

“Religions in the UK: Contexts and Issues”

**Joppa Group and Baptist Union of Great Britain
Consultation on
“Good Neighbours?”**

**St. Philip’s Centre for Study and Engagement
1st March 2007**

Paul Weller

**Professor of Inter-Religious Relations at the
University of Derby**

and

**Head of Research and Commercial Development in the
Faculty of Education, Health and Sciences**

© Paul Weller, 2007

Secularisation and All That.....

The first man in space said he hadn't seen God

30-40 years ago, people thought religion would disappear

If anything, religion was often the object of amusement

Religion became more a 'private' option.

But religion did not disappear...

Religion in Your Face and All Over the Place!

Today, the media and public life is full of religion

Positively:

- the important role of religious groups in 'civil society'
- religions and 'social capital'

Negatively:

- conflict & tension between competing religious groups
- 9/11 in the USA, 7/7 in London

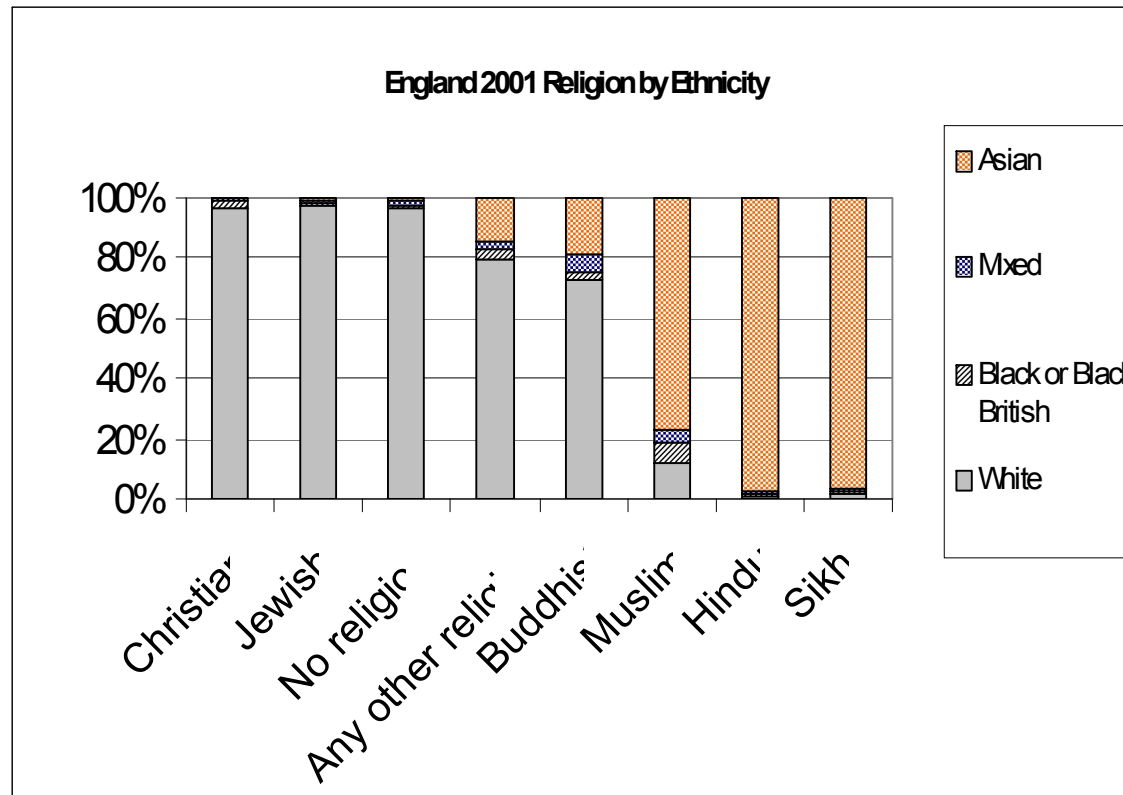
Religions and Statistics in England

Buddhist	139,046	0.3%
Christian	35,251,244	71.7%
Hindu	546,982	1.1%
Jewish	257,671	0.5%
Muslim	1,524,887	3.1%
Sikh	327,343	0.7%
Other Religion	143,811	0.9%
No religion	7,171,332	14.6%
Not stated	3,776,515	7.7%

[Source: Office for National Statistics, 2001 Census,
Percentages have been “rounded” so will not add exactly to 100%]

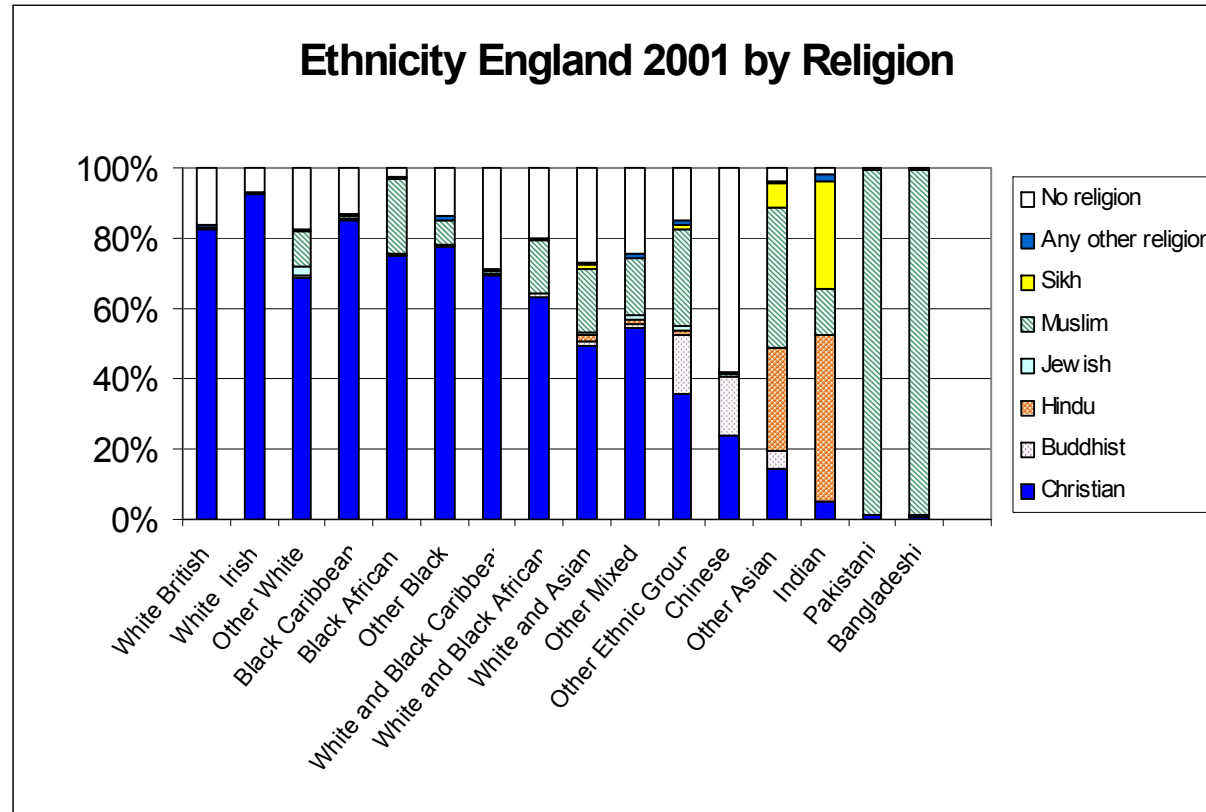
Religion by Ethnicity in England

Source: Census of Population 2001 Table S103



Ethnicity by Religion in England

Source: Census of Population 2001 Table S103



Some Aspects of the Contemporary Religious Landscape

**English religious landscape is ‘three dimensional’:
Christian, secular and religiously plural.**

[Weller, P., Time for a Change: Reconfiguring Religion, State and Society, London: T & T Clark, 2006]

The *significance* of religion for individual and corporate life is high: 95% of Muslims; 89% of Hindus; and 86% of Sikhs saw religion as ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important for them

[Modood, T., Berthoud, R., Lakey, J, Nazroo, J, Smith, P, Virdee, S, Beishon, S. Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage, London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997.]

Members of all three put ‘religion’ as the second most important factor defining their identity after ‘family’.

[O'Beirne, M., Religion in England and Wales: findings from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey, Home Office Research Study 274, London: Home Office, 2001]

Muslims, Islam, Islamism, and....

Some Muslims seek political goals through violent action

Majority put in position of having to “apologise/justify”

Global conflicts, ‘security’ and impact on young people

Runnymede Trust. Islamophobia: A Challenge for us All

(London: Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 2001).

P. Weller, A. Feldman and K. Purdam, et al, Religious Discrimination in England and Wales

[London: Research Development Statistics Directorate, the Home Office, 2001].

Islamophobia, Religious Discrimination and Disadvantage

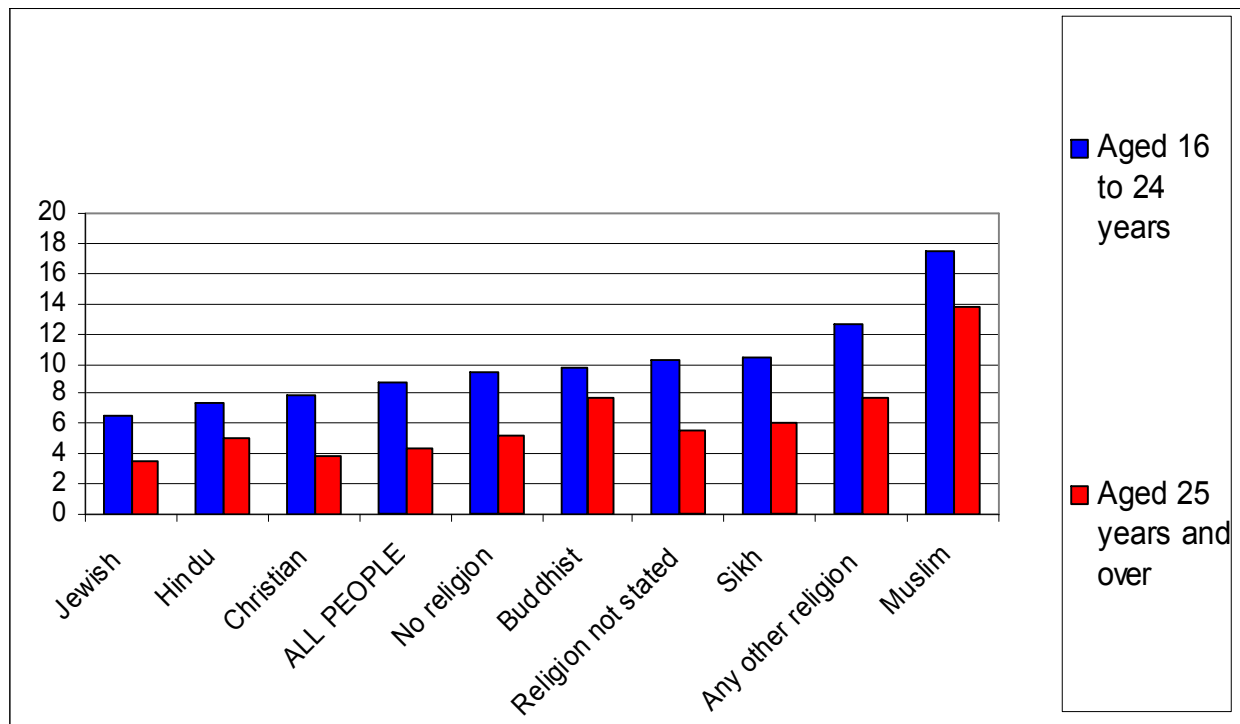
2005-6 Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities Project, for the (then) Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Department for Communities and Local Government), looking at: Hindus, Sikhs & Muslims.

Conducted by "Mercia Group" of: Professor Jim Beckford (University of Warwick); Dr. Richard Gale (University of Birmingham) Dr. David Owen (University of Warwick); Professor Ceri Peach (University of Oxford); Professor Paul Weller (University of Derby)

Outcomes published electronically, as J. Beckford, R. Gale, D. Owen, C. Peach & P. Weller. Review of Evidence Base on Faith Communities [at the Department for Communities and Local Government website]

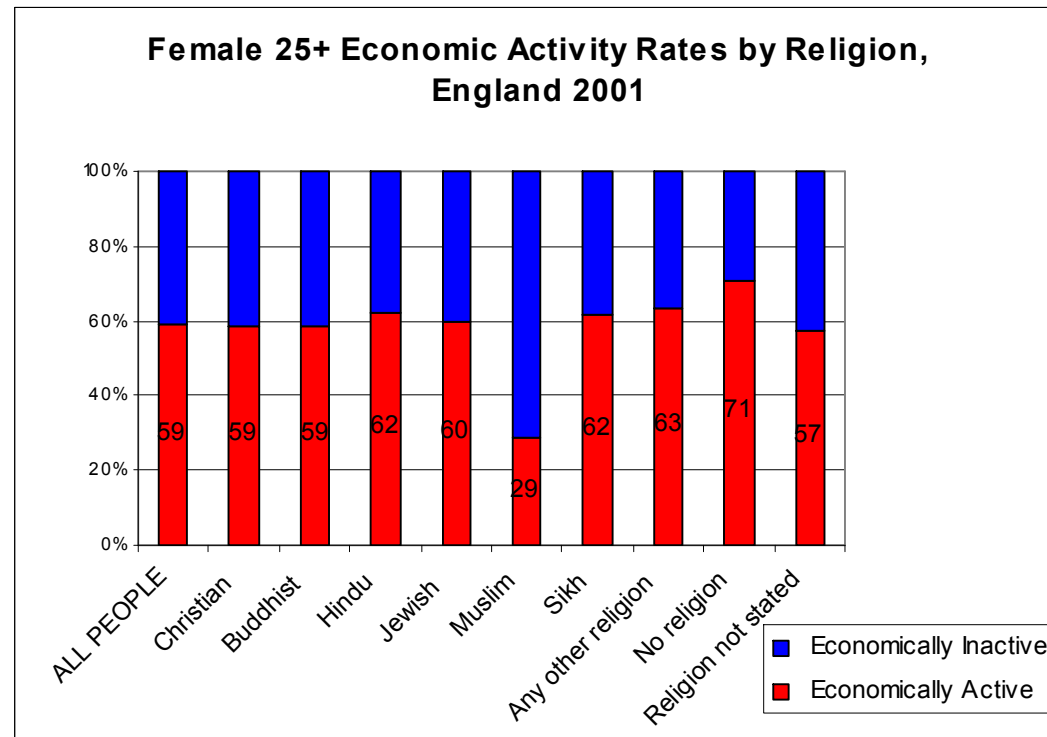
More on Islamophobia, Religious Discrimination and Disadvantage

Young People, Religion and Unemployment. Source: Census of England and Wales 2001 Table S153

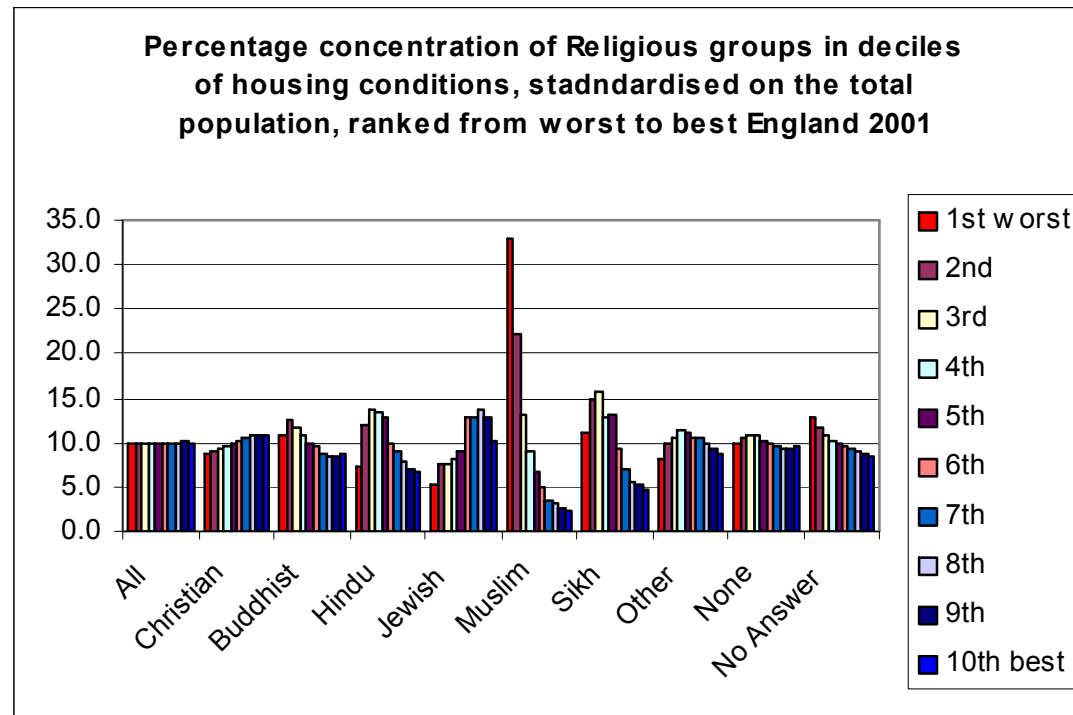


Yet More on Islamophobia, Religious Discrimination and Disadvantage

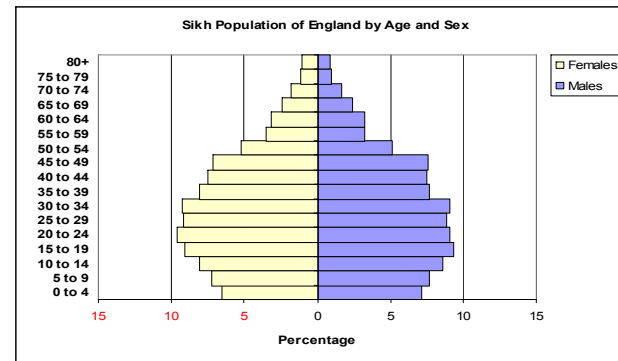
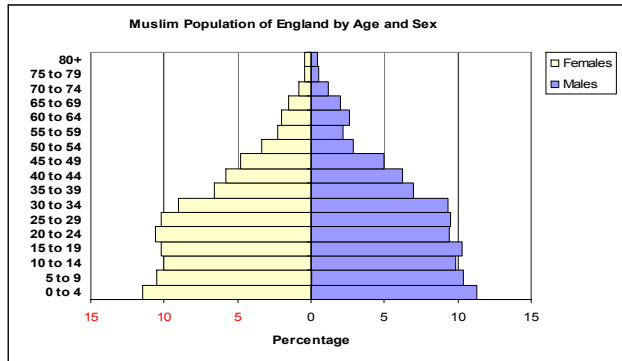
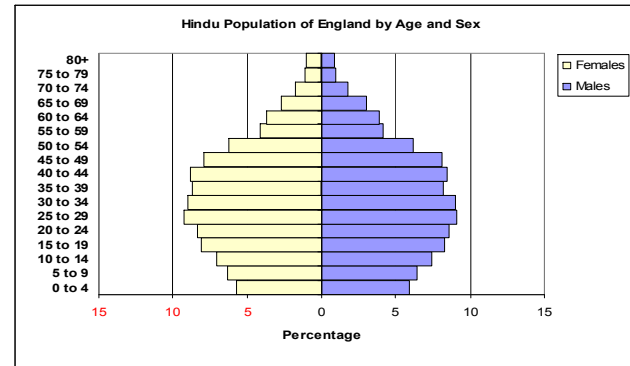
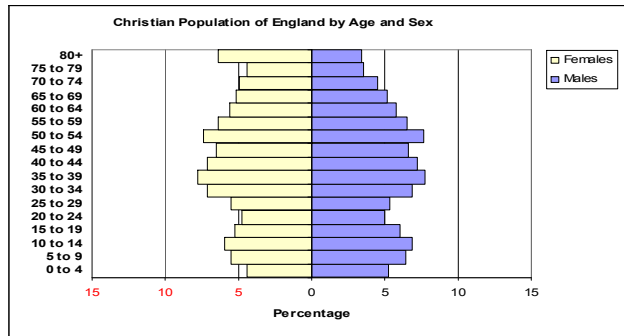
Women, Religion and Economic Activity. Source: Census of Population, 2001 Table S153



Even More on Islamophobia, Religious Discrimination and Disadvantage



The Demographic “Shape” of Religious Groups in England



Integration and Social Cohesion: Policy Inheritance

Roy Jenkins' classic 1967 formulation:

"I do not think that we need in this country a melting-pot, which will turn everybody out in a common mould, as one of a series of someone's misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman."

**Aimed for 'integration' not 'assimilation', and defined as:
"....equal opportunity, coupled with cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance."**

**In 1989, during the Rushdie controversy, Lord Jenkins:
"In retrospect we might have been more cautious about allowing the creation in the 1950s of substantial Muslim communities here."**

Whither Religion, Cohesion and Multi-Culturalism?

Cantle report (2001) on Community Cohesion after northern mill-town disturbances

Concern over “parallel lives” or what Trevor Phillips (Commission for Racial Equality) called “ghettoisation”

Politicians’ post 7/7 concern with “Britishness” (David Blunkett, John Reid)

**Department for Communities and Local Government
“Commission on Integration and Cohesion”**

Jack Straw..... and all the others..... Hijab, Niqab etc

Issues in Multi-Culturalism

Less research on Hindus and Sikhs than on Muslims

[J. Beckord, R. Gale, D. Owen, C. Peach, P. Weller. Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities, London: ODPM, 2006]

Feeling of “minorities within minorities”

[P. Weller, A. Feldman & K. Purdam, et al., Religious Discrimination in England and Wales, London: Research Development Statistics Directorate, the Home Office, 2001].

“Our group is bigger than yours”

“Our problems are more important than yours”

Need for sensitivity to these dimensions or else:

“....the alternative is the reduction of increasingly complex issues to the convenient slogans of religious-cum-litical pressure groups – a bleak and unhappy prospect indeed.”

[G. Parsons. “From Consensus to Confrontation: Religion and Politics in Britain Since 1945”, in Parsons, G. (ed.), The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain From 1945. Volume II. Issues, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 123-159 (154)]

The Dangers of Communalism

We are different, we behave differently

We are right

We are right and you are wrong

You are a less adequate version of what we are

You are not what you say you are

We are in fact what you say you are

What you are doing is evil

You are so wrong that you forfeit ordinary rights

You are less than human

You are evil

You are demonic

[Joseph Liechty & Cecelia Clegg, Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland, Dublin: The Columba Press, 2001, pp. 102-103]

Inter-Faith Initiatives

Inter Faith Network for the UK, Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK: A Survey (London: Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2003) identified 140 local multilateral initiatives

Places for individual ‘seekers’ and ‘refugees’ (‘groups’)

Dialogue between formal ‘representatives’ (‘councils’)

Interface between religions & local public bodies (‘fora’)

Religions: Their Uses and Integrity

Governments tend to want religions for what they can offer as ‘social glue’ or in terms of ‘common values’.

Religions will respond because they see connecting with the common good as a part of their vocation - but religions are not there to implement Government policy!

“In an age dominated by science and secularism one of the tasks of genuinely religious people is to draw attention to the Mystery of transcendence, a centre of values, a source of meaning, an object of loyalty beyond the smaller loyalties to one’s particular caste, language or religion.”

[Stanley Samartha, “Religious Identities in a Secular State”, in One Christ – Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology, Orbis, New York, 1991.]

Religion and Politics

“To say that politics and religion should be kept separate is understandable, especially at a time like ours. But what it really should mean is that politicians should not use religions for short-term political ends and religious leaders should not use politicians for narrowly communal gains. But surely every religion has a social and public dimension. To say that religions should be a private affair is to misunderstand both religion and politics.”

[Achin Vanaik, "Reflections on Communalism and Nationalism in India", in New Left Review, No. 196, 1992, p. 43-62 (56).]

Implications for Christian Presence & Witness

“...the confession of Jesus in a way that recognises the freedom of the other as a deep theological value and not only a reflection of general toleration....takes place before God, and in a dialogue with others, in which their social, political, cultural and theological space and integrity is affirmed to make their own response to Jesus.”

[Paul Weller, “The Changing Face of Europe: The Nature and Role of Ethnic Minorities in European Societies”, in Peter Penner (ed.), Ethnic Churches in Europe: A Baptist Responsene Christ – Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology, Neufeld Verlag, European Baptist Federation/International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006, pp. 17-63 (44)]

Need to develop a “Christology of invitation” rather than a “Christology of gatekeeping”

[In Paul Weller, Jesus, God and Dialogue: The Beach Lectures for 2005, Bracknell, Newbold College, Centre for the Study of Religious and Cultural Diversity, 2006, p. 40]

Jesus in a Plural Society

“At the heart of Christian theology and witness is what Christians have discovered in Jesus. Jesus is the distinctive focus of the Christian way of being in the world. The person and work of Jesus do need to form the substantive content of Christian witness in terms both of words about him, and more importantly of actions patterned upon him.”

“....the Jesus who is offered, and to whom all cultures and religions are invited to respond, is not in any way to be confused with the ‘property’ of any one cultural form of the Christian Church. Jesus is not the property of Christians. To treat Jesus as if he were such property would be to make Jesus into the idolatrous deity of a Christian form of tribalism”.

[Paul Weller, “The Changing Face of Europe: The Nature and Role of Ethnic Minorities in European Societies”, in Peter Penner (ed.), Ethnic Churches in Europe: A Baptist Responsene Christ – Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology, Neufeld Verlag, European Baptist Federation/International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006, pp. 17-63 (44)]