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**FINAL ACCEPTED VERSION for *Journal of Religious History* special issue on
Secularization**

Towards the Post-Secular City? London since the 1960s

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Towards the Post-Secular City? London since the 1960s

At first sight, the statistical evidence for the long-term decline of Christian practice in London seems consistent with a narrative of inexorable secularization. In the Census of Religious Worship of 1851 Sunday attendances amounted to 37.0% of the population; in the *Daily News* survey of 1902-3 they were 22.2%; in the *UK Religious Trends* survey of 2005 only 8.3%.¹ Such bald statistics, however, need to be carefully interrogated: in particular the 1851 Census's reliance on estimates by ministers and church officials and its failure to allow for double and triple attendances by individuals mean that it almost certainly over-represented the level of mid-nineteenth century practice. The 1902-3 survey did take this factor into account, leading to a calculation that attenders – as opposed to attendances – amounted to 18.3% of population.² Even in the Victorian era therefore, it seems likely that regular Christian practice was limited to less than a third of the population and had declined to around a fifth by the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed on that crude, but significant, measure, London in 1851 appeared much more secular than the rest of the country, as the average Sunday attendances over England and Wales as a whole amounted to 58.1% of population. The two counties encompassing most of the metropolis, Middlesex and Surrey, had respectively the lowest and third lowest attendances of any English county even when then still rural areas are taken into account.³

By the early twenty-first century, however, the relative position of London had changed dramatically. The mean national level of church attendance was only 6.3% in 2005,

¹ B.I.Coleman, *The Church of England in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: A Social Geography* (London: Historical Association, 1980), 40-1; R. Mudie-Smith, ed., *The Religious Life of London* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 15; P. Brierley, ed., *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 6* (2006), 12.46.

² Mudie-Smith, 15.

³ Coleman, 40-1.

2% below that for London. The only English county with higher attendances was Merseyside, at 8.7%, where the substantially older age profile indicated the likelihood of more rapid subsequent decline.⁴ Indeed attendances in London appeared to be on a slightly rising trend, as a subsequent survey in 2012 calculated attenders at 8.8% of the population.⁵ This figure is the more striking when one notes that in the 2011 census only 48.4% of the population of London identified themselves as Christian, suggesting that no less than 18.2% of the professedly Christian population were actively practising. This was a very similar proportion to 1902-3 when the great majority of the population was professedly Christian.⁶

In the 2011 Census moreover 22.3% of the population of London identified with religions other than Christianity. 12.4% or over a million people were Muslims, 5.0% Hindus, 1.8% Jewish, 1.5% Sikhs and 1.6% saw themselves as belonging to other smaller traditions, notably Buddhism.⁷ Although religious identity as such is particularly important for minority groups, it should not be equated with active religious commitment. However, while there are regrettably no reliable attendance statistics for traditions other than Christianity, a couple of surveys from the 1990s point to substantially higher levels of practice and commitment than among the nominally Christian population. The 1994 national survey of ethnic minorities reported that 27% of Hindus, 62% of Muslims and 39% of Sikhs claimed to attend a service or prayer meeting or to go to place of worship at least once a week. Among people of South Asian origin 47% of Indians (predominantly Hindu) 73% of Pakistanis and 76% of Bangladeshis (both predominantly Muslim) regarded religion as ‘very important to how I live

⁴ Brierley, 12.2, 12.47, 12.70-1.

⁵ P. Brierley, *Capital Growth: What the 2012 London Church Census Reveals* (Tonbridge: ADBC, 2013), 74.

⁶ In 1902-3 26,612 Jewish attendances were counted separately from the Christian ones, corresponding to 0.6% of total population (Mudie-Smith, 265).

⁷ <http://www.ons.gov.uk>, 2011 Census Table KS209EW: Religion, Local Authorities in England and Wales, accessed 16 Oct. 2015.

my life'.⁸ A smaller local survey in Newham (East London) in the same year indicated that 41% of Muslims and 42% of Hindus attended worship at least weekly.⁹ It should be borne in mind that participation in public worship is an inadequate measure of commitment for a tradition such as Hinduism that emphasizes individual and domestic devotion. Even in Islam, one can comply dutifully with the call to prayer without being physically present at a mosque, which is especially the case for women for whom many mosques are unwelcoming or even inaccessible. In the Newham survey less than 10% of women were regular mosque attenders.¹⁰ The 1994 surveys indicated that religious practice and commitment was lower among young people from ethnic minorities - especially those born in Britain – than among their elders, which might point to a declining trend over the subsequent two decades.¹¹ That assumption, however, needs to be tested by further research: meanwhile admittedly anecdotal and impressionistic evidence¹² suggests that among younger Muslims in particular it is more likely that recent decades have seen growth rather than further decline in religious activity.

While such evidence is too sketchy to draw definitive conclusions, a reasonable inference would be that in the recent past around 40% of self-identified adherents of minority traditions have been actively practising to an extent analogous to regular churchgoing by the self-identified Christian population. 40% may understate the proportion of Muslims and overstate that of Hindus and especially Jews, but if it is accepted as a working overall assumption, it would suggest that the 8.8% of the population of London in 2012 who were

⁸ T. Modood et al., *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997), 303, 306.

⁹ G. Smith, 'The Unsecular City: The Revival of Religion in East London', in T. Butler and M. Raisin, eds, *Rising in the East? The Regeneration of East London* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996), 132.

¹⁰ Smith, 132.

¹¹ Modood, 303-4; Smith, 135.

¹² For example, the present author was struck during a visit to the East London Mosque on a weekday in November 2011 by the large, predominantly young male, congregation attending for Maghrib (sunset) prayers, almost completely filling the large prayer hall.

churchgoing Christians were equalled and perhaps even slightly exceeded by the total of 8.9% who were active practitioners of other religious traditions. This would indicate a total religiously active proportion of 17.7% of the population, again very similar to the position at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Analysing Urban Religious Change

Data on religious practice is merely one strand of evidence informing analysis of wider secularization processes, but it is nevertheless a significant one that is especially useful in indicating long term trends. The above interpretation of the statistics might of course be questioned in various ways and should not be seen as definitive, but it is a useful starting point for this article because it suggests significant hypotheses about religious change over the last century that merit exploration and testing. First, whereas conventional wisdom from both contemporaries and historians has been that nineteenth-century urbanization produced an environment hostile to religious practice, was it the case that by the end of the twentieth century religion was actually faring better in cities than in smaller towns and in the countryside? Clive Field's analysis of London opinion poll evidence pointed to the persistence of 'a surprisingly strong "spiritual" dimension to metropolitan life' over the period from the 1940s to the 1990s, despite the decline in actual churchgoing.¹³ Second, if in Callum Brown's phrase, the 1960s did indeed see 'the death of Christian Britain',¹⁴ would the subsequent reality be better characterized as one of religious plurality rather than of

¹³ C.D. Field, 'Faith in the Metropolis: Opinion Polls and Christianity in Post-War London', *London Journal*, 24 (1999), 80.

¹⁴ C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

secularity? Finally, have we indeed since the 1980s seen ‘the revenge of God’¹⁵ not only in the increased prominence of religion in international affairs but also in a resurgence in grass roots religious practice which, in the case of London at least is taking observance back towards early twentieth-century levels?

These questions expose a significant lacuna in the existing academic literature. Hugh McLeod’s seminal study of religion in late Victorian London¹⁶ was the first of a series of substantial monographs and PhD theses that cumulatively over the subsequent two decades developed a rich understanding of urban religion over the century and a half between the Industrial Revolution and the Second World War. Metropolitan London attracted disproportionate interest from researchers,¹⁷ but there was also significant work on other urban areas, notably by Stephen Yeo on Reading, Mark Smith on Lancashire, by Rosemary Chadwick and Simon Green on Yorkshire, and by Callum Brown and Stewart Brown on Scotland.¹⁸ Robin Gill developed something of an overview through analysis of the various local religious censuses that succeeded the national one of 1851.¹⁹ Since the turn of millennium, however, this flow of work on British cities has almost dried up, with the

¹⁵ G. Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).

¹⁶ Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974).

¹⁷ J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); A.B. Bartlett, ‘The Churches in Bermondsey, 1880-1939’, unpublished University of Birmingham PhD thesis, 1987; J.N. Morris, *Religion and Urban Change: Croydon 1840-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992); S.C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁸ S. Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); M.A. Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth 1740-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); R.E. Chadwick, ‘Church and People in Bradford and District 1880-1914’, unpublished University of Oxford DPhil thesis, 1986; S.J.D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); C.G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); S.J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1982).

¹⁹ R. Gill, *The “Empty” Church Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

significant exception of Rex Walford's important 2007 study of interwar London.²⁰

Internationally too, although there have been some significant recent studies of continental European and American cities,²¹ it seems that few historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are now engaging systematically with urban religion.

Moreover most of the existing literature concludes its detailed coverage with the First World War. Historical analysis of urban religion in the interwar period remains much less systematic, while in this respect the seven decades since the end of the Second World War are largely uncharted territory. It was understandable that historians of urban religion working in the 1970s and 1980s implicitly regarded the period since 1945 as too recent to merit their professional attention, but now, more than a generation later, as the mid-twentieth century recedes to the edges of living memory, such neglect is no longer so excusable. While there has been thorough exploration of the overall 'crisis' or even 'death' of Christianity in the 1960s,²² relatively little attention has been given to what this actually meant for church life at the grass roots. Furthermore the same period that indeed saw a 'crisis' in many traditional forms of Christianity also saw significant innovations and the beginning of trends that by the early 2000s were to have a substantial impact on the religious landscape. Above all, faiths other than Christianity and Judaism began to develop a substantial organized and increasingly visible presence. Although the histories of particular traditions in Britain have

²⁰ R. Walford, *The Growth of "New London" in Suburban Middlesex (1914-1945) and the Response of the Church of England* (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen, 2007).

²¹ A. Liedhegener, *Christentum und Urbanisierung: Katholiken und Protestanten in Münster und Bochum 1830-1933* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997); J-O Boudon, *Paris: capitale religieuse sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Cerf, 2001); A.J. Steinhoff, *The Gods of the City: Protestantism and Religious Culture in Strasbourg 1870-1914* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); R.A. Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); M.L. Bendroth, *Fundamentalists in the City: Conflict and Division in Boston's Churches 1885-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²² C.G. Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*; H. McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

received some scholarly attention²³ they still merit more detailed investigation, while their interactions with each other and overall significance for the longer term trajectories of urban religion remain to be properly explored.

In recent years contemporary urban religion has attracted growing attention from geographers, political scientists and sociologists.²⁴ However, while valuable on its own terms, this work suffers from a converse limitation to that of the historical literature: whereas historians are still liable to see their horizon as the Second World War, or at the furthest the 1960s, and to limit their attention to Christianity, social scientists seldom explore historical contexts before 2000. Even an otherwise excellent volume edited by two historians is heavily contemporary in its content.²⁵

The present article therefore seeks to open up a territory that merits more detailed investigation. Some relevant recent work should first be noted, notably Ian Jones's study of generational change in Christianity in Birmingham since the Second World War,²⁶ and a collection edited by David Goodhew analysing church growth in Britain since 1980.²⁷ Clive Field's important study of the 1950s questions the previously received view that this was a period of religious revival and as a corollary modifies the interpretation of the 1960s as a

²³ G. Parsons, ed., *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Religion in Britain since 1945: Volume 1 Traditions* (London: Routledge, 1993); H. Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain since 1800* (London: Hurst, 2004); J. Hinnells, *Zoroastrians in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

²⁴ For example J. Beaumont and C. Baker, eds, *Postsecular Cities: Space, Theory and Practice*, London: Continuum, 2011); J. Becker et al., eds, *Contemporary Manifestations of the Religious in the City*, Zürich: Müller, 2014; C. Dwyer, D. Gilbert and B. Shah, 'Faith and suburbia: Secularisation, modernity and the changing geographies of religion in London's suburbs', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 2012.

²⁵ J. Garnett and A. Harris, eds, *Rescripting Religion in the City: Migration and Religious Identity in the Modern Metropolis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013).

²⁶ I. Jones, *The Local Church and Generational Change in Birmingham 1945-2000* London: Royal Historical Society, 2012).

²⁷ D. Goodhew, ed., *Church Growth in Britain 1980 to the Present* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

decade of sudden religious crisis.²⁸ Anne Kershen and Laura Vaughan have taken the long view of successive waves of migration to the East End, and John Wolffe has examined Christian responses to religious minorities in London since the early nineteenth century.²⁹ Nevertheless there remains much scope for further detailed research.

It might be objected that London is something of a special case in that its relative prosperity and large professional middle class produce conditions particularly conducive to the survival and even resurgence of organized religion. However, for many prosperity leads to secularity, while conversely some of the most intensive religious activity has been found in the poorest boroughs, such as Newham and Southwark. It is true that here, as elsewhere in the metropolis, extensive migration from most parts of the world has resulted in a transnational sensitivity to religious resurgence in other parts of the globe. On the other hand, there is also evidence that migration results in the loss of the social, familial and organizational pillars that helped to sustain religious commitment in a country of origin.³⁰ Hence there would seem to be no obvious *prima facie* explanation as to why religious practice should be higher in London than in other urban areas. Indeed the sheer size of London – with its population of 8.6 million in 2011 exceeding that of many smaller European countries – and its cultural, economic and political dominance suggests that even if it is seen as an exceptional case, it was still an influential and significant one.

²⁸ C. Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival? Quantifying Belonging, Behaving and Believing in the Long 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

²⁹ A.J. Kershen, *Strangers, Aliens and Asians: Huguenots, Jews and Bangladeshis in Spitalfields, 1660-2000* (London: Routledge, 2005); Anne Kershen and Laura Vaughan, '“There was a priest, a rabbi and an imam ...” an analysis of urban space and religious practice in London's east end, 1685-2010', *Material Religion*, 9 (2013), 10-35; John Wolffe, 'Plurality in the capital: the Christian response to London's religious minorities', in Charlotte Methuen, Andrew Spicer and John Wolffe, eds, *Christianity and Religious Plurality: Studies in Church History* 51 (Woodbridge: Boydell/Ecclesiastical History Society, 2015), 232-58.

³⁰ E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Inter-Generational Negotiations of Religions Identity, Belief and Practice: Child, Youth and Adult Perspectives from Three Cities' in Garnett and Harris, eds, 163-176.

Christian Decline and Resurgence

The straightforward comparison made above between religious practice levels in 1902-3 and those 2011-12 obscures many complexities that merit exploration. Even if, as is suggested, London in the early twenty-first century was on this measure no more and no less secular than London in the early twentieth century, the make-up of the religiously-committed minority changed substantially. Practising Christians were possibly now outnumbered by practising adherents of other faiths. There was also significant Christian fluctuation over time: the indications are that both world wars had a negative immediate impact but were followed by modest recoveries; and that decline between the 1960s and the 1990s began to be reversed after 2000, particularly due to the rapid expansion of Pentecostalism. Hence the denominational distribution of Christian attendances changed radically: Anglicans made up 42.8% in 1902-3 but only 12% in 2012; Pentecostal denominations had yet to be founded in 1902-3, but were 32% of the Christian total in 2012.³¹ Overall attendance figures for the traditional Christians denominations across London showed marked decline between 1979 and 2014, Anglicans from 140,500 to 84,800; Roman Catholics from 333,700 to 198,300; Methodists from 35,000 to 18,300. The Baptists fared rather better, only decreasing from 46,600 to 41,900. On the other hand over the same period Pentecostal numbers grew from 57,500 to 229,000 and the Orthodox from 5,300 to 19,900.³²

Closer investigation reveals variegated local situations in which church growth and decline were simultaneous rather than sequential processes. In the 1990s, even as overall Anglican attendances continued to fall, the Church of England Diocese of London was

³¹ Mudie-Smith, 271; Brierley, *Capital Growth*, 57

³² Brierley, *Capital Growth*, 57.

already showing signs of recovery. The Diocese of London covers only around a third of Greater London: the central and north-western parts of the metropolis to the north of the river Thames and the west of the river Lea. The Electoral Rolls of committed church members are fully revised every six years and the figures for the revision years showed a clear pattern

Year	Membership (000s)
1972	68
1978	66
1984	51
1990	45
1996	53
2002	58
2007	63

Administrative factors have to be taken into account, notably the ending in the mid-1990s of a policy whereby parishes were in effect taxed by the diocese in proportion to their membership and thus had a financial incentive to keep declared numbers as low as possible. Nevertheless the shift from decline to growth was so striking that it cannot be explained by such considerations alone. In any case Sunday attendances showed a similar, if less pronounced pattern. However, in the same period attendances in the neighbouring Anglican dioceses of Southwark, covering most of the metropolis south of the Thames, and Chelmsford, which includes five boroughs in north-east London, continued to decline. Hence explanations of the increase in the Diocese of London focus not on London-wide factors, but on specific organizational factors, such as the aforementioned change in financial policy which removed a discouragement to numerical growth and by substantial changes in leadership styles and institutional culture. While numbers were swelled somewhat by large central London churches such as All Souls Langham Place, Holy Trinity Brompton and St Helen's Bishopsgate, growth was more broadly based. In the 1970s and 1980s the Diocese had readily persuaded itself that struggling churches had to be closed; in the 1990s it began purposefully to revive them by the appointment of energetic and effective incumbents such as

Michael Marshall at Holy Trinity Sloane Square and Mark Aldridge at St Gabriel's Cricklewood. Moreover the planting of new churches, whether in previously- redundant buildings or in entirely new premises came on to the agenda: across London as a whole the number of functioning Anglican churches increased from 982 in 1979 to 1031 in 2012.³³

Among other Christian groups too, relative resilience or even resurgence appears similarly to be related to a readiness to open new churches. The Roman Catholics, Methodists and United Reformed, all of whom experienced more steeply declining attendances, also all saw substantial net reductions in their numbers of churches, from 434 to 381, from 253 to 231 and from 183 to 144 respectively. On the other hand the 270 Baptist churches in London in 1979 had increased to 365 in 2012.³⁴ Independent churches, including historic groups such as the Christian Brethren as well as a more recent 'free evangelical' churches also kept broadly stable attendances in a somewhat increased number of churches. While smaller congregations in longstanding churches were likely to find themselves in difficulty as a core of stalwarts aged, in recently planted churches, such as Bonneville Baptist Church in Lambeth and Plaistow Christian Fellowship in Newham,³⁵ congregations were younger and more dynamic, providing a basis for growth.

There were other ways in which late twentieth-century Christianity in London manifested considerable dynamism and influence. In the late 1970s Holy Trinity Brompton began to offer the Alpha Course, an introduction to basic Christianity, to recent converts in its

³³ B. Jackson and A. Piggot, 'A Capital Idea', unpublished report for the Diocese of London, 2003; B. Jackson and A. Piggot, 'Another Capital: Church Growth and Decline in the Diocese of London 2003-2010', downloaded from <http://www.london.anglican.org/about/another-capital-idea/>, 16 Oct. 2015; R. Chartres (Bishop of London), 'New Fire in London', Lambeth Lecture, 30 Sept. 2015, <http://www.london.anglican.org/articles/new-fire-in-london-lambeth-lecture/>, accessed 16 Oct. 2015.

³⁴ Brierley, *Capital Growth*, 23.

³⁵ M. Eastman, ed., *Ten Inner-City Churches* (Eastbourne: MARC, 1988), 58-76, 176-95.

congregation. After the course was redesigned by Nicky Gumbel in 1990 to target those enquiring into Christian faith but not yet committed, it was rapidly and widely adopted elsewhere. By 2001 over 7,000 churches in the UK, including many in London, and 17,000 worldwide in 121 different countries had registered to use Alpha.³⁶ Meanwhile, at Holy Trinity Brompton itself, nearly a thousand people were attending the regular Alpha courses.³⁷ While judgements vary regarding the effectiveness and appropriateness of Alpha as an evangelistic tool, its global influence grounded in London pastoral experience is undeniable. In 1995, the formation of London-based Premier Christian Radio was a further indication of the capital's key role in sustaining a substantial Christian subculture.³⁸

Hence, while some readings of the overall figures can suggest a static picture, the reality on the ground was a complex one in which there was substantial Christian resurgence even as some churches continued to decline. In some localities moreover growth was very rapid in the short term: six boroughs – Barking and Dagenham, Greenwich, Lambeth, Merton, Newham and Southwark – all saw increases in attendance of 30% or more in the seven years between 2005 and 2012.³⁹ Central to this process was the rapid growth of Pentecostalism in the three decades after 1980 and, to a lesser extent, the expansion of the so-called ‘house’ or ‘new’ churches from 8,100 attendances in 73 churches in 1979 to 43,200 attendances in 270 churches in 2012. Whereas the steepest growth in the house churches occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, the Pentecostal upsurge gathered momentum around the turn of the millennium, with attendances of 93,700 in 1998 more than doubling to 229,000 in 2012.⁴⁰ Substantial migration from Africa in the early twenty-first century was undoubtedly a

³⁶ R. Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 115. Cf. <http://www.alpha.org>, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

³⁷ S. Hunt, *The Alpha Enterprise: Evangelism in a Post-Christian Era* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 17.

³⁸ <http://www.premier.org.uk/About>, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

³⁹ Brierley, *Capital Growth*, 68, 70.

⁴⁰ Brierley, *Capital Growth*, 23, 57.

significant factor: between the 2001 and 2011 censuses the African-born population of the city grew from 6.3% to 7.6% of the total, or in numerical terms an increase of 167,077 people. 45,811 of these were from Nigeria, a country with a strong Pentecostal presence.⁴¹ However migration alone is insufficient to explain the growth in Pentecostal attendances, as many of the new arrivals were from Muslim backgrounds, so it would seem that these churches were also recruiting from the already settled African population, and, to a lesser extent, from indigenous and other migrant groups. Many Pentecostal churches were quite small, notably in Southwark, where 12.9% of the population in 2011 were African-born, and where numerous churches were formed in improvised and temporary premises.⁴² However, there were also some Pentecostal mega-churches, notably Jesus House at Brent Cross in north London, which had 2,500 members in 2009⁴³ and Kingsway International Christian Centre in Hackney, which grew from 300 in 1992 to 10,000 in 2003. Subsequently, however, its further growth was limited by planning constraints, and it was obliged to divide its congregation and move its main base out of London, to Chatham in Kent.⁴⁴

Engaging with Society

Behind the statistics, moreover, were significant localised and personal initiatives that collectively were indicative of Christian capacity to engage creatively and effectively with

⁴¹ https://data.gov.uk/dataset/country_of_birth_2001_census; www.ons.gov.uk, 2011 Census Table QS203EW, Country of Birth, both accessed 23 Oct. 2015.

⁴² *Being Built Together: A Story of New Black Majority Churches in the London Borough of Southwark* (London: University of Roehampton, 2013).

⁴³ R. Burgess, 'African Pentecostal Growth: The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Britain' in Goodhew, *Church Growth*, 136.

⁴⁴ Brierley, *Capital Growth*, 69-70. For social-scientific analysis of the implications of migration and diversity for Christianity in London see J. Eade, 'Religion, home-making and migration across a globalising city: Responding to mobility in London', *Culture and Religion* 13 (2012), 469-83 and F. Dodsworth, E. Vachelli and S. Watson, 'Shifting religions and cultures in London's east end', *Material Religion*, 9 (2013), 86-112.

the urban London context. Against the backdrop of the ‘crisis’ years of the 1960s, David Sheppard explored new approaches to urban ministry, first as warden of the Mayflower Centre in Canning Town from 1958 to 1969 and then as Bishop of Woolwich until 1975, where his social radicalism was a noteworthy sequel to the notorious theological radicalism of his predecessor John Robinson.⁴⁵ Kenneth Leech, an Anglo-Catholic counterpart to the evangelical Sheppard, served curacies in Soho and Hoxton and was rector of St Matthew’s Bethnal Green from 1974. Leech co-founded the charity Centrepoint which became a leading force in tackling youth homelessness and subsequently became an influential anti-racist activist, and freelance ‘community theologian’. He based himself at St Botolph’s Aldgate on the interface between the wealth of the City of London and the deprivation and ethnic diversity of Whitechapel.⁴⁶ Also in the East End Colin Marchant, a Baptist minister, was warden of Lawrence Hall in Plaistow from 1970 to 1990, and ran it on Christian lines as a thriving community centre, also providing sheltered housing flatlets for old people, and ‘starter’ flats for young couples. The complex provided worship facilities for several new Christian churches and for gatherings of other faiths. Marchant wrote in 1985 that ‘there is increasing evidence that the new life within the Churches and the stress on personal, direct evangelism is beginning to face up to the spiritual emptiness and competing demands of the urban milieu.’⁴⁷ In nearby Bromley-by-Bow, from 1984 onwards Andrew Mawson led the transformation of a struggling United Reformed Church into a successful flagship centre for social entrepreneurship.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ D. Sheppard, *Steps Along Hope Street: My Life in Cricket, the Church and the Inner City* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), 37-57, 96-114.

⁴⁶ Obituary, *The Guardian*, 22 Sept. 2015.

⁴⁷ ‘Lawrence Hall, 1970-1990’, <http://www.newhamstory.com/node/2422>, accessed 15 October 2015; Colin Marchant, *Signs in the City* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 10, 40-1.

⁴⁸ A. Mawson, ‘Community Regeneration’ in E. Blakebrough, ed., *Church for the City* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), 122-49; <http://www.bbbc.org.uk/>, accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

While the East End was a natural focus for such Christian community engagement there was also similar activity in other parts of London. For example, in Harlesden in the 1950s and then in Tottenham in the 1960s, Clifford Hill, a Congregational minister, successfully pioneered multicultural churches in the face of hostility from white racists and the indifference of many Caribbean migrants.⁴⁹ In Kingston-on-Thames, the John Bunyan Baptist Church, led from Eric Blakebrough from 1967, set up a youth and community project that came to play an important role in supporting local drug users.⁵⁰ In 1985 another Baptist minister, Steve Chalke, set up Oasis Trust, initially to run a hostel for homeless young people in Peckham, south London, but subsequently expanding into an extensive network of hostels, schools and churches.⁵¹ Roman Catholics were also active, notably in The Passage, set up in 1980 by Westminster Cathedral and the Roman Catholic Sisters of St Vincent de Paul, complementing the work of Centrepoint through assisting numerous homeless people over 25, and similarly growing to become a major charity.⁵²

Examples of such initiatives during the half century after 1960 could easily be multiplied. They gained further momentum after the publication of the Church of England's *Faith in the City* report in 1986 was followed by the setting up of the Church Urban Fund in 1987 to resource Christian projects to address poverty and strengthen urban communities. By 2015 it had invested a total of over £16 million in 1734 projects in the dioceses of Chelmsford, London and Southwark.⁵³ The new millennium saw the emergence of

⁴⁹ C.Hill, *Free at Last? The Tottenham Riots and the Legacy of Slavery* (London: Wilberforce Publications, 2014), 33-43, 62-82.

⁵⁰ E. Blakebrough, *Called to be Giants: The Faith which Inspired a City Mission* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1987); A. Blakebrough, 'Responding to Drug Users' in Blakebrough, *Church for the City*, 75-90; <http://www.jbckingston.org.uk/history.htm>, accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

⁵¹ S. Chalke and N. Page, 'Action Evangelism' in Blakebrough, *Church for the City*, 110-21; <http://www.oasisuk.org>, accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

⁵² B. Dowd, 'Helping the Homesless' in Blakebrough, *Church for the City*, 91-101; <http://passage.org.uk>, accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

⁵³ <http://www.cuf.org.uk>, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

organizations such as Street Pastors, started in Brixton in 2003, sending volunteers from churches on to the streets on Friday and Saturday nights to care for people in need. By 2015 they were operating in 31 locations around Greater London.⁵⁴ The growing black majority churches also developed an increasing commitment to social action.⁵⁵

Such recent activity moreover should be seen alongside the longstanding historic social roles of the churches, notably in hospital chaplaincy and above all in education. In 2015, the Church of England Diocese of London continued to run 154 schools with over 55,000 students, while the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Westminster (which includes Hertfordshire as well as London north of the Thames) had 220 schools.⁵⁶ There was comparable provision south of the Thames. The popularity of church schools was an incentive to instrumental church attendance by parents and children who needed to demonstrate a church connection in order to secure admission, but their very readiness to do so was indicative of the limits of secularity. While church schools, anti-racist engagement and shelters for the homeless probably did not otherwise contribute significantly to church attendance they were nevertheless indicative of a breadth of impact and social engagement that is not captured by statistical measures alone.

Beyond Christianity

Judaism, the other tradition with a long-established presence in London, followed a trajectory that was broadly comparable to that of Christianity. There was significant long-term decline in the headline figure for household synagogue membership in Greater London, from 74,339

⁵⁴ <http://www.streetpastors.org>, accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

⁵⁵ B. Adedibu, *Coat of Many Colours: The Origin, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches to British Christianity* (Blackpool: Wisdom Summit, 2012), 162-7.

⁵⁶ <http://www.london.anglican.org/mission/schools/>; <http://rcdow.org.uk/education/>, both accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

in 1977 to 66,221 in 1990 and 52,941 in 2010. However closer scrutiny reveals some important qualifications. First, by the early twenty-first century there were indications that the decline was bottoming out: whereas numbers decreased by 5,637 between 1990 and 1995, between 2005 and 2010 they only reduced by 733.⁵⁷ Second, the period saw modest *increases* in synagogue membership in counties contiguous to London, notably Hertfordshire, suggesting that some of the apparent decline was due to continued outward migration. Indeed the overall figures for east and south-east England (including London) were stable over the 2005 to 2010 quinquennium.⁵⁸ Third, whereas in 2001 Greater London had 56.2% of the national population identifying as themselves as Jewish, it had a higher proportion, 65.2%, of the national synagogue membership. Hence in the capital Jews, in common with Christians, were more likely to be actively practising than their co-religionists elsewhere in the country.⁵⁹ Fourth, the denominational distribution changed substantially, with Orthodox declining substantially, Reform and Liberal declining slightly, and the Ultra-Orthodox growing rapidly. Indeed it has been suggested that the relatively very high birth-rate among the Ultra-Orthodox could lead to them making up the majority of British Jewry by 2050.⁶⁰ Finally, for synagogues as for churches, static or declining overall numbers obscured a dynamic local picture not only of closures, but also one of numerous openings and expansions.

Clearly, however, the case for seeing the experience of London since the 1960s as at odds with a narrative of ongoing secularization rests not only on the evidence for partial Christian and Jewish resurgence but also on the greatly increased presence of other faiths. As noted above, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs lack the kind of systematic reliable statistics that

⁵⁷ M. Schmool and F. Cohen, *British Synagogue Membership in 2001* (London: Board of Deputies of British Jews, 2002), 7; D. Graham and D. Vulkan, *Synagogue Membership in the United Kingdom in 2010* (London: Board of Deputies of British Jews, 2010), 16, Table 5.

⁵⁸ Graham and Vulkan, 17.

⁵⁹ Graham and Vulkan, 16, Table 4.

⁶⁰ E. Kauffman, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile, 2010), 161.

would enable a researcher to track patterns of religious practice over time. The growth of places of worship, both in numbers and in scale, was however a significant indicator.

Both Sikhs and Muslims had begun to develop an organized presence in London before the First World War, through, respectively, the Khalsa Jatha, British Isles, formed in 1908 and the London Mosque Fund, which first met in 1910. (Both, however, were relative latecomers compared to the London Zoroastrian Association, which dates back to 1861.) Sikhs rapidly realized their ambition to create a permanent gurdwara, which opened in Putney in 1911 and moved to Shepherds Bush in 1913. Muslims meanwhile made do with temporary and hired premises until the East London Mosque opened in Commercial Road, Whitechapel in 1941.⁶¹ Hindu organization did not emerge until the 1950s, when meetings of a small group of devotees led in 1959 to the formation of the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, London Fellowship Centre and eventually in 1970 to the opening of the first mandir in a former Anglican mission hall in Islington.⁶²

These small beginnings were followed by dramatic expansion in the last third of the twentieth century and the opening years of the twenty-first. In 2015 unofficial but credible online sources listed 412 mosques, 54 Hindu temples and 24 gurdwaras across Greater London.⁶³ The disproportionately large number of mosques relative to the size of the Muslim population - exceeding the number of churches for every Christian denomination except the

⁶¹ <http://www.centralgurdwara.org.uk/history.htm>, accessed 21 October 2015; H. Ansari, ed., *The Making of the East London Mosque, 1910-1951* (Camden 5th series, vol. 38, Cambridge: Royal Historical Society, 2011), 23, 81.

⁶² <http://londonmandir.baps.org/about/history-of-baps-in-the-uk-europe/>, www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol8/p117a, both accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

⁶³ <http://mosques.muslimsinbritain.org/maps.php#/town/London>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Hindu_temples_in_the_United_Kingdom; <http://www.sikhtouch.com/sikh temple/>, all accessed 24 Oct. 2015. While sources of this nature are not definitive, because they rely on informal notification and enquiry, they would seem inherently more likely to understate than to overstate the numbers.

Church of England - is probably indicative of higher levels of religious practice, but is also attributable to the internal sectarian and ethnic diversity of the Muslim population.

A full understanding of the development of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh places of worship and their chronology will require extensive new research, but some illustrative examples can be offered here. The Islington mandir rapidly proved unequal to the needs of its devotees, especially after the expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972. Hence the community acquired a disused factory in Neasden, and renovated it to provide larger facilities, which opened in 1982. Aspirations to build a large new temple to a traditional Indian design had to be put on hold until adjoining land was acquired in 1990, but Shri Swaminarayan Mandir - better known as the Neasden Temple – was then built quite rapidly between 1992 and 1995, with the aid of very substantial voluntary labour and fundraising. The prominent and distinctive building close to the North Circular Road is a conspicuous presence in an otherwise nondescript suburban townscape.⁶⁴ Another significant Hindu example is the Shree Ghanapatty Temple in Wimbledon, which originated in a small meeting of a few families in 1966, leading to regular devotions in temporary venues and the acquisition and renovation of permanent premises in 1980-1. Adaptation and expansion continued in subsequent decades, culminating in January 2015 in the opening of a worship space reconstructed on traditional Hindu lines.⁶⁵

The Shepherds Bush gurdwara remained for half a century an inconspicuous presence in an ordinary terraced house with a gradual expansion of activity in the 1950s evidenced by the introduction of regular weekly worship and the employment of a full-time *granthi* (ceremonial reader of the holy book). In 1969, however, it moved to larger premises in a

⁶⁴ <http://londonmandir.baps.org/about/history-of-baps-in-the-uk-europe/>, accessed 23 Oct. 2015.

⁶⁵ <http://www.ghanapathy.co.uk/our-heritage>, accessed 23 Oct. 2015.

former Salvation Army hall, which was subsequently adapted and expanded, notably with the addition of domes in the 1990s.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, a few miles to the west, Southall was becoming a major centre of Sikh settlement and numerous gurdwaras were established there. The largest of them, Sri Guru Singh Sabha, dates back to the 1950s, and acquired its own premises, a converted dairy, in 1967. Between 1997 and 2003 it was completely rebuilt to become what its website claims is the largest gurdwara outside India. The building is effectively adapted to a restricted urban site in a northern European climate but also has conspicuous traditional features, including prominent domes visible from the nearby M4 motorway.⁶⁷

The East London Mosque followed a similar pattern of expansion. Its original premises were compulsorily purchased in 1975 but in return the Greater London Council was obliged to pay for the erection of a replacement temporary mosque and to allocate land for the building of a larger permanent mosque to serve the now rapidly growing Muslim population in the area. The conspicuous and distinctively Islamic building on the Whitechapel Road – a major route into central London from the east – was completed in 1985. It was subsequently expanded with the opening of the adjoining London Muslim Centre in 2004 and of the Maryam Centre, making specific provision for women, in 2013.⁶⁸ While the great majority of other mosques in London continued to operate from adapted rather than purpose-built premises, the consistent trend over the period was from informal to formal organization and from small temporary to larger permanent facilities. For example the Idara-e-Jaafariya Shi'a mosque in Tooting originated in the 1960s in the basement of a

⁶⁶ http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/planningedm/img_planningapps/00079723.pdf; <http://www.centralgurdwara/history.htm>, both accessed 21 Oct. 2015.

⁶⁷ <http://www.sgsss.org/>, accessed 21 Oct. 2015; personal observation, June 2015.

⁶⁸ Ansari, 52-3; <http://www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/content/history>, accessed 21 October 2015;

member's house, then acquired a large house of its own, and in 1979 bought a former church.⁶⁹

In a *longue durée* historical perspective, the expansion of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism in late twentieth-century London, is reminiscent of the growth of both Methodism and Roman Catholicism in London and other cities during the nineteenth century. While much local presence remained inconspicuous either because it was small scale or because it utilised adapted buildings that were already familiar features of the townscape, there was a trend towards constructing new flagship buildings that made a strong visual statement of strength and permanence.⁷⁰ In that respect the East London Mosque, the Neasden Temple and the Sri Guru Singh Sabha should be seen as continuing the pattern set by Victorian and Edwardian Christian minorities in the City Temple (1874), Westminster Cathedral (1903) and Methodist Central Hall Westminster (1912).⁷¹

The analogy can be pursued by noting the wide range of social and cultural activities centred on gurdwaras, mosques and temples, which placed them, like Victorian churches and chapels, very much at the heart of their respective communities. The Sri Guru Singh Sabha upholds the Sikh tradition of *langar* to its fullest extent by providing free meals to all visitors round the clock and throughout the year. While other places of worship could hardly match that impressive achievement, they nevertheless became focal points for hospitality and mutual support. Increasingly religious groups developed wider forms of social engagement:

⁶⁹ I. Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (London: Hurst, 2014), 146.

⁷⁰ Cf. Dwyer, Gilbert and Shah.

⁷¹ Contemporary religious groups also assert their presence through processions and events in public space. See D. Garbin, 'Marching for God in the global city: Public space, religion and diasporic identities in a transnational African church', *Culture and Religion*, 13 (2012), 425-47 and A.R. David, 'Sacralising the city: Sound, space and performance in Hindu ritual practices in London', *Culture and Religion*, 13 (2012), 449-67.

for example the Darul Ummah mosque in Shadwell set up a secondary school in 1996 and in 2004 began to run a series of crime reduction projects.⁷²

Although most religious schools like the one at Darul Ummah remained small and independent, a few were incorporated into the state system, such as the Islamia Primary School in Brondesbury, established in 1983 and securing state funding in 1998, and the Guru Nanak Sikh Academy in Hayes, established in 1993 and securing state funding in 1999.⁷³ Alongside ongoing state support not only for numerous existing Christian and Jewish schools in London but also for new ones like the Church of England sponsored Wren Academy in Finchley, which opened in 2008,⁷⁴ these decisions were a further indication of a trend towards religious pluralism rather than secularity.

A further indicator of the continuing importance of religion for civil society and social capital in London was the East London Communities Organization, founded in 1996 and building on existing links between faith groups. It subsequently developed into the citywide London Citizens which under its umbrella national organization Citizens UK aims to organize ‘communities to act together for power, social justice and the common good’. Despite that broad seemingly secular objective, however, a substantial majority of its member organizations in 2015 were religious ones. Of the 212 in London in 2015, 54 were Roman Catholic, 40 Anglican, 29 from other Christian denominations, 15 Muslim, 6 Jewish and 1 inter-faith. Collectively these heavily outnumbered the 67 secular organizations, which made up only 31.6% of the total.⁷⁵

⁷² <http://www.darulummah.org.uk/mosque/>, accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

⁷³ <http://islamiaprimary.org.uk/content/view/84;>
<http://www.gurunaksikhacademy.co.uk/files/prospectus/011E44537B53DDD780CD12B55D4BB822.pdf>, 5, both accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

⁷⁴ <http://www.wrenacademy.org/52/executive-principals-welcome>, accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

⁷⁵ http://www.citizensuk.org/local_chapters, accessed 24 Oct. 2015.

Conclusion

There is thus substantial evidence of a religious resurgence in London that had its origins in the 1960s and 1970s, but gathered momentum around 2000. This resurgence was not only quantitative - in terms of numbers of active participants in organized religion – but qualitative – in terms of the more intangible social, cultural and political influence of religious groups. It was, however, a resurgence grounded in the growth of Pentecostalism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, while most traditional Christian denominations saw continued net decline. Nevertheless even here there were instances of expansion and effective new activity.

At first sight this conclusion might appear to be at odds with the increasing proportion of the population of London who considered themselves to have ‘no religion’, which rose from 15.8% in 2001 to 20.7% in 2011. However this increase was substantially less than that in England and Wales as a whole, where the proportion rose from 14.8% in 2001 to 25.1% in 2011.⁷⁶ Thus, while London had a higher than national proportion of ‘no religion’ in 2001, by 2011 it was significantly lower. Moreover the continued growth of ‘no religion’ is not inconsistent with growth in organized religious activity in the context of an overall trend towards more pronounced self-definition. In an earlier twentieth-century culture characterised by what Jeffrey Cox has termed ‘diffusive Christianity’⁷⁷ it seemed unproblematic even for those who never attended church and had little or no belief in Christian teachings still to identify as Christians in a residual sense, drawing on the widespread childhood experience of Sunday School. Subsequently, however, as Christianity became more of an activist minority

⁷⁶ https://data.gov.uk/dataset/religion_2001_census, accessed 24 Oct. 2015; 2011 Census Table KS209EW.

⁷⁷ Cox, 90-128.

interest and less of a national consensus, it seems likely that such individuals, especially those from younger generations, were more likely to see themselves as having ‘no religion’.⁷⁸

In conclusion we revisit the three hypotheses stated above. First, the case of London does indeed suggest that organized religion could be relatively successful in the late twentieth-century and contemporary city, with an upsurge in activity supported by a concentration of population and resources. It remains unclear, however, whether London has been an exceptional case, or whether it is more broadly representative of emerging trends in cities elsewhere in Britain, and indeed in continental Europe. Certainly there have been numerous localised examples of urban religious resurgence in other cities, both in the United Kingdom and beyond, although these are patchier and have had less impact on the overall statistics than in the case of London.⁷⁹ However even in north-east England, a region very different from London, there are indications that, despite overall decline, church attendances have grown in some urban areas, notably inner-city Newcastle and Durham City.⁸⁰ A narrative of inexorable urban religious decline is now shown to be open to serious question.

Second, the concept of ‘the death of Christian Britain’ is valid insofar as it highlights the ending of Christianity as a cultural consensus and the decline and closure of many traditional churches. However in London at least, ‘death’ was accompanied and followed by widespread ‘resurrection’ of Christianity in new and renewed forms, no longer claiming monopoly or even dominance but still attracting substantial activist minorities and exerting a wider influence on the fabric of society. Moreover by the early twenty-first century the

⁷⁸ Cf G. Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 43-4, 107-9.

⁷⁹ See for example the case studies of Birmingham, Edinburgh and York in Goodhew, *Church Growth in Britain* and, for French parallels, L. Endelstein, S. Fath and S. Mathieu, eds, *Dieu change en ville: religion, espace, immigration* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010).

⁸⁰ D. Goodhew and R. Barward-Symmons, *New Churches in the North East* (Durham: Durham University, 2015), 81.

numbers of active Christians in London were matched or perhaps even somewhat exceeded by active adherents of other world faiths. The indications are that this context of substantial and increasingly visible religious plurality served to clarify and reinforce both religious and secular identities.⁸¹ The distinction between the secular and the religious became more marked, but arguably the city as a whole became less rather than more secular.

Finally, however, the concept of the ‘revenge of God’ as a distinctively late twentieth century phenomenon has some credibility but should not obscure the longer term historical reality of continual fluctuation, parallel decline and resurgence in London’s religious history. The available evidence points to a low point in religious activity in the 1960s and 1970s when the traditional churches were haemorrhaging members, but when the massive growth in Pentecostalism and in organized Hindu, Muslim and Sikh places of worship was still in the future. Even in this period though there was an underlying religiosity⁸² and the inconspicuous beginnings of movements that were to grow substantially in subsequent decades.

Further research is needed, and in the meantime, interpretations will inevitably differ and conclusions should be regarded as provisional. Steve Bruce argues that numerical growth in religious practice in London and elsewhere is predominantly attributable to migration and hence does not substantively alter the reality of the ongoing secularization of the indigenous population.⁸³ However, as David Goodhew points out,⁸⁴ this argument is complicated both by the evidence for localised innovation and growth in historic Christian churches, and by the

⁸¹ There is no space here to explore consequent controversies over ‘multiculturalism’ but for recent perspectives on these see S. Vertovec and S. Wessendorf, eds, *The Multiculturalism Backlash* (London: Routledge, 2010); T. Modood, *Multiculturalism*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); D. Herbert, *Creating Community Cohesion: Religion, Media and Multiculturalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁸² Field, 80.

⁸³ S. Bruce, ‘Secularization and Church Growth in the United Kingdom’, *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 6 (2013), 273-96, especially 288-90.

⁸⁴ David Goodhew, ‘Church Growth in Britain: A Response to Steve Bruce’, *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 6 (2013), 297-315, especially 306-7.

indications that as migrant communities become settled and move into their second and third generations their religious activity becomes more institutionalised and effective and has significant consequences for the wider culture and society. London's religious life has long been shaped by migration: the African, Caribbean, and South Asian migrants of the later twentieth century are following in the footsteps of the Irish Catholic and Russian Jewish migrants of the nineteenth century. David Martin's emphasis on the unique historical and social contexts that shape the ebb and flow of secularization in any given location is therefore particularly germane to the London case.⁸⁵

Indeed, the long-term continuity in the overall level of religious activity suggested by the statistics for 1902-3 and 2011-12 suggests that the historian of London may be better employed analysing religious *change* rather than religious *decline*. The very nature of 'religion' had changed, from a diffuse Christian consensus to a complex multiplicity of faiths, within which Christianity itself had become contested and variegated. The religious life of London was certainly different in 2012 from what it had been in 1903, but it was not necessarily any less vigorous. This conclusion cuts both ways: while the recent past was less secular than is often supposed, we should not exaggerate the religiosity of Edwardian London in a way that magnifies the reality of secularization. Early twenty-first century London was not so much post-secular as in continuity with a past in which the secular and the religious were in a dynamic and constantly evolving relationship.

⁸⁵ D. Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); D. Martin, 'Secularisation and the Future of Christianity', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 20 (2005), 145-60.