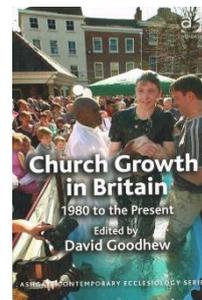


# David Goodhew (ed) : Church Growth in Britain 1980 to the Present

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## Introduction – David Goodhew

*It is a truth almost universally acknowledged that Christianity in Britain is in decline. However, not all universally acknowledged truths are actually true. Some churches in some regions are declining, but this volume shows that substantial and sustained church growth has also taken place across Britain over the last 30 years. This growth is large-scale; it is occurring across a wide geographical range; it is highly multi-cultural in its social reach; and it shows no sign of slowing down. The current consensus, by focusing almost exclusively on decline, is seriously mistaken.*

- 500,000 Christians in black majority churches (hardly any 60 yrs ago)
- In the 30 yrs since 1980 new congregations have been founded at an average of 1 pa in the city of York
- The diocese of London has grown by over 70% since 1990

The dominant narrative in the literature is one of decline; known as the 'secularization thesis', it anticipates further inevitable decline in the future. Decline is real, particularly in mainline denominations; but there's another side to the story. This book is 'a mosaic of micro-studies' – ie it's local stories.

How to interpret statistics – eg while the 2011 Census reveals only 47% of 18-34 year olds declare any religious affiliation, 67% of them said they pray. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre once said that whilst the English do not believe in God, they do like to pray to Him from time to time...

## Major findings:

- The Christian Church in London is growing both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the population.
- Mainline churches can grow – the Baptists have grown over the last 3 decades; English cathedral attendance has grown.
- There is substantial growth of black/ethnic minority churches in Britain.
- Fresh Expressions/church plants/emerging church are now attended by 10s of thousands
- In Birmingham, black majority and new churches are beginning to overtake mainline ones
- Brierley: some 2950 new churches were started between 1989-2005. Probably over 5000 have been started since 1980 – that means the no of new churches started sine 1980 is greater than the total number of RC churches in England and equivalent to 1/3 of all CofE churches. Newspaper headings and book covers which presuppose vast numbers of church closures are misleading in their failure to note the similarly substantial number of new churches which are opening. There is growth *and* decline.
- Church growth is most common in areas of migration, population growth and economic dynamism – corridors of growth have developed alongside major economic arteries like the A1/E coast mainline, and in growing cities on them.
- Church growth diminishes the further away you get from London
- Women are associated with church growth – the vibrant spirituality of multicultural Catholic London is driven by women, and the new churches of York though led by men are heavily affected by the agency of women; churches led by women are as likely or more likely to grow than those led by men.

## The secularization thesis

Academic agreement as to the fact of church decline is close to unanimous. Discussions tend to emphasize regions where decline is strongest, and ignore those where growth has happened (where you look affects what you find). Studies focus on mainline denominations; 'new' (ie in the last 100 years) churches are passed over (harder to collect the data).

1m Christians attend black, asian and minority ethnic churches; research tends to ignore them –but they are growing rapidly. Multicultural Britain has led to marked church growth.

The elite culture in Britain may well be secularizing, whilst other parts of British life are seeing church growth – you'd get a different result from BBC executives and BBC cleaners.

It may be the best way of describing the religious shift in the W world in recent decades as being from obligation to consumption, ie duty to choice – so obligation based churches are declining, consumerist based ones growing; so we can get both more and less religious at the same time.

The lesson of history is that Christianity has declined and grown in surprising ways across the centuries – so we should be wary of theories which assume faith can only shrink, or only grow. *Many British theologians, church leaders and churches have consciously or unconsciously internalized both the secularization thesis and its eschatology of decline, thereby*

creating an ecclesiology of fatalism which feeds the assumption that church growth is impossible and encourages the redefinition of Christianity so that shrinking congregations are not a problem.

Research in Europe suggests a link between establishment and decline and vv.

*The evidence of this volume is that substantial church growth has taken place in Britain in recent decades.. Have mainline churches internalised a secular eschatology of decline and accepted an ecclesiology of fatalism as a result? This volume offers churches, church leaders and theologians the intellectual space in which they could re-set their theology, so that they let go of the eschatology of decline that the secularization thesis has instilled and replace it with an alternative eschatology. 20*

## 2. Anglican Resurgence: the CofE in London – John Wolffe and Bob Jackson

Between 1990-2010, members of CofE churches in London rose by over 70%. Part of a wider picture – in 2005 attendances at all denominations in London were 8.3% of the population (cp national average of 6.3%). It's in the forefront of church growth and renewal.

- In 1851 attendance was 37% (est)
- In 1902-03 it was 22%, of whom 43% were Anglican (8% in inner London and 11% in outer London were in Anglican churches on a Sunday.)

Probably given double attendance it's actually 83% of those figs for attenders rather than attendances. Figures higher in the City (with lots of non residents worshipping there) than elsewhere.

- 1990 uSa was 1.5% in Anglican churches – this was the low point.
- 2009 uSa increased by 15% ; but weekly attendance was more - perhaps 3.7% of the London population in Anglican churches; electoral roll membership increased 71% since 1990, to 77K. There were no noticeable changes in social trends in the capital in this period.

Fresh expressions mostly meet on weekdays so have no impact on Sunday numbers. *The official statistical series appear to be missing new church members to such an extent nationally that level or even gently declining official statistics probably indicate rising adherence numbers.*

How's it happened? It's happened in London Diocese(+15%) but not in Southwark (-10%). It's not chance, but organisational reform and renewal of its interior life. In the 80s attention was focussed on the battle for the ordination of women. The change began in 1991 with David Hope as Bishop of London. Three changes were made

1. Job descriptions moved to being about leaders in mission and enablers of lay ministry, rather than pastoral care/ views on gender – every major individual church growth story since 1990 began with the appointment of a new incumbent chosen with mission and growth in mind
2. MAPs – all churches have to complete and renew them
3. Parish share was reformed, moving away from being a poll tax to being an agreed contribution (no formula). This removed the cushion from shrinking churches and didn't penalise growth in numbers

HTB – the main contribution has been church planting.

Child attendance has risen faster than adult attendance since 2001.

Population turnover is high – up to 20-40% pa.

## 3. Devout East Enders: Catholicism in the East End of London – Alana Harris

Catholics seem to be about 8% of the British population, with a marked decline in attendance at Mass since the 60s. They remain the largest church-going group in the country. Catholics and Anglicans together account for more than half all church attendance in the UK. But this is only part of the story. The 2005 English Church Census show that non-white attendance in Britain has increased by 19% since 1998 (3x greater than their proportion in the population); in London 44% of churchgoers are black, with another 14% non-white. London is home to 11% of all churches in England, it accounts for 20% of the nation's churchgoers and caters for 57% of all worshippers in their 20s.

Canning Town Catholic parish – now has 1200 weekly attendance, from over 40 migrant backgrounds. Migrants bring spiritual practices from their own backgrounds, and these are flourishing:

- The Block Rosary – devotion stemming from the appearances of Mary in Fatima in 1917 – Belinda introduced it in Canning Town
- Legion of Mary – founded in Dublin to practice spiritual works of mercy, restarted in 1998
- A lay driven Bible study group – run by Nigel from Nigeria
- Divine Mercy – devotion to image of Christ and prayer practices from Poland
- Union of Catholic Mothers, founded 1913, restarted by a Nigerian professional woman
- London Citizens – 1996; an alliance of 90+ civil society institutions
- Franciscan Friars of the Renewal – a community of missionary men from the US
- Christian People's Alliance – evangelical Christian candidates in 2005 local elections

Religious affiliation may allow for the formation of relationships across cultural backgrounds – 'cosmopolitan sociability'.

## 4. Baptist Growth in England – Ian Randall

Chapter restricted to Baptist Union of GB, some 2000+ churches, mostly in England.

In the mid 70s there were fewer than a dozen growing Baptist churches; by 1979 there were 200. Growth in 1984 was the highest for 60 years. Further increase was reported in 1987.

This was the result of deliberate effort – in the 80s there was a new spirit of optimism and commitment to church growth and church planting, flowing from Baptist involvement in the church growth movement. Derek Tidball helped start the British Church Growth Association, and Roy Pointer worked through the Bible Society to create church growth materials, urging churches to deploy leadership, use small groups, define evangelistic tasks and identify members' ministries.

The Baptist Union launched a church planting initiative in 1982, and in 1990 at a further conference regional Baptist Associations were urged to have their own church planting strategies. Nearly 200 Baptist churches were planted during the 1990s.

In the 1980s a new group called Mainstream brought new energy, with its emphasis on evangelism. Many Baptists were involved in evangelical enterprises such as EA, Spring Harvest. In 1991 a census showed that 84% of Baptists identified themselves as evangelical. It also showed 3% growth in attendance from 1985-89.

Spiritual renewal was an ingredient contributing to Baptist growth; in 1989 80% of the students at Spurgeon's College saw themselves as charismatic.

The most spectacular eggs of church planting and rapid growth have been among black-majority Baptist congregations.

Research showed that against a background of 14% in churchgoing in the 90s, attendance at Baptist churches had grown by 13%. The results for 2002-08 are less good – attendance rose by 3%, same as population. Teenage attendance was up by 9% but church membership was down by 7%, baptisms by 23% and children under 14 in contact with Baptist churches by 8%. Membership was down (but to less than attendance, so that may say something about ways of belonging).

## **5. Stirrings in Barchester : Cathedrals and Church Growth – Lynda Barley**

A dramatic rise in worship attendance over the last 10 years. English cathedrals are in good health and of ongoing significance to wider society. Around 12m people visit English cathedrals each year; there are 15000 volunteers. 41% said the cathedral building was the attraction; 10% were attracted by the opportunity to reflect and be thoughtful.

- Highest satisfaction was reported by those who attended a service – 74% of those attending said it was very good; the next highest satisfaction was reported by those who lit a candle and prayed (68% of those).
- Overall 59% of visitors lit a candle or said a prayer
- 66% said they were spiritual/religious
- 80% said they consider themselves Christian
- 40% attend church once a month or more.

Surveys (2004) in Wells and Truro indicated that 78% of visitors to Wells came primarily for the cathedral; 23% in Truro. National surveys in the last decade show that 85% of adults in the UK have visited a church in the past year (46% have visited a historic house/garden, and 51% the cinema). In an English Heritage / CofE 2003 survey, 72% of adults said a place of worship is an important part of the local community; 63% said they should be more actively involved, 69% that they should be more accessible to the community, and 72% that they provide valuable community facilities.

In the 80s Sunday attendance levels were declining, alongside those of local churches. Growth began in 1996 with a 1% growth rate. It has continued, slowly, but the greatest growth has been in mid week services – more than doubled between 2000 and 2010, nearly doubling Sunday attendance levels. On average each cathedral has 20+ services; attendance has doubled from 1m in 2000 to 2m in 2010. Special services add another 1m.

Cathedrals attract a wide range of people and offer a breadth of hospitality and experience incorporated in Christian heritage, religion and spirituality. Christmas Day sees an average attendance of 3000 people in cathedrals. Most people came with others, living under 30 mins away; half had been to a cathedral service before but weren't regular churchgoers; others had visited. Christmas worship appeals to many who attended church as children and regard themselves as Christians/spiritual/religious people.

50% of adults categorise themselves as dechurched, 30% (mostly younger) are unchurched. Cathedrals offer a high quality shop window to the CofE, appealing to churchgoers as well as non churchgoers.

## **6. Reverse Mission: from the Global South to Mainline Churches – Rebecca Catto**

'Reverse mission' is generally seen to have taken off in 2008; and is growing. Or is 'partnership' a better term?

- The Melanesian brothers and sisters mission to the UK in 2005 – events well attended but no impact outside churches
- Maria and Mateo, from Peru, working in NW UK with Latin Partners, evangelising Muslims – negligible numbers responding. They point to danger of missionaries just becoming economic migrants
- Korean Methodists in a SW city

None of these is winning converts; but they do contribute to the UK church.

## **7. The Rise of Black Churches – Hugh Osgood**

Overview of the growth of Black Majority Churches since 1980. Dates back to 1950 with the beginning of Afro-Caribbean church growth – churches which grew up not because of racist attitudes but to fulfil particular spiritual, social and cultural needs (Joel Edwards). A MARC Europe survey identified a 20% growth in Caribbean churches from 1975-79, not explicable by immigration. By 1980 Black Majority churches were looking for ways of working together – but the single large BM Church was not a feature till 1980.

A second wave started c. 1980, catering for a more African traditional experience of church life not present here – individual African churches were founded that were not denominational, but grew from prayer groups established by professional African residents looking to provide culturally-familiar fellowship to fellow nationals.

- Samson Ksaku Boafo, a Ghanaian lawyer, began a prayer group in Tottenham which grew by 1988 into Edmonton Temple, with a congregation of 1200. It's now run by elders as the Dominion Centre, in Wood Green, and has a new centre in Welling.
- Deeper Christian Life Ministry began in 1973 in Lagos, Nigeria as a bible study fellowship; Pre Ovia was sent to found one in London, now in various London boroughs and N cities.
- Other Nigerian plants are New Covenant, and Foursquare (Matthew Ashimolowo).

The word of Faith, with its prosperity culture which fitted well with African students' upwardly mobile aspirations; Christianity in W Africa changed in this direction in the 80s. Ashimolowo started Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) in 1992; soon 4000 strong, and relocated to Hackney.

199' the Afro-Caribbean EA became the African and Caribbean EA, most Afro-Caribbeans now being happy to be linked to an African identity, which they were not before. Morris Cerullo's 1992 Mission to London brought down barriers between denominationally and independently minded Africans and A-Caribbeans., and thereafter.

Training thought two London churches, Kensington Temple and Victory Church. African students came to train to plant, and this led to church growth. Other churches have been planted independently by individuals.

## **8. African Pentecostal Growth: the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Britain – Richard Burgess**

There are nearly 300 African initiated congregations/denominations in the Black Majority Churches UK Directory; mostly Pentecostal and over half led by Nigerians. Of the UK's 10 largest churches, 5 are led by Nigerians.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) began as a small local denomination in SW Nigeria, and now has 14)))+ branches in 140+ nations – one of the fastest growing Pentecostal churches in the world.

African churchplanting has come in waves:

1. 1960s – linked to immigration, mostly Nigerian
2. 1980s – Neo Pentecostals from Nigeria and Ghana
3. 1990s, African church planters leaving these denominations to establish independent congregations, coinciding with massive increase in immigration. Kingsway ICC is the largest single congregation in W Europe. The RCCG began in 1988 as a house fellowship; now has 400 parishes with 85000 members.

One of the reasons for KICC's popularity is the way its social and religious support networks help to negotiate the migration process and become incorporated into British society – standing in for extended family networks. Another is its holistic concept of salvation, including healing, deliverance and prosperity, all attractive theologies in a hostile economic environment like Africa. Deliverance enables a break with the past. It is able to empower women and young people. It has a great churchplanting vision – a church within a 5 min drive in every town/city. The current Overseer is Enoch Adeboye, a charismatic man of integrity, healing, prophecy and teaching ability – a Big Man. He introduced informal dress, English and technology. RCCG membership remains predominantly Nigerian – 97%. Most are young; but there is a challenge to keep second generation Africans. Partnership with HTB and CMS is strong.

## **9. Moving Up and Moving Out? The expansion of a London-based 'African Pentecostal' Church - Amy Duffour**

FCI Peckham (Freedom Centre International) – a multi ethnic church with a mostly African migrant congregation. It sees itself as a community based church, part of Universal Prayer Group Ministries charity. Both head pastors are Ghanaian, as are 60% of members. Interesting thing is the expansion (move?) to Welling, 40 mins away and a white area – is the church upwardly mobile?

## **10. A History of Fresh Expressions and Church Planting in the CofE – George Lings**

Anglicanism has lived through not much short of a revolution since c 1960. Then it was a Sunday gathering in a consecrated building using the BCP, led by a full time clergyman for local people, connected to a diocese headed by a remote bishop. These landmarks have virtually disappeared as essential components of being Anglican. There are 6 major changes prior to 1980 which prepared for the church planting movement which has changed all this:

1. The Ecumenical movement – a sense that we belong to something bigger
2. The small group movement, rising from the base communities of the 50s in S America, expanding into cell groups – communal learning/discipleship, lived outside the control of the clergy
3. The Lay Leadership movement – lay leaders planted churches
4. The Charismatic movement, 1964 onwards, and the recovery of 'body ministry'
5. Liturgical revision in the 60s, moving us beyond individualism
6. The Church Growth movement, coming from the US through the Bible Society and being Anglicized by Eddie Gibbs

Two reports by David Wasdell in 1974/5 made key points: 180 people is the most one minister can handle irrespective of parish size, so the parish system is a self-limiting church; and that multiplication of lay led units within parish areas is the way forward.

Church plants were different from the daughter churches of the 30s and 50s; these served areas, not cultural differences. Bob & Mary Hopkins went as missionaries to St Helens to plant a church; this was the change of a paradigm, a shift from addition to multiplication. In 1966-77 there were 2 plants per year; from 1978-84 there were up to 10. 1985-91 saw up to 40 plants per year. By 1991 at least 15000 people were attending an Anglican church plant. These started in nearly every context. There was a church planting conference in 1991. From 1990-98 there were 234 church plants; by 1999 there were 50 Anglican cell churches and by 2005 another 40. The Sheffield Centre has records for c. 387 fresh expressions begun in 1999-2005.

The Church is on a journey away from uniformity into principled unity in diversity. *MSCh* described 12 types of fresh expression; we now have nearly 20. Five values ran through the report, 5 marks of missionary churches - Trinitarian, relational, incarnational, disciplinarian, transformational. And yet the majority of UK churches are still operating in the church growth paradigm.

### **11. From the Margins to the Mainstream : New Churches in York – David Goodhew**

27 new churches have started in York in the last 50 years; some are small but some are larger than any of the established churches – which suggests that churches once on the margin are moving into the mainline. Listed on p.181. New churches now represent a substantial stream of life in a town far from London which does not have a large ethnic minority. They are particularly strong among children and young people. Most are evangelical charismatic, but 4 are Orthodox. Most are conservative – the exception is Visions, planted by ST Michael le Belfry in 1991 as altworship – but it's small (20). Some have formed through schism – but then gone on to grow. New churches have attracted those new to York, but some with the white working class- it is impossible to account for the expansion of the new churches by merely attributing it to the decline of other churches.

New churches tend to be conservative, pessimistic about the world – so Calvary Chapel does a lot of home schooling. They are better at using electronic media than many mainline churches, and most worship in secular buildings; they tend to be apolitical. Some express criticism of the liberalism and laxity of mainline churches. Some belong to a wider network, others are independence. They tend to be conservative on gender.

The student population of York is growing – student Christianity is arguably one of the most important aspects of religious history in modern Britain – one of the few success stories for contemporary British Christianity. More students now attend new churches.

York shows that a significant sea-change is taking place within British Christianity – that which might once have been seen as on the margins is becoming mainstream.

### **12. The Diversification of English Christianity: the example of Birmingham – Colin Marsh**

In Birmingham, churches which were tiny/absent 50 years ago may soon form the bulk of the Christian community. Mainline churches rep only 60% of the 700 places of Christian worship in Birmingham/Solihull (2007 survey). The other 40% are from over 50 traditions, inc Black Majority, new evangelical/charismatic, and others from overseas. Profiles:

- Church of God of Prophecy – Jamaican
- Mount Zion Community Church – AoG
- Riverside – founded by Anglican Nick Cuthbert
- Solihull Renewal Centre – David Carr

### **13. Growth Amidst Decline: Edinburgh's Churches and Scottish Culture – Kenneth Roxburgh**

The C20th has not been kind of Christianity in Scotland...Steep decline in every denomination since the 60s. Church of Scotland membership has dropped from 1.3m in 1960 to less than ½m in 2010 – same in other denominations. Churchgoers declined by 33% between 1984 and 2002. The only growth was in mainstream evangelical organisations between 1994 and 2002. IN recent years

however several churches have grown – evangelical, charismatic, within congregations able to appoint specific leaders and staff, and able to empower lay people. Also Polish immigrants in the RC church have boosted numbers.

#### 14. Economic Factors in Church Growth and Decline and South and SW Wales – Paul Chambers

Recent surveys suggest attendance may now be stable compared to the 1995 Welsh Churches Survey.

Religion in Wales grew as the economy grew, expanding with industrialisation, peaking in 1904-05 with the Welsh Revival, then declining in tandem with industrial and economic decline in the C20th. But in 1980 recession came, bringing mass unemployment, especially in the steel industry, and disrupting traditional social networks and identities and leading to migration. Attendance was plummeting in the valleys – though there was some growth in the conurbations.

Community involvement is now providing a new opportunity to form a platform for church growth.

#### 15. Northern Irish Protestantism : Evangelical Vitality and Adaptation – Claire Mitchell

‘Rumours of Northern Ireland’s secularization have been greatly exaggerated’! Church attendance remains high, belief in God, heaven and hell remain strong and attitudes to morality are more conservative than in any other part of the UK. N Ireland still ranks among the most religious societies in the world. Evangelical Protestantism in NI presents a formidable challenge to the assumptions of secularization theory.

12% said in a 2009 survey that they have no religion – but a third of those said they believed in God, 39% said the Bible is the word of God, and 10% said they pray daily!

Church attendance among Protestants is not much lower than 40 years ago – 45% are currently regular churchgoers.

Evangelical Protestantism is growing – core beliefs are rising (eg 46% believed in miracles in 1998, 57% in 2008).

#### Conclusion: The Death and Resurrection of Britain in Contemporary Britain – David Goodhew

Is religion growing or declining? Boris Johnson was keen to speak at the 2010 Global Day of Prayer; David Cameron was unwilling to associate himself with it. One saw electoral advantage, the other electoral damage – their reactions illustrate how Christianity is both declining and growing in contemporary Britain.

- *A survey of the last 30 years shows that substantial church growth has happened across much of Britain. This growth is strongest in London but it is by no means confined to the capital. Such growth crosses the denominations but there are two particular strands of vitality; black, asian and minority ethnic Christianity and new churches... The notion that all British churches are in inexorable decline is a myth.*
- *The key thing to note is that parts of the British church have seen serious and long-lasting decline during these same years - but parts have grown. British churches are experiencing both decline and growth. Britain has grown more secular and more religious in the last 30 years. It all depends where you look – 253.*
- *Putting together decline and growth amongst British churches shows a church changing very rapidly - more ethnically diverse, more new (disestablished) churches. More generally, the British church is shifting from a religion of obligation towards one of consumption, from a religion of ‘opting out’ to a religion of ‘opting in’. In regional terms, London and the SE are becoming more significant, whilst the importance of Wales, Scotland and parts of the north of England has diminished.*

The overall picture is: confused! Thousands of churches have closed; thousands of churches have opened. National levels of religious affiliation seem to have declined between the 2001 and 2011 censuses. *It could be that British culture is growing more akin to that of the early Christian centuries in which Christian faith acts as a kind of ‘counter-culture’, capable of vigorous growth, amidst a wider culture which is essentially non-Christian in tone.* So Londoners were least likely to describe themselves as religious in the 2011 census – but London’s churches are growing faster than anywhere else in the country.

The secularisation thesis fits certain parts of the country, but does not work for London, N Ireland, for a number of other centres, for people from ethnic minorities and for new churches (and for many non Christian faiths). It only ever worked in parts of the W world – in America and much of the global south it has limited value. Britain sits, in religious terms, between the West and the rest. Churches which have embraced a pluralistic worked thrive; those which still live in Christendom decline.

Growth is strongest in London and along the trade routes of modern Britain, and in N Ireland. Decline is greatest in parts of Scotland, Wales, and parts of England distant from economic and demographic dynamism. The more multicultural and economically buoyant an area, the more likely it is to have growing churches.

Society needs to learn to relate to growing Christian communities.

The significant conclusion of this research is that the secularisation thesis has led many mainline churches and their leaders to adopt an eschatology of decline, and in turn an eschatology of fatalism. *The research in this volume .. shows that in many places.. churches can grow and decline is not inevitable.*

*It is striking that church growth had happened predominantly amongst those churches that are unashamed of the core doctrines of Christianity, though often happy to adapt culturally.*