

Where can I go to study the management of religious and faith-based organisations?

If you work in the private sector, then the answer to the questions 'Where can I go to study management? Where can I find out how the private sector works? And what can I read?' would be fairly obvious: a business school, and the now vast literature on management theory developed in the private sector. And when it comes to selecting an appropriate business school, and an appropriate course, the diversity on offer can be overwhelming.

If you work in the public sector, or if you want to know about it, then the answers to those questions would be a little more complicated, but there would still be plenty of answers. A course on a particular public sector field, such as healthcare management, or education policy, might be in a social policy department, or in the public sector department of a business school: but it would take long to find plenty of appropriate departments and courses to choose from. The literature might not be quite as voluminous as for the private sector, but there is still plenty of it, again often divided into separate public sector subfields.

And there are now answers to the same questions in relation to the voluntary and community sector. Starting with Brunel University forty years ago, a wide variety of academic institutions now offer courses in how the voluntary and community sector works.

In all three of these sectors – the private, the public, and the voluntary and community – there are courses at a variety of different levels, there are research opportunities, and there is peer reviewed literature, both books and journals.

But those are not the only organisational sectors. There is a fourth sector – the 'faith' or 'religious' sector – containing a vast number of organisations; and between the religious sector and the private, public and voluntary and community sectors, we can find a plethora of faith-based organisations – not religious organisations, because religion is not their main function: but faith-based, because they are closely connected to religious organisations or traditions – and these too constitute a vast sector all of their own.

The religious and faith-based sector might be vast, but when we attempt to answer the same questions that we have asked about the other three sectors, answer comes there none. Is that really true? Are there not academic departments – perhaps of sociology, or of voluntary sector management – in which staff members and researchers have an interest in religious and faith-based organisations? Take, for instance, Goldsmiths University of London's Faiths and Civil Society Unit. Doesn't that count? Yes, it does, in a way: but its focus is the boundary between religion in all its many aspects and civil society in all of its aspects. It might sometimes do some work on the characteristics and management of religious and faith-based organisations: but that is not its primary focus. And doesn't Lancaster University's Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion have a strong interest in the sociology of religion and in congregational studies? Yes – and perhaps congregational studies is the closest we get to research on the characteristics and management of religious organisations. But all of that only goes to show that there really is no answer to

the questions 'Where can I go to study the management of the religious and faith-based sector?' and 'Where can I go to find out how the religious and faith-based sector works?' – because the departments that we have discussed will not be labelled in such a way that someone asking those questions will find them; and if they did find their way to them then they would find that specifically organisational studies would be one interest among many others.

The same is true of literature on the characteristics and management of religious and faith-based organisations. There *is* literature out there, but it is hidden away within a wide variety of other categories: sociology, voluntary sector management, social policy, and organisational behaviour, to name just a few of them. As far as I know, there are no peer reviewed journals dedicated to the characteristics and management of religious and faith-based organisations – although there are of course numerous articles on the subject in a wide variety of differently labelled journals. I know that there is a lot of literature out there because I have read much of it, and you will be able to find some of it in my books, *Managing God's Business* (Ashgate, 2005) and *Managing Religion* (two volumes, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). But it was hard work finding it all.

Religion now matters more than it has for a very long time. The world has not become secular. It is still intensely religious: and now we've noticed what an important social fact religion is. At the heart of religion are religious and faith-based organisations; there is a sense in which religion is intrinsically organisational; and it might even be true to say that a religion is constituted by its religious organisations and by the beliefs and practices that evolve within them.

This means that it is now essential that there should be not just one place to which we can point someone who asks 'Where can I go to study the management of religious and faith-based organisations? Where can I find out how the religious and faith-based sector works? And what can I read?' but that there should be lots of places to which we can point them: to which we can point the local government councillors and officers who want to know how to relate to the religious organisations in their borough; and to which we can point the minister of state, the MP, or the civil servant, who wants to understand the different levels at which religious organisations operate, and can't understand why religious organisations don't work in the same way as other organisations do.

It is from these questions that a new research project that I have been asked to undertake at the Susanna Wesley Foundation will set out. The first task will be to find out exactly what is out there in terms of courses, research opportunities, and literature. We'll then evaluate what we find and ask where the gaps are and how they might be filled.

Perhaps by the end of the three year project we'll be able to answer the questions: 'Where can I go to study the management of religious and faith-based organisations? Where can I find out how the religious and faith-based sector works? And what can I read?' by pointing the questioner towards at least one academic institution dedicated to education and research on the characteristics and management of religious and faith-based organisations.