Contextualising Islam in 21st Century Britain – Professor Grace Davie

Opinions on the event:
“Grace’s talk was empowering in discussing the new sociology of religion when religion nowadays is being so often marginalised in contemporary debates” Matthew Vince

“A really intellectually stimulating debate that raised a lot of interesting questions surrounding the integration of religion within the public sphere, it was especially interesting to learn about the importance of emphasising the positive role religion can play within the context of policy making. A great talk.” Becci Brouard

“Lovely welcome, very interesting questions and a wonderful audience” Grace Davie

Aim: to address the debate about Islam and how it has provoke the social sciences to think differently
- To understand this debate is very important for the democratic future of countries
- If we cannot allow for religious diversity, there is something wrong with our democracy
- Reflects on trying to write the follow up to her first book on the topic twenty years later and realising that so much had changed she was unable to use the same data
- Not only this, but Grace says she had also changed as a person due to travel
  - Travel makes you not only aware of other countries and cultures, but also aware of your own country and what it is/is not doing
- Grace informs that there are five factors that you need to take into account to understand religion in Britain as well as the complexities and pressure that is put on the Muslim community
- Media accounts are often inadequate
  - Media does not take full picture when reporting/analysing religion – focused more on the smaller, more sensationalist aspects of religion.
  - We need to do better!

Five Factors:
1. Cultural Heritage
   - Firstly we must take the Judo/Christian religion seriously – just look at time and space
     - Time: the framing of the entire year is modelled on Christian time and other faiths work on a different rhythm – even the working week is different in other religions.
     - Space: the skyline is becoming more diverse with religious buildings but it is still not easy to place non-Christian faith based buildings in the centre of old cities and towns – what are our expectations of a city?

2. Vicarious Religion
   - There are forms of religious organisations all over Europe
   - We are becoming both more secularised and more diverse

3. Shift from Obligation to Consumption
4. New Arrivals
   - Expanding economies
     - E.g. Ireland has become a country of emigration and immigration
   - 2004 – extension of the EU
   - 2015 – humanitarian crisis is at the top of the current political agenda but there is so much distortion in the media which is a bad start for a debate on religion – we have an obligation to challenge what we hear
   - The arrival of Islam has reopened the debate about religion and public life – a reason why we live in this “paradox” (title of her book)

5. Secular Alternatives
   - There is no doubt that public debate centres on religion and Islam is a catalyst
   - The British debate is much different to the French debate and lots of other countries
   - There is arguably a more pragmatic debate in Britain
   - The Dutch for example, have always pioneered liberalism but they have a strange way of protecting this liberalism - by excluding anyone who isn’t liberal
   - The public and the private are no longer the way that they should be

There have been three world changing events that are pivotal to the debate about religion, which are referenced in the book: Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century’ by Christian Caryl
   1. 1979 – Iranian Revolution
   2. 1989 – fall of Communism
   3. 9/11 2001 – Twin Towers Bombing
   - All of these events were not predicted by scholars, how come?
   - These events show just how powerful a motivator religion is
   - Maybe the reason why scholars did not predict these events is because they sidelined religion from the debate?

Chapter 10 of her book explored: Religion in Public Life:
   - Right thing for wrong reason fuelled knowledge into religion [fear of religion = education of religion]
   - Discussion and academic data and research programmes funded into to explore religion.
   - Religion and law; politics; welfare; healthcare – their roles?
     - Financial constraints and demographic
   - Religion and Welfare: entitlement and who in particular benefits from state.
   - Religion and Healthcare: Mental health and migrants – religious narrative for those migrants who suffer from mental ailments.
     - The Lancet – faith based healthcare in the developing world
     - With regards to healthcare, there is a huge importance when it comes to partnering with religion
E.G. The Ebola crisis – it had to Islam and Christianity that said you can set aside the practice of touching the body during burial.

- Religion and Law: Religare Project;
  - Funded by the European Commission
  - Interdisciplinary between religion and law
  - Religious pluralism and policy recommendation
  - Addresses separation that exists between Law, Sociology and Religion
  - Grassroots mobilise to create integration between socio and legal discourse

Debates:
- Local
- Metropolitan
- National
- Global
  - Often the local journalists are much fairer to religion than the other journalists and the metropolitan can be quite mocking of religion.

Goal: More constructive debate about issues of extreme importance to the democratic functions of the country
- Local debate is healthier than national debates because they are more personal and familiar and there exists none of that metropolitan/national disdain towards religion – more encompassing views of religion at local level.
- If social science takes religion more seriously, it can change the core of social science – shift it away from the secular and detached nature it portrays for it to be adopted well.

The Challenges
- Can you be fully modern and fully religious?
- Can we add the study of social sciences to the study of religion?
- The serious study of Islam will have a radical effect on Islam if we do it well

Q&A Audience Session:

**Can you be a Muslim and effectively study social sciences?**
- Being a Muslim gives you great insight and great reflection
- Everyone brings baggage to the table from all aspects of life so there is nothing to stop you from studying the social sciences well if you are a Muslim

**You refer to it as the Return to Religion rather than the Return of Religion, which many other scholars do, what is your reasoning for this?**
- There are new forms of religious life
- The Return of religion implies that it went away which did not happen, it was always there
- The 20th Century was full of religion which was mostly ignored