

Michael Allured, student number 1705426. Course module TRDL7036: Christianity, Culture and Society in Twentieth Century Britain. Tutor: Dr Timothy Baylor.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

LEVEL 7 ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATION

Student name:	MICHAEL ALLURED	Student ID number:	1705426
Programme:	MTH CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY		
Module:	Christianity, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain		
Module code:	TRDL 7036	Contribution to Overall Module Assessment (%):	
Lecturer:	DR TIMOTHY BAYLOR	Internal Verifier:	
Assignment Title:	Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.	Word count (or equivalent):	5000
Submission deadline:	26 August 2019	Return date of provisional marks & written feedback:	
Submission method:	Via Turnitin.		
Academic honesty / referencing:			

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

People whose minds belong to the twentieth century already make many sacrifices in order to stay in the churches. For example, every Church of England clergyman has to assent to the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion, which have never been revised since the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.¹

Writing in 1963, David L. Edwards, the Anglican priest, scholar and Church historian, went to the heart of the matter with these words explaining the dilemmas of religious believers and the challenges to established Church doctrines and traditions during the 1960s. That clergy in the Church of England had not since 1865² been required to declare their personal belief in the Thirty Nine Articles but only that they were 'agreeable to God' suggests that the tensions between official religious beliefs and the encroachment of the modern world were sown well before the modern crisis in Christian belief and the rise of Mary Whitehouse's so-called 'permissive society'. It cannot be explained wholly in terms of a rapid and dramatic implosion of Christianity's cultural and religious power in the decade between 1960 and 1970.³ The extent to which the changes in religious opinion that burst on to the scene in the early 1960s were attributable to the fast pace of social change or whether they need to be placed into a wider context has of course been the crux of the historical debate between historians of the Hugh McLeod and Callum Brown schools about how the far reaching changes that occurred during what Arthur Marwick termed 'the long 1960s' can be explained. I shall suggest that the weight of evidence is with the contextual historians McLeod, Alan Gilbert and Clive Field.

¹ David L. Edwards, 'A New Stirring in English Christianity' in *The Honest to God Debate*, ed. by John A. T. Robinson and David L. Edwards (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 25.

² Adam Augustyn et al, 'Thirty Nine Articles, Church of England', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. by Adam Augustyn et al, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thirty-nine-Articles> [Accessed: 7 August 2019]

³ Mark Donnelly review of *The Death of Christian Britain* by Callum G. Brown in *Gender and History*, Volume 22, Issue 2, August 2010, p. 496-497. (https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:3688/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2010.01602_23.x) [Accessed: 4 August 2019]

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

McLeod has perceptively called the 1960s 'a hinge decade' which separated the 1940s and 1950s from the 1970s and 1980s but with shared features of the periods before and after.⁴ As it is difficult to understand the 1960s in a vacuum such an image is helpful, not least, McLeod notes, because many attaining adulthood during the decade were raised in a society that remained culturally and socially Christian. In the titles alone of monographs charting the place of religion in 1960s Britain – from McLeod's *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* and Field's *Secularization in the Long 1960s* to Brown's starker *The Death of Christian Britain* - we pick up without opening the dust jackets that major shifts in opinion were afoot. I concur with McLeod and others that the reasons can be most fully understood by acknowledging the interplay between different factors rather than attributing the accelerated rate of change in religious sensibilities in the 'swinging sixties' (and not everyone was 'swinging') to a single main cause. The seeds for the shift in religious opinion manifest in the 1960s had been scattered in the decades before – some may argue over the course of two centuries since the Enlightenment. The world was becoming smaller, humankind was on the threshold of putting a man on the Moon and people's 'cognitive acquiescence'⁵ in old theological certainties was becoming harder to maintain, particularly as we approached 1968.⁶ The power of television and other forms of mass media on a global scale did for the 1960s what the invention of printing did for the Reformation. Indeed that medium, along with associated factors such as increasing affluence and the invention of the 'teenager' as well as scientific advances like the contraceptive pill made official religion and church attendance seem less relevant to many ordinary people than ever before. Theologians and religious institutions responded by attempting to make Christianity more relevant to people's lives in the later decades of the Twentieth Century. We see this reflected in the *Honest to God* and Vatican II debates. The action and reaction were played out in books, on television, in Billy Graham revivalist meetings and in the calls for civil

⁴ Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford Scholarship Online, January 2008), DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0013, p. 3. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

⁵ Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 122.

⁶ In *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* McLeod devotes a chapter to 1968 as a high point of radical change in society and the Church; he points out that many Christians with radical views left the Church disappointed at the lack of radical change though many who had been influenced by the 'spirit of the age' remained within or returned to the Churches.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

rights, equality and social justice in the years of Beatles Britain. These are the matters to which we shall now turn.

Our understanding of the major shifts in religious opinion in the 1960s can be enhanced through a consideration of four main strands of theological discourse: the publication of John Robinson's *Honest to God*; the impact of Vatican II; the consolidation of ecumenism and the weakening of denominational identities; and the divergence of conservative and liberal religious opinion in the context of an increasingly secularized Britain.

Alan Gilbert has written about the quest to find what he insightfully terms a 'preachable gospel', a Gospel relevant to a modern religious audience and which began with Friedrich Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to Cultural Despisers* and continued with F. D. Maurice and those who questioned the doctrine of eternal damnation in *Essays and Reviews*. Notwithstanding neo-orthodox challenges from Karl Barth and others, the trend towards developing a liberal theological framework and one that embraced Rudolf Bultmann's, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's and Paul Tillich's more existentialist understanding of a discursive Christianity that attempted to speak more to a modern secular age was in the ascendancy by the late 1950s.⁷ As the Bishop of Woolwich, Robinson arguably went further with *Honest to God* than any modern senior British cleric had dared by moving beyond New Testament scholarship to engage with broader philosophical questions.⁸ Indeed Robinson was comfortable describing his theological position as 'panentheist'. He might even have been mistaken for a Unitarian.⁹

⁷ Gilbert, p. 119-123.

⁸ Gilbert, p. 121.

⁹ John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p. 426.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

Honest to God captured the spirit of a secular age. It attacked 'supranaturalist theology', 'supranaturalist ethics' and the concept of a three-decked Universe with a transcendent God 'up there' and 'out there' who was completely separate from the world and 'above' Nature. Robinson writes:

But the centre of today's debate is concerned not with the relation of particular myths to history, but with how far Christianity is committed to a mythological or supranaturalist picture of the universe at all. Is it necessary for Biblical faith to be expressed in terms of this world view, which in its way is as primitive philosophically as the Genesis stories are primitive scientifically? May it not be that the truth of Christianity can be detached from the one as much as from the other – and may it not be equally important to do so if it is to be defended properly today?¹⁰

Though Robinson was accused of being an atheist, knowing God through Jesus Christ as Lord remained central to his theology.¹¹ What was perhaps uniquely refreshing but uncomfortable for institutional organised Christianity and some of its followers who feared his approach would dilute the faith was his unwillingness, in spite of his bishop's status, to conduct debate on literalist and binary lines regarding questions such as the Resurrection and Virgin Birth. Quoting Herbert Butterfield 'Hold to Christ and for the rest be totally uncommitted', he wrote:

Be free to admit that you are a Christian agnostic, that is a *Christian* who does not *know* a great deal. 'On the borders', said Bonhoeffer..., 'it seems to me better to hold our peace.' The centre for the Christian is firm: the edges and the ends are gloriously and liberatingly open.¹²

Such engagement with alternative approaches to Christianity, illustrated by a series of lectures by Cambridge Christian theologians in February 1963 on 'Objections to Christian Belief', was not uncommon within 1960s academia.¹³ But it was new to lay people not trained in theology. Robinson captured the zeitgeist of the time in sensing

¹⁰ John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 33.

¹¹ John A. T. Robinson, *But That I Can't Believe* (London: Fontana, 1967), p. 127.

¹² Robinson, *But That I Can't Believe*, p. 127.

¹³ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0005, p. 2. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

not so much a growing tide towards atheism but rather a Christianity of doctrines and definitions that had become so distant from the reality of people's everyday experiences that it was becoming irrelevant. It no longer made sense to them as a reality with which to connect. He recognised the appetite for what he referred to as a 'New Reformation'¹⁴ in which Christianity as a religion was not cordoned off from the secular and in which a 'new morality' was applied creatively and intelligently, in a way that reflected the realities of modern life rather than believers being bound to one set of rigid legal and ethical codes.¹⁵

In a world where science, technology and communications touched individuals and the ethical dilemmas of living affected them as in no past age Robinson, who defended Penguin Books in the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial, was on the side of Christians who were prepared to accept moral relativism. He spoke of the quality of relationships as

the real morality, rather than some external rule – that things are right, for instance if they are inside marriage but wrong if they are outside, right if they are heterosexual but wrong if they are homosexual, and so on. The criterion of what makes for deep, stable, mature, free personal relationships seems to so many of our generation, both Christians and others, the more significant test.¹⁶

Though more than a million copies of *Honest to God* were sold not all of the thousand readers who wrote to Robinson in the three months following its publication supported the ideas it articulated. One representative correspondent lamented 'I always thought that it was a parson's job to get people to go to church, but if there are many like you, nobody will go...' A rural dean in the Church of England urged Bishop Robinson to resign. McLeod is probably right to conclude that most people were in between the extremes of those who welcomed *Honest to God* and those who lambasted Robinson for it.¹⁷ It also seems reasonable to conclude from a sample of published letters he received that his message spoke to the 'condition' of many by

¹⁴ Robinson, *But that I can't believe*, p. 122.

¹⁵ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0005, p. 3. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

¹⁶ Robinson, *But that I can't believe*, p. 126.

¹⁷ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0013, p. 7. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

challenging the habit of casual belief, engaging with difficult questions and articulating what Joe and Jane Bloggs had long been thinking but never dared voice.¹⁸ Extracts from two letters illustrate the point made in several of them.

- A lapsed Roman Catholic woman who became an Anglican in the 1950s said that she remained dissatisfied with Church symbolism, which she thought 'useless' in helping people, and was sceptical about whether young people searching for truth would recognise it in the present form of institutional Christianity. Of *Honest to God* she wrote:

I am simply an ordinary housewife with an ordinary history, but probably representative of many others, who like me, have been inspired and encouraged by your book.¹⁹

- Similarly a civil engineer wrote:

This great argument which you have started is going to bring the Church back into the market place, and involve the spiritual interest of millions who have chosen for a variety of reasons to consider themselves not 'religiously minded'.²⁰

Another letter from an Anglican theological student to the *Daily Telegraph* shows it also spoke for some training for ministry:

...I can vouch for the fact that numbers of men in training for the ministry are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with a theological preparation which consists largely of intellectual antiquarianism supported by autosuggestion. Some indeed are losing their Christian faith altogether, simply because the expressions of Christian truth which they are expected to assimilate are quite divorced from the realities of individual human existence....²¹

¹⁸ David L. Edwards, ed., 'Some Readers' Letters' in *The Honest to God Debate*, ed. by John A. T. Robinson and David L. Edwards (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 48-81.

¹⁹ David L. Edwards, ed., 'Some Readers' Letters' in *The Honest to God Debate*, ed. by John A. T. Robinson and David L. Edwards (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 55.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 52.

²¹ Ibid, p. 22-23.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

Quoting Gilbert's summary of *Honest to God's* impact, McLeod is right to agree that 'Liberals like Robinson fatally opened the way for doubt and a massive growth in agnosticism' because it made open doubt more acceptable.²² It is also fair to conclude that what *Honest to God* did for Anglicans Vatican II (1962 to 1965) did for Catholics by denting their belief that the Roman Catholic Church provided a timeless, infallible and unchanging set of answers by which the 'faithful' should live their lives. To some nothing seemed sacred anymore.

McLeod notes that some conservative critics have tended to see the problems experienced by the Roman Catholic Church since the 1960s as a direct result of Vatican II and Pope John XXIII's desire for *aggiornamento* and an 'opening of the windows' of the Church. Certainly Vatican II was the most important development in the history of the Roman Catholic Church since the First Vatican Council of 1870. It unleashed expectations among clergy and laity of progressive change that were difficult for conservatives to control and for progressives to see realised and honoured.

In his radio speech broadcast on 11 October 1962, the day the Second Vatican Council opened, the Pope delivered an address to the world in which he spoke of external rather than internal aspects of Church renewal. Among his themes were world peace, the equality of all peoples, the world as a family of nations, the moral aspects of marriage and procreation and the mission of the Church as the servant of everyone, especially the poor. In his opening Council speech, entitled 'Mother Church Rejoices' (*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*), Pope John spoke of the Council as an encounter with Christ to strengthen the Church in its mission. While guarding the deposit of faith the Church had to look to the present and its challenges. It had to engage in the education of consciences and present perennial truths in ways that contemporary people could understand. He called for a spirit of hope and optimism by 'turning to the wisdom of history and the considerations suggested by faith' and

²² McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0002, p. 7. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

for trust in Divine Providence and the 'fulfillment of God's designs'.²³ The Church should strive towards 'unity of souls leading all to peace in this life and salvation in the next' and be a force for peace, understanding and reconciliation, 'a loving mother to all – kind, patient, full of mercy and goodness, even toward the children who are separated from her'.²⁴

This set the scene for the four distinct developments Vatican II ushered in. As Williams and Davidson succinctly note, firstly, it 'prescribed a new understanding of the church's place in the world' by reversing its 'traditional view of the world as a hostile place, arguing instead that the church should become part of the modern world', a positive force in it rather than as a haven from its evils. Secondly, it facilitated greater ecumenism by 'acknowledging positive aspects of non-Catholic and non-Christian religions' and recognising 'a more relative than absolute approach to religious truth' and open attitude to 'Christian identity', which 'acknowledged that religious truth could be found in other faiths'. Thirdly, notwithstanding that the hierarchical model of the Church remained (the Pope, clergy and laity), Vatican II saw more collegiality between Pope and bishops. Fourthly, the Council began a shift in the emphasis of responsibility for their faith to the laity, who could now be guided by their own individual conscience in ascertaining if their actions were in accordance with Church teachings rather than relying exclusively on the official Church as the final arbiter and only source of truth.²⁵

Though Robinson's *Honest to God* was hardly of the same magnitude and impact as Vatican II we might reasonably draw parallels between John XXIII's aims for Vatican II and Robinson's for *Honest to God*. Both in different ways and settings were responses to a growing alienation from institutional religion and an attempt to update the Church. While restating Church teachings, both sought to make Christianity more relevant to contemporary needs and aspirations without, as McLeod notes, 'changing

²³ Patricia Treece, *Meet John XXIII* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Servant Books, 2008), p. 176.

²⁴ Treece, p. 176-177.

²⁵ A. Williams and J. Davidson, 'Catholic Conceptions of Faith: A Generational Analysis'. *Sociology of Religion*, 1996, Volume 57(3), p. 273-289. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2084/stable/3712157> [Accessed: 14 August 2019]

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

its substance'. McLeod puts it well in agreeing with the thesis advanced by Wilhelm Damberg and others that 'Vatican II was a response to already existing problems, including declining numbers of vocations and, in some countries, mass alienation from the church'.²⁶ The Roman Catholic Church was undoubtedly going through a period of change and the shift in language from Latin to the vernacular for celebrating the Mass was the most visible sign of this. Another, as we have noted, was ecumenism: the 1964 *Decree on Ecumenism* was one of the many documents to emerge from the work of the Council and by 1971 Catholics were full members of eleven national councils of churches.²⁷ McLeod accurately notes that 'barriers between Catholics and Protestants were fast breaking down, as was indicated by the increasing frequency of shared worship, Bible study or social action' and the rising rate of inter-marriage, a consequence, he observes, of the 'diminishing importance of religious identities'.²⁸ The attempt to update and enter the modern world, however, revealed tensions between reformers and conservatives: the modernising vision of and the hopes for Vatican II inaugurated by John XXIII and continued under Paul VI were never fully fulfilled for reformers like Hans Kung. Yet Vatican II went too far for many conservatives, who had, for example, disapproved of and downplayed the Pope's meeting (the first in 400 years) with the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, in 1960, two years before the Council opened.²⁹

The frustrations of Catholics crying out for reform were particularly notable in the response to Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*, published in 1968. David Geiringer, citing Michael Hornsby Smith, succinctly sums up how the Catholic Church was largely responsible for its own decline when he quotes Hornsby Smith on Catholic institutions "lagging behind the rest of society" in their stances towards women's changing sexual status in the 1960s'.³⁰ Although the majority of the Papal

²⁶ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0013, p. 5. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

²⁷ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0005, p. 15. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

²⁸ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0005, p. 16. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

²⁹ Treece, p. 155.

³⁰ David Geiringer, 'Catholic Understandings of Female Sexuality in 1960s Britain' in *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 28, Number 2, June 2017), p. 209-238, <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:4563/10.1093/tcbh/hww051>

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

Commission established to advise on artificial contraception came out in its favour, Paul VI's encyclical did not embrace modern values and the 'spirit of the age' and instead reaffirmed traditional previous Papal teaching that all artificial methods of contraception were prohibited. This theologically rarefied and somewhat academic discourse was, however, becoming increasingly irrelevant to the real lives of many ordinary lay Catholics who were resorting to artificial methods of contraception.³¹ If the Pope and Vatican Curia were not prepared to move with the times they would be ignored as the 'faithful', exposed to the influences of an increasingly secular and pluralistic society, lost respect for Papal authority (post Vatican II also continued to insist on priestly celibacy) and even the Church itself as an institution. They would make their own decisions based on the realities of the modern world. The reaction against *Humane Vitae* was sometimes vociferous: fifty-five priests protested in a letter to *The Times* and Adrian Hastings records scuffles breaking out on the steps of Westminster Cathedral.³² In 1964 the Roman Catholic Church in Britain conducted approximately 137,000 baptisms but by 1976 only around 70,000 had been recorded.³³

Robbins provides an insightful assessment in summing up the impact on religious opinion of Vatican II when writing that across the British Isles it produced a 'grudging and somewhat bewildered acceptance at all levels of the Roman Catholic Church', notwithstanding the equal numbers of its champions and opponents. He writes that it is in Ireland that the potential impact was more far reaching before proceeding to note that across the British Isles the scene was set for 'a complicated dance of 'leaders' who 'circled the floor, warily looking over new partners'.³⁴ This brings us to the changing nature of religious identity, the reaching out of those 'partners' and the impact of ecumenism.

³¹ Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church 1900-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 381.

³² Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990* (London: SCM Press, 1991), p. 576.

³³ Sarah Lewis, *Christianity, Culture and Society in Twentieth Century Britain, Unit 6: The Secular 1960s* (Lampeter: Trinity Saint David, University of Wales)
https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/169298/mod_resource/content/1/TRDL7036%20Unit%206%20The%20secular%201960s.pdf. [Accessed 15 August 2019]

³⁴ Robbins, p. 356-357.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

McLeod, referring to the 'diminishing importance of religious identities of whatever kind', rightly maintains that a shared belonging to Christianity made more sense in 1960s Britain than denominational differences, which were breaking down.³⁵ Two examples of this change can be observed in Anglican relations with the Catholic Church and the Methodists. Cardinal Heenan joined the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi as joint chairs of the Council of Christians and Jews in 1964; anti-Catholic prejudice grew weaker in Glasgow and Liverpool and official representative to the Vatican was appointed in 1961. Anglican-Roman relations were crowned in 1966 with a highly publicised visit of Archbishop Ramsey to Paul VI. This seemed a distant dream when we look back on Rome's frosty approach to ecumenism post 1943 and during the 1950s. Anglicans and Methodists were also reaching out to each other. An Anglican report published in 1963 proposed a 'union of one Church' with Methodists. Although when the vote was held in 1969 the required 75% majority on both sides to trigger the Anglican-Methodist union was not reached (78% of Methodists were in favour and 69% of Anglicans), the percentages in favour suggest antagonistic denominational tribalism seemed to be on the wane.³⁶ Why should this be so?

McLeod's narrative of the 1960s suggests some answers. He points to a broader spectrum of beliefs and world views, now accessible to more people than ever before, changes in how (with the possible exception of Ireland) people perceived their religious identity in a more 'pick and mix' culture, the changing ways in which children were socialised into Christianity and the lessening of contentious theological issues, such as the Eucharist, which had divided people along theological lines since the Reformation.^{37 38} McLeod is right to judge that by the end of the 1960s the divisions between the conservative and liberal wings within the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches were more significant than divisions between Catholics

³⁵ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0005, p. 16. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

³⁶ Lewis, *Christianity, Culture and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, Unit 6.

³⁷ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0013, p. 1-2. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

³⁸ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0005, p. 20. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

and Protestants.³⁹ This can be reflected in responses to the publication in full of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1960), attitudes to the part decriminalisation of homosexuality (1967), the legalisation of abortion (1967), the liberalising of divorce laws (1969), the Women's Liberation Movement (from 1968 onwards) and the emergence of popular culture and student rebellions, civil rights, social justice and Liberation Theology. Dogmatic systems of religious belief were now exposed to the chill winds of secularization and social and political change. The impact of these factors on religious opinion in Britain in the 1960s, the debate about the interplay between internal and external pressures on religious institutions and the extent to which changes in people's religious outlook can be wholly explained by the phenomena of the 1960s or had their roots in earlier decades will now be considered.

Callum Brown describes how a British schoolgirl identifying as an atheist in the 1950s would have been called a 'heathen' by fellow pupils whereas in the 1960s it would have been nothing out of the ordinary.⁴⁰ For Brown what McLeod called 'the religious crisis' occurred because 'the institutional structures of cultural traditionalism started to crumble'⁴¹ as a result of particular events and movements that occurred in the 1960s and which the 'salvation economy' could not withstand.⁴² This writer would not disagree with this broad analysis: Brown is right that as the decade wore on what he calls 'discursive Christianity' was indeed being assaulted on a number of cultural and other fronts so that those attaining adulthood in the 1970s were even more disaffected; that, if measured by belief in a supernatural Being and an afterlife, faith itself was declining; and that 1960s youth were more dissimilar to their parents than any previous generation. This was reflected in the decline of church marriage and

³⁹ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0005, p. 19. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

⁴⁰ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 192.

⁴¹ Brown, p.176.

⁴² Brown uses the term 'salvation economy' to refer to the way in which Christian Churches in Britain wielded power over people after 1800 and up to the 1950s when the State had no power to force people to adhere or believe. This broke down with changes in society occurring in the 1960s. The 'salvation economy' was a way of encouraging people, often on gendered lines, to go along with a religious identity as part of a framework of moral respectability.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

gradual changing attitudes to homosexuality, abortion and 'illegitimacy'. Brown makes a cogent and reasonable case for the 1960s being not the culmination of Christianity's gradual decline in Britain but rather a sudden 'violent event' within a changing cultural and ethical landscape (protest against the Vietnam and Biafran Wars, equality and environmentalism), the primary trigger being the changing role of women and female identity.

Women had previously been at the heart of family piety, the moral restraint upon men and children. By the mid-1960s, domestic ideology was assailed on many fronts.... The loss of domestic ideology to youth culture from c. 1958 [Brown also attributes this to women's role in the workplace] meant that piety 'lost' its discursive home within femininity....The reconstruction of female identity from the late 1960s put not just feminism but female identity in collision with the Christian construction of femininity.⁴³

Brown's analysis of the content and tone of women's magazines in an increasingly consumerist culture is an interesting illustration of changing attitudes to feminism and morality and, by extension, religious opinion. *The Boyfriend*, launched in 1959, was ultimately unsuccessful because, while attempting modernity, it basically promoted the traditional role of women, whereas *Jackie* abandoned the domestic agenda and by 1976 had a circulation of 605,947.⁴⁴

As illuminating and challenging as Brown's 1960s 'big bang' thesis, in opposition to those who argue for gradual and evolutionary change, is he overstates his case. The gradualists' narratives on the religious changes occurring during this 'psychedelic decade' are more nuanced in their consideration and, on the whole, more plausible. While the 1960s undoubtedly saw a sharp acceleration in the pace at which people were willing to abandon their 'believing without belonging' approach to traditional Christianity and even created the conditions for 'liberation' to happen (the changing nature of traditional industries, increasing affluence, home ownership, relaxation of laws on gambling and divorce), this was also the coming to fruition of a general move towards more libertarian attitudes and moral relativism such as those on

⁴³ Brown, p. 179.

⁴⁴ Brown, p. 176.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

homosexuality expressed in the pages of the *New Christian*.⁴⁵ This was, arguably, all a continuation of the spirit of Enlightenment thinkers and progressive theologians like Schleiermacher.⁴⁶

To many historians McLeod's thesis that there was no one overriding cause for the major shifts in religious opinion leading to a 'religious crisis' is convincing: we find ourselves agreeing with him that Brown's emphasis on the role of women and changing attitudes to femininity is 'too specific a factor to provide sufficient explanation'; neither is it adequate to fully explain changes by deploying vague concepts like 'modernisation'.⁴⁷ Post 1945 Britain and its place in the world had changed and the way the peoples of the four nations understood their place in the world and what they expected from life had changed too. The interplay between those expectations and the movements to which they gave birth as well as the Churches' responses produced sometimes dramatic effects. Gilbert too, cautions against the temptation of over simple explanations. He writes that despite their being coherence to the development of secularisation, we need to understand the recent development of secularisation in a much larger historical perspective. It is also important to take account of the variations of patterns within England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, including class and denominational factors. More recently Clive Field has argued that secularisation in Britain 'has been progressive, not sudden' but that 'there have been "accelerants" at particular times'.⁴⁸ In the space remaining I shall comment briefly on what I perceive as the two broad principal factors that became those 'accelerants'.

⁴⁵ G. I. T. Machin, *Churches and Social Issues in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), p. 2. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198217800.001.0001 [Accessed 20 June 2019]

⁴⁶ Gilbert, p. 120.

⁴⁷ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0013, p. 4. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

⁴⁸ Clive D. Field, *Secularisation in the Long 1960s: Numerating Religion in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

Firstly, we have already considered the desire and the search for a more authentic Christianity, even among religious ordinands, in the reactions to Robinson's *Honest to God* and Vatican II. Loyalty to institutional religion was either weakened or abandoned. When conservatives tried to proclaim and re-establish more traditional Christian theology and values their efforts were not always well received. Church leaders were not in favour of widening the basis for divorce to include grounds of 'breakdown of marriage' alongside 'proved matrimonial offence'. To support such a development destroyed the notion that 'marriage was for life'. Yet when Leo Abse's 1963 Bill was defeated not only did Humanists argue that the Christian minority was imposing its view on the non-Christian majority but Canon Douglas Rymes wrote in *The Times* that 'it looks like the Church prefers the sordid to the decent way of ending marriage'.⁴⁹ After *Humanae Vitae* was published fifty-five liberal Catholic priests declared publicly they could not support official Roman Catholic teaching on artificial contraception. As McLeod argues, many gave a nominal and rather vague allegiance to 'official orthodoxies' and over time were becoming more detached and, to quote Grace Davie, were 'believing without belonging'.^{50 51} The masses wanted more than 'theosophic moonshine'⁵² and when they began to doubt they were 'firmly on the path to apathy and unbelief'. Even natural science ceased to attack religion because of its seeming perceived irrelevance to explain how the world worked.⁵³ Geiringer wryly notes that sociologists were perceived by Catholic officialdom as a greater threat as 'Sections of the Catholic community still balked at sex being studied for intellectual purposes'.⁵⁴ These internal conflicts between sections of the Church were certainly a barrier to institutional religion, though not necessarily religion itself, thriving in the modern age.

Coming now to our second 'accelerant': the most powerful catalyst to shifts in religious opinion was, I suggest, the impact of modern culture and changes in 1960s

⁴⁹ Machin, p. 23.

⁵⁰ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0013, p. 7. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

⁵¹ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 93-94.

⁵² Gilbert, p. 59, quoting Leslie Stephen in *Religion as a Fine Art* (1873).

⁵³ Gilbert, p. 58.

⁵⁴ Geiringer, p. 224.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

society. Gilbert is right that by 1963 the compelling reason to belong to an institutionalised religion had withered. Greater affluence, choice and the benefits of the NHS gave Britons a feeling of having more control over their lives and so the need to rely on a supernatural God 'up there' intervening to make things right was diminished. There were new opportunities to pursue 'alternative' spirituality and enjoy leisure. Keith Robbins writes that Eastern gurus became more relevant for the Beatles than the Christian clergy. Deference for authority was less willingly given and boundaries were being tested: the F-word was uttered on television for the first time in 1965 and *Private Eye* and *That Was the Week That Was* openly lampooned religion. We echo Marwick and McLeod that 'a principal catalyst for change...was the emergence of a rebellious youth culture focused above all on popular music...latest fashions...and ready to defy the restrictions placed by adults on sex and the use of drugs'.⁵⁵

Major shifts in religious opinion, while not universally followed, did occur during the 1960s and with lasting impact. How then are we to explain them? It would be a challenge to improve on McLeod's three dimensions to such dramatic changes of perspective: the long-term seeds or preconditions, perhaps beginning even with the spirit of the Reformation challenge to established orthodoxy and continuing with 17th Century dissent; the impact of immediate changes occurring in 1960s Britain; and the impact of specific events, movements and personalities and the interconnections between them. Those interconnections of course include the relationship between changing beliefs at an individual and a societal level as illustrated by McLeod's thesis that, while secularisation happened at an individual level in the Nineteenth Century, it filtered through to societal belief and practice in the Twentieth and burst out in the 1960s. Modern technology brought 'the big questions' about the nature of God into the living rooms of ordinary people. Because of that and the greater access to education we progressed from persecuting dissenters and mere toleration of them to allow the open publication of theology perceived by some as 'anti-Christian'. Robinson's 'New Reformation' had been born.

[5000 words, excluding bibliography and this note.]

⁵⁵ McLeod, DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.003.0013, p. 9. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

Bibliography

Augustyn, Adam, et al, 'Thirty Nine Articles, Church of England', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, edited by Adam Augustyn et al <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thirty-nine-Articles> [Accessed: 7 August 2019]

Badham, Paul, ed., *Religion, State, and Society in Modern Britain* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989)

Brown, Callum G., *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009)

Cowling, Maurice, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)

Davie, Grace, *Religion in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994)

Donnelly, Mark, review of *The Death of Christian Britain* by Callum G. Brown in 'Gender and History', Volume 22, Issue 2, August 2010. (https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:3688/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2010.01602_23.x accessed 4 August 2019)

Edwards, David L., 'A New Stirring in English Christianity' in *The Honest to God Debate*, ed. by John A. T. Robinson and David L. Edwards (London: SCM Press, 1963)

Field, Clive D., *Secularisation in the Long 1960s: Numerating Religion in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

Geiringer, David, "'At Some Points in the 1960s, Hell Disappeared": Hell, Gender and Catholicism in Post-War England', *The Journal of the Social History Society*, Volume 15, Number 2 (2018) <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfcs20> [Accessed 20 July 2019]

Michael Allured, student number 1705426. Course module TRDL7036: Christianity, Culture and Society in Twentieth Century Britain. Tutor: Dr Timothy Baylor.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

Geiringer, David, 'Catholic Understandings of Female Sexuality in 1960s Britain' in *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 28, Number 2, June 2017) <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:4563/10.1093/tcbh/hww051> [Accessed 20 July 2019]

Gilbert, Alan D., *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* (London: Longman, 1980)

Hastings, Adrian, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990* (London: SCM Press, 1991)

Lewis, Sarah, *Christianity, Culture and Society in Twentieth Century Britain, Unit 6: The Secular 1960s* (Lampeter: Trinity Saint David, University of Wales)

Machin, G. I. T., *Churches and Social Issues in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198217800.001.0001 [Accessed 20 June 2019]

Macquarrie, John, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (London: SCM Press, 2001)

McLeod, Hugh, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford Scholarship Online, January 2008), DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298259.001.0001. [Accessed: 21 June 2019]

Robbins, Keith, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church 1900-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Robinson, John A. T., *But That I Can't Believe* (London: Fontana, 1967)

Robinson, John A.T., *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963)

Robinson, John A.T. and David L. Edwards, *The Honest to God Debate* (London: SCM Press, 1963)

Michael Allured, student number 1705426. Course module TRDL7036: Christianity, Culture and Society in Twentieth Century Britain. Tutor: Dr Timothy Baylor.

Account for the major shifts in religious opinion that occurred during the 1960s.

Treece, Patricia, *Meet John XXIII* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Servant Books, 2008)

Welsby, Paul A., *A History of the Church of England 1945-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

Williams, A., and J. Davidson, 'Catholic Conceptions of Faith: A Generational Analysis' in *Sociology of Religion* (1996). Retrieved from <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2084/stable/3712157> [Accessed 14 August 2019]