

***Only Connect - Communicating the Christian Faith in the 21st Century  
From Obligation to Consumption:***

**Patterns of Religion in Northern Europe at the Start of the twenty first Century**

**Grace Davie, University of Exeter**

The following chapter has two principal sections.

The first, and longest, explores the current situation in the religious life of Northern Europe, utilizing as a conceptual frame the complex relationship between religious belief and religious belonging. It draws extensively on previously published work (Davie 1994, 2000).

The second section suggests an additional and overriding mutation that is taking place in this part of the world both within and outside the historic churches, that is from forms of religion that are imposed or inherited to forms of religion that are primarily chosen.

The implications of these changes for the future of Europe's religious life are explored in a short conclusion, which reintroduces the more general theme of comparative secularity. In so doing it pays particular attention to the relationship between the public and private.

One preliminary is important at the outset.

These sections do not represent clear-cut differences in terms of the realities of religious life, in the sense that the processes described in each of them are to a large extent overlapping. Or to put the same point in a different way, the gradual emergence of an ethic of consumption rather than one of obligation takes place within the historical parameters of Northern Europe, a part of the world characterized by the particular connections between belief and belonging that are explained in the following pages.

## **I Believing and Belonging in Northern Europe**

Both the following sections assume a general understanding of the patterns of religion in Northern Europe. A detailed discussion of both the patterns themselves and their implications for sociological (as indeed for pastoral) thinking can be found in Davie (2000: 5-23).

### **Believing without belonging**

One of the most striking features of religious life in contemporary Europe is the evident mismatch between different measurements of religiousness. There exists, first of all, a set of indicators which measure firm commitments to (a) institutional life and (b) credal statements of religion (in this case Christianity). All of these display a marked reduction in Europe as a whole, but most of all in the Protestant states of Northern Europe – hence the reputation of a country such as Sweden as one of the most secular in the world.<sup>1</sup>

These indicators are, of course, closely related to each other in so far as institutional commitment (in the form of religious membership or regular practice) both reflects and confirms religious belief in its orthodox forms. The believing Christian attends church to express his or her belief and to receive affirmation that this is the right thing to do. At the same time, repeated exposure to the institution and its teaching necessarily informs, not to say disciplines, belief.

No observer of the current religious scene disputes these facts – i.e. that these dimensions of European religion are both interrelated and in serious decline. There is, on the other hand, considerable debate about the consequences of this situation. The complex relationship

between belief (in a wider sense) and practice is central to this discussion, for it is clear that a manifest reduction in the 'hard' indicators of religious life has not, in the short term at least, had a similar effect on rather less rigorous dimensions of religiousness. Indeed, the resultant mismatch in the different indicators is the principal finding of the of the various enquiries carried out under the auspices of the European Values Study 2; it is supported by almost all empirical investigation of the current religious scene in Northern Europe. It is precisely this state of affairs, moreover, which is captured by the phrase 'believing without belonging' (Davie 1994), the popularity of which in both pastoral as well as sociological accounts of religious life in modern Europe indicates, in itself, its perceived accuracy.

Important questions follow from this, not all of which have been underlined as firmly as they might. The first concerns the status of the churches as voluntary organizations. If it is true that the churches as institutions have declined markedly in the post-war period, the same is true of almost all parallel activities in the secular life of Northern European (and indeed other) societies. The most obvious comparative example are political parties, trades unions and the wide range of leisure activities which require 'gathering' on a regular basis.<sup>3</sup>

Situating the churches within this broader economic and social context is crucial for a proper understanding of what is going on. In my view, it indicates that the reduction in church life in this part of Europe should be seen a part of a profound change in the nature of social life; it is not, in contrast, an unequivocal indicator of religious indifference. Or to put the same point more directly, believing without belonging is a pervasive dimension of modern European societies, it is not confined to the religious lives of European people.

A second point concerns the churches themselves. Understandably enough, significant numbers of those responsible for their maintenance have fallen upon the phrase 'believing without belonging' in order to justify their continued existence – in other words things are not as bad as they seem.

As it happens, I do think that the churches have a continued existence in Northern Europe, but for reasons that require careful and detailed consideration (see below). In the meantime, it is important that the churches' personnel appreciate that the situation described by this phrase is neither better nor worse than a more straightforwardly (if one may use that term) secular society. It is simply different.

Those that minister to a half-believing rather than unbelieving society will find that there are advantages and disadvantages to this situation (as there are in any other). Working out appropriate ministerial strategies for this continually shifting and ill-defined context is the central and very demanding task of the religious professional. A firm and necessary grasp of the sociological realities is but the starting point.

A third question relates to the remark made above concerning the short and long term. It is, moreover, at this point that the sociological debate intensifies. There are those, for example (and most notably Steve Bruce<sup>4</sup>) who argue cogently that the mismatch between believing and belonging is simply a temporary phenomena; it is only a matter of time before belief - unsustained by belonging (i.e. by an institution) - diminishes to match the more rigorous indicators of religiousness.

In so far as this debate refers to statements of credal religion endorsed by the churches, I would agree with him. I am much less sure, however, about the looser and more heterodox elements of belief. Indeed there are persuasive data emerging from the most recent EVS enquiries which indicate that the relationship between certain dimensions of belief and belonging may well be inverse rather than direct.

Notable here are those aspects of belief which relate to the soul and to life after death (Bréchon 2000). These appear to rise markedly in younger rather than older generations, and in precisely those countries of Europe (mostly but not exclusively in the North) where the institutional capacities of the churches are most diminished. More specifically Nordic data (Bäckström 2000) support these findings; they affirm the relative confidence among the young that there is something (not very specific) after death and that the tendency to believe in an afterlife is increasing rather than decreasing. They also reveal the predilection of the young for an immanent rather than transcendent understanding of God (God is inside each person, rather than external).

With this in mind, the future becomes extremely difficult to predict. What seems unlikely, however, is the emergence of a society in which secular rationalism becomes the overriding norm. It is more likely that looser forms of belief will go on existing alongside more secular understandings of life. The relationship between them will be long term and complex, rather than one simply replacing the other. Indeed a useful focus of research might lie in elucidating the particular circumstances in which one aspect of human living may predominate over the other.

In other words, are there circumstances (both individual and collective) where the religious emerges as more rather than less significant and what forms of religion might be helpful in such circumstances? It is at this point, moreover, that the discussion needs in my view to reconsider the connections between emergent patterns of belief and the institutional churches themselves, for it is clear that the latter continue not only to exist but to exert an influence on many aspects of individual and collective lives – even in Northern Europe.

### **Vicarious religion**

The separating out of belief from belonging has offered fruitful ways in which to understand the religion of modern Europe. On-going reflection about the current situation has, however, led me to reconsider this relationship, and at least in part to bring the two variables back together – utilizing, amongst other tools of analysis, the concept of ‘vicarious religion’ (Davie 2000, 2001). 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.

My thinking in this respect has been prompted very largely by the situation in the Nordic countries. A number of Nordic scholars have responded to the notion of believing without belonging by reversing the formula: the characteristic Nordic stance in terms of religion is to belong without believing.<sup>5</sup> Such scholars are entirely right in these observations. Nordic populations, for the most part, remain members of their Lutheran churches; they use them extensively for the occasional offices and regard membership as part of national just as much as religious identity. More pertinently for the churches themselves, Nordic people continue to pay appreciable amounts of tax to their churches – resulting, amongst other things in large numbers of religious professionals (not least musicians) and beautifully maintained buildings in even the tiniest village. The cultural aspects of religion are well cared for.

This does not, of course, mean that Nordic populations attend their churches with any frequency, nor do they necessarily believe in the tenets of Lutheranism. Indeed, they appear on every comparative scale to be among the least believing and least practising populations in the world. So how should we understand their continuing membership of and support for their churches? This question is not only central to the understanding of religion in Northern Europe, but poses a significant methodological challenge. How is it possible to get beneath the surface of the Nordic, or indeed any other, society in order to investigate the deep but largely hidden reflexes of a population? A second point follows from this: how do these reflexes not only

connect with, but sustain the institutional churches, so often described as moribund in Northern Europe?

An iceberg may provide a helpful analogy. It is easy enough both to measure and to take note of the part that emerges from the water. We have endless studies which have done precisely that and concluded that the visible tip of the religious iceberg in Northern Europe is getting smaller and less significant almost by the day. But this is to ignore the vast mass under the water which is invisible for most of the time, but without which the visible part would not be there at all. How, though, can a sociologist penetrate beneath the surface in order to understand what is going on underneath?

One way is to observe societies at particular moments in their evolution when 'normal' ways of living are, for one reason or another, suspended and something far more instinctive comes to the fore. One such occurred in Sweden in 1994, following the sinking of the Baltic ferry, Estonia, with the loss of some 900 lives. The shock for Swedish people, a safety-conscious nation if ever there was one, was colossal; with no exaggeration the unthinkable had happened. And almost without hesitation, the Swedish people went to their churches not only to gather, to light candles and to mourn privately, but also in the correct anticipation that someone (the Archbishop in fact) would articulate on their behalf (vicariously) both the sentiments of the people and the meaning of the tragedy for human living. This, for the Swedish people, is precisely what the churches are for and why they should be sustained financially.

A second Swedish example can be found in the fire that swept through a night club in Gothenburg, killing 65 young people in November 1998. Here the capacity of the Church of Sweden to speak and act on behalf the Swedish population is almost taken to excess, given that a substantial proportion of the young people who died were from Muslim backgrounds. The Archbishop's prayer (his articulation of national sentiment) appeared none the less on the front page of the national dailies.

Similar episodes can be found elsewhere. One such occurred after the death of Princess Diana in Paris in a car crash in 1997. Once again, large numbers of British people were drawn to their churches to make some sort of gesture. This happened in two ways: first the churches became an important, though not the only, gathering point for a wide variety of individual gestures of mourning in which Christian and less Christian symbols became inextricably mixed, both materially (candles, playing cards and madonnas) and theologically (life after death was strongly affirmed, but with no notion of judgment).

More significant, however, was an awareness in the population as a whole that multiple and well-intentioned gestures of individual mourning were inadequate in themselves to mark the end of this particular life (as indeed of any other). Hence the need for public ritual or public liturgy (in other words a funeral) and where else but in the established church. The fact that Princess Diana had not led an unequivocally Christian life was immaterial – she, like the rest of us, had a right to the services of the church at the end of her life. It follows that the churches must exist in order to meet such demands.<sup>6</sup>

Princess Diana was in fact an entirely typical English woman in terms of her religious pilgrimage (the word is chosen deliberately). She was baptized, confirmed and married in the Church of England, but then looked elsewhere – disillusioned maybe at a time of considerable unhappiness in her personal life. We know, for example, that she visited a guru and that was attracted, if only fleetingly, to Catholicism (her mother had by this time become a Catholic). And, at the end of her life, Diana was keeping company with the son of a prominent Muslim. Despite this, her funeral (effectively if not formally a state occasion) took place in Westminster Abbey, a request that the Dean and Chapter could not possibly have refused.<sup>7</sup>

The understanding that this was a right and proper thing to do was widely shared. A religious funeral is not the prerogative of the practising or morally upright minority; they in fact were the most likely group to be critical of the whole affair.<sup>8</sup>

The crucial point to grasp in terms of sociological method is the need to be attentive to episodes, whether individual or collective, in or through which the implicit becomes explicit. With this in mind, it is equally important to remember that the Estonia and the Princess Diana examples are simply large-scale and media-hyped versions of what goes on all the time in the life-cycles of ordinary people. Individual families and communities regularly pause for thought at critical moments in their existence, frequently marking these with some form of liturgy. Birth (baptism) and death are the most obvious of these events, but confirmation and marriage remain significant for many in the Nordic countries. Indeed the persistence (and in some cases growth) of the occasional offices in the Lutheran parts of Northern Europe should not be overlooked in our haste to affirm institutional decline (Davie 2000: 71-8); they offer important counter evidence.

So much for the continuing role of the churches in the life-cycles of European people. Two quite different features of Europe's religious life lead, it seems to me, in a similar direction – i.e. to a better understanding of vicariousness. The first reflects the symbolic importance of the church building both for the community of which it is part and, in many case, for the wider public. Few Northern Europeans attend their churches with any regularity; that is abundantly clear. Many more however feel strongly about the church buildings present in their locality, but only protest (make their feelings explicit) when a building is threatened with closure. The status quo is simply taken for granted until disturbed, when it becomes an issue of considerable unease.<sup>9</sup>

Rather more subtle, but equally revealing in this connection are the reactions of the wider public if they are asked to pay to enter a religious building. Once again the 'normal' roles are reversed. The worshipping community, burdened by the maintenance of their building are anxious both to generate income and to reduce the wear and tear caused by constant visitors; they are entirely in favour of entry charges. The wider public in contrast resent being asked for money on the grounds that such buildings, particularly those that belong to the historic churches, are considered public rather than private space, to which everyone (believer or not) should have the right of access. They do not belong exclusively to those who use them regularly.

My second remark in this context concerns the highly complex situation in those parts of Europe previously under communist control. In the years since 1989, considerable attention has been paid to the reconstruction, both in physical and constitutional terms, of the churches in countries where the church had at best an ambiguous legal existence. This has proved a highly contentious subject, the evolution of which reflects shifting moods from something close to euphoria in the months immediately following the fall of the Berlin wall to considerable disillusionment as the years wore on. Conflict, sometimes very bitter, has been part of the story as disputes about money and power have come to the fore. No one, however, has seriously suggested that the churches should not be there – hence the struggle to put them back despite the difficulties. And to concentrate too much on the fact that in some, if not all, of the formerly communist countries church going rates have fallen rather than risen is to miss the point. The real questions lie elsewhere. Why, for example, are the churches so important that they are worth the all-too-evident effort to re establish them? One reason can be found perhaps in the crucial role of the churches in the moments just before the fall of the wall. In many parts of Europe, a tiny and undoubtedly infiltrated worshipping community had somehow maintained a protected if somewhat marginalized public space, which became available to the population as a whole at the moment of need, and in which protest could become explicit rather than implicit (Martin 1996).

In making this point, it is important to bear in mind the Lutheran as well as the Catholic countries dominated by communism until 1989 – notably Estonia and East Germany. Both were and remain some of the most secular parts of the continent. Yet even here the vicarious role was possible, the most notable example being the Nicolaikirche in Leipzig. Berger's remarks concerning the Gedächtniskirche in Berlin (Berger 2001: 195) reinforce the same point, still operative some ten years later. Vicariousness can, it seems, maintain itself on pretty slim resources. The rather different form of protest that took place in Poland through the 1980s, and in which the Catholic Church undoubtedly played a vital part, was of course much more visible. Quite rightly it has caught the attention of a wide variety of observers; it was not, however, the only way to proceed.<sup>10</sup>

Once the notion of vicariousness has been put in place, a series of sociological questions inevitably follow. It is these that I have explored in considerable detail in Davie (2000). It is in this context, moreover, that the nature (as well as the role) of Europe's historic churches becomes apparent, the more so if seen in a comparative perspective. It becomes increasingly clear, for example, that European populations continue to see such churches as public utilities maintained for the common good, a situation quite different from that in the United States. Or to put the same point in rather different terms, Europeans from all parts of the continent understand the meaning of vicariousness (an understanding that overrides questions of translation).

Explaining the concept to an American audience is, in contrast, a non-starter; quite simply it has no resonance. An entirely different ecclesiastical history has led to different understandings of the relationship between church and society, a situation accurately described as a market. The church tax system of Northern Europe exemplifies one relationship; the freely given tithe the other.<sup>11</sup>

I am convinced that vicariousness still resonates in Europe in the early years of the twenty-first century and will do for the foreseeable future. The longer term, however, is rather more difficult to predict, bearing in mind the complexities in the relationship between belief and belonging already described. A whole range of issues need to be taken into account in this respect, not least an increasingly discernible mutation in the religious lives of Europeans: that is from what I call a culture of obligation to one of consumption. It is this shift that forms the focus of the following section.

## **II From Obligation to Consumption**

Two things are happening simultaneously in the religious life of Northern Europe. The fact that they have occurred at the same time is partly a coincidence; each however encourages the other. On the one hand, the historic churches – despite their continuing presence – are losing their capacity to discipline the religious thinking of large sections of the population (especially amongst the young). At the same time, the range of choice widens all the time as new forms of religion come into Europe from outside, largely as the result of the movement of people. Populations that have arrived in Europe primarily for economic reasons bring with them different ways of being religious (some Christian and some not); conversely European people travel the world, experiencing amongst other things considerable religious diversity. In this sense a genuine religious market is emerging in most parts of the continent.<sup>12</sup>

The crucial question lies, however, not in the existence of the market in itself but in the capacities of Europeans to make use of this. Hence, in my view, the significance of an increasingly observable trend which is taking place both inside and outside the historic churches – from an understanding of religion as a form of obligation to an increasing emphasis on consumption. 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. I go to church (or to another religious organization) because I want to, maybe for a short period or maybe for longer, to fulfill a particular rather than a general need in my life and where I will continue my attachment so long as it provides what I want, but I have no obligation either to attend in the first place or to continue if I don't want to.

As such this pattern is entirely compatible with vicariousness: the churches need to be there in order that I may attend them if I so choose. The chemistry, however, gradually changes, a shift which is discernible in both practice and belief, not to mention the connections between them. There is, for example, a clearly observable change in the patterns of confirmation in the Church of England.

The first point to make is that the overall numbers of confirmations has dropped dramatically in the post-war period, evidence once again of institutional decline. In England, though not yet in the Nordic countries, confirmation is no longer a teenage rite of passage, but a relatively rare event undertaken as a matter of personal choice by people of all ages. Indeed there is a very marked rise in the proportion of adult confirmations amongst the candidates overall – up to 40 per cent by the mid 1990s (by no means enough however to offset the fall among teenagers).

Confirmation becomes, therefore, a very significant event for those individuals who choose this option, an attitude that is bound to effect the rite itself – which now include the space for a public declaration of faith. It becomes in fact an opportunity to make public what has often been an entirely private activity (see below). It is increasingly common, moreover, to baptize an adult candidate immediately before the confirmation, a gesture which is evidence in itself of the fall in infant baptism some twenty to thirty years earlier.

Taken together, these events indicate a marked change in the nature of membership in the historic churches which become, in some senses, much more like their non-established counterparts. Voluntarism (a market) is beginning to establish itself de facto, regardless of the constitutional position of the churches. Or to continue the chemical analogy, a whole set of new reactions are set off which in the longer term (the stress is important) may have a profound effect on the understanding of vicariousness.

So far the trends are considerably more visible in some parts of Northern Europe than in others. There is, for example, a marked parallel between the Anglicans and the Catholic Church in France in this respect: adult baptisms in the Church of England match very closely those in France (Davie 2000: 71-2) – indeed the similarity in the statistics is almost uncanny given the very different ecclesiologies embodied in the two churches (one Catholic and one Protestant). But it is precisely this shift across very different denominations that encourages the notion that something profound is taking place. The Lutherans, however - despite their reputation for being the most secular countries in Europe – still stick to a more traditional pattern as far as confirmation is concerned, though the manner in which they do this is changing. Large numbers of young people, for example, choose the option of a confirmation camp rather than a series of weekly meetings.<sup>13</sup> In making this choice, confirmation becomes an 'experience' in addition to a rite of passage, implying a better fit with other aspects of youth culture.

So much for shifts in the nature of membership in the late twentieth century. In rather more general terms, the country of Northern Europe which has evolved most dramatically in its religious behaviour is The Netherlands.

Until well into the post-war period, the Netherlands remained one of the most practising countries of the continent; it maintained in addition a system of religious pillars within which its citizens were cocooned from the cradle to the grave (Goudsblom 1967). Quite suddenly (as part of the sixties revolution) the system imploded. The pillars ceased to have resonance in political debate (in the party system for example), and it became increasingly clear, almost by

the day, that growing numbers of Dutch people were conducting their lives outside the influence of the churches altogether. Levels of practice remain, however, relatively high - markedly so if compared with the Nordic countries, where nominal membership continues to be the norm. There is, in other words, an increasing polarization in Dutch society between those (of whatever denomination) who choose to go to church and those who do not; nominal attachment, once embedded in the pillarization system, is eroding fast.<sup>14</sup>

A further question cannot be avoided. Is the system that is emerging in The Netherlands the likely future of Northern Europe taken as a whole or is it an exceptional case? A partial answer can be discerned perhaps in the following comparison. Sweden, The Netherlands, Britain (more especially England), and France all claim in some sense or another to be the most secular country in Europe – indeed in the world. (The claim is sometimes made with pride and sometimes not; it all depends on your point of view.) It is immediately clear however, that the ‘winner’ in this rather bizarre competition must depend on how you define secular. And that precisely is the point to underline in the context of this chapter: these countries are as markedly different in their supposed secularity as they were (and still are) in their religiousness.

In other words, a system based on consumption rather than obligation is likely - in the long term - to become pervasive across the continent but its precise form will, as ever, be patterned by the historical circumstances from which it emerges. Hence in Sweden, unlike the Netherlands, the maintenance of nominal membership prevents polarization between churchgoer and non churchgoer, a situation likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The very different situation in the Netherlands has already been described. The patterns in England and France are different again; here innovative forms of membership are emerging within the historic churches themselves, a trend that bridges a significant theological divide. In short, emergent voluntarism is as conditioned by the past (including the presence of a state church) as its precedents. In order for each case to be properly understood, there will be no alternative to long-term and patient empirical analysis.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has been concerned with the changing patterns of religion in Northern Europe. It is now time to place this material within the more general context of comparative secularity. Is it the case that Europeans, and more especially Northern Europeans, are less religious than populations elsewhere in the world, or are they simply different in their religious aspiration and expression? The response to this question must necessarily take into account the fact that the position in Europe is mutating relatively fast and, as I have tried to explain in the preceding paragraphs, may be moving from a situation in which vicariousness is well (if latently) understood by significant numbers in the population to one in which this is no longer the case.

With this in mind, my answer has two parts. Firstly, so long as vicariousness remains the norm, I would support an argument that recognizes the implicit if not the explicit religiousness of Europeans in any comparative frame. The second point needs a little more explanation. Before jumping to conclusions about a necessarily secular future, we need to re-examine at least some of the assumptions embedded in the notion of choice - with particular reference to the private and the public sphere.

The gradual shift from patterns of religion which were imposed to those that are primarily chosen has provided a *fil conducteur* for this chapter. (The capacity to impose was, of course, part and parcel of the evident collusion between religion and power that is distinctive of European history – both in the continent as a whole and in each constituent nation.) So far, so good: this is entirely consonant with traditional understandings of secularization, particularly in its European forms.

Religious institutions retreat in their capacities to dominate both individual and societal decisions and religion itself becomes progressively privatized – in the sense that it is pushed to the margins and confined to domestic rather than public life.

It is at this point, however, that the fit between the evidence and the theory becomes, in my opinion, less and less satisfactory. It may indeed be the case that inherited or imposed forms of religious life are increasingly relegated to the private sphere. In this sense I agree with the privatization thesis, though it will be a long time before that process is complete. The point that I would stress here, however, concerns the forms of religion that are chosen rather than imposed and how these fit, or fail to fit, into the privatization thesis. The changing nature of confirmation provides, once again, an excellent example.

The choice itself may indeed be private, but the implications quite clearly are not. Indeed the whole point of a rite such as adult confirmation is to make a private choice public. The individual declares publicly that they wish to be a full member of the church, an act of considerable courage for many people. The same to a certain extent is true of marriage.

Young couples now live together all over Europe. Very few of them get married because they have to; such disciplines are no longer imposed except in relatively limited circles. When a couple choose to marry, however, they very often declare that they are doing this with the precise intention of making their relationship public. Significant numbers, though by no means all, make use of the churches to ritualize this decision.

A final and somewhat different point in this connection reflects the growing diversity in the religious populations of Northern Europe, not least the arrival of significant Muslim communities. A privatized Islam makes no sense, indeed it is almost an oxymoron. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Europe's Muslim communities make increasing claims on public space in European societies to the discomfort, in many cases, of their host societies – particularly those whose dominant mode of religious life has been to believe but not to belong.

Islam, in other words, disturbs Christian nominalism (i.e. the increasingly privatized forms of inherited religion). It disturbs very much less those Christians who have chosen to belong to their churches. Indeed the latter are beginning to see in Islam a positive role model, despite the disquiet amongst those of them whose theology embodies exclusive forms of Christianity. The role model argument proceeds as follows: if small and newly arrived Muslim communities can make claims on public space in Europe, so too can Christians – in for example the complex moral debates of modern societies and in the competition for adequate institutional provision for all those in European societies who take religion seriously (Christian or otherwise).

The latter point can be exemplified in any number of ways; it concerns amongst many other things the political sphere, educational provision and access to the media. The pressure to include a question about religion in the 2001 British Census was a case in point. The Muslim community provoked the debate by wanting to be counted as Muslims (rather than in national or ethnic categories). But if Muslims made such a claim, why shouldn't Christians, or at least certain kinds of Christians who wished precisely to stand up and be counted? Numbers, after all, can be used to support initiatives elsewhere in society, not least in terms of education and the media. The size of the community becomes a bargaining point in the on-going negotiations between different societal groups.

Hence my conclusion. Vicariousness may indeed cease to be the norm; it is much too soon, however, to predict the demise of either the European churches themselves, or of the latent support that is given to them by significant sections in the population. And well before that happens, innovative forms of religion may begin to emerge, both inside and outside the traditional churches. Such groups may be numerically small but they will, I think, be capable of

sustaining forms of religion that become one crucial variable among others in the competing claims of Europeans in their public as well as their private lives. This gradual and on-going metamorphosis is, in my view, inadequately described by the term 'privatization'. With this mind, Casanova's brilliant analysis of public religion in the modern world can be applied as much in Northern Europe as it can in the rest of the world (Casanova 1994). In short, Europeans may indeed be exceptional in some aspects of their religious lives, but not, it seems, in quite all.

## References

Ashford, Sheena and Timms, Noel 1992 *What Europe Thinks: a Study of West European Values*, Aldershot: Dartmouth.

Bäckström, Anders 2000 Personal communication, based on information taken from Gustafsson, Göran and Pettersson, Thorleif (eds), *Folkkyrkor och religiös pluralism – den nordiska religiösa modellen*, Uppsala: Verbum.

Barker, David, Halman, Loek and Vloet, Astrid 1992 *The European Values Study 1981-1990: Summary Report*, Aberdeen: Gordon Cook Foundation on behalf of the European Values Group.

Berger, Peter 2001 'Postscript', in Woodhead, Linda with Heelas, Paul and Martin, David (eds), *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, London: Routledge, pp. 189-98.

Bréchon, Pierre 2001 'L'évolution du religieux', in *Futuribles*, 260, Janvier: 39-48.

Bruce, Steve 2001 'Christianity in Britain, R.I.P.', *Sociology of Religion*, 62/2: 191-203.

Casanova, José 1994 *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Davie, Grace 1994 *Religion in Britain since 1945. Believing without Belonging*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Davie, Grace 2000 *Religion in Modern Europe. A Memory Mutates*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davie, Grace 2001 'The persistence of institutional religion in modern Europe', in Woodhead, Linda with Heelas, Paul and Martin, David (eds), *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, London: Routledge, pp. 101-11.

Ester, Peter, Halman, Loek and de Moor, Ruud 1994 *The Individualizing Society: Value Change in Europe and North America*, Tilburg: Tilburg University Press.

Goudsblom, Johan 1967 *Dutch Society*, New York: Random House.

Halman, Loek and Riis, Ole 1999 *Religion in Secularizing Society. The European's Religion at the End of the 20th Century*, Tilburg: Tilburg University Press.

Harding, Stephen, Phillips, David with Fogarty, Michael 1986 *Contrasting Values in Western Europe*, Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle 1996 "'Une Messe est possible". Les doubles funérailles du Président', *Le Débat*, 91: 23-30.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle 1999 “Une messe est possible”. Les doubles funérailles du Président’ in Julliard, Jacques (ed.), La mort du roi. Essai d’ethnographie politique comparée, Paris: Gallimard, pp. 89-109

Martin, David 1996 Forbidden Revolutions, London: SPCK.

Putnam, Robert 2000 Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Stoetzel, Jean 1983 Les Valeurs du temps présent, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Timms, Noel 1992 Family and Citizenship: Values in Contemporary Britain, Aldershot: Dartmouth.