

Europe the Exceptional Case

The sociologist Grace Davie has described Europe as exceptional with regard to secularisation. That single reality impacts the work of church planters. In what ways is Europe exceptional and how does that impact our approach to mission?

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1. Societal Mega-Trends

- a. The Secularisation of Europe
 - i. A long process that begins with “the wars of religion” in the 17th century
 - ii. The secular authorities create a level playing field for all denominations
 - iii. The State takes over the functions of religion in public life
 - iv. Religion is barred from a role in the public square (privatized)
 - v. Religion is expected to decline and die (the secularization theory)
- b. *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World* (Penguin Press, 2009). Written by the editor-in-chief of *The Economist*, John Micklethwait with writing partner Adrian Wooldridge.
- c. The rest of the world arrives in Europe
- d. Europe becomes not the leader of things to come but the exceptional case to be explained.

2. Figures for world belief

- a. Christianity 32%
- b. Islam 22%
- c. Hinduism 13%
- d. No religion 22% (secularists, humanists, agnostics etc)

- e. Buddhism 6%
- f. Atheists 2%

3. Factors in the growth of secularization

- a. 19th century origins
 - i. Darwin
 - ii. Marx
 - iii. Nietzsche
 - iv. Freud
- b. Impact of the First World War
- c. 20th growth of alternative narratives
- d. The gradual end of Christendom
- e. Shift in culture since the 1960's - difficult for the church to adapt

4. Church Mega-Trends

- a. The huge declines in European church attendance have slowed or halted
- b. The shape of the church is changing
 - i. Nominal Christianity is departing in favour of faith
 - ii. The mainstream of the church is shifting
 - iii. Church often (not always) looks different
- c. Spirituality is on the agenda
- d. A great deal is happening in terms of activity and initiatives

5. Church and culture – recent history

- a. 1950's - we can fix it. Rebuilding through crusades and campaigns

- b. 1960's - disconnect. Church and culture go their separate ways.
- c. 1970's to 2000 - is it possible for the church to grow in Europe at all? Yes, but as a minority
- d. 21st century - the missional question. Can we reconnect with culture and imagination in terms of people movements

6. Christianity in the UK

- a. Tear Fund research in the UK
- b. Key Findings
 - i. 53% claim to be Christian
 - ii. 15% attend at least once a month(7.6 million)
 - iii. 10% attend at least weekly (4.9 million)
 - iv. 26% attend at least annually (12.6 million)
 - v. 3 million likely to attend in the future
 - vi. 66% have no connection with church at all

7. Comment on the findings

- a. Broadly in line with other data
- b. Talking ourselves into insignificance
- c. Unusual situation of London
- d. Christians and secular people are occupying different worlds
- e. We need to note who attends
 - i. Women
 - ii. AB's
 - iii. Over 55 years of age

- iv. Those of black ethnic origin

8. Warnings

- a. Don't believe the pendulum theory – we have an opportunity but no more than that
- b. There is a huge issue around trust and power
- c. The search for new “models” of church may be mistaken
- d. The answers for Europe will not come from America

9. 5 Propositions

- a. Hope lies in our ability to harness the energy of the Historic Protestant Churches and the newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches
- b. We need to create a conversation with local communities
- c. The energy and creativity of the ethnic church needs to be utilised
- d. Church planting will be important for every denomination
- e. We need a Europe-wide conversation between thinking practitioners and practical thinkers

Useful Resources

Europe: The Exceptional Case, Parameters of Faith in the Modern World, Grace Davie, DLT, 2002.

The Religious Crisis of the 1960's, Hugh McLeod, OUP, 2010.

God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, Penguin, 2009.

The Faith of the Unbeliever, Martin Robinson, Monarch, 1994.