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1968: Declining Identities – Religion and Nation in the United Kingdom

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In 1968, to some minds, «the world» was on the brink of transformation. If so, however, the United Kingdom was scarcely leading the way.[1] It was in Paris that walls were decorated with slogans which proclaimed that it was realistic to demand the impossible. It was there that *illuminés* urged comrades to run forward, for the old world was now behind them. The walls of London, by comparison, were less disturbed. In so far as the events of «1968» looked like a re-run of «1848» – and the comparison between the two years was made at the time, at least by historians – Britain again looked «out of step». There was indeed some domestic disturbance and unsettlement, but it was small in comparison with what was happening on «the Continent». The «disturbances» of 1968, for the British public, were largely taking place elsewhere, glimpsed at a distance on television screens. It was unlikely, though perhaps not impossible, that the most dramatic scenes as seen elsewhere were going to be repeated in the cities of Britain. Much has of course been written subsequently about the general global significance of «1968», but this is not the place to embark on a further general attempt at explanation. It may be noted, however, that while some historians interpret the revolts of this year as «cultural revolution», others see them predominantly as a challenge to «late capitalism».[2] No full understanding of both the similarity and yet also the differences in the «spirit of 1968» can be gained without paying attention to the specifics of their «cultural politics».[3] However, in identifying, at the outset, a smug British exceptionalism it is not the intention to take refuge in an insular *Sonderweg,* whether judged glorious or pathetic, and leave it at that. It is the thesis of this article that «the spirit of ‹68›» in the United Kingdom, exposed and arguably

[1] Carole Fink/Philipp Gassert/Detlef Junker (eds.), 1968: The World Transformed, Cambridge 1998.

[2] Gerd-Rainer Horn, The Spirit of '69. Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976, Oxford 2007, 1–4; Arthur Marwick, The Sixties, Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States c.1958–c.1974 ,Oxford 1998.

[3] Matthias Reiss (ed.), The Street as Stage. Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth Century, Oxford 2007.

SZRKG, 104 (2010), 35–50

accelerated the dissolution, or at least illustrated the attenuation, of long-established and mutually reinforcing identities in church and state. What «1968» implied «from the perspective of religion» cannot be divorced from its significance when viewed from other perspectives. And in Britain, as elsewhere, «1968» was itself only a heightened and culminating manifestation of a mood – «the Sixties» – already given a special quality, not that the world returned to «normal» after the year itself came to an end.

Sir Brian Harrison, the author of a recent major history of the United Kingdom between 1951 and 1970, structured his volume, chapter by chapter, across the whole period, on a thematic basis, but he made one exception to his plan. He produced one chapter devoted to a specific period, «the Sixties». In his opinion, the time is now ripe to try to clarify the decade's reputation and impact. He summarized the decade, as far as the UK is concerned, in terms of four images: youth in revolt, relaxed manners, political radicalism and Puritanism repudiated. In his opinion, social change was more important than political change. Yet, even in the act of giving «the Sixties» this separate consideration he cautions against a simplistic «decade-mindedness». Most people living through the 1960s in Britain, he suggests, were probably not conscious that they were collectively experiencing an «outlook» which would seem, from a future vantage point, to be «special».[4] That outlook is usually summarized in terms of throwing off old inhibitions, conventions and restraints. It is not too difficult, however, to see signs of these changes before the 1960s began, and, as in all patterns of social evolution, pinpointing «beginnings» and determining «causes» is hazardous. One thing does indeed lead to another, but the motor that impelled the quest for «freedom» remains elusive. Sociology itself, as a discipline, «took off» as a school subject in England in the mid-sixties. Its popularity expanded across the universities and thus was itself a manifestation of social change. Marxist theories from France and Germany penetrated the British intellectual scene. It would be misleading to suppose that they had a deep public resonance.

The British political context was very significant. Conservative government in the United Kingdom came to an end in 1964 and in itself this might be taken to indicate «change». However, the majority Labour gained in the 1964 general election was tiny and made governing difficult. After a further general election in 1966, Labour gained a large majority. The administration proved itself initially rich in rhetoric, with a touching devotion to a «white heat of technological revolution», a slogan which was as obscure as it was glamorous. The government, nevertheless, soon found Britain's economic problems to be intractable. On the party's backbenches, a group of Labour MPs, and some Cabinet members, found the party's programme too «centrist» and wanted, though with little success, more conspicuous evidence of a commitment to «Socialism». Such revolt as there might be in 1968 therefore would be from a «New Left» against what was perceived to be a «compromised» government of the Left. The Communist party, which had obtained 0.1 per cent of the total vote in 1966, had no significance,

[4] Brian Harrison, Seeking a Role. The United Kingdom 1951–1970, Oxford 2009, 472–473.

though individual Communists held important positions in some trade unions. Yet, whatever its deficiencies from the perspective of an extra-parliamentary Left might be, the Labour government was not the «Grand Coalition» of Bonn, which allegedly emasculated critical views, nor the regime in Paris over which the now venerable de Gaulle presided. It was also, of course, the case that the British parliamentary and party system was not newly-minted, in the sense that the systems in Bonn or Paris were. The British constitution was an old and odd beast. Both the Chancellor in Bonn and the President in Paris had past records which played differently with their domestic publics. The politics of 1933–1945 had resonances still in Bonn and Paris which they could not have in London. The children of those in power had «difficulties» with the politics of their parents of a kind which could not apply to the «pasts» of the British political elite. All of this argued for the cohesion of British political life and is capacity to soak up and transmute «outside pressure».

The Labour government remained committed to the possession of nuclear weapons (pending some multilateral disarmament) and to membership of NATO. It had been unable to stop the white minority government in Rhodesia declaring independence, nor would it intervene with force to overthrow it. Britain proved the most reliable ally of the United States in Europe in relation to Vietnam – but by this juncture it had no military conscription and Wilson resisted American pressure to send British troops to fight. In 1968, Britain formally announced a withdrawal (Hong Kong apart) from military activities «East of Suez» by 1971. Domestically, producing a White Paper entitled *In Place of Strife*, the government in 1968–1969 attempted, in the end unsuccessfully, to introduce legislation to curb strikes. While no overall assessment of the government can be attempted here, its popularity and effectiveness had plummeted by 1968. By May 1968, in the opinion polls, the Conservatives were ahead in percentage points by 56–28, a figure which, if repeated in a General Election, would have annihilated the Labour Party. The country as a whole was swinging to the Right, not seeking a more radical government of the Left than that provided by Labour.

British exceptionalism, however, did not extend to lacking young people. Whatever else «1968» might be taken to mean, no historian seems able to resist its categorisation as «the youth revolt». The generation «at the helm» in church and state now found itself challenged by a new generation and a «youth culture» more self-conscious and more capable of cohesion than ever before, if inevitably itself fast-moving and transient in expression. «Teenagers», after all, grew up quickly, and fashions swiftly altered. The term «generation gap» originated in the United States but it had crossed the Atlantic by 1968. It pointed to a condition in which «the young» rejected authority – whether that was to be found in school, university, factory or church. Deference was emphatically «out». In 1968/9 the UK parliament passed legislation reducing the voting age to 18. It was a ges-

ture, perhaps a little tardy, in the direction of youthful political «incorporation». To speak broadly, it was a British generation which put wartime and post-war «austerity», with its accompanying social constraints, behind it. [5]

Western European governments, pursuing «growth», decided that an expanded higher education system was likely to contribute substantially to prosperity, indeed might be vital to it. The United Kingdom in 1962/3 had 216,000 full-time students in higher education. Lord Robbins produced a report which recommended substantial expansion. New universities were set up at a rapid rate in the years that immediately followed. Even so, by 1968, numbers of students in higher education in France, the Federal Republic and Italy exceeded those in the UK and the rate of growth had been greater. It may be that the relative slowness in growth explains the more sedate mood in British universities.[6] There was, however, a paradox in this acceleration. Lord Robbins spoke of universities transmitting a common culture, common standards of citizenship, promoting the general powers of the mind and the advancement of learning. He also referred, rather generally, to the instruction in skills «suitable to play a part in the general division of labour». Politicians, doffing in acknowledgment of lofty objectives, nevertheless wanted more tangible outcomes. The students they funded liked the more lofty objectives though those who were «first generation» students were not so sure about the «common culture» and «common standards of citizenship» which their new universities were supposed to be transmitting.[7] Some universities were the scene for confrontations, sit-ins and occupations as students pressed for campus «rights» and also demonstrated in protest against American involvement in the war in Vietnam and in favour of nuclear disarmament. Some students in the humanities and social sciences read, or at least started to read, Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964).

It may be pertinent to note here that this author, in 1968, was teaching modern history in the University of York, as he had been since its foundation five years earlier. It was a very different atmosphere from the University of Oxford, where he had been an undergraduate and postgraduate. His own youth had not then departed and it was with difficulty that he maintained that he was not a «student». But did that matter? Often, if not universally, informality reigned. Use of Christian names, as they were still called, hitherto used with caution and on the basis of some intimacy, began their journey to the contemporary point where it is difficult discover what a person's surname might be. It would be redundant here to rehearse in detail all the exuberant manifestations of what came generally to

[5] Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Austerity in Britain. Rationing, Controls and Consumption 1939–1955, Oxford 2000.

[6] Keith Robbins, «More means different» Contemporary Universities in Context, in: Franz Bosbach et al, Prince Albert and the Development of Education in England and Germany in the 19th Century, Munich 2000, 225–236; Harold James, Europe Reborn. A History, 1914–2000, London 2003, 310; Nick Thomas, Challenging Myths of the 1960s: The Case of Student Protest in Britain, in: Twentieth Century British History, 13/3 (2002), 277–97. It should perhaps be pointed out that Lord Robbins and this author are not personally related.

[7] G. Carr, The Angry Brigade. The Cause and the Case, London 1975.

be described as «the permissive age». York had a notable past in English history. It had somehow hitherto avoided the university which that heritage might have suggested. Now it was «all change», though not quite. Donald Coggan, the archbishop of York (to be translated to Canterbury in 1974), took a lively interest in this creation and chaired its governing Council. He was, however, a Semitic scholar and, for a few years had himself been a university lecturer in Manchester. He was not an ardent reader of Marcuse. Here, in microcosm, different «worlds» encountered each other in a provincial English city, one distant from the centre of government but «in tune» with what was happening elsewhere. Here, «1968»-type' adjustments were made to university structures – not without tension, but equally without a complete breakdown in communication between the generations or explosion into violence.

In interpreting these developments it is not surprising to find different interpretations. The United Kingdom certainly had some experience of the exalted moments to be found elsewhere. There were some parallels, for example, between what was happening in Germany and what was happening in Britain.[8] British «New Left» intellectuals engaged energetically with «the early Marx» and Herbert Marcuse's escape from one-dimensionality seemed an attractive prospect to youthful, and some not so youthful, readers. «Direct Action», its advocates claimed, would expose the exploitative violence which lay behind the facade of «liberal democracy». «Social Democracy» in the hands of a British Labour government, elected in 1964, was deemed a sham. The British «Angry Brigade» was a weak version of the German Baader-Meinhof gang, but it had its moment. Many other examples could be given to confirm that «1968» did not pass Britain by. Yet, when full reference to parallels and connections has been made, there is no convincing case for suggesting that Britain at this time was on the brink of «total revolution». There was no suggestion, for example, that a British Prime Minister needed to ape de Gaulle and call an election to buttress his imperilled position. As they toured the country, ministers sometimes encountered hostility but there was little prospect that the parliamentary system would be toppled. Students might position themselves as spokespersons for the poor and excluded, but Labour's working class supporters, not notably well-disposed towards «intellectuals», seemed unimpressed by students. There was no fracture in the party system. The two parties which had dominated post-war politics held together with little more than the customary difficulty. When the General Election was held, two years later, to the surprise of many commentators, it produced a Conservative government with a comfortable parliamentary majority. Turn-out, however, was the lowest since 1935. The Conservatives, however, had not mounted a deliberate and specific campaign against «the spirit of 1968». A meritocratic but uncharismatic prime minister, Edward Heath, sought rather to «modernize» the country in his own grumpy way. Part of his agenda was to persuade the United Kingdom to think of

[8] Keith Robbins, Politicization Tendencies in British Protestantism, in: Klaus Fitschen/Siegfried Hermle/Katharina Kuntner/Claudia Lepp/Antje Roggenkamp (eds.), Politisierung. Der westdeutsche Protestantismus in den 1960er und 70er Jahren, Göttingen 2010, 278–289.

itself as European. While Hugh McLeod may have a fair point to suggest that in Western Europe the defeated «Sixty-Eighters» nevertheless «remained a potent influence through the remaining years of the twentieth century», it is hard to identify a phalanx of British politicians of whom that can be said.[9]

That is far from saying, however, that there was no sense of crisis hanging over British structures and institutions at this time. Arguably, it became ever more apparent at this juncture that «traditional» benchmarks of «national» coherence were losing their potency. Replacements were proving hard to find. The «displacement» caused by the end of the British Empire was now evident. The pale imitation of it, which the Commonwealth provided (now without the adjective British prefixed), was no substitute as a symbol of Britain's global significance. Some found it particularly galling, for example, to see a British Prime Minister being fiercely criticized by other heads of Commonwealth governments in relation to British policy in Africa. Of course, it is difficult if not impossible to measure the precise impact of «loss of Empire». Some historians, picking up the notion that the British Empire was acquired absentmindedly suggest that its disappearance also occurred nonchalantly.[10] There was, they suggest, no trauma. The question is too complicated to be argued through here, but it is difficult to believe that there was not some awkward adjustment to be made for a generation accustomed, since childhood, to be celebrating «Empire Day».[11] In writing, in the late 1970s, a history of modern Britain covering the century after 1870, this author wrestled with an appropriate sub-title. Some colleagues thought it would be appropriate to speak of «The Decline of a Great Power» but he opted, perhaps in cowardly fashion, for «The Eclipse of a Great Power».[12] There was no doubt that the «traditional» heavy industries of the «first industrial nation» in the world were in decline. The American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, spoke of Britain at this time as seeking a role, but it had not yet been found. However, amidst much discussion of «missed opportunities» and «wrong turnings» in the 1960s there was no consensus about when «decline» had begun. Different yardsticks produced different conclusions. Nor was there consensus about what steps might be taken to arrest or reverse it, supposing indeed that «decline» was indeed real. Some commentators, however, thought that the cultural and economic pessimism was overdone. There was no evidence, they thought, of pervasive «decline» and the whole concept was nonsense. Others disagreed.[13]

[9] Hugh McLeod, Religious Crisis of the 1960s, Oxford 2007, 141–142.

[10] Bernard Porter, The Absent-minded Imperialists. Empire, Society and Culture in Britain, Oxford 2004.

[11] Stuart Ward (ed.), British Culture and the End of Empire, Manchester 2001; J.M. Mackenzie, Propaganda and Empire. The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880–1960, Manchester 1986.

[12] Keith Robbins, The Eclipse of a Great Power. Modern Britain, 1870–1975, London 1983, 342–343.

[13] Bruce Collins/Keith Robbins (eds.), British Culture and Economic Decline, London 1990; Richard English/Michael Kenny, Public Intellectuals and the Question of British Decline, in: Journal of Politics and International Relations, 3 (2001), 259–283.

So, while the «1960s» appears as an international phenomenon, it is necessary to stress more than is sometimes done in this context that «every country has its own history». The democratically governed countries of western and northern Europe, of North America, and of Australia on which Hugh McLeod concentrated, do indeed have a certain coherence but a transnational «religious crisis» should not be too swiftly detached from the crises being experienced by particular states. The UK crisis was as severe and as complex as any. Where was the country heading? What kind of future did it have? On the one hand, in December 1967 the UK had again been «kept waiting» when de Gaulle vetoed negotiations for British entry into the European Economic Community. It reinforced the popular view that the EEC was an essentially alien enterprise run by a typically arrogant «Continental» who had the nerve to tell «this great people» that they needed to achieve a profound economic and political transformation before they could join. The British people seemed suspended between an imperial identity and a European one, both of which they rejected.[14] On the other hand, there appeared cracks in the very integrity of the United Kingdom itself. In 1966, in Wales, *Plaid Cymru*'s leader won the nationalist party's first parliamentary seat at Westminster. He claimed that the Welsh were not just being denied self-expression as a nation, but «we are fighting in the last ditch for our very identity».[15] The following year the Scottish National Party also gained a by-election seat and seemed poised for rapid growth. Scotland had been a nation-state. Now was the time, activists claimed, to win back independence.[16] In Northern Ireland, the Civil Rights Movement challenged the status quo in the province. In 1968, in the light of these and other developments no one could tell how far and how fast Britain would «break up» but they seemed significant straws in the wind. It was sometimes thought that «the English» lacked any identity apart from their empire over others and had no nationalism separable from that empire. Their identity crisis, therefore, was likely to be more severe for them than for any other people.[17] How the «historic peoples» of these islands would adjust to each other was one thing, how «natives» would cope with «incomers» was another. Immigration from the former empire had been growing, despite the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962). The majority came from the Indian subcontinent, hitherto a minor source. In April 1968, a Conservative former minister, distinguished classical scholar, and occasional preacher, Enoch Powell, made a speech in which he thought the nation was mad to be permitting an annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants.[18] It was, he said, like watching a nation engaged in heaping up its own funeral

[14] Richard Weight, Patriots. National Identity in Britain 1940–2000, Basingstoke 2002, 468–469.

[15] Gwynfor Evans, Wales, in: Owen Dudley Edwards (ed.), Celtic Nationalism, London 1968, 259; Densil Morgan, «The Essence of Welshness». Some aspects of Christian Faith and National Identity in Wales c.1900–2000, in: Robert Pope (ed.), Religion and National Identity. Wales and Scotland c.1700–2000 Cardiff 2001, 139–162.

[16] William L. Miller (ed.), Anglo-Scottish Relations from 1900 to Devolution, Oxford 2007.

[17] J.G.A. Pocock, The Discovery of Islands. Essays in British History, Cambridge 2009, 309.

[18] Enoch Powell, No Easy Answers, London 1973, contains his discussion of «Christianity and Immigration».

pyre.[19] He was sacked from the opposition «Shadow Cabinet» but found immediate support from two thousand London dockers. They sang «I'm dreaming of a white Christmas». Powell denied that he was a «racist». Race was a cultural not a biological category. No race was genetically inherently superior to another but the English had a right to conserve an «Englishness» which was the product of a specific historical process. The Labour government, in 1965, had accepted that Britain was «already a multiracial society» but whether multiracialism, entailed multiculturalism (however defined) was another matter. Immigrants could not be regarded or treated as second-class citizens but whether there were common understandings of what citizenship entailed received little attention. At the very least, «Britishness» was entering on a period of instability, indeed some began to say that «Britishness» was in terminal decline.[20]

This sense of a «national crisis» was paralleled by a sense of «religious crisis». Both «religion» and «nation», it appeared, were simultaneously problematic in terms of how they were to be defined and what purpose they served. Each «crisis» was the subject of much public discussion, though the relationship between the two spheres, supposing there to be such a relationship, was not frequently considered. The uncertainty about «national decline», already alluded to, also attached to «religious decline». Was «decline» the right word? What were the benchmarks or yardsticks which could be applied either to nation or religion? There were various options. It might be that *Christian* Britain was «declining», that is to say that Britain remained stable but that part of its heritage which was presented as «Christian» was of diminishing significance. Alternatively, it might be that Christian *Britain* was «declining», that is to say that it was «Britishness» which was in disarray, that Christianity itself remained intact but was detaching itself from the «national project». However, it might be that *Christian Britain*, was declining, that is to say that both what religion was, and what it entailed, and what «nation» was, and what it required, were both simultaneously losing coherence.[21] It could also be argued that the word «decline», or sometimes «death» might be too loaded. What was happening was a «change», a complex change, in the manner in which individuals fashioned their identities, or were prepared to have their identities formed for them.. It looked in this context as though all social constructs were under general strain. The «spirit of '68» was not so much international as transnational, that is to say activists sought new social forms and structures which ignored or by-passed all the baggage of «national history». At another level, for two decades, with accelerating momentum, the «integration» of Western Europe had

[19] Hugh Kearney, The British Isles. A History of Four Nations, Cambridge 2006, 300; Peter Leese, Britain since 1945. Aspects of Identity, Basingstoke 2006, 80. In November 1968 Powell predicted, with some accuracy as it has turned out, that the coloured population would rise above 4.5 million by the beginning of the twenty-first century.

[20] Paul Ward, Britishness since 1870, London 2004, 170–173; Keith Robbins, L'historiographie britannique et la Britishness, in: Revue d'histoire du XIXe Siècle, 2 (2008), 113–126.

[21] John Wolffe, God & Greater Britain. Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843–1945, London 1994; Roger Hooker/John Sargent (eds.), Belonging in Britain. Christian Perspectives on Religion and Identity in a Plural Society, London 1991.

seemed to require some soft-pedalling of all of those «national» emphases which had arguably led to such disaster in Europe between the wars. The «nation» as the bond of social cohesion had to change or perhaps simply to cease to engender a committed loyalty to its symbols and myths. One illustration of changing intensities can be given. In the 1950s, the «national anthem» (the UK anthem?) was customarily played at the end of the performance in cinemas and theatres. The audience normally stood up. By the late sixties, however, audiences in the UK tended to rush for the exit before the music struck up. By the end of the 1960s, in what has been described as «one of those major historical transitions with no precise date or single impulse» the national anthem was no longer played.[22] It was indeed a significant development but it should not be taken to imply that the national anthem was henceforth never played or that there was a general wish that God would cease to save the queen. British «subjects», in the process of being described as «citizens», would make their own choices as to how deeply penetrative they wished their identity to be and how pervasive they wished to see its expression. In short, what «membership of the nation» entailed became a matter of individual inclination and definition.

«Religious identity» was subjected to analogous, indeed sometimes the same, pressures. The «spirit of '68» did not launch a full-scale assault on the arrangements between church and state which then prevailed in the United Kingdom. Over the previous century, first in Ireland and then in Wales, the state had withdrawn from «establishing» any church. In 1968, therefore, only in England and Scotland were there «established» churches – though what «establishment» meant in Scotland in the case of the Church of Scotland (Reformed) differed considerably from what it meant in England in the case of the Church of England (Anglican). There was, therefore, no *British* church to separate itself from the British state. It could be argued, of course, that different churches within the British Isles had long been content to «carry» national identities in the absence of, and in the substantial absence of a demand for, political independence, or something akin to it.[23] Prominent Christians, clerical and lay, were indeed now active in the political cause, but whether «the essence of Welshness» was indeed to be found in its churches and chapels, or indeed should be found there, was problematic.[24] The survival of the «established churches» could not but fail to suggest that in some sense Britain remained a Christian country. There were some Anglican bishops who sat as of right in the House of Lords. The monarch was the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. It would be erroneous to suppose that «1968» triggered an assault on this kind of «establishment» and the Reformed/Anglican message it still conveyed to such outside observers who were curious about the Constitution of the United Kingdom.. Indeed, it is only in the present that the position of bishops is under consideration in the current complicated business of re-

[22] Harrison, Seeking a Role (see footnote 4), 497.

[23] Keith Robbins, Religion and Identity in Modern British History, in: Keith Robbins, History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain, London 1993, 85–104.

[24] All these matters are discussed in Keith Robbins, The Oxford History of the Christian Church. England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales 1900–2000, Oxford 2008.

forming the House of Lords. In this respect, therefore, «1968», in terms of the formal status of «religion», had little impact. The monarchy remained intact and the same queen, more than four decades later, remains the Supreme Governor of the Church. No significant party has wished to attempt to unscramble these complexities comprehensively, though a change of monarch might be the occasion. The Church of England therefore still continued to see itself in England as the «national church» with a parochial network in every part of the country and as «hosting» state occasions of remembrance or celebration. No doubt idealistically, it considered itself to be serving all the people of the parish. It did not see itself as existing to sustain a huddle of the holy (and wholly) English. Here, in certain externalities at any rate, was a conception of a «Christian country» in which, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than two-thirds of the population declared in the national census that their identity was «Christian».

Yet the picture of religion, specifically of Christianity, in decline had apparently been well-authenticated by 1968. It was not a year of sudden mass exodus from «organized religion» with a sense of revolutionary release. It simply appeared to be another year in a by now familiar pattern remarked upon and acknowledged as much by church leaders as by social commentators. The indicators of a substantial «withdrawal» from anything which can be characterized as «regular churchgoing» are familiar and need little rehearsing in detail at this point. As is well-known, they have been set out and expounded, amongst others, by Callum Brown.[25] Whether the emphasis he has placed upon the mid-sixties, and the explanation he has offered, bears the weight he has placed remains contentious. The point to be stressed here, however, as with «national decline», is to determine within the universe of Christian belief, the point at which what is judged to be central and defining subsists or decays at a given period of time. There is no shortage of books which appear to pinpoint «Ages of Decline» (in religion) but they do not agree either about dates or about what constitutes true «religion» at any given juncture. A «religious boom» may have been «irreligiously» based – as may sometimes appear. It has recently been argued that what passed for a Victorian boom was baseless but «where Christianity remained the central focus it was apparently immune to both the allurements of the world and the internal rivalry of ‹ecclesiastical machinery›.» The alternative attempt to make the circles of salvation and recreation «concentric» led «ultimately» to the triumph of the latter.[26]

So disputation about the conditions of Christian flourishing did not suddenly arise in the Sixties, though that impression has been frequently conveyed. What appeared again, though naturally with new features, were debates and divisions about «faith» and «works», about «action» and «reflection», about «authority» and «freedom», about «withdrawal» and «immersion» in the affairs of the world – all of which had been played out for centuries. The Churches of the United

[25] Callum Brown, The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularization 1800–2000, London 2001, 2009; Callum Brown, Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain, London 2006.

[26] Dominic Erdozain, The Problem of Pleasure. Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion, Woodbridge 2010, 280–281.

Kingdom, as they were constituted in 1968, had all given different answers, indeed owed their distinctive origins to standpoints which had been taken on one or other of these issues over previous centuries. The question they now faced, in reacting to the «spirit of 1968», was whether these historically inherited convictions had themselves to be reformulated when faced with ubiquitous and incessant «change» or, alternatively, held onto tenaciously, even if the consequence was societal marginality. There was here an unsettling paradox, remarked upon by various authors in their own way. The more emphasis placed within «the Church» upon the «scandal of peculiarity» and its own sense of itself as a «body» with its own «identity» the less acceptable or «relevant» its societal influence became. If, on the other hand, it downplayed its distinctiveness and «underwrote» many «secular» tendencies it risked dissolution into a more general and anchorless civic religion.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find in the titles of books being written evidence of this preoccupation. One such author was David L. Edwards who blended his wealth of historical and theological reading for a «general» readership. [27] It had, however, been in the early Sixties rather than at their conclusion that intellectual turmoil had been most apparent – as seen in the «Honest to God» debate.[28] In another volume, Edwards' successor as editor of the Student Christian Movement Press (the publishing house which published much of the relevant literature), John Bowden, lamented what he called the deep-seated feeling that Christian faith was a matter of all or nothing. He encountered too many who believed that even the slightest deviation from the norm would open the floodgates for doubt, despair, moral collapse and anarchy. Theology could not progress without risk and it was better to venture on new paths even at the risk of failure or disaster than to put up the shutters and attempt to sit out the storm. [29] A disaster did in fact befall the Student Christian Movement itself – which at this juncture disintegrated and ceased to hold the leading position which it had held in universities and in leading church circles. While the precise pattern of events remains somewhat unclear it would appear that the split between «social radicals» and those who were still «churchy» proved serious and unmanageable.[30] The conviction, expressed at the time and later embodied in a book, by Dennis Nineham was that Christianity, at any given period, was part of an unrepeatable combination of cultural elements. [31] It was implicit that it could accommodate a fresh combination of cultural elements and not seek simply to rehearse adherence to something called «the unbroken tradition of the church». Liberation from the notion that there was, or indeed ever had been, an unchanging «past» naturally brought

[27] David L. Edwards, Religion and Change, London 1971; David L. Edwards, What is real in Christianity?, London 1972.

[28] Keith Robbins, Contextualising a «New Reformation». John A.T. Robinson and the Church of England in the Early Sixties', in: Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte (forthcoming, autumn 2010).

[29] R.H. Preston (ed.), Theology and Change: Essays in Memory of Alan Richardson, London 1975, 23.

[30] Robin Boyd, The Witness of the Student Christian Movement: Church ahead of the Church, London 2007.

[31] Dennis Nineham, Christianity Mediaeval and Modern. A Study in Religious Change, London 1993, 236–237. Nineham was Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge in the Sixties.

freedom to look afresh at a host of contemporary social and ethical issues.[32] Christianity, T.S. Eliot had written, was «always adapting itself into something that can be believed». It further followed from his remark, it was frequently argued, that theology had to be perpetually mobile: no single confessional position could or should be immune to change.[33]

Fluidity therefore established itself as a norm. Right across the ecclesiastical spectrum, from Roman Catholics to Baptists, controversies blew up as individuals shifted their positions publicly. In December 1966, the Roman Catholic theologian, lecturer and editor of the *Clergy Review* announced his departure. He no longer found the biblical and historical claims of the Catholic Church justified. It now seemed to him to be «a pseudo-political structure from the past». It was clearly breaking up. The controversy his departure engendered bubbled on. The mood of crisis came to a head in England on the publication of Pope Paul's encyclical on contraception, *Humanae Vitae,* in July 1968. It is probable that a majority of at least middle-class Catholics were already using the pill. Catholic dissent reached the letter pages of *The Times* newspaper. The Catholic Church was experiencing «a crisis of authority» in public view. One historian, himself once a Catholic priest, took the view subsequently that what happened was the tragedy «of a whole generation of able priests».[34] Heenan, archbishop of Westminster, saw himself as embattled. Only in 1973, as he saw it, was light beginning to break through. He had beaten back a bitter attack on the Catholic Church being mounted by her own children. The faithful, he supposed, were again looking to their bishops and priests for protection and guidance. The turbulence, perhaps, was to be explained by the laity's unsettlement at being asked by the Second Vatican Council to accept «co-responsibility» yet not knowing what it really meant (or what bishops thought it meant). One incoming bishop at the meeting of the Conference of English Bishops gathered to discuss the implementation of the Council's proceedings jocularly asked how they were going to persuade the laity not to kiss episcopal rings any more.[35]

English Baptists had no bishops and therefore needed no injunction to cease exuberant kissing of rings. Yet it should not be supposed that the absence of hierarchical structures meant that there was no comparable crisis of authority within the mechanisms which kept their «Union» together. There was ample and sometimes stressful debate both about structure and doctrine. «Liberty» had been a Baptist watchword, but how far could it go in terms of the range of belief and practice which the denomination contained.[36] Secession of particular churches did occur, but not on the level that was sometimes being predicted. It was a propitious moment, many evangelicals believed, to change – not, however, in the modish

[32] G.I.T. Machin, Churches and Social Issues in Twentieth-Century Britain, Oxford 1998.
[33] Cited and discussed in David Ferguson, Faith and its Critics. A Conversation, Oxford 2009, 39; E.R. Norman, Church and Society in England 1770–1970, Oxford 1976, was the most trenchant of contemporary critics in his chapter «After 1960».
[34] Adrian Hastings, A History of English Christianity 1920–1990, London 1991, 573–579.
[35] Robbins, England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales (see footnote 24), 352–355.
[36] Ian M. Randall, The English Baptists of the Twentieth Century, Didcot 2005, 313–363.

manner so evident, as they perceived it, in the liberal acquiescence which was so widespread. «Reinventing» Evangelicalism, however, was a complicated business but offered an indication that 1968's iconoclasm could lead in very different directions.[37] One document, *Baptists at the Crossroads* published in 1968 warned evangelicals in their ranks that they were in danger of losing what was distinctively evangelical in the «coming great Church». It expressed the conviction that there were truths which it was necessary to continue to hold firmly. It was not necessary to give unquestioning obedience to «change». It also reflected the notion that «the coming great Church» might actually happen. A Faith and Order Conference held at Nottingham in 1964 expressed an «urgent desire» that the member churches of the British Council of Churches (which body did not include Roman Catholics) should inaugurate a union. They dared to name a date. It would not be in 1968, but it would be in 1980. In April 1968 came the final report of the joint committee of Anglicans and Methodists which had been at work through the decade. It envisaged union in two stages. The proposals were put to votes in both churches in July 1969 but, while the Methodists clearly recorded a majority in favour the Anglicans failed to reach the 70 per cent hurdle by a small margin. It was an indication that urgency might be delayed. At one level, all the discussion that had taken place was part of the staple of ecumenical discussion as it had evolved post-war. Gaps had been closed, but not sufficiently. At another level, however, there were those in all the churches who were impatient with «structures». Charles Davis, in departing, had spoken of his belief that some other form of Christian presence in the world was under formation. Others in other churches, whether they left or stayed in, shared a similar view. They had little interest in struggling to bring a «coming great Church» to life if it was only, writ large, a glorified version of whatever church it was that they belonged to. Events also appeared to be showing that a good many Roman Catholics too had lost, or were losing, the comforting and reassuring conviction that their church was indeed the model to which all should adhere. In all this, however, there was a reluctance to give much information about what «form of Christian presence in the world» might actually be «under formation». A «Church Leaders' Conference» organized by the British Council of Churches, with a substantial Roman Catholic participation took place in Birmingham in September 1972. It was intended to be an honest meeting of 500 minds reflecting on the turbulence surrounding them. This was not a time to pass resolutions and agree on messages. It was one for heart-searching and groping after solutions.[38]

And there was still «establishment». It was the queen who opened the first session of the new Synod of the Church of England in Westminster Abbey in November 1970. Leading figures from the political parties were present. *De facto,* though not *de jure*, the Church of England was now substantially able to govern itself. Whether the Crown should continue to appoint its bishops (on the recom-

[37] Rob Warner, Reinventing English Evangelicalism 1966–2001. A Theological and Sociological Study, Milton Keynes 2007.

[38] David L. Edwards, The British Churches Turn to the Future, London 1972.

mendation of the prime minister) and, if so, through what changed procedure, remained to be further considered. It was an accommodation which seemed generally acceptable. The commission on «Church and State» appointed by the Anglican archbishops and chaired by the historian Owen Chadwick reported its view in 1970 that there remained «a general, diffused, inarticulate assent to Christianity» in the body of the nation. The Church might regret that the occasions when the people wanted the church were all too rare, but they did exist. Neither the *British* state nor the *English* church, at this juncture, wanted to draw clear and unambiguous lines. In the formal constitutional sense, therefore, «1968» signified little in this «religious» sphere. At a time of frail identities, neither church nor state wanted to unpick a «heritage» which both could selectively emphasize for their own purposes. There was little momentum behind the call from the National Secular Society or any other body for an immediate and absolute disentangling of church and state. This kind of accommodation – «very English» some said – masked great uncertainties in church and state, buffeted though not shattered as both were by the «sixties». The relation of past to present could not avoid scrutiny. The stiff English upper lip gave way. In the face of this enveloping age, the churches we have been considering were, in the eyes of one recent author, «towers of jelly, tolerant, deeply concerned, and wobbling tremulously in the breeze», but they were not the only institutions to be doing so.[39] It was a point when the history of «religion» and «nation», which had been symbiotically written about for several centuries, no longer seemed possible. «Time was», as Michael Bentley puts it when «ecclesiastical history and the history of state and society had been taken to be inseparably intertwined» but it was no longer the present time. [40] Social scientists did not like to talk about «national character», but by the 1960s it was deemed possible to pin down «national identity». Studies might perhaps enable one to speak positively about the nation when it was not acceptable to embrace «nationalism». Lord Radcliffe, the distinguished jurist, amongst whose previous achievements had been the delimitation of the boundary between India and Pakistan at the time of partition, expressed the view in 1966 that it was necessary to «get back quickly to the active realisation of our identity as a nation». National feeling, he thought, was still the strongest bond of union in the contemporary world and the British as «an old and experienced people»

[39] Paul Addison, No Turning Back. The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-War Britain, Oxford 2010, 342.

[40] Michael Bentley, Modernizing England's Past. English Historiography in the Age of Modernism 1870–1970, Cambridge 2005, 45–69; Keith Robbins, Ethnicity, Religion, Class and Gender and the «Island Story/ies». Great Britain and Ireland, in: Stefan Berger/Chris Lorenz, The Contested Nation. Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories, Basingstoke 2008, 231–255; Peter Mandler, History and National Life, London 2002. It is perhaps significant in this same context that in his volume: Making History Now and Then. Discoveries, Controversies and Explanations, Basingstoke 2008, which reflects on how history has been written and made in Britain across the twentieth century, David Cannadine gives no space to what has been written, in this process, on «Church», «Christianity» or «Religion».

could be trusted not to abuse it.[41] By the early 1970s, politicians from Left and Right could not restrain their determination to «rediscover our own identity».[42] They were less forthcoming on what it actually was.[43] Christians were indeed «in difficulty», as Sir Brian Harrison puts it, but they were not alone. Many organizations and institutions found themselves having to distinguish between «active» and «passive» members. Lord Radcliffe's «bond of unity» was elusive.

It scarcely needs to be said that the issues which have been considered in this article are not novel. In country after country in Europe in the long nineteenth century, states and churches had bargained over «spheres of influence», with varying results.[44] In England, churchmen had looked on «the English church» and then on the civilization in which it was placed. If they were John Henry Newman, they became uncomfortable. In 1890, reflecting on Newman's death, R.W. Church, the Dean of St. Paul's thought that he had always before him a Church, a religion, a «Christian nation» which professed to be identical with the Church and the religion of the Gospels and Epistles but «what was the identity, beyond certain phrases and conventional suppositions?» The English Church had exchanged religion for civilization. So Newman had departed for Rome, but, in Church's view, it could not, and did not escape him, that the Roman Church, for all its good things, was, as a whole, as unlike the Church of the New Testament and the first ages as was the English Church from which he departed. And, in becoming a Roman Catholic, he did not become Roman. His chief interests never ceased to be for «things English».[45] More than a century later, however, it was no longer so clear what «things English» were.

It has been the argument of this paper that «1968» did not constitute a clear caesura in the United Kingdom when viewed from the perspective of religion. There were no «befores» which had been totally obliterated and no «afters» which were without precedent. Nevertheless, in the late sixties and early seventies, the manifestations of unsettlement were profound. The ramifications reached into an unresolved present as «the common good» has been picked over and re-presented. The events of late sixties buried a simple notion of a «Christian nation», or «nations» but what «pluralism» entailed proved more difficult to determine, as ethnic, cultural, religious and non-religious elements staked their competing claims in the public arena on a scale not seen in the 1960s.[46]

[41] Cited in Peter Mandler, The English National Character. The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair, London 2006, 226.

[42] W.J.M. Mackenzie, Political Identity, Harmondsworth 1978, 16–17.

[43] «Who was who was becoming much more difficult to identify» writes Robert Colls in his: Identity of England, Oxford 2002, 151.

[44] Keith Robbins (ed.), The Dynamics of Religious Reform in Northern Europe 1780–1920, Vol 1. Political and Legal Reform, Leuven 2010.

[45] R.W. Church, Occasional Papers II, London 1897, 472–477.

[46] Further reflection on these issues can be found, for example, in Roger Trigg, Religion in Public Life, Oxford 2007 and Jane Garnett et al. (eds.), Redefining Christian Britain. Post 1945 Perspectives, London 2006; Keith Robbins, Religion and Culture. A Contemporary British/Irish Perspective, in: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte, 100 (2006), 331–343.

1968: Declining Identities – Religion and Nation in the United Kingdom

This article argues, as far as religion is concerned, that the features most commonly identified with ‹the spirit of '68› in the UK – youth in revolt, relaxed manners, political radicalism and Puritanism repudiated – must be seen in the wider context of a pervasive loss of confidence in the UK in ‹identities› and the institutional frameworks, secular or ecclesiastical, which expressed them. Some pertinent factors are then explored: ‹loss of empire›, non-European immigration, ‹economic decline›, ambivalence about ‹Europe›, and the possible ‹break-up of Britain›. These were political, social and cultural issues but had their ‹religious› counterparts in the questioning of denominational identities and, indeed, of ‹institutional Christianity› as a whole. A great deal, across the board, seemed ‹in decline› or ‹dying›. In the event, however, despite some fervent debate, ‹1968› brought no radical transformation. It left behind, however, in church and state, unresolved issues of ‹belonging›.

1968: schwindende Identitäten – Religion und Nation in Grossbritannien

Dieser Artikel verfolgt die These, dass in Bezug auf Religion die Faktoren, welche zumeist mit «'68» in Grossbritannien in Verbindung gebracht werden – Jugendrevolte, gelockerte Sitten, politischer Radikalismus, Ablehnung von Puritanismus – im weiteren Kontext eines durchgreifenden Verlustes von Vertrauen in britische «Identitäten» und die institutionellen Rahmenbedingungen, säkular oder kirchlich, welche diese Identitäten zum Ausdruck brachten, zu sehen sind. So werden im vorliegenden Beitrag einige zentrale Faktoren untersucht, so der «Verlust des Empire», die «nicht-europäische Immigration», der «wirtschaftliche Niedergang», die ambivalente Haltung gegenüber Europa, der mögliche «Untergang Grossbritanniens». Dies waren politische, soziale und kulturelle Angelegenheiten, die jedoch ihren «religiösen» Gegenpart in der Infragestellung konfessionell-denominationeller Identitäten und, ganz eigentlich, des «institutionellen Christentums» schlechthin hatten. Vieles schien im «Niedergang» oder «Sterben» begriffen. Als Ereignis brachte «1968» allerdings trotz einiger hitziger Debatten keine radikale Transformation. Es hinterliess jedoch in der Kirche wie im Staat ungelöste Fragen von «Zugehörigkeit», von «belonging».

1968: le déclin des identités – religion et nation en Grande-Bretagne

En Grande-Bretagne, les révoltes juvéniles, la libération des mœurs, le radicalisme politique et le rejet du puritanisme sont des facteurs assimilés la plupart du temps à 1968. Cet article étudie la thèse qui démontre que, concernant la religion, ces événements sont à comprendre dans le contexte plus large de perte de confiance générale dans les «identités» britanniques et les cadres institutionnels, profanes ou ecclésiastiques, ayant représenté ces identités. Il aborde quelques facteurs centraux, comme la «perte de l'Empire», l'«immigration non européenne», le «déclin économique», l'attitude ambivalente face à l'Europe et le possible «déclin de la Grande-Bretagne». Ces affaires politiques, sociales et culturelles se répercutèrent sur le «religieux» par une remise en question des identités confessionnelles et dénominationelles et, plus fondamentalement, du «christianisme institutionnel». Tout semblait sur le point de «décliner» ou de «succomber». 1968 en tant qu'évènement ne provoqua néanmoins pas, malgré quelques débats passionnés, de transformation radicale, mais légua à l'Eglise et à l'Etat des questions irrésolues d'«appartenance», de «belonging».

Schlüsselbegriffe – Mots clés – Keywords

Youth revolt – Jugendrevolte – Révoltes juvéniles, University expansion – Expansion der Universität – expansion de l'université, Immigration, Decolonization – Entkolonialisierung – décolonisation, Economic decline – wirtschaftlicher Niedergang – déclin économique, National identity – nationale Identität – identité nationale, Ecumenism – Ökumenismus – œcuménisme, ‹Christian Britain› – «christliches Grossbritannien» – «Grande-Bretagne chrétienne», ‹Crisis of Authority› – «Autoritätskrise» – «crise d'autorité», Monarchy – Monarchie – monarchie.

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