Faith in Europe

Issue 36 Editor: Darrell Jackson

Most evangelicals enjoy the quiet life and appreciate the apostle Paul urging his readers to obey those in authority. Praying for those in authority is far less common, if the average Sunday intercessions are a fair indication. Even where prayer is offered for the authorities, we assume that Paul meant we were only to pray for national authorities. When was the last time you heard your pastor or another church leader praying for European political leaders?

I suspect that few readers of Encounters will know who the President of the European Union is and, although we are responsible for the election of the European Parliament's MEPs, very few of us appear to appreciate the extent to which it is shaping the lives of ordinary citizens across Europe. It needs our prayer. HOPE II will see 600 national church and agency leaders gather in Hungary in a few month's time. The proposed educators' track has been withdrawn due to a lack of interest in European themes on the part of theological educators. If we're not praying for European legislators and decision-makers, we're certainly not thinking about them, or their policy making, in any sustained or serious way.

When MEPs, European Commissioners, and the ‘eurocrats’ of Brussels frame legislation and policy with reference to purely secular assumptions, perhaps Christians in Europe are getting the decisions they deserve. The time is well overdue for Christians to be taking Paul seriously and praying for those in positions of authority within the various European institutes.

Jeff Fountain captures the irony of the scenario I have described in his finely portrayed biography of Robert Schuman. Schuman is considered by many as the 'father of the European Union'. It was his vision for a Europe united against the prospect of yet another catastrophic European war that captured the imagination and minds of German and French leaders in the aftermath of the Second World War. Constantly throughout the book from which Fountain's paper is extracted, Schuman and other European politicians are shown to have been individuals committed to prayer, individual retreat, and to a Europe rooted in Christian values. The legacy of faith laid down by Schuman demands constant attention, not the least by Christians with a concern for wise and good government across Europe.

The importance of wise government is illustrated by Joanne Appleton's paper exploring immigration in Europe. She tackles the contentious issue of immigrants and their integration into European societies. Appleton writes against the backdrop of debate focussed on the issue of multiculturalism and its related political policies and programmes. Her argument in favour of a nuanced and reciprocal process of migrant integration deserves close attention. She raises precisely the kinds of questions that European Christians must face if they are to understand the serious issues facing European policy makers. Migration will continue to hold the policy spotlight for some time to come and if European leaders are to make good and wise decisions regarding the fate of many millions of people, they require our informed prayer and support.
Chris Ducker’s paper is also essential reading for anybody trying to understand the inter-relationship of faith and secularisation in Europe. There are certainly many avowedly secular MEPs and European Commissioners. Equally, there are very senior leaders who regularly attend prayer breakfasts in Brussels and some for whom spiritual retreat is a central part of their Christian discipline. This cameo is played out against a wider engagement of faith with secularisation across Europe. Ducker’s paper highlights the main issues through a very useful summary of Grace Davie’s various writings about Europe. If Davie is correct about her development of the idea of ‘vicarious religion’ then the implications of this for Christian mission in Europe, highlighted here by Ducker, will bear close attention.

Schuman’s legacy to Europe has been the vision for a community of reconciled nations engaged in an ongoing search for purpose and identity beyond the language of the financial marketplace and the secular corridors of Brussels. Appleton, Ducker, and Fountain represent a very small number of Christian theologians and writers giving the contemporary European context serious missiological consideration. Schuman would have approved of their contributions to the search for European identity and purpose.

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- **Article 1**: A Christian Europe(an): the forgotten vision of Robert Shuman  
  (Jeff Fountain, 3746 words)

- **Article 2**: Assimilation or integration: migrants in Europe  
  (Joanne Appleton, 5307 words)

- **Article 3**: Believing in Grace Davie: what does she bring to an understanding of mission in Europe?  
  (Chris Ducker, 7022 words)

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A Christian Europe(an): the forgotten vision of Robert Shuman

Jeff Fountain, The Schuman Centre for European Studies, Netherlands

‘We are called to bethink ourselves of the Christian basics of Europe by forming a democratic model of governance which through reconciliation develops into a ‘community of peoples’ in freedom, equality, solidarity and peace and which is deeply rooted in Christian basic values.’

Robert Schuman (1958)

Anyone familiar with today’s European Union knows that, while it has continued to attract member states, and has facilitated countless dialogues that in the past were settled by violence, thus upholding peace for 60 years, it falls short of Schuman’s original dream of a ‘community of peoples deeply rooted in Christian basic values’. Whatever happened to that dream?

The overwhelming trend in Europe over the past sixty years has clearly been one of secularisation, and that has been reflected in the general tenor of EU policy-making. Biblical values have been considered by many to be outdated, quaint, passé and irrelevant. Secularists assumed that religion was doomed to die slowly on the sidelines as Europeans grew more enlightened.

That assumption, however, has proved to be ill-founded. Now the term ‘post-secular’ is being used increasingly to describe our times. God and religion are making a comeback on to the European scene, a subject of much recent debate in the media. Islam’s renewed presence in Europe has been but one factor causing the debate on religion and politics to resurface.

A brief survey of the development of the European Union since 1950 will help us understand what happened to the dream.

The European Union story, 1950-2010

Schuman's declaration on May 9, 1950, was the dramatic breakthrough that virtually overnight created the conceptual architecture of the European House within which half a billion Europeans live in peace with each other today. It was a modest but concrete step, containing the embryonic elements that would be expanded eventually into today’s EU.

After much negotiation and consultation, the European Coal and Steel Community was signed into existence through the Paris Treaty on April 18, 1951. France, Western Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg and The Netherlands were the founding members.

The institutions established by the Paris Treaty are still the four pillars of the EU today: The High Authority (now the European Commission), the Council of Ministers, the Common Assembly (now the European Parliament), and the Court of Justice.

The initial success of this venture led to the expansion of cooperation among the member states into the European Economic Community (EEC), at the Treaty of Rome in 1957; or more correctly, the Treaties of Rome. For at the same time, treaties were signed for cooperation in developing nuclear energy, the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), and for a customs union.
Behind these developments, French initiative continued to play a key role. This is all the more remarkable given the volatile nature of the contemporary French political scene, with communist and Gaullists agitating on both extremes, while Christian Democrats and socialists cooperated in the mid-field. Fragile pro-European majorities could be sufficiently swayed by the extremes, which led to the rejection of the proposed European Defence Community, denounced by Gaullists as ‘the only known example of the conqueror demanding and obtaining parity with the conquered’.

No sooner had the nationalist de Gaulle become president in 1958, having vigorously opposed all the European treaties, than he surprised all by promptly endorsing them. The logic of his volte-face was that the best way to contain France’s ‘hereditary enemy’ was to embrace him.

The complex De Gaulle continued to baffle his European colleagues, acting as the most pro- and anti-European of his time simultaneously. In the 1960’s, his commitment to deepen the European project fuelled his fierce opposition to widening it with British entry. The general, who never shared Schuman’s conscious Christian values, was consistently hostile to any form of supranational integration and loss of French sovereignty. While declaring support for a strong Europe, a ‘European Europe’ not controlled by America, his fear of strong European institutions caused him to weaken the decision-making process. Some blame de Gaulle for delaying the European project some twenty years, and greatly increasing europaralysis.

In 1967, the communities of the Treaties of Rome were merged into a collective identity called the European Communities, more commonly the European Community (EC), through the Merger Treaty.

Following de Gaulle in 1973, President Pompidou welcomed the first new intake of members, Denmark, Ireland and the UK; (Norway’s voters elected to stay outside). Never bosom-buddies with his leftist West-German counterpart Willy Brandt, the Frenchman fell back on a balance-of-power mentality, seeing Britain as a counter-weight to German influence, and sandbagging any supranational development in the community.

However, his successor, Giscard d’Estaing, renewed Franco-German relationships the following year working with Helmut Schmidt to move the community forward economically and politically. The European Monetary System was set up, linking the currencies of participating members, a first step towards the later introduction of the Euro. In 1979, voters in member states had their first opportunity to vote directly on a European level in elections to the European Parliament.

In 1981, Greece became the tenth member of the EC. That same year, the rising politician who had succeeded Schuman as Minister of Justice in 1956 was voted into the French presidency in 1981. Francois Mitterand was now over sixty years old. He was to become the longest serving French president, until 1995.

Unlike Schuman, Mitterand was happy to serve in the Vichy regime; yet after the war he joined a French delegation to Caux, even before Schuman’s visit. One commentator described his life as ‘played out under an immense question-mark’; and as a man who ‘did not accept the principle of contradiction’ (Bourlanges, Eminent Europeans, pp130-132).

Mitterand initiated grandiose architectural monuments in Paris such as the Grand Arc de la Defense, large enough to totally encompass Notre Dame Cathedral. George Weigel, author of ‘The Cube and the Cathedral’, sees this as a deliberate humanistic statement of the superioriy of reason over faith, and reflecting a secular culture ‘downright hostile’ to Christianity. ‘European man has convinced himself that in order to be modern and free, he must be radically secular.’ Weigel continues, ‘That conviction and its public consequences are at the root of Europe’s contemporary crisis of civilizational morale.’
Euro-sclerosis peaked in the mid-80’s. Enlargement was on hold. A democratic deficit, economic problems and British vetoes on EU projects produced widespread apathy and pessimism.

A welcome sea-change came however in 1985 with the arrival of Jacques Delors in Brussels as the president of the European Commission. The International Herald Tribune credited Delors with rescuing the EC from the doldrums:

‘He arrived when Euro-pessimism was at its worst. Although he was a little-known former French finance minister, he breathed life and hope into the EC and into the dispirited Brussels Commission. In his first term, from 1985 to 1988, he rallied Europe to the call of the single market, and when appointed to a second term he began urging Europeans toward the far more ambitious goals of economic, monetary and political union.’ (Merritt, 1992, International Herald Tribune, 21st January)

Soon after his arrival, the Schengen Agreement opened borders without passport controls between several member and non-member states. The following year Spain and Portugal brought membership to double the original size, adding further momentum to the European project.

Delors presided over the European Commission for three terms spanning the years 1985-1994, the longest of any president. His commissions are seen by many as the most successful in EU history. He introduced qualified majority voting to break the stranglehold of the veto through which one member state could impede progress. His first commission injected new momentum into the process of European integration, and laid further foundations for the Euro.

He came to personify the European project, and instilled widespread faith and trust into its future direction. Mitterand was still French president and Delors, his former minister of economics, president of the European Commission, when the Iron Curtain fell in November 1989, totally reshaping the political landscape both of Europe and the world.

Despite the resistance of some anxious French politicians (who said they loved Germany so much they preferred two of them), the two Germanys reunited, opening the way for further expansion of the EU.

With a number of former communist satellite nations seeking the safety, welfare and values of the European Community, the Copenhagen Criteria were agreed on for membership, and negotiations began. Each applicant had to have achieved ‘stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union’.

Delors and his commissioners prepared the way for the Maastricht Treaty, after which the community formally became known as the European Union, on November 1, 1993.

Two years later, Austria, Sweden and Finland joined the Brussels club, pushing the membership up to fifteen.

Although a socialist, Jacques Delors challenged long-standing secular tradition by practising his Catholic faith openly, as had Schuman. He tried to rally European citizens, and Europe’s religious leaders in particular, to the quest for ‘the soul of Europe’, arguing that if Brussels could not develop a spiritual dimension into the EU, it would fail. Echoing Schuman’s earlier warning, he stressed that the EU would not succeed solely on the basis of legal systems and economics.
His very last official words as president of the European Commission were: ‘if in the next ten years we haven't managed to give a soul to Europe, to give it spirituality and meaning, the game will be up.’

The success of the Delors commissions was contrasted with the Santer Commission which followed in 1995, but was forced to resign over allegations of corruption.

The next commission, led by Romano Prodi, also failed to measure up to the Delors standard, despite overseeing another historic milestone in 2002, when the Euro was introduced in twelve of the member states. The Eurozone, expanding to sixteen by 2009, was the most important European initiative since the Treaty of Rome.

The Prodi Commission also presided over the Union’s biggest ever enlargement in 2004, when Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia became members. Romania and Bulgaria were admitted in 2007, almost doubling the membership in three short years. These additions were widely criticised for risking serious dilution of the European ideals, and moving too fast. Fears were expressed that the project would fail under the weight of its own success.

It was clear that the old rules, created for the original six, needed drastic revision. Plans for systemic reforms to streamline procedures and structures to cope with the much enlarged membership were presented, along with a proposed constitution.

The gap between Brussels and national governments on the one hand, and the general public on the other, became very evident when firstly the French and then the Dutch rejected the controversial proposals in a referendum.

The constitution, in which mention of God or the Judeo-Christian heritage of Europe were conspicuously absent, was shelved. Finally on December 1, 2009, just months before the 60th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, the Lisbon Treaty was signed, salvaging the remains of the reform proposals, and creating a permanent President of the European Council.

How would Schuman feel about the EU if he could see it today? There would be much for which he would be very grateful, perhaps most of all the 60 years without the wars he had himself twice experienced first-hand. The level of economic and political cooperation, with consultations on all manner of subjects constantly taking place in many languages in the specially-built facilities in Brussels and Strasbourg, would surely be almost overwhelming for him.

But his chief concern no doubt would be for the missing spiritual dimension which Jacques Delors had fought in vain to recover, the search for Europe's soul.

Talk of Europe’s ‘soul was a direct echo of Schuman’s own plea in the year of his death. The emerging identity of a New Europe, he wrote,

‘cannot and must not remain an economic and technical enterprise; it needs a soul, the conscience of its historical affinities and of its responsibilities In the present and in the future, and a political will at the service of the same human ideal.’ (Schuman, 2010, For Europe, p58)

Although ‘basic Christian values’ have indeed shaped many of the European institutions, the predominance of materialistic values in Europe today and the quest for immediate gratification, sensual pleasure and trivial pursuits would cause him deep concern for Europe's future. The false ethic of greed in the financial sector, and the ‘culture of death’ expressed in youth suicides, abortions, euthanasia, low birth rates, rising murder rates, would be signals of deep spiritual poverty.
Having stated that ‘the European Movement would only be successful if future generations managed to tear themselves away from the temptation of materialism which corrupted society by cutting it off from its spiritual roots’, what would he conclude today?

**Meanwhile, where were the Christian ‘players’?**

As we have seen, devout Christians have been engaged in the unfolding process at various stages, particularly Catholics. The Christian democracy movement has strongly influenced EU thinking and language, ‘subsidiarity’ and ‘solidarity’ being two terms permanently adopted with specifically Christian origins. The moral principle behind subsidiarity, for example, was once described as ‘that it was wrong to steal others’ responsibilities’.

Mainstream church leaders have enjoyed a long-standing official relationship with the commission president, with formal consultations taking place regularly. Catholic bishops and ecumenical church leadership councils have maintained permanent lobby offices in Brussels and have actively engaged in presenting submissions to shape EU policy and decision-making. Article 52 of the rejected EU constitution addressed the status of churches and non-confessional organisations and would have guaranteed an ‘open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations’. This was the first time the churches would have been legally recognised as such at that level.

Christians have carried and continue to carry key roles in the EU, bringing their influence to bear where possible. Both the current presidents of the European Council and of the European Parliament are confessing, devout Christians, the Belgian, Herman van Rompuy and the Pole, Jerzy Buzek, respectively.

Van Rompuy regularly retreats for prayer and meditation in a monastery. On the question of Turkey’s membership of the EU, he stated: ‘It’s a matter of fact that the universal values which are in force in Europe, and which are also the fundamental values of Christianity, will lose vigour with the entry of a large Islamic country such as Turkey.’

Buzek, hindered from moderating the European Parliament Prayer Breakfast last December due to the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in Portugal, sent a letter apologising for his absence to all participants saying: ‘it is wonderful to think that so many people of different nationalities and churches were able to gather together in the European Parliament around the person of Jesus Christ.’

Over the years, numerous Christians from many countries have served as members of the European Parliament, as well in Commission departments. The story of my visit to the European Commission building in 1991 revealed a network of Christian workers meeting regularly for prayer.

Evangelicals have had a much lower profile in Brussels than ‘mainstream’ Christians, often attributed to being a smaller proportion of Europe’s population, perhaps 15 million in total. However that is about equal to Holland’s population, and yet the Dutch seem to be able to make a very visible impression.

Paul van Buitenen’s tale, who later served in the European Parliament as a one-man party, *Europa Transparant*, also illustrates what one person can do–even if at great personal cost. Shortly before I first met him in Brussels over ten years ago, his exposure of corruption and cronyism involving Former French Premier, Edith Cresson, had caused the resignation of the whole of Jacques Santer’s European Commission. At that stage he was just one of thousands of office workers in the European Commission. But before his allegations were proven to be true, van Buitenen had been suspended, his salary halved and he faced disciplinary action.
Public indignation over his treatment eventually contributed to the fall of the Commission in March 1999. Later he was named ‘European of the Year’ by Reader's Digest magazine and the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

Three or four years before his exposure, van Buiten had become a believer. His personal commitment to a God of truth and justice remained the driving force behind his investigations over the years, despite the constant cold-shouldering and stonewalling he continued to experience in the European Commission.

Van Buiten battled on. During his parliamentary term from 2004 to 2009, he brought to light many instances of corruption in EU-institutions. None of these revelations however led to any further investigation by the EU antifraud department OLAF. Instead, complained van Buiten, the European Commission, the Parliament and OLAF simply looked the other way. After proposals for increased supervision of OLAF by an adequate independent body went unheeded, van Buiten decided not to stand again for the European Parliament.

Yet the European Union requires democratic structures, checks and balances, at the European level. As long as prophetic voices like van Buiten’s remain crying in the wilderness, the European project is headed in the wrong direction.

Sir Fred Catherwood's is a different story again. A rather unique figure in the British evangelical world, which tends towards euroscepticism. He was president of the Evangelical Alliance in the UK, and also served as vice-president of the European Parliament, 1989-1992. He made the case for Christian engagement in shaping the European Union in his book, Pro-Europe.

In his address to Europa 92, a gathering of evangelical leaders from across Europe convened in Brussels in 1992, referred to in the following chapter, Sir Fred shared a panoramic oversight of European history making it quite clear why Christians had a responsibility to shape Europe's future.

Europe's unity had been made possible only by the common Christian view of life developed and applied progressively over 2000 years, he began. It had curbed the war-like paganism of the northern tribes, the greed and ambition of principalities and powers. Christian influence had been the overwhelming influence in our Europe, as evidenced in the wholly Christian inspiration of the European Convention of Human Rights. ‘Go through each item and you'll find a Christian doctrine backing it up,’ he challenged all present. Whatever the many faults of the church and of individual Christians, the leaven of the Christian faith had worked through the lump of our society for 2000 years, he stressed.

We owed even our rational science to the Christian faith, he claimed. Four hundred years ago, Christians came humbly to the Book of God's Works, creation, as they came to the Book of God's Word, the Bible. They came with certain presuppositions without which you could not have had our present natural science: that there was one God, not a pantheon of gods. So there would be one natural law in the universe and not conflicting laws. The unity in the natural laws is one pillar of the scientific method.

Above all, we believed in a good, benign God, not a hostile God, who has given the universe to us for our benefit. We were therefore to work out these laws for ‘the relief of man's estate’, as the founding father of science, Francis Bacon, had said. So natural science had arisen from Europe, not from Africa or Asia. Pagans did not believe in one God, but many. Pagans did not believe in an orderly, rational, stable universe. If paganism came, science went, he argued: ‘Let’s be very clear about that.’

Similarly, Christian belief in the dignity of each individual had led directly to the development of democracy, the rule of law, education and to social care. The Christian belief that we should love our neighbour as ourselves was the antidote to tribalism, nationalism and racism.
The rise of pagan nationalism in the twentieth century had cost Europe 50 million dead in two world wars: *the greatest slaughter in the entire history of the human race!* The rise of militant atheism in Eastern Europe had frozen it into a long sleep for over three generations.

We had swept our European house clean of fascism and of communism, he stated at the 1992 consultation. We now had democracy and freedom of speech from the Atlantic to the Urals. But we also now had a Europe emptier than before of the Christian faith. In the words of Christ’s parable, Europe was a house swept clean, ready for seven devils worse than the first to come in, he warned.

Only if we recovered our common Christian faith would we have the cement of a common belief needed to hold our European Union together. Common cement among people came not by treaties signed by governments, however good they were. Neither from a common currency, a common social policy, or a society empty of belief. A common belief was what held us together. We did not have a common belief anymore. Secular up to a point, the state could really only work if society itself had a well-rooted belief system. Without that the entire whole would fall apart. But today's intellectual leaders lacked that common faith.

Yet the power of the Gospel was God’s Holy Spirit. We didn’t need the monopoly of Christendom. The message had a power of its own. Pagan Rome was not overcome by giving Christians a monopoly. Pagan Rome was overcome by the Christians’ lives, the consciences they pricked and the Spirit revealing truth.

The power was just the same as it had been in the early Church, he declared, and in all the great works of conversion which had swept Europe.

Then he added confidently, ‘and will certainly sweep it again!’

These sections are excerpted from Jeff Fountain’s book on the life of Robert Schuman *Deeply Rooted*, published by the Schuman Centre. It is available to download from their website at [http://www.schumancentre.eu/2010/05/deeply-rooted/#more-196](http://www.schumancentre.eu/2010/05/deeply-rooted/#more-196)

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Assimilation or integration: migrants in Europe

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Introduction

Migration is defined by UNESCO as ‘the crossing of the boundary of a political or administrative unit for a certain minimum period of time. It includes the movement of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people as well as economic migrants…International migration is a territorial relocation across nation states.’ (www.unesco.org)

Migration into, from and within Europe has had a profound affect on the continent’s culture and history from its earliest days (Hall, 2000; Guerinna, 2002,p15). A migrant in Europe could be a wealthy Asian, American or Russian businessman; a Pilipino au pair or Polish construction worker, an African or Burmese asylum seeker or a trafficked teenager. They may be coming to find work or a better quality of life, to be reunited with family members, or to escape persecution or environmental disaster (Jackson and Passarelli, 2008,p5).

Some countries, for example, the UK, have a history of migration into, as well as from, the country. Others, such as Italy, Spain and Greece who typically experienced emigration, now find themselves challenged by the presence of European and non-European migrants in their midst (Itano, 2010).

For the purposes of this paper, migrants are immigrants to or between European countries. We reflect on how the relationship of a migrant to their host country is described theologically, particularly relating to integration or assimilation. In addition, we explore the idea of integration from a theological perspective and the implications for Christians – migrant and non-migrant – living and working in a European context.

1. The relationship of a migrant to the host country

The presence of immigrants in Europe divides public opinion. 54% of respondents to a Eurostat survey said that ‘immigrants enriched the cultural life of their country’ (EU, 2007,69). Slightly less (46%) felt immigrants competing for jobs with the indigenous population increased unemployment in their country. And 50% of Europeans believe their country has too many immigrants (Peters, 2009).

Integration is ‘the process of inclusion of immigrants in the institutions and relationships of the host society’ (Boswick and Heckman, 2006,p1). Politically, the EU is committed to the integration of migrants, reflected in part by Franco Frattini’s comment ‘there can be no immigration without integration’ and the commitment of €825 million between 2007 and 2013 to aid integration (Goldirova, 2007).

1.1 Assimilation versus Multiculturalism

The International Organisation for Migration places integration in the middle of a continuum spanning assimilation to multiculturalism, stating that assimilation expects migrants to ‘adjust entirely to the values and the rights system of the host society’ (IOM website). Boswick and Heckman add that assimilation means ‘disregard[ing] the values and practices of their countries of origin’ (2006,p7) and as such it is a one-sided process (2006,p4).

Singaporean Ravi Chandran leads a large international church in Denmark (Sullivan, 2007). He describes assimilation as ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do’: 
In the mind of the foreigner, especially one who has come to a new culture, assimilation is giving up the way you think and your values, and adopting the host’s values. The Romans went all over the world and conquered. The mindset you communicate when you say “when in Rome...” is basically going back to colonisation, particularly for African and Asian migrants. They feel “I have come to your country and you want to colonise me?” (Chandran, 2010)

Chandran (2010) adds that one of the dangers of demanding assimilation is that the migrant will react against the demands to give up their value systems by retreating into their own subcultures and refusing to interact in meaningful way with the host culture.

Alternatively countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden have advocated a multicultural approach. (Main, 2006,p2; Peter, 2006). According to the International Organisation for Migration, a multi-cultural society aims to allow diversity, equal rights and equal opportunities to migrants, at the same time allowing them to keep a cultural affiliation to their country of origin.

In practice however, multiculturalism can create tensions when the migrant’s values are in direct opposition to those of the host country, for example sharia law being set up in British towns (Carey, 2010).

In fact, neither approach has proved successful – indeed Main (2006,p2) reflects that although France and the Netherlands are at opposite ends of the assimilation-multiculturalism spectrum, both have experienced ‘similar problems with immigrant unrest and deepening cultural divides, and violence has erupted in both countries’.

1.2 Integration – long-term and multi-dimensional

Chandran (2010) pictures integration as a partnership, with the host and migrant cultures (or individuals) ‘meeting sort of in the middle of the bridge, where they take time to understand the journey each one has taken.’

The Global Commission on International Migration frames integration as a ‘long-term and multi-dimensional process’. Both migrants and non-migrants need to be committed to the process and respect each other, and prepared for the naturally occurring changes in the perceptions and cultural structures of each society as a result of integration. (GCIM, 2005, p44, cited by Jackson 2009).

The EU is developing a Common Agenda for Integration based on eleven Common Basic Principles (CBP) for Immigrant Integration. Recognising the two-way dynamic of integration, the principles include ‘frequent interaction between immigrants and Member state citizens’. For the immigrant, some knowledge of the host society’s language, history and institutions is seen as ‘indispensable’, and they are required to make ‘efforts in education’. The host society should allow migrants and non-migrants equal access to institutions and protect ‘the practice of diverse cultures and religions’ (EU, 2004,p17).

However it must be noted that while Integration Policy appears to be directed towards third-country nationals, from beyond the EU’s borders (EU, 2007,p3), much of the migration in Europe is between EU countries (Jackson and Passarelli, 2008,p14).

1.3 Measures of integration

The Migration Integration Policy Index uses over 100 policy indicators to measure integration. Its latest report, MIPEX II (2007), measured how well policies relating to integration in labour market access, family reunion, long-term residence, political participation, access to nationality and anti-discrimination helped promote integration. Overall, each policy area was found to be only halfway to best practice, with Sweden scoring the highest across all six areas, and the only country to favourably promote integration.
During their 2009 EU presidency, the Swedish government proposed identifying some common indicators across the EU of ‘what makes integration work’, aiming to make measuring the success of EU integration policy possible. So far these include work, education, social inclusion and active citizens (Kvam, 2010).

2. Theological reflections on the relationship between migrants and their host countries

The Council of European Churches has designated 2010 as the European Year of the Churches in Migration. Many individual Christians, churches and organisations across the continent work with migrants, and many migrants themselves are Christians.

Bearing in mind that ‘theology cannot unilaterally dictate specific policy’ (Spencer, 2004,p125), undertaking theological reflection can help us “develop a biblical mind by means of which [we] might evaluate modern value statements and explore how the appropriate biblical foundations might be translated into policy” (Spencer, 2004,p35). In addition, our theological understanding of migration will naturally inform our actions as individuals, churches and organisations, and our decision to promote, amongst other things, assimilation or integration.

According to Nagy (2009,p201) the migrant’s theology is often autobiographical, arising out of their life-experiences. The theological reflections of a non-migrant are defined as ‘reaction theology’ because they are formulated in response to ‘the different manifestations of migration in their midst’ (Nagy, 2009,p219). The theologies described below show aspects of both perspectives.

2.1 Victim

Some migrants are victims, fleeing intolerable persecution or poverty, or trafficked to Europe against their will. While the EU’s Integration Policy recognises that ‘promotion of fundamental rights, non-discrimination and equal opportunities plays a crucial role in the context of integration’ (2007,p6), irregular migrants can also be at the mercy of EU migration and asylum policies which ‘remain focused on keeping [them] … out of the EU and removing those who are present rather than ensuring their rights are protected’ (Pop, 2009).

When you consider the migrant as a victim who is poor and oppressed, the Bible has plenty to say about how Christians should act on their behalf (Leviticus 19.33,34; Isaiah 1.17; Isaiah 58.6; Matthew 25.35-40). The concept of looking after the poor and oppressed is known as *diaconia* and according to Nagy (2009,p220) is the rationale behind the work of many organisations to migrants, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant or ecumenical. The Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe, for example, is involved in lobby and advocacy work for the rights of migrants and refugees. (www.ccme.be).

The 1996 World Council of Churches Resource book states that migrants are ‘symbols and reminders of an unjust and unmerciful world and the church is called to act on their behalf to build a new community that points towards the Kingdom.’ (Nagy, 2009,p225) Using Isaiah 65.17-25 and Eph 2.19, they actively encourage inclusive communities that bring the migrant into community within the household of God, as a foretaste of the Kingdom to come.

It is right that Christians should be involved in seeking justice for the oppressed and marginalised, including immigrants within society. In doing so, they are following Christ’s example (John 20.21); bearing witness to a living faith through their deeds (e.g John 14.21; James 2.18) and potentially bringing about transformation of society (Escobar, 2003,p248).

Commenting on the WCC’s theology on migration however, Nagy (2009,p226) says ‘WCC’s theologies on migration continue to operate from the perspective of the non-migrant being there to serve the migrant who they see as victims,’ who are on the margins. Unless the
actions of the non-migrant lead to the empowerment of the migrant, an unequal relationship could occur, potentially hindering the integration of the migrant into society.

2.2 Stranger

In contrast to that of victim, the description of a migrant as a ‘stranger’ describes most immigrants – whether they arrived business class to an international airport, or hanging on to the underside of a lorry.

Strangers can also be defined as the ‘other’ who, according to Guerrina (2003,p5) have shaped European identity. Modernity sees the stranger as a ‘major irritant’, because they cannot be categorised as either friend or enemy.

Modernity’s response to the disturbing presence of strangers has been typically to adopt one of two strategies: assimilation or exclusion…. However modern societies have not succeeded in either….the central question is no longer how to get rid of them, but how to live with and handle the difference in every day life. (Jackson and Passarelli, 2008,p10)

Many Christians turn to the biblical idea of ‘strangers’ to give them a framework for dealing with the ‘other’ in their midst.

2.2.1 The Old Testament and the alien

Leviticus 19:33-34 is clear that rather than being irritated by strangers (also translated alien), we are to love them – a command repeated 36 times in the OT. (Spencer, 2004,p73) ‘When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt.’

The Israelites were encouraged to remember they were once strangers themselves and told to treat the migrant as ‘one of your native born’. Aliens were not allowed to be discriminated against on the basis of their cultural identity; God’s punishment against other nations described in the prophets was due to the values these nations displayed, rather than the fact they were ethnically different. (Spencer, 2004,p110)

However, in order to be fully accepted, the alien needed to be committed to the Covenant (Exodus 12.48,49) – which could be interpreted as moving closer to assimilation than integration. According to the Torah, the noikrim were independent individuals living in Israel with little desire to join Israel. They were treated differently and had less privileges than the gerim – dependant and vulnerable foreigners who were expected to live by the same ethical principles as the people they lived with, such as keeping the Sabbath and taking part in festivals (Spencer, 2004,p86,94; Jackson and Passarelli, 2009,p21).

Nagy (2009,p239) warns against taking the OT command out of its setting, and interpreting it in a contemporary context : ‘love for the alien does not mean tolerance and acceptance of all that and who the person is, on the contrary it means a love which becomes active as soon as the alien enters the country with the aim to “make him or herself one of us”.’

Ruth the Moabitess is an example of a ger who says ‘My God will be your God’ (Ruth 1:16). Jackson and Passarelli (2004,p21) use this story as an example of integration, stating that in this case ‘assimilation is neither sought nor urged’. However if Christians view integration as saying ‘my God will be your God’, a religious Muslim or Hindu might disagree and be more likely to opt for exclusion and marginalisation in their own sub-culture.

2.2.2 The stranger as guest

Hospitality is another way of ‘loving the stranger’. Christ suffered the ‘alienation that comes with being a stranger’ (Hanclies 2003,p150). He was ‘rejected and despised by men’ (Is 53,3), having ‘came unto his own, but his own did not receive him’ (John 1.11).
Biblical culture expected hospitality, from Abraham entertaining angels in Genesis 18 to the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. The idea of the stranger/migrant as guest is often used as the basis for encouraging people to offer hospitality to migrants – whether it is hosting international students, or local churches allowing migrant church groups to use their buildings for meetings. The implication, based on Matthew 25.40 and Hebrews 13.2 is that by offering hospitality, you are by proxy, entertaining Christ or at the very least, being open to a divine encounter. (Huston et al, 2003,p29)

Implicit in the idea of being a guest is that of temporary residence. This is a reality for some migrants, for example seasonal or guest workers, businessmen and international students. (Huston et al, 2005; Jackson and Passarelli 2009,p7; ). They, along with others who can return home easily are less likely to feel the need to integrate. 'The Pole who goes to Ireland today doesn’t have the same pressure to adapt as one who came to New York a century ago.' (Anon, 2009)

But for many migrants, going home is not an option. ‘The question of migration is not always if ever a question of paying a short visit, but is a permanent component of contemporary social reality’ (Nagy, 2009, p242). What happens if we see migrants only as guests - and they outstay their welcome?

Guests always remain the visitor and therefore the ‘other’ – they are not hosts, who belong to the area and allow the guest onto their territory (Nagy 2009,p242). If the guest misbehaves – for example when a migrant church meeting in a state church building is too noisy or loses the keys - the response is all to often neither assimilation or integration – it is modernity’s other response of exclusion (Lund, 2009).

2.2.3 No longer strangers

Another theological approach to strangers is to see them as ‘no longer strangers, but fellow citizens in God’s kingdom’ (Eph 2.19). Contrary to popular opinion, the majority of migrants to Europe are Christians. For indigenous Christians, the migrant stranger is a fellow brother or sister in Christ, and should be treated as such – even though this is difficult to work out in practice (Appleton, 2009)

Can the idea of ‘no longer strangers' be used with non-Christian immigrants? Perhaps. Our common ground is that we are all made in the image of God (Genesis 1.27), all sinners (Rom 3.23) and Christ died for all (Rom 3.24). ‘How differently we might view people if we might truly recognise, as Jesus did, the image of God in each and every person in those who are different, in those we may not understand, and in the stranger who lives among us’ (Thacker and Clark, 2009).

2.3 Migrant as neighbour

Love of the neighbour is emphasised in both the OT and NT (Leviticus 19.18, Luke 10.27). In a very physical sense, the migrant may be your neighbour, living next door or in the next street. In many areas, having communities of migrants living nearby is unwelcome (Peters, 2009) so Christians showing love and compassion can be very powerful (Caleb project, 2009,p30).

The story of the Good Samaritan is often quoted when talking about migrants. The usual interpretation is that the Church is the Samaritan and the victim is the neighbour – in this context the migrant – who we should help. Nagy (2009,p256) points out that the person helping is also the neighbour. She references Matthew 7.12, which says you should do to your neighbour as you would have them do to you. ‘Such a command presupposes a profound knowledge about the other from both sides’ (Nagy, 2009,p256) – something that can only occur when time is taken to get to know each other.

She also suggests another translation of the original Leviticus command – to ‘love your neighbour because he is like you’, which ‘indicates a common ground of similarity as the
starting point of any encounter.’ Viewing migrants as more like you than different and taking
time to get to know them could help to create the bridge that Chandran (2010) talks about,
where dialogue and integration can take place.

However, while the migrant is like you, differences will eventually surface. It is important to
recognise the tension between the migrant as ‘other’ and the migrant as ‘like you’. Integration is not only about focusing on the similarities and ignoring the differences, but
about working through the differences and coming to a common understanding, as part of
the ‘dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation’, outlined by the European Union
(EU, 2004,p17)

2.4 Migrant as Exile

Sixty-nine refugee-assisting NGOs across Europe work together as the European Council on
Refugees and Exiles to promote ‘a humane and generous’ European asylum policy
(www.ecre.org). The theology of exile has been developed particularly by Latin Americans
migrating to North America and living through the experience of feeling dislocated and not at
home (Nagy, 2009,p204).

The story of the Jewish people in exile and their laments recorded in the Psalms and
elsewhere (for example, Psalm 137’ and Lamentations) are an important part of exile
theology. Through reading these scriptures, the non-migrant can also enter into the
experience of the exile. In addition, all Christians can identify with the exile’s experience of
being ‘strangers in the world” (1 Peter 1:1).

With regards to integration however, Bruggeman (1997, cited in Frost, 2006,p9) warns that
the danger of exile is to ‘become so preoccupied with self that one cannot step outside
oneself to re-think, reimagine and redescribe larger reality’. As integration requires effort on
the part of host and migrant to adjust to the other, the danger of a theology of exile is to
create a self absorption that stops the migrant from relating with the host society, holding on
instead to their own cultural expressions.

In Jeremiah 29.7 (NIV), the Jewish exiles were encouraged to ‘seek the peace and prosperity
of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it
prospers, you too will prosper.’ This does not infer a rejection of their own culture, but
instead a call for to interact with the host culture – fitting well with the EU’s common basic
principles for immigrant integration.

Some Christian migrants also interpret this verse as a call to the evangelisation of the nation
in which they now reside, as explored below.

2.5 Missionaries – and people to be evangelised.

‘When people move, they carry their ideas, beliefs and religious practices with them…the
migration movement was – and still is a prime factor in the global spread of world religions, notably Islam and Christianity’ (Hanciles, 2003,p146).

Huston et al (2005,p10) state that ‘the movement of peoples in our world is part of God’s
purpose, from the Garden of Eden onwards’. Acts 17.26-27 is often quoted as being part of
God’s plan to help people hear the gospel through migration (Caleb Project, 2009,p2;
Chandran 2010).

God has ‘determined the times set for [men] and the exact places where they should live…so
that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.’

Hanciles (2003,p150) says, ‘Many African Christian who have recently migrated to Europe,
generally to find work, consider that God has given them a unique opportunity to spread the
good news among those who have gone astray.’ However, one of the challenges is that
migrant churches are often mono-ethnic, where they reach other migrants, rather than
engaging cross-culturally (Appleton, 2010; Clarke, 2007).
Through coming to Europe, migrants from countries closed to the Gospel are able to hear it – often from other Christian migrants, and can be more likely to respond (Lund, 2010; Caleb Project, 2003). According to Huston et al (2005,11) the gospel is not bound to any one culture. Christians from many different cultures help to create an integrated community, with ‘new forms of cultural expression, with a fusion of different cultures, which will enable people of all backgrounds to draw near and follow Christ.’

While this kind of integration is possible – particularly in international churches in large cities where many different nationalities worship, this viewpoint is more about mission than integration. Nagy (2009,p231) points out that with this approach, ‘it does not matter whether somebody belongs to the category of the migrant or non-migrant. What matters is to belong to the category of those who have “heavenly citizenship”.’

In addition, if we see migrants solely as evangelistic targets, we can fail to recognise the increasingly diverse religious landscape in Europe. ‘Christian churches must realise that they are no longer the only ones to occupy the place of religion in society’ states a report by the Council of Europe (Vöcking, 1999,p14)

One of the principles they suggest to improve integration is to engage in inter-faith dialogue, vital to improving ‘mutual awareness, understanding and respect’ (Vöcking, 1999,p20). Through the creation of dialogue however, opportunities for sharing the gospel may arise.

3. Theology of integration

Given that the above are primarily theologies of migration, is it possible to find a specific theological basis for supporting the integration rather than assimilation of migrants into a host culture – i.e. is God pro-integration, and should his Church be as well? I would suggest yes, using the pictures of the Trinity and the worshipping Church in Revelation, and the example of the early Christians. While there is much that could be said about the integration of migrant churches into the European church context, this short discussion will focus on integrating the migrant into the host culture in general.

3.1 The Trinity

According to Trinitarian theology, the Godhead exists as three distinct persons, working in harmony together. For example, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit in John 15.26; the Spirit is sent out from the Father, but testifies about Christ. But the Father, through Christ, brings reconciliation to all mankind (Col 1.20) – whether we are near, or far away (Eph 2.17). The fact that reconciliation is part of God’s nature and plan for mankind should act as an incentive for us to work towards the reconciliation of migrants with their host culture, though integration.

3.2 The worshipping church in Revelation

Revelation 7.9 provides a picture of nations, tribes, peoples and tongues all worshipping the risen Saviour in a vision of ‘infinite diversity in perfect unity’ (Huston et al, 2004,p12). These categories are mentioned seven times in Revelation. This suggests that the differences between peoples are not obscured even in heaven, and each is worshipping God as themselves. If God does not expect people to give up their ethnic identity, even in heaven, should we expect people to do so when they come to our country? But just as Christ longed for the church to be one (John 17.23) through integration, people from diverse backgrounds can also see themselves as ‘united’ while maintaining an individual identity.

3.3 The early church

At Pentecost, the gospel was preached in many different languages – although the hearers were mostly proselytes in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival who had assimilated with the Jewish culture (Acts 2.5). Even when the church was scattered through persecution, the early believers preached only to the Jews (Acts 11.19). It took Peter’s dream in Acts 10 for the church to wake up to the fact that God the ‘Gentiles might hear’ the Gospel because they
too received the Holy Spirit and God ‘makes no distinction between us and them’ (Acts 15.6-8).

But should the Gentile Christian – as ‘other’ – be forced to assimilate? Some of the early Jews thought so, insisting that Gentile Christians were circumcised and followed Jewish laws. A council in Jerusalem needed to be called in order to clear that issue up (Acts 15) and Paul’s letters, for example Galatians 1-2, Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-10, make it clear that Gentile Christians were not required to become Jews. They had to change some of their customs – for example not eat meat with blood in it, but Jewish Christians were to respect the different cultural expressions of their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ (Acts 15.23-29). The numerous calls to ‘love one another’ in the New Testament epistles are a recognition that love – because the differences in personality, background – and culture – doesn’t come easily.

4. Conclusion

Theologies of the migrant help describe the relationship between migrant and host culture. However, these theologies tend to be framed in relationship to the migrant as ‘other’ or ‘different’. Integration, pictured as people meeting on a bridge and taking time to get to know each other infers a sense of equality and reciprocity. Our theologies of migration may reinforce the ‘us’ and ‘them’ and a feeling of superiority on the part of the non-migrant who is helping the migrant, thus preventing them meeting as equals. In addition, they could allow acceptance only when the migrant becomes ‘like us’ rather than ‘other’?

In contrast, a specific theology of integration recognises difference. It is based on an understanding of the co-equal relationship of the Godhead as Trinity, and the call of all men, regardless of their background, to God. He accepts each other’s differences – and the Church is called to do the same. In Revelation, there is a unity centred around worship of the Lamb that acknowledges what we have in common (redeemed through Christ) but allows for infinite diversity of identity in tribes, peoples, nations and tongues. Despite pressure from Jewish Christians for Gentile believers to assimilate, both Jews and Gentiles had to accommodate one another – an important part of integration.

In Europe’s post-Christendom culture, immigration and the integration of the ‘other’ is one of the biggest issues facing society. Through a deep theological understanding of the integration of migrant and non-migrants, and putting it into practice at the level of individuals, local churches and Christian organisations, we can prophetically model what it means to be ‘truly integrated communities’ (Showell-Rogers, 2009, cited in Jackson, 2009).

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Please Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of Redcliffe College.

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Believing in Grace Davie: what does she bring to an understanding of mission in Europe?

Chris Ducker, Mission Partner, Moldova

“Religion in Europe is like an iceberg: most of what is interesting is under the water and out of view.”

Grace Davie (2003b)

Grace Davie is a British sociologist of religion who has explored the relationship between religion and modernity. I begin this essay by introducing Dr Davie’s work and outlining her contribution to the field over the last twenty years, including her well-known phrase ‘believing without belonging’ as well as more recent developments. In Section II, I focus on Dr Davie’s concept of ‘vicarious religion,’ and explain why it can be considered her most significant contribution towards understanding the place of religion in contemporary Europe. In Section III, I engage with this concept, considering its relative strengths and weaknesses as a methodological tool. Section IV demonstrates the usefulness of vicarious religion by considering it in relation to Christian mission in Europe. Section V then identifies some problems and weaknesses in its application to this context.

Section I – Introducing the Work and Key Concepts of Dr Grace Davie

Dr Davie is a highly respected professor of sociology, responsible for either introducing or popularizing a number of key developments in the sociology of religion in Europe. Davie has a doctorate from the London School of Economics and is a Lay Canon of the Diocese of Europe. She has lectured and researched in Britain, western Europe and the United States, and has published books and articles covering each of these areas. As the scope of her research has broadened from Liverpool, to Britain, to western Europe, to global religion, her methodological toolbox has expanded accordingly.

(1) Believing without Belonging

In 1994, Davie published Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging, substantially developing ideas that she had introduced in a short article four years earlier (Davie 1990). As the book’s subtitle suggests, Davie found what she argued was a profound mismatch between religious values that people professed (‘believing’), and actual churchgoing and religious practice (‘belonging’). Whilst others had remarked on this disconnection, Davie researched, articulated and explained it most clearly and coined the memorable phrase ‘believing without belonging’ to describe it. It is perhaps for this concept
that Davie is best known.\textsuperscript{1} The book became a significant landmark for those trying to understand the contemporary role and status of religion in Britain.\textsuperscript{2}

\textbf{(2) Vicarious Religion}

Whilst Davie found believing without belonging “offered fruitful ways in which to understand the religious life of both Britain and other parts of Europe” (2006b, 22) it also had considerable limitations. In particular, it seemed more descriptive than explanatory, and it relied partly on statistical measurement of what is in many ways a more nebulous phenomenon. Acutely aware of these limitations herself, Davie’s work turned towards more qualitative and more subtle tools of analysis. Conscious that the contemporary religious scene in western Europe has undergone profound changes, Davie developed the concept of ‘vicarious religion’ to describe the new state of affairs. In her opinion, this concept “provides the key to understanding the present state of religiousness in Europe” (2007, 137).

In \textit{Religion in Modern Europe – A Memory Mutates} (2000), Davie starts from her “convenient shorthand, [that] Europe believes but it does not belong” (2000a, 33) and finds it significant that “churches remain, however, significant players” within society (2000a, 38), performing a moral, spiritual and social role on behalf of the population, i.e. vicariously.\textsuperscript{3} This specifically European phenomenon means that those who see secularization taking place throughout Europe may be misunderstanding and misinterpreting the signs of the times.\textsuperscript{4} For Davie, ‘vicarious religion’ is “an innovative [and]... empirically useful approach to the notion of secularization” (2001, 111), and we will engage with this concept in much greater detail below.

\textbf{(3) Other Developments}

Davie’s work is important for introducing these connected concepts of ‘believing without belonging’ and ‘vicarious religion,’ yet is also significant for two arguments she has helped establish together with other sociologists, most notably Peter Berger. She has (quite successfully) challenged the secularization thesis that sees dechristianization as an inevitable consequence of modernity; and has likewise challenged the thinking that saw European religion as somehow normative and other instances as ‘exceptions’ from the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Whilst initially popular as a term and as a concept, ‘believing without belonging’ has recently attracted a good deal of criticism for its lack of clarity or sharpness as an analytical tool. An example of its falling popularity comes from Voas and Crockett (2005, 24-25): “We suggest that the only form of believing without belonging that is as pervasive as Davie suggests is a vague willingness to suppose that ‘there’s something out there,’ accompanied by an unsurprising disinclination to spend any time and effort worshipping whatever that might be... ‘believing without belonging’ was an interesting idea, but it is time for the slogan to enter honourable retirement.” For her part, Davie (2006b, 33) “largely agree[s]” but “doubt[s] that it will be allowed to do so.”
\item Subsequently, Davie reported the opposite phenomenon in various Scandinavian countries, where ‘believing without belonging’ is the norm (2006b, 25).
\item A dictionary definition of vicarious is: “(loosely) not experienced personally but imagined through the experience of others; exercised, performed or suffered by one person or thing instead of another; filling the place of another” (Chambers Dictionary, 1998).
\item Steve Bruce is one of a number of sociologists continuing to argue that modernity necessarily leads to the demise of traditional religions such as Christianity, the central tenet of classical secularization theory. For Bruce, any attachment the public has to institutional religion is merely “a nostalgic fondness” (1996, 35). Peter Berger is one sociologist who prescribed to this theory until becoming convinced that evidence pointed to the contrary (see, for example, Berger 1999 for his restatement of his position). The secularization thesis has declined in popularity due to its perceived inability to explain the religious vitality of the United States and other parts of the modern world. One academic has gone so far as to claim that “the enormous amount of work in the study of religion in the last 30 years has simply destroyed that [secularization] thesis” (Professor Leslie Francis, quoted in Taylor 1999, 13), but the debate continues.
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European norm. If anything, she argues, *Europe* is the exception in a global trend of sustained or increased religiosity.⁵ Davie’s work to date can be summarised thus: she has added very helpful terms to our sociological vocabulary; challenged the monolithic theory that is the secularization thesis; argued persuasively that there are multiple sociologies of religion (and indeed multiple modernities); and opened up new methodologies in what she once described as “an impossibly difficult field to research… [which] is not amenable to anything but the most subtle of methodologies” (2001, 108). Her work has gone some way towards bolstering what many have regarded a methodologically weak and under-researched field, the sociology of religion.⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that Pellivert (2008, 25) notes that Davie’s work is “widely acknowledged as a thorough and acute explanation of current changes [in European religion].”

**Section II – Vicarious Religion Explored**

In this section, we focus on Davie’s concept of ‘vicarious religion,’ explaining why it can be considered her most important contribution towards understanding the role of religion in contemporary Europe.

Davie (2000a, 59) herself defines vicarious religion as “the willingness of the population to delegate the religious sphere to the professional ministries of the state churches” and, moreover, Europeans are grateful that “churches perform, vicariously, a number of tasks on behalf of the population as a whole.” At specific times, churches – or church leaders or church members – are “asked to articulate the sacred” on behalf of individuals, families or society as a whole. Whilst ordinary European citizens may not practise religion on a daily basis, they recognise its worth, and are “more than half aware that they might need to draw on [it] at crucial times in their individual or collective lives” (2002, 19).

To support and clarify this concept, Davie gives a number of examples, such as the mourning and articulation of grief after Princess Diana died in 1996; after the terrorist attacks of September 2001; after the sinking of the Baltic ferry *Estonia* in 1994; and on a more regular basis the persistence of religious ceremonies such as funerals, weddings and, to a lesser extent, baptisms. At such times, people instinctively turn to the church, its officials, buildings, symbols and liturgy to help them understand and articulate the sacredness of what has happened.

Important aspects of this concept of vicarious religion are: that it is drawn upon by others on rare but special occasions; that in some sense the church has an obligation to perform its expected role as mediator of the sacred; and that the church ‘ought’ to persist so that it is able to provide such vicarious religion as is required. In some European countries, this (typically implicit) understanding of the societal role of the church means that the state may financially support or privilege the church to help it continue in the future: effectively, religion

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⁵ For Davie’s work on ‘European exceptionalism,’ see her *Europe – The Exceptional Case* (London: DLT, 2002) and her summary of this material in “Is Europe an Exceptional Case?“, *International Review of Mission* 95, July/October 2006, pp.247-258.

⁶ Another example can be found in a little-known paper that Davie wrote on the use of text as data in the sociology of religion. Here, Davie analysed letters of correspondence from some of the 350,000 visitors to the National Gallery exhibition “Seeing Salvation: The Image of Christ” in 2000. Her textual analysis of the 461 letters was innovative and increased her confidence in the validity of the concept of vicarious religion (Davie 2003a, 28-44).

⁷ The concept was developed by Davie in order to “attempt to grasp both the nature of European religion as it emerges from a complex past and the forms that this memory or memories are likely to take as the twentieth century gives way to the twenty-first… [to understand a] world characterized by unusually low levels of active religiousness, but with relatively high levels of nominal belief” (2000a, 33).
should be kept ‘on hand’ for when people want or need it. This understanding of religion in Europe has been echoed by other commentators such as Philip Jenkins, who quotes Grace Davie’s ideas approvingly and who himself concludes that “institutional weakness is not necessarily the same as total religious apathy” (2007, 54) and that “in surprising ways, Christianity continues as a ghostly presence” (2007, 69) within European society.

Davie (1999, 79-80) acknowledges her debt to the work of French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger, who regards religion as a form of collective memory, passed on from one group or member of the community to another via a series of chains. Davie’s insight was that churches can hold part of that collective memory vicariously (described as ‘vicarious memory’) for the community as a whole. Davie (2006a, 249ff) identified four particular ways in which this is done:

1. Churches and church leaders perform ritual on behalf of others;
2. Church leaders and active Christians believe on behalf of others;
3. Church leaders and active Christians embody moral codes on behalf of others;
4. Churches offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved social issues (e.g. homosexuality).

Thus it can be seen that there are different agents of vicarious memory – churches as institutions; ministers and other church leaders; church members and other churchgoers; and, perhaps more controversially, the church as a form of public arena. These form a nexus through which religious memory is held, celebrated, and reformulated (i.e. it is not necessarily static, despite the connotations of the word ‘memory’). This formulation of religion is generally grasped and recognised by Europeans but much less so in America, says Davie (2000, 49 and 2006a, 251), where churches are less of a public utility and faith is a more privatised, individual phenomenon, the result of a different cultural history.

Reflecting on vicarious religion as a sociological concept, Davie herself concludes that “vicariousness still resonates in Europe in the early years of the twenty-first century and will do for the foreseeable future. As a concept, it is both more penetrating and more accurate than believing without belonging. It not only goes beyond a simple dichotomy but also points to the complex cultural and political histories that are likely to shape vicariousness in any given society” (2006b, 26). In the next section we briefly evaluate the extent to which vicarious religion can be regarded as a reliable methodology.

**Section III – Vicarious Religion Evaluated**

At this point, we must stop and take stock of where the concept of vicarious religion has led us. We have moved considerably beyond bald statistics such as what percentage of a given population attends church each week, and have shifted towards something altogether less tangible. The significance of churches and religion persisting, argues Davie, lies less in the number of people they attract and more in the societal role they can and do perform, as retainers of collective memory.

As a progression beyond the stale dichotomy of believing versus belonging, the concept of vicarious religion is surely to be welcomed. In this section we shall raise some questions about vicarious religion as a sociological concept, in an attempt to make us think more rigorously about how and when to use it. It is only fair to point out that some of these queries have been anticipated by Davie herself.

Firstly, there is a sense in which vicarious religion may be, in part, a return to earlier attempts at understanding modern religion from a three-fold perspective, namely believing, belonging and behaving. Earlier sociologists who recognised the limitations both of attendance statistics and creedal or belief statistics also tried to incorporate data relating to behaviour
and public action. Vicarious religion seems in some way related to this approach since the agents of vicarious religion are behaving in certain ways, such as performing ritual, embodying moral codes, debating social issues and so on. Those who ‘opt in’ to this vicarious religion at various points in their lives are also behaving in certain ways. So whilst vicarious religion moves us beyond the believing/belonging mindset, in some ways it also returns us to questions about religious behaviour, and this is not entirely new territory. What is new is the extent to which such religious behaviour is somehow enacted on behalf of others.

Secondly, and following on directly from this first point, is the unavoidable issue of to what extent religion (and it must be acknowledged that this debate relates principally to Protestant and sometimes to Catholic forms of Christianity in western and central Europe) can be conducted or performed vicariously. Whilst to some extent this is a theological and philosophical question, it also has sociological significance. Christianity celebrates the biblical example of Jesus Christ vicariously bearing the sins of mankind, of suffering and dying on a cross in place of fallen humanity; the ‘suffering servant’; the Lamb of God. Thus the concept of vicariousness is at the very heart of the Christian faith. However, the irony is that – certainly within mainstream Protestant theology – profession of faith in Jesus Christ must be an individual’s own decision, and therefore Christianity ultimately cannot be a vicarious religion for those choosing to believe. Historically, priests had (and for many, continue to have) a significant role performing ritual (presiding over communion, receiving confession etc.) on behalf of their congregations, but the one thing they cannot do is believe for somebody else. Thus a sociological concept based on a group of people believing for others is inherently controversial.

Likewise, if people only seek to engage with this vicarious religion momentarily and/or in times of considerable stress (as with many of Davie’s examples), again what does this tell us about the nature of their religious experience? If religion is accessed by non-practitioners on this transient basis, how meaningfully can we say that religion affects them? One of the difficulties with the concept of vicarious religion is that it gives us no way of answering this question. Have we moved from a sterile situation of overreliance on statistics, to a new situation where we are basing our analysis on too many nebulous and immeasurable concepts? It is difficult enough measuring a group’s religiosity at any given point in time but measuring one group’s religiosity on behalf of another’s over a period of time is more complicated yet.

Next, what are we to make of the future of vicarious religion? Where could this concept lead us? That is to say, a religion that is predominantly vicarious will sooner or later have difficulty sustaining let alone growing its number of adherents. Davie herself is clear on this point: “[m]y sense is that vicarious religion will endure at least until the mid-century, but not for much longer” (2006c, 293). Is it possible to distinguish between religion lingering as a memory, and religion actively being passed on with each generation? This is an important question for Europe, because the latent expressions of Christianity could be understood either as the presence of lapsed Christians and surrendered social influence, or as new forms of Christianity that will continue to meet a public need. It is not altogether clear which of these alternatives best describes religion in modern Europe; neither is it clear that, as a concept, vicarious religion sufficiently distinguishes between people who have handed over to the church to hold vicariously that which they once practised for themselves; and those who have never fully engaged with Christianity but instinctively turn there when necessary. In short, the concept of vicarious religion fails to illuminate the difference between those remembering religious significance through the church, and those discovering it for the first time.

Despite these criticisms, however, vicarious religion is undoubtedly a helpful addition to the sociology of religion. There may be some concern that the concept could be used by Christians seeking to justify the social and political influence of the church at a time when its
membership is declining, but it is a helpful way of considering the ‘sacred canopy’ or general influence of that which is religious. It redefines the debate away from the, say, 10% of the population who practise Christianity regularly, towards the greater majority who may have different and inevitably weaker ties with the church, and who may not even be aware that such a relationship exists. Whilst some sociologists claim that Europe is secular, and will be even more so in the future, the notion of vicarious religion challenges the assumption that a population will necessarily be religious or secular, but rather may occasionally turn to the church for spiritual succour or emotional support, requiring the church to be available and ready for when that time comes.

This section has critiqued the concept of vicarious religion in the abstract. In the following two sections we evaluate it positively and negatively by considering examples of its application (section IV) and then some of its practical limitations (section V).

Section IV – Vicarious Religion and Christian Mission in Europe: Some Applications

In this section we look at six issues arising from the application of the concept of vicarious religion to the European context for Christian mission in the twenty-first century.

(1) Secularization Revisited

Perhaps most significantly, if we accept vicarious religion as a meaningful tool for sociological analysis, we must revisit the issue of secularization. For almost the entire history of sociology as a discipline, it has been widely held that modernity necessarily leads to secularization. Yet the concept of vicarious religion seems to offer a different interpretation of observable social phenomena, an interpretation that brings greater hope to Christians. If religion is, to some extent, being continued vicariously, it is less dependent on individual, personal participation and regular attendance. Even if secularization theory could be deemed correct at predicting less active and less regular participation in religion, this is not necessarily where we should be seeking evidence for the vitality of religion, Davie would argue. Secularization is a theory positing a long-term decline in churchgoers, decline in public influence and decline in religious belief. But even if these things came about, a society could in some meaningful way still be considered religious if its collective religious memory were carried on by a large or influential enough minority, to be accessed at key times. In Davie’s words, “[w]hile many Europeans have ceased to participate in religious institutions, they have not yet abandoned any of their deep-seated religious inclinations” (1999, 68).

(2) Transmission of Collective Memory

If vicarious religion is understood and taken seriously by European Christians, there ought to be a shift towards deliberate cultivation and transmission of the collective religious memory. Quite simply, for vicarious religion to continue it must be passed on from one generation to the next, though not necessarily in the same form. Davie explains that cultural memory “is socially constructed and requires not only knowledge but training in order to continue as an effective resource or memory” (2000a, 173). This construction and sharing of collective

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8 For this and other reasons, Davie prefers to use the word “unchurched” rather than “secular” to describe contemporary western Europe (1999, 68 and 2002, 5).

9 Gill is right to question the extent to which a disengaged population could ever connect with the church: “…few adults in the future, even when faced with a crisis of identity, will be able to ‘return’ to church. They will never have acquired the language, symbols or rituals of church culture and are likely to find it strange rather than reassuring. Searching for meaning beyond the ambiguities of life, they will find difficulty in decoding the meanings offered within institutional worship” (2003, 218). This demonstrates the importance of transmitting and sharing the religious memory.

10 The Catholic church has already identified this specific role for the church in Europe: “One of the main tasks of the Church must be, then, to act as the repository of the continent’s tradition… recalling Europe to its roots in God” (Murphy-O’Connor 2005, 83).
relational memory (as a principal form of cultural memory) is not just for future generations but also for the present. If the continuation of the Christian faith in Europe depends partly on the passing on of religious memory, then Christians will need to take even more seriously the fight for a public role for religion, especially in the media, in politics and in education (the main routes through which religious memory can be publicly communicated). On an even broader level, Davie (2000a, 52ff) argues cogently that former state churches should play an important role in the “formation of civil society.”

(3) Moral Guidance

One of Davie’s four ‘pillars’ of vicarious religion is that church leaders and churchgoers embody behavioural and moral codes for the population as a whole: “religious professionals (both local and national) are expected to uphold certain standards of behaviour… and incur criticism when they fail, from outside churches as well as within” (Davie 2006a, 250). Therefore, those wanting to strengthen and promote religion in Europe would do well to redouble their efforts at living lives of integrity and purity. If European mission is to be done amongst those expecting moral lives to be lived on their behalf, it should be done so not just as a testimony of personal transformation but also as a means of communicating the transcendent ‘other’ that vicarious religion represents. This will be understood by people in terms of moral examples and guidelines for living, rather than abstract theology (Davie 2002, 46).

The church is not only permitted to explore a moral and ethical response to social issues; it is expected to do so on everyone’s behalf. For Davie, this explains the media’s apparent fascination with the church’s struggle to articulate a contemporary response to homosexuality (2006c, 280 and 2006b, 24-25). If Davie is right, then new doors of opportunity open for Christian mission in Europe if the church can find ways of including non-members in its debates and moral wrestling. There remains a sense that sections of society across Europe, whether consciously or not, still look to the church for a moral line on social and ethical issues.

(4) Adaptive Rituals

Another of Davie’s four ‘pillars’ of vicarious religion is ritual, whereby the church and its leaders perform ceremonies, employ symbols, define and celebrate rites of passage, and generally demarcate spiritual or religious occasions and impart their meaning. The key to understanding what impact this may have on Christian mission throughout Europe is to recognise that these rituals are actually both flexible and adaptive. Davie (2006b, 24) gives two examples of new rituals being developed: ceremonies recognizing (and thereby legitimizing) divorce, and gay marriage. Whilst these are only partially accepted within the wider religious community, they highlight the possibility of churches responding to social changes meaningfully and innovatively. For Christianity to remain or become relevant to more Europeans, it may need to creatively explore the possibility of other such rituals. Traditionalists may take some comfort from the fact that some of these rituals could be rediscovered or reinterpreted rituals from the church’s rich history.

(5) Churches as Public Utilities

At the heart of the concept of vicarious religion, and the main difference from Christianity in the United States, is the idea that European churches are a form of public utility, that is to say they provide a form of service to the public in general, and have an obligation to provide that service satisfactorily. When comparing European Christianity with North American, Latin American, African and Asian alternatives, Davie argues that “Europeans, by and large, 11

11 It should be acknowledged that throughout Davie’s writings is the underlying belief that the church ought to continue, as a matter of public interest, e.g. “It is to everyone’s advantage to find appropriate forms of religious life for the new millennium… The ‘soul of Europe’ cannot be left to chance” (2000a, 194). Davie is writing both as a sociologist and as a Christian.
regard their churches as public utilities rather than competing firms; this is the real legacy of a state church history and inextricably related to the concept of vicariousness" (2002, 43-44). In reality, of course, religion in Europe is characterised by both state churches and ‘competing’ free churches. Nonetheless, it would be helpful to church leaders if they understood that people often feel entitled, or affiliated, or connected in some way to their local church, even if they are not regular attendees. Of course, good priests and vicars will already be aware of this attachment but it would be beneficial to think more clearly about the nature of this relationship and, from a missional perspective, how it may be used as a springboard for engaging with non-church members. To return to earlier terminology, how many people feel they ‘belong’ to a church without that church even realizing? How can a church make the religious memory more accessible to such people, and on more occasions?

(6) Alternative and Emerging Memories

Finally, it is imperative that we account for alternative and emerging religious memories when attempting to apply the concept of vicarious religion to Europe as a mission field. Significantly, the subtitle of Davie’s 2000 book Religion in Modern Europe is ‘A Memory Mutates,’ and we should remember that there need not be anything static about vicarious memory: as long as it has an element of continuity, it may prove to be remarkably adaptive. One significant way in which religious memory adapts is through fusion with emerging or alternative memories. Davie’s own examples of these include new religious movements, other faiths such as Islam, and secularism itself (2000a, Ch. 7).

From a missional perspective, it has sometimes been argued that southern Christianity has the potential to rejuvenate European Christianity, and this would be one example of an alternative memory helping shape the religious memory of Europe. Davie has tended to write about vicarious religion monolithically, but it is not difficult to conceive of a multiform vicarious religion that incorporates different strands of Christian belief and practice. Migration into Europe has brought different Christian religious traditions and religious memories, and these could sit alongside the dominant European religious memory. Once we conceive of such a nexus, the possibility occurs that this multiform nexus would be capable of vicariously practising religion for a greater number of people, if it were able to incorporate different rituals, beliefs and values.

Section V – Vicarious Religion and Christian Mission in Europe: Some Reservations

The six subsections above indicate that there are certainly some potentially fruitful applications of the concept of vicarious religion to understanding the context and future of mission in Europe. In this section, however, we balance this by making some reservations and more negative observations.

(1) Which ‘Europe’?

Davie’s field research has been conducted chiefly in Britain, Scandinavia and France, and her writings generally reflect this fact. The concept of vicarious religion seems to be truer of certain countries than others, and Davie falls short of specifying precisely which countries she believes it applies to. She acknowledges that her “Europe” is effectively western

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12 This point touches upon Rational Choice Theory, a popular way of understanding religion in North America, which posits that competition in the religious ‘marketplace’ leads to high levels of religious participation as individuals choose which denomination/faith is most attractive to them; conversely, monopolistic state churches offer less choice and will lead to lower levels of religious participation. Commenting on RCT in relation to European forms of religion, Davie (2006c, 281) observes that “choice is entirely compatible with vicariousness” since churches continue the religious memory so people can go to them when they choose.
Europe, at times it seems smaller still, relating only to Protestant countries – this is the implication of her claim that perhaps vicarious religion equates to “Catholic identity” elsewhere (Davie 2000a, 59). As such, the concept of vicarious religion can only partially describe the context of European mission, since European Christianity has Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox strands (as well as other religions altogether). Davie’s “Europe” is a smaller geographical and religious construct than Europe is in reality.

(2) Examples Used to Substantiate Vicarious Religion

Davie claims that the ongoing popularity of baptisms, church weddings and funerals tells us much about people’s vicarious religion (2000a, 71ff). She also claims that media and popular outrage over church scandals are examples that people feel deeply that certain views should be held by those who maintain religion vicariously for them. This latter claim is very difficult to prove one way or another, and could as easily be driven by the press’ appetite for scandal. But beyond these examples, Davie says that vicarious religion is most clearly revealed in moments of national stress (2006b, 28).

Throughout her various published works, I have found Davie using six different examples, viz. the public and state reaction to the death of French President Mitterrand (1996); reaction to the death of Princess Diana (1997); reaction to the death of Pope John Paul II (2005); reaction to the sinking of the Baltic ferry Estonia with the loss of 900 lives (1994); reaction to the abduction and murder of two schoolgirls in Soham (2002); and British reaction to the terrorist attacks in America (2001). It is immediately noticeable that all six of Davie’s examples are actually the same phenomenon – how the public responds to death. These variations on a single theme certainly tell us something about temporary reactions to unique events, but perhaps less about the ongoing religious state of Europe in general. We must also question the claim that religion is best understood at times of national stress; it does not seem that this assertion has been well established at all.

(3) Differently Religious

Central to Davie’s argument about the current state of religion in Europe is the belief that Europe is not areligious but “differently religious” (1999, 65 and 2002, 19). Many of the signs that to Davie are evidence of Europeans being differently religious would, to arguably most non-Europeans, indicate absence of religion (in this case, Christianity). Low church attendance, lack of Christian behaviour and values, and a restricted public role for expressions of faith would lead many to conclude that Europe is areligious, or secular. For Davie to fully convince that Europe is differently religious, she would need to be clear about what an areligious Europe would look like – and how is that different from the relatively secular states of western Europe now. At what point does ‘differently religious’ become ‘no longer religious’ is a question she fails to address. On the level of the individual, the concept of vicarious religion does not enable us to answer the question how much faith or religion one person can abdicate to another person or institution and, in any meaningful sense, still be a part of it.

(4) Lack of Resonance

When describing the fact that Europeans want their faith to be carried on vicariously by others, Davie makes the interesting claim that Europeans are “grateful” for this service (2000a, 59) and, “quite clearly, approve” of it (2006b, 22). This writer would argue, however,

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13 In her introduction to Europe – The Exceptional Case, Davie explains her use of the term ‘Europe,’ and seemingly uses this definition implicitly in her other works: “When speaking of Europe, I will in fact be referring to Western Europe in the sense of Western Christianity. I will not be including the Orthodox parts of Europe, nor the complex marchlands that lie between the two halves of the continent… [because] it is too soon to say whether the Eastern European case will follow the Western one… or whether a substantially new variant or variants will emerge” (2002, xi).
that there is widespread apathy and often outright hostility towards the church, and rather less evidence of gratitude or enthusiasm for its vicarious role.

We have available an interesting, though not altogether unbiased, example from the liberal British newspaper, *The Guardian*, for which Grace Davie wrote a short article in June 2009 under the heading “Christian, but not as we know it.” In this article she confronts the question, ‘Is Europe’s future Christian?’ concluding “‘yes’ but not in the same way that it is now.” Whilst avoiding the technical term vicarious religion, Davie is clearly rehearsing this familiar argument, claiming that churches “continue to have a significant role in the lives of both individuals and communities, most obviously at times of celebration or loss.”¹⁴ The interesting thing here is the comments that Davie’s article prompted – which were overwhelmingly against an active Christianity in Europe: of 128 posted comments, just 11 responses were broadly in favour of Davie’s argument and 78 were broadly against it (the remaining 39 comments were either neutral or not relevant). Even if we take into account reader bias for *The Guardian*, this is a very high figure and not one that speaks strongly of “grateful” Europeans benefiting from vicarious religion. Most people posting a comment were advocating a secular Europe, and of those who wanted to maintain a Christian legacy, some were proposing this for cultural rather than religious reasons. It seems that the concept of vicarious religion does not necessarily resonate with ordinary Europeans.

**Conclusion**

We can conclude by recognizing that, of Davie’s various concepts, vicarious religion is the most insightful and should ultimately prove to be the most helpful to sociologists of religion. I have also tried to outline six ways in which this concept may affect missiological thinking and missional practice concerning Europe in the twenty-first century, followed by four concerns about its application.

The concept of vicarious religion has to some extent succeeded in moving debate about religion in Europe beyond polarised assertions that Europe is secular – or not – or will be soon. Consequently, we are forced to consider whether religion in Europe has changed or, using Davie’s preferred word, “mutated” into a new form. This form may be less obvious and less participatory but persists nonetheless, ready for occasions when people wish to draw on its spiritual reserves. An approach, such as Davie’s, which recognises such grey or shadow areas will better explain the subtleties of modern life, than a dualistic or statistical approach alone. Whether or not we agree with Davie’s description of the religious scene in Europe today, few would deny it is undergoing change and Davie has created a plausible way of interpreting it. The challenge for others is to respond with ideas that similarly try to explain the persistence of religion and its continuing function as a provider of meaning, particularly in times of crisis or key moments in life. Between the minority of Europeans who attend church (or mosque or synagogue) regularly, and the minority who actively describe themselves as secular, lies a large majority of Europeans who have not yet been adequately explained or described by sociologists.

In one explanation of vicarious religion, Davie describes it as “an institutionalized form of free-riding” (2007, 77) questioning whether this is necessarily a bad thing. Christians in Europe must wrestle with the same question which ultimately asks what are we expecting of those who consider themselves Christian. This is a pertinent question precisely because in Europe there is a very long tradition of the Christian faith being a matter of personal choice – whereas in other parts of the world, there is sometimes an element of familial, tribal or

¹⁴ Davie’s original article, together with readers’ responses, can be found at http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/jun/01/europe-christianity-religion [Accessed 10 March 2010].
communal faith that would have to be opted out of, rather than opted into, and which makes fewer demands of its followers. The European religious tradition has also tended to be very cerebral and intellectual; it seems that a shift is taking place towards more experiential religion, and the concept of vicarious religion may be a better way of understanding (and accommodating) this shift.

To understand the European context for Christian mission, Christians must root themselves in God’s word, the Bible, but they must also understand the culture into which they wish to communicate God’s truth. The discipline of sociology continues to offer many ways of observing and analysing religious and cultural phenomena, and Grace Davie’s concept of vicarious religion has made many Christians reconsider the context in which they seek to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the means by which they may do so. Whilst many staunch Christians would argue that faith cannot be held vicariously, our sociological and missiological starting point is not where we would have others be, but rather where they are now. The concept of vicarious religion is useful precisely because it goes some way towards describing the (western) European religious picture as it is now. Even whilst recognizing its limited geographical applicability and acknowledging its methodological weaknesses, the missiologist should make good use of this helpful conceptual tool.

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