official policy regarding religion. Put simply, by privileging Christianity we fail to be as inclusive as we should be towards non-Christians, especially towards the non-religious. In the interests of full disclosure I should point out that I am an Atheist. This fact should not matter but, sadly, in an organisation that retains a Christian bias, it does.

I used not to think too deeply about religious belief. Then, after a difficult tour in Iraq in 2006, I decided to research the evidence for how we form beliefs. This led to *critical thinking* and on to morality, gender equality and a wide range of philosophical issues that no self-respecting middle-aged engineer would ever consider. The process led me to reassess my views on many things that we just accept and take for granted without thinking. In particular I was struck by just how much our institutional Christian framework excludes those of no religion and how we could be more inclusive and effective as an Army if religion was left as a purely personal issue.

For a number of years I could see that what we were doing was not right, but to my shame I did nothing about it. The impetus to do something finally came at a remembrance service at the Commonwealth war grave at Monte Cassino in 2013. The padre led the service and asked God to hold our fallen comrades with him until we meet them again. However, as he talked, he was standing in front of the graves of Sikhs, Jews and some with no recorded religion. Christian doctrine does not teach that non-Christians go to heaven. Then I recalled that we were on Exercise CASSINO CRUSADER and being in 8 Engineer Brigade, we wore a crusader cross as our formation badge. How must all this look to a potential recruit who is Muslim for example? That was it; I couldn’t walk on by anymore. What we were doing was wrong and I resolved to foster informed professional debate to change it.

I quickly wrote an article for the *British Army Review (BAR)* and was both honoured and surprised when it was published in full. I submitted the article in summer 2013 but it wasn’t published until March 2014. The reason for the delay was in part because a rebuttal article was drafted so that both articles could be published side by side. The rebuttal made a number of erroneous claims that did not tally with the available evidence, so I sent another to the *BAR*. It was published in January 2015. It was becoming clear that conducting the debate purely on the pages of the *BAR* would only ever move at a glacial pace. On the advice of the Directorate of Defence Communications I set up a website called “*A Secular British Army*” on the Defence Connect<sup>1</sup> framework – a password protected network behind the Defence Gateway. Most of the material in this report is based on the blogs, poll results and comments developed during the professional debate on Defence Connect.

I am often asked why I focus on the Army when the benefits of secularism apply equally well to the Royal Navy and RAF. This is because the strongest resistance to change is from the Army...and I am, of course, a soldier. The Army can be proud of the considerable work it has done to ensure *inclusivity* when it comes to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and non-Christian religions. By collating the data and other evidence into a single document and logically setting out the argument for a secular Army, I hope that this report helps bring about the change necessary to address the Army’s final inclusivity blind-spot - its personnel who have no religion.

*Laurence Quinn*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://jive.defencegateway.mod.uk/groups/a-secular-british-army>

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In common with its sister Services, the British Army is institutionally, officially, Christian in nature. From our collective acts of remembrance, to rules on who can become a unit chaplain, there is no doubt that Christianity holds a privileged position in the Army. However, there is neither a constitutional nor a military operational reason why this should be so; it is simply the product of our tradition and culture.
2. Sadly this means that our non-Christian soldiers are not as fully included as they should be in *all* aspects of our profession. The Army is doing much to champion *Inclusivity* with regards to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion. However, whilst for example multi-faith services attempt to include soldiers of all religions, they do not include those who have no religion. Indeed the MOD maintains a small pool of chaplains from *all* “world faiths” (imams, rabbis etc.); but, it excludes Humanists celebrants – their non-religious counterparts.
3. This lack of inclusion of the non-religious will become an increasingly pressing issue as JPA data shows that the growth in personnel self-declaring “no religion” is accelerating within each successively younger cohort. There is quite literally an order of magnitude in change from the youngest to the oldest across the 3 Services. This demographic change is remarkable in sociological terms. That its significance has gone unanalysed is both surprising and disappointing. Further research is clearly required to determine the extent to which the non-religious feel disengaged and excluded, why there is a significant difference between the Services, and why there is such a marked difference between the Armed Forces as a whole and the wider UK. Given the clear endorsement of Christianity by our chain-of-command, it may be that some of our service personnel are reticent in declaring that they have no religion, as to do so seems somewhat “anti-establishment”.
4. It is clear that religion in general and Christianity in particular, is no longer a unifying factor within the Army. Nevertheless even if the Army itself should not be institutionally religious, there is still an argument why an individual soldier may wish to have a religious belief. Therefore by making the Army, indeed all 3 Services, secular, it will be possible to support individuals in their personal beliefs (religious or not) whilst fostering an all-inclusive culture. The three main areas to address are:
  - *Collective Remembrance*. Our sacred collective acts should no longer be exclusively Christian services. If we have one, unifying collective act, then it should not be explicitly religious.
  - *Chaplaincy*. It is impractical to have chaplains representative of every possible belief in each single unit. Therefore a secular chaplaincy is required to provide support to those of all faiths and none.
  - *Language and culture*. From declaring that “there are no Atheists in foxholes” to prohibiting soldiers from changing religion without their Commanding Officer’s permission, there is much about our language and culture that must change.
5. If we are serious about establishing a world class reputation for being an inclusive employer, we must make the Army (and its sister Services) secular.

## REPORT STRUCTURE

The structure of the report falls broadly into two parts. Chapters 1 to 6 form the first part; collectively they set out the problem. They explain how the British Army is institutionally Christian. They then describe who the non-religious are and how it is that they are not as included as they should be. Chapter 6 then explains how becoming secular is the only practical way to include all personnel, regardless of whether or not they are religious.

Chapters 7 to 10 explain how and where secularism can be implemented and what this would mean in practice for the Army. This second part concludes by addressing the most commonly expressed objections to secular inclusion.

The report closes with two annexes. The first is a glossary defining atheism, agnosticism and secularism. The second highlights the limitations of JPA data when used to inform discussions over the religious make-up and beliefs of service personnel.



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*“We’ve got a tremendous culture in all sorts of ways, but, it is not necessarily a culture that encourages diversity in a way that it will have to if we are to have a work place that is positive for the sort of breadth of opportunity that I am describing. It is important that we get after that.”<sup>2</sup>*

General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the General Staff

***What then are we waiting for?***

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with the CGS. The British Army Review. Spring/summer 2015. Number 163. pp 6-7





**Figure 1.** From red coats to cavalry charges, traditions remain only when they continue to meet our military need. Our officially Christian position is born of tradition, but does it foster the inclusivity we seek in our increasingly plural future? [Images from Wikimedia Commons and MOD]



**Figure 2.** Girlguiding changed its Promise to make it more inclusive. The British Army could learn a lot from these Brownies. [Photograph courtesy Girlguiding]

# 1 **The British Christian Army**

*“The reverent observance of religion in the armed forces is of the highest importance.”*

The Queen’s Regulations for the Army, 1975. Clause J5.262.

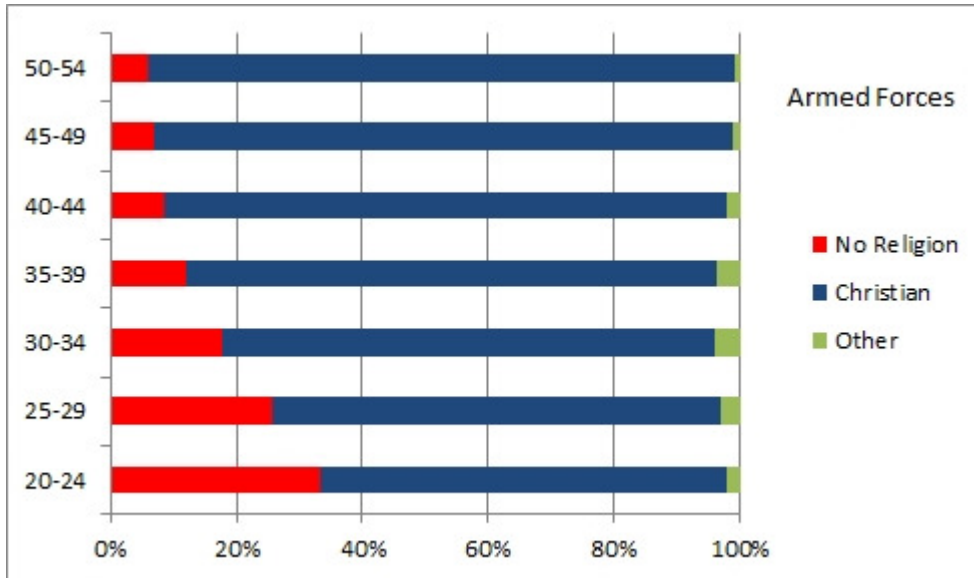
- 1.1 **Institutional Christianity.** Our soldiers are ordered to attend a religious service as a military parade, at which our senior officers read passages from the Bible. Our sacred acts of remembrance are always and only Christian services. We have Christian symbols as formation badges and only Christians (from a select group of “sending churches”<sup>3</sup>) can be chaplains in regular Army units. There is no doubt that those soldiers who are Christian enjoy a privilege that their other comrades do not. We are undeniably an institutionally Christian Army – something for which there is no military operational justification.
- 1.2 **Tradition versus military capability.** Our official religious affiliation is born of tradition. Whilst a sense of tradition is essential to soldiers, it must never be allowed to impair military capability. Our enemies used to fear the advance of our redcoats at bayonet point and panic as the ground shook when our cavalry charged. However, the reality of modern warfare has meant we now wear multi-terrain camouflage and 70 ton tanks have replaced our horses. Yet, as this report will explain, we continue to pay a heavy price for our religious affiliation.
- 1.3 **Being institutionally Christian is not inclusive.** The most obvious problem is that this is not an all-inclusive system. What about the non-Christian, the non-religious? When we embed Christianity into our collective acts of group bonding, we actually undermine the very effect we are trying to achieve; group bonding. After research showed that it was losing potential recruits, Girlguiding recently changed its Promise to make it more inclusive<sup>4</sup>. The Guides used to promise “to love my God.” Now they promise to “be true to myself and develop my beliefs”. Strange as it may sound, we could probably learn a lot from the experience of the Girl Guides.

## **Key Points**

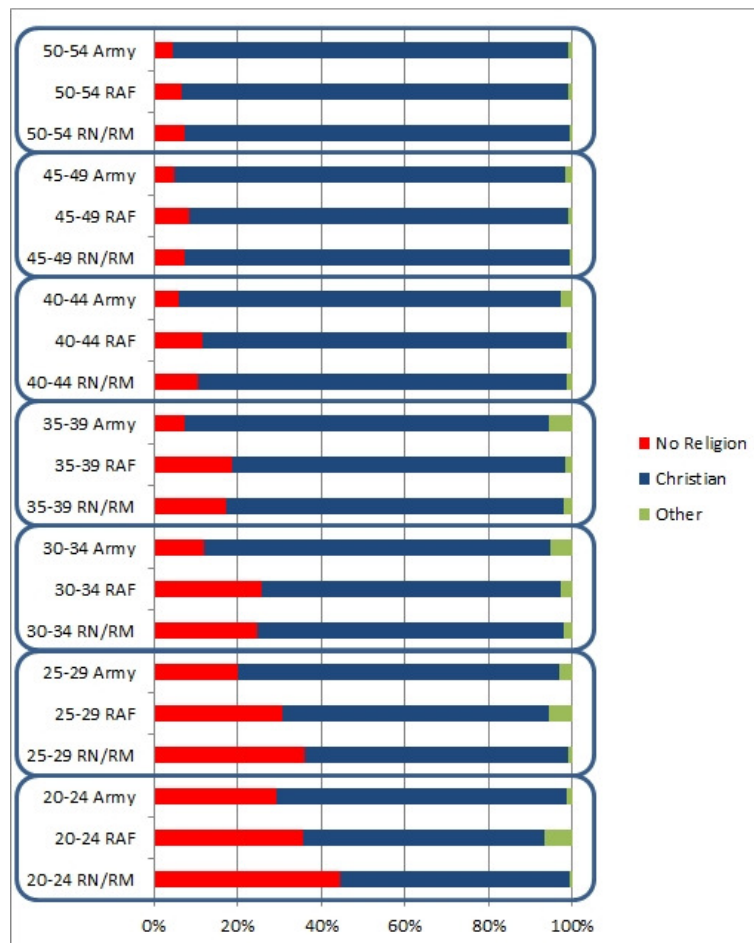
- Christians enjoy a privilege in the Army that others do not and for which there is no military operational justification.
- Our institutional Christian position is not inclusive when it should be.

<sup>3</sup> The sending churches are; Church of England, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Church of Scotland, Presbyterian, Baptist Union, United Reformed, Congregational, Free Church of Scotland, Elim Pentecostal and Assemblies of God.

<sup>4</sup> “A video message from the Chief Guide” [http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/pdf/Video\\_Script\\_final.pdf](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/pdf/Video_Script_final.pdf).



**Figure 3.** Religious belief as a function of age across the UK Regular Armed Forces. The rapid growth in numbers of non-religious service personnel is remarkable. However, this huge demographic change that has gone unobserved and unanalysed. Defence Statistics (Tri-service)



**Figure 4.** Religious belief compared across the 3 Services. It is not clear why there is such a marked and growing difference between the Services. Defence Statistics (Tri-service)

## 2 ***The changing demographic of the Armed Forces***

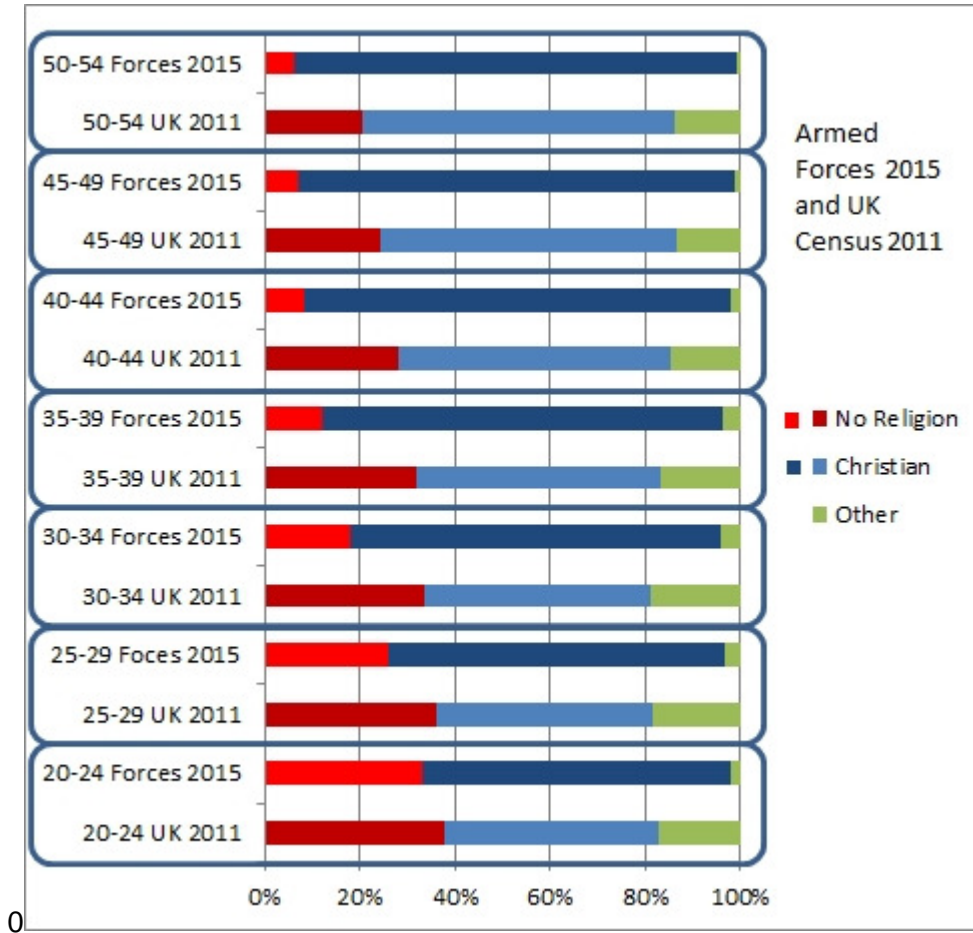
- 2.1 **Onward Christian soldiers.** From Oliver Cromwell's new Model Army to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the British Army has been traditionally Christian. In part this has been a reflection of the religious belief held by the vast majority of British soldiers. Indeed during the First World War, churchgoers disproportionately voluntarily enlisted in the Armed Forces, fusing religion and patriotism.<sup>5</sup> However, there is now a profound demographic shift underway.
- 2.2 **Religious belief as a function of age in the Armed Forces.** Figure 3 is a snapshot of current JPA data which shows how religious belief changes within each age cohort in the Regular Armed Forces.<sup>6</sup> Those recording "no religion" are shown in red, "Christian" in blue and *all* other responses combined are shown in green. The graph clearly shows how "no religion" is becoming more and more prevalent in each successively younger cohort. In the older half of the Forces (age 54 to 37) the increase in "no religion" is only about 6%. Whereas in the younger half (37 to 20) this increase shoots up to over 20%. From a sociological perspective, this is an extremely rapid change. The religious make up of those at the top of the Armed Forces is now markedly different from those at the bottom.
- 2.3 **The 3 Services compared.** It is also interesting to compare declared religious belief across the 3 Services. Figure 4 shows the same information as Figure 3, but is broken down into Army, RAF and RN/RM. There is clearly a marked difference between the Services and this difference is growing. The youngest cohort of the Navy now has the highest proportion of those declaring "no religion" – 44.6%. Contrast this with 4.5 % within the oldest cohort of the Army. This is a difference of literally an order of magnitude. Those who set our policy now have a different perspective on religion compared to our most junior people.
- 2.4 **Non-Christian religions.** The other feature to note is that with a modest exception in the RAF, there has not been a growth in the number of personnel from non-Christian religions. This is despite a growth in numbers of non-Christian people in the UK as a whole.

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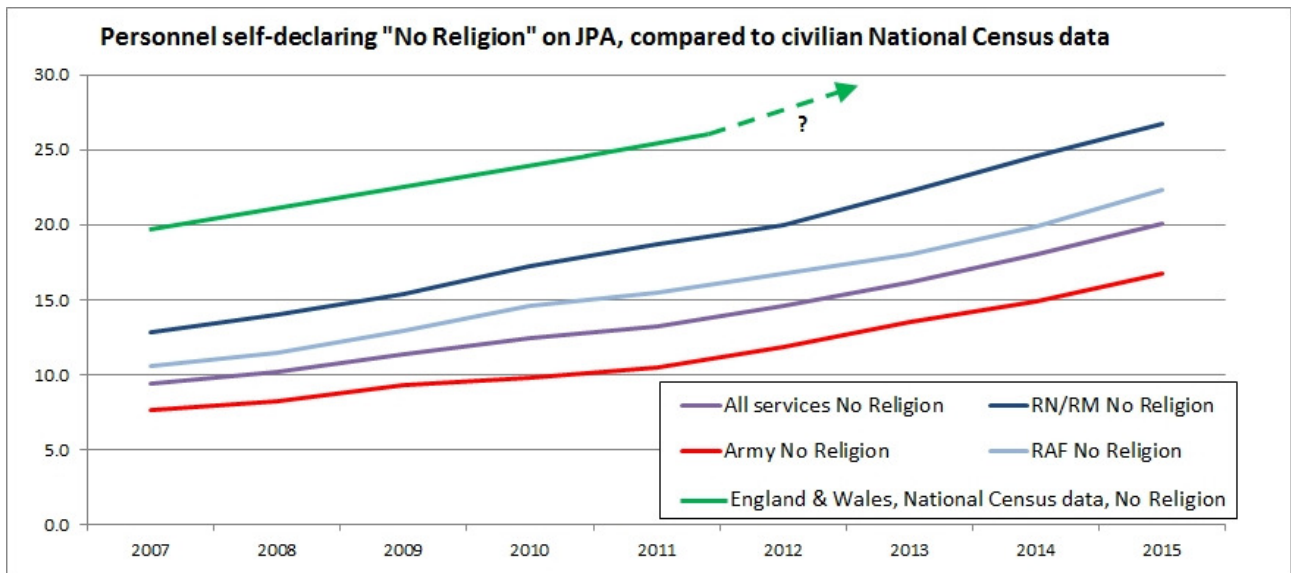
<sup>5</sup> FIELD C D. Some Historical Religious Statistics. British Religion in Numbers, 19 Oct 12. [viewed 20 Jan 16]. Available from <http://www.brin.ac.uk/2012/some-historical-religious-statistics/>

<sup>6</sup> UK Regulars are full time Service personnel, including Nursing Services, but excluding FTRS personnel, Gurkhas, Naval activated Reservists, mobilised Reservists, Military Provost Guarding Service (MPGS) and Non Regular Permanent Service (NRPS). "Other" includes all personnel declaring a non-Christian religion on JPA. Percentages have been calculated to include those whose religion is unknown; therefore will not exactly match those reported elsewhere by Defence Statistics.





**Figure 5.** Comparison of UK civilian population and Armed Forces.



**Figure 6.** Comparison of JPA and National Census data of the proportion of people who self-declare they have "No Religion". Defence Statistics (Tri-service)

- 2.5 **Comparison of UK civilian population and Armed Forces.** Figure 5 compares military and UK civilian data. The civilian data is from the 2011 Census whereas the military data is from 2015. Arguably the civilian data could be shifted 5 years forward to reflect this difference, however in order to preserve data integrity this has not been done. Nevertheless a meaningful civil–military comparison is still possible. The graph shows that religious declaration of the Armed Forces and the UK population is significantly different. However, with each successive cohort the Armed Forces are moving closer to the position held by our civilian counterparts – we are merely “closing the gap”. Yet, despite these rapid changes in the Forces, there is still some way to go before we fully align with the civilian population. This suggests that our younger cohorts will continue to be increasingly likely to record “no religion”.
- 2.6 **Trend over time.** Rather than just take a single snapshot of JPA data, Figure 6, looks at this overall trend since data was first recorded on JPA. The graph clearly shows that the rate of growth of “no religion” is accelerating. If the current trend holds up, by 2025 half of the Armed Forces will declare they have “no religion”.
- 2.7 **Accounting for the difference.** Although there is a significant difference between the Services in the number of non-religious personnel, the difference between the Armed Forces and the UK as a whole is even greater. There is no reliable evidence upon which to postulate why. In part it may be that to declare oneself non-religious or an Atheist is seen as a rejection of membership of the Forces or in some way “anti-establishment”, given that we are institutionally Christian and that this is constantly reinforced by our chain-of-command.

#### Key Points

- Members of the Armed Forces are becoming increasingly non-religious; the growth in personnel self-declaring “no religion” is accelerating within each successively younger cohort.
- The significance of this change has not been officially analysed and its consequences assessed. Indeed this has been the motivation for this report.
- The growth in the numbers declaring “no religion” is far more significant than the growth in those declaring non-Christian religions. We have gone to considerable lengths to accommodate those who hold a non-Christian belief.<sup>7</sup> However, can we say we have done the same for those who have “no religion”?
- The religious self-declaration of members of the Armed Forces does not match that of the wider UK population. It is not clear why.

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<sup>7</sup> Such as the introduction of Halal and Kosher rations and the recruitment of MOD world faith chaplains.



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### 3 **Who are the non-religious?**

- 3.1 **Why we need to understand who the non-religious are.** A first step in understanding the significance of the growth of “no religion” in the Army is to appreciate just who the non-religious are, what their relationship with religious belief is and consequently how included or excluded they may be by the Army’s officially Christian position.
- 3.2 **Categories of no-religion.** Saying that you have “no religion” is not the same as saying you are an “Atheist”. Indeed, giving people *labels* such as “Atheist” often risks oversimplifying a highly complex situation such as personal belief. Nevertheless it is a useful way to develop an understanding of how our non-religious people might relate to our religious military practices. Therefore this chapter identifies a number of categories, which collectively describe those who declare that they have “no religion”. These categories have been selected specifically in order to help form an assessment of their perspective on our religious practices. It is important to acknowledge that these *labels* neither fully describe an individual, nor does one person neatly fit into just one category. Furthermore, their position may change over time.
- 3.2.1 **Religiously unaffiliated.** There are some people who believe in a *higher power*, but object to the concept of “religion” as such, which they see as a man-made convention. This group may also include New Age religions that are not shown as an option in JPA. However it is possible that those people who hold such beliefs may have chosen “Other Religion” instead. Nevertheless, the religiously unaffiliated may be comfortable with the worshipping aspects of events such as acts of remembrance, but may object to what they perceive as an artificial ceremony.
- 3.2.2 **Fuzzy believer.** Human minds are not logic machines into which data goes and from which a single cogent belief is logically forged. In practice, people form beliefs for a variety of reasons; emotional, social etc. Fuzzy believers are those who either believe in an afterlife, but not God, or they sometimes believe in God and sometimes not.<sup>8</sup> The fuzzy believer is probably therefore less likely to feel excluded from military religious events than the other categories described here.
- 3.2.3 **Atheist.** As explained in Annex A, an Atheist is someone who has specifically considered the question of whether gods exist and has concluded that there is no reason to believe that they do. To an Atheist,<sup>9</sup> religious claims are effectively *imaginary narratives*; they are something that they cannot join in. Therefore the religious aspects of an event such as a vigil or act of remembrance will effectively exclude an Atheist. It is this group of the non-religious that is let down the most by our failure to be truly inclusive.
- 3.2.4 **Agnostic.** Agnosticism is the view that some knowledge claims, especially whether or not Gods exist, are unknown or even unknowable. Many people use this term to mean that they neither believe nor disbelieve in God – which, technically, is a slightly different interpretation. In practice, it is likely that Agnostics also fall into one of the other categories described in this report.

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<sup>8</sup> VOAS, David. The mysteries of religion and the lifecourse. CLS Working paper 2015/1, Jan 15.

<sup>9</sup> To complicate this ever so slightly, it is possible to be an Atheist *and* religious. For example many Buddhists are also Atheists. To them, Buddhism is not about either believing or not believing in gods. Buddha taught that believing in gods was not useful for those seeking to realise enlightenment. However in the context of this analysis, Buddhists are unlikely to select “no religion” on JPA as “Buddhist” is an option.

3.2.5 **Apatheist.** An Apatheist is not interested in whether gods do or do not exist. Apatheists live their lives as if there are no gods and give natural explanations to phenomena without the reference to any deities. Gods neither provide purpose to life, nor influence everyday conduct. Other than not giving a damn, this makes them very similar to Atheists to all intents and purposes. For this reason, Apatheist are sometimes referred to as “practical atheists”.<sup>10</sup> The question of the existence of gods is neither meaningful nor relevant to their lives. Therefore in the context of such events as religious Remembrances, Apatheists may feel disconnected from what is to them, an irrelevant ritual. They may object...if they can be bothered to do so. Anecdotally, I have found that many soldiers fall into this category, whether or not they declare themselves to have “no religion”.

3.3 **Requirement for further research.** Sadly without a detailed study it is impossible to say how many people each of these categories describes and consequently just how many of our people feel excluded from events such as Remembrance. As explained in Annex B, JPA data is not collected in a manner that allows this issue to be adequately analysed. Nevertheless, a 2013 poll by YouGov and commissioned by Westminster Faith Debates<sup>11</sup> asked 1,552 members of the public who said they had “no religion”, whether they thought there was a “higher power”. The results from this question give some indication of the make-up of the non-religious demographic in the UK. How this is reflected across the Armed Forces is unknown.

| <b>Do you believe in a god or some 'higher power'?</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>My Remarks</b>  |
|--|----------|--|
| Yes, there is definitely a God or some 'higher power'  | 6        | <i>These may be described as the “religiously unaffiliated”.</i> |
| Yes, there is probably a God or some 'higher power'    | 11       | <i>Fuzzy believer?</i>   |
| No, there is probably NOT a God or some 'higher power' | 22       | <i>Fuzzy believer/Apatheist?</i>                                 |
| No, there is definitely NOT a God some 'higher power'  | 41       | <i>Atheist/Apatheist?</i>  |
| Don't know   | 20       | <i>Agnostic/fuzzy believer/Apatheist?</i>                        |

**Table 1.** 2013 YouGov poll on how do the “non-religious” relate to the concept of a God?

### Key Points

- All that can be reliably concluded about the non-religious is that they have specifically rejected religion; religion cannot therefore be used as a collective, inclusive framework.
- Further research is needed in this area.

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia. Apatheism. [viewed 10 Apr 16]. Available from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apatheism>

<sup>11</sup> YouGov/University of Lancaster Survey for Westminster Faith Debates. 18 Jun 13. [viewed 10 Apr 16]. Available from [http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/4vs1srt1h1/YG-Archive-University-of-Lancaster-Faith-Matters-Debate-full-results-180613-website.pdf](http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/4vs1srt1h1/YG-Archive-University-of-Lancaster-Faith-Matters-Debate-full-results-180613-website.pdf)

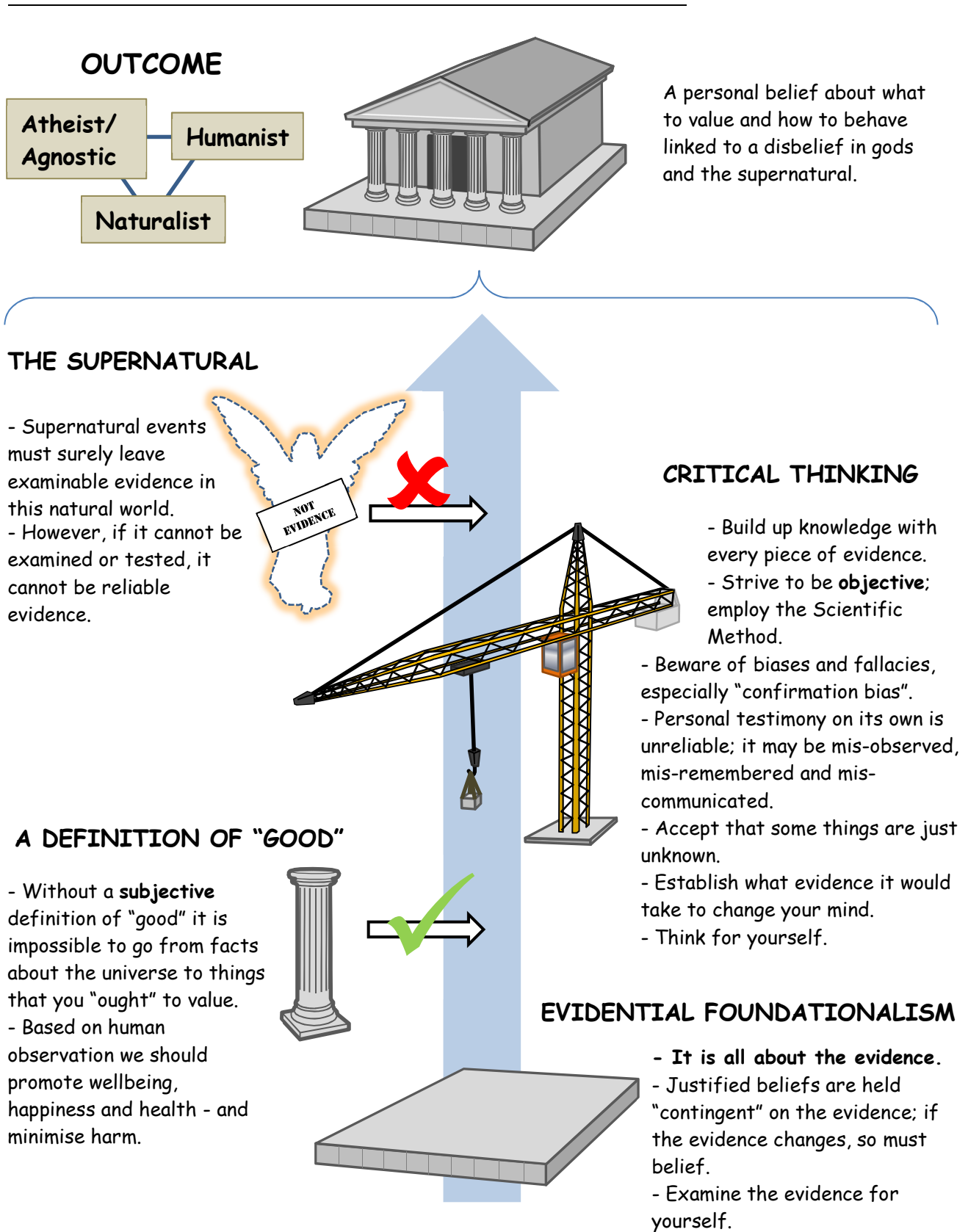


Figure 7. Humanism and non-belief; the epistemic thread.

## 4 **No-religion, Humanism and the Army**

*“Sympathetic as I am to aspects of the humanist case, I fear it is out of its depth when confronted by certain realities of soldiering that require theological concepts of sin, confession, penance, forgiveness, mercy, atonement, grace.”*

Rev Andrew Totten MBE<sup>12</sup>

- 4.1 **“No religion” and Atheism as a “rejection identity”.** It is easy to see “no religion”, especially Atheism, as an identity defined purely as a rejection of religion in a society or culture where religious belief is common place. It is true that “Atheism” simply means an absence of belief in gods, however at the level of the *whole individual* this is a misleading over-simplification. Atheists and other non-religious people *do* have other, complementary and complex systems of beliefs. People cannot just be defined by what they *don’t* believe. For many, if not most, the beliefs that the non-religious hold are *humanistic*; they focus on the wellbeing of humans and sentient creatures during this one life we live. Indeed, as Figure 7 shows, there is a strong epistemic thread that connects Atheism to Humanism – even if it is rarely acknowledged.
- 4.2 **What is Humanism?** It can be a little hard to pin down what exactly is “Humanism” as there is no Chief Humanist, no church and no holy text to establish orthodoxy – it is open to interpretation. Nevertheless based on the definition given by the British Humanist Association (BHA), Humanism entails:
- Rejection of the supernatural.
  - Basing ethical decisions on reason, empathy and a concern for humans.
  - Making the welfare of humanity *in this life*, as the basis of moral action.
  - Advocating that human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same.

Philosopher and academic AC Grayling, describes Humanism as an approach to life that *“requires only open eyes, sympathy and reason”*.<sup>13</sup>

- 4.3 **Spirituality without belief in Gods.** Whether spirituality exists outside the context of religious belief is perhaps one of the more contentious issues regarding non-belief. Unfortunately the word “spiritual” is so closely connected to religious belief that many on both sides of the argument simply refuse to accept the use of the word in anything other than a religious context.

*“Most secularist definitions of spirituality are in any case an indicator of wanting to have one’s cake and eat it. Many refer to ‘transcendence’, but it is not clear what this means in a secularist worldview. Religions have a more-or-less well-developed sense of transcendence because they have a belief in the divine. What transcendence means for those who are confident that there is no such thing, is far from clear. One might make a similar point with regard to references of the ‘sacred’. How is it possible to have a concept of the sacred, inclusive or otherwise, in a worldview that refuses any concept of the holy?”*

Maj Gen Tim Cross, former president of the Armed Forces Christian Union<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> TOTTEN MBE, Reverend Andrew. Chaplaincy and Moral Soldiering. *British Army Review*, Winter 2012, Number 153, pp 81-90.

<sup>13</sup> GRAYLING A C. The milk of humanist kindness. *Guardian*. 21 Nov 06. [viewed 19 Nov 15]. Available from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/nov/21/humanismandreligion>

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However, spirituality *is* about having a sense of awe and wonder, of being inspired by the natural world or human achievement. It is about having a feeling of transcendence; the ability to rise above everyday experience. It is about self-identity, self-worth and self-esteem. Spirituality speaks of a sense of purpose and meaning in life when faced with difficult and challenging experiences. Spiritual health therefore addresses “emotional development or emotional literacy, and aesthetic awareness”.<sup>15</sup> As Sam Harris argues, spirituality fortifies people against shocks and buttresses them against stress.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.4 **Objections to Humanism.** Rev Totten is not alone in his doubts about the suitability of Humanism for soldiers on combat operations:

##### 4.4.1 **“Soldiers need to believe in the Afterlife”.** In the same article in the BAR,<sup>14</sup> Maj Gen Cross also made this point:

*“To paraphrase the slogan of the British Humanist Association that this is ‘the one life we have’ - is anything but compassionate and would undoubtedly undermine morale for those soldiers for whom death is a genuine possibility”*

However, many other soldiers may be equally as motivated by how we are remembered.

*“What we do in life, echoes in eternity”<sup>17</sup>*

##### 4.4.2 **“Only a religious belief can underpin our values and standards”.** In the course of professional debate, several people have asserted that morality is not possible without a religious foundation. However, the preface to the Army’s guide to its values and standards says;

*“They [the British Army values and standards] reflect, and are consistent with, the moral virtues and ethical principles that underpin any decent society”*

“Values and Standards of the British Army”, January 2008

...“any decent society”, not just a religious one.

##### 4.4.3 **Belief in belief.** Religious belief can clearly be an extremely powerful motivator for many people. There are many benefits to an individual from holding a strong personal belief<sup>18</sup>; a sense of wellbeing, comfort, companionship etc. However, a personal belief does not need to be religious to be effective. A recent study<sup>19</sup> by Oxford University suggests that:

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<sup>14</sup> CROSS, General Tim. What has God got to do with Military Capability? A different view. *British Army Review*, Spring/summer 2014, Number 160, pp 59-66

<sup>15</sup> “Spirituality - What on Earth is it?” International Conference of Children’s Spirituality at Roehampton Institute, Summer 2000 by Marilyn Mason, Education Officer of the British Humanist Association.

<sup>16</sup> HARRIS, Sam. “Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion”, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Maximus Decimus Meridius, Commander of the Armies of the North and General of the Felix Legions. *Gladiator* [film]. Directed by Ridley SCOTT. USA: Universal Pictures, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> JONES, James W. Religion, Health, and the Psychology of Religion: How the Research on Religion and Health Helps Us Understand Religion. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 2004, 43 (4), pp 317–328.

<sup>19</sup> (e) *Science News*. [viewed 18 Mar 15]. Available

from <http://esciencenews.com/articles/2013/06/05/belief.science.increases.stressful.situations>

*“It’s not just believing in God that is important for gaining these psychological benefits, it is belief in general. It may be that we as humans are just prone to have belief, and even atheists will hold non-supernatural beliefs that are reassuring and comforting.”*

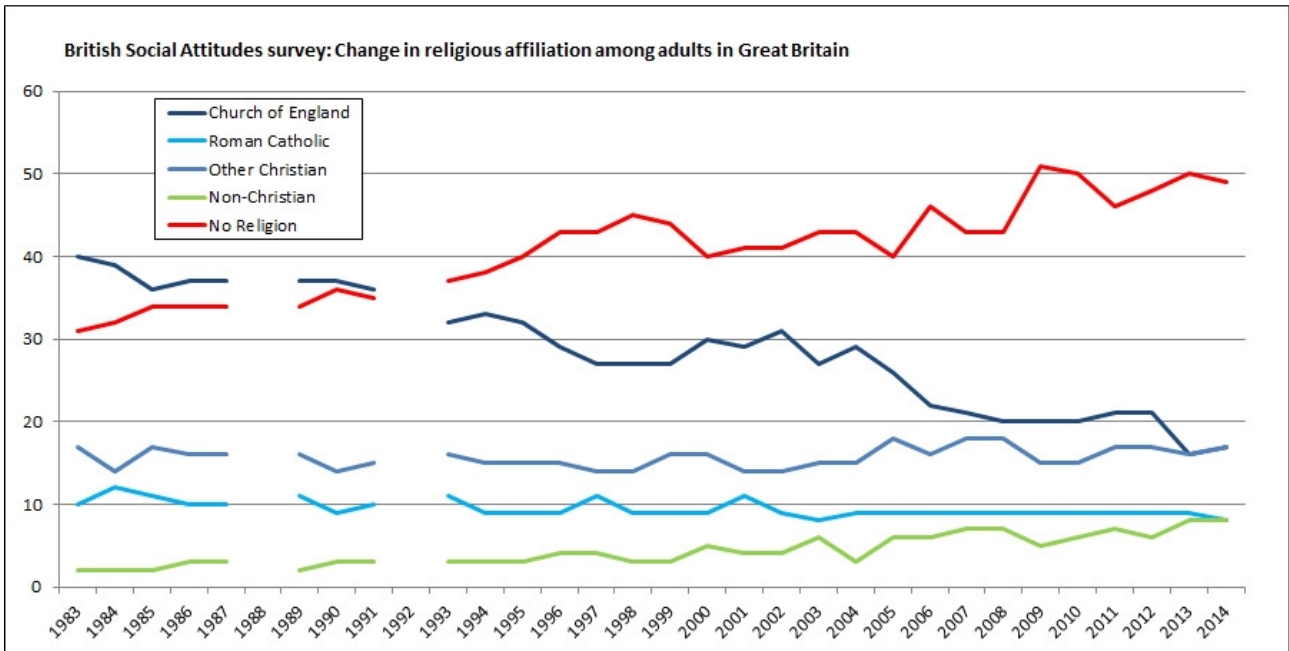
- 4.5 **“O-Negative” Humanism.** Applying the definition above, Humanism’s rejection of the supernatural makes it incompatible with religious beliefs. However, if one leaves open the question of whether the supernatural exists, the result is, arguably, what is tacitly accepted in the UK as the basis of a “decent society”. In the same way that O-negative blood is the universal donor (anyone can accept it) this “O-Negative Humanism” could provide a moral framework that is compatible with any reasonable philosophy, whether religious or not. In effect it would provide the natural progression of our current “All Souls” ministry, but would include both our polytheistic and non-believing soldiers. What matters are your values and how you live by them; it is of secondary importance how you think that you have come to form them. This then is the basis for a secular underpinning of our military values and standards.
- 4.6 **Are the non-religious all Humanists?** As explained in Chapter 3, not all non-religious soldiers reject the supernatural. Therefore they cannot all be Humanists. Even though most people may, arguably, have a *humanistic* philosophy, this does not mean that all Atheists and Agnostics should automatically be assumed to be *Humanists* without some explicit acceptance of this “label” on their part. Sadly, JPA does not accurately record the number of Humanists in the Armed Forces (see Annex A).
- 4.7 **Humanist as chaplains.** To be a chaplain in a Regular Army unit, one must be an ordained minister from one of the officially recognised sending churches.<sup>2</sup> All are Christian.<sup>20</sup> However it is important not to over-look that we also have 5 chaplains employed directly by the MOD from the world faiths. The chaplains are Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Muslim. They work as MOD civilians in an advisory and pastoral role across the three Services. They do not have specific unit responsibilities and, unlike Royal Army Chaplains’ Department (RACHD) chaplains, have responsibility only for those of their faith. There are no Humanist chaplains; you *absolutely must be religious* to be a chaplain of any sort in the Armed Forces.

### Key Points

- Although the non-religious eschew faith-based spiritualism, they do still need and can benefit from the spiritual support of someone who shares their philosophical perspective; welfare officers simply aren’t enough. It is therefore unsupportable that non-religious Humanists are barred from being chaplains.
- “O-Negative” Humanism should form the basis for a secular underpinning of our values and standards.
- What matters are your values and how you live by them; it is of secondary importance how you think that you have come to form them.

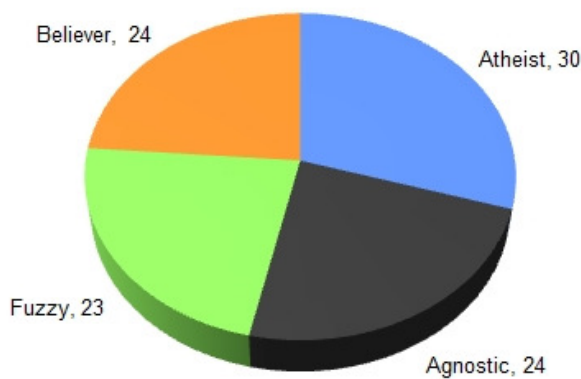
<sup>20</sup> There is one Jewish chaplain attached to a Reserve unit for historic reasons.



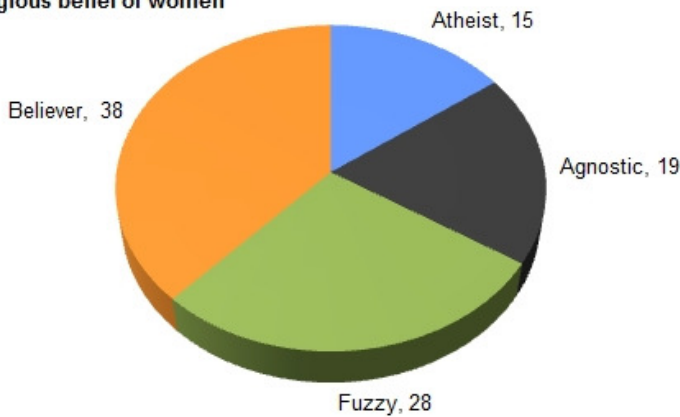


**Figure 8.** The British Social Attitudes survey shows how the decline in Church of England numbers broadly mirrors the rise in “no religion”.

**Religious belief of men**



**Religious belief of women**



**Figures 9 and 10.** A report by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies shows how, for many people, there is a fuzzy boundary between belief and non-belief. There is also a significant difference in religious belief between men and women.

## 5 **Religious faith no longer unites us**

- 5.1 **Christian decline.** Attendance at Church of England services is in decline. It is widely recognised that this is due to “generational replacement”; older members dying and not being replaced by younger ones.<sup>21</sup> Figure 8 shows the results of the British Social Attitudes survey run by NatCen, an independent social research organisation which conducts research for the government and charities. Although the sample size is small (1,500 to 4,500) each year, it has collected data since 1983 and has been able to identify emerging societal trends. All respondents were asked: "Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion? If 'Yes': Which?" The key observations made by NatCen were:
- 5.1.1 **Anglican decline.** The Church of England has been in decline for over 30 years and that decline appears to have accelerated over the last decade.
  - 5.1.2 **Rise in No Religion.** The largest group are those who say they have no religion. They now account for around half (49%) of all people in Britain.
  - 5.1.3 **Non-Christian Religions.** There has also been a significant rise in the proportion of people from religions other than Christianity. Islam is the largest such group. It has grown from around 0.5% of the population in 1983 to around 5% in 2014.
- 5.2 **Fuzzy Belief.** The “1970 British Cohort” study has been surveying the same group of 9,000 people from mainland UK born in 1970, since they were 16. The Centre for Longitudinal Studies manages the study and various academics periodically publish the results of their analysis. Professor David Voas of the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, has recently used the study’s data to publish “The mysteries of religion and the lifecourse”.<sup>22</sup> The report found that religious affiliation remained largely stable throughout adulthood. The real changes that are most evident are those between age 16 and adulthood. A substantial proportion of teenagers who reported that religion was an important part of their lives became relatively unreligious adults. However, the report also found that many individuals go back and forth between the religious and non-religious categories, because the boundaries are fuzzy, responses are sensitive to question wording and context, and many people are relatively indifferent to the issue. The report concluded that 24% of men were “believers” and 30% were Atheists. The rest were “fuzzy” believers<sup>23</sup> or Agnostics.<sup>24</sup> There was also a significant difference between men and women; men being much less religious. This is probably a more accurate picture of subtleties of actual belief in the Army.
- 5.3 **The Faith in a Foxhole Survey.** There is a scarcity of published academic research into religious belief on contemporary operations. One notable exception is the *Faith in a Foxhole Survey*<sup>25</sup> by Reverend Peter King. Rev King was the Padre of a ground-holding Battle Group in Afghanistan between October 2011 and April 2012. The Battle Group was engaged in heavy fighting, losing 23 soldiers with many more very seriously injured. On return to the UK, Rev King held a chaplains’ focus group of seven padres with recent

<sup>21</sup> Daily Telegraph online. Church of England attendance plunges to record low. 12 Jan 06. [viewed 30 Jan 16]. Available from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/12095251/Church-of-England-attendance-plunges-to-record-low.html>

<sup>22</sup> VOAS, David. The mysteries of religion and the lifecourse. CLS Working paper 2015/1, Jan 15.

<sup>23</sup> “Fuzzy” believers either believe in an Afterlife, but not God, or they sometimes believe in God and sometimes not.

<sup>24</sup> Agnostics believe it is not possible to know whether or not God exists.

<sup>25</sup> KING, Reverend Peter CF, RChD and Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies. Faith in a Foxhole? Researching combatant religiosity amongst British soldiers on contemporary operations. *The Defence Academy Yearbook*, 2013, pp 2-10.



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operational experience to garner their comments. In conjunction with Cardiff University he also sent questionnaires to members of the Battle Group to see whether their tough tour had made them more open to religious faith. Of particular interest however are the comments from the panel of padres:

- *“Operations give soldiers almost an excuse to be more spiritual...it’s more acceptable”, “they definitely expect the Padre to pray for them and appreciate all that he is”.*
- However another perceived a ‘complete pagan base’, declaring: *“at our peril we dress it up as spirituality I think it’s no more than superstition whether you offer them...Buddha, Gaia...Jesus Christ...they don’t care...they just want a bit of luck”.*
- One chaplain concluded: *“whether there was genuine faith or the seedlings of faith or Talisman mentality; if we were being realistic there is probably a real mixture of it all”.*

**5.4 The importance of belief amongst soldiers.** The *Faith in a Foxhole* survey gave a great insight into the role that religious belief may play on operations. Remarkably, although 75.6% said they were Christian, the majority of soldiers (64.5%) said that God did not exist or that they were uncertain there was a god. See Figures 18 and 19 at Annex A. This means that most soldiers should probably be described as Atheist or Agnostic/“Fuzzy” believers. For many, if not most, it seems that Christian ritual is indeed a talisman, a good luck charm; they’ll take all the help that they can possibly get. Ritual, especially surrounding group bonding and remembering the fallen, is particularly important - whether the soldier is religious or not. Nevertheless, the *Faith in a Foxhole* survey showed how religious belief (whatever that might entail) is important for a large number of our soldiers.

**5.5 Why Christianity?** Religious belief can clearly be an extremely powerful motivator for many people. There are many benefits to an individual from holding a strong personal belief,<sup>26</sup> a sense of wellbeing, comfort, companionship etc. Historically, many Catholic soldiers would seek a priest’s absolution of sins before battle and would feel comfort in knowing that should they die, they were free of all sin and so would go to heaven. For those that believe prayer works, the act of praying can re-establish a sense of control and a feeling that they are doing something to address an intractable problem. Some even say that “there are no Atheists in foxholes”. There is no denying that religious belief can be useful, particularly to soldiers. However some religious beliefs such as Sikhism and Islam, are arguably better, more effective for soldiers. These faiths have strong warrior traditions which emphasise the military values we cherish. Indeed as recently reported on the Defence Intranet, the Hindu festival of Diwali is the story of Lord Rama’s triumphant return from exile. A story which;

*“...emphasises the messages of courage, commitment, discipline, respect, integrity and loyalty – themes reflected by the Armed Forces’ core values”<sup>27</sup>*

If the reason we retain our official religiousness is because religious belief is useful for soldiers, why should the British Army specifically endorse Christianity? What makes it more suitable than other beliefs? However, officially endorsing a particular religion just

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<sup>26</sup> JONES, James W. Religion, Health, and the Psychology of Religion: How the Research on Religion and Health Helps Us Understand Religion. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 2004, 43 (4), pp 317–328.

<sup>27</sup> Defence Intranet. [viewed 19 Nov 15]. Available from <http://defenceintranet.diif.r.mil.uk/News/BySubject/PeopleinDefence/Pages/TheArmedForcesHinduNetworkandHMSPresidentcelebrateDiwali,thefestivaloflights.aspx>

because it is seen as “useful” would be distastefully cynical. It is far better to leave it to individuals to choose a faith (or none) and to encourage them to develop those beliefs.

### Key Points

- Religious belief in the UK is becoming much less homogeneous. With the huge rise in numbers who are non-religious, it is clear that religion is no longer a unifying factor.
- Data from the *Faith in a Foxhole* survey shows that even though most soldiers may declare on JPA that they are Christian, in practice they are probably Agnostic or Atheist.
- Regardless of statistics, many people argue that soldiers on operations need religion. However at best this is an argument for why an *individual soldier* should have a strong belief, not why the *Army itself*, should be officially religious.

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# Religious Issues

Does God exist?

No

Yes

VATICAN MUSEUMS

## Secularism

Neutral on religious issues

**Figure 11.** *Secularism isn't anti-religious. It is a-religious; it is neutral on religious issues. In a religiously plural organisation, secularism is the only means of ensuring inclusivity. [Image Wikimedia Commons]*

## 6 *Inclusivity through secularism*

6.1 **What does “secular” mean?** Being secular simply means keeping official business and religion separate. It does not mean banning religion. Religion is left to individuals to pursue as their conscience dictates. In a religiously plural organisation, secularism is the only means of ensuring *inclusivity* by neither privileging nor disadvantaging anyone because of their religion or belief.

6.2 **Objections to secularism.** In an article in the BAR,<sup>28</sup> Rev Dr Philip McCormack wrote:

*“On what authority does a minority exclusionist form of secularism take the right to define what is appropriate in the public square and to limit where religious belief is permissible?”*

This is an objection to the loss of privilege. It is not the role of the Army to promote any particular religion. Secularism is not anti-religious. The Constitution of the USA establishes it as a secular nation. Church attendance and religious belief is stronger there than in officially Christian UK.<sup>29</sup> India adopted a secular Constitution as the only practical way to get its multi-religious country to function effectively. Secularism is clearly not a threat to religious belief. A secular Army would safeguard individual religious worship.

6.3 **Secularism as applied to the Army.** For the Army (or indeed all the Services) secularism simply means affording Christianity the same status as other religions; Christianity would no longer be specially privileged. A secular British Army would not seek to ban religious belief – simply make it a personal matter. Soldiers would be supported and encouraged to develop their own beliefs if they wished to do so. In practice, there are 3 areas that need to be addressed:

6.3.1 **Collective Remembrance.** Our *sacred* collective acts should no longer be exclusively Christian services.

6.3.2 **Chaplaincy.** It is impractical to have chaplains representative of every possible belief in each single unit. Therefore a secular chaplaincy is required - one which is also open to those of no faith and which is trained to minister to all faiths and none.

6.3.3 **Language and culture.** From declaring that “there are no Atheists in foxholes” to prohibiting soldiers from changing religion without the Commanding Officer’s permission, there is much about our language and culture that must change.

### Key Points

- A secular British Army would not ban religion, but would encourage its soldiers to develop their beliefs, if they wished to do so.
- A secular British Army privileges no one belief above another, making it inclusive and meaningful for all.

<sup>28</sup> McCORMACK, Reverend Dr PJ. In Defence of Liberty. *British Army Review*, Spring/Summer, Number 163, pp 76-83.

<sup>29</sup> Wikipedia, Church attendance. [viewed 23 May 14] Available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_attendance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_attendance)





**Figure 12.** “We will remember them.” This is what an act of remembrance is about – not about worshipping a particular God. [Photograph copyright MOD]

## 7 **Remembrance and sacred collective acts**

- 7.1 **The role of remembrance within the military.** Acts of remembrance serve many purposes and meet a number of needs. First, at the level of the individual, they provide an occasion to focus minds on the loss of a friend in order to strengthen and encourage one another. This helps with the grieving process that many may be going through. Second, in a more general sense, we hold these acts of remembrance to honour the memory of our dead. In doing so, we remind ourselves of the sacrifices that we, as soldiers, may have to make in the discharge of our duty. They are an opportunity for us to reaffirm our pledge to remember our fallen, to recall the fellowship we share with their memory. It shows our younger soldiers that we hold their lives dear and that should they die, their memory will live on within our collective consciousness in some symbolic way. The participation by soldiers in acts of remembrance therefore is an essential component in developing a professional Army and in fostering unit cohesion and identity. Acts of remembrance *do* need to be formal military occasions.
- 7.2 **Religious faith is not a connecting framework.** Chapter 2 describes how “no religion” is the most rapidly growing philosophical position in the Armed Forces. Figure 1 shows that our younger people are increasingly more likely to declare that they have no religion. Chapter 5 then explains how, therefore, religion is no longer a framework that unites us. Consequently, because our sacred acts of group-bonding are built around religious worship, they are increasingly failing to be inclusive.
- 7.3 **“Sacred”, but not religious.** The word “sacred” is intentionally used here as it is the best, most appropriate word to use. Deeply symbolic, cherished, emotive and uniquely significant – the word “sacred” is applicable to these ceremonies whether they are religious or not. Rather like the regimental colours of an infantry battalion, “sacred” can be the proper word to use in a secular, a-religious context.
- 7.4 **The toxicity of lip service.** Most people enjoy singing in a group and as soldiers we expect to join in collective affirmations. The desire by soldiers to take part in remembrance can be, in effect, misappropriated by the religious aspects of the service. For example, we often choose soldiers from Private to Commanding Officer, to read chapters of the Bible adding “this is the word of the Lord”, at the end. Do they all actually believe what it is they have read out, or is it that they accept it as something we are simply expected to do? Indeed throughout the whole remembrance service, all those on parade are invited to repeat many solemn oaths or pledges, such as to serve God. Many may do so, as they feel it is expected of them as part of the ritual of the service. However, how many people honestly, fully mean what it is they are forswearing? In doing so, we are effectively training soldiers to ignore the bits they don’t actually believe. They “tune out” and very often simply just speak the words without actually meaning what they say. When we encourage soldiers to say things they don’t truly believe and endorse, we are teaching them to pay lip service to declarations that are meant to be taken seriously. This undermines our attempts to inculcate the other things that really matter; our values and standards. We need to teach our soldiers to mean every word they say at these occasions, not merely recant what they feel is expected of them. The lip service we teach our soldiers is toxic to our efforts to get them to internalise our values and standards. This prevents us from demonstrating that we really are a values-based organisation. This in turn hinders us from establishing a credible counter-narrative to the negative stereotype and propaganda we face on operations.
- 7.5 **Military parade or religious service?** Most units publish the timings of Remembrance Service on Part 1 Orders. They instruct personnel where and when to parade and in what dress. This is a formal order to attend and is allowed under The Queen’s Regulations for the Army. However the Regulations make it clear that personnel cannot be compelled to take part in religious services of a belief different from their own. Non-Christian soldiers are

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therefore present on parade, shoulder-to-shoulder with their Christian comrades, but are simply considered to be, in effect, by-standers to the service. Is this the standard of inclusivity we should accept?

7.6 **Including all our soldiers in collective acts.** In his article in the BAR<sup>14</sup>, Maj Gen Cross claimed that our collective Christian acts are inclusive but then advised that soldiers should be “given the opportunity to exclude themselves” during Christian acts of worship. How can this be done in practice, when religious ritual is threaded throughout our remembrance parades etc.? One is forced either to be excluded from a unit’s collective acts or say/do something one feels uncomfortable with. There is no doubt that our acts of remembrance are essential to us both on a human level and as a corporate collective act. All soldiers, religious or not, recognise the importance of acts of remembrance.<sup>25</sup> Symbolism, ritual, silence and the hallowing of sacrifice are highly valued. In order for them to connect with all our soldiers and remain relevant and inclusive, we need to make our acts of remembrance secular. Servicemen and women overwhelmingly wish to attend a remembrance parade. Why make this key military activity religious, when doing so excludes many of our people? Making these sacred rituals secular would increase their relevance and meaning for everyone. Either the words are important and mean something, or they don’t. If they don’t matter, then why object to changing them? The fact is they should and *do* matter very much.

7.7 **Unit Collects.** The *Faith in a Foxhole* survey showed that unit Collects (collective prayers that specifically mention the unit) are important to all soldiers – even to non-believers. Their importance, therefore, cannot be their religious content, but rather the solemn collective act itself. For example, take the Collect of the Corps of Royal Engineers; instead of promising to “*do our duty, and so glorify Thee, our Father in heaven*”, the Sappers could say:

*We are soldiers, combat and professional engineers.  
We are in the vanguard of the breach and the bastion during withdrawal.  
We are wherever right and glory lead.  
We are Sappers and our fellowship holds fast, **Everywhere.***

Each phrase in this secular version has historic resonance with Sappers and so connects with all members of the Corps regardless of religious belief. It is clearly possible to change unit Collects to make them traditional and inclusive.

7.8 **Secularism and Inclusivity.** No soldier would ever be turned away from an act of remembrance. Furthermore, our chain-of-command and our padres make considerable effort to include all our people and make them welcome. In this sense, these sacred acts are “inclusive”. However this is not the “inclusivity” of which I write. At the remembrance ceremony in Army HQ in 2015, the event began with these words:

*“We meet this day  
to glorify the God who sustains the world”*

This clearly is not an event that includes those who do not believe in gods. The current religious framework does not reflect what we all believe, what we value and why we come together for this collective act. “Multi-faith” obviously does not include those who have no religion. It simply does not include all our people – when it should. Given our increasingly diverse and plural backgrounds, secularism provides a means of achieving inclusivity.

7.9 **Always and only Christian.** It is not a question of having to endure someone else’s religious ceremony. The issue is that our ceremonies are *always* and *only* Christian. This

unduly favours one group at the expense of another. Theoretically, we could allow every group to have their say at this one, single event. However we'd end up with an awkward compromise akin to "Oh Lord, if you exist, which you probably don't, hear our prayers". This is clearly unworkable. A secular (religiously neutral) ceremony is needed.

- 7.10 **"A secular Remembrance isn't inclusive, it actually excludes people."** I'm not advocating secularism for its own sake, but merely as a means of achieving inclusivity. The case is simply that if we have one collective act, then it should not be explicitly religious. Those who wish to hold a religious service may do so afterwards, attending in uniform with our full support.
- 7.11 **"But soldiers don't complain about exclusion to their chain-of-command."** Most people only really think about this issue as the remembrance ceremony starts. It's a bit late then to speak up; afterwards the moment is lost and this is an uncomfortable subject to bring up. Furthermore given the clear and powerful endorsement the chain-of-command gives these events, anything that questions the practice has a whiff of disobedience about it. The fact remains there are many soldiers for whom this *is* an issue. They feel excluded from important collective rituals such as remembrance. If we are serious about wanting to be an inclusive Army, we need to address this.
- 7.12 **Remembrance and Britishness.** It is important to acknowledge that public acts of remembrance also take on a national significance. In a service in St Paul's to commemorate the battle of Waterloo, the Bishop of London, the Rt Revd Richard Chartres said that commemorating historic events such as the battle of Waterloo, helps to cement our Britishness.<sup>30</sup> He said that acts of public remembrance have always contributed powerfully to the coherence and sense of identity among groups or nations, adding:

*"Britishness cannot simply be defined by reference to abstract concepts, like tolerance or fairness. Admirable as they are, they cannot generate the energy required to sustain a civilisation. Civilisations die in the night when no one can remember why, once upon a time, they inspired self-sacrifice."*

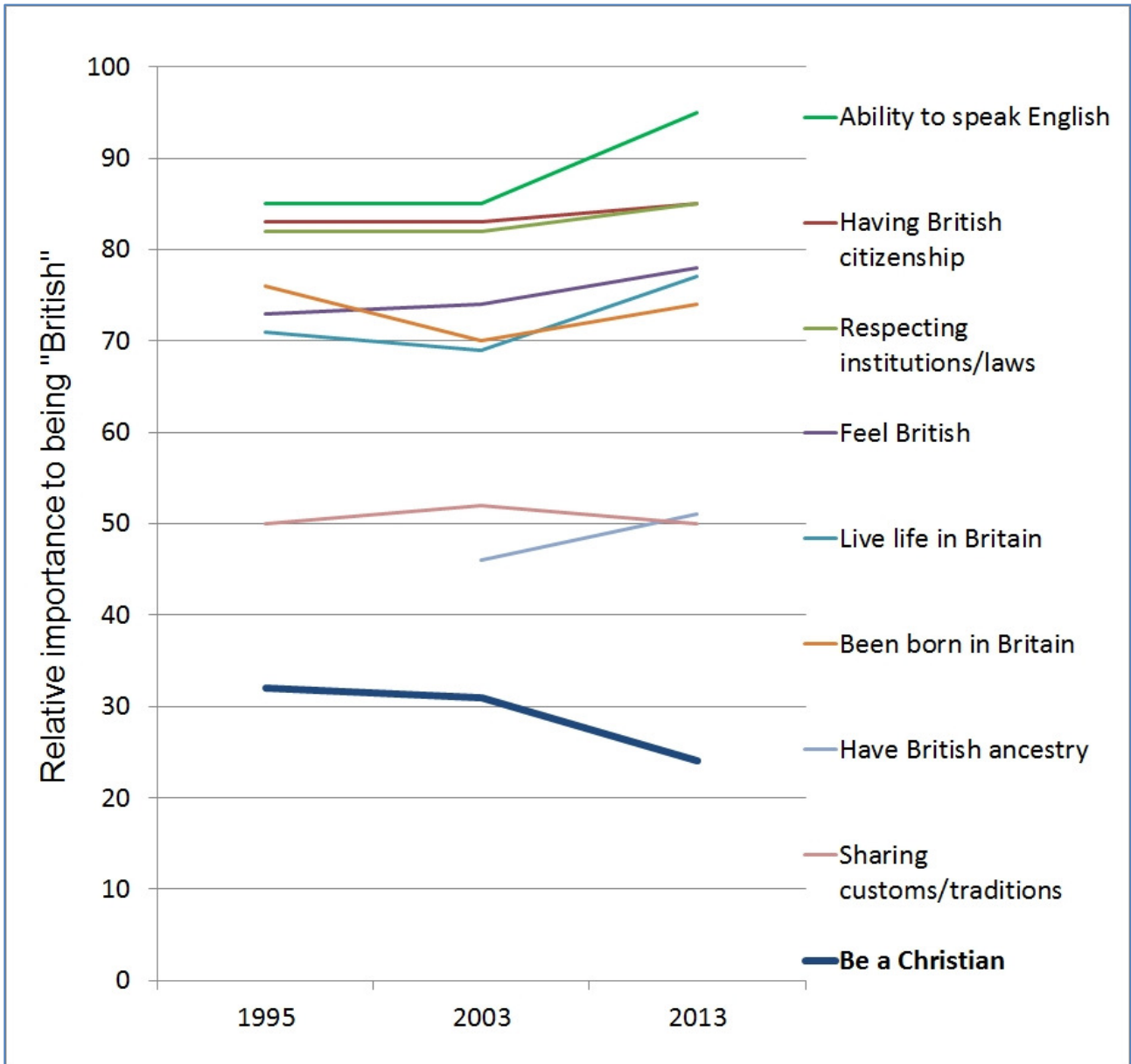
Powerful and wise words, yet what constitutes Britishness is hard to define and subject to change over time. The British Social Attitudes survey looked at a range of ethnic and civic attributes and found that "being Christian" was considered, by the public, to be the least important. See Figure 12.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore its significance is reducing more rapidly than any other attribute examined in the ongoing survey. Whilst acts of remembrance remain especially important to the people of Britain, the available evidence shows that their Christian framework is becoming much less significant.

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<sup>30</sup> Waterloo remembered: 'Recall past to cement Britishness' The Church Times, 26 Jun 15 [viewed 28 Jun 15]. Available from <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2015/26-june/news/uk/waterloo-remembered-recall-past-to-cement-britishness>.

<sup>31</sup> *Defining British identity*. NatCen, British Social Attitudes survey. [viewed 1 Jul 15]. Available from <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-31/national-identity/defining-british-identity.aspx>





**Figure 12.** Being Christian is the least significant factor in being “British” according to the British Social Attitudes Survey.

### Key Points

- Vigils, unit Collects and other acts of collective remembrance need to become inclusive. Having non-Christian soldiers attending as mere by-standers at a Christian service is not the level of inclusivity to which we should aspire.
- If we have one, unifying collective act of remembrance, then it should not be explicitly religious. Those that wish to hold a religious service may do so afterwards, attending in uniform with our full support.
- It may be difficult for the Armed Forces to change how public acts of remembrance are conducted. However, those held by military units on military bases are easily within our power to change.

## 8 *A secular chaplaincy*

- 8.1 **The need for a secular chaplaincy.** As religion becomes an ever more contentious and divisive topic throughout the world, a secular chaplaincy would provide inclusive leadership across the Army. It would underpin our military capability by being an obvious demonstration to our commitment to being a values-based organisation without any religious bias and by focusing on our values and standards, it would promote cohesion rather than dwelling on our differences.
- 8.2 **Spreading the word of God.** In the Army Chaplain's Handbook, our chaplains are specifically forbidden from proselytizing (trying to convert people to their faith). However, it is the duty of every Christian to spread God's word.<sup>32</sup> Through the handbook, Army chaplains are instructed to do this in the tradition of their particular sending church; to "set forth God's word at all times".<sup>33</sup> In an annex to the handbook, the Chaplain General details the framework for this as part of *Missio Dei* (God's Mission); this is the basis of modern missionary work. *However, spreading the word of God has nothing to do with military capability.* The operational need for chaplains is beyond doubt, but they don't need to be religious. Indeed whether chaplains, as individuals, have a religious belief should be immaterial. A secular chaplaincy would retain the key features required to support military capability, whilst leaving religious issues to the individual.
- 8.3 **Inclusive leadership through a secular chaplaincy.** In an article in the BAR,<sup>11</sup> Rev Andrew Totten MBE made a good case for retaining the Army's chaplaincy. However his article failed to establish why that chaplaincy should be Christian. A secular chaplaincy would provide the inclusive leadership we need and would be the focal point for our bonding, sacred acts. A secular chaplaincy, just like our current system, would have 3 roles; moral, pastoral and spiritual.
- 8.3.1 **Focal point for advice on morality and ethics.** Supporting the chain of command, but external to it, the secular chaplain provides an important sounding-board for moral issues. Our values and standards are secular. A secular chaplain should therefore, be just as well, if not better, placed to explain them within that wider context in order that our soldiers are able to apply them in today's complex operations.
- 8.3.2 **Provision of pastoral welfare.** Our chaplains have repeatedly proved their worth in their welfare role. Having a secular chaplain would not change this.
- 8.3.3 **Focus for spiritual wellbeing.** The *Faith in a Foxhole* survey suggests that there is a need to provide spiritual support. It just does not have to be religious.
- 8.4 **Charter of a secular chaplain.** The charter of a secular chaplaincy would be primarily concerned with the interests and welfare of humans and consequently be broadly *humanistic* in nature. A secular chaplain:
- Strongly focuses on our values and standards. For example a chaplain must be able to look a gay soldier in the eye and tell them it is OK for them to physically love someone of the same sex. They have to believe that people who are homosexual should be treated exactly the same as everyone else.
  - Makes ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for humans and other sentient animals.

<sup>32</sup> Mark 16:15-16 "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

<sup>33</sup> RACHD, Chaplain's Handbook (2014), p 6.

- Advocates that human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same.
- Considers the basis of moral action is the welfare of humanity.
- Must not proselytize but should encourage others to reflect on morality and foster a solid personal belief through any compatible philosophy; arranges access to priests, imams etc. if required.
- Must never excuse killing in God's name, or consider our military operations to be doing "God's work". The narrative of lethal force must only be expressed through the legitimacy of our mission and our endorsed Rules of Engagement.

There is nothing in this charter that is not compatible with any reasonable alternative philosophy. This leaves room for individuals to develop their religious beliefs if they wish. It also means that both religious and non-religious personnel may become unit chaplains. The most important criteria would be the desire to serve and help others, based on a concern for the welfare of soldiers.

- 8.5 **Recruitment and training.** Currently, because chaplains must be ordained ministers before they join the Army, much of the required selection and training has already been done for us. The Army would need to take on this role. In this we could learn much from our Dutch allies. Around a third of their chaplains are Humanists who, after selection, undergo graduate and post-graduate training in humanistic studies. All their chaplains are taught to lead non-religious, all-inclusive acts of remembrance.
- 8.6 **Retaining a religious cadre.** As explained in chapter 4, there are currently 5 civilian chaplains employed by the MOD from the world faiths. In a secular Army we would need to increase this pool to include representatives of some of the various Christian faiths and Humanism. Nevertheless, there will undoubtedly remain occasions when only an ordained priest will do, such as the administration of the *last rites* at a Field Hospital in a Main Operating Base. However, for those rare occasions, we could deliver this capability on a contracted basis much as we currently contract-out for other key services.
- 8.7 **Retaining the name "chaplain".** There have been some that have argued that only religious ministers or other holy men may be called a "chaplain". Not so. Secular chaplains would cover the same 3 key functions; moral, pastoral and spiritual – however they just don't necessarily have to be religious. Furthermore, the word "chaplain" is not under copyright. Take the word "marriage" for example. Many people used to insist that it was only to be used to describe the union of a man and a woman. The country (and the Army) now recognises same-sex marriage.

#### Key Points

- If we truly aspire to establish an unassailable reputation as an inclusive employer we need to create a secular chaplaincy.
- The current small cadre of MOD chaplains would be retained and augmented with Christian and Humanist representatives.

## 9 *Language and culture*

- 9.1 **“Wallpaper” issues.** Outwith Remembrance and chaplaincy, there are many other aspects of Army language, culture and practice where religion influences what we say and do. They are often so commonplace that they go as unnoticed as any background wallpaper.

### *Identity discs*

- 9.2 **Singling out individual soldiers for harsh treatment if captured.** A soldier's religious affiliation is recorded on his/her ID discs. If a soldier refuses to state a religion, they are stamped “ND” for “no denomination”. It is never left blank. In this way non-believers are marked out from their religious colleagues. In the event of capture by religious extremists, this key piece of personal data (protected by the Data Protection Act) is handed, *gratis*, to the captors. It may easily lead to non-believers and those of other faiths being singled out for harsh treatment. Imagine how Jewish, Muslim or Atheist soldiers may be treated by Islamist terrorists? Of course Islamists don't hate us just for our religious beliefs but, rather, for our Western values. However it is also true that in many parts of the world, some religious and philosophical positions are especially hated, particularly Judaism<sup>34</sup> and Atheism.<sup>35</sup>
- 9.3 **Safer ID discs.** All that is really needed on an ID disc is service number and contact details of the MOD. If the captors were genuinely interested in providing religious services they need only contact the MOD and a decision can be made whether or not to provide the information. Gone are the days when our front line needed a carrier pigeon or fast horse to communicate with HQ. Satellite phones and our deployed IT system ensure that should we need to know a soldier's religious affiliation we can quickly look it up; we don't need to rely on a metal disc around the neck.

### *Queen's Regulations for the Army*

- 9.4 **Queen's Regulations establish the Army as formally religious.** It is through QRs<sup>36</sup> that the Army establishes the pre-eminence of religion.<sup>37</sup> First published in 1731, they are regularly updated to reflect current circumstances. Unfortunately there are some clauses that seem rather anachronistic and run counter to the freedom of religion that we enjoy in the rest of the UK.

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<sup>34</sup> Even in Britain 37% of Jews do not display their religious identity. BBC News, 22 Mar 15, [viewed 2 May 15]. Available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-31993763>

<sup>35</sup> In fact in some countries it is illegal even to be an Atheist. International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). *Freedom of Thought 2014: A Global Report on Discrimination Against Humanists, Atheists, and the Non-religious*. pp 13. Available from: <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

<sup>36</sup> A copy of The Queen's Regulations for the Army is available from

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/223530/response/550986/attach/4/QR%20Army.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Clause J5.262. "The reverent observance of religion in the armed forces is of the highest importance.



**Figure 13.** *The formation flash of 8 Engineer Brigade is a crusader cross. Christian symbols are everywhere. How often do we pause to think about the effect this has on how others perceive us?*



9.5 **Atheists cannot, in effect, be Commanding Officers.** Clause J5.263 requires that;

*“Commanding officers are to encourage religious observance by those under their command and are themselves to set a good example in this respect.”*

It is difficult to see how an Atheist CO can comply with this.

9.6 **Soldiers can be ordered to attend a religious military religious parade.** Clause 5.268e sets out compulsory attendance at religious military parades:

*“...a CinC or GOC [a senior officer] may order a parade which includes a religious service on special occasions of national or local importance. No officer or soldier on such a parade is to be compelled to take part in a service of any denomination other than his own or in any joint service. In special circumstances, authority to order such a parade may be delegated to local commanders.”*

As explained in chapter 7, this clause binds Christian worship and remembrance together thereby excluding non-Christians.

9.7 **Soldiers must get permission to change religion.** By law, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change that religion or belief.<sup>38</sup> However, under the terms of QR clause 5.272, a soldier can only exercise this freedom if both his CO and chaplain allow it:

*“When a member of the armed forces wishes to change his denomination he is to notify his commanding officer, who is at once to inform the chaplain(s) concerned in order that the matter may be discussed with the individual and any necessary religious instruction given. The commanding officer is to arrange for the personal documents to be amended when he is satisfied that the individual has decided to make the change and is fully aware of the significance of his action, and when the chaplain concerned has notified the commanding officer of his concurrence in the change.”*

### **“There are no Atheists in foxholes”**

*“...for many Servicemen and women the old adage that ‘there are no atheists in a foxhole’ is one that has proved to be true.”*

*Soldier Magazine, December 2014.*

9.8 **What does this phrase mean?** The statement “there are no atheists in foxholes” is an aphorism used to argue that in times of extreme stress or fear, such as during combat, all people will turn to God for help. This phrase is often used to argue that soldiers need a religious belief. Sadly, it also implies that under operational pressure, Atheists lack the strength of conviction to hold true to their beliefs – so much for the Army value of “Respect for Others”.

9.9 **Are there Atheists in foxholes?** Undoubtedly, under great stress, humans can become desperate for help and support. If they are taught from an early age to pray at those times, it is possible that they may do so. However, there are many Atheists who have served and are serving on operations. In the US, members of the Military Association of Atheists &

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<sup>38</sup> Human Rights Act 1988, Article 9, Schedule 1. [viewed 2 Feb 16]. Available from <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/schedule/1/part/1/chapter/8>

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Freethinkers<sup>39</sup> publicly display their military service in order to show that there are Atheists in foxholes. The JPA data highlighted in chapter 2 shows that there *are* Atheists in foxholes – lots of them.

## **“This is a Christian country”**

9.10 **What does it mean to say that this is a Christian country?** In professional debate, one of the first arguments people routinely raise against having a secular Army is that they say that “this is a Christian country”. When people make this claim they may be inferring a number of things:

9.10.1 **“This is an officially Christian country”.** This all depends on what exactly is meant by “this country”. *England* has an established religion but the rest of the *UK* does not. How then is this point relevant to the UK’s Armed Forces?

9.10.1.1 **What does it mean to have an “established church”?** If a church is “established” it simply means that it is officially endorsed by the state. The (Anglican) Church of England became the independent established church in England and Wales from 1534 as a result of the English Reformation. There are 23 Anglican bishops in our Parliament and our monarch is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Our Parliament votes on certain matters concerning the running of the Anglican Church. However, having an established Church does not confer a legal, moral or constitutional obligation on the Armed Forces to be officially religious.

9.10.1.2 **What about the rest of the UK?** In Scotland, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, established in a separate Scottish Reformation in the sixteenth century, is recognised as the “national” church. It is not subject to state control and our monarch is an ordinary member (not the head), required to swear an oath to “maintain and preserve the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Government” upon his or her accession to the throne. The (Anglican) Church in Wales was disestablished in 1920. The (Anglican) Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1870 before the partition of Ireland; there is no established church in Northern Ireland. “England” does not equal the “UK”, therefore there is no established church of the UK as such. There is no logic in linking an established Church of England to the Armed Forces of the UK.

9.10.2 **“We are culturally Christian”.** It has also been argued that most of us are “*christian with a small c*”. What exactly this means and how it differs from “*humanist with a small h*” is unclear. Besides, as individuals, most of us are far more complex than this simple assertion presupposes:

*“Britain has been shaped for the better by many pre-Christian, non-Christian, and post-Christian forces. We are a plural society with citizens with a range of perspectives and a largely non-religious society. To constantly claim otherwise fosters alienation and division in our society.”*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers*. [viewed 18 Mar 15]. Available from <http://militaryatheists.org/atheists-in-foxholes/>

<sup>40</sup> Open letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 Apr 14 from 50 prominent public figures. [viewed 5 Oct 15]. Available from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/10777417/David-Cameron-fosters-division-by-calling-Britain-a-Christian-country.html>

9.10.3 **“Most of us are Christians”**. Chapter 5 casts considerable doubt over the claim that most people in the UK are practising Christians. However the main flaw in claiming that “most of us are Christian” is its implicit assertion; that in a democracy, the view of the majority negates the contribution of others. To put it more bluntly, would you also say we are a “white country”? The UK is more ethnically white (87.7%)<sup>41</sup> than it is Christian (59.5%). However, we wouldn’t dream of saying we are a “white country” or indeed a “white Army”? The Army is statistically more white (89.6%) than it is Christian (80.3%). Would it be right to tell our black and Asian soldiers they are in a “white Army” defending a “white Country”? Then why then tell our non-Christian soldiers that it is a “Christian country”? I’d prefer to say we have an Army in which neither colour nor religion is privileged. That’s what having a secular Army means.

### Key Points

- There is no operational justification to record religious belief on identify discs. Indeed to do so poses an unnecessary risk to personnel. Aren't we more likely to protect our soldiers if we remove religious affiliation from *everyone's* ID discs?
- Queen’s Regulations for the Army require amendment.
- “There are no Atheists in foxholes.” Let’s have no more condescending and misinformed use of this phrase. Belief in a religion is not a pre-requisite for courage in combat.
- Saying that this is a “Christian country” is untrue and irrelevant; it does not foster inclusion and we should stop claiming that it is.

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<sup>41</sup> 2011 Census, Table KS201UK; Ethnic group, local authorities in the United Kingdom. [viewed 5 Oct 15]. Available from <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-and-quick-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-the-united-kingdom---part-1/rft-ks201uk.xls>





**Figure 15.** Traditions aren't always what they seem. The image I use to characterise the debate on Defence Connect is a painting by John Singleton Copley. It is called *The Death of Major Peirson*, and was painted in 1783 following a brief skirmish to repel the French at the Battle of Jersey, 1781. The image works on many levels. First it symbolises the traditional heart of the British Army, defending our shores against those rascals, the French. Our soldiers stand shoulder-to-shoulder in unity under the Union Flag as, sadly, under that flag the gallant leader makes the ultimate sacrifice. Tradition is the main obstacle to the change that a secular Army would bring. However, look again, look closely. Right at the centre of the picture is a black officer. We tend to imagine we had an all-white army back then and were ethnically homogeneous – but we weren't. The argument that “we have always done it this way” fails when you take a look at the evidence and think clearly about the best way forward. [Image Wikimedia Commons]

## 10 Countering objections to secular inclusion

### Army, Church and Crown

- 10.1 **The British Establishment.** There is no doubt that the close intertwining of the Army, Church and Crown is seen by some as a reinforcement of the “British Establishment” - however elusive that concept may be. Therefore, anything that calls into question this nexus, or indeed de-couples it, may be perceived as an attack on the Establishment, the very fabric of this country. If truth be told, *this* is the source of the greatest institutional resistance to change. However, secular inclusion is not an attack on the Establishment. The Army has already accepted the importance of inclusivity; of changing our culture to make all our people feel a fully integrated part of the whole. Furthermore the “Establishment” has weathered many storms in the past, its adaptability and pragmatism ensuring its continuity and strength. The Church of England does not need the Army to bolster its position, nor does the Army need the Church to lend legitimacy and *gravitas* to its acts of collective remembrance.
- 10.2 **HM Forces.** Our monarch is Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and Head of the Church of England; “Defender of the Faith”. Our monarch can retain both positions; they are indeed two different jobs. There is no formal constitutional reason that requires the Armed Forces to be Anglican. Nor do military personnel have to share the same faith as the sovereign to demonstrate due respect and loyalty to the Crown. Clearly then, the position of the monarch will be in no way reduced by having a loyal, but secular, Army.

### *In the finest traditions...*

- 10.3 **“We’ve always done it this way.”** Interestingly, however, no we haven’t. For example, the first act of remembrance at the cenotaph was secular. After the first world war, recognising that the war dead were from a dizzying array of peoples, nations and creeds<sup>42</sup>, the prime minister insisted on a secular monument, specifically turning down requests for Christian symbols and inscriptions. At its dedication on 11 November 1919, there was no religious service. The King unveiled the cenotaph after which a 2 minutes’ silence was held.
- 10.4 **The importance of traditions.** Of course tradition is an essential part of the make-up of the British Army. Tradition helps generate cohesion and forges continuity beyond the mortal limitations of the individual. It gives us pride and our sense of who we are. Our traditions are very important to us, but to remain they must meet the needs of our modern military capability; sadly, Christianity is no longer something that unites us.

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<sup>42</sup> SNOW, Dan. Remembrance Sunday should not be dominated by religion. The Guardian. 6 Nov 14. [viewed 11 Oct 15]. Available from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/06/remembrance-sunday-lack-of-secular-presence>



## Army Values

- Courage
- Discipline
- Respect for others
- Integrity
- Loyalty
- Selfless commitment

## Christian Values

- Love of God
- Fidelity in marriage
- Renunciation of worldly goods
- Renunciation of violence
- Forgiveness of sins
- Unconditional love

## British Values

- Democracy
- Rule of law
- Individual liberty
- Mutual respect, tolerance

**Figure 16.** *The values of a culture or organisation reflect its role and purpose. It is not surprising therefore that Army, Christian and British values are different.*

## ***Our morality and Army values are based on Christianity***

10.5 **Do we really have “Christian” morality?** It is often claimed that our morality is based on Christianity. However, empathy, compassion, altruism, reciprocity and justice have all been hallmarks of human societies across the globe since before the Christian era. Our moral compass is partly innate but is also a product of our culture. Equality for women and homosexuals, prohibition of slavery, animal welfare and environmental custodianship are all modern developments. It is unhelpful and misleading to suggest that our morality is the product of *purely* Christian faith. The key tenets of what we consider to be our collective moral code are not unique to Christianity. For example, “treat others as you wish to be treated” is known as the Golden Rule and can be “found in some form in almost every ethical tradition”.<sup>43</sup> The sanctity of life is more emphatically observed in Jainism where its adherents are often vegetarian or vegan pacifists. Followers of the Bahá’í faith are taught to love all humans regardless of religion, race or community, and that they also should love their enemies. Even the concept of restraint in battle and the use of only minimum force was advocated by Sun Tzu, 500 years before Christ. Christianity has undoubtedly had some influence in shaping our moral code, but to label our morality as “Christian” is a misleading fallacy. It lays a false trail for issues of ethical discussion as it infers that our future course is best guided by the Bible, and its characterisation of good versus evil sets up an unhelpful false dichotomy which can lead to oversimplification. The suggestion that we should consider that we have “Christian” morality hobbles critical thinking with bias.

10.6 **Comparing Army and Christian values.** Values are a set of virtues that act as guiding principles, dictating behaviour and action. “*Values form the basis of how we make judgements and decisions about all we do and don’t do.*”<sup>44</sup> Different people, cultures and societies have different opinions on what constitutes a value/virtue; it all depends on the role and ethos of the specific society in question. The Army’s values<sup>45</sup> are of course:

- Courage
- Discipline
- Respect for others
- Integrity
- Loyalty
- Selfless commitment

Christianity does not have an “official list” of values in quite the same way, but based on the biblical teachings of Jesus these could include:

- Love of God
- Fidelity in marriage
- Renunciation of worldly goods
- Renunciation of violence
- Forgiveness of sins
- Unconditional love

Given the different roles of the church and Army it is unsurprising that the two lists are completely different.

10.7 **British values.** Sometimes when pressed, people suggest that Christian values are the basis of *British* values and as we are Britain’s Armed Forces, we need to retain a Christian

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<sup>43</sup> BLACKBURN, Simon. *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp 101.

<sup>44</sup> The Army Leadership Code; an Introductory Guide.” First edition, Sep 2015. AC72021.

<sup>45</sup> The Army’s sister Services have similar values. The RN list is almost identical to the Army’s; Commitment, Courage, Discipline, Respect for Others, Integrity and Loyalty. The RAF list looks different but when you read the definitions, they are very similar; Respect, Integrity, Service, Excellence.



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core. Yet, when you ask people what are “British values”, you get a wide and vague range of replies from “fairness” to “determination in the face of overwhelming odds”. Nevertheless, the government has listed what *it* feels are “British values” in so far as what should be taught in schools:<sup>46</sup>

- Democracy
- The rule of law
- Individual liberty
- Mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith

Again, this is a different list from what could reasonably be argued are *Christian* values.

10.8 **Beach-towelling every virtue.** Some people go further and make up their own list of “Christian values” inevitably listing all the Army values in the process. However throwing your beach towel over every worthy virtue does not justify your claim to it. Not only does this approach lack academic discipline and any credible provenance, it also dilutes the core tenets of the Christian message.

10.9 **Conclusion.** The values of the Army and its sister Services are different from those of Christianity. The argument that we should remain a Christian Army because of uniquely shared common values with the church does not hold up to scrutiny.

### ***Flat-out denial***

10.10 **“This whole thing is a non-issue - move along”.** Actually there are many soldiers for whom this *is* an issue. They feel excluded from important collective rituals such as remembrance. If we are serious about wanting to be an inclusive Army, we need to address this. How many is an acceptable number to exclude? I suggest that excluding even one soldier is one too many. The principle of inclusivity is not based on a headcount.

10.11 **“There is no clear case for change”.** Perhaps the most disappointing objection to secular inclusivity is the unsubstantiated, flat-out denial that there is a clear case for change. It is obvious that we are institutionally biased towards Christianity. It is a matter of *fact* that many of our soldiers feel excluded from key aspects of our profession because of our official Christian position. The evidence is freely available and the case for a secular British Army is plainly “*well found*”. Merely stating there is no clear case for change without offering any evidence to support that assertion is patently incorrect and worse – it is poorly researched.

#### **Key Point**

- Excluding even one soldier is one too many. The principle of inclusivity is not based on a headcount.
- There are no good reasons to object to adopting secularism as a means of fostering inclusivity.

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<sup>46</sup> "Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools; Departmental advice for maintained schools." Department for Education. Nov 2014.

## **Annex A Definition of Atheism, Agnosticism and Secularism**

### **A.1 Put simply.**

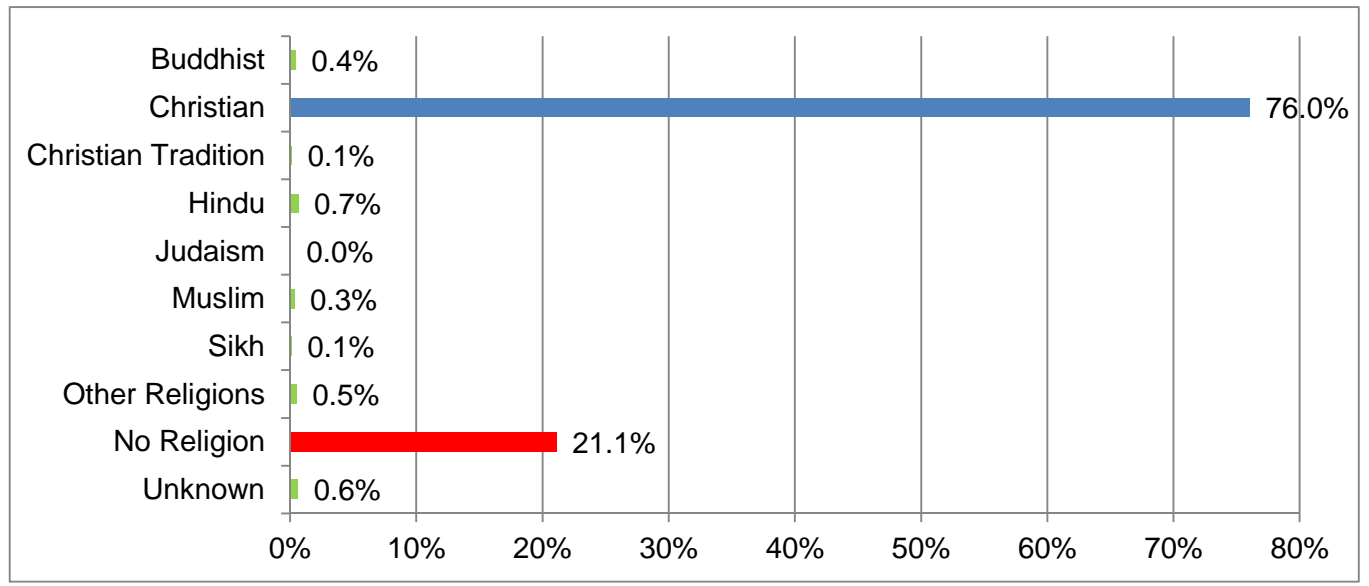
- **Atheism** is the disbelief or lack of belief in the existence of God(s). That's all.
- **Agnosticism** is the view that some claims especially whether God(s) exist, are unknown or even unknowable. Many people use this term to mean that they neither believe nor disbelieve in God – which, technically, is a slightly different interpretation.
- **Secularism** is the separation of religion from official business, i.e. leaving religion to individuals and not having religion influence official activities.

### **A.2 Common mistakes.**

- **Conflating atheism and secularism.** Some people lump atheism and secularism together as one thing e.g. “atheistic/secular”. This is either through a lack of understanding or as a means to attack atheism and by extension secularism. They are two separate things and should not be confused.
- **Claiming secularism tries to take religion from people.** No, it doesn't. People are still free to believe what they want. Secularism just ensures that no single belief is privileged over another. This is why secularism forms a cornerstone of an inclusive society.
- **Saying secularism leads to Nazi-ism.** This is of course nonsense.
- **Saying atheism is equivalent to a religious belief.** It's not. It is a non-belief. It is as much a religion as “off” is a TV channel.
- **Saying rocks or babies are Atheists.** An inherent assumption in the use of the word *Atheist* is the subject's capacity to hold a belief; rocks and babies cannot do this.
- **Confusing Agnostic with Apatheist.** An Apatheist is someone who does not care whether God(s) exist or not; they just get on with their lives as if there are no gods and don't think about it.



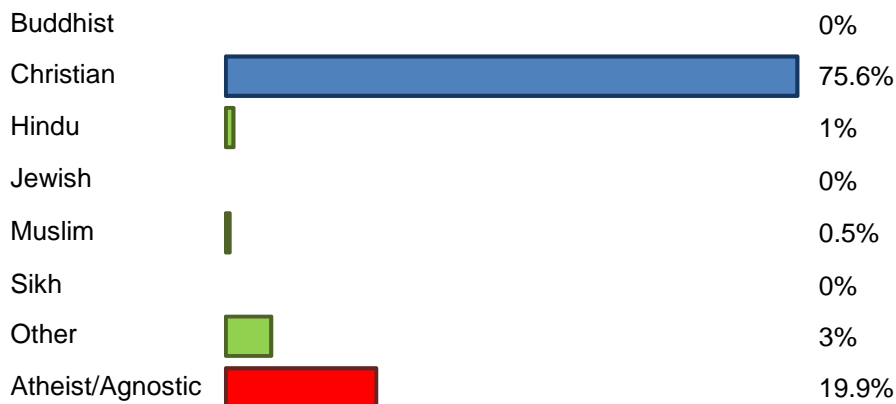
**JPA , 1 Oct 15; Whole Army,**



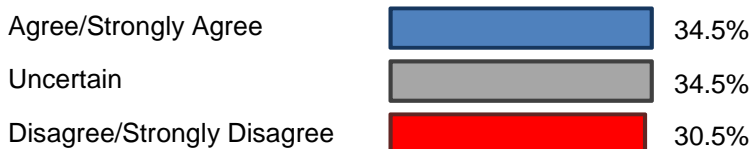
**Figure 17.** JPA shows the religious make-up of the Army – or does it? Def Stats (Tri-service)

**“Faith in a Foxhole” Survey, Rev Peter King, 2012; 200 Battle Group soldiers**

**Q1. Please indicate your personal faith.**



**Q2. I believe there is a God or gods.**



**Figures 18 and 19.** In the Faith in a Foxhole Survey, Q1 asked broadly the same question as JPA. This elicited a result that correlates remarkably well with JPA. However Q2 reveals that most soldiers in this survey are in fact Atheist or Agnostic – despite the answers they gave to Q1. What does this say about the veracity of JPA data?

## **Annex B Using JPA data to examine religion in the Armed Forces**

**B.1 What is JPA?** The Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) database was set up in 2007 to process and record military personnel data. With regard to religion JPA asks two questions of personnel, for neither of which is an answer compulsory. This is important as often JPA data is published as a percentage which omits those personnel who have not entered information in those data fields. This may give a slightly incorrect impression about how personnel regard religion. The two data fields on JPA are:

- Religion
- Religion requirements

**B.2 The “Religion” data field.** The first data field is called simply “Religion”. Military personnel are invited to choose one answer from a dropdown menu that reflects their religious affiliation (see Figure 17). The current options on JPA are:

- Buddhist
- Christian
- Christian Tradition
- Hindu
- Judaism
- Kirati
- Muslim
- No Religion
- Other Religions
- Sikh

**B.3 Faith in a Foxhole.** As described in Chapter 4, The Reverend Peter King conducted a survey<sup>25</sup> of his ground holding battle group once it had returned from a difficult tour in Afghanistan. The purpose of the survey was to examine whether the stress of combat made soldiers more open to religious belief. Rev King sent over 400 questionnaires and around 200 responses were returned. This makes it a small, but statistically significant, survey. The first question asked respondents what was their personal faith. This gave a result remarkably similar to the data held on JPA. However, the second question sought to determine whether or not they believed in God. Remarkably, whilst around 80% said they had a religious faith, only 34.5% believed there was a God. This is shown in figures 18 and 19. Most soldiers in the survey were technically Atheists or Agnostics/Fuzzy believers. It is highly plausible, therefore, that the data we hold for the Army as a whole may not accurately reflect the true religious belief of our personnel.

**B.4 The “Religion Requirements” data field.** The second religious record field on JPA is “Religion Requirements”. Again this is not a mandatory question. Unfortunately only one option may be selected from this list:

- Agnostic
- Atheist
- Humanist
- No Religion (Unspecified)
- Not Applicable
- Other Beliefs
- Secularist

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**B.5 Counting Humanists, Atheists etc.** Clearly it is possible to be an Atheist, Secularist and Humanist at the same time. However, not everyone who selects “no religion” from the first field subsequently also identifies as a Humanist. Nor might they select Atheist if they want to stress their Humanist identity. Therefore, it is currently impossible to use JPA to determine with any accuracy how many Humanists, Atheist etc. there are in the Armed Forces. Consequently when JPA shows that there are just 200 Humanists across all 3 Services,<sup>47</sup> it is possible that the number may be far higher.

#### Key Points

- Whilst a useful tool in gaining an insight into the religious make-up of the Armed Forces, JPA’s question set is flawed when it comes to determining the number of Humanists, Atheists etc.
- Furthermore, data from the *Faith in a Foxhole* survey suggests that the number of personnel who are non-religious may be significantly higher than JPA shows.

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<sup>47</sup> This is more than the number of Sikhs (158) but fewer than Muslims (528). *Defence Statistics (Tri-service)*.





