Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularization?  
A Case Study of Religious Belonging in Inter-War Britain, 1918–1939

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Abstract
The timing of secularization in Britain remains a contested topic among historians and sociologists, some regarding it largely as a post-Second World War phenomenon (with the 1960s a critical decade), others viewing it as a more gradual process commencing in the Victorian era. The inter-war years (1918–1939) have been little studied in this context, notwithstanding a coincidence of social, economic, and political circumstances which might have been expected to trigger religious change. The extent of religious belonging during this period is reviewed, with reference to quantitative evidence, from two perspectives: churchgoing, and church membership and affiliation. Trends in church attendance are documented, including the demographic variables which shaped it and the effect of innovations such as Sunday cinema and Sunday radio broadcasts of religious services. A conjectural religious profile of the adult population of Britain, c. 1939 reveals that, while, relative to population, there was only marginal growth in professed irreligion and non-Christian faiths since c. 1914, there was accelerated decline in religious worship (notably in terms of regularity) and active affiliation to Protestant denominations. This shift to nominalism particularly impacted the historic Free Churches (the phenomenon had long existed in the Church of England). Examination of these two religious indicators for the inter-war years thus lends further support to the view that secularization in Britain is best seen as a progressive and protracted process.

Keywords
Secularization; church attendance; church membership; religious statistics; inter-war Britain

1. Introduction
Contested Chronology of Secularization

The secularization of Western Christian society continues to be a hotly-debated topic, especially among historians and sociologists. There is certainly still no consensus about its nature, timing, and causation, while a few scholars would even dispute its very existence. Within the British context the traditional and
sociologically-determined view of its chronology, recently reaffirmed by Steve Bruce and Tony Glendinning, traces the decline of churchgoing to the mid-nineteenth century and of church membership to the Edwardian era. They see the process as relatively incremental thereafter, with some acceleration in the late 1950s and 1960s which, they suggest, had its roots in the social dislocation, particularly in respect of family formation, occasioned by the Second World War. Proponents of the so-called “gradualist” school of secularization, they contest what they characterize as Callum Brown’s “recent-and-abrupt” interpretation of the phenomenon, whereby the social and cultural changes of the 1960s (the “permissive society” in short) become the trigger for the sudden and substantial decline of Christian culture and institutions in Britain. 1 Brown’s thesis on the primacy of the 1960s as the locus of “revolutionary” secularization 2 has been strongly restated in his most recent book, which significantly moves his argument from qualitative to quantitative ground. However, he introduces an important caveat, now conceding a more gradualist pattern for the diminution of weekly churchgoing, while criticizing the gradualists for attaching too much weight to church attendance in the first place, to the exclusion or neglect of other religious data or cultural factors. 3 Hugh McLeod, a gradualist in Brown’s eyes, is perhaps the leading exponent of scholarship which has complemented, refined, and contradicted Brown’s view of the “religious crisis” of the decade. 4 This preoccupation with the 1960s has, to an extent, also diverted some research effort into the “long” 1950s, which Brown regards as something of a time of religious revival, by way of prelude to the de-Christianization which was to follow, and witnessing “the greatest church growth that Britain had experienced since the mid-nineteenth century.” 5 This upbeat reading of the 1950s has not gone unchallenged, including by Simon

1) Steve Bruce and Tony Glendinning, ‘When was Secularization?’ British Journal of Sociology 61 (2010), 107–126.
5) Brown, Death (see above, n. 2), pp. 170–175, Religion and Society (see above, n. 2), pp. 177–223; Brown, “The Unholy Mrs Knight” and the B.B.C., English Historical Review 127 (2012), 345–376, there 347–350; and Brown, Religion and the Demographic Revolution (see above, n. 3), pp. 47–53.
Green, who contends that “the passing of Protestant England”—both institutionally and culturally—was already well underway by that time.  

The chronological axis of the debate on secularization in Britain has thus latterly shifted to the second half of the twentieth century, mirroring a more general academic perception that the pivotal religious changes have all post-dated the Second World War.  

However, Brown himself, in his Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain (2006), was careful to assign religious attributes to each of the sub-divisions of the first half of the century, thereby laying the foundations for the secularizing climax which he revealed in the 1960s. Edwardian Britain, for example, he portrayed as “the faith society,” an image not entirely substantiated by the latest statistical research, which found elements of sacralisation and secularization co-existing.  

The First World War, according to Brown, left a religious balance-sheet full of contradiction, although he himself tends to side with the optimists, claiming that “popular Christian faith still retained resilience,” and that the War had mainly resulted in “a crisis of authority,” of waning deference to churches and clergy.  

More detailed research has uncovered a mixed picture, church attendance rising briefly at the start of the war but falling away thereafter in the Protestant tradition, accelerating a pre-existing trend, which was not reversed after 1918; and church membership declining in the Anglican and mainstream Free Churches, albeit not for other denominations and faiths, but temporarily reviving after the War (unlike non-member adherents and Sunday scholars, whose reduction was more continuous).  

For Brown the inter-war years witnessed “Christian culture in confusion” and “the mellowing of religion from puritan enforcer to liberal comfy sofa.” It became “relaxing, unpretentious and less demanding on the user,” in the sense of being less doctrinaire, but there was no significant or sustained statistical decline in religious performance measures, and “little changed in most people’s religious practice.” At the same time, “the emphasis of culture was shifted quite markedly towards moral

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9) Brown, Religion and Society (see above, n. 2), pp. 88–115.
The short- and medium-term religious consequences of the Second World War are more cursorily discussed by Brown, and more inconclusively, but substantial continuity with pre-war popular religion has certainly been demonstrated by Stephen Parker’s qualitative study of wartime Birmingham and Clive Field’s quantitative appraisal of the national scene.\(^{12}\)

**Inter-War Britain**

The inter-war years, 1918–1939, decidedly had the potential to impact Britain’s secularization trajectory. Any number of external events could have moved emphasis away from faith and toward de-Christianization, at least of Protestantism (Catholicism continued to grow, thanks to a combination of demographic circumstances). These latent negative influences included: the scarring legacy of the First World War, to whose mast organized religion (it appeared to many) had nailed its colours too enthusiastically; industrial unrest (most church leaders opposed the General Strike), economic depression, and mass unemployment; new concepts of womanhood, easier access to contraception, and liberalization of divorce, which challenged traditional Christian social thought and morality; growth in transport and leisure opportunities, not least in car ownership, cinema, radio, games, and gambling, which undermined Sabbatarianism; rising international tensions, leading ultimately to the Second World War; the seeming preoccupation of many mainstream denominations with “internal” issues of theology, ecclesiology, liturgy, and ecumenism; and the advance of alternative belief systems such as Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Communism. On the surface, faced with such challenges, perhaps only the long-standing association between Protestantism and national character could act as a brake on secularizing forces.\(^{13}\)

Despite this potential significance of the inter-war years for the study of secularization in Britain, the numerous general social historians of the period have almost entirely ignored religious developments, McKibbin being an honourable exception, and concluding that: “By the standards of many European countries

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or the United States England was a ‘dechristianized’ country.”  

Ecclesiastical historians have naturally taken more notice, with several useful wide-ranging surveys of inter-war religion, albeit not necessarily majoring on the secularization issue nor the measurement of religiosity. More specialist theses, monographs, and articles, excellent though they may be, have often focused on denominational concerns, while even Green’s *Passing of Protestant England*, which purports to address secularization, fails to do so systematically, the book being in effect a compilation of essays. Recent rejection of inter-war secularization by Ben Edwards is based on the vehemence of Christian responses to the Spanish Civil War and to the 1938 International Congress of the World Union of Free-thinkers. At the local level, oral historians have begun to illuminate many facets of inter-war popular religion, but their evidence base is qualitative and, deriving from an entirely non-random group of early twentieth-century survivors, not necessarily representative. Equally, localized instances of revival in the early 1920s could hardly be said to constitute an evangelistic summer.

For all these reasons, it therefore seems opportune to reassess the importance of the inter-war period to Britain’s secularization history. Using primarily quantitative data, disaggregated wherever possible by three broad faith groupings

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(Anglican, Roman Catholic, and other Christian), we shall be seeking preliminary answers to two fundamental questions that help delineate the religious character of a society at the level of institutional belonging. These are: how many people in the 1920s and 1930s still went to church, and how many could be regarded as members or adherents of a Christian denomination? These span three of the four areas which Brown appears to regard as crucial in investigating “religious change”: church attendance, church membership, and religious identification. The fourth area—religious belief—is not easily susceptible to statistical measurement during our period, in the days before opinion polls. Neither is the phenomenon of “diffusive Christianity,” a term popularized (but not coined) by Jeffrey Cox, and describing how faith can permeate society in (often intangible) ways beyond measures of institutional religion.

2. Churchgoing

Contemporary Assessments

Almost without exception, contemporaries were convinced that church attendance in Britain declined substantially during the inter-war years. This was certainly the view of leading clergy, and a few examples from the late 1920s will suffice. “To-day many families are living recklessly on spiritual and moral capital that has been slowly accumulated through the centuries,” the vicar of Barking lamented in 1928, noting particularly the declension in Sunday morning congregations. For a Presbyterian minister, writing in 1929, “it may be taken to be beyond discussion that within the last twenty years there has been a considerable decline in the attendance at public worship. So much is this realized by denominational authorities that a recent proposal for a further census was strongly deprecated on the ground that it would only prove gravely discouraging.” “Church-going has simply dropped out of fashion,” the vicar of Partington proclaimed in 1930, with the rate of decrease “very much accelerated” since the end of the First World War. Foreign visitors were also struck by the phenomenon, one Frenchman remarking: “It is generally admitted that a certain decadence has manifested itself in the churches since 1914. There has been a falling off in attendance at divine service, and the observance of Sunday as a day of rest is less strict.”

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19) Brown, Religion and the Demographic Revolution (see above, n. 3), pp. 71–126.
German put it more simply: “Churchgoing has ceased to be the normal national habit.”²⁴ Social scientists agreed. Thus, for Henry Mess, writing at the end of our period, “religious observances are neglected to-day by the majority of the population. It is doubtful whether more than one quarter of the adults of this country are attached, even loosely, to one or other of the denominations.”²⁵ Such contemporary assessments have clearly conditioned the judgments of present-day historians, who have little doubt that the inter-war years witnessed a slump in churchgoing, particularly during the 1930s.²⁶

**Churchgoing in London**

Unfortunately, documenting what happened to church attendance between the wars is far from easy. There were no national censuses of churchgoing between 1851 and 1979, and even the local censuses which occurred in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras became a rarity. In particular, there was no replication of the religious censuses of London undertaken by the *British Weekly* in 1886–1887 and the *Daily News* in 1902–1903. The nearest surrogate was a survey conducted by Arthur Black, a prominent Baptist layman, in 1927–1928. Visits to more than 180 Protestant churches in working-class areas of twelve industrial London boroughs revealed that attendances on Sunday had declined by 63.9 percent since 1902–1903, 58.4 percent in the Church of England and 66.6 percent with the Free Churches.²⁷ More in-depth investigation of two districts, one now believed to be a poor parliamentary division of the borough of Battersea and the other the suburban area of Putney and Roehampton in the borough of Wandsworth, broadly confirmed the picture. In the former congregations at morning and evening services had decreased by 56.9 percent overall during the previous quarter-century, and by 74.8 percent in the mainstream Free Churches (although even the Roman Catholics experienced a drop of 8.4 percent), and amounted to just 6.8 percent of the population in 1927–1928. In the latter the fall in churchgoing since 1902–1903 had been less steep, partly due to growth among Catholics and the newer Protestant sects, but it was still a substantial 25.5 percent (and 44.3 percent for traditional Nonconformist denominations), with attendances equivalent to 11.8 percent of the inhabitants in 1927–1928. Black

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concluded that “London is becoming paganised in its disregard of the outward corporate forms of religion.”

Other metropolitan evidence also bears Black out. South of the River Thames clergy visitation returns for the Diocese of Southwark pointed to a significant post-war fall in Anglican church attendance, and by nearly one-fifth in the poorest districts between 1924 and 1929. In Bermondsey alone the Anglican decline was 23.2 percent over this quinquennium, with average attendances in 1929 standing at 3.5 percent of the population; Roman Catholics were also struggling to maintain their Mass attendance in the borough by the 1930s. To the north, a survey of the working-class borough of Bethnal Green in 1925–1926 discovered “an almost entire absence of desire for religion,” with just one in 50 having any close connection with the churches, and only “a smattering ... who still come to church once a day.” Neither did it prove easy for the churches to establish themselves as a major force on the new and mainly working-class housing estates being developed by London County Council between the wars. On the Becontree estate in 1932 attendance at Sunday services was reckoned to be 4,500 adults (or 9 percent of those aged 18 and over), less than one-half the accommodation available for worship. On the Watling estate in 1937 it was estimated that no more than 8–10 percent of adults were in regular contact with the churches.

Outside London something approximating a census of churchgoing was undertaken in seven English towns (Table 1), although the methodologies, weather conditions, and nature and size of the communities varied. Relative to population, attendance rates fluctuated between 13.5 percent in Slough in 1938 to 29.3 percent in Ipswich in 1923, the latter count occurring two years after a large-scale mission. However, churchgoing fell substantially in Ipswich over the next fifteen


years, to stand at 17.4 percent in 1938. This was symptomatic of a generally downward trend. In York, for example, adult congregations declined from 35.5 percent of the adult population in 1901 to 17.7 percent in 1935, while for Anglicans alone congregants in the whole population fell from 11.1 percent in 1912 to 8.6 percent in 1931 to 8.2 percent in 1935 to 4.2 percent in 1947. The city’s incumbents in 1931 complained of “much modern paganism together with ignorance and indifference to spiritual things,” resulting in many parishioners neglecting regular worship, albeit they seemed “thoroughly well disposed to both Church and Clergy.” Starting from a lower base, it was a similar story for the Church of England in Kingston-upon-Hull, where congregants fell from 5.0 percent in 1912 to 3.9 percent in 1931 to 1.7 percent in 1947. The Anglican position in South Shields appears to have been steadier between 1928 and 1936, although the clergy visitation returns here are somewhat ambiguous. In Liverpool in the early 1930s it was estimated that 15–20 percent of the inhabitants went to some place of worship, down from 22 percent in 1912, Anglican and Free Church reductions over the two decades having been offset by Roman Catholic growth. Incomplete data for Bolton point to a maximum of 22,000 worshippers on an average Sunday in 1937 or about one-eighth of the population, well below the proportion in 1881 (35.3 percent); once again, it was only a large Catholic presence of 12,000 in this industrial town which prevented numbers from being much lower. The position in urban Wales and Scotland is unclear, apart from a small-scale survey of students enrolled in workers’ educational classes at Glasgow University in the early 1930s, which revealed that one-third went to church less regularly than their parents. Otherwise, we are dependent upon oral history.

33) Gill, “Empty” Church (see above, n. 28), pp. 248–249.
Table 1. Church attendance at principal morning and evening services as a proportion of population in inter-war English provincial towns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Anglican attendance</th>
<th>Free Church attendance</th>
<th>Roman Catholic attendance</th>
<th>Total attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hertford</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>11,600</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>81,400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>92,500</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maidstone</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>39,700</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slough</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shields</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallsend</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>85,100</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


NOTE: All figures relate to total population except for South Shields and Wallsend which relate to the population aged 14 and over.

Churchgoing in the countryside

Churchgoing in the countryside had traditionally run at higher levels than in towns and cities, but the gap had narrowed considerably by the inter-war period. This was widely commented upon by contemporaries, one of them lamenting: “if a village were deserted at the hour of divine service, it would be because the villagers were in bed, or away on a ‘chara [banc]’ trip; they would certainly not be in church ...”41 Anglican attendances seem to have been especially badly affected,

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public perceptions of the Church in some rural areas not being helped by the bitter wars over tithe rent-charges which were fought in the 1920s and early 1930s. Clergy visitation returns from some more rural dioceses illustrate the challenges. In the Diocese of Oxford, for instance, as early as 1921 the majority of incumbents complained that their congregations were shrinking, particularly as a consequence of “the growing tendency to turn Sunday into a weekly Bank Holiday” (Littlewick) and of the demoralizing influence of returning ex-servicemen, who seldom or never worshipped themselves and whose “example seems to have worked like leaven of evil amongst the elder boys & younger men” (Cropredy). Occasionally, ministers attempted to quantify the scale of the problem. Thus, at Warfield (Berkshire) in 1928 at least one-half of adult parishioners never attended any place of worship, while at Chalgrove with Berrick Salome (Oxon) just 36.4 percent were claimed as regular churchgoers or chapel-goers. Although the Bishop of Oxford felt the corner had been turned by 1934, examination of the clergy returns for that year demonstrates that such limited improvement as there was affected a minority of parishes and mostly manifested itself in increased confirmands and communicants, rather than ordinary worshippers.

Similar messages are found in the Diocese of Durham visitation returns. As early as 1928 more than two-thirds of incumbents were bemoaning the negative impact on congregations of the secular Sunday habit and greater access to public and private transport. By 1936 a significant minority sensed some recovery, but the actual proportion of parishioners attending public worship, while hugely erratic (2–90 percent, reflecting the vague question-wording), fell below 30 percent in four-fifths of places. In market towns such as Chester-le-Street and Greenside average congregations for all denominations were down to 11.1 and 12.8 percent respectively; but some rural parishes were also struggling, such as Hart, where the church attracted a mere 4 percent of parishioners as worshippers, albeit 30 percent in the actual village in which it was situated. In the Diocese of

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42) Carol Twinch, Tithe War, 1918–1939 (Norwich, 2001).
Chelmsford in 1930 it was considered that churchgoing had been fairly stable in rural areas during the previous five years, in contrast to the towns where the picture was less consistent, although it was simultaneously claimed that the charabanc had made serious inroads on Sunday attendance in the former. As one minister put it, “the people are intoxicated with petrol.”\(^45\) In the Diocese of Chichester it was estimated in 1937 that 5 percent of parishioners overall frequented one or other of the Anglican services on Sunday, but that this rose to around 10 percent, sometimes more, in country districts.\(^46\) However, the only systematic survey of the rural situation was in West Kesteven, Lincolnshire in 1938, where, in a sample of 47 communities, one-quarter of the inhabitants of small villages attended church or chapel every Sunday, compared with one-fifth in the medium or large villages.\(^47\)

**Effects of Sunday Cinema and Sunday Radio Broadcasts**

Among the litany of explanations offered by clergy for declining church attendance, whether in town or countryside, two particularly stand out: Sunday cinema and Sunday radio broadcasts of religious services. Sunday cinema performances were felt to have had a dramatic negative impact, particularly on evening congregations.\(^48\) Sunday cinema shows were not expressly prohibited by the Cinematograph Act 1909, and they were already taking place before 1914, especially in resorts. But their *de facto* or actual licensing by local authorities spread markedly from the 1920s, first in London and then elsewhere, as did determined opposition to them from the Lord’s Day Observance Society as a breach of the Sunday Observance Act 1780. A test case brought in the King’s Bench Division in 1930, with the judgment that Sunday cinema was indeed illegal, and thereby inciting a spate of prosecutions, forced successive Governments to rush through the Sunday Performances (Temporary Regulation) Act 1931 and the Sunday Entertainments Act 1932, the latter permitting cinemas to open on Sundays, subject to a form of local option in areas where they had not opened previously and to a proportion of the day’s takings going to charity. These were the only two pieces

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of legislation between the wars which weakened Sunday regulation in England and Wales, the other new statutes generally strengthening it, including on Sunday trading. Preceded by often acrimonious campaigns, numerous local polls of ratepayers followed from November 1932, not all of which resulted in endorsement of Sunday opening, Bournemouth, Oldham, and Rochdale being amongst the first to reject Sunday cinemas. Nevertheless, a momentum in favour of them slowly built up, including support from some prominent clergy (such as the Bishop of Croydon, who was President of the Sunday Films Association). By 1934 nearly all cinemas in London opened on Sundays and over one-quarter of those in England as a whole, and it was speculated that the number of Sunday cinema-goers already exceeded churchgoers (by 1,800,000 to 1,500,000). On the eve of the Second World War, one-third of cinemas in England were open on Sundays. Wales and Scotland were more resistant. In the interests of wartime morale, an Order in Council in December 1939 set aside the provisions of the 1932 Act and enabled local authorities easily to obtain Sunday cinema licensing powers from the local military authority.

If Sunday cinema seemed a genuine rival to evening public worship between the wars, contemporary opinion was less clear-cut about the consequences of the Sunday radio religious services from the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.), which commenced in 1924. John Reith, founder and first director-general of the B.B.C., was supremely confident that such broadcast services would not undermine churchgoing, but would rather exercise a religious influence over those who could not or otherwise would not frequent public worship and perhaps even ultimately rejuvenate religious practice; “I think it absurd to suggest that churchgoers will surrender their habits of attendance for what is obviously a poor substitute.” To make doubly sure, he had agreed with the Central Religious Advisory Committee at the outset that services should not be broadcast at the same time as conventional worship was taking place, and

49) Wigley, Rise (see above, n. 26), pp. 207–208.
50) Details of local polls may be found in Kew, The National Archives, HO 45/14857–14858, 15247–15249, 15817–15829, 18059–18063.
52) News Chronicle, 15 February 1940.
this “gentleman’s agreement” held for many years in England (although it never applied in Wales or Scotland). Indeed, for a long time no radio programmes of any sort, whether religious or secular, were broadcast during the traditional hours of Protestant morning public worship.

However, many diocesan clergy were not so sure that the radio was not a competitor, and from the late 1920s complaints began to multiply about the leakage from the pews to the wireless. Examples can be found in the Dioceses of Durham, Oxford, Winchester, and St Asaph, broadcast services being condemned for inculcating “a wrong conception of worship” and for turning “twicers” into “oncers,” with some listeners to such services even giving their religious profession as—in the words of the Punch cartoon—“I’m a wireless.”\(^{55}\) An assessment in the third of these dioceses in 1939, while acknowledging some benefits for the aged and infirm, concluded that “the ‘wireless’ offers a vague sense of religion, with a minimum of accompanying duties, which is quite satisfying to the English dislike of definite principles,” and it warned that “once the habit is learnt of this proxy-way of worship, the whole fellowship of Christian worship is torpedoed ...”\(^{56}\) Concerns seem to have particularly emanated from country rather than urban districts, a point underlined by The Times in 1931: “many incumbents of scattered rural parishes ... find that people are less ready to tramp long distances through darkness and mire in order to attend Evensong at their parish church when the pressing of a knob enables them to hear a service in their own cottage or farmhouse.”\(^{57}\) Another commentator denounced broadcast services as “an easy and lazy substitute for churchgoing,”\(^{58}\) while other critics roguishly intimated that their attraction had been augmented by the absence of a collection.\(^{59}\)

Notwithstanding these fears, such empirical evidence on the topic as became available in the 1930s did not convincingly demonstrate that broadcast services were a major cause of churchgoing decline. A review by a joint committee of the Convocation of Canterbury (chaired by the Bishop of Ely) in 1931, set up after vocal concerns in its Lower House in 1930 about their adverse effects on


\(^{56}\) Church in Country Parishes (see above, n. 41), pp. 54–58.

\(^{57}\) The Times, 24 January 1931.

\(^{58}\) Frank Ballard, Twentieth-Century Christianity (Edinburgh, 1927), p. 247.

\(^{59}\) William Sangster, Methodism can be Born Again (London, 1938), pp. 22–23.
public worship, determined that they were less a threat to the Church than a potential source of recruitment.\textsuperscript{60} A survey for the B.B.C. in a working-class district of east Bristol in 1938–1939 likewise concluded that broadcast services were not a rival to organized religion, in the sense that people had discontinued the habit of public worship as a result of listening in. But it did note that, in bad weather, some elderly or infirm people stayed at home to tune in who would otherwise have gone to church, and it found no indication that anybody had become a churchgoer simply as a result of listening to a service on the radio.\textsuperscript{61} The B.B.C.’s own audience research in 1939, conducted among 4,000 “keen listeners” between December 1938 and April 1939, indicated that it was the working classes, who were generally not churchgoers, who disproportionately listened to broadcast (as opposed to studio-based) religious services. This was especially so on Sunday mornings, when the middle classes were considered more likely to be in the pew.\textsuperscript{62} However, the sample was not necessarily representative of all listeners, and the first proper estimates of the adult radio audience in 1940 revealed that no more than 10.2 percent tuned in for Sunday morning and 11.2 percent for Sunday evening services.\textsuperscript{63} On the other hand, one-quarter of the British Institute of Public Opinion (B.I.P.O.’s) interviewees in February 1938 admitted to staying away from church because they could hear a service on the radio.\textsuperscript{64} The considered opinion of a secondary historian is that there is no proof that broadcast services either accelerated the decline in inter-war churchgoing or rekindled enthusiasm for it among the lapsed; but that they may have slowed down the decrease in religious conviction and helped to keep residual Christian belief and morality alive.\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[60] Joint Committee of the Convocation of Canterbury, \textit{The Religious Value of Broadcast Services} (London, 1931); Cooper, Religious Broadcasting (see above, n. 53), pp. 160–161; Bailey, ‘He Who has Ears …’ (see above, n. 53), 11–12.
\item[62] Cooper, Religious Broadcasting (see above, n. 53), p. 247; Wolfe, \textit{Churches} (see above, n. 53), pp. 127–129.
\item[65] Cooper, Religious Broadcasting (see above, n. 53), pp. 232–235.
\end{footnotes}
Frequency and Seasonality of Churchgoing

Perhaps the greatest effects of Sunday cinema and radio services may have been less in reducing the absolute numbers of churchgoers than in curtailing the frequency of their attendance, a phenomenon commented upon more generally by Brown.66 “Twicing,” the practice of going to more than one service each Sunday, was certainly diminishing among Protestants (it had never been greatly followed by Catholics), with possibly no more than 10–15 percent of total Sunday congregations in the 1930s being comprised of “twicers.”67 The evening service seems to have been especially adversely affected by the trend.

Irregularity—worshipping on a less than weekly basis—was also an issue, exemplified by a B.I.P.O. poll in January 1939 in which 27 percent of respondents claimed to attend church “regularly” (not defined), 41 percent “occasionally,” 17 percent just for rites of passage, and only 15 percent never.68 The pattern disproportionately impacted the Church of England, as can be seen in Walford’s hypothetical four-layered model of Anglican allegiance in inter-war suburban Middlesex, with, in one church, a projected mean of 9.5 attendances per worshipper per annum, ranging from each week to once a year.69 Further illustrations come from the Diocese of Durham clergy visitation returns in 1936, with weekly churchgoers always in a minority of those who worshipped at some stage. At Dipton, for example, four times as many attended throughout the year as were present on any particular Sunday, while in two Darlington parishes the breakdown was 10 percent regularly, 7 percent every two to three months, and 11 percent annually.70 Take-up of rites of passage was even more widespread than attendance at ordinary or festival services. At least nine in ten inter-war new-borns were baptised into a Christian denomination, albeit there was some decline in the proportion of infant baptisms per 1,000 live births in the Church of England, from a high of 717 in 1927 to 671 in 1939.71 A majority of mothers were also “churched” after

66) Brown, Death (see above, n. 2), pp. 165–166 and Religion and the Demographic Revolution (see above, n. 3), p. 87.
68) News Chronicle, 7 February 1939; What Britain Thinks (London, [1939]), p. 23; Cantril, Public Opinion (see above, n. 64), p. 699; Gallup, Gallup International (see above, n. 64), 1:13.
69) Walford, Growth (see above, n. 28), pp. 348–367.
childbirth (in London, Berkshire, and Staffordshire the number of “churchings” was equivalent to two-thirds of baptisms). A mean of 74.8 percent of marriages in England and Wales and 85.8 percent in Scotland were solemnized according to religious rites in four specimen years (1919, 1924, 1929, 1934, although by the last of these the English and Welsh figure had fallen to 71.6 percent), and virtually every funeral was conducted by a minister of religion. Funerals would be very well frequented, and sometimes the effect took a while to wear off; as the incumbent of Aycliffe noted in 1936: “Attendance good after a death in the family. Otherwise spasmodic.” One-off state occasions, such as the passing of George V and the Coronation of George VI, were also said to have made people “spring to attention” in terms of churchgoing.

Closely associated with irregularity was seasonality of worship, the summer trough (causally linked with longer hours of daylight and better weather, and the excursions and outdoor pursuits they enabled) being unanimously complained of by contemporaries. “On the Sunday before an August Bank Holiday, you may be sure of finding the tide at its ebb in Hull churches and chapels,” a local journalist observed in 1926. At York in 1931 “the neglect of the Lord’s Day is particularly bad in the summer months when even good people cease to come.” From East Boldon in 1932 came the lament: “Whole families are never seen at church during the six months (Apr. to Sept.) the car licence is taken out.” At Slough in 1938 Protestant summer congregations were 15.7 percent lower than during the winter months, and in Hertford in 1937 their Sunday school attendance dropped by at least one-quarter in the summer.

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74) *C.&C.* (see above, n. 63), pp. 224, 227–228.
75) Power, *Social Structure* (see above, n. 67), p. 408; Pickering, ‘Persistence’ (see above, n. 71), 68–69.
76) D.U.L., DDR/EV/RET/22 (see above, n. 36), p. 785.
77) *Daily Mail*, 4 August 1926.
80) Bevington et al., *Leisure* (see above, n. 47), p. 96.
Part of the difficulty was that most “special” services in the Church’s calendar, which could (but not invariably) tend to maximize churchgoing, were concentrated during the autumn, winter, and spring. The Harvest Festival was particularly appealing, and not just in the countryside; in London it was “the great day in the East End. Churches are crowded with costers in their ‘pearlies’ and their wives in very full dress.”

Armistice was a new commemoration of the inter-war years, albeit Armistice Day (on 11 November itself) was the principal (and mainly civic) ritual until 1938, rather than Remembrance Sunday, which did not formally assume the dominant national role until 1946. Although religious leaders often claimed good congregations on Remembrance Sunday, particularly in 1923 when it coincided with Armistice Day, a detailed study of three Birmingham Anglican churches in the 1920s and 1930s suggested only marginal improvement on an average Sunday.

As for Christmas, while attendances throughout Advent were probably reasonable, the same seems not to have been the case for Christmas Day, unless it happened to fall on a Sunday. Afternoon and evening services on Christmas Day, which had been common before the First World War, were increasingly given up for morning only ones between the wars, while at Bolton in 1937 Christmas Day (a Saturday that year) worshippers were computed as a maximum 4.2 percent of the population, only one-third of the level on a normal Sunday.

New Year’s Eve services seem to have been far more popular, attracting the largest congregations of the year in some churches, 1,100 at St Peter’s, Monkwearmouth in 1936 against the usual Anglican Sunday attendance of 300.

Demographics of Churchgoing

Seasonality was not the only variation in churchgoing. It was also characterized by differential participation in terms of key demographics, much of it of long standing. Women, for example, still had a far greater propensity to worship than men, even though recalled childhood attendance fell by around one-third between the pre-1904 female birth cohort and that for 1924–1934. In the 1939

85) SxMOA 1/5/14/B2 (see above, n. 38), p. 81.
86) D.U.L., DDR/EV/RET/22 (see above, n. 36), p. 605.
B.I.P.O. survey 31 percent of women versus 23 percent of men claimed to be regular attenders, while 23 and 40 percent respectively never went to church or only for a rite of passage. A similar pattern had emerged in a survey of adult students in the London area in 1936, albeit even fewer males (10.5 percent) admitted to being regular worshippers, compared with 53.0 percent who frequented the cinema regularly and 24.0 percent who indulged in “convivial drinking” on a regular basis. Censuses of adult churchgoers in inter-war Hertford, South Shields, Wallsend, and York revealed 60.2 percent were women, 64.5 percent in the Church of England, 57.3 percent in the Free Churches, and 60.1 percent in the Roman Catholic Church. The Anglican and Nonconformist position was analogous in Liverpool in 1930–1931, where a sample survey was undertaken, but, at 54.3 percent, the Catholic proportion was lower in this stronghold of the faith, albeit still slightly more than the 52.6 percent share of females in the city’s population. The preponderance of women was equally manifest in the formal membership of the inter-war churches, standing at 56.7 percent for Anglican confirmations, and at 70.1 percent of Baptist members and 67.3 percent of Congregational members. Among the Free Churches the Quakers seem to have had the smallest number of female members, 56.1 percent in 1935 and 1940. Naturally, some contemporaries were at pains to point out that such facts did not necessarily mean that males could be assumed to be irreligious. “The men may not often come to church, but they believe in a God and in future life, and in extremity they pray.” However, other indicators revealed equivalent disparities between the sexes. Thus, a B.I.P.O. poll in March 1939 found that, whereas 55 percent of women believed in life after death, this was true of only 43 percent of men.

Age variations are less straightforward to describe. Sunday schools (discussed later) were the main focus of Protestant ministry among children and young people, and therefore churchgoing statistics undercount the presence of children, who, in 1935, constituted just over one-fifth of congregants in Hertford and York. Notwithstanding, adolescents were often seen as better attenders than adults, as

88) Unpublished table in author’s possession.
90) Sources as Table 1.
93) Baptist and Congregational figures calculated from 51 published and unpublished membership lists for English chapels in 1918–1940, covering 14,480 members.
95) *Rural Life* (see above, n. 41), p. 67.
96) *News Chronicle*, 27 April 1939.
at South Shields and Wallsend in 1928, and, in control groups of boys aged 11–16 in 1938–1939, 38.8 percent in London and 51.3 percent in six provincial towns regularly frequented church or Sunday school, with only 32.7 and 19.8 percent respectively never having done so. However, the religious practice of youth apparently fell away sharply on leaving school, exemplified in Sheffield in the late 1920s where 63 percent of boys and 54 percent of girls had largely never gone to church or Sunday school during the three years since they left primary school in 1927, with no more than one-fifth still attending.

Adult worshippers were mainly profiled by age in Liverpool in 1930–1931 (a sample survey), York in 1935 (a census of attendance), and Great Britain in 1939 (an opinion poll). The Liverpool data are complicated by the fact that the Anglican and Free Church returns were confined to evening services, which may partially explain the poor representation of worshippers aged 30–59 (41.6 percent among the Anglicans and 43.5 percent for Nonconformists, against 59.4 percent in the city’s population); Catholics, by contrast, had a more normal age distribution. Moreover, both the Anglican and Free Churches in Liverpool had an above-average proportion of worshippers aged 60 and over, and twice that for the Catholics. A bias towards the oldest cohort was also evident in York; overall, 75.7 percent of attendants here were aged 17–49 and 24.3 percent 50 and over, but the latter figure was 26.8 percent in the Church of England, 25.1 percent in the Free Churches, and only 18.5 percent in the Catholic Church.

Protestant observers certainly feared their flocks were getting older; as one new incumbent remarked in 1927: “I have but one criticism to make, and that is, that in fifteen years they will all be dead.” The B.I.P.O. poll in 1939 seemed to bear this out, with regular churchgoing being reported by 23 percent of those aged 21–49 but by 36 percent of the over-50s (and non-attendance or participation solely in the rites of passage falling from 39 percent of interviewees aged 21–29 to 31 percent among the over-50s).

The Liverpool, York, and B.I.P.O. sources also provide clues about the relationship of churchgoing with social class, which McKibbin has seen as a partial explanation for assumed higher levels of religious practice in southern than...
northern England. Whereas three-quarters of Liverpool’s residents were manual workers, this was true of only 51.0 percent of Anglican and 48.7 percent of Free Church worshippers in 1930–1931, in striking contrast to 85.5 percent among Catholics. Furthermore, within the manual grouping, Anglicans and Nonconformists were disproportionately skilled and Catholics unskilled manuals. The Free Churches even had a stronger following among the middle class than the Church of England. Their relatively affluent base was also confirmed by contemporary research in Hertford, and by subsequent analysis of Methodist marriage registers for Lincoln and Lancaster/Preston in the 1920s, which revealed that 72.3 percent of all Methodist support derived from lower middle class and skilled occupations, and even 65.9 percent in Primitive Methodism (with its historically proletarian reputation).

In Sheffield post-school-leaving attendance at church or Sunday school by 14–18-year-olds in 1930–1931 was found to correlate very strongly with the economic circumstances of the family, especially for boys; for example, where those circumstances were good, 51.2 percent of boys attended, but where they were very poor it was only 23.6 percent. The methodology employed by the York census in 1935 was sub-optimal in this regard, enumerators being asked to judge whether attenders belonged (actually or potentially) to the servant-keeping class. With the exception of Salvation Army worshippers, all churchgoers (including Catholics) were found to be within the range of servant-keeping in the population as a whole. B.I.P.O. in 1939 divided its sample into three economic (income) groups, with claimed regular churchgoing peaking at 34 percent in the higher group, falling to 27 percent in the middle group, and 24 percent in the lower. Inversely, the lower group contained the most people (37 percent) who never attended worship or only for rites of passage, while the higher group had the fewest (30 percent).

Although the social class differential in churchgoing had a long pre-history, it may have been accentuated in the inter-war period by the proportionately greater decreases in Sunday evening than morning congregations, the former traditionally having been the more socially democratic. The mass unemployment which characterized these years was also thought by some to be a factor. In the

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103) McKibbin, Classes (see above, n. 14), pp. 274–275.
Diocese of Durham in 1928 two-thirds of clergy reported that unemployment had negatively impacted the spiritual life of their parishes, largely through demoralization, albeit several instances were noted of absenteeism from worship on the grounds of want of suitable clothes—an excuse for non-churchgoing more familiar in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contexts. However, a more systematic study of unemployment in the London borough of Greenwich in 1931 concluded that it had not precipitated any collapse in public worship, most workers who attended church being unaffected by unemployment, which was at its longest and most acute among unskilled workers, who formed only a very small minority of most congregations. This was corroborated at Liverpool in 1930–1931, where the unemployment rate for Anglican and Free Church attenders was half the city-wide average, with Catholics about average.

3. Church Membership and Affiliation

Previous Estimates of Church Membership

Churchgoing’s advantage is that it was a universal measure, recognized by all Christian denominations at that time as a valid and necessary public expression of religious commitment (even if not all “ordinary” Christians viewed it in that light). The same consistency does not exist for church membership, somewhat misleadingly lumped together with adherence by Brown as a “basically passive” indicator. Here varying criteria were applied, making it difficult to aggregate and compare national statistical series for the three principal Christian groupings. A comprehensive reappraisal of the data follows, but first it is worth noting the various estimates of religious allegiance which have already been produced by contemporaries and later historians.

In Scotland at the very start of our period it was claimed that 63 percent of adults were attached to some Church. In England and Wales the standard social conspectus of the time confined itself to listing only those religious bodies which had more than 50,000 members, and was thus incomplete, its authors adding dismissively: “The Sunday aspect of England hardly suggests that the Churches have still the hold that the figures claim.” A self-selecting reader-
ship survey of a politically Liberal newspaper, *The Daily News*, in 1926 found that 63.2 percent of respondents stated they were active members of some Church.\(^{115}\) B.I.P.O.’s poll of a more representative sample of British adults in 1937 reported that 78 percent regarded themselves as church members.\(^{116}\) Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert, and Lee Horsley computed in 1977 that the “membership” of the major British Churches rose from 8,029,000 in 1918 to 8,718,000 in 1939, with a peak of 8,793,000 in 1935 (but eight years earlier for Protestants alone)\(^{117}\). These figures compared with a national population of 44,795,000 in 1931, suggesting that fewer than one in five were church members, although this was an artificially low proportion, given that Protestant membership mostly corresponded to adulthood. The same consideration should be borne in mind in examining Brown’s estimates. He calculated that church membership expressed as a percentage of the British population reached its high-point (of 19.3) in 1910, falling to 19.1 in 1920, recovering to 19.2 in 1930, before falling again to 18.1 in 1940.\(^{118}\) For Scotland Brown also quantified church adherence, including Sunday schools, originally suggesting that (at a minimum) this was about 49 percent of the population in 1920, remaining steady until the losses from the Presbyterian reunion of 1929, but then, after a brief recovery in 1931–1933, declining to 44 percent in 1939.\(^{119}\) He has since revised these figures upwards, seemingly to exceed 50 percent throughout the whole inter-war period.\(^{120}\) Brierley, apparently referring to the United Kingdom, argued that church membership peaked in 1930 in absolute terms (at 10,600,000 members) but fell relative to population after 1900, standing at just over one-quarter by 1940.\(^{121}\)

Membership of the Anglican and Catholic Churches

This broad-brush picture can be refined by examining the statistics for individual denominations. The Church of England’s principal membership measure was the electoral roll. This was first introduced in 1924, when it contained

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\(^{116}\) Cantril, *Public Opinion* (see above, n. 64), p. 699; Gallup, *Gallup International* (see above, n. 64), 1:3.  
\(^{117}\) C. & C. (see above, n. 63), p. 31. Communicant data were used for Episcopalians, membership, or communicants for the five principal Free Churches, and estimated population for Roman Catholics.  
\(^{118}\) Brown, *Death* (see above, n. 2), p. 164.  
\(^{119}\) Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland* (see above, n. 15), pp. 61–66, 147.  
\(^{120}\) Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution* (see above, n. 3), p. 90.  
3,537,000 names, grew to 3,656,000 in 1930 and then reduced to 3,390,000 in 1939. Relative to English adults aged 18 and over, electoral roll membership peaked at 15.2 percent in 1927, falling to 11.7 percent in 1939. These rolls were revised quinquennially and thus were probably less “dynamic” than the traditional yardstick of Anglican belonging, Easter communicants, originating in the canons of 1604. Total Easter communicants (Easter Day plus Easter week) in England stood at 2,317,000 in 1922 (equivalent to 8.9 percent of adults aged 15 and over), climbed to 2,554,000 in 1927 (9.3 percent), and then drifted downwards to 2,416,000 (7.8 percent) in 1939. However, as Gill has argued, marked diachronic and synchronic fluctuations in the relationship between general church attendance and Easter communicants considerably undermine confidence in use of the latter as a longitudinal indicator of Anglican conformity. Unfortunately, Easter Day communicants were the only membership measure employed by the newly-disestablished Church in Wales, the numbers generally rising throughout the inter-war years, from 152,000 in 1918 to 194,000 in 1939. In Scotland, by contrast, the permanent members of the Episcopal Church of Scotland declined after 1921 (when there were 147,000), dropping by 15.3 percent to 125,000 in 1939. The Church’s communicant figures were much steadier, so that the ratio between communicants and permanent members improved; by 1939 members were about double the communicants. Data also exist for confirmands, which serve as a proxy for “new members” in the Anglican communion. In the Church of England the number confirmed represented a very small and gently reducing proportion of the estimated population aged 12–20, falling from a post-war peak of 38.9 per 1,000 in 1923 to 28.1 in 1939.

Membership of the Roman Catholic Church was coterminous with the total “baptised” Catholic population (including children), whether practising or not. This was assessed, and probably often guessed, by parish priests, so the figure’s reliability should not be exaggerated. It probably excludes very nominal and lapsed Catholics who were not known to priests; certainly, there was a big surplus after the Second World War of those self-identifying as Catholics in sample surveys against the Church’s population returns. But, even on the official data, the Catholic community was clearly expanding in Britain between

\[122\) Gill, “Empty” Church (see above, n. 28), pp. 13, 124.
\[123\) Neuss, Facts (see above, n. 71), pp. 59–60; C.&C. (see above, n. 63), pp. 128–129; Williams, Digest (see above, n. 71), 2:257.
the wars, through births, conversions, and migration (especially from Ireland), from 2,466,000 in 1918 to 2,990,000 in 1939. This overall increase of 21.2 percent outstripped the 19.6 percent rise in British population, but it was concentrated in England and Wales (25.7 percent), Scotland recording a much more modest figure of 6.6 percent (albeit still 2.5 percent ahead of Scottish population growth).126

Membership of the Free and Presbyterian Churches

Most Free and other non-Anglican “Protestant” Churches had some form of “membership,” usually associated with the transition from adolescence to adulthood, although the age of eligibility for and criteria of membership varied. Table 2 collates actual figures and estimates of members for each denomination. It will be seen that total non-Anglican Protestant membership in Great Britain rose from 3,740,000 in 1918 to 3,790,000 in 1939, or by 1.3 percent, just one-fifteenth the rate at which the population grew. Moreover, the small net increase owed much to the Scottish Presbyterians and to smaller movements such as Christadelphianism, Christian Science, Elim, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists.127 In England and Wales the five leading Free Churches (Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterian Church of England, Presbyterian Church of Wales) lost ground. They had collectively peaked in 1906 (2,057,000), declined thereafter until 1921 (1,962,000), rose again until 1927 (2,019,000), and then fell back to reach 1,896,000 in 1939. Losses throughout the 1930s became something of an obsession.128 In Scotland the various Presbyterian bodies grew continuously between 1900 and 1925 (apart from a slight dip in 1911–1912), contracted until 1930, expanded until 1934, and then fell to 1939, although their total communicants on the eve of the Second World War were still 4.6 percent above the level at the end of the First World War.129

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126) C.&C. (see above, n. 63), pp. 31, 153.
129) C.&C. (see above, n. 63), pp. 31, 133–134, 143, 150.
Table 2. Actual and estimated membership of non-Anglican Protestant Churches in Great Britain, 1918 and 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>1918</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>% change</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BAPTISTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist Union—England</td>
<td>255,469</td>
<td>241,915</td>
<td>-5.3</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist Union—Wales</td>
<td>124,888</td>
<td>116,813</td>
<td>-6.5</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist Union—Scotland</td>
<td>21,875</td>
<td>22,692</td>
<td>+3.7</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict and Particular Baptists</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>22,500</td>
<td>-6.3</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Baptist Union</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>1,080</td>
<td>-5.3</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>427,372</td>
<td>405,000</td>
<td>-5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONGREGATIONALISTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational Union—England</td>
<td>287,000</td>
<td>259,876</td>
<td>-9.5</td>
<td>Author/C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational Union—Wales</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td>162,691</td>
<td>+1.7</td>
<td>Author/D.W.H.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congregational Union—Scotland</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>39,949</td>
<td>+14.1</td>
<td>Author/C.&amp;C.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>482,000</td>
<td>462,516</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>METHODISTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan Methodist—England</td>
<td>420,388</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan Methodist—Wales</td>
<td>39,011</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan Methodist—Scotland</td>
<td>9,679</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Methodists</td>
<td>9,261</td>
<td>9,722</td>
<td>+5.0</td>
<td>W.A./N.F.C.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan Reform Union</td>
<td>8,367</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>-16.3</td>
<td>W.A./Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>827,475</td>
<td>819,177</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
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<td><strong>PRESBYTERIANS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Church of England</td>
<td>85,551</td>
<td>78,359</td>
<td>-8.4</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Church of Wales</td>
<td>187,834</td>
<td>177,448</td>
<td>-5.5</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church of Scotland</td>
<td>722,750</td>
<td>1,285,011</td>
<td>+77.8</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Free Church of Scotland</td>
<td>523,808</td>
<td>23,328</td>
<td>-95.5</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Church of Scotland</td>
<td>8,192</td>
<td>6,250</td>
<td>-23.7</td>
<td>C.&amp;C./Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland</td>
<td>6,250</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td>-5.6</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Original Secession Church of Scotland</td>
<td>3,561</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>-29.8</td>
<td>C.&amp;C./Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>-19.4</td>
<td>C.&amp;C./Author</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>1,538,876</td>
<td>1,579,546</td>
<td>+2.6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER FREE CHURCHES</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apostolic Church</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>4,050</td>
<td>+125.0</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denomination</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>% change</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies of God</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches of Christ</td>
<td>16,437</td>
<td>15,229</td>
<td>– 7.3</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of the Nazarene</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>1,001</td>
<td>+ 30.0</td>
<td>U.K.C.H./C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countess of Huntingdon's</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>– 52.4</td>
<td>Author/U.K.C.H.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connexion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elim Church</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>+ 1775.0</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellowship of Independent</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Churches</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Free Church of England</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>+ 66.7</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutherans</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>6,450</td>
<td>+ 13.2</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moravian Church</td>
<td>5,646</td>
<td>3,604</td>
<td>– 36.2</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quakers</td>
<td>19,137</td>
<td>19,673</td>
<td>+ 2.8</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed Church of England</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>131,000</td>
<td>127,000</td>
<td>– 3.1</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>279,190</td>
<td>325,207</td>
<td>+ 16.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER NONCONFORMING CHURCHES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Apostolic Church</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>– 68.8</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christadelphians</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>+ 50.0</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Scientists</td>
<td>12,800</td>
<td>44,200</td>
<td>+ 245.3</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>5,945</td>
<td>+ 980.9</td>
<td>U.K.C.H./C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter-day Saints</td>
<td>7,117</td>
<td>6,393</td>
<td>– 10.2</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Church</td>
<td>6,583</td>
<td>5,509</td>
<td>– 16.3</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Day Adventists</td>
<td>3,253</td>
<td>5,966</td>
<td>+ 83.4</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritualists</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>61,600</td>
<td>– 38.4</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theosophical Society</td>
<td>3,946</td>
<td>3,191</td>
<td>– 19.1</td>
<td>C.&amp;C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitarians</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>– 12.0</td>
<td>U.K.C.H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other smaller denominations and</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>+ 100.0</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isolated congregations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>184,549</td>
<td>198,054</td>
<td>+ 7.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>3,739,462</td>
<td>3,789,500</td>
<td>+ 1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**NOTES:** All rounded figures are estimates. Most of the U.K.C.H. data are back-projected, and some seem potentially suspect. The Wesleyan, Primitive, and United Methodist Churches united in 1932. Much of the United Free Church of Scotland amalgamated with the Church of Scotland in 1929. The Free Church of England united with the U.K. branch of the Reformed Episcopal Church in 1927.
Table 3. Aggregate membership turnover in four non-Anglican Protestant Churches in Great Britain, 1918–1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wesleyan/Methodist Churches</th>
<th>Presbyterian Church of England</th>
<th>Presbyterian Church of Wales</th>
<th>Church of Scotland</th>
<th>All four Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GAINS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New/restored members</td>
<td>666,283</td>
<td>106,609</td>
<td>154,442</td>
<td>840,932</td>
<td>1,768,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfers</td>
<td>224,956</td>
<td>42,636</td>
<td>171,032</td>
<td>726,817</td>
<td>1,165,441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>891,239</td>
<td>149,245</td>
<td>325,474</td>
<td>1,567,749</td>
<td>2,933,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOSSES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>191,045</td>
<td>27,493</td>
<td>68,053</td>
<td>338,622</td>
<td>625,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfers</td>
<td>382,458</td>
<td>56,361</td>
<td>173,647</td>
<td>732,874</td>
<td>1,345,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>322,765</td>
<td>73,290</td>
<td>92,938</td>
<td>472,840</td>
<td>961,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>896,268</td>
<td>157,144</td>
<td>334,638</td>
<td>1,544,336</td>
<td>2,932,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NET CHANGE</strong></td>
<td>−5,029</td>
<td>−7,899</td>
<td>−9,164</td>
<td>+23,413</td>
<td>+1,321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**NOTE:** Two of the series (Methodist and Church of Scotland) are affected by church unions. See notes to Table 2.

The foregoing are all net figures (“stocks”), the balance of year-on-year gains and losses (“flows”). Some sense of the underlying dynamics of non-Anglican Protestant membership can be gauged from Table 3, charting cumulative annual inflows and outflows between 1918 and 1939 in the four denominations (three Presbyterian) which collected this information. This demonstrates that an ostensibly flat membership over 21 years in reality concealed huge movements, comprising gains of 2,934,000 and losses of 2,932,000, which therefore cancelled each other out. There is no reason to believe such large-scale turnover was untypical of Free Churches as a whole. In this way, far more adults than might be imagined were touched by Free Church membership. Very many will have been members for a relatively short period; lifelong membership was probably not the norm. In terms of specific flows, while all four Churches lost members when they relocated from one area to another, this was only a minor problem for the Presbyterian Church of Wales and Church of Scotland but a major one for the Presbyterian Church of England and, even more so, the Methodists (whose net transfer losses were of the order of 7,500 per annum). Deaths accounted for about one-fifth of losses in each case, averaged out for the inter-war period, but detailed investigation of the Methodist data has demonstrated that the proportion of losses attributable to death was steadily rising from the second decade of the twentieth century. This was not because Methodists had a lower life expectancy than anybody else (the contrary may have been the case) but because their congregations were begin-
ning to age, thus moving into cohorts which were more likely to die, making their population pyramid progressively top-heavy.\textsuperscript{130}

Such membership flows connect to another characteristic Free Church phenomenon, that of adherents. All denominations attracted people who maintained close links with a chapel, often as regular worshippers and financial supporters, while stopping short of a commitment to formal membership. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries adherents heavily outnumbered members; indeed they formed an internal constituency from which members might be recruited at times of revival (as happened in Wales as late as 1904–1905). However, by the inter-war period adherents constituted a disappearing breed.\textsuperscript{131}

The trend can only be quantified in two denominations. In Primitive Methodism the totals of adherents are probably best understood as including members, although they must have omitted Sunday scholars. On this basis, non-member adherents declined by 28.7 percent between 1918 and 1932 (compared with a fall of merely 0.5 percent in membership), and the ratio of non-member adherents to members decreased from 1.83 to 1.31.\textsuperscript{132}

The Presbyterian Church of Wales returns were for the “whole congregation,” again seemingly excluding Sunday scholars, from which non-member adherents can be calculated by a process of subtraction (deducting members, probationers, and members’ children). Their number dropped by 49.5 percent between 1918 and 1937, and the ratio of non-member adherents to members from 0.34 to 0.18. Even if the definition of non-member adherents is extended to subsume probationers and children of members, the ratio only improved to 0.74 in 1918, dipping to 0.45 in 1937. The relative eclipse of adherents was probably one of the most significant changes to have affected the inter-war Free Churches.

Protestant Sunday Schools

All these statistics understate the work of Protestant denominations among children, largely through Sunday schools. The movement was already in recession by 1918 in that the increase in Sunday scholars in Britain had probably not kept pace with population growth since the 1880s, while absolute decline in numbers had set in for several major denominations by the Edwardian era. Existing estimates for the inter-war period (variously for the United Kingdom, Britain,


\textsuperscript{132} C.\&.C. (see above, n. 63), pp. 143, 190.
or England and Wales) are not wholly consistent,\textsuperscript{133} causing the author to prepare a fresh assessment of firm and conjectural data.\textsuperscript{134} This produced figures of 6,091,000 scholars in Britain in 1918 and 4,177,000 in 1939, an overall fall of 31.4 percent, which is substantially yet not fully explained by the contracting child population (18.2 percent down between 1921 and 1939).\textsuperscript{135} Although most of this decrease occurred during the 1930s, the 1920s were also unpropitious times for Sunday schools in the principal denominations, with the conspicuous exception of the Baptists, who experienced growth until 1926. The overall inter-war decline was more pronounced among the five “historic” Free Churches (34.6 percent) than for Anglicans (28.5 percent). Expressed most optimistically, not far short of three-quarters of British children aged 5–14 were apparently enrolled at Sunday school during the early 1920s, albeit fewer in Scotland where Sunday schools were somewhat less significant (but Bible classes more so).\textsuperscript{136} Even factoring under-fives into the total still yields a proportion of one-half. These fractions would be inflated even further if certain categories “ineligible” for Sunday school (most obviously, Catholics and Jews) were removed from the population baseline.\textsuperscript{137}

Several factors should be borne in mind, however. First, a proportion of scholars were aged 15 and over, guessed at one-fifth in 1919,\textsuperscript{138} and with 15.6 percent of those on the books of schools affiliated to the National Sunday School Union (N.S.S.U.) in 1936 aged 15–21.\textsuperscript{139} Second, enrolments in Sunday school did not automatically translate into regular attendance. In particular, the morning session had lost ground since about 1870 and continued to do so between the wars, morning attendances in N.S.S.U. schools decreasing from 24.1 percent of the day’s total in 1918 to 19.1 percent in 1936. At the same time, aggregate average attendances of all registered scholars improved marginally, from 84.7 to 85.7 percent, between 1918 and 1936; absolute numbers may have been falling, but scholars who remained were more committed.\textsuperscript{140} Third, many children went to Sunday schools for relatively brief periods, so net figures for a given year do not necessarily capture all those involved at some point during their adolescence. In a


\textsuperscript{134} Utilizing a similar range of sources as for membership, in Table 2.


\textsuperscript{136} Brown, *Death* (see above, n. 2), p. 168.

\textsuperscript{137} Cairns, *Army* (see above, n. 113), pp. 121–122.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{139} *Annual Report of the National Sunday School Union* 134 (1936–1937), 111.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid. 116 (1918–1919), 119, 134 (1936–1937), 111.
sample of over-30s interviewed in 1955, no more than one in twenty had never attended Sunday school or Bible class when a child, although one in eight of those aged 30–49 (and thus born 1906–1925) had only been for a short time (against 82 percent for several years). Together with family and school, Sunday schools were thus an important instrument of religious socialization, leaving an inevitable legacy of residual Christian beliefs and values in the lives of former scholars throughout their adulthood.

**Membership of Other Faiths**

To complete the picture of “church membership,” allowance has to be made for other traditions besides Anglican, Catholic, and Free Church or other Protestants. The Orthodox community, which was mainly rooted in immigration from countries where Orthodoxy was the principal religion, has been estimated, by back-projection, at 10,000 in 1930 and 20,000 in 1940. However, these figures may well be too high since the baseline after the First World War was small (for instance, there were only four Greek Orthodox congregations in Britain in 1922). Estimates of the number of Jews vary, even for Greater London (where there was by far the biggest concentration); two independent calculations produced totals of 212,000 in 1929 and 234,000 in 1931–1933. Nationally, *The Jewish Year Book* quoted 275,700 in the British Isles in 1918 and 385,000 in 1939. The Jewish population was swelled in the 1930s by around 55,000 European Jews seeking refuge from Nazism. Islam was the next most significant non-Christian faith, but, by 1924, even after substantial immigration during the First World War, there were thought to be no more than 10,000 Muslim migrants and 1,000 converts. Growth during the inter-war period was constrained by mass unemployment, which seems particularly to have affected Muslims who worked preponderantly in low-skilled occupations in already depressed areas, and by mounting prejudice against and statutory restrictions on “aliens.” Many Muslims returned

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144) *Jewish Year Book*, 1919, 161, 167; 1940, 336.
145) Jonathan Campbell, ‘The Jewish Community in Britain,’ in *History of Religion*, ed. Gilley and Sheils (see above, n. 15), 427–448, there 442.
to their home countries and the unfavourable conditions deterred other potential migrants from coming, at least until the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{147} Other world faiths were newly-established in the British Isles (for example, the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland was formed in 1907), and 20,000 is probably a generous estimate for them all. As for membership of secularist organizations, this was tiny: probably less than 1,000 for the National Secular Society at the start of our period,\textsuperscript{148} 2,774 for the Rationalist Press Association in 1918 and 3,802 in 1939.\textsuperscript{149}

**Religious Affiliation**

Undoubtedly, more people than this would have professed atheism or secularism if asked, but this cannot be tested from the decennial population census, since no question on religious affiliation was included at this time, except for Ireland (from 1861). The parliamentary pressure for taking a religious census on the mainland in 1911 was driven entirely by the campaign for Welsh disestablishment; with that achieved, there was no political imperative for a religious census in 1921 and 1931, even if some statisticians were in favour.\textsuperscript{150} Otherwise, Government routinely collected religious profession data only for the army, which was not likely to have been typical of society at large. Hastings has assessed the situation in 1920 as follows, but offers no evidence: 65 percent Anglican, 15 percent Nonconformist, 5 percent Roman Catholic, and 15 percent irreligious.\textsuperscript{151} Clergy making their visitation returns hazarded guesses about the religious composition of individual parishes, informed by their house-to-house calls, but it is hard to generalize from them, and there was in any case some fluidity of allegiance. As the incumbent of Holy Trinity, Gateshead remarked in 1936: “I have discovered many persons whose religious profession seems dependent upon the obtaining of food vouchers, dispensary letters, etc.”\textsuperscript{152}

The best-quality data are, in fact, retrospective, from subsequent opinion polls. For instance, when interviewed by B.I.P.O. in 1947–1949, 51 percent of adult Britons aged 21 and over (and thus all alive between the wars) affiliated with the Church of England, 11 percent were Roman Catholics, 29 percent were Free

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., pp. 40–50, 92–130; Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 37, 42–43.


\textsuperscript{149} C.&C. (see above, n. 63), p. 194.

\textsuperscript{150} For example, George Bisset-Smith, *The Census and Some of its Uses* (Edinburgh, 1921), pp. 10–21, 99–101, 210–213.

\textsuperscript{151} Hastings, *History* (see above, n. 15), p. 40.

\textsuperscript{152} D.U.L., DDR/EV/RET/22 (see above, n. 36), pp. 53, 97, 149, 213, 253, 477.
Church (including Scottish Presbyterians), and 9 percent had no faith.\textsuperscript{153} Had these four separate surveys been carried out before the Second World War, it is likely that the proportion making no profession may have been less, since it is clear that the War did lead to some loss of interest in religion.\textsuperscript{154} This was especially among those in their twenties, 12 percent of whom told B.I.P.O. in 1947–1949 they had no faith. Another, and even later, source is aggregated data from the British Social Attitudes Surveys for the cohorts of respondents whose childhood or adolescence occurred during the inter-war years. They were asked questions about the religion in which they had been brought up, the religion of their parents, and their own religion at the age of 16. Results are presented in Table 4. The small number with no religion is again confirmed, 3.7 percent among the fathers and mothers of respondents, with only 2.4 percent of the latter having no religious upbringing; however, by the time they were 16 interviewees were obviously flexing their muscles, and 9.3 percent had rejected faith. Anglicanism was the denomination of just over one-half and Catholicism of one-tenth. The Free Churches and sects were supported by more than one-quarter, but the inter-generational transmission of Free Church allegiance was weakening; whereas 30.1 percent of parents were Nonconformists, 3.7 percent fewer brought their children up in the same tradition.

Table 4. Religious affiliation of the inter-war generation in Great Britain (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Free Church</th>
<th>Roman Catholic</th>
<th>Non-Christian</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>N =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion of upbringing</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>5,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s religion during respondent’s childhood</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s religion during respondent’s childhood</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s/mother’s religion during respondent’s childhood</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion of respondent at age 16</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{153} Unpublished table in author’s possession.

\textsuperscript{154} Field, ‘Puzzled People’ (see above, n. 12), 453.
4. Assessment

How far do these statistics of churchgoing and church membership/affiliation validate or contradict Brown’s portrayal of inter-war Britain as a society beset by “Christian culture in confusion” but where “little changed in most people’s religious practice”? In terms of church attendance, it is clear that the process of decline relative to population, which has been traced in the Church of England from the 1850s and the Free Churches from the 1880s, persisted, perhaps with some acceleration and hitting the historic Free Churches the hardest. Moreover, it seems to have been continuous throughout the 1920s and 1930s, with no signs of a temporary recovery after 1918 as occurred in some church membership series. On the contrary, the reductions in churchgoing during the First World War, consequent upon secular disruptions to organized religion, were long-lasting.\(^{155}\) In England (evidence from Wales and Scotland is too patchy to comment) normal weekly attendance at places of worship probably did not exceed 10–15 percent in towns or 20–25 percent in the countryside. This is broadly consistent with Brown’s estimate of 15–30 percent for weekly churchgoing in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s.\(^{156}\) Much of the fall seems to be attributable to the fact that people were worshipping with less regularity rather than stopping entirely, which again concurs with Brown.\(^{157}\) Former “twicers” had become “oncers,” and those who had been accustomed to going weekly contented themselves with once or twice a month. Social changes do much to explain the phenomenon. Significant enhancements in public and private transport extended and liberalized the opportunities for spending Sundays, especially during the summer months, and created alternative leisure destinations beyond the local church. Throughout the year, Sunday evening congregations also now had to contend, as potential rivals, with the cinema or listening to a religious service on the radio. Younger adults, including the parents of young children, were apparently most likely to be drawn away from the pew, and the first signs are manifest of a new phenomenon, notably in the Anglican and Free Churches: the progressive ageing of worshippers, to become such a marked feature of Britain after the Second World War. The disproportionate number of women and middle-class churchgoers, a longer-established tendency, persisted. Roman Catholics bucked these trends to an extent, since demographic undercurrents were fuelling growth; however, a large part of their community was non-practising.

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\(^{155}\) Field, ‘Keeping the Spiritual Home Fires Burning’ (see above, n. 10).

\(^{156}\) Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution* (see above, n. 3), p. 77.

\(^{157}\) Ibid., p. 87.
Table 5. Conjectural religious profile of the adult population of Great Britain, c. 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANGLICANS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicants</td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other regular churchgoers</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional churchgoers/nominal affiliates</td>
<td>14,700,000</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sub-total</em></td>
<td>20,200,000</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ROMAN CATHOLICS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptised persons known to priests</td>
<td>2,100,000</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal affiliates</td>
<td>1,850,000</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sub-total</em></td>
<td>3,950,000</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FREE CHURCHES/PRESBYTERIANS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>3,790,000</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adherents</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal affiliates</td>
<td>5,700,000</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sub-total</em></td>
<td>10,990,000</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>270,000</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religions</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>1,550,000</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sub-total</em></td>
<td>1,650,000</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>36,790,000</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


NOTE: In working from community figures, and deducting children, allowance has been made for the fact that Roman Catholics and Jews had above-average family sizes.

For church membership and affiliation, an aggregate of available data for c. 1939, inevitably supplemented by some conjecture, is presented in Table 5. From this it will be seen that 96 percent of the adult population still professed a religion, only three points less than c. 1914,\(^{158}\) hardly suggesting any great “crisis of faith.” Churchgoing Anglicans were 9 percent fewer in 1939 than in 1914, with communicants down by 2 percent and other regular worshippers by 7 percent. In terms of baptised persons known to priests, the Roman Catholic population was static (6 percent) as a proportion of the adult population, but opinion polls uncovered an additional 5 percent who ancestrally identified as Catholics even though the Church had lost sight of them. Many of the latter were probably Irish, and it is possible that the estimate is slightly inflated by labour migration from

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\(^{158}\) Comparative Edwardian data from Field, ‘Faith Society?’ (see above, n. 8), 62.
Ireland immediately after the Second World War, when the polls were conducted (the flow was restricted during the War itself). The Free Churches and Presbyterians had gained two points since 1914 on an overall measure of allegiance, but there had been significant reductions in the numbers of members (from 13 to 10 percent) and adherents (from 11 to 4 percent), with a corresponding massive shift towards nominalism. Moreover, membership in the “historic” Free Churches fell between the wars, with losses only offset in the aggregate by the emergence of new religious movements. The year 1927 seems to have been a particular tipping-point for membership decline in the “historic” Free Churches, as it was in the Church of England (for communicants and electoral roll), the early 1920s witnessing modest growth in both cases. More research is clearly necessary to isolate possible explanations of this fairly sudden change in direction. For example, what difference might the Prayer Book controversy of 1927–1928\textsuperscript{159} or the negotiations and implementation of the unions within Scottish Presbyterianism in 1929 and British Methodism in 1932 have made?\textsuperscript{160} The percentage of non-Christians was unchanged since 1914. As for children and the young, while the proportion ever attending Sunday school did not greatly diminish, the number enrolled at any one time certainly did, even discounting the contraction of the child population as a whole. This fall in scholars was mostly continuous throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

So, although irreligion may not have advanced appreciably between the wars, the public practice of religion (other than rites of passage) certainly seems to have further weakened, not least in England, as regards both church attendance and church membership, preponderantly (it would seem) as a result of social changes, notably enhanced leisure and transport opportunities on Sundays. It is hard not to regard such a shift away from active to passive allegiance as anything but a secularizing tendency, notwithstanding that church leaders comforted themselves with the knowledge of “the greater sincerity of worship and the greater depth of devotion” of the remaining attenders,\textsuperscript{161} or that “centuries of conventional church-going” had left an enduring legacy of belief in God, ritualized prayer, and observance of the rites of passage.\textsuperscript{162} This article thus adds to the existing evidence which suggests that—at least in terms of hard quantitative indicators as opposed to diluted measures of “diffuse Christianity”—secularization in Britain has to

be seen as a progressive and protracted process, and not as a cataclysm of the 1960s. It is, accordingly, still best viewed through a gradualist rather than a revolutionary lens.