

WELCOME!

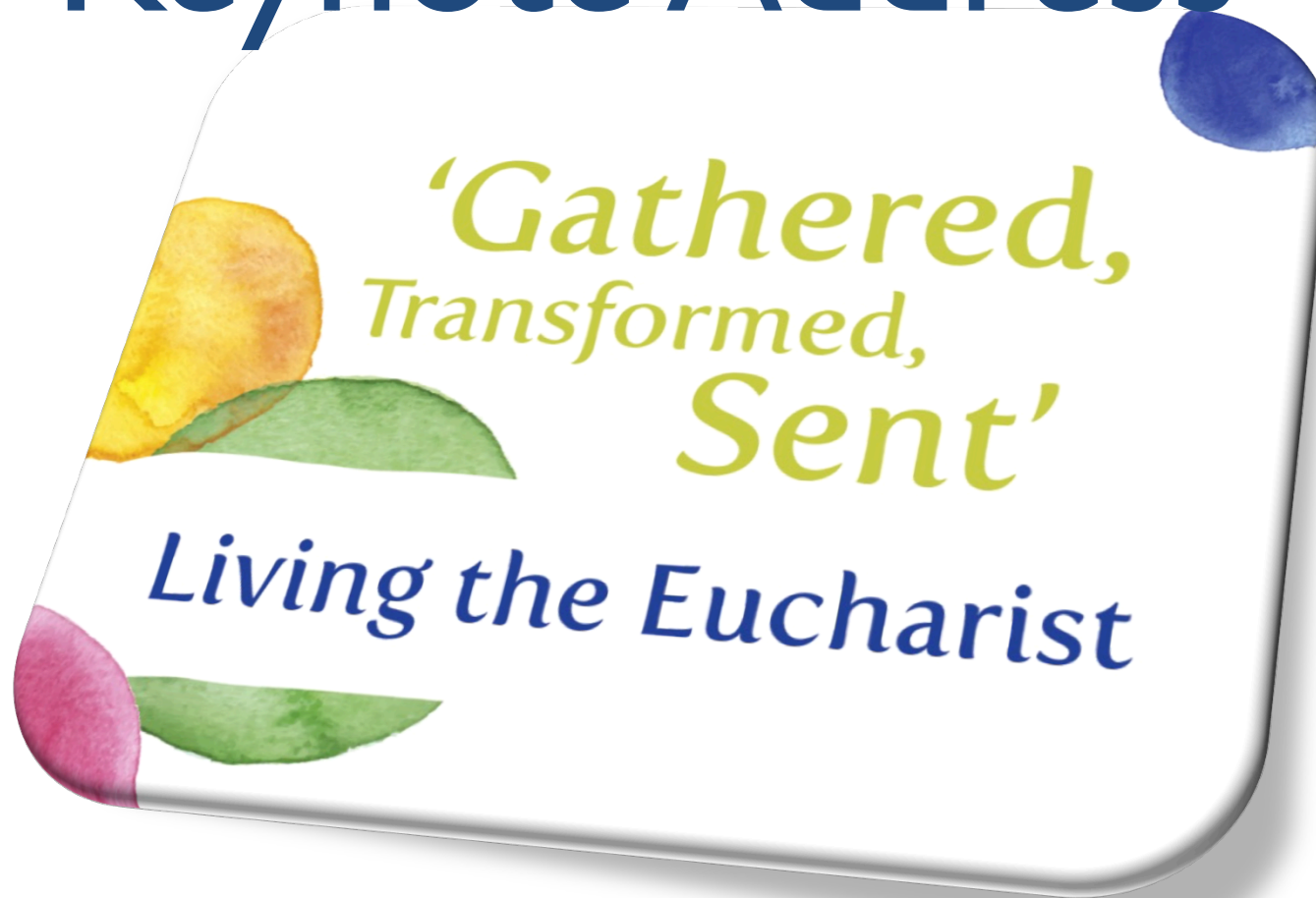
*'Gathered,
Transformed,
Sent'*

Living the Eucharist

Please sit where you like but do take the opportunity to mix with those you don't know as well as those you do.

The hearing loop works best at the sides of the room.

Keynote Address



Professor Grace Davie

Understanding religion in modern Britain

Looking in and looking out



The steps in the argument

Looking inwards

- the British case
- the factors to take into account

Looking outwards

- the crucial question
- the European Enlightenment
- the International Panel on Social Progress



What Britain is the factors to take into account

There are six:

- cultural heritage
- vicarious religion – a public utility
- a shift from obligation to consumption – a market
- new arrivals
- secular alternatives
- **Europe as an exceptional case**

Drawing these together – a tentative conclusion



A tentative conclusion . . .

A continuing/remorseless process of secularization
(bringing with it a worrying loss of religious literacy),
offset by growth in some areas

The increasing salience of religion in public as well as
private debate, a tendency encouraged by the ever
more obvious presence of religion in the modern
world order

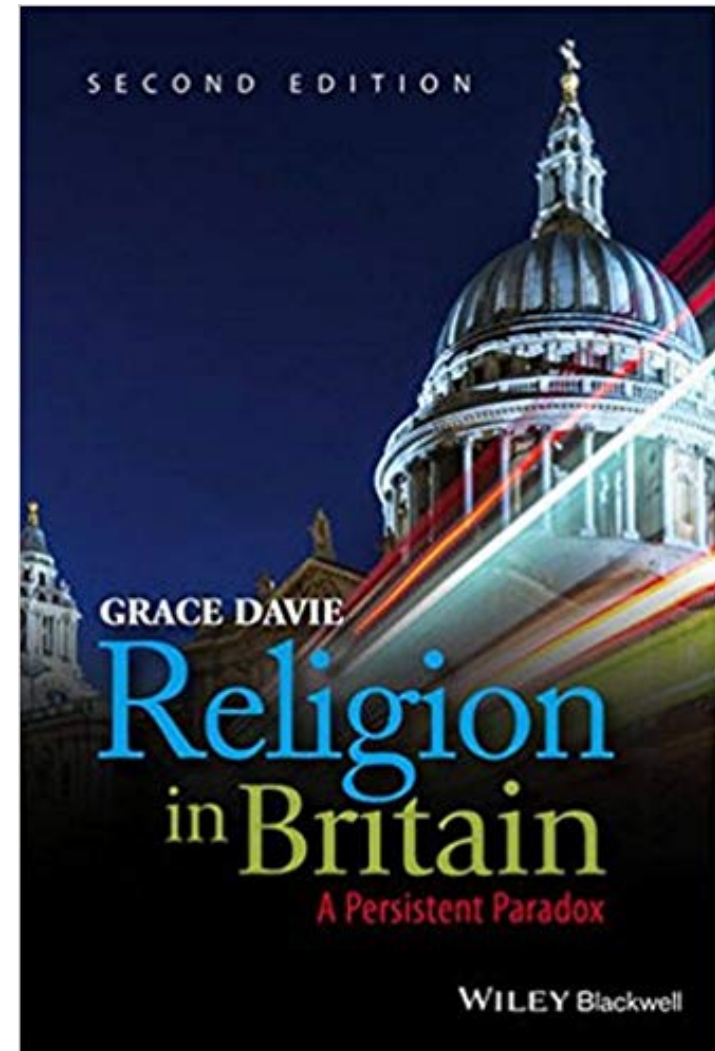
We talk more about something that we do less
A challenging combination



In more detail

Best summarized as
'a persistent
paradox'

Hence the subtitle
of my 2015 book



Variations on the theme

Regional differences

England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

London

the factors are differently weighted

new factors to take into account

David Martin (1978) – Europe is a unity (one Caesar and one God); Europe is a diversity (the existence of nations)

the tensions and partnerships that ensue

Brexit



Looking outwards

The crucial question

Is Europe/ Britain secular because it is modern; or is Europe secular because it is European?

A great deal depends on the answer

- huge implications for the understanding of religion and the tools that we bring to bear on this process
- conceptual maps
- understanding absence as well as presence



What Europe/ Britain is not

It is **not** a vibrant religious market as is found in the US

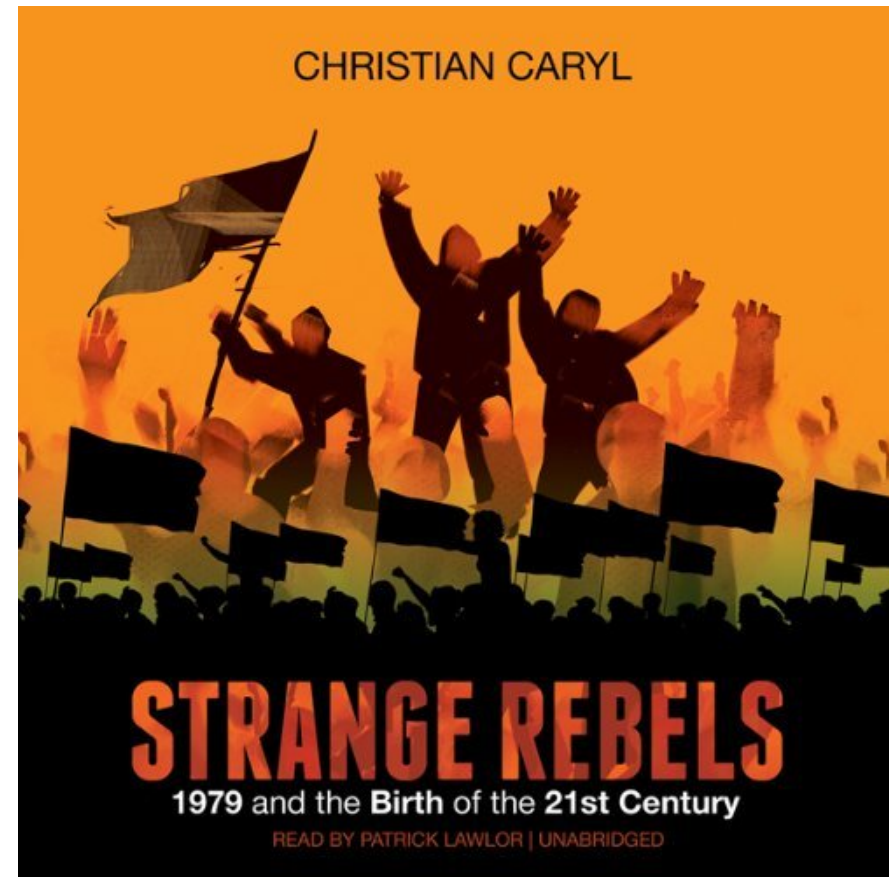
It is **not** a part of the world where Christianity is growing exponentially, often in Pentecostal forms, as is found in the global south

It is **not** a part of the world dominated by faiths other than Christian, but is increasingly penetrated by these

It is **not** for the most part subject to the violence often associated with religion and religious difference in other parts of the globe – the more so if religion becomes entangled in political conflict



Global religion



1979

Four leaders and five countries

Mrs Thatcher, Deng Xiaoping, John-Paul II, Ayatollah Khomeini
UK, China, Poland, Iran, Afghanistan

In each case a 'strong' state and a commitment to secularism
give way to a free market and persistent religion

Nobody saw this coming

Why not? The assumptions of social science

1979 → 1989 → 9/11,2001



The Enlightenment and social science

Manuel Vasquez (from El Salvador) – sociology as the epistemological child of the Enlightenment

- rationality/ empirical observation – the ultimate sources of knowledge, as opposed to faith and revelation

Drawing on Auguste Comte – the opposition between theology and sociology is central to incipient sociology's self understanding

Religion as the intellectual and dying 'other'
Secularization is built into the DNA of the discipline



Does this matter?

Europe

- a *relatively* good fit between sociological thinking about religion and empirical realities, keeping in mind regional variations, growing complexities, and unexpected developments (e.g. London)

The global context

- universalizing the theory causes trouble
- my/our experience with the IPSP



What is the IPSP?

The International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP) harnessed the competence of hundreds of experts about social issues

- to deliver a report addressed to social actors, movements, organizations, politicians and decision-makers
- to provide them with the best expertise on questions that bear on social change

Full independence from political parties, governments, and organizations with a partisan agenda

Secondary goal – to foster research on the topics it covered



Chapter 16 in the ISSP report 1

2015 – an invitation from the IPSP to co-lead (with Nancy Ammerman) the chapter team dealing with religion

- the significance of religion as a factor in social progress on a global scale

A marked shift in attitudes amongst those who work in the field of religion

Much less evident in the mainstreams of the social sciences, where European paradigms persist





Chapter 16 in the ISSP report 2

Starts from the premise that **some 80 percent of the world's population affirms some kind of religious identification**, a proportion that is growing rather than declining

The peak of secularity/ secularism – 1970s

Significant changes in the former Soviet Union and in China

Plus differential birthrates

Note throughout – an emphasis on **lived religion**, rather than belief as such



Chapter 16 in the ISSP report 3

Emphasizes the **significance of belief and practice in everyday lives and local contexts**, analyzing the impact of religion and its relevance to social progress in a wide variety of fields:

- family, gender and sexuality
- diversity and democracy
- conflict and peace-making
- everyday wellbeing
- care for the earth



Further . . .

Argues that researchers and policy makers pursuing social progress will benefit from careful attention to the power of **religious ideas** to motivate, of **religious practices** to shape ways of life, of **religious communities** to mobilize and extend the reach of social change, and of **religious leaders and symbols** to legitimate calls to action

All of these, however, can be put to either good or ill, for which reason assessment of particular religions in specific contexts is essential



In conclusion

Five interconnected themes:

- the persistence of religion in the twenty-first century
- the importance of context in discerning outcomes
- the need for cultural competence relative to religion
- the significance of religion in initiating change
- the benefits of well-judged partnerships

A continuing need for critical but appreciative assessment and the demonstrable benefits of creative partnerships



Key readings 1

Grace Davie 'Religion in Europe in the 21st century: the factors to take into account', *European Journal of Sociology*, 65, 2006

Grace Davie *Religion in Britain*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell 2015

Grace Davie *Europe: The Exceptional Case*. DLT 2002

Peter Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas *Religious America, Secular Europe: A Theme and Variations*. Farnham: Ashgate 2008

See also:

David Martin *A General Theory of Secularization*.
Oxford: Blackwell 1978



Key readings 2

Grace Davie A lived, situated and constantly changing reality. Why religion is relevant to the pursuit of social progress

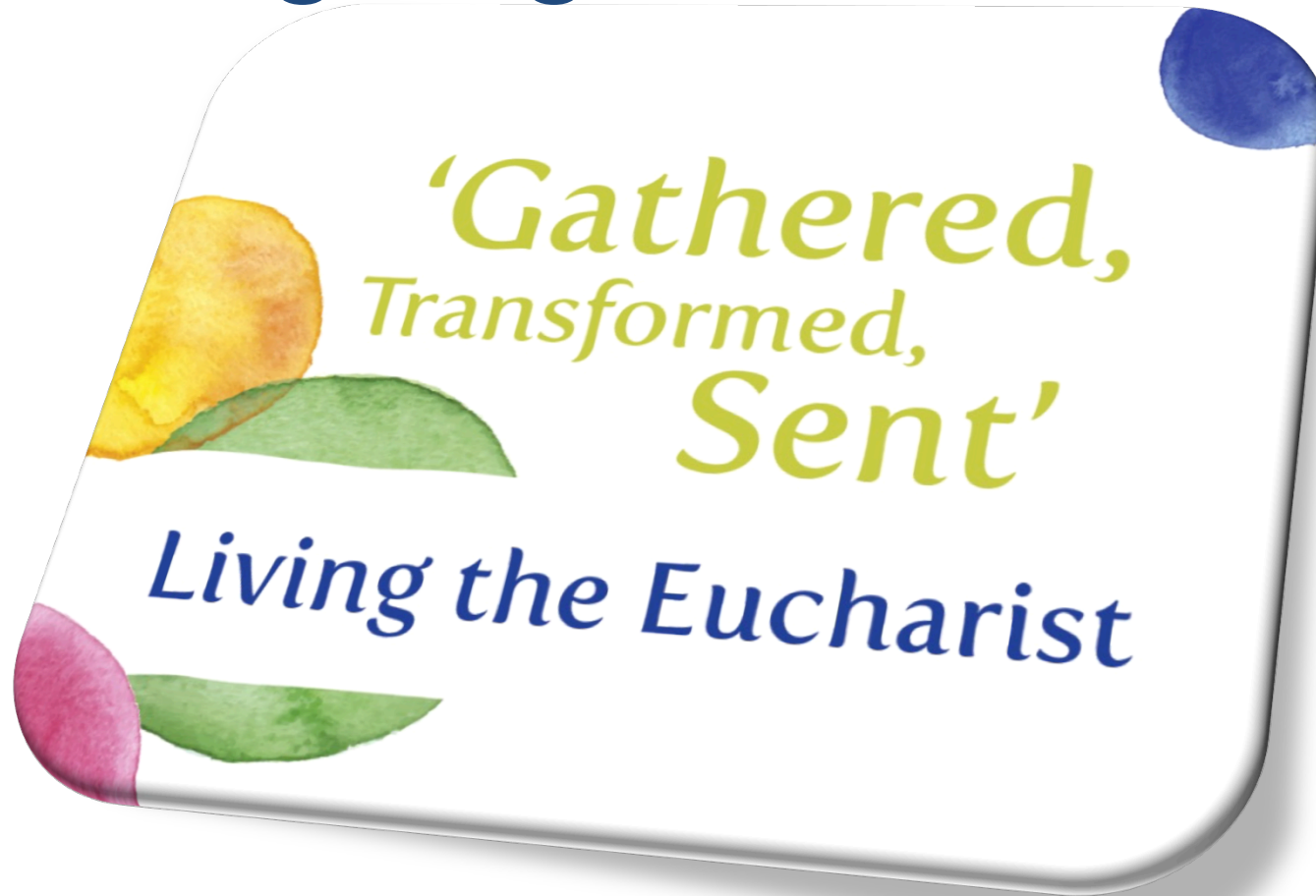
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2019/01/a-lived-situated-and-constantly-changing-reality-why-religion-is-relevant-to-the-pursuit-of-social-progress/>

Grace Davie *Religion in Public Life: Levelling the Ground* (Theos 2017)

<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2017/10/28/religion-in-public-life-levelling-the-ground>

Manuel Vasquez 'Grappling with the legacy of modernity: Implications for the sociology of religion', in Courtney Bender et al., *Religion on the Edge: De-Centering and Re-Centering in the Sociology of Religion*. New York: OUP 2013

Understanding religion in modern Britain



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