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In this book a leading contemporary theologian investigates the relation between religion and society. Professor Davis begins with the thesis that society is a product of human agency; this raises immediately the questions of the meaning of modernity and of the function of religion in that context. The linguistic and pragmatic orientation of modern philosophy and social theory leads to a discussion of religious language and of *praxis*. Whether modernity is an incomplete project, as Habermas would have it, or a mistaken universalism, as the post-moderns maintain, is debated under the heading of human identity, both individual and collective, and in an examination of the formation of the modern self. The practical relevance of the theoretical analyses comes to the fore in a critique of Michael Novak's attempt to make 'democratic capitalism' an ideal. Professor Davis shows that, paradoxically, the post-modern rejection of secularity can be interpreted as a return from the secular to the supernatural.

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Religion increasingly is seen as a renewed force, and is recognised as an important factor in the modern world in all aspects of life – cultural, economic, and political. It is no longer a matter of surprise to find religious factors at work in areas and situations of political tension. However, our information about these situations has tended to come from two main sources. The news-gathering agencies are well-placed to convey information, but are hampered by the fact that their representatives are not equipped to provide analysis of the religious forces involved. Alternatively, the movements generate their own accounts, which understandably seem less than objective to outside observers. There is no lack of information or factual material, but a real need for sound academic analysis. ‘Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion’ will meet this need. It will give an objective, balanced, and programmatic coverage to issues which – while of wide potential interest – have been largely neglected by analytical investigation, apart from the appearance of sporadic individual studies. Intended to enable debate to proceed at a higher level, the series should lead to a new phase in our understanding of the relationship between ideology and religion.

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# RELIGION AND THE MAKING OF SOCIETY

*Essays in social theology*

CHARLES DAVIS

*Emeritus Professor of Religion,  
Concordia University, Montreal*



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*For my son Anthony*

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Only twenty years ago it was widely assumed that religion had lost its previous place in Western culture and that this pattern would spread throughout the world. Since then religion has become a renewed force, recognized as an important factor in the modern world in all aspects of life, cultural, economic and political. This is true not only of the Third World, but in Europe East and West, and in North America. It is no longer a surprise to find a religious factor at work in areas of political tension.

Religion and ideology form a mixture which can be of interest to the observer, but in practice dangerous and explosive. Our information about such matters comes for the most part from three types of sources. The first is the media which understandably tend to concentrate on newsworthy events, without taking the time to deal with the underlying issues of which they are but symptoms. The second source comprises studies by social scientists who often adopt a functionalist and reductionist view of the faith and beliefs which motivate those directly involved in such situations. Finally, there are the statements and writings of those committed to the religious or ideological movements themselves. We seldom lack information, but there is a need – often an urgent need – for sound objective analysis which can make use of the best contemporary approaches to both politics and religion. ‘Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion’ is designed to meet this need.

The subject matter is global and this will be reflected in the choice both of topics and authors. The initial volumes will be concerned primarily with movements involving the Christian

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*General editors' preface*

religion, but as the series becomes established movements involving other world religions will be subjected to the same objective critical analysis. In all cases it is our intention that an accurate and sensitive account of religion should be informed by an objective and sophisticated application of perspectives from the social sciences.

Christian social theology has in recent days been going through a period of turbulence and re-assessment. For a variety of reasons older approaches to the subject seem no longer to be valid. Marxism and various brands of socialism are no longer monopolizing the role of dialogue partner with social theology. There have been a number of interesting encounters with neo-conservative thinking and with other religions, together with a new concern for the foundations of the discipline. In all this, Charles Davis has been one of the most creative and stimulating thinkers. This book of essays will provide stimulus and illumination to all who are interested in the relationship between theology and the social sciences, and the social relevance of theology.

DUNCAN FORRESTER AND ALISTAIR KEE  
*New College, University of Edinburgh*

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The Introduction and Chapters 6 and 11 are being published here for the first time.