

Labour's hidden soul: religion at the intersection of labour and the environment

David Uzzell, Nora Rätzzel

Abstract

Contributing to the growing area of environmental labour studies, this study examines the intersection of individual life-histories, organisational histories and societal histories. This reveals how religion, in several different expressions, serves to provide a connection between justice for workers and justice for the environment in the work of trade unionists. The trade union movement is generally seen as secular, and thus in our life history interviews religion as a backdrop to labour activists' formation was unexpected. Religion becomes manifest in various ways, partly through experiences in the present or at formative periods in unionists' lives, but also through its cultural embeddedness in language and collective memory leading to ongoing subtle influences on beliefs, concepts of social justice and daily action. The paper concludes with some reflections on the relationships between nature and labour.

Keywords

Environment; Labour; Life histories; Religion; Trade unions

Labour, Religion and the Environment

A few years ago, one might have asked whether there is any trade union engagement with environmental issues, or why unions should include environmental issues in their agenda. But trade unions are having to proactively respond to a changing and warming world (Lipsig-Mummé & McBride, 2015; authors, 2013). Workers have a 'double-interest' in addressing climate change. First, they will be affected directly as citizens in their communities and in the workplace in terms of living and working conditions. Second, the industries and organisations in which they work will be subject to regulations and controls, which will have a direct or

indirect effect on jobs. It makes sense for trade unions to play an active role in formulating constructive worker-protective policies and practices that include environmental protection (International Transport Federation 2010). Particularly since 2006, trade unions have been contributing to international climate change debates and to the formulation of agreements at the Conference of the Parties (COP) demanding the inclusion of a just transition for workers (United Nations Environment Programme 2007; International Trade Union Confederation 2009).

In 2007, the UK Environment Agency asked leading scientists and environmentalists what are the most important actions that can be taken to address climate change (Stoneham 2012). Their first priority was energy efficiency and reductions in fossil fuel use. Their second priority was action, support and advocacy from religious organisations. As Christie (2011) argues, there is a growing recognition that “sustainable development movements can’t afford to ignore or reject opportunities for collaboration and communication associated with faith.” Trade unions too have recognised that environmental actions can be made more effective by working with others, not only environmental NGOs but also faith groups. In the study reported in this paper a number of trade unionists argued that it was important to involve civil society organisations such as church groups, and gave examples such as securing support from the Quakers for a climate change caravan that toured the North-West England. Another unionist referred to working with a Pakistan Community Centre which represented six mosques. However, the unionists in our research project did not only discuss religion in terms of organisational co-operations, they also talked about the role of religion in their own lives.

In our study, we investigated the life trajectories of senior trade unionists who have been decisive in creating and shaping the environmental programs of their trade unions in the UK.

Using a life history methodology, our aim is to understand the role of individuals in transforming organisations by investigating the relationship between individual trajectories, the trajectories of the organisations in which they work, and the societal contexts in which they develop, avoiding both individual and structural reductionism. Since trade unions need to transform themselves to accommodate environmental issues into their agenda, they were the case study we used to approach our question. The trade union movement is generally seen as secular with a Marxist and Social Democratic tradition rather than a religious one.

Therefore, we were surprised to find that quite a number of unionists mentioned religion as an element of their life-history although we had not asked about it. Thus, we decided to investigate the salience of religion in the formation and background of our trade union interviewees, and its possible relationship to their environmental engagement. We wanted to know what role religion has played in the way they conceptualise environmental concerns as a trade union issue. If a linkage can be identified, has this in turn provided inspiration and tools for trade unionists to become engaged with environmental and labour futures?

It is important that we state at the outset that we do not consider that this work sits comfortably within a body of scholarship which is typically referred to as the sociology of religion. We do not situate this study within the theoretical frameworks that inform most of that work (Beckford and Demerath 2007). We are also aware that there is a body of research on religion and protests movements and collective action (Nepstad and Williams 2007), but the emphasis in this paper is different. We present some of the ways in which trade unionists relate to role of religion in their lives and for their present engagement in workers' interests and environmental justice. Our question is whether and why religion might play a role in connecting these two areas of engagement. While we do not claim that this connection can be generalised, what we will argue is that connecting social and environmental justice through a

religious framework indicates that broader worldviews than those currently available in the labour movement are needed in order to address the environmental issue from a workers' perspective.

Religion's growing influence on global politics and social movements

In what is often presented as a highly technological, rational and secular world, it might be thought that an affirmative response to the question posed on the now-famous 1965 cover of *TIME*, 'Is God Dead?' would be inevitable. But as Christie (2011) points out, this is very much a European perspective. Worldwide, in a study based on the analyses of 2500 censuses, surveys and population registers, it has been calculated that eight in ten people identify with a religious group (Hackett and Grim 2012). While there may be evidence in some churches of declining congregations, we should not confuse falling church attendance with a decline in religiosity. The strong version of 'Believing without belonging' (Davie 1994; Voas and Crockett 2005) hypothesises that although church attendance may have waned over the years, and the church increasingly is taken for granted except in times of 'need' (e.g., baptisms, marriages, funerals and at moments of 'national crisis'), many Britons are nevertheless 'Christian though unchurched' (Voas and Crockett 2005). Importantly, believing without practice does not prevent the persistence of Christianised beliefs within national culture(s).

Philpott (2009) takes a slightly different position. He argues that religion's influence on global politics across the world and its place in public life has become more prominent and controversial over the last decade. It is just that its place and importance for political science – and one might add other scholarly disciplines such as sociology and psychology – has not been fully acknowledged, although there are signs that this is changing. (Philpott 2009) throws down a number of challenges: first, there is need for a better understanding of

religion's relationship to modernization if, as (Shah and Toft 2006; Hanson 2006) argue, economic and technological development, and democratization actually strengthen religion. Second, the relationships between religion and the state need to be explored and explained more adequately. It is not simply a question of inserting religion into the mix, but rather recognizing that religion may become a salient component of the identity of politically influential social movements (Thomas 2005). Third, religion has had significant influence on 'large-scale shifts and innovations in the international system' (Philpott 2009). It is difficult to think of an international system more significant than the global climate system that will require large-scale social and economic shifts and innovations. Recent evidence of the 'Francis Effect'¹ suggests that this is already happening (Maibach 2015).

Glock (1962) argues that regardless of differences between traditions and faiths, religiosity can be understood to comprise five dimensions: the experiential (i.e., subjective experience including affect, expectations and awareness of immanence), the ideological (i.e., expectations concerning shared beliefs), the ritualistic (i.e., outward manifestations of religious practices, e.g., prayer, fasting etc.), the intellectual (i.e., knowledge of the tenets of faith), and the consequential (i.e., the secular effects of religious belief, practice, experience, and knowledge on the actions of the individual). Our analysis focuses largely on the intellectual and how this becomes a driver for the consequential dimension. In other words, the ways in which the normative tenets of the faith (e.g., the *Ten Commandments*) specify how people should and should not live out their faith in their daily (working) lives and relate to others (even if they do not consider themselves to be religious anymore), and how this may become manifest through their union work (i.e., the consequential).

¹ This is a reference to the international influence of the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si* (Pope Francis 2015) and the personal influence and advocacy of Pope Francis on issues of climate change and social justice.

Past Meets Present

While labour and the environment is a more recent relationship, the growth of Protestant nonconformism in the industrial centres of 19th century Britain and its role in the advancement of trade unionism and socialism was critical and formative (Thompson 1963; Reid 2004), and is still present in the collective memory of the labour movement (Glasman 2011). If we are to understand the influences of the past on the actions of UK trade unionists, and at the same time appreciate the influence of religion on the labour movement and its development, we have to go beyond the role of institutional collective memories and draw on formations over the more recent lifecourse.

In his intellectual genealogical account of ‘Labour as a radical tradition’, Glasman (Glasman 2011) argues that the relationship between the English church and the Labour tradition has been neglected. Although this is not entirely accurate as Thompson (1963) and Hobsbawm (1957) discuss in detail the development of working class radicalism and its relationship to the church, Glasman is correct in suggesting that the conjoining of the Church and workers’ movements does seem like a paradox, as this represents a coming together of the previously opposed and antagonistic into new forms of common life. But it was not the ‘Established’ Anglican Church, which Keir Hardie described as a “reflex of modern business” (Pierson 1960), but rather the non-Established churches (i.e., Roman Catholic and the non-conformist Protestant churches such as the Methodists) which had been subject to persecution over the centuries (Bevir 1999) and were marginal to the establishment, who became what Glasman (2011) calls ‘the grandparents of the Labour Movement’.

Particular reference should be made to the Labour Church (Bevir 1999; Inglis 1893; Katterhorn 2011; Pierson 1960; Trevor 1897), which was seen by its adherents as a driving force for obtaining "the Kingdom of God on earth". This was the most outwardly manifest expression of the link between religious beliefs and social justice, such that Bevir concluded "Although British socialism owes debts to Marxism and Fabianism, many of its leading characteristics derive from a tradition of ethical socialism ... and did much to inspire the formation of the ILP [Independent Labour Party] and thus the Labour Party" (Bevir 1999). Indeed, at the Bradford conference in which the Independent Labour Party was formed, John Trevor, the founder of the Labour Church in 1891, organised a church service to accompany the event. saw the purpose of the church as to "develop the religion of the Labour Movement into clearer self-consciousness". For Turner, the Labour Church was "Labour's lost soul" and "... has a place in history synonymous with the foundation and development of the political working-class movement" (Turner 2009). There is more than a passing correspondence between the tenets of liberation theology (Löwy 2000) which gives primacy to a reading of the scriptures through the eyes of the poor, and solidarity with the poor and oppressed to bring about social and economic change, and the principles of the Labour Church (Trevor 1897), with their identification of capitalism as a type of structural sin, and the individual as an agent of their own emancipation from social, economic and moral bondage.

Methodology

The study reported here was part of an international project² with the overarching theme of understanding the role that individuals play in transforming organisations (authors, 2015). This should not be seen as a reductionist formulation but a question set with the context of how do individual life-histories, organisational histories and societal histories intersect to

² We are grateful to the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) for funding this project: Moments of danger, moments of opportunity: the role of individuals as change agents in organisations.

create change. As the organisation to be investigated we chose trade unions since their engagement in environmental issues requires them to transform not only their policies but their self-perception as well. Life-history interviews with individuals engaging in such transformations are our main sources of information together with trade union documents. The 22 trade unionists we interviewed in the UK came from a range of manual, professional, managerial, or administrative-focused unions in the resource extraction, manufacturing and service sectors, some of which are high carbon-emitters. Unionists interviewed were those whose portfolio was the environment. As the number of unionists involved at a policy and implementation level in environmental affairs is still quite small, we can say that we interviewed the most senior, well-known and influential unionists.

Life history interviews insightful for our understanding of change and the subtleties of social, economic and historical influences on social practices over the lifespan. Interviewees were asked to relate their life story beginning from the date of their birth and including the familial, spatial and societal contexts in which they grew up, and talk about what *they* thought was important in their lives. However, they knew we were interested in trade union strategies regarding climate change and in individual trajectories into union work and environmental issues. While we occasionally sought clarifications and elaborations we never asked questions relating to religion. Thus, where interviewees brought up the theme it was because they regarded it as salient for them. Most interviews lasted between 1½ - 2½ hours; some were longer. They were recorded with the interviewees' agreement and then transcribed.

While coding the transcripts according to our research questions, our close reading of all our interviews is done on the basis that we are open to new insights, relationships and connections that were not anticipated. The twelve interviewees in the UK whose life-stories

included the mentioning of religion (out of 22 interviewees), either as religious beliefs, religious organisations, or religious upbringing were an unexpected result. It was a result we wanted to investigate more closely because we are interested in the motivations, world-views and theories through which trade unionists position their environmental practices. At first sight, trade union world-views, political practices and traditions do not seem closely connected to religious world-views and practices.

Interviews are a co-construction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Holstein and Gubrium 2003). This does not mean that life-stories are inventions but rather, different aspects of a respondent's life will be told differently in different contexts and at different times. The opportunities that life-histories provide is to learn something about the ways in which people experience themselves as actors and how they act upon what they see as limitations, success or failure around them. The challenge for the researcher is to walk the thin line between taking stories at face value and giving them a meaning that corresponds more with the position of the researcher than with the experience of the respondents. One of our strategies to avoid the latter is to send our text to the interviewees. So far, we have never had to make decisive amendments to our analyses, even where respondents were surprised by the ways in which we made sense of their stories.

A case study is not a basis for statistical generalisations but may provide the possibility to learn something about people's potential to act, since it is closer to a 'multidimensional and unpredictable reality' (Flyvbjerg, 2006). What we hope to provide are insights into the *possibilities* of connecting traditional trade union concerns of social justice with environmental concerns and religious beliefs or with world-views derived from religious influences. It was not our intention to prove that religion plays an important role in trade

unions in the UK (neither do we argue for the opposite). What interests us is *how* religion is articulated in the life-histories of those who mention it, and whether and how it plays a role in their environmental concerns and policies. In other words we are interested in the function of religion for our interviewees' practices, or as (Glock 1962) expresses it, the consequential dimension of religion.

All conditions of anonymity and confidentiality were followed throughout, in accordance with the favourable ethical opinion which had been given by the Ethics Committee of the University of Surrey and the Swedish Etikprövningsnämnde. For this reason, we cannot describe the place and position of our interviewees in detail and all names are pseudonyms. Interviewees have had the possibility to check the quotes we used prior to publication. We have followed Yardley's (Yardley 2000) four principles for conducting and analysing qualitative research: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance.

Religion in the Formation of Trade Unionists

Belief, Social Justice and Action

In this perspective, religion provides a moral justification for acting upon the world, taking up the cause of social justice, addressing inequality, protecting the vulnerable, and being driven by a set of beliefs that are implicitly or explicitly derived from a religious faith.

Jack Cromore, an Irish Catholic

For Jack Cromore who was raised in Ulster, a country with 300 years of sectarian discrimination, oppression and violence that cut across all aspects of political, social and economic life (Cairns and Darby 1998), the Roman Catholic Church represented resistance,

because it was a culture under attack. Thus, Ulster Catholics had a *'siege mentality'* as Cromore calls it. Jack Cromore, whose parents died when he was young, was brought up by relatives in a rural part of County Down. He did not belong to any youth organisations because *"the Boy Scouts were seen as a kind of British establishment thing, so we didn't do that."* Moreover, the Boy Scouts were seen to have ties to the established Anglican Church. Many scout, cub and guide groups are associated with their local church and participate in quasi-military parades on Remembrance Sunday (the annual day of commemoration of the war dead in November). As a Catholic non-membership affirmed resistance. Jack played Gaelic football, the principal sport of the Irish Republic, not rugby or soccer that epitomised colonial (i.e., British) culture. While Jack had a devout and strict upbringing, attended Mass daily and knelt down every night and said the rosary, as a teenager he eventually rebelled. This was because, *"people wouldn't answer your questions properly ... say about the Pope's infallibility. ... it was just waffle, to be honest. 'Cos they weren't that well educated, and they were going to say, you know, 'We'll take you to the priest,'"* Jack, a committed environmentalist both in terms of his advocacy within the union and in his personal and domestic life was not sure how religion "how it shaped my environmental thing" except his questioning was a product of this kind of questioning and it shaped his views about "...Fairness, equality, stuff like that." His recalcitrant and questioning attitude was seen not just as disrespectful, but challenging the authority of the Church which would bring disgrace, *"No, you're not bringing shame on this family!"* In a rural community, identity through cohesive association with the Catholic Church was central. From an early age, he was seen as confrontational: *"Well, he's going to be an argumentative little sod."* He contrasted his experience with relatives over the border in Donegal (Republic of Ireland) where the attitude to religion was more liberal and flexible. In Ulster, however, threatening religion threatens

identity and one's right to belong, or even exist; a Catholic identity was a statement not only of faith but also of politics.

Although religion ceased to be part of Jack's daily life, interpretations of its values and precepts became engrained into his thinking, and continue to inform and guide his actions: "*I try to judge them fairly, no matter what their creed, their colour, their sexuality, whatever else it may be... I think that Catholicism did shape my – I suppose my conscience, for want of a better term. It didn't dominate from a Christian ethos; it was more to do with a humanistic thing*". These sentences show two contradictory aspects of Jack's self-representation: while he recognises the 'Christian ethos' as decisive, he also seeks to translate it into a different ethos, the humanist one. Humanism is defined by atheism as an alternative to religious world-views.

Richard Newcastle, an Anglican

Richard Newcastle said that his commitment to trade union work was: "*.... a moral thing... It's more about the contribution you can make in the time that you have ... [making] a mark in some way*". He contrasted his position with a relative who is a wealthy financier who, when he dies, "*no one would ever know that he'd made an impact on the world – he just has a lot of money*". As with many Anglicans, Richard begins almost apologetically and embarrassed to admit he is a Christian, but his language is suffused with idioms that come from the Bible, and ties them to what unions do:

"I'm not particularly religious. I am a Christian, and in fact I was only baptised a couple of years ago! But I wouldn't say I'm particularly overly religious. But I think it has always been a presiding factor that I do, you know, treat other people as they would treat you, and look after people, make sure they're looked after. You know, I

think that's just the common strand through the work that we do. And I think you couldn't be an active trade union official without having some kind of element of that deep down".

Although a concern for others is something he had always felt, even prior to him formally becoming a member of the church, this signifies that religion has played a decisive role in his life, otherwise he would not have decided to be baptised as an adult. But he imputes the same values that drive him, i.e. *"Try and make things better for people"* to other trade union officials; it is regarded as a requirement of the job – a *'common strand'*. He does not ascribe religious beliefs to this, although he sees his beliefs (e.g., peace and conciliation) informing his actions: *"I tend to much more look to work in partnership with employers ... [whereas] ... some will very deliberately as a strategy take quite an aggressive hard line. I don't tend to do that."* Richard is looking to apply his Christian beliefs to his daily, perhaps conflictual, encounters; partnership for him means working with employers even though their interests may be different, and if necessary *'turning the cheek'* if it will serve his members'. One should be cautious in attributing causality to the relationships between beliefs, actions, and identity, i.e. did Christian beliefs precede (because they are deeply embedded in culture as we argue later) or post-date what he calls his guiding principles? What is clear is that:

"What can we do so at the end of the day so that people are better off than they were at the beginning of the day?" I think that, as I say, certainly drives me, and probably drives, you know, pretty much everybody that works here."

This is seen as a personal *and* a shared value, thereby providing the conditions in which action becomes possible. However, he does not make a connection between his beliefs and bringing work and nature together on the trade union agenda. Religion is predominantly a guide for human interaction, and for caring for people.

Julie Kingston, a Quaker

Beliefs, injustice, discrimination and the environment come together powerfully for Julie Kingston, a senior trade unionist who was brought up in a Quaker and political household, “*a really formative experience*” in a city dominated by the chemical and mining industries. Her mother, an environmental and political activist, led the community’s campaign against the development of a toxic waste incinerator, eventually taking her case to the European Commission. Asked about the influence that being a Quaker has on her present work in the trade union she makes reference to being a chair in Quaker meetings:

“... part of the responsibility of the chair is that you sense what the consensus is in the room... So you have to have quite an astute feeling of people’s body language, but also that you’re really listening to what people say. Because sometimes people say, ‘Yeah, yeah, fully agree!’ – but you know that really there’s a big problem which, if you’re not careful, it’ll come back to you afterwards. And that’s a skill that I’ve had since a kid and it’s a trained skill [through being a Quaker]. ... as young Quakers from the age of eleven we were clerking little groups of eleven-year-olds or twelve-year-olds. So it’s something which I wouldn’t know where it started or where it came from, or whether it’s natural or – you know, nature/nurture. I’ve no idea, ‘cos it’s my life.”

Julie studied history, politics, sociology and philosophy, and on graduation was employed in a European Quaker organisation and was responsible for the work on Human Rights and Social Justice questions. Undertaking a Master’s degree in social welfare, but pursuing her interests in collective bargaining. This led her to realize where this road was leading:

“... probably a little bit like Paul on the road to Damascus” ... “Oh my God, that’s the best way to organise society!” ... “I’d always grown up in and around the trade union movement. I mean, my mum and dad aren’t massive shop stewards or union

activists, but there'd always been a union kind of feeling around people: parents, friends were."

From early childhood, political, environmental, trade union and religious commitments were closely connected in Julie's life. In this sense, her life-history stands out in relation to other unionists we interviewed, where different sources of world-views only came together or replaced each other at different points in their life.

Colin Bedford, Catholic

Colin Bedford was brought up in a household where his mother was a liberal Catholic while his father was a member of the Communist Party who "*never lost a belief that the Soviet Union was worth defending, despite it being a caricature of socialism.*" Colin was educated in a Catholic grammar school run by Christian Brothers, which was "*not the most enlightened educational environment!*"; one particular Brother would launch into a tirade at any reference to the Soviet Union and thought Mussolini's achievements were underestimated. Colin joined the Labour Party Young Socialists to "*escape the repressive regime that was the Christian Brothers*". Colin's socialist ideas were informed over the years,

'by a sort of ecological perspective. Although you'd have to say that neither the Left in the Labour Party nor Militant or many of the Left groups, or even Left Unity, have ever really sort of given the issue a priority. But it's something that has sort of grown and become more and more an important element of my conception of socialism: ... the question of climate is not some secondary question; it's absolutely intrinsic to the whole question of how we raise socialist ideas and challenge capitalism, all its consequences.'

While Colin mentions Catholicism as one of his formative experiences, it was an experience that taught him to reject religion. His decisions to join the young socialists, to leave school at

an early age and to study politics and sociology were escape attempts from his conservative catholic upbringing.

Robert Petworth, lapsed Anglican

Robert Petworth is a trade unionist with a national responsibility for environmental issues. He talked of being a churchgoer when he was a young boy. While questioning and uncomfortable with many of the formalities of the Church of England, he acknowledged the continuing importance and legacy of the Christian values that influenced his boyhood. He was encouraged to join the Cubs and later the Boy Scouts by his parents (who were not regular churchgoers), which was based in his local church. By his early teens he had become sceptical of activities such as a monthly 'Church Parade'. Notwithstanding this rejection, he acknowledged that it had an influence on his later work experiences with which he was confronted:

"... whether as a community worker in an inner city area or working for the T&G as a trade union official in low paid industries in London, and the exposure to people's hardships I'm sure that my choices of this kind of commitment were influenced by those early-acquired, if you like, Christian values. I mean, I'm not a churchgoer now, but when I was young, attendance whether with the Cubs or Scouts was expected, it went with all the other activities I really enjoyed, especially camping and hiking – the activities you shared with friends and in so doing learned about mutual support. (...)

So what does that do to your understanding of society? You learn about these Christian values from a very early age, whatever that means, and about working with others These values are often summed up in simple phrases or mottoes, like, 'Don't walk by on the other side. Do unto people as you would be done by' – all that does influence you quite profoundly, and the choices you make, I believe'

While Robert's experiences of Christian values emerged from a relation to the church that 'was expected', they are still the first values that come to mind when asked about the source of his values today. As with Richard Newcastle above, not only does Robert draw on Christian values, but he has no difficulty in remembering the exact expressions from the Bible. He uses the archaic 'unto', and expresses the phrase using the *quid pro quo* style of treating people that Jesus used. We can see how this legacy has a powerful influence both as a guide for practices and as a way of seeing the world. In addition to the conjunction of outdoor activities and the church mentioned above, his interest in the environment emerged

"... in a kind of very profound way influenced by living near the sea, and often on the beach in the summer with my mother, and on the edge of what's called the South Downs, which is the countryside on the edge of Brighton, where we would often play when we were kids, in woods and – so that you would have a lot of contact I suppose, with just the natural environment without really kind of appreciating just how much you enjoyed it."

This is a vision of the environment not as a battleground between competing forces of capitalism, but a bucolic setting for restoration from everyday troubles.

Cultural Embeddedness and Historical Memory

There are less obvious but no less important ways in which religion insinuates itself into the everyday, even for those who do not see themselves as following a faith. First, through language and the discourses people use to organise their thoughts and give meaning to their world. Second, through the collective and historic memory of actions in the past which become talismanic and a source of identity for the present.

Language and Culture

Even if the unionists were not practicing their faith in the traditional way, i.e., attending church or praying regularly, for many their speech was peppered with Bible phrases which often reflected Christian principles and values, e.g., ‘do unto others as they would do unto you’ which might be a popular way of expressing justice and equality. Sometimes, such expressions emerge even though they do not mention religion or the church as part in their upbringing. One trade unionist, John Beaulieu, who has spent thirty years as part of a “democratic centralist Trotskyist organisation”, was not only keen to involve religious (and non-religious) groups in the ‘Campaign Against Climate Change’ but twice used the expression ‘being part of a broad church’ to refer to the inclusion of other groups, a phrase frequently employed by the Labour Party to describe its inclusive reach (Fletcher-Hackwood 2011).

Religion provides a discourse with which to describe the relationships between beliefs and action. A number of interviewees used the term ‘tools’ as instruments for change, perhaps not unsurprising given their industrial background. As Matt Cambridge said, “... *toolmakers have always been radical – they used to refer to them as the ‘labour aristocracy’ ... Heidegger who, of course, was a hideous person politically ... pointed out that one should distinguish between a tool and a machine. A tool is amenable to the human spirit, whereas a machine appropriates your knowledge.*” And tool, of course, reminds us of the prayer attributed to St Francis, ‘Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace’.

For others, the discourse of religion stands in contrast to action as it lays bare conflicts and contradictions. Jack Cromore cited the hypocrisy of some churchgoers and priests, who would demonstrate their faith inside the church, but “... *outside people were badmouthing each other! As a kid you think, ‘Well, that’s not what the priest was saying ten minutes ago!’*”

... *So that maybe formed the genesis of my questioning why, you know, faith, religion, Christianity, whatever, you know.*” He could see the contradiction in that people in church were exhorted to be just and non-discriminatory in their beliefs but the life lived outside encouraged people to be discriminatory. Arguably his criticism of Christianity is based on the values that this religion is defending, since what he criticises are not those values, but the ways in which they are not realised in the practices of those who allegedly follow them: “... *I didn't abandon what you might call the principles of it in terms of treating people fairly. And an extension of that is to treat animals fairly, and treat the environment fairly.*” This ‘extension’ is especially interesting because many religions, not only Christianity, create a connection between humans, or human nature and non-human nature (Simpson 2011).

Collective Memory and Culture

Language, is so much part of other influences it is difficult to discriminate ‘figure and ground’. It lies within the collective memories of those organisations to which individuals belong. Assmann (2011) maintains that while memories are held by individuals they are also shared with others, inter-generationally communicated in narratives, and interact with the material world which in turn become carriers of memories through events and acts of commemoration, sites and monuments, and the institutions of education and the media. The past and its traditions become socially constructed, assimilated and accommodated within existing cognitive structures. It becomes memorialised in language, images, artefacts, structures and events to provide discursive resources upon which the present draws (Potter and Wetherell 1995). The union banners paraded in marches which celebrate values such as solidarity, shared struggles, loyalty and strength, provide an obvious example. When

marching behind such a banner you are no longer marching only with those around you, but with all those members who fought the struggles of the past.

What bearing does this history and legacy have on the formation of UK trade unionists in the early 21st century, especially for those who do not purport to be ‘religious’? It is easy to become convinced of the construction of our societies and especially the labour movement as secular or even anti-religious, and thereby overlook the impact that religion has had on values and practices in our everyday lives. Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, argued that although Britain is clearly a more secular country than it was even fifty years ago, it still retains the vestiges of a Christian culture: “... *the cultural memory and in some ways, the cultural presence is still quite strongly Christian. But it is post-Christian in the sense that habitual practice for most of the population is not taken for granted... “A Christian country as a nation of believers? No. A Christian country in the sense of still being very much saturated by this vision of the world and shaped by it? Yes.”* (Moreton 2014). This is a reflection of the ‘Christianised beliefs’ (Voas and Crockett 2005) referred to earlier by several unionists who could recall words and language from religious engagement in their youth, but long since detached from their original context. When relating their life-stories, however, these engagements were resuscitated. Religious practices and world-views are deeply embedded in the weft and weave of society’s fabric and provide authority and significance for many people at transition points in their lives (e.g., baptisms, marriages and funerals).

Whether the unionists we interviewed are practicing or lapsed Christians, the language and values of the Bible run deep: “*the ‘purer tenets’ of Christianity, I suppose get embedded in you in the sense that ‘treat people fairly, you know, no discrimination’*” (Jack Cromore). The

dominant worldviews and the practices of a society are reflected in its language and thus language provides an almost inescapable framework for our assumptive world (Parkes 1971).

While the relationship between religion and trade union activity was openly expressed and consciously lived for some, for others it was more immanent, a taken for granted part of everyday culture, merged through discourse and collective memory. This culture feeds the genealogical roots of socialism in the UK, as Glasman (2011) argues. For example, Miliband was lampooned in the national media for appearing to see himself as Moses during the 2015 national election campaign when he wrote Labour's commitments on a tablet of stone. We would suggest that the media didn't 'get it'. While it may be speculation that he chose to present his commitments this way as it spoke to Labour's heritage, it is quite clear that this is how it was interpreted. Jack Cromore illustrates well the historical perspective: "*...because all unions don't see the cross-over between the environment and the industrial. But... we get knocked back on lots of things, you know, but you can't just say, 'Oh, we're giving up.' Because otherwise we wouldn't have got this far! I mean, we were founded 120 years ago*".

Of course, one must be cautious in making a direct correspondence between historical collective influences and individual action, implying that the interaction between religion and the labour movement 150 years ago is instrumental in the formation of individuals as agents of change today. But one way in which those influences exist and form the genetic code is through everyday language and through values that appear at first sight secular but are seen by some of our respondents in retrospect as part of their religious upbringing.

Conclusion

Perhaps we should not have been surprised that religion and the church played a role in the formation of some trade unionists. After all, the church is one of society's significant institutions (the workplace, the family and the school are others) and directly or subtly, plays a key role in the development of individual and collective identities, integrates personal lives with the State, inculcates cultural norms and practices and is a critical source of hegemonic discourses. We know that early experiences (e.g., attending religious services and church-based youth and sports organizations) leave a lasting legacy on values and actions. A number of the unionists we spoke to took on leadership and organizing roles in such organizations in their youth, which then provided the competences, sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem and experience they drew on in later life. We are also well aware that our societies are steeped in religious practices and discourses, even when they are not necessarily experienced as religious anymore, but just as everyday culture. In some of our other case studies (especially in Brazil authors, Forthcoming)³ a link has been drawn between concern for the environment and concern for workers' rights and conditions, the two "plagues that bleed" as Boff (1996) called them. This link is both a theoretical (Gutiérrez 1973) and one based on everyday experiences: the destruction of nature and its impact on communities. In the UK, it is less easy to find this kind of connection. All of our UK interviewees were passionate about their environmental concerns and the role of unions in making a difference, but in many cases their interests focussed on trade union concerns about climate change legislation and its potential impact on the workplace, production and jobs. Even those unionists who represented their religious belief as an important motivation for their work, described its presence more as a personal conviction guiding their individual actions, not as an institutional association.

³ See also: *Laudato Si* (Pope Francis 2015)

The life experiences that led our unionists into an involvement with environmental issues were as different as the role of religion in their formation as individuals. For some, denominational faith had been passed across generations; some had come to a faith later in their lives. Those respondents who had experienced conservative and doctrinally orthodox positions were critical and prepared to ask awkward questions and be “*an argumentative little sod*” (a good training ground for a trade unionist) on the grounds that the values which were preached were not lived. Yet others simply reject any kind of religion. Some were surrounded by a hostile world in which the ‘comfortable words’⁴ have to stand alongside ever-present injustice and pain such as sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland. For others, coming from more progressive religious backgrounds, even the ‘lapsed’ religion provides a moral compass and a normative framework of values with respect to social relations, mutual support and listening to others. And for some, a link was forged with the environment as a vehicle for connecting justice for workers with justice for animals and nature, including the struggle against climate change. It is this link that we found especially interesting since it begs a question about the way in which the relation between nature and labour is conceived in the labour movement.

Nature and Labour

Despite the fact that trade unions internationally (Rosemberg 2013; Burrow 2014; ITUC 2015) and nationally (TUC 2008; Hampton 2015) have included environmental issues into their agenda and fought to incorporate a ‘just transition’ for workers into the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, we did not find them to have developed a new worldview which accounts for the inseparable relationship between nature and labour. Both are seen as separate entities, where one (production) has an effect on the other (authors 2013).

⁴ The ‘comfortable words’, taken from the New Testament and found in Anglican Book of Common Prayer, aim to give succour to those who are burdened.

Marx' dictum that society's wealth is not produced by workers alone but by workers and the earth Marx (Marx 1998) has not been taken up in the trade union movement. Recently Moore (2015) developed the concept of the *oikeios* to conceptualise that 'Nature, (...) becomes the matrix within which human activity unfolds, and the field upon which historical agency operates.' (Moore 2015, 2013). While the trade union movement has not yet found a way to develop its own concept of the relationship between labour and nature, in some interpretations of Christianity a worldview is espoused in which humans and nature are seen as allies, as opposed to an unequal relationship in which humans dominate nature. In Liberation theology, the exploitation of the labourer and the exploitation of nature by Capital are seen as one and the same process (Boff 1996). Several unionists, including Jack Cromore, grasped this idea (above) and saw a relationship between justice for people and justice for nature.

Even though individuals may no longer attend church or have a Christian (or other) faith, religious precepts were a salient part of these individuals' biographies and formation, in which involvement in the church at a young age has left a lasting legacy of values centring on social justice, fairness and a concern for others. Such values are not exclusively Christian but in the Western world historically such values have been formulated to a large degree by Christianity, an argument that is reinforced by the finding that the cultural influence of religion is also manifest in everyday discourse.

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