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978-0-521-83977-8 - The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, 1920-1960

S. J. D. Green

Excerpt

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Part I

Outline of the problem

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1 Towards a social history of religion in modern Britain: secularisation theory, religious change and the fate of protestant England

This book aims to make an original contribution to the social history of religion in modern Britain. It offers no *a priori* definition of religious phenomena. Rather, it conceives of its subject as including all (anyway, most) of those characteristic ideas about, and institutions dedicated to, explicit and significant notions of the sacred that have flourished in these islands during the last century or so.¹ *Mutatis mutandis* it presumes the widest possible remit for a comprehensive study of an ever-changing thing. This presumes the 'social history' not merely of ecclesiastical institutions, but also of quasi-religious organisations; similarly, of arcane doctrine and unsophisticated attitudes about God, His Church and our immortal ends.² Yet what follows is, for the most part, an unashamedly specific account of the fate of Christian, denominational, practice and popular, protestant, belief in Britain from the end of the First World War down to the dawn of the 1960s.³ Indeed, its real concerns are in some respects narrower still. That is because it concentrates overwhelmingly (though not entirely) on English experience in these respects. This study sheds little direct light on Scottish and Welsh religious history, and even less

¹ Not least because any such definition is almost immediately a matter of dispute amongst scholars. For an introduction to the range of possible definitions, see Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory*, 2nd edn (London, 1991), pp. 242–6.

² What is 'social history'? For the fullest 'mission statements', see Peter N. Stearns, 'Some Comments on Social History', *Journal of Social History*, 1 (1967), 3–6 and 7–16; also Janet Blackman and Keith Neild, Editorial, *Social History*, 1 (1976), 1–3. For a more theoretical perspective, see B. R. Wilson, 'Sociological Methods in the Study of History', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 21 (1971), 101–18; also the wider reflections contained in E. J. Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society', in M. W. Flinn and T. C. Smout (eds.), *Essays in Social History* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 1–22. Social history as simply all-encompassing history is asserted rather than established in the remarks of F. M. L. Thompson, Editorial preface, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain*, vol. I: *Religion and Communities* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. xi–xv.

³ Albeit different from most pre-existing examples. For some of the best, see Roger Lloyd, *The Church of England, 1900–1965* (London, 1966); Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and E. Gordon Rupp (eds.), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, vol. III (London, 1983); and R. T. Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662–1962* (London, 1962).

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on the very different dynamic of contemporary Irish Christianity.⁴ To the extent that its English interests are multi-denominational, they are devoted largely to the fortunes of the protestant churches. According to these terms, Roman Catholicism stands at the farthest shores of indigenous biblical faith.⁵ About Jewish history in this country, of the recent emergence of British Islam and concerning the recent emergence of so-called 'new religious movements', these pages are virtually silent.⁶

That may seem strange. By comparison with typical priorities in the contemporary sociology of religion, it may be perverse.⁷ Judged even by the less exotic standards of modern religious historiography, it must appear somewhat outdated.⁸ But if such narrowness of focus entails obvious limitations of breadth, it may permit certain less immediately observable gains in depth. There is, of course, much to be said

⁴ On which see Callum Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* (London, 1987), esp. chs. 6 and 7; Keith Robbins, 'Religion and Community in Scotland and Wales since 1800', in Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils (eds.), *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 363–80; John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), chs. 8–10; J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985* (Cambridge, 1985), esp. chs. 2–5; and J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Ireland, 1923–1979*, 2nd edn (Dublin, 1980), *passim*. More generally, consult John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843–1945* (London, 1994), chs. 5–8 and, above all, Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: the Christian Church, 1900–2000* (Oxford, 2008), *passim*.

⁵ Perhaps best approached initially through the various essays contained in A. McClelland and M. Hodgetts (eds.), *From Without the Flavian Gate: 150 Years of Roman Catholicism in England and Wales, 1850–2000* (London, 1999); note also the important works of Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, especially his *Roman Catholic Beliefs in England: Customary Christianity and Transformations of Religious Authority* (Cambridge, 1991); though, again, see Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales*, *passim*.

⁶ For Jewish history, see Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Oxford, 1992), esp. chs. 4–7; also the essays collected in David Cesarani (ed.), *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford, 1990). On Islam, see Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity amongst British Muslims* (London, 1994), esp. chs. 1, 4 and 6. Much important information is summarised in Muhammad Anwar, 'Muslims in Britain', in Syed Z. Abedin and Ziauddin Sardar, *Muslim Minorities in the West* (London, 1995), pp. 37–50. On the 'new religions', see Roy Wallis, *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* (London, 1984), chs. 2 and 3; also Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, *Sociological Theory, Religion and Collective Action* (Belfast, 1986), chs. 7 and 8.

⁷ For a flavour, representative enough, see Paul Davie, John Smith and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Religion, Revival and Secularisation* (London, 2003), esp. the introduction and chs. 7–10.

⁸ For the pursuit of 'popular' or extra-institutional religious experience in modern religious historiography, see (*inter alia*) James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsay, 1825–1875* (Oxford, 1976), pt III; Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870–1930* (Oxford, 1982), esp. ch. 7; and, above all, Sarah Williams's *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c. 1880–1939* (Oxford, 1999), *passim*. The present author is far from unsympathetic to their cause. See his *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870–1920* (Cambridge, 1996), esp. ch. 8.

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for a fully integrated, multi-national history of religious experience in twentieth-century Britain. But there is still something to be gained from both chronological and geographical disaggregation. To concentrate upon the English experience is explicitly to acknowledge – for good or ill – England's ever-increasing priority in the economic, social and cultural history of post-imperial Britain.⁹ It is also, implicitly, to recognise the very different trajectories of British religious history in its many (and various) Celtic fringes.¹⁰ In a quite different way, to highlight the fate of protestant denominationalism in English religious history is to insist that mainstream, twentieth-century British social history properly comes to terms with its institutionally Christian as well as its popular and pagan dimensions. This is no small point. To date, it has shown remarkably little inclination to do so.

One possible reason suggests itself immediately. This is the argument of salutary neglect. It is rooted in the supposition that there is not very much to write about. This is because religion is in decline. Moreover, it has been in decline for the whole of the twentieth century.¹¹ That decline, so the argument goes, is inexorable; its progress in the direction of further decline is inevitable. It will eventually proceed to the point where religion – if not now, then very soon – becomes a truly marginal aspect of social life. Some call this process the secularisation of British society.¹² Others resist the phrase.¹³ Most, bar a few eccentrics, acknowledge the underlying dynamic. They equally seem to agree that, whatever its name,

⁹ Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales*, pp. v and vi; also ch. 1. On demography, see David Coleman, 'Population and Family', in A. H. Halsey with Josephine Webb (eds.), *Twentieth Century British Social Trends* (Basingstoke, 2000), ch. 1, esp. at pp. 34–5 and 72–3; implicit recognition of the economics can be found in Christopher Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Scotland since 1914*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 1987), chs. 2, 3 and 6; Davies, *A History of Wales*, chs. 9 and 10; also Geraint H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* (Cambridge, 2007), ch. 7; and for Ireland, Eorin O'Malley, 'Problems of Industrialisation in Industrial Society in Ireland', in J. H. Goldthorpe and C. T. Whelan (eds.), *The Development of Industrial Society in Ireland* (Oxford, 1994), ch. 11.

¹⁰ For a sense of that difference, and its significance, see the balance of the essays in Gilley and Sheils, *A History of Religion in Britain*, pts III and IV; also the specific histories noted in n. 4 above.

¹¹ The fundamental argument, with attached statistical proof, adduced in Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford, 1977), ch. 4 and pp. 128–95. For a subtle qualification, bringing the material up to date, see Peter Brierley, 'Religion', in Halsey and Webb (eds.), *Twentieth Century British Social Trends*, ch. 19.

¹² Hence the sub-title of Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: a History of the Secularisation of Modern Society* (London, 1980); see esp. pp. 9–15.

¹³ Note the scepticism sounded in Robin Gill, *Competing Convictions* (London, 1989), *passim*; also his 'Secularization and Census Data', in Steve Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Historians and Sociologists Debate the Secularization Question* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 90–117, esp. pp. 90–101.

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the causes and consequences of this dynamic entail the increasing irrelevance of religion as a significant agent in the evolution of contemporary social history. So widespread is this attitude that, to re-work Trevelyan, the vast body of modern British social history – at least of twentieth-century English social history – might for all practical purposes be defined as ‘history with the religion left out’.¹⁴

This book has been written in explicit opposition to that view. It argues that religion has been a vital aspect of the history of twentieth-century Britain, including England. More: it insists that the evolution of British, including English, society cannot be properly understood without significant reference to the importance of religion in that story. It does not suggest that the evidence of decline in common-sense experience is entirely erroneous. It is certainly not argued that religion has actually gained in social significance during that time. Nor does the book posit that such diminution is of only qualified significance. To the contrary, it insists that the specific forms which this decline has assumed (and also, by implication, avoided), similarly the particular *changes* both of religion and in wider society which these in turn have implied, have been of enormous significance for the nature and evolution of the society in which they occurred, both informing all aspects of modern British social relations and altering the very nature of British identity itself. It is becoming increasingly clear that, more than anything else, it was a religious creed, specifically the protestant, Christian, faith, that forged the manifold peoples of the British Isles into something like a recognisable nation during the eighteenth century.¹⁵ It has long been appreciated that it was this

¹⁴ See the remarks in Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*, p. 2. Note the absence of religion as a factor, even in the index, of E. J. Hobsbawm’s influential *Industry and Empire: from 1750 to the Present Day* (London, 1968); and for an explanation, consider his observations in his *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1984), ch. 3, esp. pp. 36–9. Nor is this a viewpoint confined to the ‘Marxist’ fringe in British historiography. It is embodied in the Oxford History of England/Britain: see A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 168–9 and 252, and Kenneth O. Morgan, *The People’s Peace: British History, 1945–1990* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 67–8, 208 and 479. A more recent account by Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–1951* (Oxford, 1998) contains one short chapter on religion, but longer chapters on sport, cinema and music. An exception is Keith Robbins: see his *History, Religion and Identity: Modern Britain* (London, 1993), esp. chs. 7, 9, 11 and 14. Trevelyan’s original remark, ‘Social history might be defined negatively as the history of a people with the politics left out’, comes from his *English Social History: a Survey of Six Centuries, Chaucer to Queen Victoria* (London, 1944), p. vii. It has long been criticised and parodied by ‘new’ social historians, who seem wilfully to ignore the perceptive – and prescient – remarks which followed. For an altogether more sensitive discussion, both locating and contextualising Trevelyan’s remarks, see David Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan: a Life in History* (London, 1992), appendix C, pp. 234–6.

¹⁵ On which, see esp. Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth Century England, c. 1714–80: a Political and Social Study* (Manchester, 1993), chs. 2 and 7; also Linda

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belief, together with the institutions that supported it, that proved crucial, even in their seemingly divided and mutually disputatious forms, to the development and integration of so much of the recognisably modern, urban-industrial, society that emerged in late Victorian Britain.¹⁶ It would be altogether more remarkable, not to say incredible, if so great a degree of subsequent religious change in twentieth-century Britain, a transformation of institutions and sensibilities which has included, but is not exhausted by, the phenomenon of decline, had not also had a profound impact on the way Britons have gradually come to define themselves, and to understand each other, in recent times.

Hence two presuppositions, each crucial to the conception and composition of this work. The first is that the social implications of religious change in twentieth-century Britain have never been limited merely to changes in contemporary British religion. Therefore, they cannot be compartmentalised into the ever-diminishing domain of church history.¹⁷ The second is that neither the origins nor the consequences of contemporary religious change are properly understood merely as passive reflections of wider changes in society. If each of these presuppositions is accepted, then it follows that not only must a proper social history comprehend religious history, but it must also acknowledge that the unproblematically privileged standing of so-called exogenous factors, that is of logically prior and analytically distinct forms of social change, in the account of religious change is unjustifiable. Indeed, any such presumption is insufficient either as an explanation of those changes or for a proper understanding of their implications.¹⁸ This is because religious

Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), ch. 1. For the later period, see John Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829–1860* (Oxford, 1991), chs. 1 and 8.

¹⁶ Compare the alternative views in George Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (London, 1962), ch. 6 and Keith Robbins, *Nineteenth-Century Britain: England, Scotland and Wales, the Making of a Nation* (Oxford, 1989), ch. 3. And for a recent, and illuminating, discussion of the local and regional dimensions of this phenomenon, see David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: from the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge, 1996), esp. chs. 3–5.

¹⁷ A basic assumption in the early volumes of Hobsbawm's *Making of British Society* series. See Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (London, 1971), also Noreen Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties* (London, 1975) where the social history of religion is all but ignored, similarly so in the popular works of Arthur Marwick, e.g. *Britain in the Century of Total War* (London, 1968), and more recently, *British Society since 1945* (Harmondsworth, 1990), *passim*. See, most recently of all, Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: a Social History of Britain between the Wars* (London 2008), where the words 'Christianity', 'protestantism' and 'religion' are absent even from the index.

¹⁸ Pace Currie *et al.*, *Churches and Churchgoers*, pp. 96–9; and its implicit corroboration in Harold Perkin, *The Structured Crowd: Essays in English Social History* (Brighton, 1981), pp. 223ff.

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ideas – like any other ideas – have a certain life of their own.¹⁹ So too do religious institutions.²⁰ Inevitably, such intellectual and organisational lives are related to the world outside themselves, wilfully or not, knowingly or not. But even to say that much is to acknowledge that they also affect the world, just as it affects them. Social history is as much an aspect of religious history as vice versa. The systematic application of that insight to twentieth-century British history is both the best justification for, and points to the importance of, a social history of religion in modern Britain.

Important as it may be, the construction of such a history is far from straightforward, particularly so in the present context. This is to some degree because of the seemingly intractable theoretical difficulties involved in constructing a plausible narrative. It is also traceable to the incorrigible elusiveness of much of the most significant evidence. Finally, it owes something to the peculiar problems of perspective implied in recounting a story whose end cannot be known for certain. The theoretical difficulties involved in constructing a modern social history of religion stem from the special complexity of the subject matter itself. For religion is simultaneously a system of soteriological doctrine, a body of ecclesiastical institutions and a vehicle for wider cultural expression.²¹ Some aspects of its multi-form character are more effectively described through the application of a characteristically ‘social’ approach than others. Yet to concentrate attention exclusively on these particular elements of religious experience, typically the more institutional, on the grounds that they are more amenable to historical analysis, especially to do so by neglecting others, typically the more ethereal, because they are usually less susceptible to this way of looking at things, is to run the risk of intellectual fragmentation and descriptive deficiency. Taken to its logical extreme it can have the effect of divorcing the social history of religion from ecclesiastical and even intellectual historiography altogether. This is no idle observation. Something suspiciously like it has been going on

¹⁹ A truth more readily acknowledged, of late, by eighteenth- and nineteenth- than by twentieth-century British historians. See *inter alia* the observations of J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 5; Richard Brent, *Liberal Anglican Politics: Whiggery, Religion and Reform* (Oxford, 1987), ch. 3; and J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867–1875* (Cambridge, 1986), ch. 3.

²⁰ A point made in Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, pp. 33–5.

²¹ For the specifically Christian dimensions of this relationship, see the incomparable analysis in David Martin, *The Breaking of the Image: a Sociology of Christian Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1981), *passim*.

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in the relevant historiography for decades.²² Nor is the resulting loss confined to an implicit abandonment of the putative goal of total history. As is becoming ever more clear, this distinction in scholarly activity has actually worked to the profound disadvantage of social history. If this is the case generally, it is especially true for the social history of religion.²³

The road back to a truly integrated social history of religion must begin with the acknowledgement that so many of the supposed social boundaries of religion – about which sorts of religious belief are generally acknowledged (that is, taken as credible and not dismissed as ridiculous) and the wider effect that often arbitrary division seemingly has in society – are profoundly affected by otherwise highbrow debates concerning the proper content of justifiable faith; similarly, by ostensibly unrelated political struggles revolving around its rightful place in the public sphere. Arcane theological arguments and the ecclesiastical antagonisms of intellectual and political élites do not in themselves determine what the masses hold dear or practise faithfully. Even to speak of a ‘popular’ religious culture is to admit that much.²⁴ But these sorts of conflicts do profoundly affect the nature, and also the dynamics, of the relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture in even minimally religious societies. That is because such struggles never take place in that atmosphere of cultural isolation (perhaps incorrectly) presupposed for so much self-consciously superior fine art or imaginative literature. This has certainly been true of modern British experience. There has never been any easily distinguishable ‘high’ and ‘low’ religious culture in these islands.²⁵ What the élites said and did always filtered down to the masses. It also materially affected what the masses said and did. Still, their responses were seldom purely passive. On the contrary, they were often profoundly reactive. The very existence of so-called Christian fundamentalism, indeed

²² As noted in Hugh McLeod, ‘Varieties of Victorian Belief’, *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992), 321–37, esp. at 322–3; and lamented by Jeffrey Cox, ‘On the Limits of Social History: Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), 198–203, esp. at 201.

²³ Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, pp. 15–21; S. J. D. Green, Reviews of Books, *Journal of Modern History*, 65 (1993), 398–402, esp. at 399.

²⁴ On the concept of ‘popular religion’ generally, see the essays collected together in Peter Hendrik Vrijhof and Jacques Waardenburg (eds.), *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies* (The Hague, 1979), esp. chs. 7–9; for the specific case of Christianity, note the approach taken in Wendy James and Douglas H. Johnson (eds.), *Vernacular Christianity: Essays in the Social Anthropology of Religion Presented to Godfrey Lienhardt* (Oxford, 1988), pt III; and for empirical examples, consult the material in Ellen Badone (ed.), *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society* (Princeton, 1995), esp. chs. 1 and 8. For the British example, see David Hempton, ‘“Popular Religion” 1880–1986’, in Terence Thomas (ed.), *The British: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices, 1800–1986* (London, 1988), pp. 181–210.

²⁵ Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, pp. 22–6.

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popular religious movements more generally, bears stark witness to that fact. On the other hand, the masses were much more rarely proactive. It is difficult to think of a single instance in the twentieth century when popular religious opinion has actually anticipated, and thereby deflected, élite judgements in these matters. No social history of religion in modern Britain can ignore that salutary truth.²⁶

Consider the secularisation or, more properly, the desacralisation of British politics during the twentieth century. It requires no genius to observe that the systematic elimination of religious questions from mainland politics in our time (an élite-driven achievement if ever there was one) has also had an important, and generally a deleterious, impact upon the social prestige of British religious institutions over the same period.²⁷ This is not necessarily to condemn the result. Few can applaud the consequences of the obvious failure of those same élites to remove the religious question from the politics of Northern Ireland after 1922.²⁸ It is, however, to observe that this development has to be taken into account in any serious consideration of the changing political nature and social significance of religious organisations in England over those years. In short, intellectual history and political history matter in the social history of religion. They matter even for self-consciously ‘popular’ versions of the social history of religion.

Still, the most exhaustive research into what have become the characteristic objects of the social history of religion – the identification of religious constituencies, the description of sacred and quasi-sacred institutions and the comprehension of popular, supernatural mentalities – is not only incomplete but also actually profoundly misleading as social history if it is conducted in the absence of similar consideration of the interaction between the supposedly ‘social’ and the peculiarly political,

²⁶ Christian fundamentalism is a vast subject. Perhaps the best introduction remains that in James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London, 1977), esp. chs. 1, 2 and 4. For an historical account, covering much British material, see Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism* (London, 1970), *passim*; and more generally, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Accounting for Fundamentalism: the Dynamic Character of Movements* (Chicago, 1994), esp. pt I.

²⁷ Most recent treatments of the subject include G. I. T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869–1921* (Oxford, 1987), ch. 7, and Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920–2000*, 4th edn (London, 2001), esp. chs. 4, 14, 26, 29, 35 and 39.

²⁸ A notable, comparative treatment is found in Donald Harman Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Law in South Africa, Israel and Ulster* (Ithaca, 1992), esp. chs. 6 and 7; the ‘protestant’ view is analysed objectively in Steve Bruce, *The Edge of the Union: the Ulster Loyalist Political Vision* (Oxford, 1994), ch. 5; and a ‘catholic’ perspective can be found in Oliver P. Rafferty, *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603–1983: an Interpretative History* (London, 1994), esp. chs. 6 and 7.

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or between the allegedly attitudinal and the specifically doctrinal, in religious life. A social history of religion has to be a political and intellectual history of religion as well. At the very least it has to be a history borne in upon, as well itself bearing upon, political and intellectual history. So much might seem obvious. If so, it is necessary to observe that this simple truth has clearly not yet been generally apprehended.²⁹ To appreciate that lesson, social historians of religion would do well to practise a little more modesty in the way they judge traditional ecclesiastical and intellectual history. If they did, they might find out that they had a great deal to learn from them.³⁰

There is a second, related, point. A general history of religion in twentieth-century Britain would be a travesty if it somehow ignored, even indeed if it sought to minimise the significance of, Britain's historic Christian and denominational legacy. The Victorians believed that they were perhaps the first successfully to disseminate, that is to systematise and to popularise, a truly Christian understanding of God and His works in the world. That their successors have subsequently come to marginalise what was actually a very specific, protestant, faith is a tale well worth telling. On any account it was a slow change, not a quick victory. Its triumph is the product of very recent history. Those same Victorians also self-consciously organised the people into Christian denominations that conceived of themselves (though, generally, not each other) as the best expression of that belief. That such denominational loyalties, and the significance of Christian denominationalism more generally, have declined so markedly during the intervening decades is to point to institutional developments of unambiguous historical importance, processes as much a part of the political and social as of the ecclesiastical history of modern Britain. So the social history of religion in Britain since 1914 must begin where the Victorians left off: with a protestant God and among Britain's traditional, Christian denominations.

But, of course, it cannot end there. If the decline of specifically Christian, denominational institutions is nothing more than a commonplace of contemporary British social observation, it is scarcely less axiomatic among contemporary sociologists of religion, at least among those generally critical of what might be called the 'conventional model' of religious historiography, that the demise of such associations was not synonymous with the passing of Christianity, *per se*; nor even is the eclipse (if such,

²⁹ A point made in McLeod, 'Varieties of Victorian Belief', 337; and reinforced in Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, pp. 20–2.

³⁰ For an inkling, albeit reluctant, see the remarks of Cox, 'On the Limits of Social History', 198–203; and for a rather more forceful statement, Green, *Reviews of Books*, 398–402.