

Searching questions, abundant data and partial answers

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Koinonia Lecture, January 2023

The starting point

Co-editing (with Lucian Leustean) *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe* (OUP 2021)

- indicative of a change in mood right across Europe

Then – in rapid succession – the pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, and a cost of living crisis

Plus in the UK, the death of the Queen Elizabeth II coinciding with abrupt changes in political leadership

Is our thinking (not to mention our tools and concepts) up to the task?

The International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP)

Noting in particular the chapter on religion

See <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/>

Selected findings:

- the persistence of religion in the modern world; the importance of context in discerning outcomes (both positive and negative); the urgent need to enhance cultural competence (religious literacy)

Key – overlapping – questions

Is it possible to reconcile a continuing process of secularization and growing religious diversity? The former impedes constructive conversation about religion in public life; the latter demands it.

How have Europe's churches responded to the restrictions and opportunities of COVID-19? Is religion an additional risk in this situation, or is it an untapped resource? And how do we move on?

The invasion of Ukraine has shone new light on the fissures within Orthodoxy; it has also exposed the dangers of 'culturalized religion'. What is to be done?

1. The changing nature of religion in Europe

The need to hold very different factors together:

- Growing secularization; a steady drift towards no-religion/ non-belief = the 'nones'; marked generational change
religion is marginalized → the consequences
- Growing religious diversity; brought about by immigration
at times, religion dominates debate
challenging issues → difficult to manage
an ill-informed and ill-mannered conversation

A partial transformation in 'vicarious religion' (GD 2000)

Wistful memories of the past; or a bulwark against outsiders

1990s – 2000s

GD – the 'original' meaning of the term

Hard and soft variables – of both belonging and belief

An active minority doing something on behalf of a much larger group

Cathedrals in this context

Would it last? Many thought not – the importance of generational shifts

The rise in 'no-religion'

Moving forwards

April 2021



September 2022



An unexpected development...

A growing literature on new forms of (mostly right-wing) politics (populism)

- re/mis-appropriations of (vicarious) religion in this
- culturalization of majority religions – with the intention of excluding ‘outsiders’ – notably Islam
- examples from different part of Europe; the notion of ‘fortress Europe’

The shell of religion without its theological core; Max Weber’s religious ethic

The ‘result’ of secularization?

Anja Hennig, Mirjam Weiberg-Salzmann (eds). *Illiberal Politics in Europe and Beyond*. Campus Verlag 2021

2. February 2020: a new virus – COVID 19

The interconnections with religion

Two starting points:

- is (minority) religion a risk or a resource in this respect?

Linnea Lundgren – a Swedish doctoral thesis

Recovery/ moving forwards: three options

- business as usual; a great unravelling; a new and creative human response

Joanna Macy and Molly Brown: *Coming Back to Life*

Religion: risk or resource

(Minority) religions at risk and as a risk

- perception and reality
- higher levels of morbidity and mortality; super-spreading events; the demography of church-goers; singing; a shared cup ...

(Minority) religions as a resource

- approaches which harness 'the wide range of experience of multiple faith groups, prominent community leaders, and NHS staff regarding community engagement', in order to develop and disseminate 'culturally appropriate COVID-19 materials and interventions' (Ala et al 2021:1).

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370\(21\)00142-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370(21)00142-5/fulltext)

Moving on

Joanna Macy and Molly Brown: *Coming Back to Life*

https://newsociety.com/books/c/coming-back-to-life?_ga=2.136387384.9034166.1664486862-471041579.1664486862&sitedomain=row

Business as usual – unlikely in either religious or secular life

The great unravelling – possible but not very constructive

New and creative human responses

- finding a way forward/ looking for handholds – what might these be?
- thinking carefully about on-line activities, many of which are very positive (the occasional offices)
- attitudes to buildings – a related question

Online worship: a learning experience

Hannah Alderson and Grace Davie

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0040571X20985697>

Four very different examples from the Diocese of Exeter (March-July 2020)

- a national service to mark the end of Mental Health Awareness Week
- a range of cathedral worship
- the experiences of an urban parish church
- a university chaplaincy

3. February 2022 – the invasion of Ukraine by Russia

Religion and conflict in general

Note the chapter on religion in the IPSP

‘Religion’ as such rarely causes conflict, but if religion becomes – for whatever reason – one factor among others in a conflict, the situation is almost always more difficult to resolve; the stakes are higher

Religion as part of the problem (a risk), but also part of the solution (a resource)

The complexities of religion in Russia/ Ukraine

President Putin believes that by invading Ukraine he is defending Orthodox Christianity from the godless West

- the role of Patriarch Kirill in this enterprise
- the notion of the Russian world (*Russkii mir*)

Is this an extreme example of culturalized religion?

‘A Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii mir) teaching’

<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/>

- Brandon Gallaher’s role in this



Noting in addition

1. The fissures within Orthodoxy – more specifically in Ukrainian Orthodoxy – and their relevance to the current crisis
2. The fault line between East (Orthodox) and West (Catholic) Europe

See OUP blog: <https://blog.oup.com/2022/05/the-president-and-the-patriarch-the-significance-of-religion-in-the-ukrainian-crisis/>

for the key themes

and Tetiana Kalenychenko and Denys Brylov ‘Ukrainian religious actors and organizations after Russia’s invasion: the struggle for peace’ for the detail

<https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/ukrainian-religious-actors-and-organizations-after-russia-s-invasion-the-struggle-for-peace>

Keeping in mind ...

The incapacity of Western/ European minds to grasp the continuing significance of religion in much of the modern world + a marked lack of cultural competence (religious literacy)

- the religious dimension of the Ukrainian conflict is a case in point

It is important that we understand this:

- good social science demands that we see the issues from the point of view of the adversary as well as from our own – only then can effective dialogue begin

To conclude

Is our thinking – not to mention our tools and concepts – up to the task?

Imagination: the crucial, and all too often, missing link

- re. the questions to ask; the data to look for; the explanations/ theories to deploy; and the policies to consider with a view to resolution

Taking note of (IPSP again):

- 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
- for good or ill ...