

Reading List: 8 Must-Read Books on Religion and the Public Sphere


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Last month, June 2016, the [LSE Religion and the Public Sphere blog](#) launched, exploring the place and role of religion in British public life today. To celebrate the launch, the blog's Editor **Esther Kersley** has brought together 8 must-read books on the topic, ranging from philosophical debates on religion, secularism and the public sphere to detailed accounts of how religion exists in Britain today.

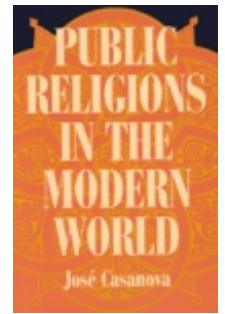
1). 'Religion in the Public Sphere'. Jürgen Habermas. *European Journal of Philosophy*. 2006.

A leading participant in the thinking process behind the secularisation thesis in Western societies, Habermas believed that religion would eventually disappear from the public sphere due to the rationalisation of society. In recent years, however, he has changed his view in light of new world developments. While not strictly a book, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', published in the *European Journal of Philosophy* in 2006, argues that there are limits to the separation of church and state, and that religion has something important to offer the public sphere. Religion can inform public discourse but requires religiously-based claims to be translated into secular, publicly accessible reasons.



2). *Public Religions in the Modern World*. José Casanova. University Of Chicago Press. 1994.

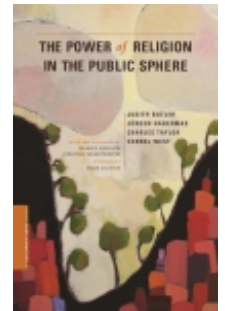
The 1980s is when religion 'went public', leaving its assigned place in the private sphere and thrusting itself into the public arena. Four seemingly unrelated yet almost simultaneous developments – the Islamic revolution in Iran; the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland; the role of Catholicism in the Sandinista revolution and other political conflicts throughout Latin America; and the public re-emergence of Protestant fundamentalism as a force in US politics – gave religion the kind of global publicity that forced a reassessment of its place and role in the modern world. Casanova looks at five contemporary case studies of public religion from two religious traditions (Catholicism and Protestantism) in four different countries (Spain, Poland, Brazil and the USA), serving to illustrate empirical instances of various types of public religion. Casanova argues that we are witnessing the 'deprivatisation' of religion, whereby religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatised role that theories of secularisation had reserved for them.



Find *Public Religions in the Modern World*: 

3). *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*. Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor and Cornel West. Edited by Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen. Afterword by Craig Calhoun. Columbia University Press. 2011.

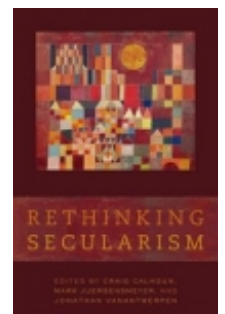
This collection of essays features four prominent public intellectuals – Habermas, Charles Taylor, Judith Butler and Cornel West – taking part in a dialogue on the relationship between religion and the public sphere, each taking up a different strand of this engagement. The 'Afterword' by Craig Calhoun provides contemporary context, discussing the effect of these approaches in national and international domains and the contributions of religion to contemporary cultural, political, social and philosophical debates and movements.



Find *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*: 

4). *Rethinking Secularism*. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntwerpen. Oxford University Press. 2011.

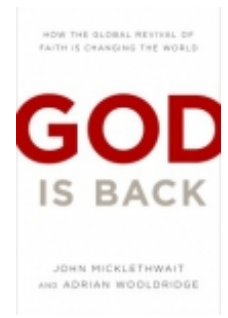
In recent years established understandings of how the terms 'secularism' and 'religion' function in public life have been challenged and a so-called 'religious resurgence' has called into question the supposedly clear division between the religious and the secular. *Rethinking Secularism* brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars to reconsider secularism and secularity in the context of contemporary global politics and transnational social change. The symbiotic relationship between religion and secularism is highlighted here, with the book seeking to reframe discussions of religion in the social sciences by drawing attention to the central issue of how 'the secular' is constituted and understood.



Find *Rethinking Secularism*: 

5). *God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World*. John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge. Penguin. 2010.

Micklethwait and Wooldridge show that religion and modernity are not at odds but in fact go together in much of the world, challenging the notion that the more modern a society becomes, the less room there is for religious belief and practices. *God is Back* argues that it is the US, rather than the European, model of religious tolerance that is prevailing in the world today, and that contemporary religion may play a role in making the modern world more open, tolerant and peaceful.



Find *God is Back*:



6). *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging*. Grace Davie. John Wiley & Sons. 1994 and *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*. Grace Davie. Wiley-Blackwell. 2015.

Moving to look at Britain in particular, Davie's 1994 book *Religion in Britain Since 1945* became one of the leading resources in the field of Sociology of Religion. The phrase 'believing without belonging' became its defining feature, describing the disjuncture between religious belief in Britain, which remained relatively high, and religious membership or practices, which declined markedly in the post-war period. The second edition, published in 2015, takes into account the dramatic changes in Britain since 1994, describing the religious situation in twenty-first century Britain, finding that religion has become more and more publicly visible in the course of the last few decades.

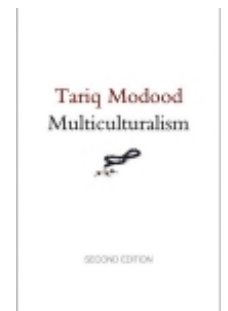


Find *Religion in Britain Since 1945* and *Religion in Britain*:



7). *Multiculturalism*. Tariq Modood. Polity Press. 2013.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 did not show the failure of multiculturalism, but rather highlighted the urgent need to include Muslims in contemporary conceptions of democratic citizenship. According to Modood, it is multiculturalism that is best placed to do this. *Multiculturalism*, reviewed in *LSE RB*, argues that the 'crisis of secularism' is really the challenge of post-immigration multiculturalism, in particular the place of Muslims (or identities that are perceived to be ethno-religious) in liberal democracies. Multiculturalism, Modood argues, remains a living force that shapes our politics and remains the best form of integration we have.



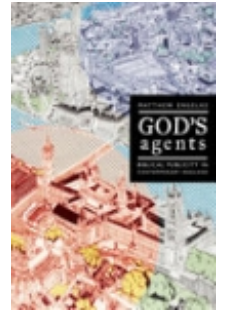
Find *Multiculturalism*:



8). *God's Agents: Biblical Publicity in Contemporary England*. Matthew Engelke. University of California Press. 2013.

This ethnographic study of the British and Foreign Bible Society traces how a small group of Christians in England and Wales are trying to create more room for faith in the public sphere. By considering the lived experience of people whose goal is 'publicising' religion, *God's Agents* forces us to rethink the location of religion in post-secular England. It provides new ways of thinking about the relationship between the religious and secular, in particular the different ways in which the secular shapes modern life on a day-to-day basis, and how our current understanding of religion needs to be complemented by a greater attention to the process of generating publicity.

Find *God's Agents*: 



Note: This reading list gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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