

Understanding religion in modern Europe: a constantly evolving story

Grace Davie

Thank you for coming.

How do I understand religion?

- the power of religious ideas to motivate, of religious practices to shape ways of life, of religious communities to mobilize, and of religious leaders and symbols to legitimate calls to action
- a powerful force – for good or ill (examples of each)

What do I fear?

- religion that has been co-opted by the state (Russia)
- a state that has suppressed/ eliminated religion (China)

Key texts

Tomáš Halík *The Afternoon of Christianity: The Courage to Change* (2024)

Hartmut Rosa *Democracy Needs Religion* (2024)

Tomáš Halík

‘Questions about God and the “essence of man” repeatedly demand plausible, meaningful and intelligible answers *in the context of a particular culture and historical situation*.’ (p. 13 my italics)

Many different things are happening at once:

‘... a decline of religion, a crisis of faith or of the Church, a religious and spiritual renaissance, a “return of religion”, a transformation of religion into spirituality or ideologies of political identity, a pluralization of religion or individualization of faith, or an opportunity for a new evangelization.’ (p.8)

A five-finger exercise (GD 2006)

- cultural heritage (time and space)
- vicarious religion (an inherited model – a public utility; there at the point of need)
- a shift from obligation to consumption (a newer model – a market; gainers and losers)
- new arrivals (migration into West Europe)
- secular alternatives (the ‘nones’) and secular reactions (at times vehement)

What happened next? (GD 2023)

Secularization is growing steadily – the ‘nones’

So too is religious diversity, driven by immigration

→ an ill-informed and ill-mannered debate

Vicarious religion

→ religion as identity/ exclusion: are you or are you not one of us?

→ a marked rise in populism

New questions

Helen Paynter and Maria Power, eds. *The Church, the Far Right and the Claim to Christianity* (2024)

A provocative question: how should mainstream churches regard their more extreme 'brethren', and to what extent are they responsible for them and their actions?

Back to Tomáš Halík

The Afternoon of Christianity – the metaphor of the passing day

The Church/ all churches have choices – to look inwards or to look out

A community of *listening* and understanding; of generosity, kindness and welcome – echoed by **Hartmut Rosa** in *Democracy Needs Religion* (2024)

Afternoon → evening → extinction → death

p. 211 'In the biblical concept of time, a new day begins at evening. Let us not miss the moment when the first star appears in the evening sky.'

New stars?

The Quiet Revival. A report published by the Bible Society (2025)

In the UK and elsewhere, what has been termed a 'quiet revival' as Gen Z leads a rise in church attendance, especially among young men.

Similar evidence from France (figures for adult baptism) and elsewhere

Is this true? Is this significant? Will it last? Is it benign?

Overlapping narratives: Christian nationalism and *The Quiet Revival*

Key references

Tomáš Halík. 2024. *The Afternoon of Christianity: The Courage to Change* (2024). Univ. of Notre Dame Press

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The Quiet Revival – see <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/research/quiet-revival>

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