

Understanding religion in Northern Europe

The factors to take into account

Questions/ tensions to keep in mind

Thinking about:

- growth or decline/ more or less?
- obligation and/or choice
- public and private
- the religious and the secular; mutually constituted or diametrically opposed?
- long-term trajectories/ recent change

The factors to take into account

There are five:

- cultural heritage
- vicarious religion
- a shift from obligation to consumption
- new arrivals
- secular alternatives

Drawing these together in light of the questions/ tensions set out above – some tentative conclusions

Cultural heritage

Religion – one factor amongst others

Time and space – think about calendars, seasons, festivals, holidays, weeks and weekends

The physical and cultural environment

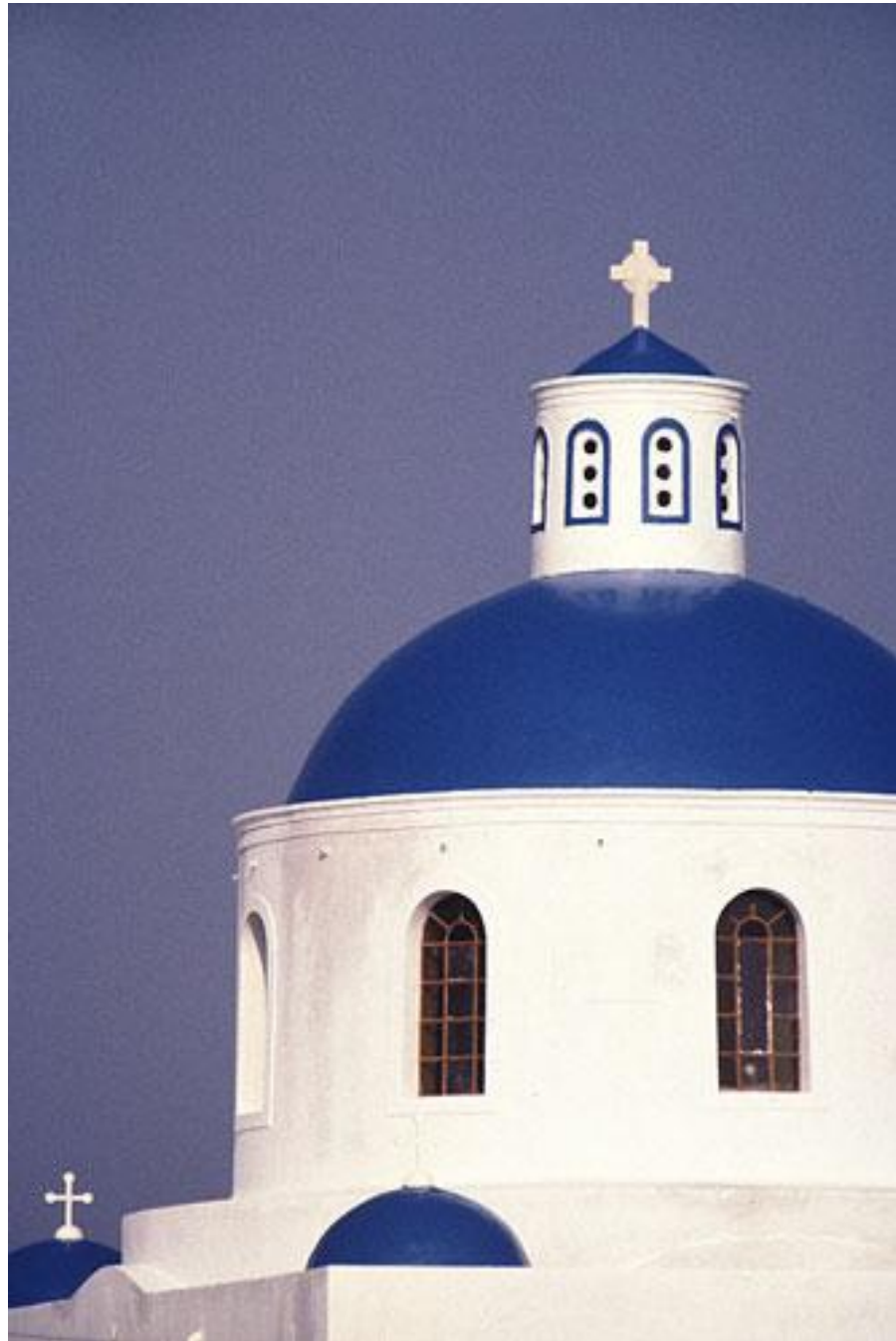
Some examples from different parts of Europe – a familiar, taken-for-granted skyline

State churches or their successors









The historical legacy: there at the point of need

Sociological approaches:

- believing without belonging (GD 1990 on)
- vicarious religion (GD 2000 on)

A modern illustration: Jade Goody

- what happened at the end of her life?
- why did she turn to the church?
- how did the church respond?

Believing without belonging

A first attempt . . . (GD 1990 on)

- where did the phrase comes from?
- when did it emerge?
- what does it mean?
- what does it not mean?
- why was it so popular?

Use and abuse

Vicarious religion 1

A more profitable approach . . . (GD 2000)

A definition of vicarious:

By vicarious, I mean the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing.

Think of an iceberg – what is under the water?

Vicarious religion 2

How does religion can operate vicariously?

- by performing ritual on behalf of others
- by believing on behalf of others
- by embodying moral codes on behalf of others
- by offering space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues (understanding sexualities, bio-ethical issues)

Who cares?

Researching vicarious religion

Can it be counted?

- if so, how and how not to do it

Imaginative sociology

- absence as well as presence
- what happens if you take something away
- revealing the 'implicit'
- death and disasters
- buildings and liturgy

Jade Goody

From obligation to consumption 1

The church goes:

What until moderately recently was simply imposed (with all the negative connotations of this word), or inherited (a rather more positive spin) becomes instead a matter of personal choice.

Good news or bad?

The example of infant baptism – no longer a sign of Englishness (or whatever), but of commitment to a particular faith community.

From obligation to consumption 2

The popular choices:

- the charismatic evangelical church
- the cathedral or city-centre church

Examples from Exeter

Nordic illustrations – from the NOREL material

- both churches and new forms of spirituality

The common factor?

- the importance of experience: Durkheim was right!

Secular equivalents

The welfare state:

- its development in different parts of Europe
- the mirror image of the dominant religious tradition
- 'replacing' religion
- state funded welfare begins to erode – internal/ external pressures
- renewed attention to the market, to the voluntary sector, and to religious providers within this
- new questions and new research fields

New arrivals 1

Who, why and where from? Two waves:

- 1960s/1970s – expanding economies
- 1990s – demographic change

A primarily economic movement with considerable implications for religion

Importance of accurate facts and figures

- popular /media misconceptions

New arrivals 2

Christians from the global South

The movement of people

Early mistakes

'Reverse' mission

Some examples

- Afro-Caribbean churches in London
- London as post-secular (a tricky term)
- using the UK Census
- religion and/or ethnicity

Afro-Caribbean churches

Matthew Ashimolowo
Hackney



Styles of worship



New arrivals 3

The significance of Islam

The public/private distinction

France versus Britain

Dutch (il)liberalism; the Danish cartoons

Shari'ah law – the Archbishop of Canterbury and a Swedish
doctoral thesis

The importance of history

Different reactions – national and other

A symbol of oppression?



A British compromise



European reactions

Political/popular – all over Europe more or less secularized populations are obliged to address complex religious issues on a regular basis, doing so within the parameters of their own history

Intellectual – new forms of theorizing are emerging in different areas of the social sciences in order to accommodate the religious factor

- one example – Jürgen Habermas

Policy making

What is to be done?

- accurate information
- the role of education
- the quality of the debate
- look for the positive
- examples of good practice
- awareness of locality

Over to you . . .

A rather different reaction: militant atheism

How to understand this?

Some examples

Reactive

‘Normal’?

- Europe v. America

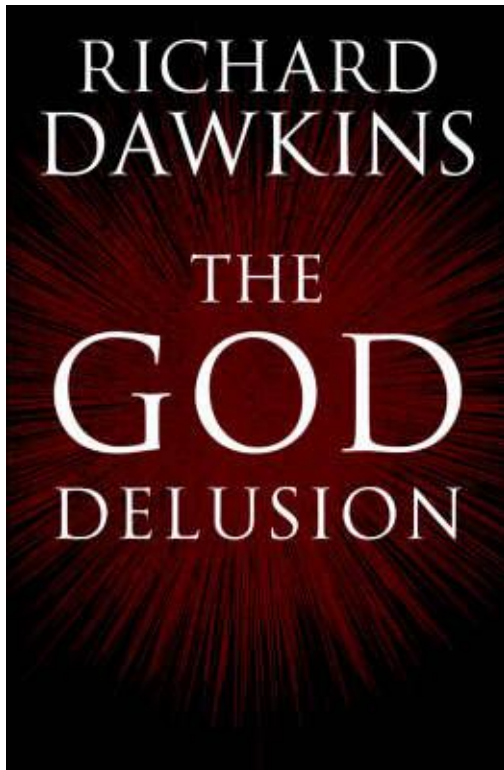
Fundamentalist

Unreasonable

Intolerant

- Richard Dawkins
- Christopher Hitchens
- Polly Toynbee
- Daniel Dennett
- Sam Mason
- Michel Onfray

Images of unbelief



Winding up

The five factors and one more:

- cultural heritage
- vicarious religion
- a shift from obligation to consumption
- new arrivals
- secular alternatives

Europe as an exceptional case

Large part of the world as 'as furiously religious as ever'

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A tentative conclusion . . .

A continuing/remorseless process of secularization (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

A challenging combination

Key reading(s)

- G. Davie 'Religion in Europe in the 21st century: the factors to take into account', *European Journal of Sociology*, 65, 2006
- P. Berger, G. Davie and E. Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe: A Theme and Variations*. Aldershot: Ashgate 2008
- A. Bäckström, G. Davie, N. Edgardh and P. Pettersson (eds) *Welfare and Religion in 21st century Europe: Volumes 1 and 2*. Aldershot: Ashgate 2010