



comprehension about religion, and have no intention of remedying the defects in their research. As Madeline Bunting wrote in a recent Guardian piece:

“The ignorance in the media is, to some extent, to be expected; this is the frontline between believer and sceptical secularism, and most journalists have a sketchy understanding of the complexity and history of theology that make up a religious tradition, and even less sympathy or interest.”

This has implications for the nature of our pluralism. The ignorance-fuelled hostility to religion, widespread among secular liberal elites, is in danger of colouring society’s value-free “neutrality” in ways that are both bland and naïve. They are also impractical, unattractive and, I suggest, oppressive. A true sense of difference, in which a genuine pluralism could thrive, is under threat of being reduced to a lowest common denominator of uniformity and conformity, where any non-secular contribution will automatically be regarded as socially divisive by definition. (...)

In 2005, a YouGov poll asked the question “Would you consider yourself to be religious?” Although 71% of the general public said “yes”, only 21% of the TV industry was as positive. If this is the case with the TV industry, you can be sure it is the same for the metropolitan Arts, Cultural and Media elites. These are people who speak only to themselves and have convinced each other that the rest of the country thinks just like them. They are wrong.

There is a huge amount of anecdotal evidence that points to a widespread discomfort felt by religious people in this world. They confront ignorance and prejudice about their beliefs, because to be religious, according to the new secular, liberal orthodoxy is to be reactionary, bigoted and narrow. A smug ignorance, a gross oversimplification and caricature that serves as an analytical understanding of religion, is the common intellectual currency. What kind of bridge can be built to this precious and introverted milieu? It would be a disaster if secular liberals were abandoned in their increasing illiberality . The democracy that they affect to defend would not survive the erasure of the spiritual perspective from the Public Square. The bridge has to be built by Christians and others being firm in resisting increasingly aggressive attempts to still their voices. They must go on speaking truth to power, expressing their insights and creativity from a confident understanding of their traditions and beliefs. It will make for honest and informed debate and a bridge built on sure foundations.