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Repurposed churches: an analysis through secularisation theory and the core-periphery model

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Abstract

This study examines the repurposing of Anglican churches in the United Kingdom by integrating the core-periphery model developed by Friedmann and Krugman (UK) into secularisation theory, exploring how religious, cultural, and secular uses reflect broader social changes. With declining church attendance, many buildings are repurposed as homes, cultural monuments, or worship spaces for other faiths, such as free churches or mosques. The theory is tested by comparing several possible reuses for closed Anglican churches in the UK: conversion into homes, monuments, or mosques. The method utilised is a literature review, using data from local newspapers and reports by the Church of England and bodies responsible for monument protection. The result is a multi-dimensional approach similar to Wohlrab-Saar & Burchardt's concept of multiple secularities, capable of assessing both the conversion of a sacred space into a profane space (a privatised or commercial actor, a public or a cultural space) and the transformation of a Christian/Anglican sacred space into a Muslim or free church sacred space. The findings indicate that many churches have been repurposed into homes and mosques, showing that market forces and individualisation have replaced religion and also revealing the emergence of diverse religious forms. This multidimensional approach suggests a pluralistic view of secularization, where secular and religious expressions co-exist and evolve in contemporary society.

Penelitian ini mengkaji pengalihfungsian gereja-gereja Anglikan di Inggris Raya dengan mengintegrasikan model core-periphery yang dikembangkan oleh Friedmann dan Krugman ke dalam teori sekularisasi, serta mengeksplorasi

bagaimana penggunaan agama, budaya, dan sekularitas mencerminkan perubahan sosial yang lebih luas. Dengan menurunnya kehadiran jemaat di gereja, banyak bangunan dialihfungsikan menjadi rumah, monumen budaya, atau tempat ibadah untuk agama lain, seperti gereja bebas atau masjid. Teori ini diuji dengan membandingkan beberapa kemungkinan pengalihfungsian gereja-gereja Anglikan yang ditutup di Inggris Raya: konversi menjadi rumah, monumen, atau masjid. Metode yang digunakan adalah tinjauan pustaka, dengan data dari surat kabar lokal serta laporan dari Gereja Inggris dan lembaga yang bertanggung jawab atas perlindungan monumen. Penelitian ini menghasilkan pendekatan multi-dimensional yang mirip dengan konsep Wohlrab-Saar & Burchardt yang dikenal dengan sekularitas jamak, yang mampu mengevaluasi konversi ruang sakral menjadi ruang profan (dikelola oleh aktor swasta atau komersial, ruang publik atau budaya), serta transformasi ruang sakral Kristen Anglikan menjadi ruang sakral Muslim atau gereja bebas. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa banyak gereja telah dialihfungsikan menjadi rumah dan masjid, menunjukkan bahwa kekuatan pasar dan individualisasi telah menggantikan agama, serta memperlihatkan munculnya bentuk-bentuk agama yang beragam. Pendekatan multidimensional ini merekomendasikan pandangan pluralistik terhadap sekularisasi, di mana ekspresi sekuler dan agamis berkembang dan hidup berdampingan dalam masyarakat kontemporer.

Keywords: *Closed churches, Secularisation theory, Church of England, Core-periphery model*

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Introduction

The religious landscape in the United Kingdom has become more diverse since the beginning of the 20th century. While the Christian religion then had been taken for granted (Brown, 2001; Woodhead, 2016), today, society is shaped by the two dichotomies between the religious and the secular and between different religions (Davie, 2017). The decreases in attendance have led to many closures of Church of England (CofE) churches. In 1968, the CofE introduced the legal possibility to sell them. There are several possible new uses for closed

churches, among the most frequent are the conversion into residential houses, into monuments open for occasional Anglican worship, into churches used regularly by other Christian denominations (often free churches) or mosques.

The decline in religious affiliation in the UK has been well-documented, with significant reductions in church attendance and a growing number of individuals identifying as "nones" (those with no religious affiliation). According to Clements and Gries (Clements & Gries, 2016), the UK is in an advanced state of secularization, where empirical evidence shows a clear distinction between secular and religious groups. This decline is not merely a statistical anomaly but reflects broader societal shifts, including increased individualism and changing cultural norms.

Voas & Crockett (2005) highlight the phenomenon of "believing without belonging," where individuals may hold spiritual beliefs but do not actively participate in religious practices. This trend suggests that while formal religious affiliation is waning, personal belief systems may persist, albeit in a more individualised and less communal context. Furthermore, Crockett & Voas (2006) emphasise that this decline is overwhelmingly generational, indicating that younger cohorts are less likely to engage with religious institutions compared to their predecessors.

The rise of secular identities is characterised by a shift in how individuals perceive their relationship with religion and spirituality. Twenge et al. (2016) note that a significant portion of Millennials not only identify as religiously unaffiliated but also express secular beliefs, such as scepticism towards the existence of God and a rejection of traditional religious narratives. This trend is indicative of a broader cultural movement towards secularism, where individuals prioritize personal autonomy and rational inquiry over institutionalised religion.

Clements (2014) further explores the correlates of traditional religious beliefs in Britain, revealing that those who identify as non-religious often hold

different ideological perspectives compared to their religious counterparts. This divergence in beliefs can influence political attitudes and social behaviors, suggesting that secular individuals may engage with societal issues from a fundamentally different standpoint. The implications of this shift are significant, as secular identities may lead to changes in community dynamics and political engagement (Sherkat, 2020; Beider, 2022).

Secularisation has been defined as the decline of the three dimensions of "believing, behaving and belonging", that is, belief, church attendance and formal membership. However, secularisation theory has only focused on describing this process by giving several explanations, such as modernisation, urbanisation, rationalisation and modernisation. It has until now failed to state what replaced the role formerly held by religion in most people's life. Is it individualism, economic pursuits, political interest and involvement, or interest in the arts or entertainment? Most of these potential replacements of religion can become visible as buildings in public spaces, such as residential homes, shops and industrial areas, community centres, monuments and museums or places of entertainment such as cinemas and pubs.

Here, it is the behaviour of the majority of people which shapes public space (even if this behaviour is influenced by their belief, and often correlates with church membership): Those buildings for which there is a large demand are built at a central place in the city, and they are used frequently, while those buildings for which demand is little, decay. Many of these buildings are institutions at the same time, and this is where the core-periphery model comes in: Those institutions that gain power and popularity move closer to the core, while those institutions that lose power and popularity move to the periphery. This does not necessarily mean the literal centre and the outskirts of a city (compare the decayed condition of many inner cities in Europe before their revalorisation for tourist purposes in the 1980s), but the core which attracts resources from several dimensions (e.g. economic, political, religious, cultural).

The core-periphery model can add to secularisation theory a visible explanation of which institutions have replaced religion.

The concept of sacred space as defined by Durkheim (1995) and Eliade (1995) is used for characterising them: The places of worship used by the churches and other religious communities are sacred spaces, while the places used by the other actors are profane spaces. According to the core-periphery model, the actors are equipped with different degrees of resources. A core is characterised by a concentration of industries, advanced technology and skilled labour, access to transportation networks, access to financial institutions and infrastructure development. In our study, these dimensions can be applied to the owners of residential estates. Categories which can be applied to the CofE, the free churches and mosques are the number of regular attendants, the number of formal members, the reputation, the social capital of their members, highly-skilled and educated leaders, connection to the "fine arts" such as high architectural value of their buildings or high value of their sacred music, geographical location, the voluntary involvement of their members, and perhaps other categories.

The advantage of this approach is that it proposes an explanation of what has replaced religion with more than one explaining factor. This is not done by either secularisation theory, rational choice theory or individualisation or privatisation theory, who all rely on monocausal explanations. It means our approach can give a more differentiated description of the status quo than these theories.

It is assumed that a certain degree of secularisation, understood as declined church attendance, but also belief and membership, has taken place. Otherwise, the CofE churches would not have been closed down. But the three possible outcomes of their use (homes, monuments, free churches/mosques) which will be compared in this study, do not support secularisation theory's claim of a general and steady decline of the three dimensions of religion. The

three possible outcomes covered in this study are only examples which, however, aim to illustrate the scope of all possible institutions replacing religion. Although it may seem contradictory to frame "individualism" as an institution with corresponding buildings, it may be safe to assume that private houses, but even gyms, spas, shopping centres, or psychotherapy services may fit both within this category and the category of the institution of the market.

The conversion of a closed church into a residential home means a gain of power or resources for the market, or individualism, and a loss of power for religion (and the turning of a sacred building into a profane one). The market – or individualism – moves then closer to the core and religion to the periphery. The conversion of a church into a monument means a gain of power for the arts, and a loss of power for religion (and a turning of a sacred building into a profane one). However, the last example of the conversion of a CofE church into a free church or mosque proves secularisation theory wrong. Here, we observe no decline of religion (the sacred space remains sacred), but replacement of one kind of religion with another kind – which even can spill back and influence new and flourishing CofE churches, as it is the case in London. One kind of religion moves closer to the centre and gains resources, while another is moved to the periphery.

Thus, the overarching narrative in which this study is embedded is an approach of multiple explanations, which is close to the concepts of multiple modernities or multiple secularities (Eisenstadt, 2000, 2003, Wohlrab-Saar & Burchardt, 2012). By using individualism as one category of institutions, it adopts some of individualisation theory's (Davie, 2017) assumptions: that a comeback of religion in public space has taken place, along with growing religious diversity and individualism. The role of culture and the arts as a replacement for religion has never been addressed by theories of sociology of religion, despite of their important role in tourism, where the categories of religious and cultural tourists have become blurred. As mentioned, this study

acknowledges that declines in church attendance, membership and belief have taken place, but it refutes secularisation theory's assumption that this is an ongoing and necessary process.

Rational choice theory assumes that individuals choose among all religious institutions those who offer most advantages and least disadvantages. So, one might assume that our approach is influenced by this theory. However, we find this theory fails to explain the behaviour of those individuals who do not choose any religious institution at all (which, however, is well explained by individualisation and privatisation theory, and the fact that also institutions from other spheres than the religious one (such as political, ethnic, cultural, sport clubs) can provide meaning, a sense of identity and belonging for the individual. Here is where the core-periphery model comes in. It describes the developments of economic cores as the tendency to place themselves in areas where political and cultural activity concentrate, which enables innovation and growth. So, this model uses factors from several dimensions, such as the political, the economic, the cultural dimension and can without doubt be applied to the religious dimension. If we also integrate the presence of several different religions and denominations, along with individualism and the above-mentioned institutions from other spheres, the model should be able to give an accurate picture of today's role of religion.

This study only analyses the role of institutions, not the role of the individual choosing them. The reason is that it uses theories from sociology of religion and political science, not from anthropology or psychology of religion.

Possibility 1: If a large number of closed churches becomes residential houses, the result is a society with a weakened role of religion and with a growing importance of the free market. This proves true secularisation theory in a wider sense.

Possibility 2: If a large number of closed churches becomes monuments, the result is a weakened role for religion, but an increased value of culture/ the

arts. Responsibility for the care of monuments can be attributed to public bodies, the private sector or to charities. This will confirm Davie's (2015) observations on the blurring of cultural and religious tourists and believers to cathedrals.

Possibility 3: If a large number of closed churches becomes free churches or mosques, the result is a strengthened role of religion along with more religious diversity, even this process having been observed by Davie since the 1990s (2015).

Every explaining variable within secularisation theory (rationalisation, individualisation, modernisation, urbanisation) is matched to an actor in the core-periphery model (which, in some cases, corresponds to a physical place in the city), equipped with more or fewer resources: urbanisation can be observed in large residential areas, rationalisation can be observed in infrastructure and the separation of work places and residential areas, individualisation can manifest itself by revalourised city centres, cathedrals and other monuments which cater to the needs of religious tourists.

The reason for choosing the UK as a case study was its early industrialisation (one major variable used by secularisation theory for explaining this phenomenon), the large amount of British literature from sociology of religion (both theoretical and empirical), and its long experience with Muslim communities (at the turn of the 20th century, the British empire had more Muslim than Christian subjects, Hassan, 2015).

The method of this study is the literature review. It allows to gather case-specific information which cannot be accessed by quantitative methods. The data reviewed are articles in local newspapers, reports by the CofE, and empirical studies. This article covers cases from the whole are of England.

The literature on the history of the legal acts on church closures and sales, on sociology of religion, on sacred spaces, religious tourism and the core-periphery model gives an encompassing picture of the supply-side of closed

churches. The demand-side, that is, the motivations of the owners of residential buildings, free churches and mosques buying these closed churches, is less accessible.

The time frame when church buildings were closed ranges from 1968, when the Pastoral Measure 1968 was decided, up to the present day. No distinction will be made between older and more recent church sales, because the legal framework and the societal factors we assume to determine the outcome (declining CofE attendance, free church and Muslim presence) were already present in 1968.

The actors involved are the different churches and religious communities, the market and the public sector, and charities involved in the preservation of monuments. The concept of sacred space, as defined by Durkheim, Eliade and Otto, is used for characterising them: The places of worship used by the churches and other religious communities are sacred spaces, while the places used by the other actors are profane spaces.

The changing role of religion in the United Kingdom

The whole 20th century sees a decline of believing, belonging and behaving (Brown, 2001 gives figures for the development of belief, attendance and membership), with some scholars identifying a religious revival in the 1950s (Brown, 2001). In the early 20th century, British society was deeply influenced by evangelical Puritanism (Brown, 2001), or a specifically Protestant identity (Green, 2010). Most scholars, such as Wilson (1969, 1976, 1982) observe a major wave of secularisation (falling church attendance and membership) in the 1960s. The welfare state built in the post-war period partly played the role of a secular civil religion and contributed to relegating religion to the private sphere. When the Thatcher government privatised parts of the welfare state, neoliberalism built alliances with religion and brought it back to the public sphere (Woodhead & Catto, 2012).

Current trends in religion and spirituality in British society are covered in Woodhead et al. (eds. 2002). Costa (ed. 2022) discusses whether secularisation theory is still needed in today's ever more diverse society. Day's (2011) study "Believing in Belonging" carries out interviews with people of different ages to determine the role of belief, concluding that the difference between religious and non-religious people is smaller than it appears. Woodhead (2016) describes the rise of „no religion" in British society as the new cultural norm. Voas & Crockett (2005) look at the mechanisms for the transmission of faith, finding that only half of parental religiosity, but almost all absence of religion is passed on. Voas & McAndrew (2012) observe gender, education and area of residence as demographic features of non-religious people. Brown (2022) identifies women and their increased entry into paid employment in the 1960s as a major agent in secularisation mainly understood as declining religious attendance and voluntary involvement. Berger, Davie & Fokas (2008) investigate differences between the religious US and the secular Europe, concluding that there are multiple modernities (Madge & Hamming, 2016).

Davie's (2000, 2007b, 2008, 2015) concept of vicarious religion means that an active minority performs belief and religious practice on behalf of a passive majority. Her other central concept is "believing without belonging", (Davie, 2015). The active minority's commitment takes two forms: the first one is that of charismatic evangelical churches and the second one of cathedrals or city-centre churches. The former emphasises a conservative moral teaching together with a tight sense of community, the second one allows for an anonymous commitment together with the beauty of the building, the quality of the music and the traditional liturgy. Today's data show that cathedrals are increasingly attractive to regular worshippers, less regular worshippers, pilgrims or tourists (the boundaries between these categories being blurred, Davie, 2015).

Saxby (2019) analyses urban church closures in the Church of England from 1833 to 2011, focusing on Inner London, Norwich & Greater Liverpool. The Church of England created the „conserve and convert paradigm" within the narrative of secularisation from the 1970s on, which gradually replaced the term of the „redundant church". Deigh (2024) analyses the process of decision-making in the case of Methodist church closures, from a perspective of practical theology. Bonnette (2023) covers the history of legal acts on the sales of closed churches in the Church of England and their consequences. She focuses on the dioceses of Leicester and Lincolnshire. Different theoretical aspects of re-uses of closed churches in Italy are debated by D'Aprile (2019), which are also applicable to the English context.

Woltermann's (2021) publication on the former Kapernaum Church in Hamburg, Germany (now Al-Nour mosque) can have exemplary value. There is already an extensive literature on the architecture of mosques in the UK, such as Gale's (2004) study on mosque buildings in Birmingham, Biondo (2006), Rasdi (2012), Fekry, Mohamed & Visvizi (2023), and on their social function, such as Naylor & Ryan (2002), Maqsood (2005), Saleem (2013) and Ahmed (2019).

Goodhew & Barward-Symmons (2015) give an empirical overview on new churches in the North East, with a particular focus on Black and minority churches. The study places itself within the secularisation debate and discusses some definitions of the term „new churches". Marchant (2015) describes the growing landscape of new churches in the London borough of Newham since the 1970s. Davie (2017), Goodhew & Cooper (2018) and Bickley & Mladin (2020) draw a picture of religious trends in London: Since the 1990s, Pentecostal, black and other migrant churches have led to a religious boom, even causing the creation of many new and dynamic Anglican churches.

Secularisation theory

The main points of criticism of secularisation theory are: it assumes a link between modernisation and religious decline; it confuses personal belief, religious adherence and social significance, it bases its narrative of decline on the assumption of an age of faith, religion is not declining in social significance, e.g. in political conflicts (Casanova 1994), and the theory emerges from an European context, ignoring other trends in other continents (Norris & Inglehart, 2011; Norris & Inglehart, 2012; Casanova, 2006; Casanova, 2007).

More recent publications from secularisation theory have become more specific in order to address these criticisms, such as Hervieu-Léger (2001) and Schultz (2006). Today, the main advocates of secularisation theory are Bruce (2001, 2011) and Dobbelaere. The later distinguished between secularisation at the societal level (macro, meta-level of society), the level of religious organisations declining (meso, churches having fewer members or attendants), and the individual (micro) level of fewer people believing or having their life guided by religion.

Currents of thinking who aim at decolonising theories are Global Sociology (Burawoy, 2015), Decolonising Sociology (Bhambra, 2014) and Theory from the South. Also Casanova, Berger & Beyer have argued for considering developments in the South. Turner (2011) and Parvez (2017) ask for a Global Sociology of Religion to overcome the theories' Eurocentric approach. This applies to data, theories and scholars who should come more from countries outside of Europe and the US. Secularisation theory also failed to assess the consequences of the arrival of Islam – or religious minorities in general - in Europe, assuming they behave just as Christian or non-religious respondents. Current research on secularisation theory fails to take into account the perspectives of minority religions, the religion of women and non-Western understandings of religion (Müller, 2020).

The edited volume by Birt, Hussain and Siddiqui (eds. 2011) applies the discourse of secularisation and religious pluralism to Islam. Also the contribution by Göle (2010) applies the concept of secularism to non-Western societies, such as India and Turkey. She claims there is a pluralism of secularisms, and that secularism has to be decoupled from Western experience. Rectenwald, Almeida & Levine (eds. 2015) compare different international perspectives on relationships between the religious, the secular and the post-secular.

A recent approach is that of multiple secularities (Wohlrab-Saar & Burchardt, 2012, Burchardt et al., 2015, Kleine & Wohlrab-Saar, 2020, 2021). It assumes that conceptions of the religious and the secular vary historically and culturally being dependent on time and place. It builds on Eisenstadt's (2000, 2003) idea of multiple modernities, that is, different paths to modernity, not just the European or American one. In some aspects, secularism has replaced the theory of secularisation in the 21st century. Taylor (2007) and McLeod (2010) are scholars who retell the narrative of secularisation as a framework of Christianity that once was taken for given and now is a matter of choice.

The core-periphery model

The core-periphery model aims to explaining inequalities between the core and the periphery by assuming that economic activities tend to focus around some areas. The core is more developed in several aspects, taking away resources from the periphery. The periphery serves as social, economical and political backstages and supply sources, which in the extreme cases can experience decline (Klimczuk & Klimczuk-Kochańska, 2019). The first version of this model was developed by Prebisch (1950), then it was applied by Friedmann (1966) to human geography in regional studies. Wallerstein (1974) applied it to world-systems theory. Krugman (1981, 1991, 1998, 2011) made contributions from mainstream economics to it. In political science, the concept has been

used for political participation (Galtung, 1964, Langholm, 1971) or international relations (world system theory by Wallerstein, 1974).

Friedmann focused on economic inequalities between different areas of the same city. He explained this spatially diversified development with the tendency of economic centres (cores) to place themselves in areas where political and cultural activity concentrate. This boosts their capacity for innovation and growth (Klimczuk & Klimczuk-Kochańska, 2019). According to their pace and degree of development, Friedmann (1966) distinguishes between upward transition regions, downward transition regions and resource frontier regions. The development potential of a region depends on the stimulating effect of regional growth centres, the presence of infrastructure and support from the centre to the periphery (Klimczuk & Klimczuk-Kochańska, 2019). Wallerstein (1974) makes similar arguments on the difference between core and periphery, adding semi-peripheries. Krugman (1991) adds the centripetal and centrifugal movements: Centripetal forces are market size, the mobility of workers and positive external effects. Centrifugal forces are natural resources, competition and adverse external effects. Usually, concentration forces are stronger than centrifugal forces, which leads to polarisation (Klimczuk & Klimczuk-Kochańska, 2019).

A core is characterised by concentration of industries, advanced technology and skilled labour, access to transportation networks, access to financial institutions and infrastructure development. These categories can be applied to the owners of residential estates. For the CofE, the free churches and mosques, analogous categories which can be applied are the number of regular attendants, the number of formal members, the reputation, the social capital/the belonging to high social strata of their members, highly skilled and educated leaders, connection to the "fine arts" such as high architectural value of their buildings or high value of their sacred music, geographical location, the voluntary involvement of their members, and perhaps other categories.

The legal framework and statistics

About 20 to 25 Church of England churches are declared closed for regular public worship each year. In many cases, congregations had already stopped using a church since many years when they formally were declared closed (Mulkeen, 2020, Bonnette, 2023). Several charities such as the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT), Friends of Friendless Churches, National Churches Trust, Friends of the City Churches, or the Congregational Federation preserve churches of architectural value, holding them open for visits and occasional worship (Church of England, 2021).

The process of closing a church works in the following way: The Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC) consults locally about the future of a church. If the Bishop suggests closure, the Church Commissioners (a body responsible for managing church finances and making investments) and the DMPC draft a scheme to enable this and carry out further consultations. The three possible outcomes decided by them are: 1) the building is sold or leased, 2) the building is vested in the CCT, or 3) the building is demolished (Church Commissioners, 2019). In spite of the official procedure, closures often are a bottom-up process and rely on decisions by the PCC. From 2010 to 2019, eight mainly northern dioceses had between 8 and 18 closures apiece (=44% of the total), while 14% had none to three closures. The two dioceses with most closures, Leeds and Manchester, accounted for 18 each, or 17% of the total (Mulkeen, 2020). The dioceses with most churches for sale in 2024 are Durham, Hereford, Chichester and Chester (www.churchofengland.org, "Closed church buildings available for disposal", https://ccpastoral.org). The data about sold churches are collected by the Church Commissioners (Mulkeen, 2020). Often, church bodies are reluctant to close churches, because they see this act as a failure of their work. Moreover, the dioceses do not want to carry the financial burden for their maintenance (Church of England, 2021). When selling a church under the 2011 Measure, the Church of England follows the

strategy to accept the most suitable use and not the highest offer. In most cases, this means worship use by another Christian body (Church of England, 2021).

The report MPCP (20)31 describes several types of re-use of closed churches from 1969 to 2019, among which the use as a place of worship for other Christian churches, but not as a mosque (Sidoroinicz, 2020). From 1969 to 2019, there were 1,972 church closures out of approximately 16,000 church buildings. The numbers per decade are: 760 from 1969-1979, 485 from 1980-1989, 274 from 1990-1999, 243 from 2000-2009 and 210 from 2010-2019 (Church of England, Closed Churches Statistical Database 2007, Sidoroinicz, 2020). During this fifty year period, 1,567 (82.87%) of these buildings had only one authorised future, and 324 (17.13%) saw a change in their authorised future. The single numbers are: 254 with two authorised futures, 56 with three, 10 with four and 4 with more than four authorised futures. By authorised futures, we mean one of the following outcomes: alternative use (57%), preservation, primarily CCT (18%), demolition (21%), other, that is, restoration as occasional Anglican places of worship, settlement out of the Measure, such as by Compulsory Purchase Order on enfranchisement (4%). Some churches change from one of these categories to the other (Sidoroinicz, 2020). All authorised alternative uses are, from the most frequent to the least frequent: residential; worship by other Christian bodies; civic, cultural or community; monument; parochial or ecclesiastical; office or shopping; arts, crafts, music or drama; storage; educational; other.

Since many buildings have had several uses, these are the authorised provisions for alternative uses, but not the latest provisions, since previous uses can have failed and been replaced by others. Moreover, the category "civic, cultural or community" is very broad and can contain the work of charities, companies or small local trusts (Sidoroinicz, 2020). So, it is possible that the cases of churches converted into mosques by the media fit in in this category. However, as it will result from the empirical chapter, it depends on decisions by

local church bodies and city councils whether the reuse of churches as places of worship, or only as Christian places of worship, is deemed an appropriate use without need for further approval.

According to mostly local media, about 20 churches have been converted to mosques up to the present date (www.mosquedirectory.co.uk, last accessed 14 July 2024): the Huguenot Chapel in Brick Lane, London; the Nonconformist Congregational Church at Cricklewood; the Nonconformist Chapel at Wembley; the Leeds Grand Mosque, until 1994 the Sacred Heart Catholic Church; Makkah Masjid in Leeds, purpose-built on land that previously belonged to the Christadelphian Church; the Ahlulbayt Cultural Centre, formerly Hanover Square Methodist Chapel; the former United Reformed Church in Solihull; the Clayton Heights Methodist Church in Bradford; St Ann's Mosque in North London; a church in Blackburn, Lancashire; the former Mount Zion Methodist Church in Clitheroe; the former Hyatt United Church on Hamilton Road in London; St John's Church in Town Road, Hanley, Staffordshire; Didsbury Mosque in Manchester, a former Methodist church; Bristol Jamia Mosque; Central Mosque Wembley in London, Brent; Madina Mosque Horsham, a former Jireh Independent Baptist church; Baitul Ahad Mosque in Plaistow, London; Baitul Lateef Mosque in Liverpool, the former Richmond Baptist Church; Madina Masjid in Oldham, a former Ukrainian Catholic church; Noor mosque in Crawley; Mid Sussex Islamic Centre and Mosque in Haywards Heath; and Baitul Ata Mosque in Wolverhampton.

However, there are no reliable official figures. Neither are there any reliable figures about the current numbers of places of worship at all, since it is up to the religious denominations to register their places of worship and their disuse (brin.ac.uk, Numbers of registered places of worship). The website "Muslims in Britain" (www.muslimsinbritain.org) gives figures about mosques. There are no official statistics on congregations, the nearest thing to it are Peter Brierleys datasets (www.faithsurvey.co.uk), who also rely on self-reporting

(Goodhew & Barward-Symmons, 2015), British Religion in Numbers (University of Manchester, www.brin.ac.uk). Data about religious trends in the United Kingdom can be found in the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, which is conducted each year by NatCen since 1983. The Office of National Statistics conducts each year an Annual Population Survey and every ten years, a national census. The European Social Survey is conducted since 2002 (Bickley & Mladin, 2020). Since 2001, UK censuses have been asking a voluntary question about religion. The main reason for the decline of Christians is the decline of the Church of England: according to BSA, for every convert, this church loses 12 members, mainly by death (Woodhead, 2016). By contrast, smaller/other denominations, Pentecostal churches, independent and new churches are likely to grow the next decades (UK Church Statistics 2010-2020, www.brin.ac.uk/figures/church-attendance-in-britain-1980-2015).

The history of the sale of churches

Since the late 19th century, historical church buildings have been the object of the conflicting interests of societies for preservation of monuments, the CofE's goal to reach out its pastoral care to the whole population and the state's goals to preserve monuments and to maintain a relationship with the church. By 1944, war damages had damaged so many churches that the CofE Area Reorganisation Measure 1944 enabled the demolition of 160 buildings. In 1948, the newly-established body of the Church Commissioners realised that a similar measure was needed for areas where the population was moving to the suburbs (Bonnette, 2023).

The Bridges Commission was established for simplifying the procedure of making a church redundant. This resulted in the Pastoral Measure (PM)1968, which for the first time allowed the sale of churches. The declaration of the pastoral and the redundancy scheme (which provided for its future use) were followed by a waiting period from 6 months to 3 years, after which the church

was transferred to the Redundant Churches Fund. During this period, the diocese had to find another use and to bear the costs. The Bridges Commission envisaged churches to become theatres, galleries, workshops or residencies, but thought that commercial uses were inappropriate. While in the early 1970s, restaurant and shop owners were still against repurposing old buildings, by the late 1970s they changed their views because good examples were published (Bonnette, 2023). Often it was difficult to find alternative uses that did not raise public concerns. In 1973, the General Synod of the CofE voted on a motion to prevent non-Christian faiths from purchasing redundant churches (The Times 1973, quoted after Bonnette, 2023). The debate continued, and in 1983, a further motion to make redundant churches available to non-Christian faiths was defeated in the House of Laity by 96 to 90 votes (The Guardian 1983, quoted after Bonnette, 2023). In total, the General Synod debated selling redundant churches to other faiths five times between 1972 and 1996 (Bonnette, 2021; Bonnette, 2023).

The present: some examples of repurposed churches

No. 59 Brick Lane was built in 1742-1774 as a Huguenot Chapel. It was later used as a Methodist mission and a synagogue. In 1975, it became the Jamme Masjid Mosque used by the neighbouring Bangladeshi community (huguenotsofspitalfields.org). For 300 years, Brick Lane has been inhabitated by religious refugees running small businesses, from French Huguenot weavers to Polish Jews and Irish labourers in the 19th century and Sylhet (today Bangladeshi) tailors in the 20th century. In 2007, the council of Tower Hamlet decided to repurpose the area with a creative, cultural and tourist focus, thus threatening to destroy „Banglatown's" character and causing business rentals and home prices go up, along with expensive offers on Airbnb and similar platforms. The council's plan to redevelop the area was met with 7,000 letters with objections to gentrification (The Guardian, 19 September 2021).

The former Methodist church at Clayton Heights, Bradford, built in 1870, became vacant in 2020. The original plans to turn the church into three homes were approved, but not implemented. Instead, the local Muslim community bought the church. Councillor Hazel Johnson said this plan did not need any further permission, because the original purpose as a place of worship did not change. She reports the proposals have been met with positive reactions, although concerns about parkings and traffic were raised sed (www.bbc.co.uk, 23 September 2023).

A Muslim charity, the Zamir foundation, obtained the permission to convert the empty church of St George in Hanley, Staffordshire. However, the CofE blocked this project stating it could only be used as a Christian place of worship. The church built in 1788 had been out of use since 1980 and sold in 2009 by the diocese of Lichfeld. First, the church was used as a cafe and antiques centre, then it was sold to Zamir foundation who planned to open a mosque, a museum, a multi-faith library and a womens' gym there (The Telegraph, 28 August 2024).

The use of repurposed churches as homes sees many positive reactions. A survey by the real estate agency propertyfinder.com states that 60 percent of the respondents would rather live in a converted building than a purpose-built one. Even the British Property Foundation (BPF) declares that „it has been noticeable that careful integration of historic buildings and areas has played an increasingly significant, important and successful role in major regeneration schemes and in creating significant benefits for local economies and communities," (Heritage Works: The use of historic buildings in regeneration, www.riluxa.com, last accessed 21 October 2024). While this position is supported by many actors, especially for churches in otherwise decaying neighborhoods, other Christians feel they are loosing a battle, with Archbishop Rowan Williamson already calling the UK a post-Christian country in 2014 (riluxa.com, last accessed 21 October 2024).

Some further arguments for turning churches into homes are the housing shortage, the long-lasting way they have been built and their central location, which makes them fit for the 15-minute-city. In March 2023, bishop Guli Francis-Deqhani of Chelmsford was appointed head of the new Church Housing Foundation, created for the purpose of providing homes out of disused church buildings and lands to favorable conditions. There are also other Christian charities working for this purpose, such as Faith in Affordable Housing (FIAH, ww3.rics.org, last accessed 21 October 2024).

The most frequent repurposes of churches are homes and hostels, but some more unusual uses are uses as farmers' markets, post offices, restaurants such as All Saints in Hereford, digital hubs or camping („champing") sites (The Guardian, 22 October 2015). The churches of St Marks in Newcastle and St Benedict in West Gorton, Manchester, have been turned into climbing walls. These conversions have been quite successful, since the height of the Gothic churches made them ideal for this purpose. The naves did not need to be subdivided. Despite of the high running costs, the climbing walls support themselves and thus contributed to local regeneration (English Heritage 2010). St Andrews in Bornemouth and Salisbury's Chapel became nightclubs. Claybury Asylum in Woodford has become a swimming pool and sauna, while High Pavement Chapel in Nottingham is now a bar (The Telegraph, 28 August 2024). In rural areas, because of the scarce population often the only possible reuse is that of a home, while in cities the reuse as community centres or museums is easier. English Heritage distinguishes between low-impact reuses which do not require the introduction of new services or damage the fabric of the building, and high-impact reuses, which require heavier alterations to the building. Examples of the latter are restaurants, homes, pubs, shops or sport centres (English Heritage, 2010).

Conclusion

Coverage of repurposed churches in local newspapers and reports by charities for monument protection mostly addresses the contrast between the former use as a church and possible new use by private owners. The reuse as homes is the most frequent and this is reflected in the literature. Articles on this topic refer to the general process of secularisation in British society, understood as the decline of behaving (since the dimensions of believing and belonging are not relevant for the use of church buildings). More unexpected reuses, such as the reuses as restaurants, pubs, sport centres, night clubs and the like, are probably mostly reported because of their status as curiosities. The reuse as a monument with its function for religious or cultural tourism is rarely mentioned. Sometimes, the degree of monumental protection (e.g. „Grade II") is mentioned. The reuse as a mosque or other Christian church is also largely covered because it probably raises emotions among the British audience. One can distinguish between a conservative and a liberal orientation: While the conservative Telegraph skeptically frames this reuse, the left-wing Guardian highlights the tradition of Brick Lane as a multicultural neighborhood threatened by gentrification.

This literature review leads to the conclusion that it is mostly hypothesis 1 and 3 which seems to prove true. It is easiest to convert an Anglican church into another Christian church, because no special permission is needed. In some cases, depending on the good will by local church bodies or city councils, this also applies to mosques. If this is not possible, the reuse as a home is the most frequent. It probably is the safest possible high-impact use, because the newly opened restaurants, shops and the like could be more likely to go bankrupt.

In terms of the core-periphery model, this means that as predicted, the market and individualisation have gained value, while the traditional form of CofE religion has been weakened. In the cities, a larger variety of reuses is

possible, among which several types of cultural uses figure. Meanwhile, for rural closed churches often the only possible reuse is that of a home. At the same time, religion has been coming back in new forms of more religious diversity. Although Black and Pentecostal churches see the largest growth in London, „new expressions“ of very active Anglican churches have been able to grow and to attract new target groups (Davie, 2017, Bickley & Mladin, 2020). Also other former industrial regions such as the North-East experience a thriving religious landscape of free churches and new Anglican churches (Goodhew & Barward-Symmons, 2015; Akomiah-Conteh, 2023). The arrival of several waves of immigrants since the Second World War has created a very diverse community of immigrants of e.g. Muslim, Sikh and Hindu faiths (Davie, 2015; Ghosh, 2022; Halafoff et al., 2024). The dismantlement of the welfare state and thus, the growing importance of the voluntary sector from the 1990s on created a larger acceptance of religion in the public sphere (Woodhead & Catto, 2012; Power et al., 2021; Ubasart-González & Minteguiaga, 2022).

With her concept of vicarious religion, Davie (2015) means the religious commitment of an active minority on behalf of a passive majority. It can assume the form of cathedrals or city-centre churches, which are appreciated because of their beautiful architecture, music and liturgy. Her data show that cathedrals are increasingly attractive to regular worshippers, less regular worshippers, pilgrims or tourists (the boundaries between these categories being blurred). So, it is not the case that interest in the arts has replaced interest in religion and there is no support for hypothesis 2 in the literature. It will be interesting to observe whether mosques in Europe in future will become both places of worship and of religious tourism in the same way as churches. The results show a multi-dimensional approach close similar to Wohlrab-Saar & Burchardt's the concept of multiple secularities.

In a more complex discussion, a literature review is not enough. Future extensive study needs to be carried out with the evaluation of legal texts, church

reports and semi-structured qualitative interviews with speakers of the CofE, free churches, mosques, agents of residential estates, and municipalities. Anyway, the current state of the art gives a picture of a diverse and highly dynamic religious landscape, shaped by centrifugal and centripetal movements and developments at the same time. This image is much closer to the multiple secularities/ modernities described by Wohlrab-Saar & Burchardt (2012) than to the one-dimensional earlier understandings of secularisation theory. The core-periphery model is a way of making visible the growth or shrinking of importance of several institutions as buildings. It adds to secularisation theory the answer which institutions have replaced religion: in this case, the market, individualisation, and other forms of religion, whether it is other religions or just new religious expressions.

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