**Religious Illiteracy in Modern Europe**

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This chapter has two sections. The first section summarises the religious context in modern Europe, and the factors that must be taken into account if this is to be properly understood. It exposes the reasons for religious illiteracy in this part of the world and the negative consequences that follow from this. The second section introduces two specific responses to this situation, recognizing that the response to religious illiteracy – religious literacy – Is not a unitary concept. Far from it: it varies considerably between sectors, settings and problems.

**Understanding religion in modern Europe: The factors to take into account**

This section draws primarily on a growing corpus of work by Grace Davie – in particular on two articles that introduce a series of factors that are currently shaping the religious life of Europe, and a more recent exposition focused on the British case.[[1]](#footnote-1) The crucial point to grasp is that these factors not only change and adapt over time, they push and pull in *different* directions. They can be listed as follows:

1. the role of the historic churches in shaping European culture;
2. an awareness that these churches still have a place at particular moments in the lives of European people, though they are no longer able to influence – let alone discipline – the beliefs and behaviour of the great majority of the population;
3. an observable change in the actively religious constituencies of Europe, which operate increasingly on a model of choice, rather than a model of obligation or duty;
4. the arrival into Europe of groups of people from many different parts of the world, and with very different religious aspirations from those seen in the host society;
5. the reactions of Europe’s secular constituencies to the increasing salience of religion in public as well as private life;
6. a growing realization that the patterns of religious life in modern Europe should be considered an ‘exceptional case’ in global terms – they are not a global prototype.

Each of these is developed below in order to construct a rounded picture of religion in early 21st century Europe, and to discern the reasons behind the growing concern about religious illiteracy.

Cultural heritage

The first factor concerns the role of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as one influence among others in the formation of European culture.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is easily illustrated in the imprint that the Christian tradition has had on time and space in all European societies – in other words on some of the most fundamental categories of human existence. Regarding the former, it is clear that calendars, seasons, festivals, holidays, weeks and weekends are all premised on the Christian narrative. It follows that the rhythm of the workplace, to take one example, favours those of the Christian tradition, whether active or not. Members of other faiths may well be accommodated – sometimes generously, sometimes less so – but their ‘fit’ cannot simply be assumed. They are, for instance, very likely to need time off work to celebrate their major festivals. In terms of space, the most obvious exemplars are a comprehensive network of geographical parishes and the dominance of Christian buildings. The skyline itself is an important indicator both of past history and present developments. It is equally clear that some modifications to this profile are more acceptable than others. A good example can be found in the close scrutiny given to the planning applications for buildings belonging to other faith communities. The protracted controversy regarding the building of a mosque in Athens is a case in point, an unease that could be replicated many times over.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Europe’s historic churches: The inherited model

Central to Europe’s history is the presence of a dominant church in each European nation with close links to the state, and therefore to territory. The model works at national (state), regional (diocese) and local (parish) level and is pervasive from one end of Europe to the other. The fact that this model is currently under strain in many parts of the continent does not detract from its underlying influence in shaping the ways that Europeans think about religion. Such sentiments can be captured in an understanding of the state church (or its successor) as a public utility: an institution that is there at the point of need for those who so desire and who live in a designated territory. Davie has developed a series of concepts in order to capture the essence of this relationship. The first of these is the notion of ‘believing without belonging’;[[4]](#footnote-4) the second – and more apposite – is ‘vicarious religion’.[[5]](#footnote-5) Both concepts focus on the middle ground seeing this as the most interesting, but also the most contested, area of European religion – a point developed at length in the more recent *Religion in Britain*.[[6]](#footnote-6)

It is, moreover, this dimension of Europe’s religious life which is most subject to the process of secularization, with the effect that institutions that once had a hands-on role in the daily lives of most European citizens are now quite other. The situation varies across the continent, but the erosion – best understood as a series of generational shifts – is evident across a wide range of indicators: practice, membership, affiliation and belief.[[7]](#footnote-7) This does not mean, however, that Europe’s historic churches have entirely lost their *raison d’etre*. Despite their relatively secularity, Europeans are likely to return to these institutions at moments of celebration or grief (whether individual or collective). The frequency with which they do this differs from place to place, but in some sectors of the continent (Nordic Europe, selected Catholic countries and most of the Orthodox world), baptism rates remain remarkably high. Elsewhere they have dropped noticeably. The proportion of burials is more stable, but that too is falling in some places (Britain offers a good example). Particular buildings very often symbolize these connections and remain significant, both for those who use them and those who do not – unsurprisingly in that they house the many-layered minutiae of individual as well as collective memories.

A shift from obligation to consumption

That, however, is not the whole story. An observable change is taking place in the churchgoing constituencies of Europe, which are increasingly operating on a model of choice, rather than a model of obligation or duty. The latter was very much associated with the state church, though less so as the centuries passed. Churches that were excluding and exclusive in the early modern period have had, bit by bit, to learn to live with difference as religious minorities established themselves all over the continent. There were in addition marked differences *within* the historic churches themselves. The present situation should be seen as the continuation of this trend. In recent decades, however, the process has accelerated to the point that in some parts of Europe the notion not only of choosing one’s religion but of changing it is increasingly common. One set of choices, moreover, involves stepping out of religion altogether: the ‘secular’ is an increasingly popular option.

Without doubt the number of alternatives is growing, bearing in mind two things: that the range of possibilities in Europe remains limited if seen in global terms, and that the ‘market’ in question overlays an earlier model. In other words, it runs alongside rather than replaces the parish system. In short this is a both/ and rather than either/ or situation: the incipient market caters for those whose aspirations exceed the older model; the public utility – though fading – continues as one choice among many for the actively religious and as a safety net for those who do not want to choose at all. The co-existence and gradual rebalancing of two religious economies, which are in partial tension but also overlap, captures a great deal about the religious situation in Europe since 1945.

An additional point is worth noting. Until relatively recently, it was broadly the case that the traditional pattern of religion in Europe was more durable in rural areas than it was in cities. Indeed much of the work on secularization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on the progressive detachment from the church of the urban working class. Opinions differed regarding the extent and timing of this drift, but there was no doubt about the subject matter. The twenty-first century has seen a different picture emerge. More often than not, it is the rural churches that are struggling. This is unsurprising given that they are deprived of people on the one hand and burdened by the maintenance of inappropriate – if architecturally significant – buildings on the other. Europe’s larger cities, however, are seeing new forms of religion emerge, a pattern driven as much by immigration as by the indigenous population. The case of London will be considered below.

New arrivals

Immigration stimulates choice – predictably in the sense that the newly arrived bring with them new ways of being religious, both Christian and other faith. Europe’s post-war decades have seen a marked growth in this respect in a movement which is economically rather than religiously motivated. There are four phases to consider. The first took place in the late 1950s and 1960s as the major economies (Britain, France, West Germany and the Netherlands) expanded fast, requiring new sources of labour. A second wave in the 1990s led to a much more widespread phenomenon which stretched from the north to the south of Europe. It included the Nordic countries, the Mediterranean rim and Ireland, many of which had been countries of emigration for most of the twentieth century. The third wave was rather different. Post-2004 a reconfigured European Union permitted the movement of labour from east to west, leading to a partial rebalancing of religions within the continent. Significant numbers of Polish Catholics, for example, moved west.

Equally important in the whole story, however, are the economic downturns – in, for instance, the 1970s, in the early 1990s and, very abruptly, in 2008. Not only do these periods of decline depress immigration (and at times reverse it), they lead in addition to growing tensions – notably in terms of entitlement to jobs, housing, healthcare and education. Such tensions dominated the headlines as a fourth phase took shape in 2015-16, the point when large numbers of refugees fled to Europe from the escalating violence in the Middle East. It is abundantly clear that this movement of people has seriously destabilized not only the European societies more immediately affected by the influx, but the European institutions as a whole. The political consequences are still unfolding.

Right from the start, moreover, the implications for religious life have been immense. As indicated above, both the growing presence of Christians from the global South and the arrival of significant other faith communities have altered the religious make-up of very many if not all European cities. Regarding the former – and to give but one example – a comprehensive survey carried out in London in 2012 revealed not only that church attendance among Christians had grown from just over 620,000 in 2005 to just over 720,000 in 2012 (a 16% increase in 7 years), but that the growth was particularly – if not exclusively – evident in black majority churches and a wide variety of immigrant groups.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Regarding the latter, the consequences are far-reaching. Simply by their presence, other faith communities are challenging some deeply held European assumptions, notably the notion that religion should be considered a private matter. The existence of sizeable Muslim minorities is crucial in this respect. The Muslim population in Europe is noticeably varied but these diverse communities share certain attributes: a need to express their faith in public (in for example the wearing of the veil), and a desire to protect Islam from satire or vilification (in publication, in the media or in film). A whole series of episodes have erupted for these reasons: the *affaire du foulard* in France, the Rushdie controversy in Britain, the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands (together with the subsequent defection of Hirsi Ali to the United States), and the furore over the Danish cartoons of Mohammed and debate which subsequently spread to Sweden. More recent debates concerning dress have centred on the wearing of the *burqa* and raise rather different issues, notably those of security. Violent attacks in both France and Belgium (2015 and 2016) have exacerbated the tensions. Finding resolutions to these intractable issues has demanded sustained attention from both scholars and policy-makers, both in the European institutions and in the member states. It has, moreover, brought religion to the fore of public debate in a way that was not expected in the immediate post-war period.

Secular reactions

Europeans react variously to this evolving situation. Some welcome the greater attention to religion in public life brought about by immigration, whilst others are not so sure. Conspicuous in this respect are the sometimes vehement reactions of Europe’s increasingly vocal secularists, many of whom have difficulty coming to terms with this change in priorities. In many respects this is paradoxical. Secular voices were often at the forefront when welcoming newcomers of different ethnicities. This is much less the case when exactly the same populations begin to assert a religious affiliation as their primary allegiance, a switch which is likely to happen where the provenance and ethnicities of the Muslim community in question are diverse (in the United Kingdom for example).[[9]](#footnote-9)

A further point should, however, be noted: the secular constituencies of Europe are as varied as their religious counterparts. French secularism, for example, is as much French as secular and markedly different from its British, rather more pragmatic, counterpart. And quite apart from national differences, secular viewpoints range along a continuum from indifference or mild agnosticism at one end to moderately aggressive atheism at the other. The secular, moreover, is gradually emerging as a category in its own right. The epithet ‘nones’ is still found in the literature to denote those that place themselves outside the purview of religious institutions. They are on the rise in most parts of Europe. More constructive, however, are the attempts to understand the secular, or rather the non-religious, as a positive rather than negative category, seeing this – like religion itself – as a lived reality as much as a cognitive choice. Lee develops this theme in some detail.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Europe as an exceptional case

The final factor is a little different. It can be found in a gradual, if uneven, realization that the patterns of religious life in modern Europe should be considered an ‘exceptional case’ – they are not a global prototype.[[11]](#footnote-11) In short, Europeans are slowly beginning to grasp that Europe is relatively secular not because it is modern, but because it is European. It is equally true that some Europeans welcome this insight; others are disconcerted by it. Those who welcome it are likely to be more favourably disposed to the growing religious diversity of the continent than those who cling to earlier ways of thinking. Among the latter are two rather different groups of people. There are those that assume that Europe is Christian and will (or should) remain so. A second cluster perceives secularization as an inevitable part of modernization – a situation in which religion declines rather than grows in social significance and can therefore be safely set on one side. Both are discomfited by growing religious diversity, and the debates that emerge from this, but for very different reasons.

One point however is clear: the situation in Europe is complex, and to understand it fully it is necessary to see the factors listed above in the round. The result is a paradox. On the one hand, religion has re-entered the public square and demands a response. On the other, an increasingly secular population (brought about by a persistent drift from the historic churches) has difficulty dealing with these issues, in the sense that most, if not all, Europeans are rapidly losing the concepts, knowledge and vocabulary that are necessary to address the difficult questions that arise in the management of difference. What follows is a public conversation about faith, which is of poor quality – at best ill-informed and at times decidedly ill-mannered. It is this situation that accounts for widespread concern about religious literacy in this part of the world.

These conundrums have provoked a growing number of responses across Europe, in higher education, schools, law, media and health and social care, among others. The next section draws primarily on a body of work by Adam Dinham which strives to connect theoretical analyses to practical action. Two examples are highlighted and used to illustrate the issues in question. They are the Religious Literacy in Higher Education Program in the UK,[[12]](#footnote-12) and religious literacy training for health and social care professionals in Norway.

**The Religious Literacy in Higher Education Programme**

The Religious Literacy in Higher Education Programme was established in England and Wales in 2010. It began with a theoretical analysis of the problem of its inverse – religious illiteracy. Quickly revealed was the paucity of attention to religion in higher education. That said a small body of literature has emerged which examines the history of religion in higher education,[[13]](#footnote-13) alongside another on the recent ‘re-emergence’ of religion on university campuses,[[14]](#footnote-14) and the implications of increasing religious diversity for teaching and research.[[15]](#footnote-15) Together this reveals considerable anxiety: where has all this religion come from, why is it back, and what should we do about it? The literature also renews an old debate about the responsibilities of universities in a world marked by the ‘complex co-presence’[[16]](#footnote-16) of often competing religious and secular philosophical traditions. Universities turn out to be particularly revealing of how religion and belief questions often confuse or elude people’s ability to address them. Knowledge is regarded as post-religious. Science and religion are often counter-posed. Religion is frequently regarded as threatening to liberal values and freedoms, and having no place in the universities which espouse them. Assumptions of secularity are continuously mistaken for neutrality. And all too often this lands us in muddled thinking about whether and how to talk about religion at all. We – and a number of others – argue that the education system, and particularly universities, should play a vital role in addressing this loss of religious literacy.[[17]](#footnote-17) This has made universities a useful place to start.

The Religious Literacy in Higher Education Programme undertook empirical research to flesh out how these analyses play out in practice. One focus was on what preoccupies university leaderships. Another was on operational staff in practical HE roles. Both were approached to find out what sorts of issues were being encountered.

In research undertaken with Vice Chancellors in 2009-10, the program identified four university leadership stances, perhaps indicative of stances in wider society.[[18]](#footnote-18) In the first type, ‘soft neutral’, society is conceived of as a secular space where public institutions remain as far as possible neutral and education avoids mentioning religions or belief. A firmer line actively seeks the protection of public space from religious faith, asserting a duty to preserve public bodies, such as universities, as secular. We called this group ‘hard neutral’. A third group – the largest - saw religious faith as a potential learning and formation resource upon which to draw. We called this group ‘Repositories and Resources’. The fourth type aims to offer education ‘for the whole person’, incorporating a specifically religious or belief dimension. This perspective was more common in universities which were founded as religious institutions. We called this group ‘Formative-Collegial’.

We also asked what issues about religion preoccupy Vice Chancellors. We found that practical and policy concerns were prominent. Vice Chancellors were concerned about issues in four key areas. First, they were focused on legal action arising out of possible discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief; second, about campus extremism and violence; third, about marketing their universities to students of all religion and belief backgrounds and none; and fourth, appealing to international students, from all parts of the world, and from all religions and beliefs. This appears to balance perceived risks (about violence and litigation) with perceived opportunities (about ‘widening participation’ and attracting international students).

Finally we conducted case study research in three universities to understand something of the experience of students and staff. We found religious students who had not felt able to attend for interviews, or for exams, or for Saturday lectures. There were anxieties about public speakers, especially on the topic of Israel and Zionism. Timetabling staff were concerned about the coincidence of exams and Ramadan. Canteens and bars were taking positions for or against halal food, alcohol-free events, and single-sex socials. There were sports societies whose members were teasing a Sikh for wearing the 5 K’s (worn by orthodox Sikhs: kesh – uncut hair; kara – armband; kangha – comb; kacchera – knee length shorts; and kirpan – sword). Residences were confused about kosher kitchens and women-only halls. Campus banks either could or could not handle the requests of Muslim students for halal borrowing for student fees, and some counselling services felt they could not discuss religion with religious students. Above all, these staff and students were strongly aware of an absence of policies and guidance to frame the conversation. On religion as such, there is almost always institutional silence.

Yet we found great diversity of both need and response underneath the religious literacy umbrella, just within this one sector, in this country alone, as the examples above reveal. We concluded that religious literacy is both a stretchy and a context-specific idea. The challenges in a medical school in a highly diverse area of London are not the same as those in a social work department in more homogenous, especially rural, parts of England. We suspected that this applies across different sectors too, and further religious literacy work in schools, law and media reinforce this.[[19]](#footnote-19). Reading across to cultural and spatial specificities, we also anticipated that religious literacy will look different from one country to another. An example of both is in religious literacy training in health and social care in Norway.

**Religious literacy in health and social care in Norway**

Colleagues in Norwegian Higher Education connected with the RLLP program in the UK in 2012 because it resonated with the challenges of increasing religious plurality in their countries as a result of new and very rapid migration. While the interest was good-willed, it was also anxious, reflecting the tension found in the UK experience between accommodating and ‘othering’ difference, especially in the context of extremism. In Norway this took a particular urgency after Anders Brevik’s crimes in Oslo in 2011. Though this was quickly characterized as motivated by the politics of the far-right, rather than religious extremism, Brevik himself quite clearly saw his actions as resistance to religious plurality caused by immigration.

The motivating issue in Norway, like Britain, has been the perceived prominence of Islam in a context of sharply increased migration. An important difference, however, is that ethnic and religious diversity is much newer to Norway. Indeed it was perceptions of the UK’s relative experience with multiculturalism that led Norwegian colleagues to connect with RLLP. As with the UK, there was a sense that education could be an essential component in recalibrating the debate away from defensive ‘othering’ and towards hospitality. But in this assumption too, another important difference is apparent. This is located in the nature of the Higher Education Institution involved – VID Specialised University in Oslo. This is a *Diaconia* institution, a framing which itself confuses or evades many Europeans in ways which shed light on the problem of religious literacy in Europe. *Diaconia*, New Testament Greek for service, is interpreted as a Christian call to respond to need in keeping with the social gospel. This describes an agenda which Christian democrats regard as translating the Christian theologies of ‘love of neighbour’, forgiveness, hospitality, peace, and reconciliation into the politics of social justice, welfare and redistribution. Diaconal work is therefore Christian-rooted, faith-motivated work for social justice and provision of social care, dating in Norway to the 1860s and emanating from their then established (Lutheran) Church, though bureaucratically independent of it.

In Norway the Diaconia institutions are by far the largest educators in the field of social services. This is in some ways unsettling because in most of Europe health and social care are regarded as secular professions, de-coupled from their faith-based roots by the growth of state welfare in the first half of the twentieth century[[20]](#footnote-20). Structurally Diaconia institutions behave as state universities, producing secular professionals. Yet they talk of religious values guiding their work including ‘Christian love for one’s neighbour, and social justice’.[[21]](#footnote-21) They therefore stand on an apparent front line between the secular and the sacred which both poses and reflects the religious literacy challenge: how are we to think about religion in a Europe which had come to think of itself as post-religious, and yet finds itself highly religiously plural after all? The ‘diaconal’ factor in particular raises the question set out in the first half of this chapter: how is a culturally Christian Europe to think of itself in a context of increasing religious plurality? What does this say about the actual or proper role of religion in the European public sphere? Questions which have long exercised those who imagine Europe to be secular – about the boundaries between the sacred and secular, private and public – are reasserted.

Diaconia institutions are also interesting to religious literacy because of their position as providers of health and social care in particular. This challenges the assumptions of a secular/sacred binary, within which the large majority of professionals have been seen as on the supposedly secular side. Instead, such institutions draw attention to the fact that Europe is in fact complexly post-religious, secular, Christian and plural all at once. The boundaries between religion, non-religion and secularity are blurred, if they exist at all. This matters because health and social care present among the largest frequency of encounters between religious and non-religious providers and service users in the public sphere. This is a pervasive, ordinary, everyday space, and the playing out of religious and non-religious identities within it is of enormous theoretical interest in terms of Europe’s ability to understand and talk well about its religion and belief.

It is also of great practical importance, making religious literacy both innovative and pressing for a number of other reasons. Health and social care professions embody a systemic understanding of the person as physical, mental, social and spiritual. Across Europe, many health and social care providers and educators employ chaplaincies as a resource for all, and in some cases these are legally mandated (e.g. in UK hospitals). Yet curricula for professional education appear to neglect religion and belief, and the resources – including chaplaincies – associated with them are widely regarded as separate, private spaces within the otherwise public service. Training has largely reflected a wider secularised sensibility in higher education which emphasises natural scientific paradigms and epistemologies. Within this, health and social care education tends towards medical model and social scientific accounts of the person which can obscure the religious and the spiritual.[[22]](#footnote-22) At the same time, many health and social care systems are at least part-public. This puts them on another front line, with public policy-making, which is itself heavily inflected with secular assumptions which also militate against more open-minded religiously literate practices of health and social care.[[23]](#footnote-23)

VID’s role in this is as Norway's second largest private university with 3300 students on four campuses in Bergen, Oslo, Sandnes and Stavanger. It offers 50 study programmes in health sciences, social sciences, theology and religious studies, and leadership studies. Programmes comprise bachelor degrees in nursing, social work, social pedagogics, theology and occupational therapy, and masters degrees in Health and Social Services for Elderly People, Social Work, Diaconia and Christian Social Practice, Value-based Leadership, Family Therapy, Citizenship and Rehabilitation, Intercultural Communication, Theology and Religion and Globalisation. The connections between diaconia and training for the health and care professions consolidated around the religious literacy idea in 2014 when VID initiated a new PhD programme which self-consciously takes up religious literacy as a core perspective. The focus is on the interplay of faith-based religious practice (diaconia), values and professional practice. It also introduced a new MA programme on religion and belief for health and social care professionals, focused on the impact of religion and values on care and welfare needs and on care and welfare practices. Several of the research groups at VID Specialized University have since committed to a similar focus: see, for instance, the group “Competence in questions of religions and worldviews in the framework of health care and social services” and the group “Cracks and in-Betweens: Religion, migration and transnational relations”.

**Religious literacies**

These two initiatives are closely related – indeed, one gave rise to the other – yet have clear context-dependant differences. Religious literacy in both starts as a response to anxiety about newly prominent Islam, and both emphasise the rebalancing of perceptions of religion in terms of risk and opportunity. Yet in the UK the most pressing challenge is to establish religion as a legitimate issue for public discussion in the first place, requiring the shedding of assumptions of secularity which are all-too often interpreted to mean neutrality. Whereas in Norway the diaconal framework widely establishes a very different set of popular boundaries between the public, professional and private in relation to religion and belief in which church-based social work seems perfectly normal.

Related work in the fields of media, law and schools also illuminates the context-specific nature of religious literacy, prompting our conclusion that what is needed is not religious literacy but religious literacies, plural. Thus in law, a key challenge is for employers, service providers, lawyers and judges to be able to access deep theological meanings on the one hand, as well as understand how they relate to the diverse ways in which individuals live them out.[[24]](#footnote-24) Since law differs from place to place the religious literacy required in different jurisdictions is itself context-specific. In media, there is agreement that the presenting task in the UK is to equip media professionals to report religion with an understanding of internal diversity rather than as monolithic blocks of fossilized doctrine, and to do so in real time.[[25]](#footnote-25) In France, conversely, it may be regarded more as a matter of freedom of speech in the face of attacks on liberal values, and the power of laïcité will likely prevent any sort of initiative in the UK mould. In education, about a third of schools in England are church schools, and the 1944 Education Act mandates religious education and a daily act of collective worship for all. Hence the key question: what should RE be for, and what should we teach within it?[[26]](#footnote-26) In France, the starting point is quite different: should we teach religion in schools at all?

**The religious literacy umbrella**

That said – and whilst religious literacy is most certainly context-specific – we argue that there are a number of shared positions which make it a meaningful umbrella term.

First, religious literacy is a particular problem of the developed West in that it is ill-conceived secular-mindedness – what has sometimes been called subconscious secularity – that assumes a post-religious world, and seeks to act as though it is one. Thus the secular paradigm, in all its varying and contested forms, is itself a product of Western intellectual life and tradition, rooted in Enlightenment philosophy, scientific method and, it must be said, in the discipline of sociology. This combination lies at the root of the challenge as to whether religion is a legitimate topic for public conversation in the first place. It follows that clarity on this point is essential if religious literacy is to flourish.

Second, religious literacy is not a Muslim issue, though it often starts as one. Most certainly it needs to respond in part to the perceived and actual challenges of Islamism – not to be confused with Islam – and of increasing religious diversity more broadly. But this is not the only issue or even the biggest one. The discourse, however, has focused far too much on religion as risk, and not nearly enough on its opportunities and enrichments, in education, welfare, informal care and community-building. Religious literacy draws attention to this and in doing so is likely to produce a less ill-tempered quality of conversation.

Third, it is a liberal endeavour. It stands within the liberal tradition of human rights, social justice and freedoms of speech and thought, and invites people of all religions, beliefs and none to engage with religion and belief diversity in this spirit. It does not extend as far as respecting and tolerating any and all expressions of religion or belief, where those expressions cut across liberal ones. It is unlikely to attract the most illiberal, though they are perhaps most in need of the conversation, but that should not stop the rest of us from engaging our differences. It is thereby normative, in that it has purposes and goals: peaceful, informed encounter across religion and belief differences. It emphasises a respectful conversation, rather than a tolerant one, regardless of one’s own religion, belief or none.

So one size does not fit all. Understanding and responding to the real religious landscape and challenges of any particular sector or setting is the key task of religious literacy. Under the umbrella of the critiques and values commonly accepted, it must be approached anew each time in every setting and sector. Thus religious literacy is a framework which needs always to be populated with specific facts and circumstances. Networks of actors, such as those in this volume, will recognise this. Sharing the challenges and responses will strengthen the burgeoning of religious literacy initiatives both across Europe and beyond.

1. Grace Davie, ‘Religion in Europe in the 21st Century: The Factors to Take into Account’, *Archives européennes de sociologie/ European Journal of Sociology/ Europaeisches Archiv für Soziologie* 47.2, (2006): 271-96. DOI:[10.1017/S0003975606000099](http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003975606000099%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); Grace Davie. ‘Is Europe an Exceptional Case?’ *The Hedgehog Review*, 8, (2006): 23-34 (a special issue entitled ‘After Secularization’). See also Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The influence of Roman organization and Greek secularism should also be taken into account. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a full discussion of the controversies surrounding the building of this mosque, see Constantine Danopoulos, ‘Religion, Civil Society, and Democracy in Orthodox Greece’, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 6.1, (2004): 41-55, **DOI:**10.1080/1461319042000187256, and Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas, ‘Constructing Difference: The Mosque Debates in Greece’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35.6, (2009): 957-75, **DOI:**10.1080/13691830902957734. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000); Grace Davie, ‘Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge’, in *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, edited by Nancy Ammerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 21-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Grace Davie: *Religion in Britain*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, for example, the data brought together by the European Values Study (<http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>) and the International Social Survey Programme (<http://www.issp.org/>). Both websites accessed 13 July 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See ‘London’s Churches are Growing’, available at http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/capitalgrowth, (accessed 13 July 2016). For a fuller discussion of recent changes in London, see Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain*, pp.107-09 and Richard Chartres, ‘New Fire in London’, Lambeth Lecture, 30 September 2015, available at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5621/bishop-of-london-delivers-lambeth-lecture-on-church-growth-in-the-capital> (accessed 18 July 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The reason, however, is clear enough: acceptance of ethnic identities fitted well with the agenda of primarily left-wing people; religious allegiances do not. Similar reservations towards specifically religious nomenclature can be seen in the social scientific community which, by and large, has been more at ease dealing with the secular categories of race and ethnicity. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Lois Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious: Reimagining the Secular* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. The Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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