

Strategic and Tactical Religion (Eboro 10-5-12)

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Of all the things everyone does, how much gets written down?

Michel de Certeau (1985: 42)

Two recent books have encouraged the study of religion to push past some of its inbuilt limitations, and have influenced the framing of this conference on ‘Sacred Practices of Everyday Life’: Nancy Ammerman’s *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (2007), and Meredith McGuire’s *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (2008). Whilst acknowledging a considerable debt to this work, I want to try to push a bit harder still, particularly on the concepts they propose.

‘Everyday religion’ is undoubtedly useful in directing attention to the quotidian, the ordinary, the mundane – but if you leave out what is extra-ordinary, out-of-the-everyday, and remarkable, don’t you leave out something very fundamental to religion? ‘Lived Religion’ is a helpful alternative, or addition, but also seems to exclude too much – what about what is thought and believed? And institutionalised? Both concepts focus attention on religion in domestic and private realms or, at best, at religion in ‘civil society’; but in doing so they may obscure the way in which the state, the market, law, and other social spheres intrude into and shape religion, civil society, and private life. And at the end of the day, don’t both concepts mimic an older set of oppositions which we need to leave behind: between real religion and ‘folk religion’; church religion and ‘popular’ religion; between ‘little tradition’ and ‘great tradition’. Some of the best work in social history, like Sarah Williams’ (1999) study of religion in Southwark, demolished these distinctions by showing how much common stock there was high and popular religion. We do better not to think of separate kinds of religion, but different ways of using the same sacred resources *and* different ways of looking.

How should we go further in the renovation of the study of religion? Three provocations:

First, I am struck how often, when asking certain sorts of Christians, especially women to talk about their religious lives, they respond: ‘Oh, you shouldn’t talk to me about this, I don’t know nearly as much about it as my husband does/the pastor does.’

Second, in a book on *Lived Islam* which I am currently compiling with some colleagues, researcher Marja Tilikainen reports how the Somali women in Finland whom she asks to interview reply: “If you want to know about Islam, it is better to go and talk to the imams at a mosque.”

Third, Jim Conroy’s research project on RE in schools in UK today (on the Religion and Society Programme) finds many school-age pupils reporting that they don’t recognise themselves in the portraits of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism etc. which they are presented with in the classroom. One also comments, when asked what he learned in RE: ‘Put it this way, if a Jew came round for dinner I’d know what to feed him.’

All of which prompts the questions: What *is* ‘real’ religion? Who knows? And who is licensed to speak about it? I will try to answer by following the lead which Ammerman and McGuire give us, but pushing beyond the limitations of the concepts they offer. My proposal is that by borrowing rather liberally from Michel De Certeau, a pioneer in the study of everyday life, we can move ahead by thinking in terms of a ‘tactical’ mode of religion and a ‘strategic’ one.

The problem

De Certeau reminds us that there are vast parts of our lives which remain unarticulated and unexamined and, as such, below the level of full consciousness, articulation and inter-subjective exchange. These are not unimportant areas. But it is only with the emergence of new genres, new approaches, new authors and new frameworks that some ‘come to light’. With the evolution of the novel, for example, aspects of life came to be represented which had lain silent before. To take a more personal example, it was not until I read Lavinia Greenlaw’s book *The Importance of Music for Girls* (2008) that I became aware of a swathe of intensely-meaningful adolescent and early adult experience of which I had never before been consciously or communicably aware. Most people will be able to think of analogous examples, of contact with approaches and perspectives which made ‘scales fall from my eyes.’

The silent areas of human life are socially inflected; their fault lines often run along those of social stratification and inequality. The most powerful groups in society are also those whose life experience is most fully articulated, represented, celebrated and thus amplified. It is not just that the victors write the history books, but that ‘subalterns’ do so on their behalf. As Virginia Woolf put it in describing the historic relation between the sexes, women have served as ‘looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size’ (1984: 33). As such, there is an over-representation of elite experience, elements of which are made hyper-visible. By contrast, subordinate groups have to swim against the tide to give expression to their own lived experience and to gain a hearing, let alone an amplification. For the least privileged groups in society, the task is hardest. As Beverly Skeggs shows in *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997), there is an important sense in which her white, working class, British female informants do not *have* identities – for their lives are barely represented in the media of our times. Instead of comfortably inhabiting, performing, or adjusting their identities, such women have the thankless task of struggling constantly *against* dominant representations of them as sexually disreputable and socially irresponsible (‘benefit scroungers’, ‘sluts’, ‘Essex girls’, ‘tarts’) by constantly asserting their respectability through cleanliness, care for others, sexual fidelity to a man and so on. Unlike working-class white men, whose narratives and struggles have long been the subject of movies, novels, pop music and other modes of representation, there is an important sense in which working class women cannot fully own their own lives and experience. Like many members of ethnic minorities and non-heterosexuals (sic), they are

constantly in danger of being defined by others in relation to standards and categories external to themselves, and being rendered semi-visible or invisible not only to others, but to themselves. As a middle-aged woman in Janet Eccles's study of church-leavers put it when reflecting on her life: 'I feel that somebody has taken something from me which I didn't know what it was and I hadn't got it and I still haven't got it and I don't know what it is' (Eccles 2010: 172).

Like the wider literature on everyday life (anthologised in Highmore 2001 and critically reviewed in Sheringham 2008), an interest in everyday lived religion takes its inspiration from an awareness of the skewed, partial and variable articulation of social experience. Above all, it recognises – as Michel Foucault has so decisively taught us – that our knowledges both represent and reinforce power. Without conscious effort and all sorts of reinforcements, we neither see nor know a great deal of the lives and experience of others or ourselves. Our gaze is usually drawn to that – or those – with most power over us, and social representations reinforce the bias.

In relation to religion, what this means is not only that those forms of religion which have to do with social power are privileged in public discourse and academic study, but that 'religion' is actually construed in terms of those kinds of activity which reinforce or are reinforced by social power. Until recently, for example, ecclesiastical or 'church' history was construed in terms of the actions of powerful white men, particularly clergy, and the institutions dominated by them, particularly churches and states. The rise of new forms of Christian and religious history in the later twentieth century first took account of working class men's lives, and then much more recently, of women's – despite the fact that women have outnumbered men in Christianity for as long as we have records. The very category of religion was restricted to that which those shaping the record considered legitimate, which in practice meant particular varieties of church Christianity, and then, by analogy, what came to be designated the 'world religions' (Smith 1988). Non-elite and non-authorized practices were either ignored or placed in a category like 'superstition' or 'magic' – not only by missionaries and church historians, but also by sociologists and anthropologists. Even today, vast areas of religious, sacred and ritual experience are routinely ignored or dismissed as 'fuzzy', insubstantial, and lacking in salience because they do not conform to the lineaments of what a dominant consensus considers 'real' religion (Woodhead 2010).

What the concept of everyday lived religion does is to encourage a shift of perspective, an alteration of gaze, a change of subject, and a more critical approach. It does not dispute the importance of studying forms of religion which are intermeshed with social power and the socially powerful, but it demands a broadening of the agenda and a fresh look at what may be obscured when implicit models of 'real' religion are left unexamined. As a growing number of critiques demonstrate, the concept of 'religion' in normal scholarly use is unduly restrictive (e.g. Cantwell Smith 1962, Smith 1988, Asad 1993, Balangangadhara, 1994). In the context of western, colonial experience, it became identified with male-led, hierarchical, church-like institutions, characterised by congregational forms, hierarchical leadership, scriptural and priestly authority, dogmatic endeavour, and charismatic male founders – and

by alliances or disalliances with nation states. Other cultural formations could either be squeezed into this strait-jacket – the so-called ‘world religions’ (though inevitably found wanting) – or dismissed and ignored altogether. The disciplined knowledges of the academy enshrined such an understanding, particularly those which endorsed a model of scientific endeavour founded on the premise that an inevitable process of secularization was taking place which necessitated and involved the removal of religion from science, state and public life.

Although widely critiqued, the impress of this agenda remains strong in the scientific study of religion, and continues to reveal itself in many of its continuing preoccupations – with church-state and religion-state relations, with churches and church-like or congregational institutions, with male priesthoods, male violence (‘extremism’), and male-led ‘sects’, with secularisation and de-secularisation, and with politically-recognised and authorized religions and their associated forms of social action.

The perspective of everyday lived religion prompts the question what *more* there is to religion: whose lives, experiences and associational forms are being overlooked by the dominant gaze; what configurations of power are obscured; what formations of identity (including masculinities) are not being examined – and what other forms of cultural, ritual, domestic, political, and economic practice might be equally worthy of study under the rubric of religion. At this point the question inevitably arises of how far the term ‘religion’ should be stretched, and boundary skirmishes with other fields of study may occur. It may be asked whether the concept of religion is needed at all, or whether some broader term like ‘the sacred’, or some existing term like ‘culture’ may be more fruitful in helping expand horizons – or whether such substitution will simply imply a different restriction of outlook (Knott 2005, Lynch 2012). Such questions push our understanding of religion in new directions, and show how porous and overlapping its boundaries are with such concepts and areas and fields as health and healthcare, socialisation and education, leisure and recreation, politics and political action, gender and identity.

Methods

The study of everyday lived religion arises out of a methodological challenge. How is it possible to see that which is invisible, to scan that which has been below the scholar’s horizon, and to capture the unarticulated with words? Some work has already helped us here, and moved our thought on a bit – including much we will hear about (I’m deliberately not mentioning names!).

Several decades ago feminist epistemologies pointed out the situatedness of knowing – the way in which our standpoint determines our perspective – and why the less powerful can see things which the more powerful cannot (for example, Smith 1990). Moreover, they exposed how the language and protocols of ‘objective’, ‘scientific’ study serve to privilege and legitimate a particular standpoint – and its ‘seers’ – as having more access to the truth than others, whether that was the case or not. The way forward was not merely to expose the myth

of objective knowledge derived from a 'view from nowhere', but to heed alternative knowledges, and give space, audience and methodological opportunity to other voices.

Such a shift entails not only listening to individuals and groups who have previously been ignored (for example, by way of interviews or surveys), but making existing instruments more open and responsive to informants (not 'subjects'), such that they can question the questions, the questioner, and even the entire theoretical agenda. This may involve something as simple as using more open questions on a survey, or holding interviews or focus groups before designing survey questions, and then trialling them extensively before use. A further step is taken when existing methods are revised more extensively. One example is the use of diaries and video diaries in order to probe minute-to-minute and everyday activities and thoughts, rather than delimited 'lab time' set by a researcher in an artificial space. Another is using narrative techniques to probe 'life stories', in which informants are free to set the agenda and identify issues for discussion themselves (e.g. Furseth 2006, who, when she employed this method, found that men told stories in which they are the author of their lives, often with a self-determined plan they follow, whereas women had much less sense of authorship, and spoke more in terms of a series events which happened to them).

More radical still is the use of methods which do not rely as heavily as existing ones on articulate knowledges. To some extent this is true even of good interviewing, which does not merely invite an informant to reflect on things they already know – to simply convey their existing 'attitudes' in the manner of most survey research – but which allows them to articulate and 'see' things which they themselves had not been aware of before. In that sense, the questioning and reinforcements of a skilful researcher using a variety of methods can produce new knowledges. Even when individuals are articulate and are being truthful and completely honest (rare in itself, but nevertheless assumed by traditional methods like surveys and interviews), much of our knowledge lies below consciousness and outside of articulation, though it may lie 'in the body' and our emotional responses. New and revised methods are called for to take account of such deep knowing. Similarly, new techniques of photo-elicitation encourage informants to capture images of scenes, events, objects etc. which are emotionally meaningful to them in relation to a particular topic, and which they can they try to explain to the researcher (e.g. Rose 2011). Ethnographers have long realised the importance of entering into the informants own spaces and societies in order to understand their structuring better, and in doing so have also acknowledged the importance of a long-term relationship between researcher and researched which involves sharing everyday life.

None of these methods give researchers direct access to 'the truth', and all shape the material they elicit in some ways (for example, diaries encourage an articulate self-reflection which might not otherwise occur). There is no neutral access to 'data', untouched by the instruments which elicit it and the spaces and relationships within which it is produced. But by using a variety of approaches which are designed to work with the grain of everyday life, and to allow informants to set the agenda and change the subject, research may be better able to overhear topics, themes, hints and suggestions about areas of life – including religion – which

have not previously been noticed or listened to as attentively. Thus methodological innovation and sensitivity to power issues may give rise to the design and application of methods which tell us more not just about ‘known unknowns’, but even uncover ‘unknown unknowns’ – themes and topics which have previously fallen below the radar of enquiry.

Pursuing methodologies for researching everyday life therefore pushes into the territory of epistemology – of how we know, and how we make our worlds. Pre-feminist positivistic and representational epistemologies tended to assume that the knower is an objective ‘tabula rasa’ who organises and makes sense of sensations by containing them within appropriate – or mistaken – categories. On this account, scientific experiment helps refine the categories and test the theories. But the knower remains a ‘brain’ who takes in the world through his or her senses. This representational theory of knowing has been increasingly exposed and undermined by alternative epistemologies – from Merleau Ponty onwards – which stress our embodied situatedness in the world as the basis of cognition. They remind us that we are not detached receivers of outside impressions, but active, ‘interested’ agents in the world who are propelled by our interests, attachments and avoidances. We are relational, embodied, social beings who constantly negotiate our way through the world, and do so first and foremost by ‘feeling’ our way. In other words, we first know at the level of body and emotion; most of our cognition takes place at a subconscious or pre-conscious level which, though it may be brought to conscious awareness, needs time, effort, opportunity, and social support to be articulated (e.g. Thrift 2007, Mark Johnson 1987, 2007, Riis and Woodhead 2011).

Research into everyday life may therefore be not so much a matter of getting people to articulate what they already know, but of helping bring to birth things which have not yet been put into words – and which in some cases could never be put into words, but might be captured in a picture, a dance, or an object. Academics, with their love of words and concepts and their obsession with ‘discourse’, are often ill equipped to take this step. Yet a gesture, a kiss, a tear, a material symbol, a set of clothes, or a song are all modes of communication which can convey as much or more than words. Research on everyday life prompts us to pay more attention to such things – something which ethnographers have often been much better at than those who favour more word-based techniques of research. This requires an approach which takes the body, emotions, material objects, symbols and spaces much more seriously, and forges new ways of doing so (Knott 2005, Riis and Woodhead 2011).

So the very idea that there is a limited set of methods which simply need to be taken out of the ‘tool box’ and put to work, and which alone deliver knowledge of reality, can be seen to be much too limited. What has worked isn’t objectivity, but imagination, creativity, openness, interest in and empathy for knowledges and perspectives which are not one’s own, and which are not already freighted with heavy social and cultural capital.

Solution: Strategic and Tactical Religion

So I come at last to Michel de Certeau's pioneering explorations in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988). For de Certeau, strategy is the prerogative of the powerful. It demands both time and, above all, space. The powerful have a place to stand, a space from which to observe, a panoptical 'room with a view', and a position from which to leverage results. They also have available time to plan, design, order, impose, and reinforce. By contrast, the weak are forced to occupy the spaces which the powerful control, and to respond with lightning reflex. They can react rather than command, and machinate rather than strategise. They have to make history in spaces and conditions which are not of their making, with tools and materials which are owned by others. This does not mean they are powerless, but that their power operates in a different mode from that of the powerful – a tactical rather than strategic mode. They duck and dive, think on their feet, turn and weave. A tactic, according to de Certeau, 'is determined by the *absence of power* just as a strategy is organised by the postulation of power' (1988: 38, italics original). But contrary to a narrow Foucault-inspired position, the tactical does not merely practice arts of 'resistance': it can be highly creative and constructive in what it does with the structures and strategies in terms of which it operates: 'sly as a fox and twice as quick: there are countless ways of "making do"' (de Certeau 1988: 29).

Thus strategy and tactics form and shape one another dialectically. The strategist cannot merely impose, for the tactical will find ways over, under, through, and around strategic plans, targets, rewards and sanctions. But if the strategist plans for such things, his plans contain the impress of the tactical, and the tactical inheres in the strategic. Likewise, the tactical may anticipate and try to foil the strategic, thereby internalising it and bowing to its logic. And the strategic, when it resorts to trickery and deception, dissolves into the tactical. Thus the tactical and strategic form the conditions of the other's possibility, the potential pathways of realisation, and the horizons of one another's dissolution – within an unequal exchange.

To apply such ideas to religion is to bring its power dynamics to the fore. Religion ceases to be treated as some 'thing', but as a set of patterned practices, objects, and relations. These favour some more than others, and serve to structure various forms of inequality. Within this framework, strategic religion is that which gives space and place to the powerful, and from whose operations they have most to gain. The power of a priest or an elder, for example, derives from the institution he leads, and he has a stake in perpetuating its power, in a way in which the 'lay person' rarely does.

In order to consolidate its power, strategic religion is constantly engaged in operations to delimit and guard its sacred spaces. It has a stake in creating sacred spaces, places and objects which are clearly demarcated from profane or mundane ones: churches, mosques, sacraments, scriptures, temples, 'holy of holies', and so on (Knott 2005). The power of such bounded territorialities reinforces the power of their guardians, who claim a special relationship with them and a unique ability to enter into relation with the most holy of places and objects and people. In relation to Christianity, for example, we can cite the priesthood's claim to a unique relationship with ecclesiastical 'temporalities' including the altar, the sacraments, and with

each other in a line of consecrated priesthood leads back to Christ himself through a physical laying on of hands. But ‘tactical’ religion is constantly engaged in attempts to subvert such strategies of limited and controlled sacralisation and enchantment by re-enchanting places, spaces, bodies and objects which the strategic has designated mundane and unworthy. Tactical religion ‘carries-out’ forms of the sacred and enjoys the portable: prayer mats and books, amulets and domestic shrines, headscarves and turbans, colourful pictures and bottled holy water, beards and fortune cards. It may locate the sacred in springs, trees, wells, gardens, roadside shrines, kitchens and living rooms, as well as within the ‘consecrated’ spaces of graveyards, temples, and tombs. Moreover, personal, ‘inner’ space may become an important part of its domain.

Thus the tactical does not necessarily shun the spaces and controlled enchantments of the strategic, but it tries to enter into them, to appropriate aspects of them, to turn them to new uses, and to gain some control over them – as well as to supplement them. As Purewal (2012) found in her study of tombs and temples in the Punjab region, for example, there is a constant battle between tactical appropriations of sacred space by a whole range of ‘unorganized’ actors and groups, and strategic attempts to clear and purify these spaces by political and religious authorities. The strategic guards and policers of the boundaries of the sacred constantly try to hedge and concentrate power, whilst the tactical makes raids and stages occupations and takeovers.

Not only everyday religious engagements, but also historical transitions can be illuminated by this perspective: strategic religions are threatened – and vitalised – by continual attempts at reform, which amount to tactical attempts by various parties to gain power through new forms of destruction, purification and controlled re-enchantment. But the new purified forms of reformed religion are in turn threatened by their followers’ tendencies to pollute them by ignoring the rules and edicts, disregarding the strictures and interpretations of their new guardians, and by smudging their neatly-drawn boundaries (Douglas 1966).

Strategic religion also attempts to consolidate its power through control of time. Many of the ‘world’ religions (i.e. the most strategically successful; Smith 1988) go so far as to overlay the natural sequences of planetary movements and associated seasons with sacred calendars which shape the social and personal rhythms of the year, the month and the week. At a more intimate level, they also try to control patterns of sleep and waking, of work and leisure, of worship and relaxation, of festival and fast. Strategic religion incorporates tactical elements into this control of the temporal, but seeks to co-opt and control them – for example in co-opting festivals, saints days and other aspects of a popular calendar. The tactical may, in turn, submit to the outer rhythms of the strategic, but overturn their meanings and significance, or add and substitute its own sacred times (bath-time with children; the sports-time of important competitions; sacred times in nature; common participation in spectacular media events). Even in the most secular societies, strategic religion attempts to keep hold of the fundamentals of the bio-lifecycle, by sacralising birth, transition to adulthood, marriage, and death; tactical religion also claims these as its own, and the tension allows for creative change and

modification – as we currently see in western societies in the emergence of new life-course rituals, including in relation to pregnancy and birth, rededication of marriage, divorce, and death.

Conclusion

So the dance between the strategic and the tactical continues – but it can shift, insofar as the relations between them can shift. I think we are living through a particularly interesting imbalance. Let me conclude by illustrating that idea with a single example, of religion and healing in modern Britain.

Prior to the advent of the modern state, healing was, of course, offered chiefly by religious providers: churches, religious orders, individual men and women known for their healing powers (Porter 1999). With the rise of modern science and the growth of the enlarged state comes a partial and patchy takeover of these services by ‘scientific’ medicine and its providers. Right up to the formation of the National Health Service in 1948, however, such providers were supplemented, and indeed outnumbered, by armies of voluntary providers, many of them Christian. The nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century witnessed an expansion of more rationalized forms of voluntary and paid community provision, often run and staffed by women (Digby 1996). As well as midwives and women guardians in poorhouses, there were female sanitary inspectors, health visitors, and women ‘counsellors’ whose work was focused on infant and maternal health. The interwar period saw the consolidation of municipal health boards, maternity and child welfare clinics, and women and religious groups were active in the campaigning which led to the formation of the NHS. But the latter, when it came into existence, did not only absorb this contribution: it also erased a good deal. In many ways the NHS represented the triumph of scientific medicine over a wider programme of social healthcare and preventative medicine; of the national over the local; of the male medical profession over voluntarism; and of secular medicine over religious, or mixed, provision of health and healing.

Interestingly, however, the eclipse was short-lived. From the 1970s onwards there was an explosion of provision of complementary and alternative forms of healing and healthcare, such that, by the turn of the millennium, the yearly use of the most established forms of alternative and complementary health practices (CAM) was estimated to involve around a third of the adult population of the UK (Thomas *et al* 2001). Many of these have an explicitly religious or, more precisely ‘spiritual’, dimension (Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Sointu and Woodhead 2008). Their philosophy is explicitly ‘holistic’. Against a bio-medical view of the human person as an organism subject to disease, they treat the ‘whole person’ understood as a unity of ‘body, mind and spirit’. This ties to an underlying metaphysic which views all forms of life as manifestations of an underlying energy, spirit, or ‘*chi*’. Disease is a symptom of a blockage of energy, and the multifarious techniques of alternative healing seek to uncover the physical, spiritual or mental causes of this, and to free ‘the spirit’.

Thus religion returns to healthcare under the market regime – but in a new form. Whereas before it had been Christianity and the churches which had dominated the religious contribution, and then secular medicine, now individual practitioners set up stall in a marketplace which allows them free entry, and they use new media like the internet to attract clients. It is not simply a case of religion taking up where it left off before the National Health Service, because it is significantly changed under the new conditions in which it arises. Not only does it display a market logic, it arises in reaction to forms of scientific medicine which are said to neglect the whole person and dwell only on physical symptoms. A significant number of practitioners are ex-nurses, refugees not only from the churches, but also from the NHS and its bureaucratic structures, rationalized target cultures, and unsympathetic doctors or managers (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). Even though such practical spirituality may preserve, or recapitulate, traditional elements of healing and the preservation of health, including charms, amulets, laying on of hands, herbalism, and various forms of magical practice, this is no ‘folk religion’. It is a form of religion which is inseparable from advanced consumer capitalism, popular culture and the media as the Church of England is from the nation state.

The interesting twist to this tale lies in the way in which holistic healing then creeps back into the state-run health system. From the 1990s onwards, some doctors started referring patients to alternative practitioners; some practices and hospitals employed holistic practitioners on their staff; nursing training started to incorporate spiritual care; and the NHS set up an official directory of CAM providers. This is not simply because some of these treatments are effective, but because ‘customers’ demand them, and because the NHS has itself been reformed according to market logics and in a way which takes patient choice increasingly seriously (Klein 2006). Not surprisingly, there is controversy over these changes, particularly from the scientific professionals who want to defend the integrity of ‘scientific medicine’. One result is a clinical testing and ranking of holistic healthcare practices, in which some are endorsed and others rejected. Another is an ongoing controversy over the value of CAM, which intensified in the twenty-first century, and in which homeopathy has become a particular focus of debate (because the dilution of its ‘medicines’ makes it seem an obvious placebo-based practice or, in the words of its critics, ‘mumbo-jumbo’ and ‘quackery’). In many ways this has become Britain’s version of the battles between evolution and creationism in the USA: a rallying point for mutual excoriations between defenders of secularism and of spirituality. But the more important point is that this illustrates not just the religious coming back to challenge the secular, but the tactical mode of religion coming back in a market-inflected form to challenge more strategic welfare-inflected scientific and secular formations.

Thus we seem to be living through a very interesting phase of religious change in the UK today, in which the tactical is driving the religious show, with strategic religion increasingly defensive and retrenched – very much in the business of purification – or demoralised and devitalised. This is simply an illustration of the fascinating, always historically specific, dialectical relations which must always pertain between the strategic and the tactical.

I don't think that our job as scholars isn't to take sides – 'I'm only interested in the tactical', or 'only in the strategic' – but, from which ever aspect we start from and concentrate upon, to try to see it in relation to the bigger, dialectical, picture.

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